

# Chalk dust and smoke signals: when the state teaches itself how to be praised.

Quiroga, Sergio.

Cita:

Quiroga, Sergio (2026). *Chalk dust and smoke signals: when the state teaches itself how to be praised*. En Dr. Teena Singh *13 Proceedings*. New Delhi (India): CEO Congress.

Dirección estable: <https://www.aacademica.org/sergio.ricardo.quiroga/257>

ARK: <https://n2t.net/ark:/13683/pgPS/Brm>



Esta obra está bajo una licencia de Creative Commons.  
Para ver una copia de esta licencia, visite  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.es>.

*Acta Académica* es un proyecto académico sin fines de lucro enmarcado en la iniciativa de acceso abierto. *Acta Académica* fue creado para facilitar a investigadores de todo el mundo el compartir su producción académica. Para crear un perfil gratuitamente o acceder a otros trabajos visite: <https://www.aacademica.org>.



13<sup>th</sup> International CEO Communication, Economics, Organization & Social Sciences Congress

**13 PROCEEDINGS  
BOOK  
EDITOR  
Prof.Dr. Teena Singh  
[www.ceocongress.org](http://www.ceocongress.org)**

**Quiroga, S. (2026). Chalk dust and smoke signals: when the state teaches itself how to be praised. Ponencia 13 CEO Congress. India. [www.ceocongres.org](http://www.ceocongres.org)**

**ISBN: 978-625-96723-7-3**



## Chalk dust and smoke signals: when the state teaches itself how to be praised

Lecturer Sergio QUIROGA

ICAES, Argentina

sergioricardoquioga@gmail.com

Orcid: 0000-0003-2586-6321

### Introduction

The study of institutional communication and its relationship to educational policy has attracted increasing attention in Latin American communication research. State and semi-state media occupy a unique position in constructing meaning about public education, simultaneously performing journalistic and propaganda functions on behalf of the state (Raiter, 2002; Verón, 1987). In Argentina, the proliferation of official provincial news agencies over the last two decades has generated a peculiar media ecology: media outlets that report the news, but whose editorial line is dictated by the very institution they describe. The San Luis News Agency (ANSL) presents itself as "an official media outlet of the Provincial Government of San Luis," and its educational coverage constitutes a privileged corpus for examining how the state narrates its own actions.

The direct antecedents of this type of analysis include Martini's (2000) work on news relevance and the media agenda in Argentina, as well as Fairclough's (1995, 2003) studies on language and power, which have been adapted to the analysis of political discourse in Spanish-speaking contexts by Van Dijk (1993, 2005), Wodak (2001), and, at a regional level, Arnoux (2006). In the specific field of education, Pineau et al. (2001) and Tedesco (2004) offer perspectives on Argentine educational imaginaries that help contextualize discourse analysis.

At the provincial level, the administration of Governor Claudio Poggi (2023-2027) declared 2026 the "Year of Education" and positioned educational policy as the central pillar of its government communication. This uniqueness makes the ANSL a particularly valuable object of study: a medium in which education is not a marginal issue, but the main symbolic capital of the government.

### Theoretical Framework

#### Content Analysis and Discourse Analysis

Content analysis (CA) is a research technique that allows for the systematic, objective, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communications (Berelson, 1952). In its contemporary form, CA is no longer limited to quantification but incorporates qualitative dimensions aimed at interpreting the latent meaning of texts (Krippendorff, 2004). For the purposes of this paper, CA operates as a first-order level of analysis: it identifies which topics are addressed, how frequently, which sources are cited, and which actors are highlighted in the news. The CA categories applied in this work include: thematic area (e.g., literacy, scholarships, infrastructure, etc.), sources consulted (e.g., provincial government, teachers, students, external organizations), evaluative tone (positive, neutral, or critical), presence of statistical data, and references to legislation or legal instruments.

Discourse analysis (DA), in its Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) variant, argues that language is not a transparent vehicle for reality, but rather a field of social meaning production in which power relations are exercised (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2005). CDA examines how certain meanings are naturalized, how social identities are constructed, and how structures of domination are legitimized or challenged through discourse. In the field of political communication, Wodak (2001) identifies that discourses on public policy operate through strategies of argumentation, legitimation, and topicalization. These strategies are especially visible in institutional communication, where the State speaks about itself and, simultaneously, produces the very referent of its own pronouncements. In this presentation, Discourse Analysis (DA) is applied at both the macro-discursive level (identification of macropropositions and interpretive frameworks) and the micro-discursive level (lexical analysis, use of metaphor, construction of agency, and nominalization).

