

**ISSUES AND REFORMS: THE CARIBBEAN, CENTRAL AMERICA,  
AND SOUTH AMERICAN REGION**

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**Resumo** O texto apresenta os problemas atuais e as reformas iniciadas nos sistemas educacionais de países do Caribe, da América Central e da América do Sul. Entre os problemas e reformas atuais são analisados: a crise e transformação do Estado, a descentralização do sistema escolar, a privatização do ensino, as finanças escolares, a pobreza e a falta de igualdade de acesso educacional, as limitações organizacionais e burocráticas, a falta de envolvimento e participação dos pais nas decisões escolares, os baixos salários dos professores, políticas curriculares e demandas por melhorias pedagógicas.

**Palavras-chaves:** Problemas educacionais do Caribe; problemas educacionais da América Central; problemas educacionais da América do Sul; reformas educacionais do Caribe; reformas educacionais da América Central; reformas educacionais da América do Sul.

**Abstract** This paper presents the recent issues and reforms initiated in the educational systems of Caribbean countries, of Central America and of South America. Among the problems and present reforms the following are analyzed: crisis and transformation of the State, school finances, poverty and lack of equality of educational access, organizational and bureaucratic constraints, lack of parent involvement and participation in school decision making, low teacher's salaries, curricular policies, and demands for pedagogic improvements.

**Descriptors:** Educational issues of Caribbean Region; educational issues of Central America; educational issues of South America; educational reforms of Caribbean Region; educational reforms of Central America; educational reforms of South America.

**Introduction**

This analysis of educational issues and reforms in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America region is far from comprehensive. At best, the analysis presented in the following pages is based on a modest amount of documentation which has been examined within the context of discussions with various individuals knowledgeable about education in these areas. Although the sources are generally high ranking education officials, or influential educators at the university level, the views they offer are, to some extent, impressionistic. While some disagreement may exist among these individuals and government agencies in prioritizing educational issues and problems and, indeed, in their prescriptions to address these problems, a broad consensus exists that the issues and problems raised here

generally describe the contours of the educational discussion and debate now taking place in the region.

More specifically, much of the information found in the following discussion was derived from meetings with officials from the Caribbean, Central America, and Latin America during the UNESCO International Symposium in Santiago, Chile, during the first week of November 1993. This symposium was well attended and featured participants from every country in the region, including Cuba. During the four-day symposium, officials and academics from many of the countries represented gave freely of their time and responded to three broad questions I asked, notably: What are the most important education problems in your country at the present time? What major changes in

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education are currently taking place? And, what initiatives are being taken to democratize or reform education in your country? Notes from these meetings were made and provide part of the data base for this brief summary and analysis.

Information for this discussion was also obtained from UNESCO periodicals and other academic books and journals that refer to recent educacional developments in the region.<sup>1</sup> Perspectives and information for the discussion were also obtained from provincial and federal education officials in Argentina, and from a meeting with the Chamber of Deputies (provincial law makers) in charge of educacional affairs in the Argentine province of Mendoza. In addition to these sources, a questionnaire was distributed by facsimile in February 1994 (in English and Spanish) to a broad selection of government officials and educators throughout the region. Communications problems resulted in a low response rate, even though transmissions were repeated several times. Unfortunately, this has meant that little specific information was available about Caribbean and Central American countries.

### **The Economic and Educacional Context**

The challenges facing Latin American society and its educational institutions today are grounded in a particular economic and social context. As one recent study explains:

The economic development model followed in Latin America after the Second World War showed various signs of obsolescence in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In previous decades, some countries had experienced significant economic growth, and a few had achieved a minimal degree of social equity, but none, apparently, had simultaneously attained these twin objectives of the development process.

The democratization process currently underway faces, *inter alia*, two great challenges: the growing disparity between aspirations and reality, particularly prevalent among Latin American youth, and the new demands of international integration (ECLAC/UNESCO, 1992, p. 23).

