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## **Secondary Education in Argentina during the 1990s: The Limits of a Comprehensive Reform Effort**

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### **Abstract**

The reform of secondary education has been a fundamental part of national

educational policy in Argentina since the beginning of the 1990s. Along with the decentralization of responsibilities to provinces and a new structure of primary and secondary education, changes have affected the areas of curriculum design, teaching methods, teacher training, school management, and information and evaluation systems. This study describes the main policies on secondary education implemented during the last decade, including their objectives and rationales. Focusing on how the reform can be seen to relate to issues of access, quality and equity, the study presents an analysis of its implementation, and discusses some of its effects. We argue that political, economic and technical factors as well as the strategies chosen by the national government resulted in a limited implementation, and we highlight the need for considering more focused reform strategies, alternative models of teacher training, and a more active involvement of teachers. (Note 1)

## A. Introduction

This article examines the reform of secondary education in Argentina during the 1990s. (Note 2) It provides a brief description of the main elements of the reform, as well as a discussion of the implementation strategies and problems. We highlight different views about the effects of the new policies, particularly as they relate to two of the main objectives of the reform: increasing access for students from economically disadvantaged families and improving the quality of academic and technical secondary education. (Note 3) This study is based on an extensive review of official documents and secondary sources as well as on information provided by key informants. (Note 4)

The reform of secondary education, which involves the redefinition of its structure, its educational functions, and its role in contributing to national development and social integration, is gaining high priority in Latin America (Braslavsky, 2001; Wolff and Castro, 2000). Although there are important differences among Latin American countries, in general, “the region is deficient in the availability of places in secondary education, as well as in the provision of quality, efficiency and equity. The structure and often the content of secondary education is outdated” (Wolff and Castro, 2000, p. 5).

In the case of Argentina, a comprehensive reform of the educational system initiated at the beginning of the 1990s proposed profound changes in the organization of secondary education, attempting a combination of "reculturing" (changing norms, habits, skills and beliefs) and "restructuring" (changing formal structures) processes both at the school and at central levels (see Fullan, 1993). "Restructuring" took place through the decentralization of the administration of national secondary schools to provinces; the establishment of a new structure that extends compulsory education from seven to ten years and creates a common upper secondary school with different orientations; the establishment of a new mechanism of curriculum design; and the development of evaluation and information systems. Elements more related to "reculturing" included the re-training of teachers aiming at upgrading subject knowledge and teaching methods; and the development of a new model of management that encourages school autonomy.

As Levin (2001, p. 6) points out, “The task of the analyst... is to consider the ways in which policies are driven by a particular logic or ideology, but also the ways in which they are shaped by other factors—historical, cultural, institutional, and political—that are far less

predictable.” In this article we argue that the case at hand represents an ambitious effort of comprehensive reform, complicated by the dynamics of a federal system. This effort encountered important barriers in political, economic and technical factors, but also as a result of a reform strategy that neglected broad discussion and participation, particularly from teachers. Such barriers shaped the reform policies in various ways, as is particularly illustrated by the different provincial responses and the teachers' reactions.

## **B. The Argentine Education System, the Context, and the Rationales for Secondary Education Reform**

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the structure of the Argentine school system was typically organized around a compulsory primary education of seven years beginning at the age of six, and secondary education system with schools usually offering five years of instruction. In 1905, a law authorized the federal government to create and administer its own schools within the provinces, establishing a national system besides the various provincial systems of primary and secondary schools. Initially, secondary education had the objectives of preparing students for teaching at the primary level or for entering the University, but through the years, new types of secondary schools were created, most notably technical schools with a vocational orientation. (Note 5)

During the 1980s and with the reestablishment of democratic rule – which brought about greater responsiveness to the demands for access through the elimination of entrance exams and the construction of new buildings for secondary schools – a remarkable expansion of secondary education took place. (Note 6) The secondary net enrollment rate went from 33.4% in 1980 to 53.5% in 1991. (Note 7) Regional differences, however, remained high: in 1991, the city of Buenos Aires showed a *net* enrollment of around 72% while the figure for a province like Chaco (in the less-developed northeast region) was approximately 38% (Tiramonti, 1995).

The reestablishment of democratic political institutions also allowed for a more open and broader-based discussion of the structure and content of education. With the Pedagogic Congress (Congreso Pedagógico Nacional, 1986-88), which involved teachers, parents, community members, students and representatives of different organizations, “an effort began to build consensus and to seek out or create new policies and action strategies” (Braslavsky, 1998, p. 299). As a result of this effort, the government began to work on the design of a new law of education.

During the 1990s Argentina experienced a profound reform of the educational sector as part of a general restructuring of the state, as well as of attempts to 'modernize' the country and adapt to international economic competition. Carlos Menem's administration (1989-1999) carried out a deep neoliberal economic reform, including the opening of markets to international trade, the privatization of state-owned companies, and the deregulation of economic activities. The Argentine economy showed high growth rates during the early 1990s (averaging more than 8% annual growth between 1991 and 1994), but the decade ended with a situation of recession and uncertainty. At the same time, "poverty levels stubbornly stayed high despite rapid economic growth... [and] rising income inequality and high unemployment, especially for the unskilled, [indicated] that the benefits of growth [were] not widely shared" (World Bank, 2000a, p. 3). (Note 8) The influence of international lending organizations has been very important in the process of economic restructuring, and the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank have participated in the

financing of educational reform.

Educational reform was supposed to introduce changes in a public school system considered to be in crisis. (Note 9) There was a general agreement in the need for organizational and instructional innovations to improve quality and to provide students socially meaningful knowledge (Braslavsky and Tiramonti, 1990; Frigerio, 1995). National and provincial ministries of education appeared to lack the capacities to govern the system and affect the work of schools (Braslavsky, 1998). The fragmentation of the system implied great inequalities, as schools varied in the quality and type of services they offered to different groups of students. During the 1980s, the combination of increases in enrollments and lack of investment in the educational system resulted in overcrowded schools and classrooms and accentuated the sense of crisis.

The *gross* enrollment rate became more stable in the 1990s after the remarkable growth of the early 1980s (see Table 1). By the end of the 1990s, the secondary graduation rate was around 52% (World Bank, 2000). The repetition rate was 9% for 1997, while the dropout rate for 1996 was 42% (Experton, 1999). It is also important to note, again, that there have been significant variations among provinces, and that repetition and dropout rates have been particularly high among students from low-income families.

**Table 1**  
**Secondary Education Gross Enrollment Ratios in Argentina (1970-97)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Gross Enrollment Ratio</b>
1970	44.4
1975	53.8
1980	56.2
1985	70.2
1990	71.1
1995	72.7
1997	73.3

Source: UNESCO Indicators, in [www.unesco.org/education/information](http://www.unesco.org/education/information).

