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SECONDARY EDUCATION IN FIVE SOUTH AMERICAN COUNTRIES

La educación secundaria en cinco países de América del Sur

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I focus on the Secondary Education in few countries of South America in order to identify recurrences among the problems, their possible interpretations, and their current processes of reforms. I analyse the changes of secondary education in four countries that are members of the MERCOSUR: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, and I also take into account one country which is located in same region: Bolivia. Thus, I track the recent trajectories of government policies on secondary education, which have been modified by these five States of South America. For this purpose, first, I analyse the global level and the regional contexts in which educational reforms have taken place in the last decades. Second, after mention few historical characteristics of education development in Latin America –in general– and in these five nations –in particular–, I look at the reforms of secondary education in this region doing a normative analysis of the government policy documents of these five countries. This analysis shall allow us to define a period starting in the ‘1990s and continuing until the second decade of the current century, in which we can identify normative changes in the countries studied and also recognize some of their actual scope and limitations. Third, recognizing the complexity of current global networks and the dynamic of interaction, we approach the secondary education reform challenging the

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assumption that globalization leads to homogenization and results in the international convergence of educational systems. Finally, we discuss the meaning of secondary education for all from a regional perspective in order to identify current convergences in academic forms of secondary school and the constraints of their implementation according to academic traditions and the educational local settings.

KEY WORDS: Secondary Education, Educational Reforms, Borrowing Policies, MERCOSUR.

RESUMEN

En este trabajo se analiza la educación secundaria en algunos países de América del Sur a efectos de identificar recurrentes problemas, sus posibles interpretaciones y los procesos de reforma en curso. Para ello se toman en consideración los casos de cuatro países del MERCOSUR: Argentina, Brasil, Paraguay y Uruguay; asimismo se incluye como caso a Bolivia, el cual se encuentra ubicado en la misma región geográfica. Se analizan los cambios normativos que los países han desarrollado en los últimos años y que modificaron la educación secundaria. En función de ello, en primer lugar se describen los contextos globales y locales en los cuales tienen lugar estas reformas educativas. En segundo lugar, se mencionan algunos datos históricos que han caracterizado el desarrollo educativo de América Latina en general y de estos cinco países en particular. Se consideran las normativas educativas que han dado lugar a reformas de la educación secundaria. Este último permite establecer una periodización reciente que se inicia en la década de 1990 y que continúa durante la primera década del siglo en curso, lo cual permite identificar recurrencias y limitaciones de los cambios implementados. En tercer lugar, teniendo en cuenta la complejidad de los cambios y redes globales y de las dinámicas de interacción entre ellos, se considera que el análisis de la educación secundaria constituye un desafío analítico a la creencia que la globalización supone cambios homogéneos y la convergencia de los sistemas educativos nacionales. Finalmente, se discuten los significados de la educación secundaria para todos desde una perspectiva regional, a efectos de identificar convergencias en las formas que adquiere la educación secundaria así como las limitaciones que encuentran las políticas de reforma en función de los contextos locales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación Secundaria, Reformas Educativas, Transferencias, MERCOSUR.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, secondary education has led to an impressive numerical expansion all around the world, responding to the great demand for attend to this educational level. In 1950, approximately 10 % of fifteen- to nineteen-year-olds attended secondary education; by 1995, 56.6 % attended; by the year 2011, 63 % of fifteen- to nineteen-year-olds attended to secondary school (UNESCO, 2013). However, in many developing countries, secondary education often has functioned as a *holdup*, not providing enough access for primary graduates. In comparative perspectives, for instances, Latin American countries such as Brazil and Bolivia have enrolment ratios nearly 15/20 % below that of international benchmarks. Moreover, when we examine secondary student enrolment as a percentage of total enrolments, Latin America lags behind development regions. In 1995, 22.3 % of students in Latin American were enrolled at the secondary school, as compared with 30.2 % for all developing areas (UNESCO, 1997). By 2011, the percentage in Latin America reached 76; while in the developing areas 84 % of students were enrolled at the secondary education. As the United Nations Project on Development and Education in Latin America and the Caribbean has noted several years ago, quantitative change generally has not been matched by a qualitative change in the aims, content, and pedagogy of secondary schooling (UNESCO/CEPAL/PNUD, 1981). Secondary education, developed long after university and primary education, has traditionally served as merely a junior appendage to university education. In time, a second branch of secondary develops, consisting of technical, commercial and normal (teacher education) schools. This vocational oriented sector of secondary education has mainly served children of the lower middle and working social groups. In many cases, it was of a terminal educational track since this population does not lead to higher education. Thus it has contributed to a dual-track character of schooling (UNESCO/CEPAL/PNUD, 1981).