Throughout the region, governments have firmly seized upon education as the instrument to address these challenges. Despite the recession of recent decades and the presence of authoritarian leadership in some countries during the 1970s and 1980s, educational opportunity throughout Latin America expanded in the 1980s and 1990s. This expansion was attributed to several factors (ECLAC/UNESCO, 1992). Chief among these was the continuous growth in the coverage of educational systems in the 1970s and 1980s, improvements in basic living conditions, and the fact that, despite broad reductions in public spending, educacional investment was given priority over expenditures on other state services (ECLAC/UNESCO, 1992).

### **Education and the Transformation of the State**

Responsibility, however, for the governance and financing of education has changed greatly in the past decade in line with what is commonly referred to as "the transformation of the state," or the "crisis of the welfare state." As one recent article states: "Up to the late 1970s, there was general agreement that considerations about the state in the world - and in Latin America - were pervaded by Marxist thought, chiefly European Marxism" (Casassus, 1993, p. 44). But this, the writer continues, has greatly changed since the debt crisis of 1981 - and a new philosophy about the role of government - and government's role in education - has emerged:

Today, the State ceases to be a direct producer but creates the framework within which the productive process may unfold under competitive conditions. In this context, it emerges as a promotor of change in the production patterns, no longer a direct producer but, in an instrumental dimension, linked to work and technical progress, as the driving force of an education capable of contributing with creativity and growth technology.... On the other hand ... the education system emerges as a promotor of the nation and the citizenry (Casassus, 1993, p. 48).

Various reasons have been given for the change in attitudes about the role of the state. The crisis in the welfare state in Latin America, it is argued, was brought about by the international oil crisis of the 1970s, restrictions in international monetary policies, and by the collapse of national development schemes (Espinola, 1992). Whatever the causes, the principal responses to the crisis of the state have been two-fold-policies to decentralize government, and policies to privatize schools or other educacional institutions. In either case, the shift in Latin American thought about government from that of a socialist state-dominated enterprise to an agent of a free market economy has had profound educacional implications.

### **Decentralization**

Since the 1970s, various countries have introduced decentralization policies in education; Brazil (1971), Chile (1980), Argentina, for primary schools, (1976), Mexico (1978), Colombia (1986), and, for secondary schooling, Argentina (1991), (Espinola, 1992). Historical experience in South America shows that decentralization was, first, an administrative process related to demands to acknowledge the declining resources of central governments.

As the 1993 UNESCO symposium pointed out:

"In the case of Latin America, it can be said that educacional decentralization ... seeks a new legitimacy for the states through the consequent redistribution of competencies between the different levels of the public system, or between the latter and private actors" (UNESCO Rapporteur, 1993, p. 8).

For the most part, decentralization has involved shifting governance and financial responsibility for schooling from federal to provincial and municipal levels (UNESCO Rapporteur, 1993). It is still unclear, however, how far decentralization will ultimately proceed (UNESCO Rapporteur, 1993, p. 8). The advantages of decentralization in terms of democratic participation are offset, to some extent, by the development of new bureaucratic structures to govern and manage schooling at other levels. This bureaucratic growth, in turn, may be minimized by new communications technologies (UNESCO Rapporteur, 1993; Fleming, 1993).

### *Argentina*

Argentina exemplifies the decentralized approach to education common throughout South America.<sup>2</sup> For largely economic reasons, Argentina's national government surrendered control of elementary schooling to the nation's 27 provinces almost two decades ago. Within the past three years, it has likewise decentralized responsibility for secondary education despite much wrangling by the provinces about the nature of the change and provincial concerns about the insufficiency of federal transfers of support.

Provincial education officials have maintained that their new - found responsibility for secondary education is

financially disadvantageous - and that the added burden of supporting secondary schools strains already - low provincial coffers. This concern appears to be especially true in the historically poorer provinces, such as Jujuy in the old colonial northwest, a jurisdiction long known for its sub-standard schools and the inadequacies of its other government services.

Transferring responsibility for secondary education has also had profound effects even in wealthier provinces and urban areas. Apart from these extraordinary costs is the added problem of reconciling the curricula between national and provincial schools. One expert in Argentine education has recently written:

Some of the national schools are very old and traditional while provincial schools are more modern and have less prestige. The provincial government must support these schools and integrate the national system with their own (Senen Gonzalez, 1994).