Some of the main problems affecting secondary education at the beginning of the 1990s were: the high dropout and repetition rates (particularly during the first and second years of secondary school), outdated curriculum and instructional methods, and the limited enrollment of students of low socio-economic status (Braslavsky, 1999; World Bank, 1995). Technical education especially suffered a low level of investment in educational resources as well as a lack of relevance of educational contents (Experton, 1999). The coexistence in the provinces of a national and provincial system of secondary education implied inefficiencies and conflicts regarding aspects like financing and the transfer of students from one system to another. In addition, the administration of the *national* secondary system was seen as too centralized as well as lacking effective supervision over schools (Morduchowicz, 1999).

## C. Educational Reform during the 1990s

The two main steps in the reform of education were the transfer of all national secondary schools and teacher training institutes to the provinces in 1992-93 (Law No. 24049) and the enactment in 1993 of the Federal Law of Education (Law No. 24195), the first general law of education in the history of Argentina. (Note 10) The Federal Law of Education (along with the Law of Higher Education enacted in 1995) spelled out a comprehensive reform of the whole educational system.

At the beginning of the 1990s, around 60% of public secondary schools were under national administration. However, there were significant differences between provinces. In some provinces (e.g., La Pampa, San Juan, Tucumán), secondary education was mainly provided by private and public national schools, and the provincial sector was very small. In provinces like Chaco, Rio Negro and Santa Cruz, less than 15% of secondary schools depended on the national government (Tiramonti and Braslavsky, 1995, pp. 61-62).

The transfer of all national secondary schools and post-secondary institutions to the provinces in 1992 – completing the process initiated by the military government in 1978 with the transfer of national primary schools – was mainly driven by financial reasons (Filmus, 1998; Senén González and Arango, 1997). (Note 11) Provinces agreed to receive the national secondary and post-secondary systems, but were not given specific resources to face the economic effort that the transfer represented. The national government argued that from 1991 significant increases in tax collection implied more resources for the provinces, which allowed them to finance the administration of the transferred schools (Senén González and Arango, 1997).

In addition, many provincial administrations lacked the necessary technical expertise and resources to manage the new system (García de Fanelli, 1997; Puiggrós, 1997). In some provinces, the decentralization was followed by an actual reduction of teachers' salaries in the context of a fiscal crisis accelerated by the burden that the transfer of schools implied (Filmus, 1998; Senén González, 1997).

The Federal Law of Education (1993) established the responsibilities for each level of government as well as the coordination mechanisms. The national Ministry of Culture and Education is now responsible for evaluating and monitoring the educational system, ensuring adherence to national policies, providing financial and technical assistance to improve the quality and equity of the system, and developing a federal management information system. The 23 provinces and the city of Buenos Aires (federal district) have the responsibilities of funding, administration, and management of schools, including the hiring and training of teachers. (Note 12) The Federal Council on Culture and Education (*Consejo Federal de Cultura y Educación*) is the organization in which the national policy and its implementation are discussed with the provinces. The national and provincial ministries of education are part of this organization.

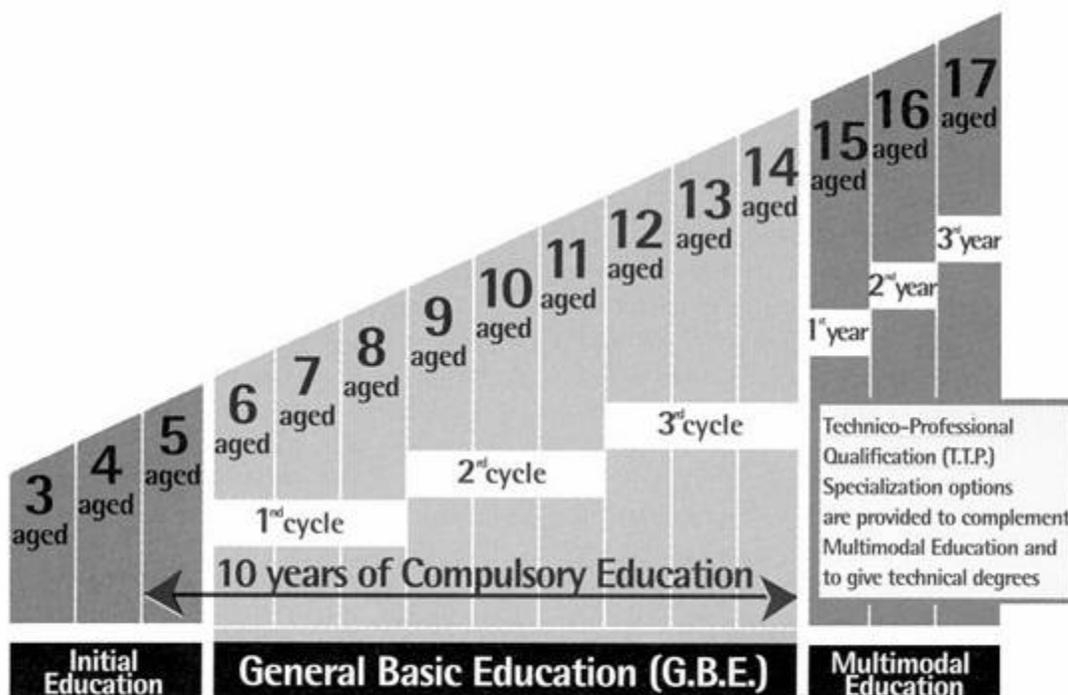
The new model that emerges is one of a stronger center with few (but strategic) responsibilities (e.g., the planning of general policies and evaluation of the system). Another important element of the law was that it established an increase of the resources for the financing of education from national and provincial governments: educational budgets were to be doubled gradually with an annual increase of 20%.

According to Decibe (1998, pp. 3-4), who was one of the ministers of education during the reform, the decentralization of secondary schools and the new division of responsibilities aimed at strengthening federalism and local government institutions, including the schools. In this process, she argues, the national government should keep the capacity to lead policies, given the links between education and the possibilities of economic and social growth.

What follows is a description of the main components of the reform that were prompted by the Federal Law of Education, including: a new structure of the educational system, new systems of curriculum design, teacher training, information and evaluation, a new model of school management, and the compensatory programs.

