Educational reforms in Latin America: realities and prospects

Regional comparison

Claudia Uribe
Regina Cortina
Robert Arnove
Christian Bracho
Thomas Luschei
Fernanda Pineda
Ernesto Treviño

Historical overview

Francisco Miranda
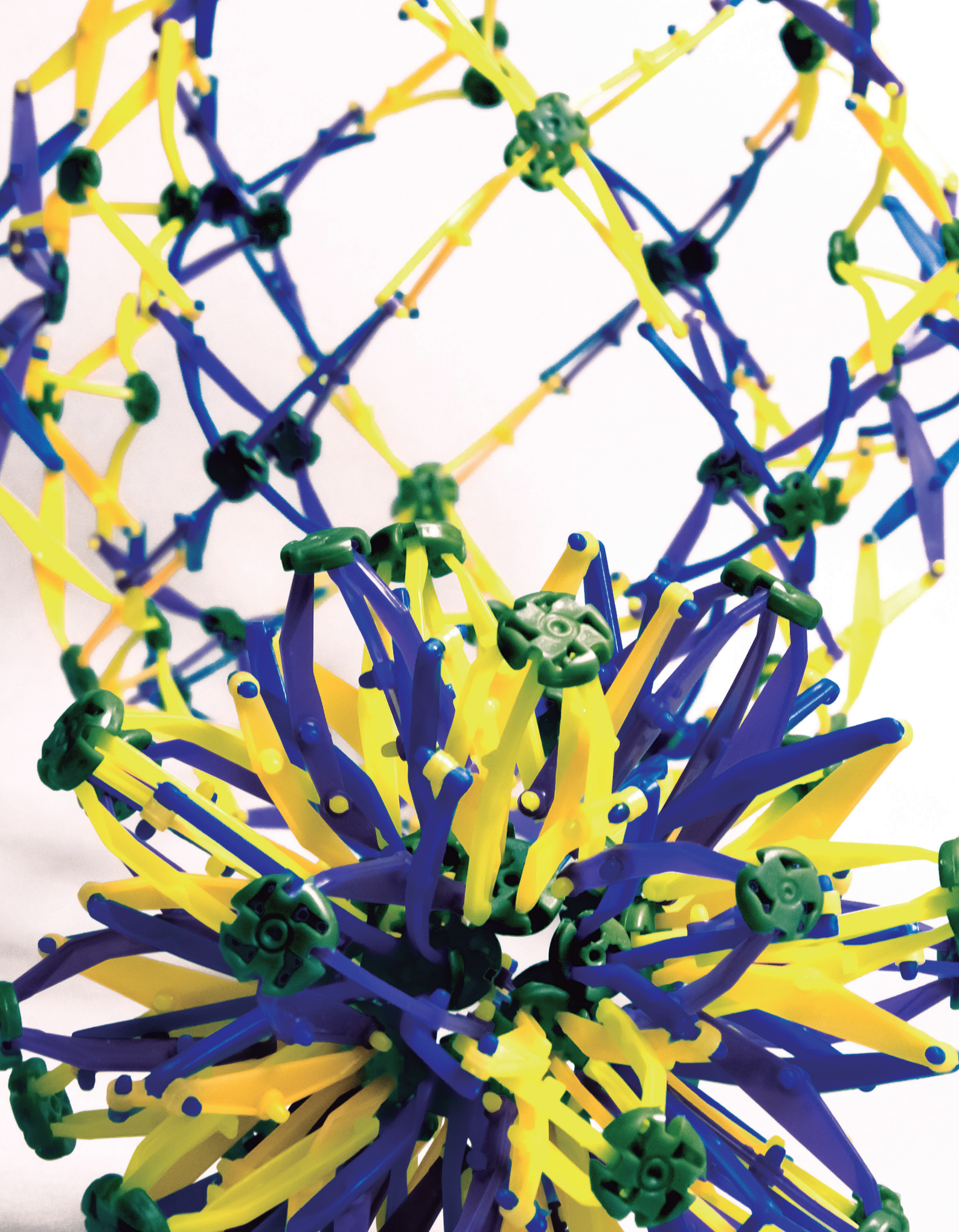Antonio Ávila Díaz
Aurora Loyo

New paradigms

Patricia Vázquez del Mercado
Ricardo Cuenca
Cecilia Espinosa

The Spanish experience

Álvaro Marchesi
Eva María Pérez

Com textos traduzidos
para o português

The logbook

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Editorial

The main problems faced by many Latin-American countries, as well as Mexico, are a deficient educational quality and a lack of equity in terms of its distribution. It is enough to review an educational comparison instrument involving various countries—such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) of the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), or the measurements provided by the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (Spanish acronym: LLECE) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)—in order to realize it.

This challenge is even more pressing because, in general, there is a shared conviction that education brings multiple benefits for those nations that champion it: it is the quintessential social equalizer, it promotes citizenship education (and, thus, democracy), it improves the conditions for people's participation in the economy, and it offers intergenerational effects in terms of health, quality of life, and the way parents educate their children, among many other advantages. In contrast, not complying with the human right to quality education always entails the violation of other fundamental rights, as well as economic and social lags. In fact, the educational gap's effect is a multiplication of problems such as poverty, violence, and corruption, among others.

In recent decades, virtually all countries in the region have pushed educational reforms; thus, they have entered—belatedly, in some cases—the educational agreement which, in the past century, was globally established. Since the late 20th century until now, a world consensus on the right to education and its relation with development has been definitively established. This can be seen in the world agreements—based on, and inspired by, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)—which have been signed during these years: from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), to the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990), the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality (1994), the Millennium Summit (which took place in 2000), and, after those, the construction of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Naturally, during the last twenty years in which this wave of educational reforms happened in Latin America, there have been some common denominators; but, also, there are traits which respond to specific local realities or to proposals posed by specific administrations. One of the goals of studying them is trying to determine the axes on which these reforms have been structured, the concrete problems they aim to solve, which have been their successes and errors, and

from which of these experiences can useful lessons eventually emerge for the region's countries. Among the difficulties facing this task, it should be noted that the results of the reforms are only visible in the long term, which makes it necessary to constantly monitor and rectify, while at the same time sustaining the changes during the maduration period essential for them to be fruit.

In *Gazette*, we want to offer a few lines on this analysis, by reviewing the educational reforms in brother countries facing similar educational issues, in the understanding that we all aim to fully comply with the right to quality education for all.

To do so, our special guests—Pablo Cevallos and Néstor López—situate Mexico's educational policy within the Latin-American context and offer us a common ground to undertake our task.

In "Voices from the Conference," Patricia Vázquez del Mercado—member of the INEE's Governing Board—reviews the state of education in our country under the light of the 2030 Agenda, in order to determine the main challenges that have to be tackled so as to comply with the fourth sustainable development goal: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." Also, Antonio Ávila Díaz, the head of the SEP's Under-Secretariat of Planning, Evaluation and Coordination, deals—from a historical reflection on the educational reforms in the region—with the distinctive features of the Reform initiated in Mexico in 2013.

Our "Special report" is formed by four articles. In the first, Aurora Loyo visits the educational reforms of the 1990s in Latin America to find out their results. In the second, Álvaro Marchesi and Eva María Pérez propose an evaluation model for teachers' professional development in Spain, a nation which shares many characteristics with the Latin-American countries, and which is also close to the European experiences in this area. In the third article, Ricardo Cuenca addresses the link between two mutually-determined areas—education and democracy in Latin America. This section closes by showing a new paradigm for educational structuring proposed by Bernardo Toro and reviewed and commented by Cecilia Espinosa Bonilla.

In this issue, "Dossier" brings us a comparative study of Latin-American educational reforms in the voices of renowned experts on the subject—Claudia Uribe, Regina Cortina, Robert Arnove, Christian Bracho, Thomas Luschei, Fernanda Pineda, and Ernesto Treviño—, whom we interviewed during the 2018 Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES).

In terms of our in-house authors, Francisco Miranda offers a general panorama on educational policy evaluations made by our Institute, and Adriana Aragón displays the Middle-Term Program (2016-2020) of the National Educational Evaluation System (Spanish acronym: SNEE).

As usual, we hope for the contents offered here to rekindle the debate on the best way to guarantee equitable quality education for Mexico's children and youths. ∈

The editors

SNEE Middle-Term Program (2016-2020): general balance, relevant actions and the strengthening of capabilities until 2017

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As it was mentioned in previous issues, the Guiding Document for the National Policy for Educational Evaluation (Spanish-acronym: DR-PNEE) was written and published, under the coordination of the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: INEE), between 2014 and 2015. This document laid the foundations for an innovative route to improve educational quality and equity, proposing, among other issues, the construction and development of programs and projects for educational evaluation and improvement.

In 2016, 170 educational evaluation projects were designed: 130 of them were related to local educational authorities; 34 had a national scope; and 6 were related to the international sphere. These projects formed the 2016-2020 National Educational Evaluation System Middle-Term Program (Spanish acronym: PMP-SNEE).

After the 2017 implementation of the first actions outlined in this Program, we now have tangible results and evidences. Down below, the most relevant ones are pointed out.

A general balance allows us to show that, out of the 130 projects that are being implemented in the federal entities, 73 are on time, which means that those projects have performed all the actions stated within their chronograms; 47 applied for reprogramming in a period greater than three trimesters; 9 are at risk; and 1 was put into consideration for being removed from the 2016-2020 PMP-SNEE (graph 1).

On the other hand, all the national projects under the INEE's responsibility are on time; and the same happens with those related to the Secretariat of Public Education (Spanish acronym: SEP), except one, known as "Evaluation of effective school time in basic-education public schools," of which there is no information. At an

Graph 1. Status of state projects' progress
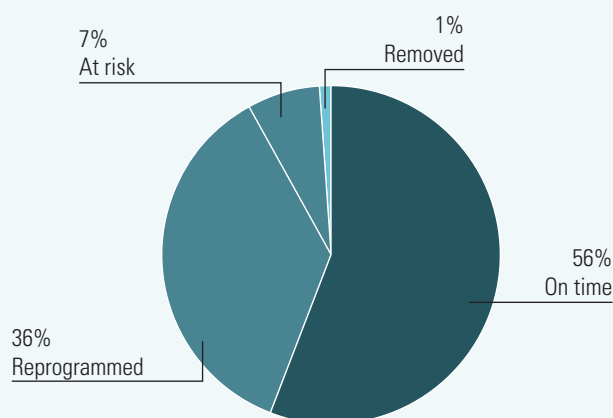
Source: Made by the author using data from the INEE.

international level, the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) was concluded on time.

A more detailed analysis allows to illustrate significant advancements in the development of relevant actions and the execution of goals at the state level. Out of the 88 evaluation projects, 83 frames of reference were made, while 6 evaluation plans and 4 evaluation instruments were designed.

Out of the 40 state projects aiming to promote and use the results of the existing evaluations, all the frames of reference were produced, and 22 strategies for promoting and using evaluation results (Spanish acronym: EDYURE) were designed and are currently in their implementation process or just about to be implemented. It is worthwhile mentioning the fact that some states have designed—within the framework

of the actions developed in their EDYURE—handout booklets with information, as well as socialization and results-usage workshops.

The regulation, guidance, consultation, accompaniment, monitoring, and follow-up actions developed by the INEE—together with the teams responsible for these projects—, in order to promote and facilitate the achievement of the expected goals and results, are also remarkable. In this sense, the main ones are:

Regulation

- Two guideline packages were issued: one to improve educational care for indigenous children and teenagers; and another one for improving school permanency in upper secondary education.

Technical consultation and accompaniment

- Thirty-five visits to the federal entities to follow-up projects' implementation and to offer technical support and consultation sessions;
- Fifteen visits to the states to officially present the State Programs for Educational Evaluation and Improvement (Spanish acronym: PEEME);
- Three support guides for the elaboration of evaluation instruments as well as promotion and results-usage strategies;
- Two guides to lead the systematization and analysis of evaluation results.

Strengthening of capabilities

- Five projects to produce training and strengthening of educational evaluation capabilities programs, aimed for state officers who take part in developing the PEEMES;[1]
- 641 people were trained for the first 4 projects, the 5th one began in 2017 and 64 people from all the federation entities are enrolled in it;

- One survey workshop for the teams responsible for the PEEME and the construction of enhanced surveys for those states that asked the INEE for them;
- One rubric-development workshop for senior and middle-level officers of the Secretariat of Education in Colima, with the participation of thirty-five state officers.

Monitoring and follow-up

Development of the SNEE monitoring and follow-up platform, through which the state projects for educational evaluation and improvement are systematized and registered.

We are convinced that the process we started in order to develop evaluation capabilities—and, before, planning capabilities—will allow the strengthening and storing of the knowledge, aptitudes, and attitudes needed for the educational system to reach its goals in time, especially in terms of guaranteeing educational access, permanence, and the highest achievements for all children and youths in our country. Thus, the herein described general balance and advancements of the SNEE's first stage—related to the design and implementation of evaluation and improvement projects—represent another essential step towards connecting evaluations results with educational innovation and improvement actions. ∈

Reference

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1 *a)* Educational Evaluation Certification Course given by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Spanish acronym: UNAM); *b)* Major Course on Educational Evaluation Politics and Management given by the Latin-American Social Sciences Institute (Spanish acronym: FLACSO); *c)* Classroom Observation Project, given by the Latin-American Institute of Educational Communication (Spanish acronym: ILCE); *d)* Certification Course on Educational Management, given by International Institute for Educational Planning (Spanish acronym: IIPE-UNESCO,); and *e)* Certification Course on Development of Capabilities for Educational Evaluation, given by the MIDE UC Measurement Center. All of them, coordinated by the INEE.

Mexico's educational policy within the Latin-American context

Pablo Cevallos and **Néstor López** present a deep analysis on Mexico's educational policy, within the framework of the regional situation and the political agendas of other Latin-American countries, emanating from a recent study elaborated by the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education and the International Institute for Educational Planning.

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Introduction

In political terms, in 2018, Mexico was marked by the election of new federal authorities. From the educational point of view, the change in the country's political lead is extremely relevant because it marks the end of the six-year administration in which an ambitious educational reform kicked off. In parallel with that, within the same period, the Mexican State ratified the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)—among them, number four—and the Education 2030 Agenda. With this, it reaffirmed its commitment to "Guarantee an inclusive, equitable, and quality education and to promote learning opportunities for all throughout life" (UN, 2015).

In this context, the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: INEE) and the Latin-American Office of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization-International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO-IIEP)—based in Buenos Aires—prepared a study on Mexico's educational policy from a Latin-American perspective, in order to contribute to the debate that comes hand in hand with this moment where change is a given, and continuity is a possibility. This article is based on that study and it points out some of its main findings.

A central idea that offers a framework for the regional perspective on Mexican education is that Latin America is a highly heterogeneous region from the economic, geographic, political, social, and cultural perspectives. However, various factors unify the region when the educational panorama is analyzed. Firstly, a glance at the great definitions of educational policy allows to state that the decisions taken in each country are inscribed—explicitly or implicitly—within a regional debate. This can be seen in at least two aspects: the current normative frameworks (and, specifically, the decision to move forward towards the recognition of education as a fundamental human right) and the structures of educational systems. These two systems' structuring elements generate more than adequate conditions for a regional dialogue, which has increased since all countries have ratified agreements—such as, in their time, those of Dakar, Jomtien, and Incheon—and agendas like the Development Millennium Goals, the SDG, and the Education 2030 Agenda.

In Latin America, the adaptation of local educational agendas to these global frameworks happened—and is still happening—within a context of a permanent dialogue between the teams of regional educational ministries or secretariats. Thus, it is possible to state that educational policies in each country in the region have remarkable convergence points, even in such diverse contexts.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to determine Mexico's situation within such a context, in order to establish a dialogue between Mexican educational policies, the regional situation, and the policy agendas in other Latin-American countries.

To attain it, the article is divided in five sections. The first one shows a few notes on Mexico's main educational achievements within the regional context and on the challenges presented to this country by its demographic and socioeconomic contexts. The three following sections deal with key aspects for the educational-policy debate in Mexico and in most Latin-American countries. These elements are related

to structural aspects of the educational system and, fundamentally, to its governance. Thus, in the second section, the normative frameworks—and, specifically, the educational general laws of the countries in the region—are studied. The third part analyzes the challenge posed in federal countries by educational policy governance. The fourth part lists the main educational reforms established in current years in Latin America. And, finally, the fifth section features some reflections as a conclusion.

Educational challenges and achievements in Mexico

Mexico is a country that, within the regional context, faces a very complex environment to keep a universal quality educational system working. On the one hand, it is a fact that Mexico is a highly populated country with a relatively high proportion of children and teenagers, and this places it—from a quantitative perspective—as a huge challenge, only surpassed in the region by Brazil. On the other, there are two factors—a larger presence of rural populations and the existence of indigenous communities—that increase the difficulties to guarantee a pertinent educational offer available for all people, and this entails an enormous challenge for inclusion and equity policies. In the regional context, Mexico is at an intermediate place in relation to these two factors and this translates into an environment which makes the instrumentation of educational policies more complex.

The panorama turns even more intricate because Mexico shows prominently high levels of poverty and this contrasts with the fact that its per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) is high within the regional context. In fact, Mexico is within the Latin-American countries with a higher per-capita income and it is also the nation with the highest incidence of poverty. Moreover, among the eight countries with a higher incidence of poverty in the region, Mexico is the country with a higher per-capita income. To face this difficulty, related to the social context in which its educational policy is posed, it undoubtedly demands a higher financial effort.

Educational indicators place Mexico as one of the countries in the region with higher achievements in terms of access, permanence, graduation, and learnings. Although graduation from the higher-middle educational level (higher-secondary education) is relatively low when it is compared to other Latin-American countries, it is important to keep in mind that Mexico was one of the last nations to incorporate this educational level to the cycle of mandatory education.

Finally, it is worthwhile pointing out two central aspects of the educational agenda in the region: educational inequities—in terms of access, permanence, and learning—are still very important challenges in all regional countries and there are signs which allow to hypothesize that the pace in which steps towards reversing this environment are taken is getting slower and, in some cases, it might even stop. Within this context, Latin-American nations face the challenge to design an educational policy focused on equity and inclusion, which implies rethinking some structural aspects related to the functioning of their educational systems.

Educational legal frameworks in Latin America

All the countries in the region have educational laws, general or organic, which establish a framework for related policies; that is, the great educational goals or purposes. These laws rule over the dynamics followed by actual practices in each case, and they define the States' obligations in relation to their citizens' education.

The legislative panorama in Latin America is diverse, because there is a coexistence between new laws and recently-enacted laws with other ones that have been present for over fifty years. A chronological reading of current laws makes it clear that the various normative texts express a temporality in the educational debate, because each of them was born within an environment for the discussion that was specific to each moment, and its main traits had an imprint on their identity. It could be affirmed, from this reading, that each new law is improved by the wording of the then-current laws in the region, as well as by the recommendations and commitments that come after new international agreements and by the issues that, in a given circumstance, bring together the multiple actors in the educational community.

An example of this is that the latest approved educational law, Ecuador's Intercultural Education Organic Law, is articulated to clearly express the definitions and recommendations that derive from the guidelines related to the right to education. However, in that text, an effort to capitalize the experience and advancements offered by each of the regional laws which preceded it can also be identified. That is, each text reflects a regional debate that goes beyond the legislative sphere where it arises and it reflects the high appropriation level, by the actors involved and the civil society in the region, of the concept of education as a human right. There is a *contagious* effect among texts which allows to speculate that there will be a gradual progression of the totality of laws towards normative frameworks strongly committed to education as a fundamental right.

Mexico's General Education Law was published in the *Federal Official Gazette* in July 1993; that is, over a quarter of a century ago. This is the fourth oldest law in the region, following those of Panama, Costa Rica, and Guatemala. It is a normative text which, even though it permanently incorporated changes that may imply an update of its contents, it still shows the structure of a text made in the past century. In view of the regional context, it is worthwhile posing the question of whether or not Mexico needs a new educational law.