These problems have been exacerbated by a 1993 *Federal Education Law* which makes nine years of basic education mandatory for children throughout the country. Increasing attendance from the seven years of schooling previously required presents additional funding problems for provinces and municipalities. Large amounts of resources, as one individual put it, must now be directed toward "new curricula, new buildings, training teachers and administrators" (Senen Gonzalez, 1994). The effects of decentralization throughout the Caribbean, Central America, and South America region were generally summarized at the November 1993 UNESCO symposium in Santiago. At the conclusion of this meeting, policy makers and scholars seemed to agree that, although decentralization policies are targeted toward social and educational equity, "in the short

run inequity, spurred by resource inequalities" is increasing throughout the region (UNESCO Rapporteur, 1993, p.2)

## Privatization

Privatization as a strategy to address the crisis of the state did not fully emerge until the late 1980s (Espinola, 1992). And, when it did, it was applied for reasons both economic and educational - in other words, to reduce the burden on central governments and, at the same time, to improve the quality of educational services and scholastic results. Private schools, colleges, or universities are not new in Latin America. Historically, the private sector has supplied education to two diverse groups - children from the economic and social elite, and children from poor sectors of society. Schooling for the latter groups has usually been provided by religious orders who charge no fees (Espinola, 1992).

What is new is the privatization of public schools in Chile, where, like most of Central and South America, the public sector has been traditionally responsible for providing primary and secondary schooling for the majority of low-income groups. In Chile, the crisis of the state has prompted privatization, a more radical strategy than decentralization, although Chile has also decentralized the governance and control of schools.

### *Chile*

Beginning in 1980, the Chilean government has essentially privatized public education on the twin assumptions that public agencies are inefficient suppliers of services, and that the private sector can offer services more efficiently (Espinola, 1992). Guided by what one senior federal educational official describes as a search for "equity, justice, and democratic results"

(Castro Silva, 1993, p. 1), education reform in Chile has been carried out, to quote one scholar, "through an unprecedented combination of decentralization and privatization" (Espinola, 1992, p. 1). Espinola, one authority on Chilean reform, observes:

Like many other Latin American countries, Chile decentralized its education system by transferring the administration of schools to municipalities, local government units dependent on the central government.... The reform accomplished the transformation of a state-regulated education system into a market-regulated education system and introduced competition between public and private schools in an attempt to increase quality and to overcome the inefficiencies of the state as administrator.... It is basically an economic and institutional reform - and not strictly educational - which draws its conceptual framework from the Friedman voucher proposal (Espinola, 1992, p. 1-3).

The distinguishing feature of Chilean educational reform was that it sought to create new private, non-profit schools that can compete with public schools for the enrollment of children from low-income families (Espinola, 1992).

Summing up the results of Chile's privatization strategy for schooling, Espinola concluded in 1992 that this strategy for change has not had altogether positive results. Relatively higher income groups, as might be expected, withdrew their children from municipal schools, but lower income households continued to use the municipal system, "not because they have chosen municipal schools, but because they have just passively stayed where they were" (Espinola, 1992, p. 101).

#### *Other Private-Sector Activities*

The extent of privatization in other countries within the Caribbean, Central

America, and South America region varies considerably. In Mexico, for example, little support exists for privatizing public educational institutions, although public dissatisfaction with the state of technical and applied education is high. In part, discussions about privatization have been resisted by the country's powerful teachers' union, although consideration is now apparently being given toward providing some income tax relief (in the form of tax credits) to those whose children attend private institutions. The private school sector in Mexico, for the most part, follows the public school curriculum.

In the Dominican Republic, three classes of private schools exist, charging fees ranging from U.S. \$1000 to \$15,000 annually. The country also has nonpublic sector trade, commercial, and technical schools for which students pay fees to attend. In Uruguay, there are private schools, private universities, and private trade, technical, and commercial institutes. Cuba has no private education of any kind and, officially, there is no likelihood of development in this sector in the foreseeable future.