### 1. The New Structure of the System

The Federal Law of Education (1993) created a new academic structure which starts with an initial level up to the age of five, continues with a nine-year stage of *Educación General Básica* (Basic General Education), or EGB, plus three years of *Polimodal* Education, and ends with the higher-education level (comprising universities and tertiary institutions). Compulsory schooling comprises a ten-year period: the last year of the initial level (5-year-old children) and a nine-year stage corresponding to the EGB, divided in 3 cycles of three years each. Secondary or middle education can be considered to include now the EGB3 (7th, 8th and 9th grades or years) and *Polimodal* (or Multimodal) cycles (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1. The new structure of the Argentine education system**

Source: National Ministry of Culture and Education (Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1997)

In the national reform strategy, the creation of the Third Cycle was meant to address what many considered an abrupt change for students in the transition from primary to secondary

school (e.g., Braslavsky, 1999), and to respond to the specific needs of young teenagers (Ministerio de Educación, 2000a, p. 6). In addition, the implementation of both the Third Cycle and the *Polimodal* should have involved strategies for improving equity and the quality of instruction for low-income students.

The *Polimodal* lasts 3 years and offers a common general education (comprising at least 50% of the instructional time) (Note 13) along with five different orientations or modalities (around 30% of instructional time): (Note 14) humanities and social sciences; natural sciences; economics and administration/management; production of goods and services; and communication, arts and design. Each school can offer one or more modalities and students have to choose one modality. The *Polimodal* should address with equal weight three different aspects of the education of students: preparation for citizenship and ethics, preparation for work, and preparation for further studies (Consejo Federal de Cultura y Educación, 1996).

Professional technical training is offered through *Trayectos Técnicos Profesionales* (TTPs), or Technical Professional Qualifications. These courses of study can be followed with or after the *Polimodal*, and grant the title of “technician” in different areas, including not only those linked with construction, agriculture and industry sectors, but also others like public health, computer science, tourism, etc. (Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1997). Provinces should decide how to organize the supply of different orientations and different technical specializations, taking into account local needs and school institutional capacities.

According to Braslavsky (1999), the organization of the *Polimodal* and the technical specializations respond to the need for training students in a way that enable them both to find a first job and to adapt to a constant changing job market. At the same time, they offer a common educational experience along with enough flexibility to integrate the content of training to the characteristics of local communities and contexts. In this way, the new organization of secondary school, including the technical component, seems to aim at finding a balance between a general education that enables students to advance to higher levels of instruction and a technical-professional training that prepares for specific jobs.

In 1995, the National Ministry created the Institute of Technological Education (INET), which has organized the implementation of technical specializations by adapting the centrally defined curricular frameworks to local realities, integrating them to the *Polimodal*, and identifying training needs for teachers in technical areas (Experton, 1999, p. 27). One of the main functions of the INET is to respond to the needs of the productive sector. It is argued that a new relationship of education-employment is being established by the creation of more effective mechanisms of communication and debate among teachers, educational officers, and representatives of workers and businessmen (Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1997).

The Federal Council established that the new structure should be completely in place by the year 2000, allowing each province to decide on how to implement it (e.g., more or less gradual, use of pilot schools, etc.). (Note 15) The EGB3 has been gradually implemented in almost all provinces since 1996. Regarding the *Polimodal*, the provinces of Córdoba and Buenos Aires started its full implementation in 1999, while most provinces have a slower pace.

## **2. Curricular Reform**

The curricular reform has been another important initiative encouraged by the national government since 1994. The national Ministry and the Federal Council worked out a general framework for all of the elementary and high schools in the country, aiming at giving coherence to the educational system. Traditionally, provinces presented a great heterogeneity of educational programs (Gvirtz, 1995) and, for each type of secondary education, there was a common curriculum which was adapted further at the school level, resulting in an “anarchic diversity” (Braslavsky, 1999, p. 84).

There are three levels in the design of the new curricula. At the more general level, the Federal Council sets the general objectives and guidelines (Common Basic Contents or “*contenidos básicos*”). (Note 16) At the provincial level – including the city of Buenos Aires – more specific objectives and guidelines are developed which take into account the reality of each province. The final design of the curriculum at the school level involves principals and teachers making decisions on content and instructional approaches. The Federal Council has stated that the school is the fundamental unit for the specification of the educational project, so the nation and the provinces should leave to the schools the responsibility of developing a curriculum that responds to the local realities and needs (“*Criterios para la planificación de Diseños Curriculares Compatibles en las Provincias y la MCBA, res. 37/94,*” in Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1996b). At the *Polimodal* level, in addition to the adaptation of provincial curriculum designs, 20% of the content should be determined by the school (Consejo Federal de Cultura y Educación, 1996).

In addition to the Common Basic Contents, in 1998, when provinces like Buenos Aires and Córdoba were already implementing the third cycle of the EGB, the Federal Council agreed to establish a common curricular structure for the EGB3 with nine “curricular spaces:” Spanish, mathematics, social sciences, natural sciences, foreign language, arts education, technology, ethics and citizenship, and physical education. A similar agreement was reached for the *Polimodal* and the technical specializations, establishing the five modalities mentioned above, and the possibility of a variety of technical-professional training courses.

### **3. Teacher Training**

The design of new curricula implied the need for the re-training of teachers and principals. Teachers were considered to have a very low degree of both pedagogical skills and subject knowledge. The Federal Network of Teacher Training was designed to prepare teachers for the curricular changes, update their skills in subject matter, and improve their use of educational materials and computers. Specific training – which took place outside schools – was offered for teachers at the EGB3 and at the *Polimodal* cycles, while encouraging university education for teachers at the *Polimodal* cycle. An innovative aspect of the network was that principals, also, received specific training.

Both Teacher Training Institutes (either under provincial or private administration) and universities are considered to be part of the new training system, under the supervision of the provincial ministries. The curricula of Teacher Training Institutes were also redesigned with three levels of specificity: national, provincial, and institutional. The new system was supposed to train future teachers as well as retrain all of the teachers already working at schools (World Bank, 1995; Decibe, 1998).

### **4. Education Information and Student Evaluation Systems**

A National System of Educational Quality Assessment has been created in the last years. Since 1993, a national evaluation has been done yearly using two kinds of instruments: 1) multiple choice tests to evaluate students' performance in different disciplines, and 2) questionnaires to school administrators, teachers, and families to gather information about institutional management, classroom practices, and students' background, attitudes, and habits of study (Decibe, 1998).

Multiple-choice tests have been administered to samples of students at primary and secondary levels, and the results have been publicized. From 1997, all students finishing the secondary level are evaluated in the areas of Spanish and mathematics. The tests have shown that students are not performing well, that private schools do better than public, and that urban schools do better than rural. The results have increased awareness about the low quality of instruction at schools and provide some legitimization for the reforms.

The National Network of Educational Information has helped advancing in the development of (and coordination among) provincial units of educational information as well as in the use of information for decision-making. The first national census of teachers and educational institutions took place in 1994 (Decibe, 1998).

