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## Micro-politics and the Examination of Curricular Practices: The Case of School Notebooks

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### Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the different ways in which micro-political dynamics affect macro-curricular policies. The first section critically explores several traditional perspectives on the relation between macro- and micro-policies. The second section introduces the notion of curricular regulation and we distinguish two types of instruments that influence the configuration of policies. The third section analyzes, through a specific case, how a micro-political regulation device—the school notebook—brought about changes at the macro-political level. This educational instrument is of considerable interest given that it was employed not only in Argentina, but also in France and Spain, and very likely in other countries. Thus, the school notebook represents an educational device with clear local relevance, which can certainly be used as a valuable source for a comparative study of education. For this purpose, the chapter (a) analyzes its structure in Argentina, (b) discusses the way it was used to dilute the Peronist doctrine; and (c) observes the way it has been used in other parts of the world.

Two sorts of conclusions are put forward in the final section of the chapter. The first concerns the use of the school notebook as a primary source in curricular studies, and the second discusses how this type of instrument can influence the development and design of curricular policies.

### Relations between macro- and micro-curricular policies

The complex relationship between educational policies in general and curricular policies in particular at the level of the state, and the effects of these policies in practice, has been a challenge for educational research for some time. Ascertaining the purposes

and intentions of a given policy is, even in itself, quite a difficult task, since policies are the result of negotiations between different agents who participate in the formulation process, and the final product is not necessarily a coherent and unequivocal one. Furthermore, policies are not transmitted and implemented in a vacuum. There are social, institutional and personal circumstances that affect the way in which policies are interpreted by those who (are supposed to) put them into practice.

With these realities in mind, Ball suggests that policies can be seen as texts that ‘are encoded in complex ways (via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations) and decoded in complex ways (via actors’ interpretations and meanings in relation to their history, experiences, skills, resources and contexts)’ (Ball 2000: 1831). Thus, the effects of a given policy cannot be grasped by simply reading the policy texts. Rather, it is necessary to look at the interpretations that these texts have been given in practice in order to determine the relationship between policy and its effects.

In sum, as there is not a direct relationship between the macro- and micro-political levels, nor a top-down, one-to-one correspondence between these levels, it would be a mistake to attempt to understand curricular macro-policies without considerable insight into the ways by which curricular micro-policies have developed in practice.

## **Curricular regulation in the macro- and micro-political level**

Taking up Ball’s point that policies can be seen as texts (Ball 2000), we suggest that the analysis of curricular documents is insufficient to ‘read the full text’ of a given curricular policy. We wish to introduce the concept of curricular regulation as a type of analysis that includes not only the processes of definition of a given curricular policy and its contents, but also the processes through which this curricular policy is transmitted to the agents who put it into practice, and the processes through which it is enforced. Furthermore, we suggest that the process of curricular regulation can be read through an analysis of what we shall call the instruments of curricular regulation (Gvirts 2002). These include:

- (a) the policy of curricular definition (and general management of the education system), which identifies the tasks of different agents in the decision-making process about the objectives and contents of education;
- (b) the curricular documents and materials per se (their internal structure and substantive contents), as a major way of representing the official curricular policy;
- (c) the policy of textbook circulation: control over one of the most important means of representing the objectives and contents of education (together with curricular documents);
- (d) policies concerning teacher education, certification and in-service training;

- (e) the supervision/assessment system of education: the fundamental mechanism in the control/regulation of the relation existing between the proposed official curricular policy and the one actually implemented;
- (f) institutional educational projects;
- (g) school notebooks and folders;
- (h) teaching plans, work projects or other documents prepared by the teacher.