What would be achieved by writing and approving a new law in the subject? Firstly, incorporating within the educational debate a series of issues which, although already mentioned in the current law text, could be strengthened by related developments witnessed in the last twenty-five years. It is worthwhile mentioning some of these issues, such as the way in which the conceptualization and operativity around the notion of education as a human right—especially in view of the international agreements and treaties ratified by Mexico during the last five lustrums—is improved, as well as its function of guaranteeing the rights and the instruments to demand the right to education.

Secondly, this could mean appropriating the references related to the meaning of education. These were expanded by the inclusion of a set of values related to non-discrimination, sexual and reproductive rights, the prevalence of the collective over the individual, peoples' autonomy, the incorporation of different aspects of pre-Columbian worldviews, the relation of social life with the environment, and so on.

Finally, this could entail the possibility of instituting a debate on the rights of the various actors within the educational community, particularly, students and teachers.

In Latin-American countries, a great part of the normativity, and specifically of the educational laws, has a deeply performative role on the dynamics within society. That is, as they are implemented, the progression of social processes is transformed. Through its legislators, each society seeks to establish new horizons and to propose yet-inexistent dynamics in order to consolidate practices which are considered as valuable for the nation as a whole. The discussion on a new educational law always represents the opportunity to generate a public debate on the kind of education each society chooses as a horizon, on the most adequate mechanisms to deal with such challenge, as well as on the place of each of the actors in the community involved—and in the society as a whole—within the project for building quality education for all.

Federalism and educational governance

Since their origins, educational systems in Latin America were highly centralized. In their original designs, regional countries chose an educational offer which directly depended on the national government, even though it had the goal of reaching the totality of the national territory. This definition was not exclusively limited to the educational sector; almost the totality of public-services—and particularly those linked to social sectors—were historically characterized by this same strongly-centralized matrix.

Within the framework of the structural reforms conducted in Latin America by the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s, the debate circled around two opposing positions: those who promoted decentralization of public services—among them, educational ones—and those who defended centralized systems. During the progress of federal states' management in this area it was proven that both frameworks have strong points that should be taken into consideration to strengthen the State's capacity to guarantee quality services.

The experience accumulated by regional countries within these decades allowed for the debate's structuring question to gradually change. It was no longer about answering the question of what was best, centralized or decentralized educational services: the axis of the debate now centers around how to achieve a better articulation between central and local agencies in order to guarantee universal quality services that will consolidate states in their condition as guarantors of rights.

How to articulate the redistributive and opportunity-equalizing capabilities of central-government agencies with the sensitivity and participation of local governments? This articulation becomes particularly complex in the case of federal countries, in which state-governments autonomy and the definition of differentiated competencies defined from constitutional texts can represent either a space for its consolidation or a real obstacle.

Besides Mexico, in Latin America there are only two other federal countries: Argentina and Brazil. The first great challenge posed to them is how to guarantee a national educational policy that articulates the various government levels and at the same time respects territorial sovereignties. In each case, there are institutional mechanisms devoted to the management of federalism: the Education Federal Council, in Argentina; the National Education Council, in Brazil; and the Education Authorities' National Council, in Mexico. The attributions, degree of representation, and binding character of the recommendations or guidelines generated from these agencies vary in their particular terms.

When analyzing regional federalisms, there is another central question: which are the attributions that the Federal National State must reserve for itself in order to guarantee a national educational policy? The answer to it comprises, at least, three dimensions on which the federal government depends to define an educational project for the whole country: funding, curricular framework and evaluation.

In these three spheres, Mexico is the Latin-American country with the most centralized model, in which the federal government retains the highest attributions in relation to the federative states' governments. Even so, within the framework of the National Educational Evaluation System (Spanish acronym: SNEE), through its thirty-two State Programs for Educational Improvement Evaluation (Spanish acronym: PEEME), Mexico is developing one of the most ambitious experiences aimed to strengthen local governments' capabilities to evaluate their educational policies.

Some recent reforms in the region

The educational systems in Latin-American countries have been consolidating, since they were founded until current times, through a permanent succession of changes, accumulation and subtraction processes, by means of a continuous action flux that shapes the educational policy. Although the way the systems work is inscribed within a dynamic of continuous transformation, in all countries—at some point of their history—authorities have taken the decision to promote deep changes aimed to modify the educational system's structure and, thus, to transform aspects such as the horizon for their policies, their governance framework, and so on. Such moments are the ones which are defined in this paper as *educational reforms*: within the context of a permanent transformation of educational systems, we use the term *reforms* to name changes intended, from political power, to modify structural aspects related to the way the educational system works.

The innovations faced during the last fifteen years in Peru, Chile, and Ecuador are inscribed within the reformist initiatives that characterize the new century. Each of them has stressed expanding educational rights through various policies aimed to broaden the access to all educational

levels, emphasizing actions directed to the initial and secondary levels. These reforms have also acted in favor of improving quality and equity education through propositions aimed to recognize the rights of excluded and marginalized populations, and to carry out curricular transformations and standardized performance evaluations, among other remarkable measures.

When the three already-mentioned educational reforms are analyzed at a distance, it can be seen that the reform in Peru included a clear emphasis on an axis aimed to the instrumentation of actions to bridge educational gaps, such as the substitution and improvement of educational infrastructure as well as complementary actions for redirecting and improving related policies: those related to quality of learnings and effective management of the school system. However, the approval of the Teachers' Law Reform has been tremendously relevant to restructure the teaching career in order to achieve teachers' revaluing and job classification in that country.

On the other hand, the Chilean case shows a denser normative set which generated great changes in that country's school structure and which intended to bring about a deep change in terms of socio-educational impact and quality of learnings. In this case, the Educational Inclusion Law is the pillar for the Chilean reform and its strongest legal argument to revert the negative perceptions that reviled its educational system—characterized as discriminating and inequitable—, and to change its foundations.

Among the analyzed countries, Ecuador is the one that advanced the most in terms of educational system's structural changes. Besides, it redefined the reach and the character of the right to education in its territory; it laid out a new map of responsibilities for each actor in the system; and it reorganized their benefits in order to achieve equitable, quality education through the combination of improving complementary political actions and great structural changes to recover the State's involvement in this area. It is worthwhile mentioning that out of all the reforms analyzed here, Ecuador's is the only one that included a new general education law, the Intercultural Education Organic Law.

Beyond their special characteristics, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru advanced towards educational reforms which could clearly be integrated around three common structural axes: first, the decision to place the quality of learnings as the engine for their reform processes; second, initiatives for revaluing and redesigning teachers' careers as a determining factor to achieve improvements in learnings; and, finally, actions aimed to redefine the keys for the management of the system and the educational facilities.

The Mexican reform of recent years shares the same three central axes and, thus, it is part of this set of reforms and it shapes a new profile of actions which, undoubtedly, arises from the debate on educational policies developed in the region today. The concern for quality and the decision to put it as the horizon and meaning for the reform are manifest in the rewriting of the 3rd constitutional article, in which it is pointed out that the State "will guarantee the quality of mandatory education in such a way that the educational

materials and methods, the schools' organization, the educational infrastructure, and the suitability of teachers and directors assure the highest goal of achieving students' education" (CPEUM, 2013). The definition of teachers' career as a nodal factor for achieving quality is also an essential element in the Mexican reform and one shared by the others. Finally, the need to advance towards new management forms is expressed in the new educational model and it represents the institutional-pedagogical element of the reform.

Some aspects of the Mexican reform bring it closer to the Ecuadorian experience: for example, having the principle of education as a right as the framework for the educational policy; the explicit mandate for the State to retake the lead in educational policy; and, at an institutional level, the creation of autonomous evaluation agencies—the INEE, in Mexico, and the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (Spanish acronym: INEVAL), in Ecuador.

In spite of what has been just mentioned, the Mexican reform has its own special features. It not only entails a change in the main laws that establish the rules of the educational-policy game, but this transformation also included—as it has already been mentioned—the modification of the 3rd constitutional article. This fact was possible thanks to a political consensus at the highest level. This is also a reform that deals with the quality issue through two very clear institutional definitions derived from two laws, such as the INEE Law (Spanish acronym: LINEE) and the Teachers' Professional Service Law (Spanish acronym: LSPD). Finally, the four countries share an aspect of educational policy which is central in the region's debate: teachers' performance evaluations. Peru, Ecuador, and México established these evaluations after their most recent reforms, while Chile had already incorporated them by 2003.

Final comments

The analysis of the educational situation in Mexico and its policies within the Latin-American context allows to identify some special characteristics which deserve to be pointed out. First, the fact that in spite of being one of the eight richest countries in the region, Mexico is also within the group of the eight countries with a higher level of poverty. The conditions of structural poverty that prevail in an important part of the population in Mexico represent one of the greatest obstacles for complying with the constitutional mandate of guaranteeing the universal right to quality education. In this environment, compensatory actions included in the spectrum of educational policies in this country are not enough to revert the deep inequities that still prevail.

Therefore, this gives rise to the need to promote a debate focused on two relevant aspects of educational policy: on the one hand, the structural parts for the functioning of the educational system which contribute towards the reproduction of these deep inequities and make current compensatory actions less effective; and, on the other, considering that the goal of guaranteeing the right to education goes beyond educational policies, which must be taken as State policies, and involves various different governmental areas—labor,

social welfare, transportation, and territorial infrastructure—in order for it to be achieved.

The need to review the structure of Mexico's educational policy refers to other subjects already analyzed in this study, the progress in the search for dialogue and consensus mechanisms to strengthen educational federalism in Mexico. As it was pointed out, Mexican educational policies are the most centralized in the three federal countries in the region, which may restrict the federal states and municipalities' exercise of sovereignty. However, the national State has the responsibility to insure—within a context of greater decentralization—equal achievements in terms of new generations' right to education. This entails the need to create support and strengthening mechanisms for educational management at the local sphere. In that context, the INEE's experience in strengthening federal states' government teams—so they can carry out the evaluation of their educational improvement programs—can be a reference point in the debate.

Reviewing the structural aspects of the educational policy in order to improve their effectiveness in face of the complex social environment which characterizes Mexico—together with the possibility of promoting a reflection on strategies to strengthen educational federalism—reinforces the arguments for opening a debate on the regulatory framework to establish the game rules for educational policy and, specifically, the general law for education. As it was pointed out, this would be a great opportunity to invite society as a whole to discuss the education Mexico proposes for its population and the needed policy strategies to guarantee its effectiveness. ∈

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Education 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: challenges and foresight

The 2030 Agenda outlines new challenges for Mexico's educational policy. In this country, the sustainable development goals (SDG) have led to an important process of participatory planning that represents a crucial change in the way of conceiving public-policy problems. **Patricia Vázquez** offers an accurate diagnosis of SDG 4 and explores solutions to overcome the challenges presented.

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Introduction

In recent decades, several international documents and regulations have posed the challenge of addressing common educational problems at a global scale. The meeting point that currently serves as reference is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, proposed by the United Nations (UN) and adopted by 193 member states since the end of 2015. This document includes seventeen objectives organized in

three developmental dimensions—social inclusion, environmental protection, and economic growth.

In this global context, Mexico has taken part actively and proactively, and has stood out for collaborating with the UN member countries in the adoption, adaptation, and development of public policies that allow responding to the source of the concerns proposed by the 2030 Agenda.

Although the Agenda allows identifying similar challenges and encourages international cooperation actions, at the national level it demands attention in several specific areas. For decades, an attempt has been made to trigger an inter-institutional agenda based on such challenges; today, its surveillance within a sustainability framework is required.

In education, approaches and goals are not a minor issue. SDG 4, "Quality education," requires a thorough review of the participation of the government sector, civil society, and academia, with the aim of quantifying and establishing common mechanisms that reflect progresses in the implementation of public educational policies while considering pending challenges.

Mexico's participation in the 2030 Agenda

A few months before the Agenda was approved at the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development, Mexico began a discussion on how the 17 objectives, 169 goals, and 231 global indicators should be translated so that its characteristics—universality, indivisibility and entailment between each other—were preserved.

At the time, commissions and work groups were installed at all levels of the federal public administration. The discussions included voices of government officials, non-governmental organizations, businessmen and researchers, who set the route for the national strategy.

At the beginning, what was relevant was to socialize the challenges and the scope of a very ambitious agenda for Mexico; but, at the same time, it was important to incorporate already-enforced actions and successful experiences.

The promoted actions, at the national level, were set through the creation of the *National Strategy for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda* [*Estrategia nacional para la puesta en marcha de la Agenda 2030*] (Presidencia de la República, 2018b) and the voluntary national reports. The latter were presented in 2018 and, with it, Mexico became one of the eight countries in the world that made public their intention to comply with the 2030 Agenda, along with Benin, Colombia, Egypt, Qatar, Switzerland, Togo, and Uruguay (Gobierno de la República, 2018).

The principles of the Education 2030 Agenda

In the Agenda, education occupies the fourth place, after the goals related to poverty, global hunger, and health. The goal that interests us here highlights the importance of guaranteeing educational quality, which consists of "an inclusive and equitable education [...] and promoting opportunities for lifelong learning for all" (UN, 2018).

In order to analyze progress in this objective, it is essential to address the principles that have constituted the frame of reference in the national strategy and that have given coherence to the scope of its goals and indicators.

1. *Not leaving anyone behind: equity.* This is the first commitment of the 2030 Agenda, and it considers that a sustainable development model must guarantee human rights for all people. In education, the compromise seeks to ensure conditions with an equity-based approach, from birth and throughout life.
2. *Promoting universality.* It refers to the shared responsibility of all countries to find solutions to global problems. Education plays a preponderant role in encouraging and creating awareness in future generations about sustainable development.
3. *Promoting multi-actor alliances: inclusion.* It requires joint work and the commitment of all the actors involved. In education, it requires exercises to collectively create, co-produce and collaborate in the solution of the problems posed by the goals and indicators.
4. *Integrality, interdependence and indivisibility: sustainability.* The three main dimensions of the 2030 Agenda—economic, social and environmental—must be conceived together, since current problems do not respond to a unidimensional logic. The possibility of establishing synergies and addressing the problems presented in a comprehensive, interdependent and indivisible way allows considering, for example, the inclusion of sustainable development as a transversal issue in the curriculum of compulsory education.

Challenges in implementing the Education 2030 Agenda

During the last three years, SDG 4 has had its own trajectory. The development of the World Education Forum, in May 2015, brought together members from 160 countries, and it was the platform for the formulation and drafting of the goal regarding quality education.

In November 2015, the 2030 Education Framework for Action was approved in Paris, which specifically frames lifelong learning. To account for progress, the monitoring reports on education in the world—Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)—represent the mechanism responsible for showing results up to 2030.

At the national level, the Secretariat of Public Education (Spanish acronym: SEP) has been responsible for articulating several working groups and conciliating the voices of specialists in the subject. Within the context of the national strategy, promoted by the federal government, the need for a *roadmap* that allows joining efforts and guiding educational dialogue is highlighted.

In Mexico there is a first consensus among the actors involved. Out of the ten specific targets contained in SDG 4, seven were designed with the intention of obtaining quantifiable results, while the remaining three were developed as follow-up and execution mechanisms to reach the other ones.

The first seven specific targets proposed for 2030 are: *a)* to achieve the universalization of primary and secondary education; *b)* to provide access and quality services for

early childhood care, development and pre-primary education; *c)* to ensure access under equal conditions for technical education, middle education, and higher education; *d)* to increase the relevant skills of young people and adults for work or entrepreneurship purposes; *e)* to eliminate gender disparities and promote equality and equity in compulsory education; *f)* to improve literacy and basic academic-skills indicators; and *g)* to promote education for sustainable development in all levels of education.

Regarding the three monitoring and execution goals, the following needs are posed: *a)* to build an institutional design that promotes innovative and effective learning environments; *b)* to increase the number of scholarships in order to support students who need it most; and *c)* to have better prepared teachers that can face a changing context.

Given that the 2030 Agenda's goal approach to problems is an innovative model for undertaking reality, it is essential to carefully review the participation of the actors involved. SDG 4 has goals and indicators that require association with state and municipal governments. This implies close collaboration with schools and teachers, which is still very difficult to visualize.

Overcoming the challenges facing the education agenda demands a significant effort of information that guides the sector on the scope, levels of participation, and requirements of the actors involved, who daily face social and cultural challenges that are not very well defined in the international agenda.

Follow-up reports provide some guidelines for reflecting on the challenges in the implementation of the Agenda in the national framework. The first one highlights the relevance of promoting an educational system with new approaches aimed at promoting the attendance and permanence of all children and youths in school age. This demands the commitment of the many levels of government: in order to achieve universality of primary education, the work of local authorities is essential. If current trends continue, only 70% of the children in low-income countries will finish primary school in 2030, even though this goal should have been achieved by 2015 (UNESCO, 2017a).

A sustainable vision of educational systems requires in-school learning, awareness, and the discussion of environmental, as well as social and cultural, developmental challenges. For this reason, lifelong learning, traditional knowledge, and supporting local languages teaching acquire greater relevance, as they strengthen identities and intergenerational links, which can be addressed from a new curricular approach.

And, in fact, the 2030 Agenda highlights the need for designing a novel curricular approach based on citizenship education and sustainability. Looking at education with a vision that incorporates current paradigms about life competency and socio-emotional skills is a pending task that must also be integrated into this project.

Reaching the aims of SDG 4 requires a deep curricular transformation. International experience shows us that the modification of study plans and programs should not be subordinated to individual government administrations, and

that the new proposals deserve a meticulous analysis in the world agenda, especially in Latin America.

Finally, it is essential to approach the issue of teachers. Although one of the targets describes the important task of having better qualified teachers by 2030, the Agenda should be an instrument to address the teachers' discussion. The distance that a global work route can show regarding local reality is immense; however, educational changes happen in the classroom and for the classroom.

The responsibility placed on SDG 4 is very high, because at least one goal out of each of the seventeen remaining objectives has a direct correlation with citizens' education. As the *GEM Report* indicates, the link between education and the other goals goes both ways. Health, gender equality, or poverty cannot be separated from the educational agenda.

Definitely, education as a tool for ability growth can have multiplier effects for the various sustainable development goals. For this reason, there is a prevailing need to include the importance of teachers' role in the discussion, which has been blurred—up to now—in the implementation strategies.

Conclusions

For Mexico, the 2030 Agenda represents a change in the way of conceiving public issues and finding cross-cutting solutions that consider their interrelation. The road towards change and transformation also requires exploring multiple forms of work and solution alternatives.

However, there are still many concepts that are not covered by the proposed indicators. It is essential to monitor progress of SDG 4, taking into consideration the complexity of the factors that intervene in the improvement of educational outcomes. In this sense, evaluation and statistics systems have a great challenge ahead to generate timely information that allows fighting inequity and guaranteeing quality education for all.

In the spirit of leaving no one behind, the implementation of SDG 4 can no longer be considered solely a governmental task, but must be assumed as a shared responsibility for the multiple actors in society. The task of turning it into a flexible and dynamic planning tool for the monitoring, evaluation, and attainment of national goals is in the hands of all those involved.

For such reason, this international framework becomes an unparalleled opportunity to generate dialogues between multiple sectors, and to encourage their active participation. The 2030 Agenda represents a unique opportunity to adjust and improve public policies upon the basis of evidence, to foster actions that go beyond a single federal administration, to generate alliances between different sectors, to promote interregional cooperation and knowledge and good practices exchange, as well as—above all—benefitting from international cooperation.

The implementation of the Agenda has required, and still requires, an immense process of participatory planning with a comprehensive, transversal, and coherent public-policy approach that considers the human rights perspective

and integrates a vision of what a sustainable future for Mexico means. **Є**

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Educational reforms in Latin America: summary and perspectives from Mexico

Connoisseur of the key points that have transformed education in the continent, **Antonio Ávila Díaz** offers a historical summary of the various phases of Latin-American educational reforms and concludes with the specificities of the 2013 Educational Reform in Mexico.