## **5. A New Model of School Management**

The national government encouraged from the mid 1990s a new model of school through the *Condiciones Básicas Institucionales* (Institutional Basic Conditions). The institutional conditions were proposed from the national level to the provinces as guidelines for the management of all schools in the country (Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1996c) and were related to the objectives of consolidating the school as the basic unit of management and strengthening its autonomy (Consejo Federal de Cultura y Educación, 1994).

The main idea is that the application of new curricular guidelines requires changes in the management and organization of schools in order to be effective and to facilitate instructional innovations. Changes in the management dimension have the objectives of encouraging the participation of the school actors and facilitating the organizational changes that would result in the transformation of instructional practices. It is argued that each school should make its own decisions on the use of the time (e.g., replacing the traditional classroom hour by different units of time), the use of space (e.g., classrooms in which students are allowed to move among "corners" with different activities), and grouping practices (e.g., more than one teacher working with students in a jointly planned activity; students of different ages grouped together for a special activity) (Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1996c).

The Institutional Educational Project (IEP) became the main tool for the new model of school. It is a document produced by each school elaborating and adapting the Provincial Curricular Design and deciding how to deliver the curriculum. Each school is invited to build its own organizational and management structure based on its needs, its reality, and the people who are part of the school. The IEP is the mechanism that should allow the school to mediate between the general educational guidelines (at national and provincial levels) and the local context. The official proposals stress the importance of teamwork, involving all of the school actors and the local community working on defining the mission and objectives of schools and how these are achieved both at the institutional and classroom levels. The

instructional practices should be the “result of an action which is deliberately and consciously planned by the institutional [school] actors, within the frame of the national and provincial political guidelines” (Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1996c, p. 33). The central element of the IEP is the school curricular project in which teachers and principals are given central participation.

## **6. Compensatory Programs**

The Federal Law established a compensatory role for the national government, which translated into the Social Plan for Education (*Plan Social Educativo*), designed to provide federal funds for improving facilities, computers and textbooks directly to the poorest primary and secondary schools in the country. The Social Plan reached more than 17,000 schools and about 3.6 million students during the period between 1993 and 1998; in the Northeast region, for example, it covered nearly 87% of all schools (Morduchowicz, 1999).

The new emphasis on compensatory programs can be seen as responding to a social context of increasing fragmentation and marginalization (see Minujin and Kessler, 1995). The government recognized that social segmentation and impoverishment translate into schools with different levels of resources serving different groups of students. The aim of one of the programs, for example, is “to provide poorer children with the same (pedagogic) resources as the most privileged ones” (Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1997, p. 44).

The different programs of the Social Plan included the construction of new classrooms for the EGB3 cycle, the provision of scholarships for students from low-income families to help them attend the EGB3 and *Polimodal* cycles, and the *Proyecto Tercer Ciclo de la Educación General Básica Rural*, which since 1996 provided technical and financial assistance for the implementation of the EGB3 in rural schools. In 1999, this specific project covered about 24% of rural schools in the country, distributed in 21 out of 24 provinces (Gozman and Jacinto, 1999).

## **D. Implementation Strategies and Problems**

In general, the implementation of the reform has been characterized by a new form of relationships between the national and provincial ministries of education, the support of international organizations (like the World Bank, IDB and UNESCO), and the opposition of teachers' unions.

### **1. The Role of International Organizations**

During the period between 1995 and 1999, the loans from IDB and the World Bank for the financing of reforms represented 2% of global educational expenditures (at the national and provincial levels). During that period, the World Bank invested US\$410 million for the Decentralization and Improvement of Secondary Education Project, while IDB provided US\$600 million for the Educational Reform and Investment Program (Decibe, 1998). The World Bank project focused on the EGB3 and *Polimodal* cycles. It supported: the strengthening and modernization of administrative, evaluation and planning capacities and systems at the provincial level; curriculum development; provision of educational resources (textbooks, libraries, computer and science laboratories, etc.); school expansion and rehabilitation; and the development of school-based improvement projects (Institutional Educational Projects) (World Bank, 1995; 2000). The IDB program focused on the EGB and

teacher training.

According to Tiramonti (1996, pp. 15-16), international organizations like UNESCO and the World Bank defined the general agenda of educational reform, but the Argentine government had some possibilities of negotiating how to use the loans received. Cocorda (1999), on the other hand, holds that the government tended to invest in the areas prioritized by the World Bank and IDB without its own diagnostic of the educational sector.

## **2. The Relationship Between the Central Government and the Provinces**

In the implementation of the Federal Law and related changes, the national government followed two strategies in the period between 1994 and 1999 (Senén González, 2000): 1) working with the provincial MOEs to build consensus and legitimacy through the Federal Council on Education; and 2) working directly with schools through specific programs. Another characteristic of the manner in which the national government guided the reform was to initiate all of its elements simultaneously, attempting to complete many of them in a relatively short time (Experton, 1999, p. 7).

As was shown in the previous section, the national government played a prominent role in designing educational policy and programs, some of which were supposed to support and coordinate provincial efforts in the main aspects of the reform. In the new scenario established by the Federal Law of Education, the national policy and its implementation were to be discussed with the provinces at the meetings of the Federal Council on Culture and Education (*Consejo Federal de Cultura y Educación*). The Federal Council advanced in the definition of some of the main elements of the reform like the new structure of the system, the new system of educator training, the curricular reform, and the development of the evaluation system.

Apparently, the Federal Council did not have an active role in the production of proposals, but discussed the initiatives and documents produced by the National Ministry of Culture and Education. The decisions of the Federal Council are not compulsory for the provinces, but some argue that the provinces' financial dependence on the national government and lack of expert knowledge make them respect those decisions (Tiramonti, 1996). (Note 17)

As mentioned before, an important element of the law was that it established that national and provincial governments should significantly increase the resources for the financing of education. Although the specified goal was not achieved (public educational budgets were supposed to reach 6% of the gross national product (GNP)), educational expenditures did grow in the context of a general expansion of public expenditures. (Note 18)

The Federal Pact on Education (*Pacto Federal Educativo*) was signed in 1994 by all provincial governors and the President, and it established a commitment from the national government to invest US\$3 billion during a five-year period to fund provincial needs in the areas of educational infrastructure and equipment, and teacher training. Provinces committed to implementing the Federal Law and to investing in the reforms (Consejo Federal de Cultura y Educación, 1994).

From 1995, when the Mexican financial crisis impacted Argentina, the expenditures expansion decreased (see Table 2). In the period between 1992 and 1997, the national government almost doubled its educational expenditures while provinces (including the city of Buenos Aires) increased their expenditures to about 40% (see Table 3).

The strategy for involving provinces was facilitated by the fact that the same political party (*Peronismo* or *Partido Justicialista*) administered the national and almost all provincial governments during the 1990s.