These instruments can be classified into three categories related to three types of discourse:

1. Pedagogical instruments created *outside* the school and *about* the school:
  - This category refers to those instruments that are produced by agencies such as academies, universities and research centers, on educational matters.
  - These might include publications that discuss different subjects such as pedagogical theory, educational policies, and the history of education.
2. Instruments created *outside* the school but *for* the school:
  - These instruments are produced for use by schools and by agencies such as governmental education bodies, publishing companies, among others.
  - They include legislation and norms regulating education (e.g., Federal Education Act, publications on teacher authority, jurisdictional curricula); graded textbooks for students; teaching guides and other texts for the practice of teaching; different materials supporting everyday activities at schools (e.g., illustrations, educational software).
3. Instruments created *within* the school and *for* the school:
  - The reference here is to devices created by school agents (e.g., students, teachers and teaching authorities) and educational institutions as a whole such as the development of school networks.
  - These devices include school notebooks and folders, attendance registers; textbooks, teaching guides, programs, work projects, all documents prepared by teachers, and institutional educational projects.

## **The principal curricular regulation model in Latin America**

Historically, the predominant model for regulating the curriculum in most Latin American countries was based on a highly centralized approach in which the national state monopolized all decisions about the objectives and contents of education, resulting in hyper-regulation at the macro-political level. Since the end of the nineteenth century, curricular documents were designed by the national state and sent directly to schools—or rather to teachers—who had to follow in every single detail the curricular prescriptions of the state. Meanwhile, other agents—for example, provincial

governments, municipalities, schools and teachers themselves—were left out of any meaningful participation in the decisions on what and how to teach.

The first study plans and programs (as curricular documents were called at that time) promoted an encyclopedic culture by emphasizing content related to the provision of information and facts. A large number of highly detailed curricular contents were included. These contents were divided into many areas (usually about 14 assignments at both primary and secondary levels) and organized into a matrix of two variables (discipline and school time), which resulted in greater control and homogenization of school activities. Furthermore, these curricular documents not only specified the contents that had to be taught, but also prescribed in great detail the amount of time to be spent on each topic and the teaching methods to be used.

Curricular policies and planning of the curriculum did not begin and end with the centralized production of prescriptive study plans and programs. Other instruments of curricular regulation were employed by the central state to guarantee a homogeneous education for every student in Argentina. These instruments included: (a) the control of the circulation of textbooks in schools; (b) the regulation of the teaching profession; and (c) a system of supervision aimed at controlling the implementation of the prescribed curriculum.

In Argentina, textbook policy was centralized in the hands of the national state, which had to approve all texts used in schools. No book could be distributed in a school if it did not have government authorization. For example, between the late nineteenth century and until 1940, the National Council of Education, through its Didactic Commission:

...prescribed and adopted the most adequate textbooks for public schools, encouraging editing and improvement by means of contests and stimuli in order to ensure its uniform and permanent adoption at reasonable prices for a period of no less than two years (Gvirtz and Beech 2004).<sup>2</sup>

In this way, the national state enforced its control over the contents that were taught in schools, extending its influence to the tiniest details.

This resulted in a model consisting of a high level of regulation at the macro-political level, together with weak regulation at the micro-political level, which was left in the hands of teachers' unions and individual teachers. This system, which came into being at the beginning of the twentieth century, is still functioning in some Latin American countries today. Despite various attempts at decentralization, political strategies continue to be centralized.

This paper analyzes the case of a micro-political instrument in Argentina and seeks to understand its impact on the evolution of macro-level policies. Thus, the aim is to concentrate on the way in which school notebooks functioned in shaping curricular policy. This case has been selected as it illustrates the importance of researching and understanding the micro-political dynamics behind policy design at the macro-level. Moreover, we believe that changes in curriculum, textbooks and educational practices

are bound to fail if they do not consider the dynamics of the school. This analysis is carried out in two parts: first, we describe the structure of the school notebook and analyze the way in which this structure is radically different from the prescribed curriculum and creates a new kind of knowledge. Second, we analyze how notebooks functioned to obscure the way that the Peronists attempted to impose their doctrine.

## **The case of the school notebook in Argentina**

The school notebook made its way into the Argentine primary school classroom in the 1920s as a suggestion for improving education. The concept of the notebook was introduced in the same way that the Progressive Movement infused its ideology into the schools—through educational magazines. The notebook fulfilled a central role in the Movement's proposed reorganization of daily life at school—and specifically for written work completed in the classroom—systematizing and simplifying schoolwork or activities. The student's work had previously been written down in several notebooks and papers, and the decision of where and how this work was to be carried out was left to each teacher. Later on, with the introduction of the notebook, everything was to be written down in one place.