In Venezuela, recent discussion has explored the possibilities of a larger private education sector, however this has been opposed by a strong teachers' union. Within Venezuelan society at large, uncertainty exists about what a larger private sector might mean, especially in terms of user costs. There are, however, throughout the country a number of public-private experiments in technical and trade schools, especially in areas of science and technology. In these institutions, the state pays instructional costs and local companies underwrite technological and other equipment costs.

In Peru, educational reform is more closely allied with the Chilean model. In recent years, great public dissatisfaction has

been expressed with the quality of public schooling and its lack of efficiency. Apparently, the public has lost confidence in public education, a development largely conditioned by a series of public sector strikes over the past three years which have only accelerated the move to the private sector. Consequently, the state is now transferring all administrative authority for schooling to the non-public sector, particularly to church-operated institutions and, in some cases, to professional educational managers. Approximately 15% of students in the country currently attend private schools, whose fees range between U.S. \$10 and \$500 a month.

Peru also has a level of technical schools between high schools and universities which are also private. Some of these institutions charge up to U.S. \$400 a month but guarantee successful graduates jobs with major companies. Other private enterprises have installed modern technology in schools and are currently training students in modern communications technologies.

In Argentina, little change has taken place in increasing educational instruction outside the existing public educational system. The private sector currently enrolls about one-third of students in the country, a proportion that rises considerably in urban areas and residential areas. At other levels of the system, community colleges, based on American models, have been introduced to middle-size cities in the province of Buenos Aires. In this province, initiatives have also been undertaken to develop fee-charging private schools jointly managed and controlled by teachers and parents (Senen Gonzalez, 1994).

### **Crisis of Traditional Education Systems**

Although the decentralization and privatization responses by federal governments principally sought to address

the crisis of the state, there are other reasons for changes that have taken place in education. Within the realm of state - provided schooling itself, there has also been a crisis. Some of the major reasons for this crisis - and the treatments now being prescribed - are as follows:

#### *School Finance*

Inflation, debt-servicing costs, and the decentralization of state support for schools have had dramatic effects on school finance since the 1980s. In a comment that typifies much of the Latin American experience, one writer says that the amount of money now available in Chile to subsidize public schools, including teachers' salaries, is not sufficient to ensure "a medium quality level of education in a society that is close to the 21st century" (Castro Silva, 1993, p. 1). Among current financial problems is the fact that, in the 1994 fiscal year, state budgets for work and social assistance were given higher priority than educational spending.

During 1994, a new system called "divided financing" will be implemented in some Chilean secondary schools. Responsibility for financing high school education will be derived from the state, through subsidies to families, and through fees from parents. At the same time,

there are experiments underway for educational structures with new types of financial systems that have greater links to the productive [business and corporate] world (Castro Silva, 1993, p. 1).

Further to this, "business companies are starting to give financial and technical support to schools of a technical character as a consequence of new law decrees" (Castro Silva, 1993, p. 1).

In Argentina, decentralization of responsibility for secondary schooling from the national to provincial levels has had profound impacts on provincial authorities. To illustrate: as a result of this recent change, the province and municipality of Buenos Aires has been obliged to support 3578 national secondary schools, without additional financial resources (Senen Gonzalez, 1994). Operating costs for these schools, in salaries alone, is U. S. \$800 million (Senen Gonzalez, 1994). Moreover, federal authorities have also mandated that, within five years, national and provincial investment in education must increase from four to six percent of the GNP. Although this signifies that education is becoming a national priority, it also means that new resources from the tax base will have to be found to support schools (Senen Gonzalez, 1994).

Notwithstanding the recent economic vigour of several Latin American countries, it is fair to say that educational needs continue to outstrip the financial resources available throughout the region as a whole. As following sections of the discussion explain, tremendous educational inequities remain among countries, among regions within countries, and among social classes within regions. Not surprisingly, recent discussion has turned toward such topics as improving the efficiency of teachers, experimenting with other delivery models for educational services, and reducing the monopolies enjoyed by unions and state agencies in education.