**Table 2**  
**General Educational Expenditures in the Period 1992-1997 (in US\$ millions)**

1992	US\$ 7.898
1993	US\$ 9.531
1994	US\$10.844
1995	US\$11.136
1996*	US\$11.302
1997*	US\$11.796

\* The data for these years are provisional.

Source: D.N.P.G.S.—Secretaría de Programación Económica. Ministerio de Economía y Obras y Servicios Públicos, Argentina.

**Table 3**  
**Educational Expenditures (in US\$ millions) for the Period 1992-1997, by Level of Government**

Year	National	Provinces and City of Buenos Aires	Municipalities	Total
1992	1.362	6.057	159	7.578
1993	1.691	7.135	190	9.016
1994	1.985	8.066	204	10.255
1995	2.086	8.273	194	10.553
1996*	2.213	8.369	196	10.778
1997*	2.556	8.490	200	11.246

\* The data for these years are provisional.

Source: D.N.P.G.S. - Secretaría de Programación Económica. Ministerio de Economía y Obras y Servicios Públicos.

The only jurisdiction that strongly resisted the national proposals was the city of Buenos Aires, which enjoys a high level of resources and where Peronism has always been a minority in electoral terms. The provinces of Buenos Aires and Córdoba, with high level of resources, also showed some independence from the national government (Senén González, 2000).

In general, provinces appeared to accept the national initiatives because of the additional funds these initiatives represented in a context of provincial fiscal crisis (Senén González, 2000). However, many provinces had an inadequate level of financial and technical resources to implement various aspects of the reform proposed at the central level (Experton, 1999; García de Fanelli, 1997). Some analysts argue that the national government

between 1993 and 1999 failed to support technically the provincial MOEs – which presented differing needs and capacities – for an effective implementation of the new policies (Senén González, 2000; Roggi, 2001).

### 3. Implementation at the Provincial Level

Provinces adopted different responses to national policies and projects, according to their financial and technical resources as well as local politics. An example of the different provincial strategies for the implementation of educational changes was the reform of the structure of primary and secondary education. Provinces like Buenos Aires and Córdoba designed their own policies with regard to the localization and the role of the EGB3 cycle, which includes the last year of the former primary and the first two years of the former secondary cycle. The province of Buenos Aires decided to implement an “institutional model” of EGB that includes the three cycles, from the 1st to the 9th year or grade. (Note 19) By contrast, Córdoba decided that the EGB3 and the *Polimodal* should constitute two cycles of the new Middle Schools. Most provincial governments seemed to choose a mixed model, where the third cycle of the EGB is placed in new buildings or in schools offering either the other two cycles of EGB or the *Polimodal*, depending on the availability of space at the buildings, their geographical location, and in negotiation with different actors (community, supervisors, school principals, local teachers' union, parents) (Ministerio de Educación, 2000b). In the cases of the city of Buenos Aires and the province of Río Negro, the new structure has not been implemented at all (Ministerio de Educación, 2000d), while many other provinces have recently started the introduction of the new cycles, involving a limited number of schools (Aguerrondo et al., 2000). (Note 20)

Provinces have also showed significant variations with regard to curricular aspects. In terms of the number of subjects, for example, 13 subjects are offered in the EGB3 cycle in Córdoba, while in the province of Buenos Aires there are just seven “curricular spaces.” At the same time, most provinces seem to be increasing the number of hours at least for the academic or traditional curricular areas (language, math, social sciences and natural sciences), but in some cases, like in the province of Salta, they do not respect the minimum established (Ministerio de Educación, 2000c, p. 7).

For the EGB3 cycle, which implies the extension of compulsory education to the 8th and 9th years, provinces have faced financial problems as well as challenges in the availability and relocation of teachers. In some provinces, decisions about who should teach at this level (primary *maestros* vs. secondary *profesores*) and with what kind of retraining were not carefully planned. Many appointed teachers did not have the necessary training, and many posts were not covered at all (Ministerio de Educación, 2000b). In most cases, both primary and secondary teachers have been included in the EGB3 cycle, but this has resulted in tensions between the two groups and the particular ways in which they conceive the teaching and learning processes (Ministerio de Educación, 2000e, p. 18). Another problem has been the lack of training for teachers who would hold new positions as “coordinator” of the cycle or “tutors” (new positions created with the EGB3) (*ibid*, p. 12). There are also questions about the capacities of principals to deal with the new structure of basic education (Krichesky and Capellacci, 1999).

The national initiative for the retraining of teachers appeared as one of the most difficult reform elements to implement. According to the National Confederation of Teachers' Unions and based on a survey of teachers' opinions, teachers have found difficulties

attending training courses, mainly because of financial and time limitations (CTERA, 2001). In some cases, the content and quality of teacher training courses have not satisfied teachers (Casassus, et al., 1998).

#### **4. The Relationship Between Central Government and the Schools and the Movement toward School Autonomy**

The Social Plan for Education (*Plan Social Educativo*), previously described, can be considered as an example of the direct relationship that the national government established with some schools. Another example is New School (*Nueva Escuela*), a program implemented from 1994 (reaching 1100 schools in 1995, though most of them in an indirect way) (Tiramonti, 1996). The New School program attempted to facilitate the development of the new and more autonomous model of school management. Similar to the mechanism employed in the Social Plan, each province selected a coordinator and a group of schools to participate in the program; the national government provided funds and technical assistance for carrying out the school projects. (Note 21)

With regard to the implementation of the new model of school management, it has been evaluated that decentralization at the school level was more rhetorical than real (Experton, 1999, p. 59), while the design of the IEPs at schools was done with limited participation of teachers and local communities and with a lack of measurable and clear objectives (Experton, 1999, p. 28).

The differences among schools in terms of cultural and material resources are a big challenge for moving toward more autonomous forms of organization and management if autonomy is expected to improve the quality of education for all. In the words of somebody who was actively involved in the analysis and planning of educational reform during the 1990s, “The main risk in the current reconversion of the educational system is that only private schools attended by the higher-income population, and public schools that participate in plans and projects for offering targeted assistance, will be able to gain the kind of autonomy needed to adopt their own proposals for restructuring the system” (Braslavsky, 1998).

#### **5. Teachers' Salaries and Political Resistance**

In addition to the limited capacities of provinces, low teachers' salaries and the unions' opposition to reforms have been considered strong barriers for the implementation of the new policies. (Note 22) Teachers' unions seemed to see the reforms implemented during the Menem administrations (1989-1999) as part of a neoliberal policy that attacked public schools and tried to weaken unions' power (CTERA, 1997). In the province of Buenos Aires, for example, the implementation of the new structure has been sometimes perceived by teachers as a threat to their working conditions and their identity (Krichesky and Capellacci, 1999), and they have had very limited possibilities of influencing the process of educational reform (Casassus et al., 1998). According to the cited national survey produced by CTERA, 69% of teachers report that they did not participate in the elaboration of the new curriculum, and 65% think that it hasn't had a positive effect on teaching (CTERA, 2001).