### **The role and effect of the notebook**

The notebook was central to the new shift of focus in educational policy. Far from simply being an auxiliary resource, it functioned as a central device in the day-to-day process of restructuring internal school functions. It served as a device for diffusing the Progressive Movement's policies.

The use of the notebook was also designed to ensure that the student played an active role in the classroom. The student would be physically engaged in the learning process through the notebook entries, rather than just being a passive listener.

The notebook entries would represent the student's work. Furthermore, activities completed in the classroom were designed to do away with homework. The notebook would reflect only the student's work at school. The elimination of homework activities would ensure that the work presented in the notebook was carried out by the students and not by family members. This would allow for a more efficient surveillance of scholastic work from two perspectives. First, no work was to be done and recorded in the notebook that was completed outside of the classroom, ensuring that the work was done entirely by the students. Second, the notebook contents provided a base that could be used to measure what knowledge the student had accumulated in school. The notebook would also facilitate the efficient surveillance of the teacher's work, providing the teaching inspectors with a tool for gauging the quantity and content of material taught. It is important to emphasize this last point because it illustrates that the notebook must be understood not as a simple didactic tool introduced by the Progressive Movement, but rather as part of a larger reform movement that was to

affect all aspects and individuals involved in daily school life. The notebook was an educational tool with a range of intended political effects.

Two effects became evident as the notebook's use spread. First, it was a significant—and controversial—innovation for organizing scholastic knowledge. It streamlined the students' work that previously had been dispersed in a multitude of notebooks and papers. The criterion for starting a new notebook was straightforward: a new notebook was only to be started when the old one had no more blank space. One notebook succeeded the previous one in the course of the school year. The notebook became the only document containing the children's schoolwork. Students' work became efficiently organized and recorded into a topological sequence of notebooks throughout the year.

Second, the notebook served as a device for recording how much work the teacher had carried out. The amount of activities recorded in a student's notebook showed how much a teacher had taught in a day, month or year. 'The notebook served to control: (a) if the class had been taught and tested sufficiently; (b) if the methodological process followed the teaching process; (c) if the educational goals—fundamental for each school—had been reached' (Ball 2000).

Surveillance was a central matter for this new device. Inspectors could not only judge the teachers' work through class observations at a given moment, they were now able to see the work that had effectively been done over a period of time, up to the moment of the visit. The notebook is explicitly presented as a surveillance instrument. The teacher controlled 'all' of the students' work; the director controlled the teachers entire period of service; and the inspectors controlled everybody.

School surveillance was not only nor fundamentally about persons, but about their work. What teachers taught was the main purpose of this control. Furthermore, the way in which the survey was to take place was highly regulated. The copybook was above all an instrument for controlling the process of teaching and learning.

This new pedagogy altered classroom dynamics. Prior to the incorporation of the notebook and its simultaneous teaching methods, groups of students worked on different activities within the classroom. Subsequently, all students were focused on the same activity at the same time.

### **Structure of the notebook: The standardization effect**

The notebook was not only intended to modify how school activities were recorded, but also to facilitate the implementation of other Progressive Movement proposals, as discussed above. Establishing the space for handwriting and illustrations, the use of colors, the way exercises were presented within a subject area, and the regulation of the style of writing utilized, although specified, were not the ultimate goal or focus intended by the Movement for altering the internal structure of the school. Once adopted in the classroom and over the course of decades of use, the notebook became completely separated from its original purpose. Through the adaptation of the previous structure and organization of daily school activities to the new activities associated

with it, the notebook became a tool for standardizing the form of students' work by manipulating the original meaning of that work. Yet one of the more obvious contradictions between the effect of the notebook and its proposed role was that it did not function in a way to standardize the actual work produced by children. On the contrary, the notebook was to become a medium for the expression of the individual learner's aptitudes.

