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## *Understanding the Aims and Assumptions of the World Bank's Report on "Great Teachers" for Latin America and the Caribbean*

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### **Abstract**

*We analyze elsewhere how teachers unions globally are responding to the Global Education Reform Movement or GERM. In this article we interrogate five key premises that drive policy recommendations in the 2014 World Bank report "Great Teachers: How to Raise Student Learning in Latin America and the Caribbean" and examine the evidence for its prescriptions. We find that Great Teachers report ignores earlier World Bank research on education in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), fails to address contradictions in its own findings, and, as it has done previously, omits acknowledgment of educational research that challenges its analysis. We also scrutinize the World Bank's research on LAC teacher quality and performance as reported in Great Teachers, identifying significant flaws in methodology that limit the credibility and usefulness of its findings and the recommendations based on its research.*



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*Editors' Note: Critical Education, along with the authors of this special report, believes the World Bank report Great Teachers: How to Raise Student Learning in Latin America and the Caribbean deserves a comprehensive critical response. We invite additional analyses from scholars working in diverse research traditions and areas of expertise, geographic and disciplinary. Critical Education encourages manuscript submissions in English, Spanish, and Portuguese scrutinizing GT's claims and conclusions. Scholars who work in each language will review submissions. Critical Education will publish contributions as they are reviewed and accepted. Contributions will also be posted on the Research Collaborative archive on [www.teachersolidarity.com](http://www.teachersolidarity.com) so they are available to teacher activists and critical scholars of teachers' work and teachers unions globally.*

*Versions of this report are available in Spanish and Portuguese:*

*Comprendiendo los objetivos y supuestos del reporte del Banco Mundial, "Profesores Excelentes: Cómo elevar el aprendizaje de los estudiantes en Latinoamérica y el Caribe" (<http://www.teachersolidarity.com/research/item/comprendiendo-los-objetivos-y-supuestos-del-reporte-del-banco-mundial-profesores>)*

*Compreender os objetivos e pressupostos do relatório do Banco Mundial, os "Grandes Professores: Como aumentar o aprendizado de estudantes na América Latina e no Caribe" (<http://www.teachersolidarity.com/research/item/portuguese-translation-of-review-of-world-bank-document-great-teachers>)*

### Introduction

In July 2014, the World Bank released *Great Teachers: How to Raise Student Learning in Latin America and the Caribbean*. In its six chapters the report puts forward policies in education it contends will jumpstart stalled economic development in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Given the huge influence of the World Bank on education policy in the global South (Connell & Dados, 2014; Klees, et al. 2012), the report is highly significant and deserves close scrutiny. Klees (2002) advises that critics of neoliberal policy "have a responsibility to deconstruct flawed research. But we must change the terms of the discussion" (n.p.). In this précis and critique we take up both charges.

*Great Teachers: How Raise Student Learning in Latin America and the Caribbean*, hereafter *GT*, is simultaneously a report of research conducted under the auspices of the World Bank and policy prescriptions linked to its research. As is the case in other World Bank reports, (Klees et al, 2012), *GT*'s policy recommendations and research are configured by explicit and unarticulated assumptions about power, politics, and pedagogy. Key to *GT*'s policies is its identification of poor teacher quality as the major obstacle in reducing poverty in LAC. Teachers unions are described as blocking government efforts to raise educational quality and thereby eradicate poverty by opposing policies identified with the neoliberal project, primarily those associated with teachers' working conditions (salary, pensions, evaluation linked to standardized testing, performance related pay, and tenure) and privatization (charter schools and outsourcing of educational services). *GT* argues for various tactics to weaken teacher unions and by so doing advance a package of educational policies termed GERM, the global education reform movement (Sahlberg, 2007). *GT* suggests three strategies of curtailing union influence: Giving unions limited access to express opinions, what Compton (2015) describes from the point of view of resisting GERM as a co-optation strategy; governmental actions that weaken and discredit unions and undercut their influence by forming a block of business and civil society that publicizes itself as defending the public interest so as to isolate and marginalize teachers as an organized entity; and legal and regulatory confrontation by governments.