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Reforms are part of the very nature of educational systems, if they really aim to accompany and sustain the development processes of a nation. This is particularly true in Latin America, a region historically determined by a deep lack of equality, and where it is hoped for education—with its transforming potential—to be the engine for economic progress and social prosperity rooted in justice and equity.

The 1950s. The background for educational reforms

After the end of the Second World War, Europe was being reconstructed and the international community, committed in this endeavor, founded the United Nations (UN) in October 1945. The urgency for immediately rebuilding Europe's educational systems, and thinking about the long term in order to educate for peace, led to the creation, in November of that same year, of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).[1] A decade later, at the 9th Session of the UNESCO General Conference, in December 1956, its Main Programme—related to the generalization of primary education in Latin America—was approved. This initiative is where the background for Latin-American educational reforms can be found. The Main Project was based on the following diagnosis of educational problems in the region:

1. Out of a school population of 40 million, only 17 million have access to primary education.
2. Studies show that school desertion is very high and the total number of students who finish their primary education is not even 20% of those who initially enrolled in it.
3. The average educational level for the total population in Latin America reaches only to the first grade of primary school, and, in the case of those who had the opportunity to actually get into school, the average only reaches up to the fourth grade.
4. This contributes to an extraordinary population growth (2.6% per year).
5. Consequently, 500,000 more teachers—and an equivalent number of classrooms—would be needed in order to properly attend school-age population.
6. Other negative aspects are the lack of professional titles or studies for almost half the existing teachers; an insufficient financial remuneration for the staff; a lack of educational materials; a lack of educational policies' continuity in many cases; and deficiencies in management and supervision, which limit an effective use of available means and obtaining new resources for educational development (UNESCO, 1960: 35).

With its Main Project, the unesco aimed to:

1. Encourage systemic planning for education in Latin-American countries.
2. Foster the extension of primary-level educational services in order to achieve an adequate educational care for school-age population in Latin America.
3. Promote the reviewing of plans and programs in order to offer all children equity in terms of educational opportunities, and adapt education to the needs of the populations in various areas or regions, accordingly to the demands that society currently places on education.
4. Improve teachers' education, promoting their continuing education, and contribute to raise the moral, economical, and social level of the teaching profession.

5. Train, in each Latin-American country, a core group of educational leaders and specialists who are able to promote education and foster its progress (UNESCO, 1960: 35).

Thus, in the second half of the last century, the Latin-American countries that had already passed through a process of institutionalization in their educational systems had to face their first challenges in terms of reforms. Information was scarce: many countries in the region did not perform national population censuses, and those that did do it had the disadvantage of not only having questionnaires with a very reduced set of population characteristics, but they also had to deal with a fundamental problem, the low trustworthiness level of these censuses. In a 1968 report by the Latin-American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (Spanish acronym: CELADE), it is pointed that "censuses in Latin-American countries are deficient both in terms of population count and the information elicited by the included statements" (Lopes, 1974: 53). Educational statistics, as it is known today, didn't exist in those days, and information was obtained—in best-case scenarios—from administrative records. However, the advantage of censuses over educational statistics is that the former allowed for linking educational characteristics with social, economic, and demographical ones which was important for analysis in a context where evaluation was completely out of the scene.

However, the information obtained showed that a considerable percentage of the population was illiterate, and that school attendance was limited and it would mainly include children from privileged families, rarely the poorest segments. Average schooling—one of the first indicators which allowed to compare different countries—was low, particularly among the lower income population. There was a certitude that deep social inequalities were prevalent in the region's countries; there was also a conviction that education could contribute to correct this situation. The starting point was school system expansion, basically for primary education—to get children in school and to manage for them to remain in it. That is what the first educational reform in the region was about: educational coverage.

At the end of 1958, in Mexico, Adolfo López Mateos became President, and right from the first moment he took office, he set public education as a priority for his government. Jaime Torres Bodet was appointed at the head of the Secretariat of Public Education and he led a national commission that had the mission of formulating the National Plan for the Development and Improving of Primary Education, known as the 11-Year Plan, which was approved in 1959. This plan was the first effort towards long-term educational planning and its transforming reach was thus described in an article published in the Latin-American UNESCO quarterly journal, *Proyecto Principal de Educación*:

An effort of such scale as the one proposed in Mexico would truly be deprived of all reasonableness if a healthy and effective reform of school "doings" were not put into operation at

[1] However, the UNESCO Constitution only came into effect in 1946.

the same time. To determine the best educational path; to establish the principles and procedures needed to promote, conduct, and select experiences so they offer some sense of a sequence according to the conditions and possibilities in each school grade; to establish well-defined goals for each aspect of learning and for each course; and to foster an integral development of a personality inspired on a strong social sense and, therefore, on the promotion of moral values: all of the former constitute the core of the new primary-education programs. The National Plan for the Development and Improving of Primary Education finds its best support in such an education because when parents realize its elevated and practical nature they will do their best efforts so their children get, at least, the education that corresponds to that first educational stage (Cano, 1960: 39-40).

Although the 11-Year Plan aimed to broaden coverage for primary education,[2] it also aimed to reform the teaching methods and to have an effect in terms of its quality. The commission in charge of elaborating this plan specifically pointed out that "the idea of achieving quality improvement ought to be the dominating guideline for authorities, teachers, and students' efforts" (Cano, 1960: 39).

Within this context, on February 12th, 1959, the Free Textbooks National Commission was created through a decree and, immediately, books suitable for the needs of primary-school children and teachers were made. In a context in which the teachers' degree of professionalization was low, educational materials were essential. This was a praiseworthy national effort, both in terms of the volume of resources placed for it and of the transforming nature of this action.

The 1960s and 70s. Social movements and the subsequent hardships for educational development

The 1960s witnessed movements for social rights and freedoms, which opened new horizons for social change. However, in Latin America, worsening conflicts between the privileged and the socially and economically disadvantaged sectors, the advance of groups who agreed with left-wing ideologies, and the threats to the *statu quo* led to conflicts that ended in *coup d'états* and the establishment of military dictatorships in various countries throughout the region.[3] Heavily repressive dictatorial governments cancelled rights; forbid political and students' organizations, as well as unions; and launched neoliberal free-market

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2 The plan stated very clear goals: building and providing the needed furniture for 27,440 classrooms and 18,751 houses for rural teachers and 11,825 classrooms for urban schools; refurbishing 36,735 schools and 15,238 rural teachers' houses, as well as 2,518 urban schools; providing educational material for all these schools; educating 67,000 teachers; and improving technical training for the teaching staff in service, through the Federal Institute for Teachers' Training [Instituto Federal de Capacitación del Magisterio] (Cano, 1960: 38).

3 Brazil, in 1964; Bolivia, in 1971; Uruguay and Chile, in 1973; and Argentina, in 1976.

economies which propitiated economic exclusion of large sectors of the population. "Within this context, education—always closely linked to politics, economy, democratic institutions, and political will—was seriously damaged" (Carreño, 2015: 66).

With this precedent, in December 1979, a Latin-American Conference of Education Ministers was held in Mexico City, and out of it came the *Mexico City Declaration* [*Declaración de Ciudad de México*], in which the following is stated:

> Still, there are very deep deficiencies, such as the extreme poverty in which large segments of the population in most our countries live, as well as the persistence of low school-attendance levels in some of them; the regional presence of 45 million illiterate persons out of a total adult population of 159 million; an excessive rate of school desertion during the first educational years; teaching systems and contents which are often inadequate for the population they should reach; maladjustments in the education-work relation; a poor interaction between education and economic, social, and cultural development; and, in some cases, a deficient organization and management of educational systems, still characterized by a strong tendency towards centralization in normative and functional terms (Carreño, 2015: 66).

The 1980s. The Main Project and the need for educational reforms, again

The *Mexico City Declaration* concluded with the establishment of clear goals, which member nations had to implement; the most prominent of them were offering a minimal general education period of between eight and ten years; abolishing illiteracy before the end of the century; gradually earmarking increasing budgets for education until allocating no less than seven or eight percent of the gross domestic product to educational action; prioritizing the attention to underprivileged sectors of the population; launching the needed reforms so education could respond to the characteristics, needs, aspirations, and cultural values of all peoples, in order to contribute towards promoting and renewing the science teaching, as well as establishing a closer link between educational systems and the world of work; transforming curricula according to the needs of underprivileged groups; renewing teachers' training systems, both before and after teachers begin practicing their profession; socially and economically promoting teachers; and fostering an educational organization and management, adequate for new needs which, in most countries in the Latin-American region, require a larger degree of decentralization in terms of organizational decisions and processes, and a larger amount of flexibility in order to insure multisectoral actions and guidelines that promote innovation and change (UNESCO-OREALC, 1979).

This Declaration was the first step towards achieving the Main Project for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, approved in 1980, the purpose of which is summarized in the *Quito Recommendation* [*Recomendación de Quito*], that calls on the countries of the region to achieve three great goals before the year 2000: *a)* to achieve basic

school attendance for school-age children and to offer a minimal general education for a period between 8 and 10 years; *b)* to overcome illiteracy and to develop and broaden educational services for young people and adults; and *c)* to improve the quality and efficiency of educational systems, and of all teaching in general, through the implementation of the needed reforms and the design of effective learning-measurement systems (UNESCO-OREALC, 1981).

It is important to remember that the 1980s were marked by a very serious economic crisis known as *the Latin American debt crisis*, and its effects for economic and social development throughout the region were so devastating that the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) described it as *the lost decade*.

In spite of the clarity of the agenda proposed in the Main Project, and probably due to the economic crisis, the educational reforms that prevailed in the 1980s and the early 90s were "institutional reforms aimed to reorganize the system's management, financing, and access" (Martinic, 2010: 31). Basically, these reforms distributed educational services from central governments to federal states or provinces, municipalities and communes, and were limited to a single aspect: the transference of resources and responsibilities (Kaufman and Nelson, 2005).

In the spring of 1992, the National Agreement for the Modernization of Basic Education (Spanish acronym: ANMEB) was signed in Mexico, and it transferred the operation of basic and college-level teachers' educational services from the federal government towards the states. All school facilities, along with all related technical and administrative

elements, as well as their rights and obligations and the financial resources used in their operation, were transferred.

Going back to the *Mexico City Declaration*, the official discourse for justifying these reforms appealed to the need for "a greater decentralization of organizational decisions and processes", in order to get solutions closer to where the services were actually being operated. However, it is noted that "the emphasis placed on these aspects of the educational reform was due to the fact that they were part of a larger political agenda" (Kaufman and Nelson, 2005: 6). In fact, the decentralization of services not only implied a reduction of the central public apparatus, but also of educational budgets, while appealing to improvement of administrative efficiency and more focalization. However, transformations related to aspects such as learning processes, school autonomy, and social participation were still pending.

By then, there was a clear advancement in terms of census information collecting and the production of educational statistics: some countries already had national evaluation systems in place, although their work was focused on evaluating the system's efficiency; that is, cost-benefit studies and the analysis of resource allocation (Martinic, 2010).

The 1990s. The interest on students' learning

The 1990 World Conference Education for All, in Jomtien, Thailand, was a multilateral watershed in terms of education, where delegates from 155 countries, 20 international development organizations, and 150 non-governmental organizations adopted the *World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs.* As part of the document, guidelines were established to put the Declaration in

practice, and these were set out in the *Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs*, which aimed to be a reference, or guide, for nations to receive support to elaborate their execution plans.

The Jomtien Declaration took the place of the Main Educational Project—which had a horizon of action set in year 2000—and it put a stress on learnings, which determined a growing interest in Latin America for measuring and improving students' educational achievements. It is worth pointing out that educational investment also became a priority in this decade for international financial institutions, and that numerous conferences and countless studies took place. Likewise, roundtables and meetings were organized to discuss what ought to be done in schools in order to achieve an increase in learnings (Kaufman and Nelson, 2005). These spaces made clear the need for a new generation of educational reforms that would deal with issues related to curricular contents, as well as pedagogical and organizational processes. Novel ideas related to incentives for teachers' performance, accountability, standardized national tests, system-performance evaluation, school autonomy and parents' participation, among others, arose with great power.

Thus, a new cycle of reforms focused on educational quality—rather than on educational coverage—begun, in spite of the persisting deficits in the latter area, particularly in low-resources sectors; that is, prevalence of illiteracy in great population sectors, and the phenomena of school desertion and repetition at the basic educational level. In those years, as the concern was set on the pedagogic area, the focus of interest centered on acquisition of basic knowledges and skills and on transversal curricula; that is, environmental, civic, and human-rights issues, among others

(Carreño, 2015). Due to the specific characteristics of the Latin-American region, issues such as interculturality and bilingualism for indigenous populations surfaced with great power. Teachers' training acquired a prominent relevance, although it was aimed towards classroom interaction as a key process. Evaluation was redirected towards assessing absolute learnings acquisition (Martinic, 2010).

The new century and the rise of evaluations

With the arrival of the new century, standardized tests also arrived at the international level, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), with the purpose of investigating the acquisition—by students near the end of compulsory education (fifteen years old)—of the knowledge and skills necessary for full participation in society; and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), that evaluates the aforesaid areas of knowledge in students enrolled in grades fourth and eighth, and is coordinated by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

In Latin America, Mexico participated in the PISA data collection in 2000 as a member country, while Brazil and Argentina also participated as non-member countries; in Chile and Peru, the evaluation began in 2002; and in Colombia, in 2006.

In 1994, the Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC-UNESCO) promoted the creation of the Latin-American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (Spanish acronym: LLECE), which promoted the application of the Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (Spanish acronym:

SERCE) in 2006, and of the Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (Spanish acronym: TERCE) in 2013, referring to large-scale learning achievement. The main goal was to generate knowledge that would help education ministries in the region to make informed decisions regarding educational policies, based on the analysis of results of the evaluation research carried out by the LLECE, under the idea that learning achievement must occupy a relevant place as an indicator of educational quality (UNESCO-OREALC, 2016). Similarly, at the national level, various evaluations were emerging, such as the Education Quality Assessment System (Spanish acronym: SIMCE) in Chile, which was first applied in 1988, and the National Assessment of Academic Achievement in School Centers (Spanish acronym: ENLACE), implemented in Mexico since 2006.

The availability of results led to the emergence of accountability in the region and, at the same time, the need for methodological rigor in the generation and analysis of information. Learning results began to be statistically linked to the student's social and cultural context. The teaching-learning process that took place in each school, in each classroom, was of particular relevance. The evaluations broadened their focus to encompass educational processes, in addition to learning outcomes. Martinic defines this stage as the third generation of reforms in the region, focused on the quality of interactions and pedagogical practices: "In these interactions rests, precisely, the possibility of change and improvement in school, despite the constraints imposed by unequal conditions in children's lives" (Martinic, 2010: 35).

2013. The Educational Reform in Mexico

Although 2013 marks the beginning of the Educational Reform, the truth is that it is a still-in-progress process. Mexico's poor results in international evaluations, such as PISA, revealed that the National Educational System (Spanish acronym: SEN) was not delivering the expected results. Although, historically, Mexico has moved with different levels of intensity through the various aforementioned phases in the process of Latin-American educational reforms, in the second decade of this century, the SEN was trapped in a problem linked to its governance, which prevented the reforms—undertaken in advance—from having the impact expected from them.

Assuming that the educational fact crucially depends on the quality of pedagogical interactions and practices, the focus of attention moves towards the school, to what happens in the classroom; the key issues are teachers' performance, curricular flexibility, infrastructure and furniture conditions, educational materials, and so on. However, everything that might be added in this sense is diluted when patronage practices prevail or when the governance of the system has broken down. Therefore, the first challenge facing the Educational Reform was recovering control of the State on education.

Its viability rested on a broad agreement between the main political forces in the country and the federal government, which was signed the day after the start of the 2012-2018 administration: the *Pact for Mexico*. In the educational area, this commitment was immediately translated into legislative initiatives: the constitutional reform and the modification or issuance of secondary laws, through which the right to quality education was raised to a constitutional status, meaning that students should reach maximum achievement in learning; the Professional Teaching Service (Spanish acronym: SPD) was established; autonomy was granted to the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: INEE); and a set of actions aimed at promoting the autonomous management of schools, strengthening information systems, improving educational infrastructure, reinforcing the role of school supervision and favoring technical assistance to school, among other measures, was fostered.

As part of the actions aimed at recovering the leadership of the State on education, the double wage negotiation—operated by the sectional union leaders with local governments—ended with the sign of the Agreement on Automaticity, in which unique salary negotiation was agreed. The reform also arranged the revision of the fund through which resources were granted to federal entities for the payment of a federalized payroll, which was replaced by a new one, the Contribution Fund for Educational Payroll and Operating Expenses (Spanish acronym: FONE). Its integration supposed a previous conciliation of federalized positions and derived in the centralization of the federal educational payroll, ending with the irregular creation of positions and significantly improving transparency and accountability.

The implementation of the Professional Teaching Service—which replaced the National Teaching Career Program—aroused resistance from certain union groups that opposed teacher performance evaluations. Now, in hindsight, most of the country's teachers have participated in the evaluation processes, either to obtain a position, to be credited for receiving incentives in their function, to promote themselves, or to remain in front of a group. The discretionary system that existed before has been transformed into one based on merit, in which knowledge and performance are recognized and appreciated.

The evaluation of learnings was also reformed. In 2013, the INEE studied the validity of the tests that were applied until then, ENLACE and Exams on Educational Quality and Achievement (Spanish acronym: EXCALE): the results indicated that it was advisable to replace them with a new approach. As of the 2014-2015 school year, the National Plan for the Evaluation of Learning (Spanish acronym: PLANEA)—"a new generation of tests to measure and evaluate the achievement of learning in elementary and upper-secondary education" (INEE, 2018: 9)—was put into operation.

The reform provided the holding of national forums for revising the educational model. As a result of a first consultation process, in 2016 a pedagogical rethinking was put into society's consideration, and work on it was continued on the basis of the contributions received; finally, in 2017, the new *Educational Model for Compulsory Education. Educate for Freedom and Creativity* [*Modelo educativo para la educación obligatoria. Educar para la libertad y la creatividad*]

(sep, 2017a) was published. The model is formed by five components, namely: the curricular approach, schools at the center of the educational system, teacher training and professional development, inclusion and equity, and educational system governance. In the same year, the documents *Key Learnings for Integral Education. Plan and Study Programs for Elementary Education* [*Aprendizajes clave para la educación integral. Plan y programas de estudio para la educación básica*] (sep, 2017b) and *Reference Curricula for the Common Curricular Framework of Upper Secondary Education* [*Planes de estudio de referencia del marco curricular común de la educación media superior*] (sep, 2017c) came to light.

In the case of elementary education, academic training was maintained as a curricular component, but two new elements were incorporated: the development of socio-emotional skills and the scope of curricular autonomy. The modification of the study plan and the study programs triggered the development of a new generation of educational materials, including not only free textbooks, but also key learnings posters for schools, books for school libraries and teaching guides, as well as online courses oriented to teachers' updating.

The 2018-2019 school year is of great importance for education in Mexico, since the multiple elements that define the Educational Reform finally converge in schools. The expectation for the implementation's results should not lead to stop thinking about what comes later. Successful reforms not only depend on a solid approach, but—substantively—on their sustainability over time.

There are still areas of opportunity that must be addressed: the budgetary constraint—of which little has been said in this article—must be approached with seriousness; questioning, for example, if the dispersion of educational facilities that characterize elementary education services in Mexico should be maintained or if the consolidation or integration of multilevel schools should be promoted; inquiring whether the policy of annually printing consumable textbooks belonging to students should be maintained or if, instead, it would be better to consider three-yearly impression of higher quality books that remain in the schools; among other. Dilemmas do not stop.