The structure of the students' notebooks was based on three central concepts: date, activities and school subjects. Each activity began with the following format:

DATE

EXERCISE NUMBER FOR THE YEAR  
SUBJECT

THEME

The *date* was the first item listed at the beginning of each school day. The school week reflects the workweek and everything that was taught in class was meant to be written down in the notebooks. Consequently, just by looking at a notebook it was possible to see how much work had been done by students (and by teachers) each day. In the second place, knowledge transmitted in class was structured in the notebook through the *activities* that students carried out. Every activity had to be recorded in the notebook, respecting a numerical order. The numerical order of the activity took precedence over disciplines. Activities were numbered as 'Exercise no.' or 'Activity no.', with the numbers continuing throughout the entire school year. A language activity could be followed by a social sciences activity in the same notebook. The numbered activities revealed how many exercises a student completed in a day, a month and a year. The performance or productive output of a student, a teacher or a school could easily be assessed. The differentiation between *subjects* is the third concept. The particular theme or focus of the information written down is included below the subject.

Thus, the production of knowledge in notebooks and the way it was structured is very different from the way in which this knowledge was presented in curricular documents. While the curriculum was subdivided into subjects or disciplines, notebooks organized knowledge by date and number of the activity or exercise, like copying, dictation and revision, and could cover any and every subject.

Scholastic knowledge became quantifiable. The school day continued to be divided by curriculum disciplines. The knowledge that was processed during the course of the school day, however, was reflected in the notebook's format. The knowledge was further broken down or categorized into activities that focused on copying, spelling and so on. A new symbolic universe of scholastic knowledge was created.

The organization of scholastic knowledge apparent in the notebook structure blurred the transmission of the processes that defined disciplinary knowledge and the

process of analytical thinking. Themes expressed through such disciplines as history or science or mathematical theory and practice are shattered by the fragmentation of activities. It is difficult to see a continuity of ideas through the structure of the notebook and within curricular disciplines since activities were separated.

The discourse boundaries between disciplines were obscured by the notebook structure. The symbolic universe of knowledge divided by disciplines where qualitative differences exist became a quantifiable universe; qualitative differences were transformed into quantitative differences. Different types of knowledge (science, language and history) became comparable and interchangeable. When the contents were formatted in numerical order of activities, a natural science exercise could be followed by a language or social science activity where the focus of the activity was on the student's ability to copy, draw, spell or produce 'good' penmanship. The ability to quantify knowledge became more important than qualitative differences. New knowledge was produced.

This structure, in which qualitative knowledge was manipulated into quantifiable forms, was utilized with few changes until the 1980s. Even political content was depoliticized by the guidelines into another numerical entry in the schoolwork. This can be seen in the following example, taken from Juan Domingo Perón's first two administrations (1946–1955), during which a different form of political and social 'knowledge' was introduced into schools.

### **Obscuring the Peronist doctrine through school notebooks**

The purpose of this section is to analyze the way in which certain educational devices within scholastic practice operated to modify intentions at the macro-political level. For this purpose, the case of the Argentine notebooks during the first two periods of General Juan Domingo Perón's government (1946–1955) will be analyzed.<sup>3</sup> More precisely, it will focus on the way in which these notebooks affected attempts to 'indoctrinate' education with the Peronist government's political ideology, analyzing the neutralizing effect they had over the contents, and obscuring their initial explicit meaning.

The case of the educational policy of the Peronist government demonstrates the possibility that the impact of educational policies upon school institutions and practices is neither direct nor homogeneous, even when the macro-politics claim to be hegemonic, utilizing the propaganda machine and even state police power (Gvirtz and Narodowski 1998: 234).

The main focus of attempts at indoctrination by Perón's government through curricular change involved compulsory insertion of material related to Peronist doctrine or ideology and the inclusion of the liturgy and specific terminology of the Peronist Party in schools. This supposed modification to the teaching content was designed to affect every educational level and every sector of the population attending them.