We analyze elsewhere how teachers unions globally are responding to GERM (Compton and Weiner, in press). In this article we interrogate five key premises that drive *GT*'s policy recommendations, examining the evidence for its prescriptions. We find that *GT* ignores earlier World Bank research on education in LAC, fails to address contradictions in its own findings, and, as it has done previously (Klees et al, 2012), omits acknowledgment of educational research that challenges its analysis. We also scrutinize the World Bank's research on LAC teacher quality and performance reported in *GT*, identifying significant flaws in methodology that limit the credibility and usefulness of its findings and the recommendations based on its research.

*GT* deserves a more comprehensive critical response than we provide in this overview, and we invite additional analyses from scholars working in diverse research traditions and areas of expertise, geographic and disciplinary. Toward this end we and *Critical Education* encourage contributions in English, Spanish, and Portuguese scrutinizing *GT*'s claims and conclusions. Scholars who work in each language will review submissions. *Critical Education* will publish contributions as they are reviewed and accepted. Contributions will be posted on the Research Collaborative archive on [www.teachersolidarity.com](http://www.teachersolidarity.com) so they are available to teacher activists and critical scholars of teachers' work and teachers unions globally.

**PREMISE 1: POVERTY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN CAN BE MOST EFFECTIVELY REDUCED THROUGH EDUCATIONAL REFORM**

*GT* contends that educational policy should be the key policy instrument in reducing poverty in nations of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Education can accomplish this goal if governments successfully pursue one objective: Improving teacher quality.

This conclusion relies on a chain of assumptions that are, at best, highly speculative, and are contested by specialists whose perspective and evidence are not acknowledged. To start, the report contends that for much of the past decade countries in Latin American and the Caribbean saw unprecedented social progress and that economic growth is the principal cause of rising incomes and greatly reduced poverty: "The principal driver of rising incomes has been economic growth, translating into poverty reduction and more broadly shared prosperity" (xvii). As we note later, the relationship between economic growth and poverty reduction is contested, primarily because of the persistence of income inequality in the region (United Nations, 2013). The salience of economic inequality as an obstacle to poverty reduction, ignored by *GT*, is underlined by a World Bank report (Vakis, et al., 2015) that observes economic growth is not sufficient "to lift the chronic poor out of poverty" (p. 17). Harvey (2014) points out that economic growth is partly based on the shrinking ground of the continued privatization of the commons, including education.

Next *GT* presumes that education is the most effective policy lever for spurring economic growth and thereby eliminating poverty. But *GT* itself notes key factors *other than education* associated with the "economic slowdown of the last few years" that are causing low growth and poverty: "The current deceleration...is arguably linked to external factors, including slower growth in China and its effects on export prices, as well as an expected increase in global interest rates" (p. xvii). Arguing that the region can't wait for these factors to change, the report demands LAC "must develop its own strategies for more diversified production, higher-value exports, and sustainable long-term growth" (p. xvii). After stating these goals, the report jumps to its next conclusion: "Building human capital, the key ingredient for higher productivity and faster innovation, is thus a central challenge for the

region” (p. xvii). *GT* does not explain why building human capital is the most effective policy for achieving these economic goals though the causal connections it makes between human capital development, education, and poverty reduction are disputed (Vally & Spreen, 2012). Solimano (2009), reviewing Chile’s economic development for the World Institute for Development Economics Research, concludes that political and social challenges to unequal income distribution are at the heart of poverty reduction:

The Chilean development story of the last two to three decades is a mix of successes in the macro, growth, poverty and trade fronts but also of failure in reducing chronic inequality of income and wealth... Adverse features of the Chilean development model include urban insecurity and rising crime, pollution, pressure on natural resources, congestion and social stratification in access to education, health and pensions. A reduction in social inequality would require changes in several fronts: more public-sector resources devoted to education; curtailing current concentration of wealth and market shares in banking, retail trade, and private pension systems, private health provision, and other sectors; more effective regulation of big business; rebalancing of labour unions’ bargaining power capacities and effective support to the sector of small and medium size enterprises. Chilean democracy would benefit from a redefinition in development priorities towards less power for the dominant elites (economic and political) and broader social participation for the middle class and the working people to support dynamic and more equitable development (Abstract, n.p.)

Moreover, as we discuss later, *GT*’s recommendation about the urgent need to curtail the power of teachers unions starkly contradicts analyses about how the weakened power of labor unions in some countries within LAC has depressed economic growth and prosperity. In regard to Chile, for instance, Solimano (2009) observes “...The fragile nature of many jobs and the reduced bargaining power of labour versus capital have biased the distribution of productivity gains towards company owners...New, modern, and more equitable labour relations are badly needed in Chile” (n.p.).