Conclusions

The revision of the Latin-American educational reforms reveals that the issue of equity has been constant—education for all. However, in the recent period, linked to the boom in evaluations, quality was almost absolutely emphasized.

It is not about choosing between the objectives of either equity or quality, but about the dilemma of how to solve both of them together—equity understood as the generation of learning conditions that allow that the knowledge—acquired by the students—breaks the vicious circle of poverty, and to achieve an effective equality of opportunities. This is what educates learners to *know*, to *know how to do*, and to *know how to be*. ∈

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Policy evaluation and the use of its results: the INEE guidelines

Francisco Miranda, head of the Unit for Normativity and Educational Policy of the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education, takes stock of the efforts made by the latter institution to carry out evaluations of educational policies and programs aimed at improving education and use their results, plotting out future development paths for strengthening the aforesaid processes.

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It should certainly be a basic concern of all governments that claim to be democratic, and are committed to transparency and accountability, to ensure that the results of systematic, rigorous, objective evaluations and studies are actually used to design and implement policies.

The evaluation of public policy can be defined as the systematic analysis and valuation of projects or programs in order to determine whether they are pertinent, effective, and impactful, achieving their developmental aims in a sustainable way.

Evaluation provides relevant information that enables us to ascertain the size and nature of public-policy problems, identify their causes and take stock of the social contexts in which they manifest themselves. Moreover, it allows us to ascertain the scope and limitations of the government policies or programs that were previously implemented, adopt good practices at the international level that can be enforced in Mexico, and study the design, execution, results and impact of the policies or programs to be evaluated.

By providing solid evidence, evaluation helps to ensure that decisions pertaining to improvement are not based on the capricious, biased, whimsical or irrational decisions of a few people, but rather on objective measurement founded on methodologies and techniques that are pertinent, valid and reliable. Hence, there is no point in putting evaluation systems in place if one does not assume responsibility for using their results in order to make decisions aimed at improving their design, implementation, efficiency and effectiveness.

While the literature on evaluation asserts that it is optimally effective when its findings influence decisions as to whether programs and policies should be continued (Weiss,

1998), it bears pointing out that there are different types and forms of use.

Sometimes evaluation results are only used symbolically to justify decisions regardless of the findings or the effects that are discovered; at other times they are used in order to enlighten, with merely informative aims. In less common, but more relevant, situations, they are used for conceptual purposes as a teaching tool, or so as to clarify points for decision-makers. Conversely, in a very small number of cases, evaluation has effective instrumental uses: it has a direct influence on decisions or on the apportionment of resources (Weiss, 1998; Mark and Henry, 2004; Fleischer and Christie, 2009; Ledermann, 2012).

Various studies assert that, in order for the results of policies and programs to be used properly, they must satisfy at least three important requirements that are closely linked to each other: they must be technically robust, lead to recommendations that are feasible, and have a normative strength that leads them to be acted on.

The said studies conclude that, although rigorous, high-quality technical work is essential, the evaluation process must also take stock of decision makers, since the success of any recommendation depends on when, how, where and to whom it is made—extremely important factors that are often only addressed based on experience. Equally important are the normative potentialities of the evaluation and incentives for the changes that it recommends. According to the literature on this subject, the higher the cost of not heeding a recommendation, or the greater the benefits of following it, the less likely it is to be ignored (Weiss, 1998; Hammersley, 2016).

The legal framework

The 2013 Educational Reform required important amendments to articles 3 and 73 of the Mexican Constitution, chief among which were the vouchsafing of high-quality education for all and the role assigned to the National Educational Evaluation System (Spanish acronym: SNEE), which is coordinated by the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: INEE), as the guarantor thereof.

So that the said Institute could fully achieve the aforesaid aim, the Constitution charged it with various tasks, outstanding among which was the issuance of recommendations regarding the improvement of education based on evaluation results, in the form of legally mandated *guidelines.*

Below, we describe the most important achievements made in the endeavor to forge the complex, difficult links between the results, recommendations and use of policy and syllabus evaluations in the context of the learnings stemming from the INEE's experience in issuing educational-policy guidelines.

From the INEE

It should first be stressed that the approaches, analytical frameworks and debates mentioned above constitute the basic touchstone of the INEE's efforts to evaluate educational policies and programs, and to issue guidelines.

In this regard, the Institute created a Model for the Evaluation of Educational Programs and Policies that established a guidance framework for the development of evaluations and the addressing of key considerations regarding what is to be evaluated, why, how and for whom.

The said model proposes the following design and implementation stages: *a*) construction; *b*) issuance; *c*) communication; *d*) response from the education authority; *e*) implementation; *f*) monitoring and follow-up; and *g*) updating.

To date, thirty-one studies and evaluations of educational policies and programs have been carried out, split up into the following six topic areas:

1. The model for the evaluation of educational policies and programs.
2. Policies and programs pertaining to educational equity, based on which government actions to address vulnerable groups were evaluated.
3. Studies and evaluations of policies and programs for tackling dropout at the lower-secondary level.
4. Studies and evaluations of the policies pertaining to physical educational infrastructure.
5. Studies and evaluations of the policies pertaining to social participation in education.
6. Studies and evaluations of educational policy carried out by international organizations at the request of the INEE.

Based on the said evaluations, the following five groups of guidelines have been issued: *Guidelines to improve the initial training of elementary-level teachers; Guidelines to improve the education of children and youths from migrant day laborers' families; Guidelines to improve the education of indigenous children and youths; Guidelines to increase continuation in lower-secondary education; and Guidelines to improve policies pertaining to the training and professional development of elementary-level teachers.*

The guidelines set out to have an impact on educational policy so that actions are taken by the government to improve educational quality and increase educational equity. They are drawn up based on an analysis of the evaluation results of the authorities' efforts to ascertain how to satisfy the population's educational needs. When they are drafted, different social and educational actors—above all, teachers, school principals, public servants, academics and representatives of non-governmental organizations—are consulted. They are aimed at the education authorities who are responsible for deploying the budget assigned for satisfying the said needs, at both the local and the federal levels.

While the issuance of guidelines is an important starting point in the efforts to change or strengthen education, it does not suffice to meet the set aims. Hence, in accordance with the powers vested in it, and to fulfill its obligation to further transparency and accountability, the INEE has set in motion mechanisms aimed at following up on, and supporting, the actions taken by the education authorities in this regard.

Conclusions

As I have stated in other publications (Miranda, 2013 and 2016), government actions and policies must be part of a concerted effort to make decisions that are both effective and legitimate. In other words, policies, and the decisions that stem from them, are the result of a dual process marked by a tension-filled endeavor to achieve a balance between the creation and use of evidence, and also to define direction, meaning and structural contents that are based on substantive principles or values.

The experiences of Mexico and other countries show that, despite the unquestionable progress achieved in educational evaluation, there are still challenges to be faced—some technical and analytical, and others political and relating to good government. Along with better evaluation that is more pertinent and technically and political articulated, more effort must be made to use evaluation results in a timely manner as a basis for improvement-oriented interventions, reformulate policies, change decisions and reassign resources.

With regard to the issuance and use of policy recommendations, some future lines of action are identified aimed at strengthening currently existing institutional frameworks and developing innovatory processes at the technical, institutional and political levels. Among other things, we should carry out the following:

1. Ensure that the evaluation results pertaining to different components, processes and evidences, and studies and evaluations of policy in the strict sense, complement each other.
2. Analyze the causal implications both of the problems that are identified by evaluations, and also the effectiveness of the programs implemented, and actions taken, by the government to solve them.
3. Do more to strengthen the legal and institutional frameworks that enable policy recommendations or government actions to have more impact.
4. Strengthen and foster the checks and balances between evaluators and political decision makers, focusing on the potential benefits, both lateral and horizontal, for society and citizens.
5. Carry out feasibility studies so as to ascertain the degree and intensity of the actual or potential constraints on improvement proposals stemming from evaluation results.
6. Tailor our recommendations or guidelines aimed at improving government policies and actions so that they address academics, members of society in general, politicians and authorities in the different areas of the education system.
7. Carry out lobbying aimed at influencing political decision-makers and ensuring that government authorities are aware of our recommendations or guidelines and heed them.
8. Put in place strategies aimed at strengthening institutional capacities at both the federal and local levels so as to enable those involved to *own* policy-improvement processes and educational results.
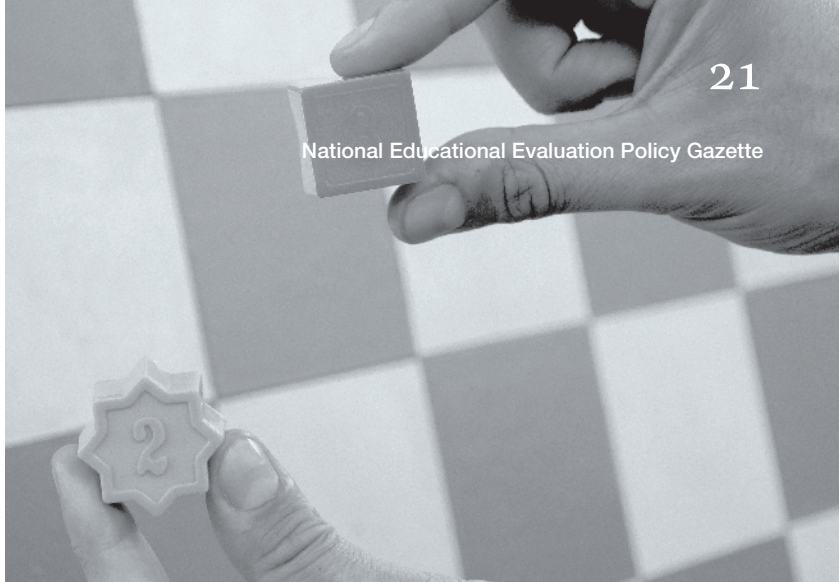
9. Create a system for monitoring and following up on adherence to the guidelines so as to ascertain how effective they are and identify bottlenecks and good practices.
10. Create forums for public deliberation and debate about the recommendations and guidelines among the political and social protagonists, which implies linking the classic takers of government action (or formulators of policy) with mechanisms for agreeing on agendas and defining policy communities.
11. Ensure that policies based on evidence of the good practices or bad results identified for each program or political action are underpinned by logic, rather than ideological leanings, party loyalties or electoral preferences, so as to strengthen public policy
12. Introduce evaluation systems and guidelines regarding transparency and public-spending accountability, for which purpose we need to ensure that there is a balance between economic considerations and the needs of the most vulnerable sectors of society.

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Special report: Reforms, challenges and new paradigms

The following *Special report* consists of four contributions which examine, from different viewpoints, the proposals that have permeated educational reforms and policies in Ibero-America, and also discuss the challenges and paradigms that are arising in this new century.

First, the researcher Aurora Loyo gives us a comparative overview of the reform proposals that prevailed in Mexico, Brazil and Argentina in the nineteen nineties. Next, Álvaro Marchesi and Eva María Pérez, academics from the Complutense University of Madrid, present their proposal for a teacher-evaluation model for the Spanish educational system.

Meanwhile, Ricardo Cuenca, from the Institute of Peruvian Studies, analyzes the results of the Latin American Public Opinion Project and the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study, stressing the importance of the link between politics and education for enhancing the quality of democracy in Latin America. Finally, in a humanistic vision based on the ethics of care, Cecilia Espinosa, the director of the SM Mexico Foundation, puts forth a new educational paradigm for achieving the aims of the 2030 Educational Agenda.

What remains today of the great wave of educational reforms of the 1990s in Latin America?

In the present article, **Aurora Loyo**, a specialist in educational policies, social actors, and teacher organizations in Latin America, contrasts from a comparative perspective the proposals that have prevailed in the educational reforms in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina during the 1990s.

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Since Baron Alexander von Humboldt's times, restless minds have sought out educational systems from countries other than their own. This healthy curiosity, accompanied by reflection, gave rise to what we know today as *comparative education.* It is not enough to travel to the neighboring country, observe, ask questions, write down in a journal; it is inevitable to inquire about the similarities and differences. Thus, we discover that comparison—as an approach—allows us to deepen our understanding about our own educational system. What in our country seems novel, in another it may have been launched earlier and showed its weaknesses. What we judge to be idiosyncratic, a distinctive feature of our schools, may not be so. In short, ignoring other experiences is almost as dangerous as imitating them thoughtlessly. On the other hand, contrasting and systematically comparing them is always enriching.

For Mexico, the natural area of reference is Latin America. Starting with this tradition, we consider it useful to turn our attention to the educational reforms of the 1990s. We will focus our attention on what happened in Mexico to contrast it with very different processes—the Argentinean and the Brazilian ones. We are interested in answering the following question: How much have the great issues of the reforms of the 1990s faded and how much are they still present?

The 1990s reforms: a retrospective

In the 1990s, an educational discourse was introduced in Latin America, which permeated, to a degree that had never happened before, the agendas of national governments, academic congresses on education, mass media, and even conversations among citizens. It was a totalizing discourse because, even though there were differences of nuance and emphasis, it contained a hard core whose most powerful issuer—although not the only one—was the World Bank. This was possible in the context of a crisis derived from public debt and the discrediting of the welfare state model. The *government's reform* was considered as a viable solution, and several interconnected processes were set in motion within the educational field.

On the one hand, there were diagnoses that emphasized the different deficits of national educational systems. There were, of course, differences in each national case, but it is interesting to mention here the general guidelines that were proposed as ways of improvement. The most important one was decentralization, followed by the recommendation to encourage social participation, seeking the inclusion of new actors beyond teachers' unions. Other guidelines aimed to change the structure and duration of educational system (ES) cycles and to give preference to basic education over the
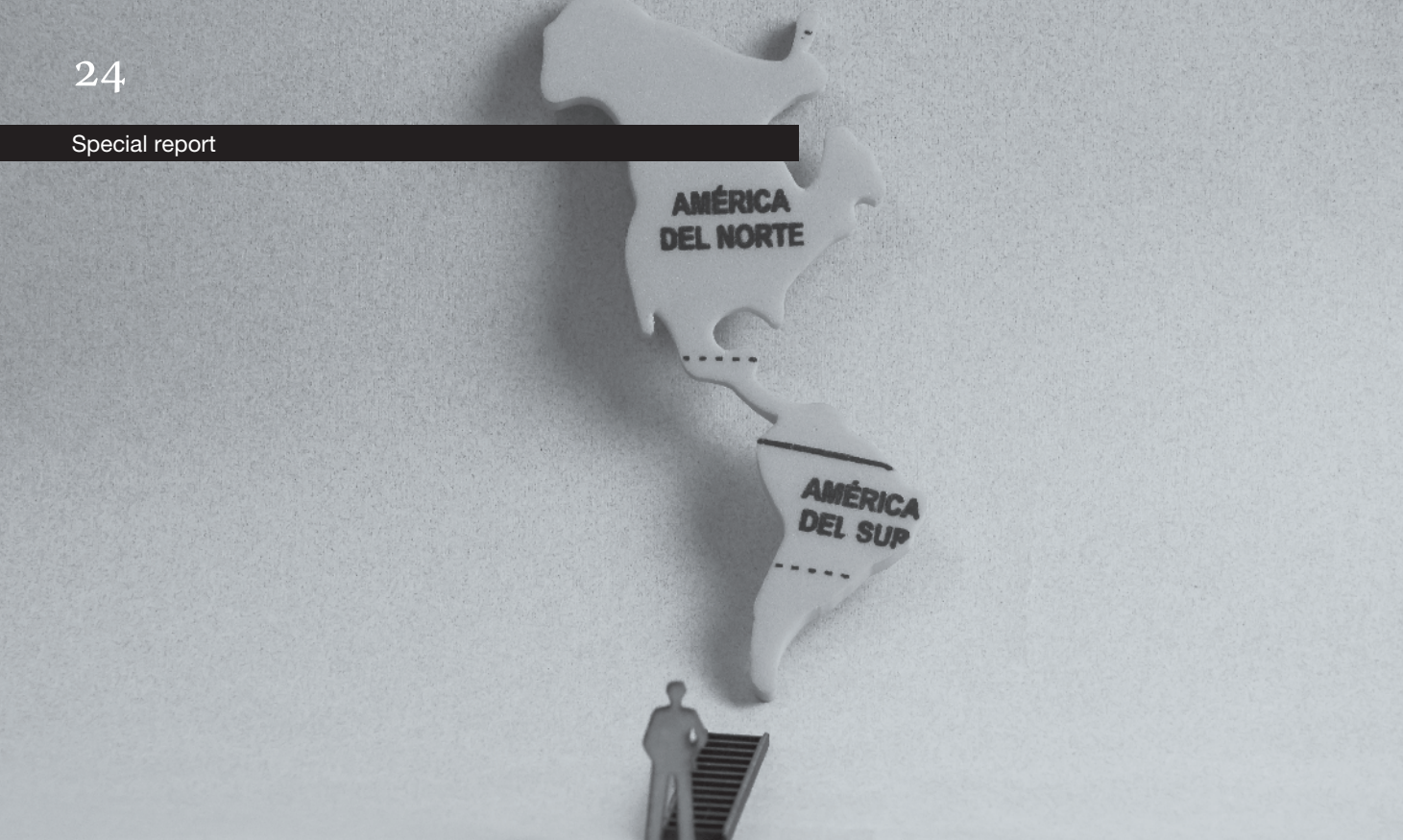
higher levels. Along with the concept of *educational quality*, the importance of teacher's professionalization and the convenience of having a set of coherent rules for entry and promotion in the educational system—as well as to install evaluation procedures and incentives—were repeatedly pointed out. School management was another paramount theme, and the need to have more and better data on all the elements and processes that intervene in the ES was emphasized.

Equity was not absent from this discourse. For example, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) produced a document that included the issues of quality and equity. Given that social policy cannot be separated from education, during that decade programs focused on the most vulnerable populations were launched. Although the quality-equity equation was solved in different ways—both in the discourse of international and regional organizations and in government agendas—the accent was placed on quality.

Three national cases

In Argentina, the educational reform acquired full legal status through the Federal Education Law of April 1993, which established changes in the structure, organization, and financing of the educational system, without forgoing to address educational and pedagogical issues. Since the reform was settled in conditions of budgetary shortage, the intention to redistribute educational financing was central. The new Federal Educational Pact established greater responsibilities for Argentinean provinces with serious political and social costs for the poorest regions.

In the case of Brazil, redistribution took a different path: The Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Fundamental Education and the Valorization of Teaching (Portuguese acronym: FUNDEF) aimed for municipalization. As a result, the total amount of the participation fund for the municipalities was similar to that established for the states. The calculation for both of them considered the number of students serviced according to the school census issued the previous year by the Ministry of Education. The objective set out in the documents was to ensure that resources were distributed in such a way that it was possible to advance in the universalization of fundamental education.

In Mexico, the reformist drive of the 1990s managed to install two trends that would mark the educational policies of the following decades. In the social sphere, targeting focused on helping the poorest sectors. The major programs in that decade, Solidarity [Solidaridad] and Progress [Progresa], included an educational component. The National Solidarity Program (Spanish acronym: PRONASOL), created in December 1988, gave priority to primary education and, in 1990, it launched the Dignified School Program [Escuela Digna]. Children in Solidarity [Niños en Solidaridad] was designed to combat school desertion; its objective, focused on specific strata, was to counteract families' misery so their children could stay in school. The Progress program introduced some modifications, but following the same lines. Although Argentina instituted a compensatory program—the Educational Social Plan, in force between 1993 and 1999—, Mexico was at the forefront in terms of targeted social-policy programs.

In other aspects, the Mexican reform was less ambitious. There were no teams of experts comparable to those involved in Argentine education (Tedesco and Tenti, 2001). Nor were spaces opened for educational innovation at the local level,

such as those that were set in place in Brazil. What happened in Mexico was, basically, a limited decentralization at the state level that, although it transferred the control of basic education and teacher-training schools to the governments of the states, it kept all normative aspects centralized, especially the curricular one. However, as far as financing is concerned, in Mexico the states did not suffer the hardships or shocks that affected the Argentine provinces during that decade.