As the school notebook constitutes the written place where the daily activities carried out by students during the learning and teaching process are recorded, it is a

unique source to carry out an analysis of this situation. Because it is a written record, the notebook allows the specific form assumed by the teacher's classroom practices to be observed during this historic period.

According to Peronist government officials, formal education was meant to play a fundamental role, thus producing within the Argentine education system what some Argentine historians have called a 'politicization' of scholastic material; that is to say, the direct introduction, at all levels of the education system, particularly from 1949 onwards, of learning material related to the 'Peronist Doctrine', and the obligation of teachers to teach its symbols and its ritual (Halperín Donghi 1972; Tedesco 1980; Escudé 1990; Plotkin 1994; Bianchi 1996; Rein and Rein 1996).<sup>4</sup>

The modification of the study plans and programs is reflected in a change of ideological orientation in the materials to be taught in schools, and in the introduction of new subjects that corresponded to government policy. In relation to this, it is of interest to point out the curricular change generated by the Peronists' educational policy in teacher-training schools (*normales*) where the new generation of teachers was being prepared. Here the government incorporated material of the 'National Doctrine', which included social studies, economics, political science and Argentine culture. More than one-quarter of the subjects of each of these courses corresponded to the message of Perón's government (Gvirtz 1991).

Radical changes were made both in the textbooks used for the instruction of reading and writing, and in school textbooks in general. The contents of traditional books underwent major ideological changes, while at the same time there appeared Peronist textbooks, such as *Justicialismo* (Justicialism–1953), *Tiempos Nuevos* (New Times–1954), *Privilegiados* (The Privileged–1953), *Evita* (1953), *Patria Justa* (The Just Country–1955), *Pueblo Feliz* (Happy People–1954)<sup>5</sup> and many others. Even their titles were part of the government's indoctrination purposes. As has already been stated, books recommended for teachers had first to be approved by the Ministry of Education (Wainerman and Bark de Rajman 1987; Gvirtz 1991).

In relation to these school textbooks, the figure of Eva Perón, President Perón's wife, who was designated as the 'Spiritual Leader of the Nation', occupies a very prominent position. For example, in some of the beginners' reading and writing texts, the traditional sentence 'I love my mother' is replaced by 'I love Evita'. In these textbooks, Evita Perón is presented as a mother and a celestial figure, a combination of a fairy and virgin. In these illustrations, at times her head appears crowned with a fairy-like star, or with a halo above it (Wainerman and Bark de Rajman 1987). Upon the death of Eva Perón in 1952, the government presented her autobiography, *La Razón de mi Vida* [The Reason for my Life], as a compulsory reading textbook in all Argentine schools.

Studies on the subject have provided a wide variety of documentation on the Peronist educational policies. Some also explore teacher reactions, both political (Puigrós 1993)—expressed through several press publication—and emotional (Escudé 1990) to these policies.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, very little evidence exists on what actually happened within schools under these same policies. For example: Were 'Peronist

textbooks' used by teachers? Was Eva Perón's book read in schools? How did teachers deal with these new contents? In other words, what was the relation between educational macro-policies (and its indoctrination and attempts to ideologize) and scholastic practices?

The following two sections are presented on the subject. The first hypothesis is that schools put institutional mechanisms into practice that neutralized the doctrine-related contents. The second section discusses the mechanisms that teachers put into practice to neutralize the doctrinal influence.

### **The 'depoliticization' of content or the schooling of knowledge**

Not until 1949, that is to say more than three years after the beginning of Perón's first term as president, could any content related to Peronist doctrine be found in primary school notebooks. But, contrary to official orders, these doctrinal principles appear in the notebooks in a 'depoliticized' way.

The teachers adapted the doctrine to the needs of teaching. The notebooks show that its points were converted into the raw material of class exercises, and not into a lesson having its own ethical and political value. Using the doctrine as a base, students were expected to carry out activities assigned to them by the teacher that resulted in the content becoming irrelevant since it was subordinated to more important didactic objectives. With the doctrine as a backdrop, the students were told to 'summarize', 'write compositions', 'copy', 'write dictations', etc. The teachers corrected whatever errors they found that were related to the performance of the activity, that is to say, the most formal part of the performance, but without correcting the ideological content of the written assignment.