In the past four decades, secondary education has become one of the policy sectors which have been subject to several regulations and reforms. The transformations that have taken place in educational systems allow distinguishing between: reform, innovation and change. *Reform* implies a process to re-structure the whole system or the core curricula approved by the State. *Innovation* means specific curricular changes. Then, while educational reforms represent a shift into an instituted logic, innovations would be an instituting change at a micro or local level. Thus, *change* would call for effective transformations that may occur at different dimensions of formal education: system, institution, and classroom. These changes may be caused by reforms or by innovations or may occur independently from them. If we approach educational reform, with a focus on national States as the unit of analysis we can see globalization as a driver of policy ideas of education and academic reforms. Nonetheless, the effects of globalization in education policy are mediated by local history and politics and by the interplay that each country has with the global forces, for mention few contingences.

In this paper I discuss these topics under the South America point of view to identify recurrences among the problems as well as possible interpretations. I analyse the changes of secondary education in four countries that are members of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR): Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, and I also take into account one country which is located in same region: Bolivia.¹ All of them were part of Spanish and Portuguese empires until the 1820s decade.² Thus, I track the recent trajectory of government policies on secondary education, which have been modified by these five South American countries.

For this purpose, first, I analyse the global level and the regional contexts in which educational reforms have taken place in the last decades. Second, after mention few historical characteristics of education development in Latin America, I look at the reforms of secondary education in this region doing a normative analysis of the government policy documents of these five countries. I shall approach the normative dimension of the State apparatus and intend on identifying their political and ideological foundations in order to interpret the application of public policies in education. This analysis shall allow us to define a period starting in the '1990s and continuing until the second decade of the current century, in which we can identify normative changes in the countries studied and also recognize some of the actual scope and limitations. Third, recognizing the complexity of current global networks and the dynamic of interaction, we approach the secondary education reform challenging the assumption that globalization leads to homogenization and results in the international convergence of educational systems. Finally, I discuss the meaning of *secondary education for all*, and these issues that are involved, from a regional perspective in order to identify current convergences in academic forms of secondary school and the constraints of their implementation according to academic traditions and the educational local settings.

¹ MERCOSUR is a sub-regional area that comprises five State members: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. MERCOSUR promotes the constitution of free-trade zones and the free transit of goods, services and factors among the State members.

In this piece, I have chosen four of these countries: those that originally have created this sub-region, and they have agreed a deeper coordination, in several areas (such education), to allow for the strengthening of an integration process. I also added to this analysis Bolivia which is an MERCOSUR associate-State and it is located in the same geographical area.

² Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay were part of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, which was established in 1776 by King Charles III of Spain. Revolutions movements spread all over this Viceroyalty since 1809. By 1814, this Viceroyalty effectively ceased to exist.

Brazil was a colonial administration of the Portuguese Empire called Governorate General of Brazil, established in 1549 by King John III of Portugal. In 1621 it Governorate was partitioned into two colonies: State of Brazil and State of Maranhão, but they were subordinated to a centralized administration in Salvador which reported directly to the Crown in Lisbon. Brazil got its independency in 1822.

2. THE GLOBAL AND THE REGIONAL CONTEXTS

Globalization is seen as denationalization of boundaries. In the age of globalization the world is run like a market and knowledge is treated as a global commodity. As Amin (1997) has pointed out the process of global industrialization and modernization is controlled by a *centre*, consisting of those Northern and Western countries, which use their financial, technological, cultural and military monopolies to maintain and increase their competitive advantage in the global market. Hence, their monopolies in the field of media and communications technologies, enhances their capacity to exercise cultural hegemony over the conditions under which knowledge is produced and distributed globally. Educational researchers in the advanced industrial regions of the world have the capacity to control the production and distribution of what is to count globally as worthwhile knowledge about the conditions and processes of educational development, including knowledge about the development of teaching profession. The global channels for marketing educational knowledge (e.g. international journals, conferences and books) tend to be monopolised by academia of the advanced industrial countries, leaving the ideas of those operating in the peripheral countries unheard and unacknowledged.

During the '1990s these components of the global political and economic power have obtained legitimacy to direct economic and social reforms in order *to solve* economic and fiscal crisis particularly in the Third World (WELCH, 2007). Therefore, globalization can be understood as "a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding" (MORROW & TORRES, 2007: 91). Further, in this new global order, globalization takes place in a structural historical situation, where economic change forces and tendencies (of changing the role of State at the national level) interplay, in contradictory dialectics.

Consequently, globalization can be understood as an economic integration, achieved in particular through the establishment of a global place characterized by free trade and minimal regulation. Revolutions in communications and information circles and the increased people mobility, services and goods also have extended the reach of globalization. The logic of globalization implies the active involvement of State mechanisms in order to ensure the unfettered operation of markets, both capital and labour. Reconstituted States begin to behave like economic entrepreneurs in a free market. Going global implies the free supervision and regulation of the State domestically (through national governments) and internationally (through intergovernmental mechanisms). Such patterns produce and require their own forms of cultural expression. However, one may wonder: How is that global governance takes place in relation to schooling and how we ought to study the circulation of educational reforms?