*GT*’s contention that developing human capital is the most efficient way to spur economic growth and reduce poverty is exactly that, a contention, contradicted by other economists, including those working for the World Bank.

***PREMISE 2: LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN CONSTITUTE A SINGLE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT IN WHICH THE SAME EDUCATIONAL POLICY CAN BE APPLIED WITH EQUAL, POSITIVE EFFECT***

*GT* asserts that a single policy, improving teacher quality, will reduce poverty in all countries in LAC.

LAC is a vastly diverse region, linguistically, socially, culturally, economically, and politically. Yet *GT* asserts its standardized educational policy will improve the economy of every country in the region. However, the “highly vulnerable and trade dependent countries” of Central America and the Caribbean (Klak & Flynn, 2008, p. 31) provide a clear example of why *GT*’s treatment of LAC as requiring the same set of educational policies to improve economies is flawed:

The region is sandwiched between larger and more industrialized and

economically diversified countries to the north and south. Together with Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean is economically dependent on the United States. This is an important regional commonality, as distinct from the situation in South America. Central America and the Caribbean's high levels of trade dependency distinguishes the impacts of neoliberalism there compared to most of South America. Namely, neoliberalism puts pressure on these already highly trade-dependent countries to open their economies further and to export more...While trade dependence is a key economic characteristic for all Central American and Caribbean countries, the smaller islands of the Eastern Caribbean are significantly more trade dependent than the larger islands and mainland countries (p. 31).

Klak and Flynn (2008) explain reducing poverty in Central America and the Caribbean requires "increasing economic diversification and a shift to higher value exports," which are subverted by trade policies insisted upon by the US government. Trade policies demanded by the US "have led to sharp declines" (p. 46) in these countries' ability to generate foreign exchange through exports. The authors note the irony that the most successful recent export from the region may well be their workforces that have gone to core countries to earn and send money to family who remain in their homeland. They conclude that "neoliberalism has created additional problems by pressuring already highly trade dependent countries to trade more and thereby decrease their self-sufficiency and self-determination" (Klak & Flynn, 2008, p. 46).

*GT's* prescription to LAC to adopt a single policy framework for schooling also contradicts policies advanced by international organizations with far more experience in education, most notably UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). UNESCO's "Senior Experts' Group" (2013) charged with rethinking education in a rapidly changing world called for understandings of education that "highlight the diversity of societies both within the so-called Global North, as well as within the Global South" (n.p.). Because the report so thoroughly undercuts *GT's* framework and conclusions, we quote it at length:

The experiences of poverty, vulnerability, and inequality, for instance, are diverse across societies and are shaped by the specificities of local political, social and cultural contexts. The analysis needs to avoid generalizations and reflect the subtle nuances of the diversity of lived realities. This includes bringing into the analysis the 'epistemologies of the South' with regard to conceptualizations of development and the role of knowledge. It is essential to recognize the plurality of sources and of outcomes. There is a need to move away from the illusion of one world and one model and recognize the reality of the diversity of cultures, development models, and worldviews. We must reaffirm a common core of universal values while recognizing the diversity of lived worlds. Based on the principles of respect for diversity and equal dignity, education can combat cultural domination and the idea of a homogenizing world society. (p. 6)

In demanding nations in LAC adopt standards and practices in education developed by the wealthiest nations of the global North, the US in particular, *GT* and the World Bank implicitly advance a model of cultural domination, a new colonialism (Hurlbert, 2006; Isch, 2014; Kumar, 2014; Nyambe, 2008; Zeichner, 2008; Zeichner, 2010). *GT* illustrates how "the mechanisms of global governance of teachers" are being transformed from "education as

(national) development” and “norm setting” to “learning as (individual) development” and “competitive comparison” (Robertson, 2012, p. 584). *GT* assumes that national systems of teacher education should be identical. In contrast, we presume that a nation’s system of education and its system of teacher education should reflect national priorities and social values (UNESCO, 2013). Verger and Altinyelken (2013) explain why the uncritical importation/ exportation of educational policies to “very different territories with very different educational cultures and levels of economic development” is inefficient and impractical: “managerial reforms are designed on the basis of past experiences that have been implemented before in rich countries, which count on technical and material conditions that are not matched in poorer countries” (p. 12).