The following is an interesting example related to this matter. In 1954, a notebook recorded the following assignment from a teacher:

*Compose sentences including the following words:*

*Workers, popular loyalty, Plaza de Mayo [May Square]*

The three concepts that the students must use are directly related to the terminology of Peronist rituals: the workers as a political focus of Argentine society; popular loyalty towards the leader, Perón; and the Plaza de Mayo, a public area located in Buenos Aires, the site of Government House where, from the balcony, Perón addressed the people in multitudinous rallies of support. Despite all this, we find the following sentences written by the student:

My brother is very hardworking.  
In life, loyalty must be cultivated.  
The Plaza de Mayo is very pretty.

The teacher graded the assignment with 7 (on a scale of 1 to 10), which is regarded as a very good grade in Argentine school tradition. The teacher's concern and the general objective were not, no doubt, to give the listed words a political meaning. On the contrary, it was a matter of composing sentences according to the instructions, without emphasizing their ideological import. In the case of the second sentence, where the inclusion of 'popular loyalty' was requested and the political meaning is more difficult to avoid, in order to neutralize the significance one of its component terms has been eliminated ('popular'), but the supposed error is not corrected by the teacher, resulting in the depoliticization of 'loyalty' and its conversion into an ordinary human sentiment. The depoliticization is obvious here: few words are as loaded with doctrinal meaning as those in the example, but they have been neutralized in the notebook.

Other forms of depoliticization consisted in the inclusion of party-oriented material in traditional subjects. The government's doctrine was mostly included in particular subjects. History, geography or Spanish were the framework within which these tenets were usually presented; thus, they became matters that came to light as part of the routine teaching of a subject. In many cases, this did not appear to be a simple task and material is included at random, mainly in the first years of various subjects.

For example, the notebooks show that Eva Perón's autobiography, *La Razón de mi Vida*, was included in the subject 'Spanish language', with quite a few consequences. Some notebooks included handwritten passages of some paragraphs of the book, and in others it was used as material for dictations—it was the spelling that was being evaluated. The common denominator was the minimal relevance assigned to the semantic aspect of the text: that is, comprehension of and working on its meaning.

The following is an exercise from 1952 in which a paragraph of Evita Perón's autobiography is copied:

*Assignment Number 261*

*Copy down from the book, *La Razón de mi Vida*.*

*In my heart I have discovered a basic feeling which, from there, totally dominates my spirit and my life: this feeling is my indignation at injustice. For as far back as I can recall, every instance of injustice hurt my soul as if something was in it.<sup>7</sup>*

The teacher requested that the students copied the text without going into details about the ideological message it carried in the context of the partisan indoctrination and ideology of the Peronist government. Besides, the written text included several Spanish spelling errors which the teacher did not correct.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify certain concepts. The two mechanisms described here—the subordination of the content to a teaching activity and its inclusion in a curricular discipline—are institutional mechanisms and resulted in depoliticization. This process took place in Argentina alongside other types of knowledge included in the notebooks, be it political or any other kind. It is possible, as Bianchi (1996) outlines, that knowledge related to religion may have suffered a similar process through schooling. Thus, the title of this section refers to the ‘schooling of knowledge’. Nevertheless, the notebooks belonging to these years register a second type of process—related to the first, but implying more deliberate action by teachers—which, no doubt, can be attributed to systematic strategies on the part of teachers to divert the inclusion of party-oriented doctrine in traditional subjects.

### **The Peronist doctrine and new forms of teacher resistance**

The analysis of notebooks reveals other forms of reaction towards attempts at indoctrination by the Peronist ideology. As has been stated before, the main form of resistance by teachers to the Peronist doctrine was not through political organizations or traditional union protests, but through the school itself.