#### Institutional Communication and Official Journalism

The tension between information and propaganda in state media has been addressed by Borrat (1989), who distinguishes between the newspaper as a political actor and the newspaper as a narrator of politics. In the case of official media, this tension is usually resolved in favor of the institutional function: the media outlet does not report on the government; rather, it is the government that reports on itself through the media (Boczkowski, 2010). This phenomenon is particularly relevant in contexts where there are no private provincial media outlets that challenge the official narrative, a situation that characterizes much of the interior of Argentina. The ANSL operates in this context, becoming one of the main producers of the educational agenda in San Luis.



## 13<sup>th</sup> International CEO Communication, Economics, Organization & Social Sciences Congress

### Methodology

This essay adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative content analysis with qualitative critical discourse analysis. The corpus was compiled by selecting 28 articles from the Education section of the San Luis News Agency ([agenciasanluis.com](http://agenciasanluis.com)), published between January 2024 and March 2026, with the aim of encompassing the greatest possible thematic diversity within the field of education. The articles were coded according to the following content analysis variables: (a) publication date, (b) main thematic category, (c) actors mentioned (provincial government, teachers, students, families, national organizations, independent experts), (d) sources directly cited, (e) presence of quantitative data, (f) predominant evaluative tone, and (g) presence of images or visual resources referenced in the text.

In addition, discourse analysis was applied to a subsample of 10 articles selected for their discursive density: articles containing direct statements from officials, testimonies from beneficiaries, and policy descriptions. These analyses examined legitimizing strategies, nominalization processes, metaphorical usage, and the construction of institutional capacity for action. Ethical data handling involved the exclusive use of publicly available materials and abstaining from any judgment regarding the individuals mentioned in the articles. The analysis focuses on discursive structures, not on the individual intentions of the communicators.

### Development

#### The Thematic Architecture of Educational Discourse in the ANSL

Content analysis of the corpus reveals that the most frequent themes in ANSL educational reports are, in order of frequency: (1) the Merit Scholarship and its beneficiaries (9 articles); (2) the Provincial Literacy Plan "We Want to Learn" (7 articles); (3) school infrastructure (4 articles); (4) the IDEA productive education project (3 articles); (5) the PANE school nutrition program (2 articles); and (6) other topics such as environmental education, teaching competitions, and university offerings (3 articles). This distribution reflects an editorial hierarchy that prioritizes visible and quantifiable government actions—the issuance of scholarship decrees, the improvement of reading indicators—over the structural conditions of the education system. Continuing teacher training, teachers' working conditions, school absenteeism, and the territorial gaps between the capital and the interior are practically absent from the corpus. A revealing finding: of the 28 articles analyzed, 26 include at least one statement from a member of the Provincial Executive. In contrast, only 4 articles incorporate testimonies from practicing teachers, and only in their capacity as recipients of a policy, never as evaluative or critical voices. Students appear more frequently, but always as grateful beneficiaries, never as subjects with their own demands.

#### Education as the Governor's Symbolic Capital

One of the most consistent findings of the discourse analysis is the centrality of Governor Claudio Poggi's figure in the educational narrative. The governor is mentioned in 22 of the 28 articles, frequently as the grammatical subject of the main clause: "Poggi signed," "Poggi delivered," "Poggi announced," "Poggi coordinated." This syntactic construction reflects that the provincial news agency focuses on the figure of the executive, who becomes the grammatical and ontological subject of provincial education. The phrase "education is at the heart of our public policies," attributed to the Governor in numerous articles with slight variations, functions as a ritualistic formula—in the Bourdieuan sense (1982)—that reiterates his position as the ultimate guarantor of the education system. This reiteration creates an effect of coherence and continuity that legitimizes the administration, while simultaneously personalizing what should be an impersonal policy.

The lexical analysis also reveals a recurring semantic field: "merit," "effort," "perseverance," "determination," "dreams." These words, especially prominent in the articles about the Merit Scholarship, construct a meritocratic narrative in which educational success is attributed to individual effort. The social structures that condition that effort—economic inequality, access to resources, family cultural capital—remain absent from the narrative.

#### The Literacy Plan: Data, Progress, and Silence

The Provincial Literacy Plan "We Want to Learn," along with the Merit Scholarship, is the most widely discussed educational topic in the corpus. Articles on literacy are characterized by the intensive use of quantitative data: percentages of students reaching expected levels, number of trained teachers, and enrollment coverage rates. This discursive strategy—which could be called "rhetoric of evidence"—serves a specific legitimizing function: it transforms a pedagogical policy into an objective and quantifiable fact, removing it from public debate.

Thus, when the ANSL reports that in 2024 only 35% of students in grades one through three reached the expected content standards, and that by 2025 one out of every two students would have reached adequate levels, it does so from the perspective of linear progress driven by the government. The magnitude of the initial problem—that almost two-thirds of children did not understand what they read upon entering school—is quickly overshadowed by the narrative of progress. None of the articles in the corpus questions why this level of reading difficulty was reached in the first place, nor what historical, budgetary, or educational factors explain this deficit.