Our assessment would be incomplete if we didn't include a crucial issue in the success of any reform: the reformers' capacity to achieve consensus and reduce conflict. In this, for better and for worse, the Mexican reform was considered the most successful of the three cases. In order to understand it, we have to refer briefly to a very important internal actor—teachers' unions.

Conflict and agreement

Within the logic of the reforms to which we have referred, the redistribution of resources was not limited to promoting decentralization measures. From the World Bank documents, replicated by many other issuers, a unanimous diagnosis emanated: the proportion of educational spending devoted to teachers' salaries and benefits was excessive and left very few remnants to ameliorate infrastructure and to introduce innovations linked to the improvement of education. The shortage of resources and the tacit acceptance of this recommendation resulted, in Argentina and Brazil, in an accelerated deterioration of the real salary of teachers. In Argentina, the actual teaching salary decreased by half over the course of the decade. In Brazil, the data is not so strong, given the great differences that exist between different states. Once again, Mexico followed a different pattern, since a sharp decrease in real teachers' salary had already taken place in the previous decade, and in the 1990s there was a recovery process instead, although it barely managed to regain what was already lost.

Given this panorama, it is not surprising that demands for wage increases were the most frequent and led to important mobilizations. It must be added that in the two South-American countries union leaders resented a drastic limitation of their scope of influence. Many measures began to be taken without their participation, which was combined with an openness towards the participation of other actors not always well seen by the unions: civil-society organizations, businessmen, and parents' associations.

Research on the responses to reforms by unions in these three countries indicated the explanatory relevance of the link between such organizations and the State.

We will limit to indicate certain data about the most important teaching organizations in these three countries: the Mexican National Union of Educational Workers (Spanish acronym: SNTE) is an organization older than its South-American counterparts, since it was founded in 1943, while the Confederation of Educational Workers of the Argentinean Republic (Spanish acronym: CTERA) was founded in 1973, and Brazil's National Confederation of Educational Workers (Portuguese acronym: CNTE), in 1987.

Their stories are very different. As it is known, the SNTE is a union of corporate tradition, while in South-American confederations teacher unionism coexists with associative and liberal traditions and, above all, accuses the mark of experiences from the struggles of organized teachers against dictatorships. These differences explain to a large extent that, while in Mexico the National Agreement for the Modernization of Basic and Teacher Education (Spanish acronym: ANMEB) was signed in 1992—a political pact between the union and governmental authorities—, in the cases of Argentina and Brazil the reform processes were accompanied by a marked conflict with national and subnational educational organizations.

What was just mentioned, of course, is nothing but a general characterization that must be qualified. For example, neither in Argentina nor in Brazil were moments of agreement completely absent. In Argentina, the CTERA registers as a triumph the creation of the Teacher Incentive Fund, as well as the banning capacity it exerted over the teacher-professionalization project. These partial victories, followed by agreements, were the fruit of new union action strategies, such as the installation of the White Tent in front of the National Congress in April 1997. In Brazil, in 1994, the CNTE managed to negotiate the Pact for the Valorization of Teachers and the Quality of Education and, later, in the Chamber of Deputies, the draft for the Law on Guidelines and Bases for National Education, promoted by the National Forum for the Defense of Public Education.

It should also be mentioned that, in Mexico, although the dominant note was agreement, the teachers grouped in the National Coordination of Educational Workers (Spanish acronym: CNTE) carried out very important protest mobilizations in the 1990s. They were not comparable to those that these same groups led during the 80s, but they retained a radical political and opposition component, both to the reforms and to the national leadership of the SNTE (Loyo, 2018).

Trends in the new century

Educational reform, as a great issue, lost its boom in the new century. Even though in Mexico it was reestablished as of 2012 as a *leitmotiv*, in Latin America—in general—it is spoken more in terms of educational policies than reforms. But, what are these educational policies? Is there, at least partially, a consensus around some of them or are we facing a broad but lax menu? The government agendas indicate that, despite the apparent fragmentation, some general orientations remain to be identified, as in the 1990s.

In the first place, the extension of rights remains, expressed above all in the extent of compulsory schooling, both downwards (preschool) and upwards (secondary or upper secondary education). Another dominant feature is what Rivas and Sánchez (2016) call *centralized governance*.

Next, we will refer—in a close synthesis—to some of the most recurrent policies and we will provide examples.

In Brazil, the Index of Basic Educational Quality [Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educaçao Básica] was established, which provides data on each school of basic education, by municipality and state. Along with this sustained interest

in improving information systems, agencies responsible for evaluation were created or strengthened: in Mexico, the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education; in Brazil, the Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Studies and Research, created in 1937, but with renewed functions (among them the educational census), the national system for the Evaluation of Basic Education and the Prova Brazil; Argentina did not subscribe to this evaluation wave to the same extent.

Throughout Latin America, exams for students, teachers, and directors proliferated as never before; at a pedagogical level, great importance was given to textbooks, but also to access to all kinds of digital materials. There were very varied compensatory programs, focused on population strata and the most disadvantaged schools. But the newest and most controversial aspect was teacher evaluation, the introduction of the so-called *improvement plans*, and the importance given to directors and supervisors. Regarding the evaluation seen as a central instrument of educational policy, as well as the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICT) and the strengthening of management, the Inter-American Development Bank financed several projects (Oreja and Vior, 2016).

Educational policies and politics

The cases we have chosen—Argentina, Brazil and Mexico—serve to illustrate the degree of interdependence that exists between educational policies and politics. In Mexico, the continuity in the general orientations of the educational reforms implemented in the 1990s, with the innovations that we have just pointed out, was greater than in the two South-American countries.

The political alternation that occurred in Mexico in the year 2000, as a result of elections in which the candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) lost the strife against the candidate of the center-right National Action Party (PAN), Vicente Fox Quesada, did not produce a change in the existing trends in educational policy. In 2012, once again, the PAN candidate won the presidential election, and, in those twelve years of the new century, the great issues of the 1990s continued to be present in the government's agenda, added to the novelties to which we have referred.

The most important change occurred in 2012-2013, with the return of PRI to the Federal Executive Power. The imprisonment of the SNTE national leader, Elba Esther Gordillo, produced a crisis in the union-government relations. The legislative reforms then introduced sought to recover the rectory of the state that—it was said—had been lost by excessive union interference in education. Anyhow, the interesting thing was that this change in the correlation of forces in the educational system greatly reduced the influence of the union factor and was accompanied by a strengthening of the emphasis on evaluation, and especially teacher evaluation.

In Brazil and Argentina, policies followed different paths. Since 2003, the governments of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, in Brazil, and *Néstor Kirchner*, in Argentina, introduced policies

which tended to lessen economic and social gaps. However, some central elements of the former educational policies were kept practically without any change and caused political tensions between social actors in the educational system. Thus, we were able to witness, for example, that Lula da Silva's government promoted policies aimed to assimilate into the school space some sectors that had historically been excluded from it, but maintained concepts of academic efficiency and merit, as well as the evaluation system which begun during the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Andrade and Felfeber, 2016).

The lesson that can be drawn from this recount on educational reforms is that the proposals of the 1990s are much more lasting than political swings could make us think. Reformism is maintained on the basis of widespread social discontent regarding educational outcomes. But its persistence and the tensions that it has caused, in virtue of the contradictions that it raises between policies coming from ideologies of different political sign, are explained because the subjects and the recommendations of those reforms were anchored to economic, technological, and cultural changes that operate at a global level. International organizations continue to influence educational policy, although their prescriptive vocation has been moderated, and government agendas show plasticity, resulting in quite heterodox combinations. As we have seen, educational policies have multiple and differentiated spheres, so that there is not necessarily a pre-established coherence between them. But, with the recent political changes that have taken place in the three countries, we will observe unprecedented developments that will give us new routes of interpretation on this subject. ⋲

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An evaluation model for teachers' professional development in Spain

Specialists in education in Ibero-America, **Álvaro Marchesi** and **Eva María Pérez** present their proposal for the evaluation of teachers' work in the Spanish educational system. The text has special interest read from Latin America, where we share challenges and idiosyncrasies with Spain, but not a certain European *expertise* from which we can learn a lot.

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Introduction

Within the Spanish educational system, teachers' evaluation[1] has not yet been incorporated, nor is there yet a professional career for them. It is true that the last two bills on the matter, that were approved this century (one with a socialist majority and the other with a conservative majority), included a mandate to encourage the educational administrations to foster evaluation plans for the professorate. However, there has been almost no progress since then.

What is the reason for this situation, highly unusual when compared to most of the developed countries? Possibly, the lack of teachers' confidence in the educational administration and the fear of consequences regarding their jobs and work stability by incorporating external evaluation systems. Also, doubts about how their work and the effort they have made for years can be evaluated in a just and balanced way have
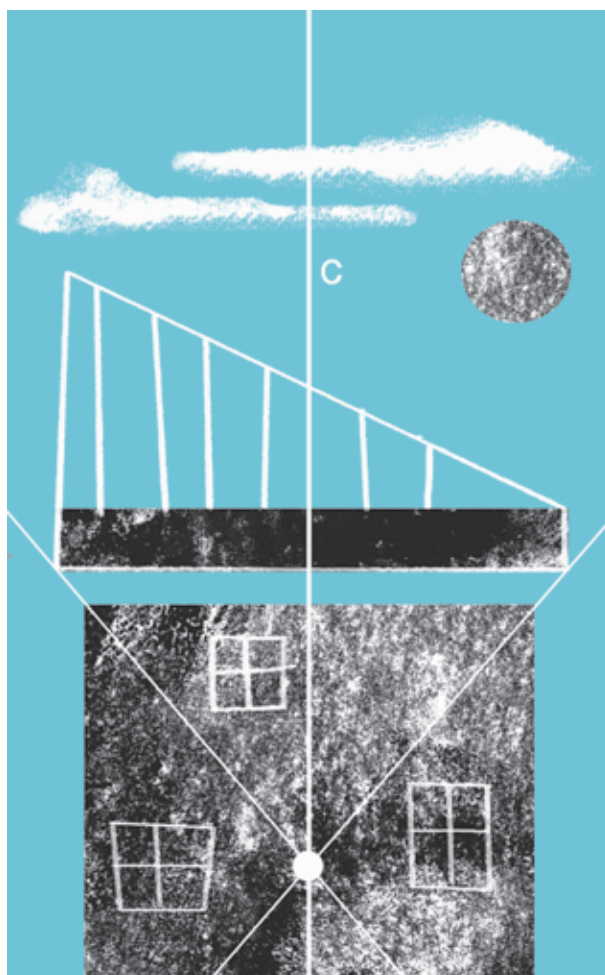
contributed to this. Can certain tests, questionnaires, or observations on a given day, they ask themselves, reflect the complexity, diversity, and continuity of a teacher's work?

In the face of such doubts and suspicions, the educational administrations have not shown a special interest in convincing teachers that an evaluation model offering security, confidence, incentives, and professional assessment is possible. Because of it, the evaluation model that is now proposed attempts considering teachers' fears to encourage them to participate in an active way. Its design is driven by five fundamental principles: *a)* it must adapt to the complexity of the teaching activity; *b)* it has to continue through time; *c)* it needs to be implemented with teachers' participation; *d)* it must be confidential; and *e)* it has to favor teachers' professional development.

In spite of historic suspicions and a lack of political will, something is currently moving in the educational debates in Spain, because in recent years different proposals have been put forward concerning teacher's evaluation

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[1] In this text, the terms *professor* and *teacher* are used without distinction.

and their professional development. This is why the SM Foundation, through the Institute of Educational Evaluation and Advice (Spanish acronym: IDEA),[2] has dared to bolster the political, social, and educational debate on the basis of a document—commissioned to the authors of this text and presented to the public opinion and the main educational agents on September 20, 2018—whose main lines constitute the present article.

Teachers' evaluation, professional development, teaching quality

Evaluation and teaching quality
Evaluation has recently become a topic of particular relevance in the educational field. The reasons are various and they are not always explicit, but one of the main ones is offering answers to the demands of society and the educational community itself with the purpose of improving educational quality.

International studies (OCDE, 2013, 2014, and 2016) ascertain that good teachers, those with better instruction, more capacity to adapt to the needs of their students, and with more competencies to get them involved in the activities that take place at school, are successful in getting their students to obtain better learnings. These researches highlight teachers' role as key elements in a high-quality system.

If it is necessary to increase educational quality and if it is proven that one of the factors that contribute greatly towards that aim is the availability of good professionals, it seems logical to think that it is essential to favor their motivation, their training, and their knowledge updating, as well as their teaching strategies. Ultimately, strengthening and improving the teaching profession is fundamental.

In the aim of achieving it, evaluation presents itself as one of the most direct paths to comprehend and improve the professional practice of teachers, without forgetting the fact that teaching functionality and students' results do not rely exclusively on it. The influence of students' social, cultural, and economic context, their personal and family experiences and circumstances, and the impact of a schools' social context, as well as its culture, leadership, and available resources, is widely documented in scientific literature. Despite these precautions, it can be said that the intention of improving the professional development of teachers is especially important within the prospect of increasing the educational system's quality.

The main challenges
The evaluation of teachers' work faces important challenges that must be considered and weighed carefully. The first of them refers to the chosen evaluation model. How to design one evaluation capable of considering all the competencies, abilities, and resources that a professor must put into play during his or her teaching? How to avoid a situation where evaluation, be it because of its chosen dimensions, or because

of the methods employed, offers a reductionist vision of a teacher's performance?

The evaluation of teachers' work is an answer to what it is to be a good teacher. In the end, the evaluation model is the mirror a teacher should look into to be assessed in a positive way. And here is the second challenge: how can the established evaluation model respect the professional autonomy of teachers? Can't those who employ methodologies that are different from the usual ones, or pedagogically correct ones in a given historic moment, be good teachers? In the aim of finding a point of equilibrium between the established regulation, proven pedagogical orientation, and teachers' autonomy, the proposed evaluation has to consider the professors' narration about their practice, the evidences on this regard, and his or her reasons for adopting certain pedagogical approaches.

Reasons for teachers' evaluation
It is necessary to pose the main question: why is teachers' evaluation a good thing? The answer can be summarized in the following reasons:

- it contributes to place value in their work;
- it improves the prestige of the teaching profession and teachers' self-esteem;
- it encourages them to focus their effort toward the most relevant competencies and assignments;
- it favors teachers' reflection on their practice and helps them to systematize and review their activity;
- it stimulates team work and cooperation with other teachers;
- it has an effect in the improvement of teaching by backing professors' commitment and updating;
- it presents a model for the professional activity and their training;
- it allows the incorporation of economic incentives and the professional development of teachers; and
- it sends a message to society on teachers' responsibility and commitment.

These reasons must be present in the evaluation model that is being developed, so as to guarantee its beneficial effects on the educational system, students' learning, and teachers' commitment. Thus, they have been the main reference in the design of the evaluation model, as well as in their implications for the professional development of teachers.

Evaluation of professional competencies as the main core of the evaluation model

The meaning of professional competencies
The study on this topic has a big tradition already and it has taken root in the educational sector. The competency models promoted in the United Kingdom have been the most important reference since the 1980s. Their objective has been to lay the foundations for a new model of professional training aimed at facilitating the entry, job promotion, required education, and performance evaluation (Blas, 2007).

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2 The SM Foundation promotes, since 1998, the IDEA.

Progressively, the influence of competencies has permeated the educational sector. In this case, the reference has not been the professional competencies specific to a profession, but the basic or key competencies that students must manifest at the end of their different educational stages. The European Union and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have incorporated them as the main guidelines for teaching and students' learning. The studies of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) have done nothing more than reinforce this direction with their international project to evaluate, compare, and interpret the competencies of fifteen-year old students in various countries.

Even though establishing the main competencies of a teacher is not a simple thing, the most difficult part is defining them in the practice of their professional activity. This is because teaching is not an individual and stable activity; but, rather, an interactive and changing one. As Marchesi and Martín (2014) highlight, the same professor does not act the same with different students, just as the latter do not behave in the same manner with all their professors; nor are the assignments, or the conditions of teaching, irrelevant to such interactions.

Moreover, it is convenient to remember that teaching does not imply the execution of techniques or previously learned procedures. Rather, it must be understood as a continued reflection on the practice (Schön, 1983) that modifies the action, which in turn generates a new reflection on the followed process and its consequences. So, how can we incorporate these reflection processes in the teaching competencies and their indicators in order to evaluate them afterwards?

There are two new traits of the teaching profession that also have a great importance in the analysis of their competencies and, therefore, in their evaluation. The first is that teachers' tasks are not merely an individual matter, but one that is performed jointly with other professors, within the frame of a particular team and school.[3] The second is that the school's form of organization and functioning can ease, or limit, teachers' activity and the development of their competencies in the practice. As the OECD (2017) indicates in its document about innovative educational environments, the evaluation of each professor needs to incorporate his or her collaboration with other colleagues, with the rest of the teaching team, and with the management of his or her school, in the same way that it should also consider how the functioning of the school center facilitates or hinders the deployment of such competencies.

The general principles that have guided the evaluation model

The model that is being formulated assumes as its main reference the basic competencies of teachers and their adaptation to different teaching conditions for each of the teachers' collectives. Besides, it intends to consider the socio-cultural context in which each professor carries out his or her activity, and to consider that this is not only a technical activity, but one that has a profound social and moral component. The said model aspires to evaluate teachers' work trajectory (and not only particular moments) and include their self-evaluation. It is a model, finally, that can become a reference for good practices, a stimulus for teachers' commitment, and a widely-recognized procedure to improve educational quality and equity.

The proposal is outlined also as the most adequate form to improve access to teaching, to articulate around it the teachers' professional development, and to promote—because of the message of responsibility and commitment transmitted to society—a more in-depth recognition and assessment of the professorate activities. All of this with the aim of improving the quality of education for all students.

The seven selected basic competencies

There are multiple paradigms on teaching competencies that cannot be considered in this article.[4] From their analysis, we have formulated a model based on the most basic, relevant, and significant of them, with a unifying standard.

We have defined the competencies, their indicators, and the execution criteria in the following manner:

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3 The terms *center, teacher's center, school* and *college* are employed in this text in a non-distinct manner.

4 It is fair to highlight the proposal by Perrenoud (1999), whose ten competencies have become a reference in this area.

Table 1. The seven competencies and their indicators for teachers' evaluation

Competencies	Indicators
1. Promotes the learning of all students (20%)	• Organizes in a coherent and integrated way the contents of the subject he or she teaches. • Uses different methodologies to promote the students' interest and participation, as well as cooperation between them. • Contributes to connect learning experiences inside and outside the classroom. • Pays attention to the development of the students' reading competency. • Designs continuous evaluation and training strategies.
2. Responds in a flexible manner to students' diversity (20%)	• Proposes learning situations adapted to students. • Coordinates with other professionals to offer a better educational response to students with difficulties. • Considers, in his or her programming, students of different cultures in his or her classroom. • Offers educational answers to students with lag in their learnings. • Adapts the evaluation procedures for students with difficulties.
3. Uses information and communication technologies (ICT) in a pedagogical way in the classroom (10%)	• Incorporates ICT in the process of teaching and learning. • Benefits from the information and the resources outside the school. • Favors the personalization of knowledge.
4. Works in team with colleagues (15%)	• Collaborates with other teachers in the programming of his or her activity. • Participates in innovation programs to improve teaching. • Takes part in projects or groups that do research on the practice. • Participates in training programs collaboratively.
5. Contributes to the socio-emotional and moral development of students (15%)	• Makes proposals to favor students' coexistence. • Carries out guidance and tutoring activities to facilitate the students' social and emotional development. • Puts in motion initiatives to favor social inclusion of students in difficulties. • Initiates solidary activities for students, like tutoring, or collaborates with learning-service programs.
6. Collaborates in the planning and management of the center, as well as in their shared activities (10%)	• Participates actively in school center and teachers' coordination organization meetings. • Collaborates in school activities: drama, music, sport, communication. • Participates in activities that reinforce the identity of the school and a culture of collaboration: awards, graduation, informal gatherings, relations between centers, competitions. • Collaborates in socio-educational programs.
7. Collaborates with families (10%)	• Informs the families adequately. • Maintains a relation with the families of his or her student group. • Establishes an individual relation with the families, especially with those of students in difficulties.