Robertson (2012) compares the distant manipulation of teachers by more powerful global governance to drones used in warfare:

Global teacher technologies have many of the features of the unmanned military drones increasingly favored in difficult spaces of military engagement. Like drones, rankings and benchmarks are powerful when they are able to reach deep inside national territorial borders, not only as data collectors but as agents at a distance able to frame, direct, act, and redirect without being physically present. Like drones, these global technologies have the capacity to collect accounts of a terrain and its topography, over time, and use this information to inform action. However, like any global positioning system that guides the drone’s actions, they cannot sufficiently see, or understand, the details that make the difference. And as Goldstein (2004) observes in relation to PISA, those complexities that do complicate the picture are stripped out because of the one-size-fits-all solution that guides the logic of the intervention. More than this, those who stand behind the technology are far removed from the consequences of their actions; collateral damage and political backwash are useful reminders of the need for caution. (p. 693)

*PREMISE 3: IMPROVING TEACHER QUALITY, AS CAPTURED BY STUDENTS’ SCORES ON STANDARDIZED TESTS AND VALUE-ADDED MEASURES (VAM), IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE LEVER TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES IN LAC*

*GT* does not acknowledge the vast amount of social science research that identifies variables beyond teacher quality that influence student learning. A full analysis and rebuttal of this omission goes beyond our aim in this article. Nonetheless it’s vital to clarify as Verger and Altinyelken (2013) explain

Acknowledging that teachers make a difference is far from saying that teachers ‘determine’ students’ learning or that the socio-economic contexts in which teachers operate should be underestimated in our analysis of learning outcomes. In fact, the uni-linear arguments and, to some extent, educational optimism expressed in the “no excuses” campaign challenge decades of social sciences research in education in industrialised countries that points out the complex and mutually influential relationship between, on the one hand, socio-economic and environmental variables (such as school composition, urban and school segregation, socioeconomic status, parents’ cultural capital, low level of expectations of disadvantaged students, etc.) and, on the other, teaching-learning processes taking place at the school level (p. 7).

In this article we do not explore the use of students' scores on standardized tests and Value Added Measures (VAM) though we encourage contributions by other scholars on use of VAM in LAC. However, we do note *GT*'s conspicuous omission of even a nod to refutation of VAM reliability (Paufler & Amrein-Beardsley, 2014) or to what has been termed a "broad consensus" among educational researchers that "standardized tests are ineffective and even counterproductive when used to drive educational reform" (Welner & Mathis, 2015). Nor does *GT* acknowledge limitations even VAM supporters put on their usefulness in driving large-scale reforms of how teachers are evaluated (Harris & Herrington, 2015).

*GT* contains internal contradictions about teacher quality as well ignoring recent, relevant World Bank research on improving education. For instance, *GT* asserts that it has found "highly effective teachers produce superior outcomes" (p. 72) in Ecuador and in so doing radically improve educational outcomes. However, though Ecuador's "better teachers" may have produced more learning *per days of school attended*, (emphasis added) they "did not have an appreciable impact on absences from school" (p. 72). In other words, the teachers affected the learning of the students who attended school. But how significant was student absenteeism among the 15,000 students in this study? This fact is omitted. *GT* does not address absenteeism as a limitation of its findings though student absenteeism might be more disruptive to educational achievement than teacher quality. Indeed, another World Bank publication, "Establishing Social Equity: Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru" (Georgieva, et al, 2009), which shares *GT*'s premise that nations need "a regular mechanism to measure and improve quality" in their schools (p. 156) finds student attendance and absenteeism a highly significant factor in educational outcomes. Its omission from *GT*'s discussion of educational reform in LAC illustrates *GT*'s strikingly selective use of research to support its premises. The report explains the many factors that cause students to be absent, to enroll in school but not attend, or not enroll at all.