### **13<sup>th</sup> International CEO Communication, Economics, Organization & Social Sciences Congress**

It is also significant that the expert Ana Borzone appears repeatedly in this narrative as the scientific guarantor of the plan, but her role is limited to validating the chosen methodology. No voices are heard questioning this pedagogical choice from alternative theoretical frameworks such as constructivism, the communicative approach, or situated learning, suggesting a discursive closure around a single pedagogical "truth" that is not subject to public debate.

#### **The Educational Tour and theatricalization**

A singular discursive element in the corpus is the Governor's "educational tour": a series of visits to schools throughout the province that generates a systematic flow of news. Each visit follows an almost identical narrative structure: the Governor's arrival at the school; a description of the improvements made to the buildings or the programs implemented; the Governor's statements emphasizing the importance of education. This structure reproduces what Debord (1967) called "the society of the spectacle": educational reality becomes a stage. The school is not examined in its everyday complexity, but rather visited in its most photogenic version. The news is not the education imparted daily, but education as a political event. From a discourse analysis perspective, the tour functions as a spatial topic (Wodak, 2001) that territorializes power: the Governor travels to the interior, to small towns, to rural schools. This physical displacement translates discursively into a symbolic displacement: the State arrives where it has not been before. History is thus reduced to the current administration.

#### **The Absent: Conflict, Autonomy, and Inequality**

In the 28 articles examined, there is not a single reference to conflicts between teachers' unions, disputes over the education budget, critical external evaluations of the provincial system, or voices of the political opposition. Nor are the gaps between urban and rural schools addressed comparatively, beyond assertions that policies reach "the most remote settlements." This absence constitutes, in van Dijk's (2005) terms, a strategy of selective silencing as significant as what is said. The official discourse constructs an educational environment free of tensions, where all actors share the government's objectives and where problems are always pre-existing the current administration and are on the path to being solved. The analysis also reveals the almost total absence of autonomous pedagogical perspectives, meaning that no teacher reflects on their practice and no parent raises dilemmas or demands. Pedagogy is a matter of state, and the ANSL (National School of Languages) is the means through which the state reflects on itself.

#### **Technology and the future: a new educational lexicon**

A final emerging discursive axis in the most recent articles of the corpus is the introduction of technological innovation vocabulary into the educational narrative. Terms such as "artificial intelligence," "digital wallet," "digital assets," "financial education," and "virtual platform" appear with increasing frequency, especially in articles about the ULP (University of La Punta), the "Generation Z" program, and school vouchers. This new lexicon fulfills a dual discursive function: on the one hand, it modernizes the government's image by associating it with global trends; on the other hand, it introduces an instrumental rationality into education—school as preparation for the market and the management of digital tools—which subtly displaces other possible meanings of education: critical citizenship, humanistic development, and democratic coexistence. The fact that school vouchers—a financial benefit for graduates—are linked to the dollar exchange rate and are collected through a digital wallet is presented by ANSL as a positive attribute, almost a pedagogical feat. No one questions the structural implications of a provincial educational incentive being denominated in foreign currency.

#### **Conclusions**

The combined content and discourse analysis of 28 articles on education from the San Luis News Agency (ANSL) yields the following conclusions.

First, ANSL functions as an instrument of institutional communication in which journalistic function is subordinated to the legitimization of governmental power. Its educational coverage does not report on education in a broad sense; rather, it constructs a narrative about the actions of the Provincial Executive in the educational sphere. This distinction, subtle in appearance, is decisive in its effects: it shapes a public sphere in which educational debate is absent or silenced.

Second, ANSL's educational discourse is organized around three structuring axes: the personalization of governmental merit in the figure of the Governor; the quantification of progress as a means to silence pedagogical debate; and the invisibility of conflicts, inequalities, and dissenting voices. These three axes operate in an articulated manner to produce a coherent narrative.

Third, the meritocratic rhetoric present in the coverage of the Merit Scholarship, School Seals, and student testimonials reveals an underlying political philosophy that individualizes success and silences structural



### 13<sup>th</sup> International CEO Communication, Economics, Organization & Social Sciences Congress

conditions. This philosophy is not pedagogically neutral: it has consequences for how society conceives of itself in relation to education and justice.

Finally, the analysis suggests that the methodological complementarity between content analysis and discourse analysis is especially productive for the study of official media. While content analysis maps the thematic structure and quantifies omissions, discourse analysis interprets the meaning-making mechanisms that organize this structure. Together, both tools reveal what neither could show on its own: that the school, in the discourse of the ANSL (National Schools Administration), is always an arena of power, and rarely a space where power is challenged.