### *Poverty and Inequality*

For decades, Latin American government leaders and educators have wrestled with problems of broadening educational opportunity and equality of access using whatever instruments various ideologies of government provided. Today,

the struggle continues. A senior state educational official in Chile describes the present challenge this way:

Firstly we are trying to overcome the inequities in the distribution and quality of educational services. An equity could be, for example, 30-40% difference in the average academic results of students in private [as opposed to] governmentally-subsidized schooling (Castro Silva, 1993, p. 1).

The path Chile has taken is one of directing greater public resources and educational programs toward the country's "most deprived schools." National attempts to improve the quality of schooling in rural and poor districts are being made, particularly, through programs such as "900 Schools," and "Assistance for Scholarships (Filp, 1993, p. 7).

In Argentina, recent efforts to improve performance through national assessments and other initiatives are being blunted somewhat by other factors. One official notes:

Schools, especially at the elementary level, are busy solving the social needs of the community. Economic crises in the provinces have led to difficult situations—unemployment, low salaries, [and] worker instability (Senen Gonzalez, 1994, p. 1).

And, because the schools have dedicated themselves to solving these social and economic problems, rather than focusing on student learning, "the consequence has been lower quality in educational results" (Senen Gonzalez, 1994, p. 1).

### *Organizational and Bureaucratic Constraints*

Three organizational problems are reported commonly throughout Latin America at federal, provincial, and municipal levels. One of these is the extent

to which politics, especially political appointments to senior and junior bureaucratic ranks, interferes with the work of a meritocratic and trained educational civil service. Simply put, educational officials are not always trained for the positions they hold, and are unable to exhibit the competencies ordinarily expected of their roles in government. Problems also arise from sometimes-sudden shifts in political priorities which disrupt, or even terminate, educational policies and programs before intended outcomes are achieved (Senen Gonzalez, 1994). In some instances, repeated changes in direction cause chaos in program planning and policy making.

Finally, organizational problems related to inadequate training for administrative staff are also evident in the region. In Argentina, one writer observes, "officials and administrators have lost their traditional instruction" and this lack of training has adversely affected their capacity to "formulate, evaluate, and manage institutional projects" (Senen Gonzalez, 1994, p.1). From other comments, this appears to be equally true elsewhere in Latin America where many administrative training programs are as impoverished as the rural schools.

### *Public Disenfranchisement and Apathy*

In Brazil, Chile, and Argentina, governments at all levels are attempting to increase community and parental participation in decisions about schooling. In this respect, there is a long history of non-participation to be overcome. Traditionally, decisions about schools were made by senior bureaucrats, provincial governors, or by members of powerful local elites. Few countries in the Caribbean, Central America, or South America can boast of lengthy or sustained traditions of public

involvement in schooling or, for that matter, of sustained traditions of democratic decision making. As a consequence of this, considerable discussion and interest has been expressed over the past decade or so about how to make schools and other public institutions more democratic in character.

One official in Argentina stated the problem this way: "What comes first, democratization of schooling or democratization of society?" (Senen Gonzalez, 1994, p.1). To this, she adds:

Argentina suffered terrible experiences because of authoritarian governments, and society has still not overcome [the effects of] this situation. Ten years of democracy, 1984-1994, are very important but not enough for the moment (Senen Gonzalez, 1994, p.1).

Current thinking in the region holds that public participation is important, first, as a form of "social control over educational goals and accountability," and, second, as a means of achieving "an equilibrium between bureaucratic and political power." Evidence of increasing interest in democratic procedures can be seen in several examples. In Argentina's provinces of Buenos Aires and Cordoba, for example, recent developments have included the establishment of participatory roles for parents through "Parent Boards," or "Community Boards."

In Chile, one respondent wrote: "We are trying many experiments [to increase participation] at a primary level through non-traditional methods ("Know Your Son") and other methods that [encourage] students' family participation." He adds that democratization of schooling in Chile is being assisted by "new regulations so that both parents and students can participate in academic events" (Castro Silva, 1993, p. 3).