With regard to salaries, in 1996, teachers at the secondary level earned 60% less than in 1980 (Carnoy and Castro, 1996). Llach, et al (1999), show that teachers' average initial salary is less than 40% of the average salary in the formal economy. The national

government started to explicitly recognize the problem of salaries in 1998, after a year of teachers' manifestations, with a law that provided a small increase for all teachers in the system (La Nación, 7/9/99).

The resistance of teachers' unions and of important sectors of the main opposite political parties to significant aspects of the reform put into question the continuity of the Federal Law when, by the end of the 1990s, a party change in the national administration was imminent. Representatives of the political opposition pointed out that the national government had not attempted to achieve a broad agreement about the direction of the reforms, had not provided the necessary funds for carrying out the reform, and had concentrated resources centrally while leaving provinces with the responsibility of implementation (Delich, 1999; Puiggrós, 2000; Stubrin, 1999). (Note 23)

Overall, the reform advanced in aspects like curriculum and student evaluation, (Note 24) and was accompanied by a major effort in upgrading facilities and providing resources for some of the schools in the poorest areas of the country. On the other hand, it faced many problems in the area of teacher training, made little progress in developing a new model of a more autonomous school with participation of teachers and local community, and resulted in an uneven implementation of the new structure.

Many of the proposed changes may require a sustained, long-term effort, more feasible if it is based on social consensus and the involvement of a wide range of actors. As Fullan (1993, p. 49) points out, "the hardest core to crack is the learning core—changes in instructional practices and in the culture of teaching toward greater collaborative relationships among students, teachers and other potential partners" as well as, we would add, among educational bureaucrats, teachers, principals and supervisors. "Stated differently, to restructure is not to reculture... Changing formal structures is not the same as changing norms, habits, skills and beliefs" (Ibid.). In the case of Argentina, there are indications that while the process of restructuring has faced significant barriers, it is at the level of reculturing where reform strategies are more in need of refinement, and of securing the support of educational actors as well as the different levels of government.

## **E. The Effects of the Reforms: Quantitative Expansion and Quality Improvement?**

It is difficult to evaluate the effects of secondary education reform since its implementation is a recent process. Some authors hold that the "primarization" of the old 1st and 2nd years of secondary education (now the 8th and 9th years of the EGB) has negative pedagogic effects since it involves a uniform approach that does not respond to the specific needs and problems of teenagers (see Puiggrós, 1997). In addition, it is argued that the different structures of secondary education within and among provinces result in a fragmented system (FIEL, 2000; Puiggrós, 2000).

A document produced by FIEL (Fundación de Investigaciones Económicas Latinoamericanas), a research institution linked to business groups, regrets the neglect of technical education, states that "the extension of a generalist academic education [through the EGB] does not appear as the best strategy for student retention" (p. 105), and concludes that the reform of the educational structure has been "costly, harmful in some aspects, and not necessary in other aspects" (FIEL, 2000, p. 110, authors' translation). According to this document, compulsory education could have been extended without changing the structure,

while technical education should be offered at the EGB3 cycle, which would make schooling more attractive and useful for students from low economic status.

Teachers' unions also tend to criticize the change of structure and its pedagogic effects. Some of the critiques that teachers' unions make to changes affecting secondary education are reflected in the following quotes from a document produced by one of the most representative groups of the province of Buenos Aires:

[The EGB] deepened the fragmentation of the educational system and caused fractures in the school organization... This discourse [of the reform] translated into lack of consideration of the characteristics of teenagers, of institutional cultures, of work conditions, and of teacher training... One of the most harmful effects of the reform is the disarticulation and disappearance of middle, technical and agrarian schools (SUTEBA, 1999, pp. 4 and 6, authors' translation).

By contrast, other analyses argue that learning conditions have improved through the updating of curriculum content and teaching methods, as well as through the upgrading of buildings and equipment (Braslavsky, 1999). National and provincial governments that implemented the reform during the 1990s and the international organizations that supported it tend to point to increases in enrollment and retention rates as one of the main benefits of the changes introduced (see, for example, Decibe, 1998). (Note 25) The national government also claims that the evaluations of students' learning show improvements in the performance of students, particularly in the poorest regions of the country, and that such improvements can be related to the educational compensatory actions of the federal government (Decibe, 1998, p. 24).

In relation to the effects of the reform on enrollments, some studies have been produced for the province of Buenos Aires, one of the most advanced in implementing the reform, and the most important in terms of the number of students, teachers and buildings. Most studies argue that the reform has been effective in increasing enrollment at the secondary level, but they point to the enduring problems of repetition and ineffective retention. Morduchowicz (1999) reports that in 1997, the number of students attending 8th year (previously the 1st year of secondary) increased 14%, while Casassus et al. (1998) show that the retention rate for the same grade and year increased about 17%. Suárez and Balduzzi (1998), on the other hand, point to the relative value of enrollment increases. They argue that the incorporation of many students was formal rather than real because of the lack of conditions for student learning and for assuring their permanence in the system. They show that only 27% of the students enrolled in 8th year during 1997 achieved the minimum learning requirements, while around 11% of the students dropped out. At the same time, according to their data, only 16% of students were absent from class less than three days per month on average. Krichesky and Capellacci (1999) also show some increases in the number of students attending the 8th and 9th years, while suggesting that schools do not employ effective strategies for the retention of students, particularly those of low SES.

Other studies about the implementation of the EGB3 in different contexts also point to improvement in enrollment rates. In the case of the province of La Pampa, the trends toward increasing enrollment and decreasing dropout rates were accelerated by the implementation of the EGB3 (Duschatzky, et al, 1999). Increases in enrollment and retention rates were also found for the rural schools included in the special project of the Social Plan for the implementation of the EGB3 (Gozman and Jacinto, 1999). (Note 26)

On the other hand, a document of the National MOE (Ministerio de Educación, 2000b) suggests that in the case of the province of Córdoba, the emphasis on improving quality that has been the rationale for the creation of the new Middle Schools comprising the EGB3 and *Polimodal* cycles, might contribute to an earlier exclusion of some students from the educational system; disadvantaged students seem to be dropping out after the 6th grade (when they complete the second cycle of the EGB), instead of 7th grade as was the case with the former primary.