#### References

- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, April 3). Training for the Provincial Initial Literacy Plan begins Thursday. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/04/03/930736>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, December 20). In 2025, the Merit Scholarship will include 800 new students with an updated amount. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/12/20/1016160>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, December 20). Merit Scholarship: stories of effort, perseverance, and achievement. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/12/20/1016266>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, December 23). Details released on Merit Scholarship and School Stamps payment. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/12/23/1016781>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, December 9). Classes in San Luis will begin on Monday, February 24. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/12/09/1011855>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, February 6). The Governor signed the Merit Scholarship decree. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/02/06/918890>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, January 2). Poggi coordinated with the Minister of Education the action guidelines for 2024. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/01/02/911696>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, July 4). San Luis represented at the launch of the National Literacy Plan. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/07/04/955435>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, June 6). Education Ministry announces schools and positions open for competitive examination. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/06/06/948119>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, March 15). Details provided on how to join the Provincial Initial Literacy Plan. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/03/15/927286>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, May 6). Registrations open for ULP programs in partnership with UNTreF. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/05/06/938719>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, May 6). School Year 2025: registrations open for interim and substitute teaching positions. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/05/06/938617>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, May 9). Merit Scholarship: 2023 graduates receive payment this Thursday. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/05/09/939601>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, November 16). San Luis presents its Provincial Literacy Plan to national education jurisdictions. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/11/16/1004103>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, September 4). Merit Scholarship receives final legislative approval. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/09/04/975516>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2024, September 4). San Luis participates in the Literacy and School Nutrition Education meeting. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2024/09/04/975439>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2025, April 8). Provincial Government presents its 2024 environmental education actions. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2025/04/08/1042886>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2025, August 20). Award ceremony announced for winning schools of IDEA Project 2024. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2025/08/20/1086250>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2025, August 26). Governor awards IDEA Prizes 2024 and confirms second edition. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2025/08/26/1088272>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2025, February 1). The Province will accompany over 800 Class of 2024 graduates on their university paths. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2025/02/01/1023964>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2025, February 19). Along with the new school year, the Literacy Plan returns renewed with fresh goals. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2025/02/19/1029007>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2025, February 7). Payment dates set for 2024 School Stamps. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2025/02/07/1025838>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2025, March 25). Argentinos por la Educacion praises San Luis Literacy Plan. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2025/03/25/1038901>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2026, February 5). Governor delivers 797 Merit Scholarships to young people across the province. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2026/02/05/1138653>



### **13<sup>th</sup> International CEO Communication, Economics, Organization & Social Sciences Congress**

- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2026, March 1). Two programs launched to train young people in finance and AI programming. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2026/03/01/1144228>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2026, March 9). San Luis reverses literacy indicators with the "Queremos Aprender" plan. <https://agenciasanluis.com/2026/03/09/1147261>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2026, March). "Suma Leyendo-Summer Mode 2026" reading contest launched for students across the province. Retrieved from <https://agenciasanluis.com/categoria/ministerio/educacion/>
- Agencia de Noticias San Luis (ANSL). (2026, March). The Student Centers debate. Retrieved from <https://agenciasanluis.com/categoria/ministerio/educacion/>
- Arnoux, E. N. (2006). Analisis del discurso: modos de abordar materiales de archivo. Santiago Arcos.
- Berelson, B. (1952). Content analysis in communication resear ch. Free Press.
- Boczkowski, P. (2010). News at work: Imitation in an age of information abundance. University of Chicago Press.
- Borrat, H. (1989). El periodico, actor politico. Gustavo Gili.
- Bourdieu, P. (1982). Ce que parler veut dire: l'économie des échanges linguistiques. Fayard.
- Debord, G. (1967). La société du spectacle. Buchet-Chastel.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). Media discourse. Edward Arnold.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research. Routledge.
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Martini, S. (2000). Periodismo, noticia y noticiabilidad. Norma.
- Pineau, P., Dussel, I., & Caruso, M. (2001). La escuela como maquina de educar: Tres escritos sobre un proyecto de la modernidad. Paidos.
- Raiter, A. (2002). Representaciones sociales. Eudeba.
- Tedesco, J. C. (2004). Igualdad de oportunidades y politica educativa. Cuadernos del CENDES, 21(55), 1–18.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Elite discourse and racism. Sage.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2005). Politica, ideologia y discurso. Quorum Academico, 2(2), 15–47.
- Verón, E. (1987). La semiosis social: Fragmentos de una teoria de la discursividad. Gedisa.
- Wodak, R. (2001). The discourse-historical approach. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), Methods of critical discourse analysis (pp. 63–94). Sage