But the situation remains difficult, as Filp (1993) explains, even though poor



families value formal education and see it as a means of social and economic mobility:

Participation of parents in schools is limited and non-productive, even when it is formally encouraged. In general, teachers tend to disregard poor parents, and the parents under-estimate their own competency, thereby closing the circle of inequality. Privatization has introduced a certain dynamic in this situation by slightly increasing the options available to parents and making schools pay more attention to community demands in order to attract more students (p. 7).

### *Low Teachers' Salaries*

The crisis of the state in Latin America has greatly affected public sector salaries, including those of professors and teachers. Throughout much of the Caribbean, Central America, and South America region teachers' salaries remain low (some argue extraordinarily low) relative to other educated workers. Academics in Argentina, for example, may earn approximately U. S. \$ 300-400 a month, with the result that professors, even in major universities such as the University of Buenos Aires, are compelled to take other jobs. Some, for example, find full or part-time employment in government agencies where they can earn considerably more. For many, survival in the professoriate depends upon cobbling together a living derived from several jobs.

The situation for teachers is similar throughout Latin America. In Argentina, teachers' salaries are low and dissatisfaction with salaries has led to conflict. The northwestern province of Salta continues to suffer from a teachers' strike which is already several months long and is, reportedly, still not settled (Senen Gonzalez, 1994). In Chile, for example, teachers in primary schools earn, on average, about U.S. \$350 a month, despite the fact that the

cost of living roughly approximates that of developed countries (Senen Gonzalez, 1994). Although some public awareness exists about the need to improve instructional salaries in schools, there is an equally strong body of public sentiment, in Argentina at least, which holds that increases in teachers salaries should be tied to higher student performance and to some measurable outcomes reflecting teachers' responsibility, dedication, and motivation (Senen Gonzalez, 1994).

### **Curriculum Control**

Control over curriculum in Central and South America has been traditionally a responsibility of senior government - however, in keeping with the broad movement toward decentralization, the construction of curriculum now reflects the interests of other jurisdictions. In Brazil and Argentina, for instance, the emergence of a collaborative approach to curriculum development is evident (UNESCO/ OREALC, 1993). Brazil's "Ten Year Plan for Education for All" (1993 to 2003) specifies that the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with local communities,

shall propose and specify the nacional curricular contents capable of assessing the amount of universal and socially useful education that must be offered to all children, taking into account their respective differences (UNESCO/ OREALC, 1993, p. 60).

In Argentina, the *Code of the General Law on Education* (1992) states that it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and Education (a federal agency) to

establish in accordance with the Federal Council of Culture and Education the basic common objectives and contents of curricula at the various levels, cycles, and special educational regimes ... leaving

sufficient curricular space to include the contents that respond to the needs of provinces, municipalities, communities and schools (UNESCO/OREALC, 1993, p. 59).

In Colombia, curriculum decentralization is even more advanced. Here, the *General Education Law*, proposed in 1993, maintains that the "financial and administrative responsibility [for education] falls to the state ...but each [institution] maintains its autonomy in the production of curricula" (UNESCO/OREALC, 1993, p. 59).

Currently, a new international initiative is under discussion that has important meaning for curriculum control and development. Chile, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico have embarked on an "Educational Agreement" which aims at achieving a broad regional understanding on such matters as educational goals, as well as other basic provisions including sources and amounts for financing school programs, teachers' labour conditions and salaries, teacher preparation strategies, and basic skill and knowledge levels for students in these three countries (Senen Gonzalez, 1993).

### *Curriculum Debate*

As in many other countries around the world, educational governments throughout the Caribbean, Central America, and South America appear to be debating a number of large curricular issues. Legislators and scholars are trying to determine the kinds of curriculum that their countries and regions require to meet the challenges of the 1990s and beyond.

How broad, or how specialized, should the primary and secondary school curricula be? Can one curriculum accommodate the needs of all students? Should the school curriculum, especially the secondary school curriculum, be more highly specialized?

Should it emphasize skills development and applied knowledge rather than classical liberal education? Should students be streamed into discrete programs within schools (academic, general, and technical), or should schools offer one broad curriculum? Can the state ensure a well-trained workforce for the 21st century? These are some of the questions currently under discussion.