Opposition to government policies can be observed in the notebooks in different forms. The teachers’ actions can be classified in two basic types: (a) ones which affect the text; and (b) ones which affect evaluation of the work, which are represented in Table 9.1.

**Table 9.1: The classification of teacher opposition responses to the inclusion of party-oriented material**

A. Text-related Responses	
A.1. Disruption of the logic of statements A. 1.1 Intratextual (within the same text) A. 1.2 Intertextual (between texts)	A.2. Presentation of incomplete texts
B. Evaluation Responses	
B.1. Grading of Activities B.1.1. No grading B.1.2. Partial grading	B.2. Correction B.2.1. No correction B.2.2. Partial correction

## Disruption of the logic of statements

This tactic consisted of breaking up the sense of the texts recorded in the class notebooks, producing a phenomenon which had been atypical until then: that is, the disruption of the logic of the text.

These tactics appear in the notebooks in different ways. One of these consists of including imprecise, ambiguous or simply self-contradictory statements within the same text, thus confusing the doctrine of educational policy. An example of this is found in the box on the following page.

Observe the comprehension difficulties this text presents. In the second sentence, 'before' is presented as an unhappy period in comparison to 'now'. However, despite this initial position, the following sentences show the 'now' as a consequence of the past, as the result of a kind of 'progress'. Compared to the historic break that Peronist doctrine proposes to understand the 'past/present' relationship, 'before bad/now good', the teacher opposes the old positive category of historical progress so dear to the Argentine teaching profession, in the same text and following the first sentences.

### *Exercise Number 354*

*The present state of teaching primary, secondary and graduate.*

*Today's teaching is not like it used to be. Now it is free; before you had to pay for it. Now it is easier to study. It was Sarmiento first and then Avellaneda who promoted studying. Sarmiento was a great teacher. Avellaneda a creator of so many schools. That is how teaching has increased. There are thousands of schools in our country. People start in primary and many reach a higher level than of the universities. Our country is one of the best in education. The president of the nation has also established the creation of 500 schools so that children can study and become useful men for the good of the country.*

## Indifference

This second example of teacher resistance is found in notebooks in which curricular contents connected to Peronist doctrine are handled with considerably less dedication than other teaching tasks.

One of the characteristics of this tactic of indifference is in regard to the teacher's grading of children's activities. Traditionally, the grading of notebooks can be subdivided into two different steps (Gvirtz 1996). On the one hand, the grading consists of evaluating the completed work according to certain standards of performance ('Good', 'Excellent', 'Poor', etc); and, on the other hand, of correction, which consists of pointing out errors made by the students and indicating the correct response.

The first type of indifference is shown when we observe that the only exercises not corrected by the teachers are those related to partisan Peronist material; neither the spelling errors nor those related to the meaning of the doctrine itself are corrected. The second type is revealed in a significant number of activities related to the Peronist doctrine where only the spelling errors are corrected and the work is not awarded a grade.

### **Notebooks in the world educational research agenda**

This chapter examined the impact of a micro-political device on macro-curricular policies in Argentina. Especially interesting has been the discovery of a written artifact of educational practices—that is the notebooks—which is relatively easy to find, but which has yet to be sufficiently exploited. Some research investigating this artifact can be found in Spain, France and Argentina in recent years (Del Pozo Andrés and Ramos Zamora 2003; Chartier 2003; De Titto 2002; Gvirtz 1999; Augustowsky and Vezub 1998); several ongoing projects are publishing initial reports (e.g., Chartier 2005).

As stated in the outset, the school notebook is neither a local device nor one that has only value solely in the Argentine case. On the contrary, it is a valuable source for comparative micro-political studies in the education field worldwide, as well as for other national studies. This last section introduces the case of two studies that have been carried out by scholars in Spain, France and Argentina.