With regard to the improvement of the quality of education, the lack of training of teachers and principals to deal with new responsibilities (particularly the management of the nine-year basic education structure and its three cycles) and curricular changes at the EGB3 cycle seems to imply a major barrier. Krichesky and Cappellacci (1999) suggest that in schools serving students of low SES, teachers and principals see the focus of the EGB3 on providing social and psychological support to students rather than on facilitating learning. Similar constraints seem to affect the *Polimodal* cycle. For the province of Buenos Aires, it is stated that “At the Polimodal level the urgency of improving teacher training and support services is even greater (than at the EGB), since the new streams (“modalidades”) require different teaching methodologies and academic skills. The poorest schools encounter most of the problems to implement the new regime, and are most urgently in need of assistance” (World Bank, 2000, p. 6).

The implementation of the EGB3 (from 7th to 9th grade) seems to involve a trade-off between coverage and quality. The linking of this cycle with the previous cycles of general basic education (not only in terms of physical space but also of pedagogic practices) appears to provide more effective integration of students from low-income groups who tended to dropout of school after completion of the former primary level, but it involves the risk of "primarizing" the cycle with a decrease in the quality of teaching. On the other hand, when the EGB3 is integrated into the *Polimodal*, it appears as offering a higher quality education but with less possibilities of retaining “at-risk” students (Ministerio de Educación, 2000a).

## **F. Conclusion**

During the 1990s, Argentina embarked in an ambitious reform of secondary schools and of the general educational system. While changes have affected almost all aspects of education, there are two elements of the reform that have set the framework for the implementation of other policies. The first one is the decentralization of national secondary schools to provinces and the new division of responsibilities between national and provincial governments. The second element is the new structure of education, which has implied a redefinition of the functions and the content of secondary education.

The reform advanced in defining a new and more coherent system, including the development of evaluation and information systems, and of national curricular guidelines, along with significant investments in infrastructure. Secondary education was restructured, now comprising the third cycle of the compulsory general basic education (EGB3) followed by the *Polimodal* and the technical specializations.

Regarding the origins of these policies, Carnoy (1999) refers to three kinds of responses in the education and training sectors as a reaction to globalization and changes in the world economy:

- Competitiveness-Driven Reforms have as their main goal to raise the productivity of labor and education institutions.
- Finance-Driven Reforms have as their main goal to reduce spending on education, with an ultimate goal of improving the productivity of labor.
- Equity Driven Reforms have the main goal of increasing equality of economic opportunities. The investment in greater equity can be justified when demonstrating that goals of competitiveness are also increased (Carnoy, 1999).

The case of Argentina shows a combination of the three, although the emphasis seemed to be put on the first type. According to Carnoy (1999), competitiveness-driven reforms involve changes in at least the following four categories: decentralization, standards, improved management of educational resources, and improved teacher training. As we have shown, these categories were part of the secondary reform effort in Argentina, and proposed changes were sometimes justified in terms of adapting the educational system to technological changes and the requirements of the global economy (e.g., Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1997, 1996b). On the other hand, the transfer of schools to provinces can be characterized as a finance-driven reform, while compensatory programs seem to reflect the equity rationale.

The implementation of the EGB3 has resulted in an increase in enrollment rates by extending the number of years that students from low-income groups stay in the system, but there are questions about the quality of the education offered at this cycle. In addition, the identity of the EGB3 is not clear: continuation of basic education, introduction to upper secondary, or a level that addresses the specific needs and characteristics of young teenagers.

On the other hand, as Castro, et al (2000), suggests, the creation of the *Polimodal* – offering different orientations within a general academic education – may be a legitimate way of addressing “the increasingly flexible labor markets of the new global economy” (p. 14). (Note 27) The combination of the *Polimodal* and the technical specializations appears as a possible way of balancing general academic and more flexible skills formation for technical orientation. There are, however, actors (teachers’ unions and business groups) that consider that technical education is being neglected with the possible effect of making secondary education less attractive to students from low- or middle-income groups.

The centralized design of the new policies by a national ministry, which devolved the administration and management functions to provinces in order to focus on the planning and evaluation of the system, has faced problems of implementation derived from the limitation of financial and technical resources at the provincial level. In general, provinces accepted the proposals from the national level, but in many cases were not able (or willing) to provide the necessary funding to carry them out, which resulted in partial implementation, particularly visible in the aspect of the new structure of the educational system. This seems to indicate the need for a more careful design of policies and their implementation, taking into account the particular capacities of different provinces, and for more emphasis on the support to provincial ministries. The financial difficulties for carrying out the various aspects of the reform may be indicative that a more gradual or focused strategy would have been more appropriate.

The analysis suggests that there is also a need for a more careful design of training policies and programs. As Fullan (1993) emphasizes, reform efforts worldwide tend to underinvest in teachers' education. In the case of Argentina, it might make more sense to organize

in-service training of teachers and principals at the schools where they work, articulating such training with the design of school institutional projects (particularly the design of the school curricular project and, at the *Polimodal* level, the definition of the 20% of instructional content that is left to the school). There is also a need for specific training to educate students from economically disadvantaged families and developing pedagogic strategies for their retention at the EGB3 and *Polimodal* levels, without disregarding the crucial role that central levels should play through compensatory policies.

At the same time, the Argentine case appears to illustrate the need for involving teachers and their unions in a more active way, and for improving their working conditions, including salaries. (Note 28) It has been recognized that national authorities failed to include non-governmental organizations like teachers' unions in the discussion and negotiation of educational policies, and were not able to create a broad public support for the proposed changes (Braslavsky, 1999).

Although the reform has addressed significant issues related to access, quality and equity, it is not clear at this point in time what elements of the reforms are going to be continued, modified or strengthened in the long term. By the end of the Menem administration, even some of the most critical voices (e.g., FIEL, 2000; Puiggrós, 2000) considered that it would not be wise to revert the reforms given that some provinces had considerably advanced in their implementation. During the De la Rúa administration (Dec. 1999-Dec. 2001), the Federal Council of Education decided to give more flexibility to provinces in the implementation of the new structure, while the National MOE began to reformulate aspects like teacher training, compensatory programs, and the evaluation and information systems, giving high priority to the improvement of secondary education. During 2002, in the context of a most severe social and economic crisis, national educational authorities focused efforts on securing funds from the IDB for the continuation of the Scholarships Program. A careful assessment, hopefully through a participatory process, of the policies carried out during the last decade in order to identify how quality and equity aspects can be enhanced in the short and long terms is still due.