Source: made by the authors.

- The *competency* is the capacity to organize and mobilize the *knowledge*, the *know-how*, and the *know how to do with others* for the execution of a task in the school environment, adapted to the situation of students within the specific conditions of a particular educational center.
- The *indicator* of the competency is the professional realization that shows in which areas of the educational activity it must be expressed.
- The *execution criteria* are the specifications that define a well achieved work in a particular dimension of the competency.

In table 1 we find, summarized, the seven competencies with their main indicators,[5] as well as the weight that each would have in the final result of the evaluation.

The competencies and their indicators, criteria, and percentages will have to be adjusted to the different teaching profiles, which supposes a rigorous elaboration process. These adaptations will be developed at a later time and will be previously known by each of the teaching collectives.

Evaluation methods

The main methodological proposition of the model exposed herein is the portfolio in which the professor writes down yearly his or her teaching activities and the proven evidences on the indicators and criteria of each of the established competencies.

At the end of the cycle, the teacher's self-evaluation and the school director's opinion, or, in some cases, the chief of studies and the pedagogical coordinator's thoughts, should be incorporated to validate the incorporated activities.

In specific hypothetical cases, which will have to be indicated in due course, the observation of his or her work in the classroom and a questionnaire filled by the families and the elder students may be included in the evaluation process.

Information on the evaluation's results

The final result of the evaluation, provided by the institution responsible for this process, will be either *positive* or *insufficient*. The teacher will receive, confidentially, the score for each of the competencies evaluated. These results will not be made public and will only be considered by the educational administration for established professional and economic incentives.

The report will include suggestions to improve the teaching practice. The training or change activities that the teacher will carry out in the following years, on the basis of these suggestions, will be considered in a subsequent evaluation. In the hypothetical case of an insufficient evaluation, the professor may determine to have a new evaluation for this lapse in the two following years.

Evaluators

It is proposed that the professionals responsible for the evaluation should be educational inspectors, members of

managing teams, and professors with a number of positive evaluations—at least as many as the teachers that request their evaluation. All of them must have underwent a previous training on the evaluation model ultimately established.

The relevance of the National Institute for Educational Evaluation

The implementation of this initiative demands the proper functioning of an institution—like Mexico's National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: INEE)—that will develop the necessary tasks to ensure the rigor and success of the evaluation: the design of the model and its methodology; its adaptation to different teachers' profiles; the evaluators' preparation; the coordination between the States or institutions responsible for education;[6] and the continuous revision of the process.

A training center of the professorate, or a similar institution, must work in close collaboration with the said institute to jointly develop the educational tasks of the evaluators, or, looking towards the future, the educational programs for teachers in the development of their professional competencies.

Implications of evaluation on the entry to teaching, economic incentives, and professional development

Evaluation and entry to the teaching activity

The entry system to the teaching public service in Spain initially requires having obtained a proper title: for a teacher of elementary and primary education, having a university degree to teach; for a middle-school professor, having completed the bachelor's degree or university degree plus a master's degree in professorate training, with the correspondent middle-school specialty. Applicants who fulfill such requirements can present themselves to an opposition contest organized in two phases: the first one entails passing the test, though the number of selected teachers cannot be higher than the number of seats convened; the second phase includes a year of teaching experience, once the opposition contest test is passed. This phase is called *of practice*, and it is solidified through the support and follow-up of the new teacher by an experienced professor. However, in spite of good intentions, this is usually a procedure with small repercussions in terms of improving new teachers' professional practice.

The proposal here formulated is that the evaluation model is incorporated to this second phase. Inasmuch the opposition system assesses, mainly, the theoretical understandings of the applicants to a teaching position, it seems necessary to assess in a complementary way how they develop, in practice, the various competencies required for the teaching activity.

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5 We have chosen not to develop the criteria for implementation until a consensus is achieved around the competencies and their indicators.

6 In Spain, Autonomous Communities are responsible for managing education. The Ministry of Education should coordinate the proposal and foster agreements with each Autonomous Community to establish a model for evaluation and a professional basic and common-base development.

Because of this, the proposition is to complete the selective process with two years of paid teaching labor that also include participating in a training and reflection process on the teaching practice, under the supervision of a qualified teacher. During these two years, an evaluation will be made on the competencies manifested by the teacher at his or her work, which will have to be adapted to his or her specific situation and will also consider the assessment of the training process conducted. Applicants with an overall positive result will obtain their seat as public servants on a steady basis. If the result were to be insufficient, they will continue their training for a third year to undergo a third evaluation at the end of it.

Evaluation and economic incentives

This model aims for teachers to participate every six years in an evaluation of their competencies. This will be organized in five six-year stretches throughout their professional trajectory. Each of them will be associated to an increase in remuneration that will be maintained all through their work activity when the evaluation is positive.

An increase of 10%, from the general remuneration agreed, is added to those professors who work in three types of centers recognized by the educational administrations: difficult performance due to social context, collective and innovative effort to guarantee educational inclusion, and participation in proven innovative projects.

Evaluation and professional development

The achievement of each six-year lapse evaluation will be associated with particular professional possibilities for teachers in public schools.

Educational administrations will indicate the number of necessary positive evaluations (along with other merits considered) to enter particular teaching jobs or a variety of activities and responsibilities: managing teams, consultancy at educational centers, mentors to professors in their practice period, pedagogical coordinators, access to paid leaves for studying, tutors to students in practices, associate professors at the university, mobility incentives, access to educational inspection, and all others considered opportune by the competent educational authorities. In this way, the design of a professional career for the teachers is outlined.

Economic cost and implementation timetable

The proposal includes a budgetary consideration with the intention of assessing its economic viability. In order to be able to make an initial estimation, hypotheses have been established about the percentage of teachers favorably evaluated, the costs for each six-year term of evaluation, and the percentage of teachers that work in challenging schools or with innovative projects. The variation of these hypotheses, due to necessary political and union agreements, would modify the final result and its distribution within the period of implementation.

The main hypothesis indicates that 80% of teachers will attend the evaluation and 90% will obtain a positive

assessment (in total, around 305,000 teachers). It is also considered that 20% of teachers work in schools of difficult performance or with proven innovative projects. The cost of the established economic incentives, according to these parameters, would be 913 million euros at the end of the implementation of the model.[7]

The planned timetable is as follows: negotiation, during the years 2018 and 2019; regulatory development, in 2020; and progressive implementation for all teachers, from 2021 to 2030. During these years, a revision of the model and the process to incorporate the needed changes will be necessary.

To summarize

We consider that the formulated proposal is balanced, respectful of teachers' complex activity, motivating, and participative.

We think it transmits a message of responsibility and commitment of teachers towards the improvement of educational quality for all students; and, in this way, it strives for teachers to obtain the recognition and value they deserve from society.

We also estimate this proposal encourages political, social, and union actors to establish a debate on these subjects and to reach an agreement on them. €

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7 This quantity supposes an increase of the public expenditure in Spain on education of around 2%.

The return of the political: education and democracy in Latin America

Based on an analysis of the results of the Latin American Public Opinion Project and the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study, **Ricardo Cuenca**, PhD in Education by the Autonomous University of Madrid, addresses the problem of the quality of democracy in Latin America and the relationship between democracy and education.

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This article arises from the determination that there have been quality problems in the performance of the Latin American democracies that extend beyond electoral transitions, leading us to ask about the responsibility education has in this regard.

The idea of the quality of democracy sprang up in the late 20th century and the early 21st century in response to the first evidence showing that the performance of Latin America's democratic regimes was problematic. This controversial concept appeared as a bone of contention among democratic models that seek to be hegemonic. On the one hand we have institutional models that argue that the quality of democracy implies legitimacy; on the other, there are critical approaches asserting that the quality of democracy is related to the priorities of the mechanisms and forums for participation in political life and the quality of social interactions.

Setting these differences aside, both sides consider that the quality of democracy is determined by the degree of stability of the institutional structure, the extent to which citizens can freely exercise their rights on an equal basis, and the legitimate functioning of democratic institutions and mechanisms (Morlino, 2005).

What is the quality of democracy in Latin America?

The information gathered from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (lapop) for the years 2016 and 2017 shows a not very optimistic view of the quality of Latin American democracies. Graph 1, consisting of the four variables of support for democracy, trust in government, support for the political system and public tolerance, reflects a half-favorable opinion about democracy.

The first variable, *support for democracy*, is defined as a preference for the said system over other forms of government, despite its shortfalls. Graph 1 shows that overall support for democracy has decreased, over a period of eight years, in the countries in the region.

The levels for the second variable, *trust in government,* defined as people's trust in political institutions and leaders—congresses or parliaments, presidents, political parties and electoral processes—, are the lowest ones of the survey.

The variable *support for the political system* is defined in terms of opinions having to do with trust in the ability of government institutions to perform the basic task of safeguarding citizens' rights, and of the degree of support for the country's political system.

Finally, *political tolerance* is defined as enduring different types of civic actions, such as the participation of those who oppose the systems of government. The results show that this variable has not undergone any major variations over time, with the regional averages holding steady between 2008 and 2016.

In general, the vast majority of countries express favorable opinions about acknowledging different types of political action of citizens, and different ways of taking part

Graph 1. Quality of democracy*
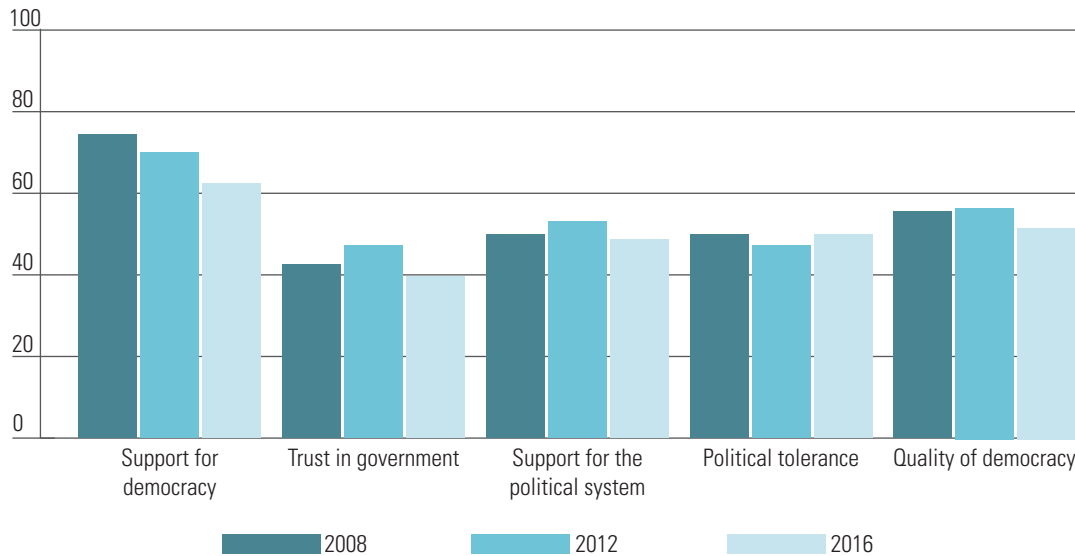
Source: made by the author, based on LAPOP (2017).
*Scale of 0 to 100, with 100 being the maximum positive rating.

in political life. Hence, the average of the four variables that make up the quality-of-democracy scale is based on the procedural and institutional approaches recorded in the literature on the subject. The results show that citizens in Latin America considered that the quality of democracy decreased between 2008 and 2016. Basically, this decline is explained by the diminished support for democracy, as citizens begin to doubt whether the latter is better than other forms of government, and also by the growing distrust in governments—parliaments, political parties, presidential regimes and elections.

What concept of democracy underlies citizenship education?

Recent comparative research on education and democracy has focused on the way in which school curricula address citizenship education (Cox, 2010; Cox *et al.*, 2014; Magdenzo and Arias, 2015; OREALC-UNESCO, 2017). In this way, they complement the prior focus on general topics that concern the administration of the educational system, such as decentralization and autonomy, and subjects such as the forms and mechanisms of participation, related to school management. Lately, learning outcomes in citizenship (measured via standardized tests) and classroom interaction have begun to form part of the research agendas.

The studies concur that the education systems in the region now include new, more complete guidelines on school curricula, with topics such as citizenship being increasingly likely to be contained in the latter.

Among the topics most commonly found in school curricula are learning outcomes in civic education, relating to
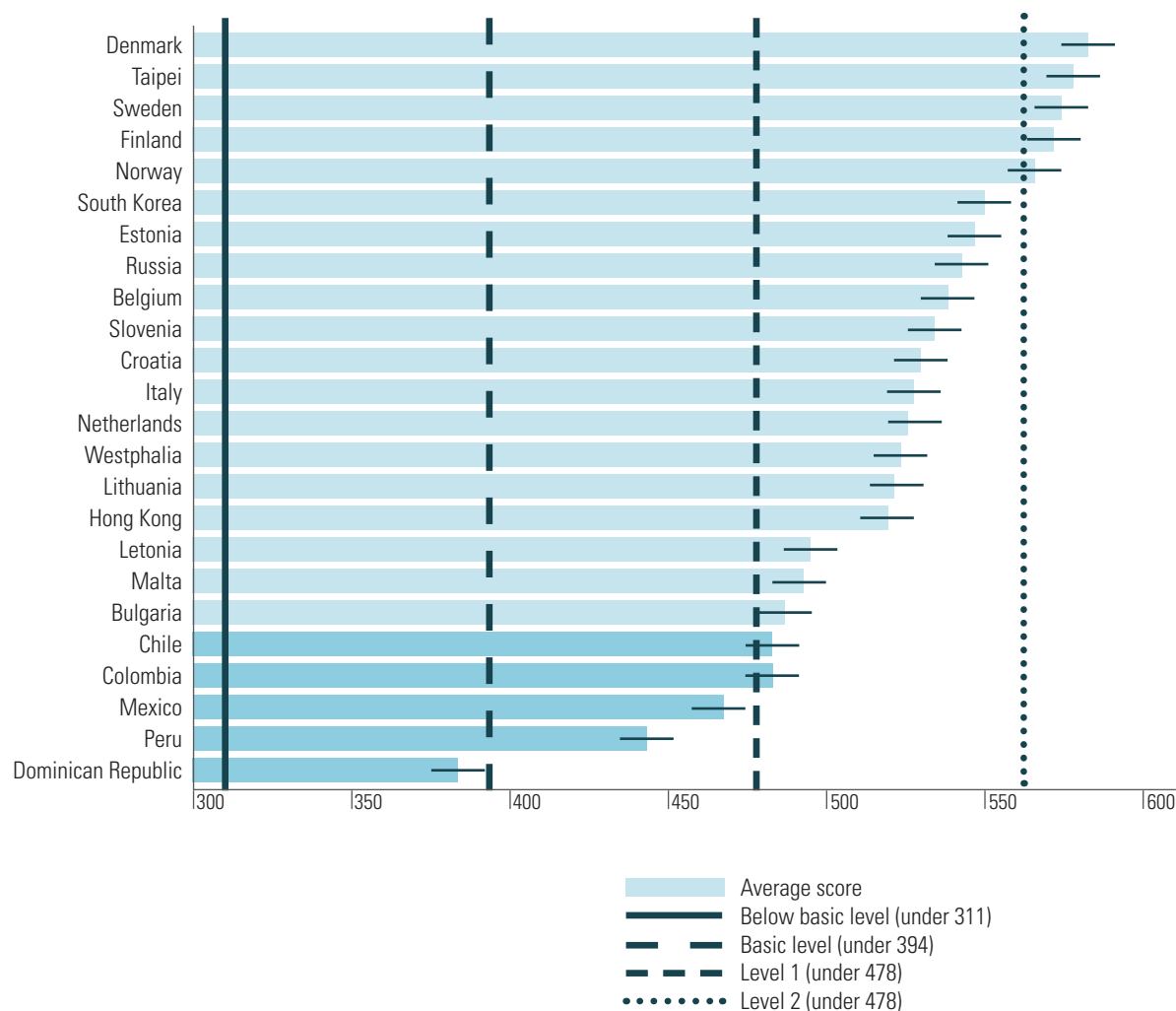
political institutions (i.e. the civic principles and values that underlie democratic life), to democratic participation and the formal exercise of citizenship (i.e. people's relationships with the political system and the part they play in it), and to knowledge about the institutions pertaining to a democratic system.

However, in some of the region's countries, aspects of citizenship education concerning identity, plurality and diversity (e.g. the cultural and symbolic underpinnings of social relationships), conviviality and peace (e.g. dialogue and peaceful conflict settlement), as well as economy, environmental protection and globalization, come low on the list of priorities, and, in some cases, are not even included in it.

Likewise, there are not enough study-plan contents related to citizenship education, either in the different subject areas or for the different school levels, and the approach to the said contents is basically theoretical.

This traditional approach to education for democracy fails to adequately address the challenges inherent in building more complex models of citizenship within the current context. For example, traditional civic education, based on learnings related to the different aspects of political institutions, state norms, and rights and duties, is a long way from an ideal vision typified by a dual emphasis on political institutions and social topics: especially those having to do with diversity, active participation in politics, and the environment, among other things. Similarly, traditional approaches do not foster the development of competencies that entail participative methodologies. In fact, institutional topics are more a matter of knowledge than of competencies.

Graph 2. Average scores for all the countries

	Average score
	Below basic level (under 311)
	Basic level (under 394)
	Level 1 (under 478)
	Level 2 (under 478)

Source: made by the author, based on IEA (2017).

What kind of citizens are educational systems producing?

Recently, various countries in the region have carried out standardized evaluations of citizenship and civic education. Overall, Latin-American students' performance levels are below the international average, although some improvement has been observed in the last few years (graph 2).

Approximately half of all students only become familiar with concrete, explicit contents and examples of the basic features of democracy. The general outline is one of a student who learns more about the *normative* aspects of democracy than about the *critical* aspects of citizenship (graph 3).

When we explored opinions about various aspects of democratic life, we found some valuable information. For example, as shown in graph 4, when students aged fifteen

or over, from Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Mexico and Peru, were asked whether dictatorships are justified when they generate economic growth, 70% of them—the highest level among the various questions about government power—answered affirmatively.