### *A Sense of Direction*

One recent report advises that curriculum developers in the region should take into account the following factors when they design a curriculum: the demands of instrumental rationality (knowledge and technology); the requirements and expectations of national development; the cultural identity and cohesion of nations; the analytical and disciplinary nature of insight (methodological differences); sequencing curriculum contents with student development; the effects of different pedagogies; and the influence of education on the social dimensions of personality (UNESCO/OREALC, 1993).

The report also observes that the following trends are evident in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America:

- \* Attention is increasingly being paid to the provision of basic education;
- \* Senior governments are generally raising the number of years of compulsory schooling;
- \* Curricular reforms are demanded system-wide (that is, toward both primary and secondary schools);
- \* General dissatisfactions exist concerning the gaps between the skills

and knowledge provided by secondary schooling and the demands of work in a plastic economy;

- \* Strong support continues to exist for what is loosely described as a "sound, general education" as the best preparation for the workplace;
- \* Increasing attention is being directed, especially at the primary level of schooling, to human and social development objectives;
- \* New pressures are being placed on schools to provide instruction in such diverse topics as sexuality, AIDS education, informatics, leisure activities, technology, and other areas of study generally associated with modern life; and
- \* Traditional emphasis on models of teaching are giving way to emphasis on models of learning (UNESCO/OREALC, 1993, p. 42-28).

In more direct terms, the November 1993 UNESCO symposium summarized the direction curriculum is taking this way:

The fact that the productive [economic] system requires skills leading to the preparation of 'more intelligent' and creative individuals, with higher degrees of autonomy, [who are] more rational, able to work in teams, capable of solving unexpected problems, [and] competent to perform at higher levels of uncertainty . . . argues for a curriculum that permanently and structurally links education and work (UNESCO Rapporteur, 1993, p. 8).

Or, as one education minister in Latin America reportedly said: "The core of the competitiveness of nations lies today, after all is said and done, in the competitiveness

of educational systems" (Casassus, 1993, p. 49).

These sentiments are echoed elsewhere. In Chile, concern has been expressed about the "unsuitability [of] the existing educational level and the search for competence, higher skills, and attitudes now required" in a modern economy (Castro Silva, 1993, p. 1; Vera, 1993, p. 1). In Argentina, one writer reports: "at the centre of dissatisfaction are problems linked to educational quality [and] the loss of social meaning in knowledge" (Senen Gonzalez, 1994, p. 1).

#### *Demands for Pedagogic Improvements*

In various parts of the Caribbean and the Latin American world, teaching and teachers are under intense scrutiny, if not under public attack. Dissatisfactions abound with the quality and direction of teacher education programs, the archaic nature of these programs, teachers' and students' performance in schools, the isolation of teachers from the communities they serve and, in some places, the power of teachers' unions.

Critics of teacher education point to the inefficiency of such programs in teaching teachers how to apply academic knowledge. They raise questions about the legitimacy and status of teaching as a profession (UNESCO Rapporteur, 1993). As one report puts it:

in their field of performance, teachers find themselves hard pressed to harmonize and functionalize the specific technical insight delivered by training in the solution of routine school-life situations. This being the case, technical and professional knowledge survives at the treatise level, and practice becomes a generating source of 'common sense' knowledge, outside the professionalization realm formulated by treatise (UNESCO Rapporteur, 1993, p. 6).

Throughout the region, calls have been issued for modernizing teacher education curricula so that such programs recognize: globalization trends; international competitiveness; rigorous scientific knowledge and applied communications skills; efficiency and entrepreneurship; and the need to nurture humanistic values and democratic principles, as well as to preserve various cultural heritages (UNESCO/OREALC, 1993).

Two examples illustrate something of the current situation. In Argentina, prospects for pedagogic change appear bleak. As one report puts it:

Different institutions with different curricula and methodologies teach teachers and professors. Teacher education has remained without change for a long time - 20 years, more or less. Many innovative programs have failed and the result is a serious deficit in training for teachers and professors (Senen Gonzalez, 1994, p. 1).