Although expanded, access to education remains limited particularly for low-income groups and students in rural areas, who face stronger financial constraints and longer commutes. Even if the opportunities for enrollment are provided, dropout rates remain high. In Bolivia in 2005, only about 77.8 percent of children completed the mandatory 8 years (Barja & Leyton 2007, 27). In Ecuador, it was reported that approximately 10.6 percent of school-age children work and study at the same time and that 16.0 percent only work and do not attend school... There are virtually no mechanisms within the education system to ensure the continuous provision of basic education that takes into account financial, geographic, or other barriers to access, so a high disparity exists between enrollment and completion. Access is limited, particularly for indigenous groups, despite the long-term existence of bilingual education systems... In Peru, where national-level school completion rates are the highest of the three states (94 percent for primary and 88 percent for secondary school), no more than 10 percent of indigenous children gain access to bilingual education. Bilingual education there is provided only up to the primary level, and it is very limited in both resources and outcomes. In Ecuador, access to bilingual education is limited to 66 percent at the elementary level, and to 86 percent in primary and 22 percent in secondary grades. (p. 153).

Also noteworthy is the report's identification of problems that are unique to particular regions and to indigenous groups, which undercuts the idea of a "one size fits all" education

policy for LAC. *GT* insists “all of the available evidence suggests that the quality of LAC teachers is the binding constraint on the region's progress towards world class education systems.” (p.50). Clearly “all of the available evidence” for the authors of *GT* does not include research of the World Bank itself.

*PREMISE 4: POOR TEACHER QUALITY, AS MEASURED BY TEACHERS' USE OF INSTRUCTIONAL TIME, DEMONSTRATES THAT THE COMPOSITION OF THE TEACHING FORCE SHOULD BE CHANGED.*

For evidence about teacher performance, the World Bank sent teams of observers into classrooms in seven LAC countries, measuring instructional time using a version of the Stalling Classroom Observation Snapshot Instrument (COS). The observation technique involves watching classes for a series of 15 second intervals and is described as “language and curriculum-neutral” with classes “snapped” ranging from grade 1 to 12. Stallings COS was developed in the US. *GT* avers that “good evaluation systems use instruments that have technical validity and protect the integrity of the evaluation process” (p. 36), but *GT*'s discussion of the COS instrument used to determine teacher effectiveness fails to satisfy this standard.

Use of the COS as a valid and reliable instrument was challenged by a previous World Bank study and yet *GT* does not cite this report nor address its critique. In “What do we know about instructional time use in Mali? Assessing the suitability of the *Classroom Observation Snapshot Instrument* for use in developing countries” (April 2008) Vanäläinen describes limitations of COS, based on empirical findings from a study in Mali funded by the World Bank-Netherlands Partnership program. The Mali study was conducted by researchers who had experience in classrooms and had conducted research in the global South. *GT*'s research team consisted of economists not trained in education or research on teaching and learning; only one person named as being on the team is described as having had teaching experience. Though *GT* co-author Barbara Bruns is acknowledged in the Mali report, *GT* does not cite or address the Mali study's highly critical findings about use of the COS as a measure of learning.

Much of the Mali report details why the COS is neither valid nor reliable for use in developing nations. For instance, the Mali researchers explain that a key factor in instructional time of students is “the amount of time that the national government has allocated to instruction,” (p. 31) a factor not addressed by the COS. Another problem is that the benchmarks in the COS developed for the United States

do not necessarily translate into adequate learning achievement in developing countries. Specifically, these benchmarks make a number of assumptions about the presence of quality inputs for effective time use. Teachers are assumed to be aware of the curriculum content and the objectives of a given learning unit, as well as to know and be able to choose suitable teaching methodologies. Likewise, classrooms are assumed to have an adequate number of textbooks for each student and other appropriate learning materials. (p. 31)

The Mali report concludes that the Stallings COS does not capture how much time is actually dedicated to learning curriculum-related contents because actual learning time may be “only a fraction of the time students are coded as being ‘on task,’ little time may actually be spent learning and practicing curriculum content....one of the limitations of the Snapshot instrument is that

it codes students who raise their hands as participating and engaged, but it does not document whether or not they are actually on task. (p. 32)

The Mali report concludes Stallings is not valid but in addition no one instrument can assess teacher performance and student learning because "multiple instruments are needed to assess classroom practices." (p. vi). Mali researchers also noted significant limitations in its behavioral categories and urged that the COS be simplified and its behavioral categories (what is "snapped") altered to address linkages the COS does not capture between instruction and curriculum content. The Mali report urges the World Bank to adapt the COS to take into account national differences and interpret the findings within the context of each country in which the data is collected.