Some final thoughts

Why is the link between politics and education important? Before giving a threefold answer to this question, we should point out that we are assuming that education is a political fact and, hence, an instrument that should transform social reality (Freire, 1969), as well as a social space for training in values and attitudes that directly influence people, and is therefore a profoundly ethical and political activity (Apple, 1996). Thus seen, education cannot be understood

Graph 3. Distribution of students by performance level

Below basic level   Basic level   Level 1   Level 2   Level 3
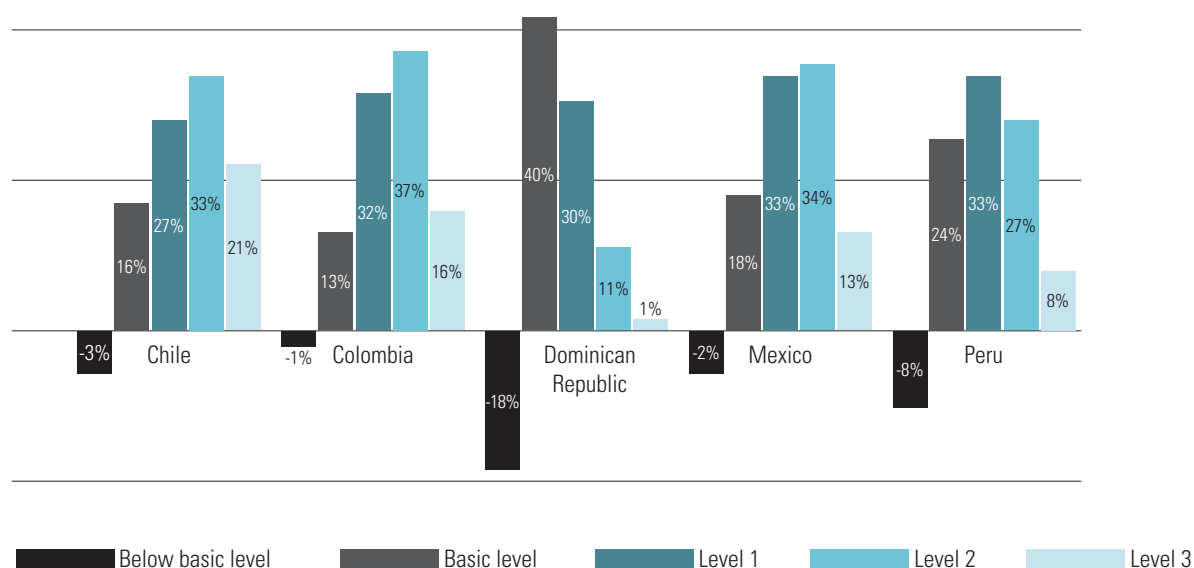
Source: made by the author, based on IEA (2017).

Graph 4. Attitudes on government power

Strongly agree or agree   Strongly disagree or disagree
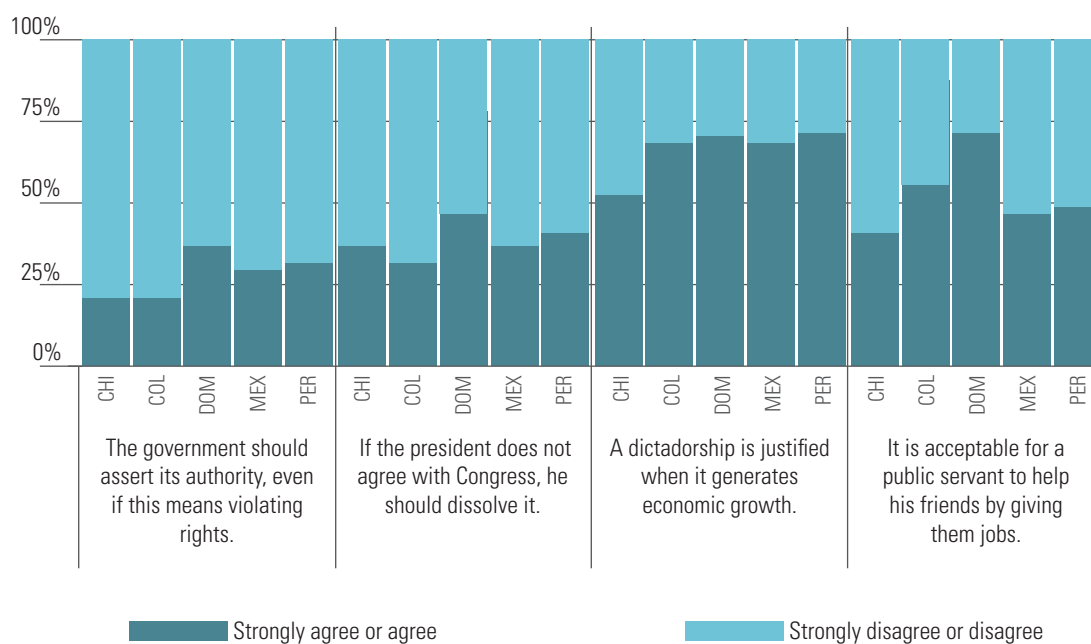
Source: made by the author, based on IEA (2017).

without taking stock of the role it plays in social constructs (McLaren, 1997).

Educational institutions are among the few spaces where students, whether they are children, youths or adults, can experience and learn the language of the community and of public democratic life (Giroux, 1993). In some ways, they are spaces for instructing the "creatures of the State" (Bourdieu, 1997).

Firstly, understanding democracy as part of the educational process means believing that the irreversible acknowledgment of diversity within a given social group necessarily brings about conflict situations that require the development of competencies for handling conflicts in democratic contexts (Mouffe, 2003). Secondly, democracy would be at risk if education did not commit itself to the thoughtful training of future professionals, aimed at developing critical thinking and fostering a willingness to acknowledge those who are different and to put oneself in their position (Nussbaum, 2010). Finally, *pedagogism,* understood as a concern for teaching methods over teaching contents (Enkvist, 2006), along with the displacement of moral arguments in teaching (Postman, 1999), has brought about a critical void in education. As affirmed by Arendt (1993), it has led to a crisis of authority.

Retrieving *the political* in education means helping in a way that differs from what has previously occurred, and building an increasingly complex democratic ideal whose ultimate aim is social justice. ∈

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A new paradigm in educational legislation

Adopting an ethics-of-care viewpoint, **Cecilia Espinosa Bonilla**, the director of the SM Mexico Foundation, proposes changing the educational paradigm and presents a humanistic vision *vis-à-vis* the challenges posed by the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals for Education in the countries of Latin America.

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The value set of a new ethical order implies a new way of looking at the world, a new cosmovision with different features that define a particular way of being in the world […].
Bernardo Toro Arango

The educational system is all the machinery that makes education possible in our countries; it is the structure that supports all the actors and components—teachers, students, parents, institutions, curriculums, materials, infrastructure, projects, programs and policies—that play a part in education.

Policies are the set of decisions made by the State in order to tackle specific problems, and programs and projects are the actions taken in response to a public policy and, in this case, an educational policy.

Educational reforms play a transformative role in a puzzle that consists of many pieces, since they underlie all the efforts aimed at achieving structural change in public policies so as to orient them towards ongoing improvement. We, in Mexico, have gone through several reforms and have also experienced many reorientations of policies and programs.

Although the challenges in education seem to change with time, the main educational problems, the answering of which must lie at the center of the public policies that seek to solve them, continue to be coverage, educational quality and achievement, teacher training, equity and inclusion, infrastructure, evaluation and governability. These issues lie at the core of educational decisions, and what is at stake are not the *whats*, but the *how-tos*, as well as the establishment of priorities.

Globalization and humanism

The countries of Latin America respond to the trends that relate to their societies' demands and to those marked by globalization. Each nation tries very hard to face new challenges by drawing up mid- and long-term agendas and forging national and regional agreements so as to achieve its main aims.

In all national projects, education plays a basic role in the creation of future citizens and in the transformation and improvement of society.

However, an educational system does not function autonomously, but, rather, forms part of an ecosystem. Everything is connected with everything else in our globalized world, and, to ensure that education improves, we must broaden our field of vision in order to be able to see how education is linked to other areas. The success or failure of an educational project often depends on external factors that must be taken stock of, and, hence, any educational-policy decision must see education as part of a bigger system.

Various efforts are underway to achieve the comprehensive development of societies: for example, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, approved by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2015, which set out a *roadmap* for Latin America and the Caribbean that identifies the long-term regional priorities and serves as a basis for

the making of policy decisions aimed at achieving sustainable development.

The aim of educational quality occupies the fourth place among the sixteen established objectives, and it stipulates the need to "ensure inclusive, equitable high-quality education and foster ongoing learning opportunities for all". The 2030 Agenda is a civilizing one that revolves around dignity and equality.

By any measure, the basic tenet of all policy decisions — in every sphere of social development—should be people's welfare. In this way, the State could base all policy decisions on humanistic principles.

In line with this humanistic approach, the aim of education would be harmonious, comprehensive human development directed at realizing people's full cognitive, physical, social and affective potential.

A paradigm change in education

Pointing out that our societies are faced with the paradox of having brought about all the conditions for global interconnection, while also risking the extinction of the human species, the Colombian philosopher, Bernardo Toro, stresses the need for a paradigm change based on the care-ethic theory (Toro, 2018).

Reaffirming, as a basic principle, Leonardo Boff's—a Brazilian theologian—assertion that "we either learn to care or we perish", Toro insists that we need to take care of ourselves, of others both near and far, of our intelligence, and of our planet.

The words *compassion* and *care* are at the core of this idea. Compassion is to be understood in its fullest sense, being crucial to the humanistic transformation of the world. Seen as one of the most human forms of love, as the ability to stand in other people's shoes and understand what they are going through with a sense of unity, empathy and communion, compassion can be the driving force for change that our society needs. An understanding of the afflictions of those around makes us want to alleviate the said afflictions and foster greater well-being.

We, members of the human race, are responsible for the world that we have. Wars, poverty, famine, inequality, violence, the deterioration of our planet, climate change, and all the misery that afflicts our world stem from the actions of some people who are blinded by boundless ambition and the abuse of power.

We live in a world of stark contradictions. Although we are living in a knowledge society, where technology spurs us on to consume and innovate, social inequality is growing: the poorest are growing poorer and the rich minority possesses more and more capital and wields more and more power.

Today, when globalization is posing new challenges to our societies, countries respond by closing their borders and adopting nationalistic policies, feeling that their independences are at risk.

Hence, we ask ourselves how we can face the challenges of a globalized world, worrying about the problems facing the human race, but not considering that the said world is in danger of extinction.

One possible solution is the paradigm change that Dr. Bernardo Toro proposes, not only in the area of education, but also throughout the ecosystem, in order to achieve a better world.

There is a lot we, who are involved in education, can contribute in this regard. It is essential that we begin by being compassionate with ourselves, taking care of our minds, our souls and our bodies. We must also understand others and show them compassion, acknowledging them as equals, respecting their differences and realizing that they can enrich us as human beings, rather than feeling threatened by them and trying to trample them underfoot.

By taking care of our environment, we become better citizens, neighbors and workmates, and, above all, better public servants who are interested in strengthening our institutions.

When asking how we can achieve a better world, we should seriously consider the role that each of us plays in bringing about the change that we all yearn for.

We can no longer tackle the problems that are faced by our society, and above all our education system, by adopting the same strategies and approaches as were adopted as part of previous reforms. We need a new vision of education and its relationship with other areas of society and development—one that fosters the welfare of our citizens and enables our countries to grow based on new forms of cooperation that can benefit all of us, placing the human being at the center of decision-making.

We need a paradigm change in education. The education system needs new consensuses, innovative forms of cooperation among those involved in the said system—companies, volunteers, young people and, of course, the educational community—so as to become stronger and work better.

This change should be driven by an awareness of the risks that humanity is running and of the part played by education in achieving a dignified, rights-focused society.

We are a crucial part of globalization, which can work to our advantage if we base our actions on care and compassion. We can no longer look at the world from the outside, but have to do our part and, as an act of profound love, transform both ourselves and our environment. ∈

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Educational reforms in Latin America: a comparative study

Within the framework of the CIES 2018 Annual Conference, *Gazette* interviewed **Claudia Uribe**, **Regina Cortina**, **Robert Arnove**, **Christian Bracho**, **Thomas Luschei**, **Fernanda Pineda** and **Ernesto Treviño**, who outline a wide and profound comparative vision of educational reforms in the Latin-American region.

Introduction

The Latin-American region shares socioeconomic characteristics that are reflected in education, as well as in the approach, implementation, and results of educational policies. Simultaneously, the area features substantial differences—peculiar to each nation and each local context—that come into play in these processes. Associations like the Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (OREALC-UNESCO) and the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) are devoted to generating knowledge about problems, experiences, and public policies, in order to contribute towards the design of new policies that, drawing from the specific contexts and challenges, lead to improving educational quality and equity.

To offer a comparative vision of the educational reforms in the Latin-American region, within the framework of the CIES 2018 Annual Conference, *Gazette* established a dialogue with Claudia Uribe, the OREALC's director; Regina Cortina, the CIES's president; Robert Arnove, chancellor's professor emeritus at the Indiana University; Christian Bracho, assistant professor of Teacher Education at the University of La Verne, in Los Angeles; Thomas Luschei, professor of Education at the Claremont Graduate University; Fernanda Pineda, associate professor at the Florida International University; and Ernesto Treviño, director of the UC Center for Educational Transformation, in Chile.

In this dialogues, the following topics were tackled: regional situation in terms of educational reforms, with an emphasis on the urgent challenges and the convergences and divergences in approaches, implementations, and results; feasibility of transferring successful experiences and policies; regional partnership mechanisms for educational improvement, specially pertaining to the OREALC and the CIES; foresight of the reforms in the area: what to expect in the short, middle, and long term; crucial measures for educational policies to effectively prosper, with a focus on teachers' role in the educational reforms and on the evaluation of the link between policy and educational improvement; and challenges for the Education 2030 Agenda.

Urgent challenges

For the respondents, the most urgent challenges regarding educational reforms in Latin America go from the lack of equity in the access to educational resources—related with teaching quality and the change in initial and ongoing teacher education—to the development of policies adapted to each context, due to the uneven development of nations and their subregions.

In the opinion of Thomas Luschei, one of the most pressing challenges in Latin America is inequity in the access of marginalized children to educational resources, which is particularly related to receiving education from *quality teachers*: There is a tendency to gather, in classrooms and schools, those children with greater social and economic disadvantages with the less qualified teachers. In general terms, this phenomenon is related to the problem of teaching quality, prevalent in the region with the exception of Cuba.

Ernesto Treviño concurs that one of the most relevant challenges consists in promoting quality together with equity.

"Beyond enhancing coverage, schools must organize to improve the comprehensive development and learning of students. Even though the economic growth that increased income levels in the year 2000 was coupled with social and educational policies that widened educational coverage, in the Latin-American region quality and inequity problems persist and reproduce the students' background disparities, like the existence of teachers with lesser preparation and limited access to resources of varied nature."

Treviño adds that multiplying possibilities for students to continue their studies, as well as improving classroom interactions through pedagogical processes that lead students to become active protagonists—during most of the day—in their own learning process is also needed. This implies a radical change in initial and ongoing teacher education, which constitutes a public-policy challenge for Latin-American governments.

Christian Bracho, of the University of La Verne, in Los Angeles, points out three factors that must be considered when developing and implementing educational policies in Latin America:

"The first factor is the cultural and linguistic diversity in the region, since the mother tongue of millions of people in Latin America is not Spanish; the second is the relationship between the State and society, which has deteriorated as a result of corporatists practices and *top-down* educational policies; the third is the uneven development that characterizes a majority of Latin American nations, which prevents a singular universal reform to be applied to the different subregions, due to their having unequal capabilities."

From a different perspective—the one of intercultural universities—, Fernanda Pineda, of the Florida International University, remarks that the challenge consists in providing, incessantly, a dignified space and validation to non-Western culture and knowledge; tackling racist attitudes and classist positions; and highlighting how creative and promising it can be to be enrolled in an alternative university. At the same time, intercultural schools have the great task of struggling to keep high standards and a genuine bond with the community.

Convergences and divergences in approaches, implementations, and results of educational reforms

The interviewees agree that the main convergences of Latin-American educational reforms are found in educational coverage and access for marginalized populations; educational equity and quality; the promotion of humanistic education; teachers' professional development; the creation of national evaluation systems; and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in educational processes. They also concur that, given the profound differences among Latin American nations, it is complicated to compare them and to speak of divergences in their policies' approaches in this matter.

Convergences

Robert Arnove, of the Indiana University, contends that nearly all the approaches of educational reforms in Latin America are related with coverage and access to education for the more marginalized and discriminated populations—rural communities, indigenous groups, women, persons living in city outskirts—, as well as with the issue of educational equity and quality. Another challenge consists in reaching a humanistic education focused not only on market needs, but on building critical citizens who participate in society, both nationally and internationally, with a solidarity-and-justice based approach.

For Claudia Uribe, the OREALC's director, nowadays, there are more convergences than divergences in the approach and implementation of educational reforms in the subcontinent.

"The integration processes and the public-dialogue spaces at the sub-regional, regional, and international levels have contributed to draw countries even closer, to look at each other to achieve a mutual learning that allows them to identify successful practices and those that haven't been so entirely. Although with specific differences, determined by contextual, circumstantial and structural conditions, it is possible to appreciate that educational policies are converging in their objectives, as well as in their implementation and monitoring processes."

Within the framework of the Education 2030 Agenda, convened by the UNESCO, Claudia Uribe has noticed that one of the most common approaches regarding reforms consists in fostering the improvement of education quality with policies focalized in aspects such as teachers' professional development, the creation of national systems for students and teachers' evaluation, participation in regional and international tests, curricular changes, the introduction of the ICT in teaching and learning processes, among others. In relation to the teachers' issue, she points out that attempts to reform the teaching career's framework can be glimpsed.

On the other hand, Claudia Uribe and Robert Arnove agree that Latin-American educational reforms suit the expansion of educational access, specifically for early childhood

and secondary education, through the development of public policies with cross-sectoral approaches addressing largely vulnerable groups.

In regards to the results of educational-reform implementation, the OREALC's director mentions that one of the common elements has been the analysis and assessment of results around students and teachers' performance. She adds that the most recent *Global Education Monitoring Report 2017/8*, published by the UNESCO, invites to consider other criteria to evaluate educational reforms and their policies, so that they reflect the comprehensive and humanist vision of educational transformation, known as the Education 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Divergences

Besides being vast, Latin America is diverse in its realities, expectations, as well as in its past and recent history, to which changing contexts in the short term are also added, accentuated by processes of instability and political, economic, or social crises.

"Thus," Claudia Uribe notes, "differences are found in the subjects, contents, and rhythms in which the reforms are implemented; in the capability and the resources allocated by countries to carry them forward; in the degree of participation by educational communities and civil society; and in the theory of change upon which one or another reform is based. Namely, depending on the contexts, reforms may follow distinct paths that will privilege some aspects on top of others to start the changes.

"Because of that," she continues, "it is very hard to speak of divergences among countries, although they do exist. One of them is that there is a group of nations that consider as a reference to guide their own educational development international or global paradigms, or models that have been successful in other nations and contexts. Another group, on the contrary, has opted to establish the basis of their educational development around national or regional referents, reappraising an identity, a history, and a shared culture and traditions. Both approaches translate into different conceptions on the paradigms of quality, equity, and inclusion."

Robert Arnove also considers that it is arduous to speak of divergences due to the differences among the various Latin-American nations:

"For example, there are the cases of Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala and Bolivia, where great indigenous populations and vast rural areas without schools exist. Or, for example, there are more decentralized countries that pass the financing costs of education to states, provinces, or counties. If there are big differences among regions, there will also be differences in educational-system quality and equity. Therefore, it is convenient to take contexts into consideration in order to design programs and to implement them."

Viability of transferring successful experiences or policies

Considering the viability of transferring educational reforms' successful experiences or policies implies carrying out a process of adaptation, which emanates from the analysis of the context they come from and, above all, from the context they are intended to be taken to, as the respondents propose hereunder.

One of the most important concepts and debates inside comparative education is the issue of policy transfer, as Christian Bracho points out. Regarding its viability, he mentions:

"Some researches uphold that these efforts are ineffective because each nation has unique politic, cultural, and historical dynamics, which prevent the implementation of a policy designed for a different context. Besides, those attempts face resistance in the countries where they are received as alien reforms. However, that doesn't mean that it is impossible to observe educational policies of other countries to apply them in a significant way in different contexts.

"It is imperative to create opportunities for local and regional actors to participate in dialogues about educational practices, identifying key strengths and areas for growth, and focusing in the implementation of policies that are better adapted to the changes actors want to see. This kind of adaptation may concern external actors that have specific visions as to how those policies must be implemented, but it has to be taken into consideration that social change takes time and that hurrying to transform things usually causes resistance at the local levels. Therefore, it is necessary to create objectives in the long term and to resist the impulse to expect immediate changes or to assess quantifiable results in the short term."