Likewise, in Chile, the provision of basic education is reportedly curtailed by a lack of specialized instructors. Schooling in approximately 3000 primary schools is provided by one or two instructors responsible for teaching all grades (Castro Silva, 1993; Vera, 1993). Among the programs for educational renovation underway in Chile

are new plans for rebuilding infrastructures, as well as the endowment of didactic material for public schools and the introduction of updated methods of learning (Castro Silva, 1993, p. 1).

Also, Chile is beginning to experiment with "dual teaching," based on both an academic model borrowed from the German system, as well as a technical-professional model, presumably being implemented to improve the quality of skills training and

applied education that now exists (Castro Silva, 1993; Vera, 1993). At the individual school level in Chile, attempts are also now underway to change school structures in the interest of improving educational quality. New high schools of a "polyvalent type" are being created which feature expanded services, including courses of different lengths and increased levels and hours of service from counseling offices within the schools.

As in the case of other countries around the world, enormous pressure by government and the public is being directed toward reforming teacher education and instructional practice in Latin America. And, like in other jurisdictions, expectations for educational reform through improvements in teaching are probably unrealistically high.

## Summary

Important similarities, as well as differences, exist between the Canadian educational experience and education in the Caribbean, Central America, and South American region. First, to the similarities: in both areas the state is touting education as the key to prosperity and modernization - and expectations that education will serve as an engine of economic development are universally high. So, too, are there similarities in curriculum questions being examined - in both areas curriculum developers are tilting toward curricular combinations that stress, at once, human and social development, as well as career and technical development. Both curricula appear equally mindful of the importance of reducing the distance between work and school, and school systems in both areas are experimenting with utilizing resources drawn from the private sector, especially in technology and communications fields.

In both Canada and the Latin American region, clear signs of public dissatisfaction

with public education, with teachers, and with school performance, are evident - although nowhere has this dissatisfaction been expressed as forcefully as in Chile and Peru where it has resulted in the privatization of once-public systems. Nevertheless, in both areas, the public appears to be increasingly enchanted with the possibilities of private-sector school services. Public participation in decisions about public schooling is likewise rising in Canada and Latin America, although Latin American countries are still experiencing difficulty in encouraging the participation of poor families long disenfranchised in educational affairs.

Notwithstanding these similarities, there are some important differences also. First, although the Latin American trend toward shifting educational responsibility from national to provincial or municipal levels brings it more into line with the structure of Canadian school governance (where provinces enjoy autonomy in primary and secondary schooling), emphasis on the importance of national testing and standards appears to be generally less developed. One exception to this is Argentina, where the federal government has recently introduced a national assessment program. In Canada, also, a discernible shift among the public has occurred that favours greater national coordination of standards, testing and, even perhaps, a national curriculum. In contrast, national education agencies in Latin America appear to be ceding greater responsibility for curriculum and for school outcomes to provinces and local levels of government. This is being done, both practically and symbolically, to accommodate general societal demands for democratization. Also, as four or five Canadian provinces are moving to reduce local control of schools through the elimination of school boards, Latin American countries appear to be in the

process of expanding local control and participation at the municipal level. These are important differences to be sure.

## Notes

1. See, in particular, UNESCO, *The Major Project of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Bulletin 30: Santiago, Chile: April 1993); and UNESCO/OREALC, "Curriculum and Decentralization: An International Seminar - Background Document," (OREALC: Santiago, Chile: 1993).
2. For specific details of the federal government's initiatives in decentralizing the schools see: Inés Aguerrondo, "Framework for Helping Decision-Making for Educational Changes and Reform," (Federal Ministry of Education, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1991), Republica Argentina Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, *Bases Para La Transformación Educativa*, 1991; Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, *Transformación De La Educación Nacional*, 1991; and Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, *Planificando la Transformación Educativa*, 1991. For a provincial view of this change, see, for example, Gobierno del Pueblo de Entre Rios, *Regjonalización y Desentralización del sistema Educativo*, (no date).

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