Despite the fact that one of *GT*'s authors, Barbara Bruns, is credited in the acknowledgments of the Mali study, the Mali recommendations are not addressed in *GT*. Although research protocols require that instruments be included when reporting findings, the World Bank will not release the COS instrument used in the studies *GT* reports and uses as the basis of its recommendations about teacher quality in LAC.

*GT*'s sole reference for the COS used in its studies in LAC is an unpublished manuscript (Stallings and Knight, 2003), which cannot be obtained from the World Bank. Though *GT*'s data analysis contains phrases to identify the COS behavioral categories used to "snap" teachers and students, *GT* does not contain an explanation what was actually "snapped." The URL *GT* provides for obtaining the instrument and supporting documents sends one to a page that does not contain the materials. Multiple efforts to obtain the instrument from researchers associated with the studies, including *GT*'s authors and authors of the reports for individual countries in LAC have been unsuccessful. (See Appendix A for documentation of our efforts to investigate the categories and to obtain the COS used.)

*GT* contends that teachers in Latin America present a "distressing" picture – predominately female, older, poor, characterized by low achievement and limited aspirations." (p.7). *GT*'s description of the teaching force deserves a fuller critique than we can provide in this overview but we do wish to point to how *GT*'s negative view of teachers in LAC mirrors neoliberalism's rejection of pedagogies that respond to cultural differences (Carter, 2009; Kuehn, 2004). *GT* advances an intensely competitive, individualist ethos with a "highly personal epistemology of knowledge" that "neglects the ways in which, for example, the sciences are social and historical activities" and that individuals learn what already exists in a culture (Robertson, 2012, p. 595). Further, *GT*'s negative interpretation of a female-dominated teaching force is challenged by the perspective that education should entail nurturing functions, identified with women's work and child rearing (David, 1993). A view that contrasts with *GT*'s singular focus on preparing students in LAC for jobs in a global economy controlled by others is that public education has other essential social and political functions. Gulpers' (2013) research about attitudes of Jamaican primary school teachers is useful in understanding the sharp contrast in how teachers in LAC may view their responsibilities and what the World Bank demands: While "teachers indicated feeling responsible for the children's academic development and learning, they also expressed feeling responsible for children's social, spiritual, and mental development. This relates to teachers' definition of the value of education, which is much broader than its contribution to the economy"(p. 42).

Teachers who come from poor and working class origins, especially those who are members of the historically marginalized groups with which their students identify, are often knowledgeable about the cultural negotiations needed to adapt to middle class cultural

expectations of schools and teachers (Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1997). *GT*'s assumption ignores a wealth of research about how teachers from students' communities who share their histories of oppression support students from socially marginalized groups to succeed academically by being cultural brokers (Carlisle et al., 2013; Gay, 1993; Gallo, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Weiner, 2000).

More practically, *GT*'s recommendations about altering the teaching force by recruiting a different type of individual to the job are contradicted by empirical evidence about what implementation would require. The report observes "salary increases may be necessary" if teaching is to compete with other professions (p.24) but it also argues for limiting salary increases to those teachers who show they merit higher pay. Yet teachers in LAC may be paid less than the national minimum wage and often have to work more than one job to remain teachers, which is what Van der Tuin and Verger (2013) explain as the situation in Peru:

To address the severe issues around education access, during the last decades, Peru invested in the construction of new schools with the assistance of the international aid community. At the same time, in order to minimise the costs of expanding access, different government measures made teacher training more flexible and allowed for the massive entry of poorly trained teachers into the system, including thousands of 'contract' teachers. This emphasis on the 'quantity' of education has negatively affected education quality. It has undermined teachers' capacities and their working conditions to the point that, in Peru today, 'it would be difficult to convince bright young people to go into teaching'" (Saavedra, 2004, in Benavides et al., 2007, p. 39). In fact, teachers in the country, particularly those who do not combine teaching with other jobs, live below the poverty threshold (López del Castillo, 2007). (p. 127)

***PREMISE 5: THE PRIMARY OBSTACLE IN IMPROVING EDUCATION BY RAISING TEACHER QUALITY IS THE POLITICAL POWER OF TEACHERS UNIONS, WHICH THEREFORE MUST BE GREATLY WEAKENED.***

Despite the evidence in previous World Bank research about the host of political, economic, and social factors that impede educational improvement, *GT* finds the "deepest challenge in raising teacher quality is not fiscal or technical, but political, because teachers' unions in every country in Latin America are large and politically active stakeholders (p.3)." Furthermore, "the goals of teachers' organizations are not congruent with the goals of education policy makers or the interests of education beneficiaries—including students, parents, and employers who need skilled workers." Teachers unions block government "efforts to raise educational quality" (p. 288) and must, therefore, be greatly weakened in their political and economic influence.