The Spanish approach views the notebooks as a privileged primary source to understand the history of the 'taught curriculum' in twentieth-century Spain. In order to carry out this study, the authors, María del Mar Del Pozo Andrés and Sara Ramos Zamora (Del Pozo Andrés and Ramos Zamora 2003), collected 102 notebooks corresponding to a period of ten years during General Franco's dictatorship. Notebooks here served as a valuable means to get to know the real written practices that took place within the schools, thus serving as a means for a better understanding of the school culture. The use of a set of criteria—such as: (a) the construction of school timetables to determine real school times; (b) prescribed curriculum *versus* taught curriculum to understand school curriculum in practice; (c) the construction of different teaching models; (d) the transmission of attitudes and values on behalf of the teachers; and (e) didactical resources and pedagogic strategies used by teachers—allowed a very fine approach to the real school culture through this historical educational source.

In the second case, the French educational historian Anne-Marie Chartier (2003) has carried out various studies on this subject. Two examples are explored. The first one concentrates on three basic uses of the school notebook for a historiographic

approach. In the first place, it is used to record expository teaching; in the second place, it is used as a clear indicator of school performance; and third, it is evidence of teaching practices. The author presents the three uses, together with examples for the teaching of elite and working-class children. On this basis, she intended to answer the question of how schools introduce children into the written culture of their time through school notebooks. These devices are precious archives on the process of the introduction of children into the written culture: a short-term process in the case of each new generation, and a long-term process in the case of a nation or society.

The second one is a study of school notebooks in Europe which is currently being carried out. The aim of the project is the production of a comparative study on this device regarding different school systems and teaching practices, showing the singularity of certain practices in a time of expansion of the European Community, and also illustrating similarities and differences in teaching practices at a certain moment in history (Chartier 2005). Some hypotheses behind this study are that these school writings: (a) represent a window through which schools reveal themselves both to the outside and within themselves; (b) build classifying categories of knowledge and their hierarchy; and (c) testify to interactions between students and teachers. The analysis will focus on such subjects as: the nature of the different objects (notebooks, folders, types of writing, quantity of writing, structures, etc.), the names of disciplines and their hierarchy, and a comparative analysis of some contents (national language, mathematics, history).

Other studies in Argentina have been carried out by Gabriela Augustowski and Lea Vezub (1998); and Raúl de Titto (2002), amongst others. Augustowski and Vezub's study is of research undertaken by the Curriculum Department of the Argentine Ministry of Education to analyze the impact of the basic common contents in the classroom through the study of school notebooks. The objective was to observe the continuity or the interruption of the former curricular designs. These scholars come to the conclusion that within the notebooks, one-third maintains old curricular practices, one-third contains some innovations, and one-third makes use of the new contents.

In de Titto's case, this approach studies notebooks to see the way in which certain changes in the curricular designs over a period of three decades are reflected in school notebooks. He concludes that there is practically no impact of macro-curricular policies reflected in the school notebooks.

Careful scrutiny of school notebooks can be useful in many respects. First, they can serve as instruments and a privileged primary source to shed light on the history of 'taught curriculum' in the twentieth century. Second, they provide an initial basis for a comparative study on 'the implemented curriculum'; third, they help scholars analyze and evaluate the impact of particular curricular policies. Finally, school notebooks, together with other curricular micro-political devices, should be considered specifically in the design of curricular policies.

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**Notes**

1. The author thanks Annie Mulcahy for her collaboration in the writing and translation of this article.
2. *El Monitor de la Educación Común* [The Monitor of General Education]. Buenos Aires, Ministry of Justice and Public Instruction, quoted in Gvirtz and Beech 2004.
3. For this purpose, 247 school notebooks corresponding to this period were analyzed.
4. Quoted in Gvirtz and Narodowski (1998).
5. Quoted in Plotkin (1994).
6. Quoted in Gvirtz and Narodowski (1998).
7. The passage copied by the student had many spelling mistakes and grammatical errors in Spanish, most of which could not be reproduced in the English translation. Trabajo Nro. 261 Copia de libro: *La Razón de mi Vida*: He hallado en mi corazón un sentimiento fundamental que domina desde allí en forma total mi espíritu y mi vida: ese sentimiento es mi indignación frente a la injusticia. Desde que yo me acuerdo cada injusticia me doler en el alma como si algo en ella.