According to Thomas Luschei, transferring public policies from one context to another is always a challenge. In Latin America, the main challenges lie on the positions taken by teachers: if they are unable, or unwilling, to accept or to implement a new reform, it is unlikely that the reform will succeed.

Ernesto Treviño points out that rather than transferring successful reforms, tested models can be used, adapting them to each reality, since, while it is true that the region comprises a great diversity of contexts, it also shares a similar cultural and social heritage that allows harnessing other countries' experiences.

"However," clarifies Treviño, "when using other models to generate national policies, it is necessary to consider the following: *a)* no educational reform is the solution to all educational problems—thus, detailed diagnostics are required to design and implement reforms inspired in external models; *b)* it is needed to take into consideration that reforms are comprehensive exercises tackling different problems through complementary and synergistic measures in each local environment—thus it is essential knowing the experiences of other countries where similar reforms have been carried out; and *c)* it is necessary to understand, thoroughly, the problems, wishes, and challenges faced by local school communities, because only in this way will it be possible to attune and adapt any reform inspired in a model external to a local reality."

As a specialist in comparisons, Robert Arnove expresses his skepticism towards transferring, lending, donating and

receiving education-related reforms and public policies. Nevertheless, he indicates that, just as there are cases of failure, there are also cases of success. And he underlines the importance of knowing the context from which a policy is being taken and why it is being introduced into another.

As for what can be done to avoid falling in practices that haven't given results in other countries, Robert Arnove comments:

"That is learning from the history of your own country. It is also learning from the good and bad experiences in other countries. What is needed is a theory, conceptual tools that can enlighten reality. If an educational system is going to be studied, at any time, the historical, philosophical, and social-science (economic and political) perspectives are required in order to understand—with their concepts, as well as with their normative and descriptive tools—how a specific event, reform, project or context works."

The OREALC's director, Claudia Uribe, agrees with Arnove in that transferring the practices of policies, programs or initiatives in the educational scope—or any other— is not possible without going through an adaptation process that allows contextualizing those practices so they effectively respond to the realities, expectations, and concrete needs of the governments, communities, and societies targeted for such transferring.

"It is important to analyze the educational models that have turned into tendencies, or trends, and distill their essence—its values or guiding principles—to know if they adapt to the contexts where their implementation is wanted.

It is necessary to move from transferring models to identifying successful variables, or elements, that could help to inspire the expected objectives, results, and the theory of change itself, through which it is wanted to achieve them. Besides, it is needed that countries adapting the experiences of other nations have the capacity, the interest, and the political will to sustain this process for as long as it is required, while monitoring it with the goal of examining and improving its execution."

According to Fernanda Pineda, the issue of transferring educational reforms or policies from one country to another opens the door to a profound epistemological, sociological, economic, and political discussion, fueled by globalization.

"Transnational transferring of educational policies and reforms, as Gita Steiner-Khamsi reminds us, has turned into a rule and not an exception. Furthermore, the eyes of education lawmakers, in general, are directed towards the exterior.

"My own position with reference to transferring educational policies and reforms," she adds, "has changed over the years. I still keep asking myself in a constant and critical manner about its neutrality. Nonetheless, time and history invite me to ascertain how porous and plural this topic is. With the help of technology and constant activism, many local groups have become global voices and, with that, they have influenced in the transferring of educational reform experiences and policies, as it was demonstrated in the movement for the creation of intercultural universities, or in the financial-support federal programs for students of low-income populations in Latin America.

"David Phillips and Kimberly Ochs' work," she continues, "shows us different kinds of educational reforms or policy transferring. There are some that are imposed (transferring as a requirement), others that are copied or relocated on purpose (and whom by), and those that are conveyed willingly (and whom by). History is filled with transferred policies that have failed completely when they are imposed or copied without considering the realities of the new context for which they are intended. Recipient populations have different success parameters and their sociocultural and educational infrastructures establish baseline data, factors, and variables that cannot be universal or indiscriminately applicable. For the transferring of an educational reform to be viable, it has to be voluntary and democratic."

Lastly, she adds:

"Things get more complicated when we speak of a transferring as requirement, copied by officials removed from what people need or ask, or when there is compromised funding involved. Quasi-governmental organizations, like the World Bank or the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), play a crucial role in conceiving and transferring policies that are taken from one context to another in the global reality. Even so, there are local actors, organizations, and educational centers—such as universities—that also have a significant impact. An example is the creation of alternative or intercultural universities in Latin America. In these cases, local actors have carried messages from their experiences to a global level and have accomplished sharing lessons on their successful reforms or practices."

Regional partnership mechanisms for educational improvement

Claudia Uribe, Robert Arnove, and Regina Cortina comment the role that two regional partnership mechanisms play in the improvement of education: OREALC-UNESCO and CIES.

Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean

According to Claudia Uribe, director of the institution, dialogue and experience exchange is paramount to contribute to educational improvement; therefore, regional cooperation is one of the most important tools to boost the development and empowerment of educational policies at all levels through the growth of its knowledge and the possibility of exchanging, adapting, and transferring experiences.

Uribe upholds that the mechanisms of regional collaboration have increased and have consolidated in the last years, facilitated by the ICT. Likewise, she assures that its characteristics and functions have also changed in accordance with the progress achieved by countries and the challenges that have emerged.

About the role played by the OREALC in such processes, its director points out:

"At the OREALC, we develop regional initiatives in concert with the countries that have allowed creating multi-actor and multi-sectoral spaces and mechanisms, where alliances have been established, cooperation initiatives have been generated, and concrete products have been defined, like networks, research, training processes, and publications that deliver tools and knowledge to educators, policy makers, organizations, students and the community in general. These spaces and mechanisms, defined around subjects prioritized by the region, contribute towards the generation of discussion and reflection processes on policies that have impacted in their strengthening and improvement, as well as the identification of action guidelines at the national and regional levels. True educational innovations have arisen from those spaces."

Out of all the initiatives that have emerged from the OREALC, Claudia Uribe highlights the following ones: the Laboratory for the Evaluation of Educational Quality (Spanish acronym: LLECE), the Teachers' Regional Strategy, the Technical and Professional Training and Education Strategy, the Sustainable Development Educational Strategy, among others. Besides, networks have been created and led in relation to topics such as education for global citizenship, inclusive education, education on the Holocaust and other genocides, adult education, and so on.

Among the current OREALC projects, Uribe emphasizes the construction of a *roadmap* for the implementation of the aims of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and the Education 2030 Agenda.

"The idea of bolstering this regional cooperation mechanism was included in the *Buenos Aires Declaration*, adopted during the First Regional Gathering of Education Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean, in the framework of the Education 2030 Agenda, in January 2017. This mechanism will help as a space for the education ministers and other relevant actors of the education field in the region—civil society organizations, international, regional, and sub-regional multilateral bodies, universities, and other UN agencies—to discuss how and what must be done in the region to achieve the compromises undertaken at a world level. As the executive secretary of this mechanism, the OREALC will coordinate the cross-sectoral and inter-institutional efforts to bring these actions to reality."

Comparative and International Education Society

According to Robert Arnove, chancellor's professor emeritus at the Indiana University, the CIES constitutes an interchange space for international experiences in the educational field, and a good context and environment for dialogue. Regina Cortina, president of the association, adds that the CIES brings together researchers and teachers from 117 countries and, thus, it contributes towards knowing what is happening in other nations.

Foresight on the region's reforms

Among the scenarios for educational reforms in Latin America in the short, middle, and long terms, those who were interviewed highlighted a greater educational coverage, higher educational equity and quality (if good teachers and directors are trained), unions' resistance to new policies, educational reforms orchestrated by education ministries together with government agencies, as well as the

enhancement of participation spaces in decision-making systems for educational communities.

Thomas Luschei indicates that, in the short term, the incorporation of more youths to secondary education can be expected. On the other hand, whereas reaching educational equity and quality is still pending, such improvement will depend on the recruitment and training of good teachers and school directors. In order to achieve it, political will and ability are needed so enough resources are invested.

According to Christian Bracho, one of the main problems of the educational reforms is that the actors implementing them expect to see results in the short term, when in reality a change in the area of education—as any other social change—may take generations to manifest itself entirely.

About the educational reforms related to teachers' professionalization, Bracho comments:

"The outlook for educational reforms is not a very optimistic one if unions do not have the opportunity to participate in their design and implementation. Given the current situation of relations between the unions and the State in Latin America, in the short term few changes will be seen concerning teacher education and professional performance, since the majority of the reforms are considered a threat for teachers' autonomy and their authority upon education.

"Besides," he continues, "external agencies like the OECD and the World Bank, considered as foreign actors, generate mistrust, since they are seen as neo-imperialistic institutions.

"In the middle and long terms, unions become more resistant to the new policies and more unyielding in their mobilizations. This is part of a wider global phenomenon, in which teachers assert their authority and advocate a better public funding. In Mexico, great-scale reforms are affecting the way teachers are trained and certificated; this is a short-term impact, but it is dubious whether it will lead to higher-quality education in the long term. Without an approach sustained in continuous professional development and learning for teachers, and without the economic support for such growth, the majority of teachers won't change and will keep the same kind of practices that they have used for years."

Under a similar perspective, Ernesto Treviño upholds that, as long as initial and ongoing teacher education is not transformed to give a substantial lap in terms of quality, and as long as the educational systems are not managed in an intelligent way with the aim of promoting continuous improvement of pedagogical management practices in schools and of teaching in the classrooms (specially where more disadvantaged students are served), it will be hard to see changes in terms of learnings and inequities.

On the other hand, Claudia Uribe agrees that in the short and middle term more educational reforms, whose protagonists will be the education ministries joined by other governmental agencies—like the ones devoted to issues related to social development, employment, environment, among others—, will be seen, building comprehensive solutions to structural problems that exceed the educational field and that, simultaneously, condition it.

Uribe foresees that the spaces of participation for educational communities and other social actors that take part in educational policies and in the decision-making systems at the level of educational institutions will continue to be empowered. Those spaces will incentivize the commitment that social actors must have towards education.

On his part, Robert Arnove insists that each Latin-American nation has its peculiarities and upholds that, even though it is known that a tendency in the short term is the expansion of the educational system and the improvement of quality and equity, each country finds itself in a different stage regarding its challenges.

Essential measures for educational policies to thrive

In this point, the respondents agree that the main measures are: regular attendance of teachers and students to school, improvement of educational practices inside the classroom, teachers' ongoing education, and the design of policies from, and for, educational practice. Besides, they highlight two fundamental elements that deserve special attention: the role of teachers in the educational reforms, and educational evaluation as an essential measure to achieve educational improvement.

Ernesto Treviño poses that an imperative condition for educational policies to thrive is the fulfillment of certain basic requirements in the schools: that students and teachers attend regularly; that all the time allotted to classes is used; and that teachers become concerned about their students as persons, answering their questions and inquires, making sure they understand, and fostering activities of genuine and profound learning, instead of traditional lectures focused on memorization.

The second essential measure, according to Treviño, is the existence of ongoing teacher-education policies that prioritize attention for those teachers who work in more socially challenging contexts.

"Here, the challenge is attending the issue through high-quality interventions, ongoing education for teachers in rural and urban marginal schools. Evidently, this involves changes in the way they perceive ongoing education and it entails an interaction with the possibilities that technological infrastructure offers to rural sectors.

"The third strategy consists in integrating models of collaboration and continuous improvement among teachers in a same school, as well as teachers and directors of nearby schools, with the aim of proposing solutions to those daily teaching problems that are assessable by teachers themselves."

According to Treviño, the requirement for educational policies to become a practical reality is for them to be thought from, and for, the actual teaching practice:

"We should never lose sight of the starting point. The secret is, then, designing policies and thinking in promoting practices that reflect the initial situation we are facing, with the aim of steady advance in building the system capabilities and fulfilling development stages. Accordingly, a conceptual model is required, assessable in time, that allows for countries to establish building stages of capabilities and results,

and that becomes a navigation map for the improvement of the practices and the system."

The role of teachers in educational reforms

According to Thomas Luschei, teachers represent the key for educational reforms to take off in the region:

"They must agree with any reform for it to be set in motion. A reform that pushes against teachers' interests will have very slight chances of success. This is because they represent the place where the reform faces the classroom. They are the *front-line soldiers*. They may implement, reject, or ignore the reform; if any of the last two happens, the reform dies."

From another perspective, Christian Bracho tackles the role that teachers have performed in Mexico around educational policies, and the function they should develop:

"Many teachers see the reforms as a governmental effort to neutralize their political power and to snatch their authority from them. Particularly in rural zones, teachers still hold a considerable power; thus, the universal reforms that the government tries to implement for the whole country will unavoidably be mediated, at the local stage, by teachers and their local delegations. At the moment, teachers have grudgingly accepted the reforms in the majority of the states, and they are implementing them, but that is not the role teachers should play. They should participate actively in the conversations about the design, adaptation, and implementation of universal policies for local contexts because they understand better the communities where the educational process takes place."

Christian Bracho adds that it is essential that educational reforms have the goal of giving teachers professional development opportunities for self-evaluation and determination of their own growth and strength areas, as a first step towards a reflective practice. Teachers, he assures, need opportunities for professional development, funded by the State, that answer to the most important needs identified through the process of self-reflection. Only after teachers have undertaken this aspect of professional identity will they be able to analyze new policies and implement them in a significant way in their local contexts.

In line with this, Regina Cortina adds:

"In the case of Mexico, all our work in the educational public sector was interrupted by the union's power. For many years, the National Education Workers Union treated teachers as workers at the service of the State and not as education professionals. Professionalizing teachers and giving them all they need for their didactic practices is very important and could not be achieved through the control the union had over the teaching profession."

The role of evaluation in the connection between educational policy and improvement

Thomas Luschei argues the essential role of evaluation in this context:

"Without educational evaluation it cannot be known if there's an improvement; thus, it is fundamental. But if this evaluation is perceived as a tool for political interests, or if its methodology hides behind statistical models that nobody understands, it will lose legitimacy and trust. Evaluation must be independent, transparent and the product of a collaborative process of all actors involved."

Ernesto Treviño concurs:

"Educational evaluation is key to provide evidence to guide the discussions for public policy. For example, before the results of the LLECE's First Explicative and Comparative Regional Study, educational equality was conceptualized in the region in terms of years of schooling. However, the results of the study showed that students that complete primary education in a country reach different degrees of learning and skills, related with their socioeconomic condition. Thanks to the evaluation, a more complex conversation about equity started. It was the case of Chile, where evaluations allowed knowing the deep degrees of socioeconomic segregation among schools. This led to a profound discussion of policy that, among other things, now prohibits the selection of students in schools."

Robert Arnove states that an evaluation can be beneficial, or detrimental, depending on how wide is that which is being evaluated, which are the variables and who formulates them, and if it is summative or formative. Whilst he clarifies that evaluations are important, he underscores that they must be wide, must have many tools, and must be sensitive to where they could be failing in order to be able to correct them.

On her side, Fernanda Pineda expresses that educational evaluation must be a bridge between educational policy and improvement.

"Stretching this parable, a bridge helps to go forth and back: evaluation must inform towards both sides. Unfortunately, the culture of educational evaluation moves quite slowly, resisting change and feeding on tradition. Besides, it tends to be punitive and lineal, and to represent hard power negotiations. Let us remember pivotal reactions and protests in response to periodic evaluation in Mexico a couple years ago, for example. However, there are global and national institutions, including teachers, that advocate for that culture and attitude change towards evaluation and provide reliable data to be able to address, through evidence, great educational challenges."

Pineda adds, as an example of the previous at a macro level, that the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO) and other global institutions play a crucial role in equipping countries with tools to establish relevant and efficient systems for educational monitoring and evaluation:

"Those systems provide us with evidence and help to create indicators, generate data, evaluate progress, and identify trends. I believe in a holistic education in which responsibility for learning happens not only at the classroom and through a teacher. It is my vision that, to face global challenges like the 2030 Agenda, or the next round of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), society should take a more proactive role, and a pro-evaluation culture should become part of daily life."

Education 2030 Agenda

According to Claudia Uribe, the UNESCO's Education 2030 Agenda summons countries and other relevant actors of the sector—civil society organizations, other UN agencies, regional and international bodies, etcetera—to bring together their efforts through greater coordination and cooperation. Because of that—she underlines—, the work done by the UNESCO in the region with the member States and other relevant partners gains tremendous importance to regionalize strategies oriented to achieve the goals of the Education 2030 Agenda and to establish how to approach them jointly.

According to Thomas Luschei, the greater challenges that must be overcome in Latin America to achieve the objectives of the Education 2030 Agenda are: meeting and matching educational resources for the most marginalized children—those who live in rural and remote areas, those of indigenous background, and those with special needs.

Ernesto Treviño concurs with Luschei that the challenges of Latin-American nations answer to their socio-economic situation:

"In Latin America there are challenges on all fronts of the goal of ensuring inclusive, equitable education with quality that promotes learning opportunities for everybody throughout life. All countries in the region face generalized low quality and high inequality, and are far from achieving pedagogical models that allow promoting attitudes for peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and building inclusive and democratic societies, as well as developing skills to participate in the 21st century society. These profound inequalities are a reflection of socioeconomic conditions; thus, it is imperative to improve quality by focusing efforts in making it possible for more disadvantaged groups to improve in terms of these indicators."

Regarding Mexico, Christian Bracho asserts that the problems the nation faces are related with the funding of governmental agencies and education-related institutions:

"Education must be a priority in terms of providing development funds. The biggest challenge is creating the political will for the government to engage the amazing gaps of equity in Mexico. The reality is that southern states like Oaxaca and Chiapas need more infrastructure and support to fulfill the objectives of the Education 2030 Agenda related with educational quality, but also the goals related to peace and justice, gender equality, poverty reduction, health and well-being, as well as sustainability. Adequate funding for primary, secondary, and tertiary education is the most important step, followed by an ongoing training in several sectors intended to develop professional skills to implement and oversee the work performed in these areas."

In the words of Robert Arnove, one of the greater challenges the region's countries face regarding the Education 2030 Agenda is being sensitive to *bottom-up* initiatives and not only to promoting *top-down* reforms; that is, considering the local context at the moment of formulating and implementing reforms that seek to achieve educational improvement and to have an impact on society.

Claudia Uribe notes that the most difficult challenges to overcome are those of a structural character, whose persistence may condition the achievement of the goals proposed by the Education 2030 Agenda.

"These are, for example, stiffness in institutional structures, that slows and obstructs educational change; the *seizure* of educational systems by corporative interests and the decrease of educational systems' relevance as we know them today; and, finally, knowing how much access students have to educational quality, and which factors promote and prevent this accomplishment, with a perspective that goes beyond the educational systems and involves contextual variables like inequity and social exclusion."

Regarding this last point, Uribe accentuates the role played by the OREALC to contribute in resolving it through evaluation:

"We work focused on the quality of education in a comprehensive sense and in all the ways to evaluate it. The UNESCO member States have designated the LLECE as a key mechanism for monitoring and following-up the Action Framework of the Education 2030 Agenda and the SDG 4 in the region. Also, we are supporting the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to regionalize the orchestration of the goals of the Education 2030 Agenda; for that, we establish a regional cooperation mechanism with the aim of building consensus oriented to identifying and implementing concrete actions whose objective is to move forward jointly towards reaching those goals."

On the other hand, Fernanda Pineda considers that inequity, poverty, corruption, and the lack of space for creativity and inclusion are the hardest tests that the Education 2030 Agenda will have to overcome:

"We must begin with a strong focus on inclusion and equity, and define—with creativity and in society—what it means 'to promote learning opportunities throughout all lifetime for everybody.' At a local level, in my opinion, families, nongovernmental organizations, teacher education colleges, libraries, mass media, university students, small and medium enterprises, as well as other actors that may contribute with 'learning opportunities throughout all lifetime' (outside the classroom), must have a more proactive role." ∈

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