Implicitly though not explicitly acknowledging the resistance teachers unions have organized to GERM (Compton and Weiner, 2008; Compton and Weiner, forthcoming) *GT* warns that teachers unions have organized a "juggernaut of teachers, parents and civil society together in opposition (p.297)" because some issues like class size and increased education spending are popular with both parents and teachers. *GT* articulates in considerable detail strategies to combat influence of teachers unions, ranging from providing unions voice so as to involve them but simultaneously dilute their opposition; to direct confrontation by governments that pass laws that curtail union influence and strength; to formation of a block of business and civil society that will isolate and marginalize teachers as an organized entity. *GT* highlights Ecuador and Peru as fine examples of how governments have joined civil

society and business by using the mass media to "paint a compelling picture of the current failures of the education system and the importance of better education for economic competitiveness" (p.324). *GT* advises that central to discrediting teachers unions are comparisons on international tests, in particular PISA, which can be used as evidence that educational systems are failing. Implied in these campaigns is the power of making parents fearful their children will not be able to obtain good jobs and rallying voters that teachers unions are making the nation economically vulnerable.

In many parts of LAC teachers unions help build social movements engaged in struggles for economic and political equality and social justice. A significant aspect of this project is supporting development of a critical pedagogy that encourages young people to question the world in which they live (Hypolito, 2008, Arriega Lemus, 2008). We cannot in this short article explore how teachers unions in LAC aid in the struggle for social justice but it is needed to rebut *GT*'s contention that teachers unions and the public have mutually contradictory aims and interests, and we invite further contributions on this topic.

We will, however, briefly explore the presumption that teachers unions are opponents of educational progress because they represent the economic interests of teachers. Like workers everywhere, teachers have the right to form unions to bargain collectively. In so doing teachers are no more "selfish" than employers who impose conditions of labor and salary unilaterally on the people they employ. Since the World Bank adopts the perspective of the employers, it finds the claims of teachers as workers self-interested while accepting as natural the claims of employers to profit.

*GT* views teachers unions as dangerous opponents of the reforms it advocates - and they are to some degree. As is true for labor unions generally, teacher unionism's principles of collective action and solidarity contradict neoliberalism's key premises - individual initiative and competition (Weiner, 2012). Neoliberalism pushes a "survival of the fittest" mentality. Labor unions presume people have to work together to protect their common interests. Another reason teachers unions are a threat is that they can exercise *institutional* power. As organizations they have legal rights. Because unions have institutional roots, they are a stable force. And a union is able to draw on a regular source of income, membership dues. These characteristics give teacher unions an organizational capacity seldom acquired by advocacy groups or parents, who generally graduate from activity in schools along with their children. It is for this reason that *GT* insists unions be weakened - they are indeed the best-organized opponents of GERM (Compton & Weiner, forthcoming).

In its three-pronged plan for weakening teachers unions, *GT* acknowledges its aim in inviting the unions to participate in discussions about reforms is to undercut union influence. The question raised for unions by *GT*'s strategy is how participation in formation of policies that aim to erode or eliminate union strength would mediate their purpose and effect. Even if governments make minor accommodations, which *GT* implies they will not, policy impact will be untouched. *GT* clarifies that union participation in negotiations wins for governments what they would otherwise have to try to obtain through more direct political offensive, legal and regulatory change, and development of propaganda campaigns to diminish union legitimacy and isolate teachers politically. An example of this strategy is given in the country case studies, where the post-Pinochet government engaged in a strategy of negotiated reform, which according to the author has allowed Chile to push the envelope of education policy more than any LAC country.