## Notes

1. This article builds upon research conducted at the Institute for International Studies in Education (University of Pittsburgh) for the Secondary Education Reform Project, which was funded by USAID and directed by Clementina Acedo (see Acedo, 2002). We are grateful for the valuable feedback provided to previous versions of this paper by: Ana Donini (Universidad Nacional de San Martín), Mark Ginsburg (University of Pittsburgh), John Hatch (USAID), Mariano Narodowski and Milagros Nores (Centro de Políticas Educativas, Fundación Gobierno y Sociedad), and MinHo Yeom (University of Pittsburgh).
2. The article focuses on the reform that the Menem administrations (1989-1999) carried out. In December 1999, a center-left coalition replaced the Peronist party in the presidency of Argentina.
3. We focus on *implementation* and, to a lesser extent, on *outcomes*, with some references to the *origins* and to the process of *adoption* of the "policy stages" of reform policies (for a discussion of the stages of educational policies see Levin, 2001).
4. The identification of official documents as well as the contacts with informants were carried out by the third author, based in Buenos Aires, during the first semester of 2001. Secondary sources were identified through literature searches and through

conversations with Argentine researchers that the first author held in the context of this and other research projects on Argentine educational reform. Key informants included: Daniel Agostino (Student Scholarships Program, National Ministry of Education); Inés Aguerrondo (International Institute of Educational Planning-Buenos Aires); Marta Andrade de Lago and Javier Rubio (National Center of Educational Information, National Ministry of Education); Verónica Batiuk, Silvia Finocchio, Víctor Meckler, and Daniel Pinkasz (Curriculum Management and Training Program, National Ministry of Education); Guillermo Gozman; Margarita Poggi (Former Director of Educational Planning, City of Buenos Aires); and Cristina Tomassi (Undersecretariat of Basic Education, Province of Buenos Aires). Researchers who have collaborated at different times for the identification of secondary sources include: Myriam Feldfeber (Universidad de Buenos Aires), Mariano Narodowski (Universidad Nacional de Quilmes), Silvia Senén González (Universidad Nacional de General San Martín), and Guillermina Tiramonti (FLACSO, Buenos Aires).

5. In 1986, 75 % of secondary students were enrolled in the general (more academic) tracks (Bachiller and Comercial), around 20 % in technical schools, and around 4 % in the more specific tracks (like agricultural or artistic schools) (Aguerrondo, 1996, p. 110).
6. In December 1983, a democratically elected government took office, an event that would mark the end of more than fifty years of alternation between military and democratic governments.
7. Enrollment rates relate to enrollment in a particular level of education to the age cohort that commonly would be expected to be participating in that particular level of education. Gross enrollment rates compare all enrollments regardless of age (thus including under- and over-age students) to the “normal” age cohort; net enrollment rates compare only the enrollments from the normal cohort to the total population of that cohort.
8. The social and economic crisis reached its peak in December 2001, when President Fernando De la Rúa was pressed to resign in a context of massive street demonstrations, supermarkets ransacking, and violent police repression. After De la Rúa’s resignation, the Congress appointed an interim President to complete the mandate and organize elections in the year 2003. The situation of crisis has resulted in increasing difficulties for national and provincial governments to invest in education, and to keep alive educational reform projects and compensatory programs.
9. Private schools play a significant role in Argentina. For example, in 1994 almost 30% of secondary students were enrolled in private institutions (Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1996a).
10. Different laws and decrees, dictated by the Congress and the executive power since the end of the 19th century, regulated the system before 1993.
11. The transfer of secondary schools to provinces was one of the measures that the national government had committed to in the negotiations for external credits with the International Monetary Fund between 1989 and 1991 (Senén González and Arango, 1997).
12. The modernization of provincial systems of educational administration was the focus of a specific program implemented from 1996 and partially funded by the World Bank (Decibe, 1998).
13. The Federal Council established 5 hours of instructional time per day and 180 days of class per year for the *Polimodal* cycle.
14. The content of the remaining 20% should be determined by each school according to its institutional project (see below the section on the new model of school

- management).
15. Under the De la Rúa national administration (Dec. 1999-Dec. 2001), this deadline was extended to the year 2003.
  16. According to Braslavsky (1998), “the Common Basic Contents are guided toward training in basic and fundamental skills, introducing many procedural contents, and placing emphasis on training in conceptual thinking more than on factual contents” (p. 308). Their design was the result of a process of consultation with experts from different fields of knowledge and with provincial MOEs.
  17. In the Argentine system, most taxes are collected by the national government, and then distributed among the national and provincial administrations. As Senén González (1997) states, this system has been a source of conflicts and negotiation between the nation and the provinces. Since its creation in 1935, various legal instruments have changed the percentages for each level of government and the kinds of taxes included (Carciofi, et al, 1996). In addition, the national government has been allowed to make special contributions to provinces facing financial problems.
  18. The national budget for education increased about 30 % between 1993 and 1996 (Braslavsky, 1999). As Morduchowics (1999) shows, this growth translated in an increasing transfer of funds from the national level to provinces and schools in the areas of infrastructure, equipment, scholarships, development of school institutional projects, and teacher training.
  19. However, in some cases, the 8th and 9th years have remained located in the secondary school buildings but under the direction of the EGB principal, which has resulted in problems of communication and coordination, and in teaching styles at those years that resemble more to those of the old secondary (Krichesky and Cappellari, 1999; Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 2000b).
  20. Even in the case of the province of Córdoba it can be questioned whether the change of structure represents the implementation of the EGB and the *Polimodal* or of a different model.
  21. For the case of the Social Plan, Puigrós (2000) states that clientelistic practices have influenced the way provinces and schools are selected.
  22. For the province of Buenos Aires, for example, a World Bank document states that “progress in educational reform has been slower than hoped, due to Teacher and Staff Unions’ resistance to change, long standing complaints over teacher salaries, and generally poor institutional capacities” (World Bank, 2000, p. 7).
  23. According to Puigrós (1999), the new national administration that took office in December 1999 had to accept the continuity of the Federal Law because many provincial governments (still in the hands of the Peronist party) were in favour of advancing in its implementation.
  24. There have been questions about the quality and efficiency of the evaluation system (see *La Nación*, 11/23/98), and about its impact on schools and classrooms (Experton, 1999).
  25. A World Bank (2000, p. 5) document, for example, states, “The ongoing reform of secondary education (in the province of Buenos Aires) has boosted the retention rates in the EGB3 cycle and is already showing a significant increase in enrollment for the Polimodal cycle.”
  26. By contrast, there is a general perception that from 2001 drop-out rates have been increasing in most provinces, particularly among teenagers, in the context of severe budgetary restrictions and the acceleration of social crisis. From 1998 to August 2002, the percentage of the population living in poverty increased from 27% to 53% according to official data (*La Nación*, 8/21/02).

27. Castro et al. hold that “In general, broad-based knowledge geared toward problem solving seems to be more valuable to graduates over their work lives than specific vocational skills” (p. 14). In their view, that is the approach employed in the *polimodales* of Argentina and Mexico.
28. Tedesco (1998) notes that the neglecting of teachers as active participants, a characteristic of many reforms in Latin America during the 1990s, needs to be reversed in order to improve the effectiveness of educational policies.

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