In explaining that allowing teachers unions to be at the table is a method of weakening the unions, *GT* illuminates why the impulse to participate in negotiations "could be welcomed by teachers as they make teachers more visible and place them at the center of

the education debate” but actually makes teachers and unions “more vulnerable” (Verger & Altinyelken, 2013, p. 7). As its policies clarify, *GT*'s focus on “teacher quality” puts teachers at the center of reform as long as they accept policies passively, agree to be managed through new technologies manipulated from a distance, and have their individual and collective autonomy undermined before the state and students’ families (Robertson, 2012; Verger and Altinyelken, 2013). The global confederation of teachers unions, the Education International, (EI) has in the past pursued collaboration/co-optation with the World Bank. However delegates from affiliate unions attending the EI’s most recent World Congress in July 2015 voted to make the EI cease working with the World Bank. Delegates argued that the World Bank’s agenda for the global promotion of GERM policies was not open to change (Compton, 2015).

## Conclusions

*GT* configures educational reform as the key to eliminating poverty in LAC and teachers unions as blocking this. In contrast, we propose that policy debate focus on whether *GT*'s premises are correct and whether GERM itself is in the best interest of the public. Unions in LAC use their resources to organize other sectors of society who share their opposition to policies that have worsened the educational opportunities for working and poor people (Compton and Weiner, 2008). When teachers unions successfully block school reform in an alliance of students, parents, advocacy groups, and unions, the unions have used their resources to build social movements that reject the policy premises *GT* and the World Bank, as well as other international finance organizations demand (Robertson, 2012). We see this clearly in Mexico, which illustrates the policy of confrontation *GT* advocates. The government-sponsored teachers union, SNTE, (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación) controlled by leaders noted for their corruption, (Cook, 1996), has strongly allied the union with the neoliberal reforms the World Bank has demanded of LAC. At the same time, a strong dissident teachers' movement, CNTE, (Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación) has developed, fostered by teachers who advocate protection of the constitutional guarantee of free public education for all and democratization of their union (Arriaga, 2008). CNTE has helped organize widespread protests challenging Mexico’s education reform policies, precisely the policies *GT* advocates and so Mexico has developed the juggernaut *GT* warns against. This powerful social movement of teachers, parents and students, exists amidst violent repression. Yet it has produced exciting new forms of collaboration and education (Aboites, 2015). In supporting the government of Mexico and thereby SNTE, rather than CNTE and the tens of thousands of students and parents who have joined in the protests, *GT* reveals its aim in weakening teachers unions. What teachers unions in LAC block is implementation of policies that are opposed by significant numbers of people because the policies are seen as denying them their rights. In helping to organize these struggles, teachers unions in LAC live up to the ideals of unionism that support a political and economic project that curtails the power of the wealthy who control resources and governments, at the expense of poor and working people. The question is whether the unions block progress - or make it possible. We think the answer is the latter and invite other scholars in contributing to our understanding of how that happens.

## Appendix A

What instrument was used in *GT*'s studies to “snap” teachers’ performance?

*GT* identifies a report by Stallings and Knight (2003), part of the International Time on Task (ITOT) project, as the instrument used in its studies in LAC. Though *GT* sends

readers to the World Bank archives for this document, the report was not available when efforts to obtain the report began.

When it was requested through the World Bank's protocol for retrieving information (email communication, 12 November 2014), the World Bank produced a different report, Stallings, Knight and Markham, 2004. This report states that it summarizes the training and findings from the initial pilot study of time usage at the classroom level conducted in Tunisia in January, 2004 and the training and results from subsequent ITOT studies in four countries: Tunisia, Morocco, Ghana, and Brazil. It describes adaptation of the Stallings Snapshot observation instrument for use in the project in these four countries, and cursory results and conclusions from the observational studies in four countries. This 2004 report cites neither Stallings and Knight (2003) – which *GT* gives as the source of its instrument – nor the Mali report. Although the World Bank website contains a manual for the COS modified in 2007 from a 2001 version with coding instructions and criteria, the criteria in this manual differ from criteria for assessing teachers in the four countries reported on by Stallings, Knight and Markham (2004).

Efforts to obtain a copy of the instrument or description of the criteria used to evaluate teachers in the COS in LAC have been unsuccessful. Messages sent to authors of the various studies, at their last reported email addresses found through Google searches, have not been answered. Readers who wish to see the screen shots of exchanges between the authors and the World Bank to obtain the COS or copies of emails sent to individual researchers should contact Lois Weiner (lweiner@njcu.edu).

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