A substantial literature focuses on the nature of educational provision in different regions of the world. Typical terms identifying regions are the European Union, the South Pacific, among others. Allied macro-level work takes the continent or sub-continent as the unit of analysis and focuses on such locations as South America or Africa. A key assumption underlying most regional comparisons is that certain shared characteristics differentiate one region from another in educationally significant matters. These shared characteristics of any particular region may include language, political organization, colonial history, economic system, national goals, religion, or cultural origins. Authors of cross-regional comparisons should believe they might convince readers that the characteristics cited as unifying a region are truly shared by the region's members; demonstrate that two or more regions are substantially similar or different in the nature of their unifying features; and show that such similarities and differences are educationally important (BRAY, ADAMSON & MASON, 2007). If we look at Latin America we can see that it is neither homogeneous nor uniform.³ It has many faces, regions, climates, diverse groups of people, and although Spanish and Portuguese are the predominant languages of Latin America, there are a large number of languages that are spoken for many people across Latin American countries.⁴

Beyond this diversity, it is possible to identify some common attributes in the region that have influenced its educational development. We can point out two differences between Latin American education and Western European education: (a) there was a restricted connection to economic development (until the 1950 decade), and (b) there were important distinctness at the expansion, enrolment and development of public education across Latin American countries. In this sense, Acosta (2011a) asserts that this region has had its own modernity, which means that these countries have had a particular type of inclusion within the international division of work, wealth and culture. The educational inclusion was not uniform in the region and Latin American countries have developed diverse and conflictive relationship with modernity since they got independency from metropolis. In that historical context, Argentina and Uruguay have gotten outstanding educational achievements, mainly at the beginning of 20th Century.

From the 1950s, in a historical context of modernization and *developmentalist* policies, under the *human capital* approach,⁵ Latin American governments started to

³ Latin America has a region of approximately 21,069,500 km². By the year 2012, its population was estimated at more than 587 million (OEI, 2014). The countries we approach in this piece have several differences in relation to the amount of inhabitants: Argentina, 41.086.927; Bolivia, 10.027.254; Brazil, 198.656.019; Paraguay, 6.687.361; and Uruguay, 3.395.253.

⁴ Spanish is spoken as first language by about 60 % of the Latin American population, Portuguese is spoken by about 34 % of the population and about 6 % of population speaks other languages. Bolivia has 36 official languages; Peru, 43; Guatemala 36. In Mexico there are almost 200 languages (spoken mainly for indigenous population and their descendants). Other countries such as Uruguay and Cuba are monolingual.

⁵ This approach meant a strong economic orientation for education. Ideological influences are also discarded because education, as any social event, has become an objective and scientific issue. Education started to be

promote a notable schooling expansion. Nevertheless, there were (again) different groups of countries in relation to the educational improvement in the region. In some countries large part of population did not have access to formal education. On the other hand, in many others countries, educational systems have experienced an enlargement since then. In the mid-1970s, in a context of military dictatorships, Latin American governments have started to apply public policies in which States reduced their efforts to provide public schooling. Return to democracy, starting in the beginning of 1980s, showed up several crises of educational systems in the region: cultural, academic, financial, quality crises were detected by democratic governments which have taken offices across the Latin American countries by that time.

3. RECENT AND CURRENT EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

Studying policy borrowing lends as a powerful tool to better understand protracted policy conflict in a given context. The concept of *policy transfer* is an analytical descriptor of the phenomenon of which *policy borrowing* is a part (PHILLIPS & SCHWEISFURTH, 2014). The study of educational transfer includes typically a political and an economic dimension. Politically, borrowing has a beneficial outcome on extended political conflict. It enables opposed advocacy groups to combine resources to support a third, supposedly objective, policy option borrowed from elsewhere. During last decades, *International standards* have become an increasingly common point of reference in such decisions. The economic dimension of educational transfer, in turn, is important in developing countries since policy borrowing is often a transient phenomenon, because it only exists so long as external funding (the import of a particular reform package) continues. Policy borrowing in poor countries is (to the education sector) a condition for receiving aid. As a requirement for receiving grants or loans at the programmatic level, policy borrowing in developing countries is coercive and uni-directional. Reforms are transferred from the global North/West to the global South/East (STEINER-KHAMSI, 2004). Following the Schriewer approach, Steiner-Khamsi has introduced the externalization framework into the field of comparative policy studies in order to analyse policy borrowing and lending in education (STEINER-KHAMSI, 2004). The concept of externalization is convenient for comparative policy studies it shows how *global forces* are in many times locally induced with the purpose of generating reform on domestic developments. The cross-national policy borrowing (discursive or factual) has a certification effect on domestic policy. Metaphorically, it seems like the local actors reach out and grab the arm of the octopus that is closest to their particular policy agenda, and thus attach (local) meaning to a (global)

understood as a dynamic element for development. This dynamism was expressed in the concept of human capital. T.W. Schultz introduced this concept at the beginning of the 1960s, believing that the human investment could facilitate development of the underdeveloped countries.

Irvin Sobel comments that T.W. Schultz's position implies both the increase of free or low tuition education programs using state funding, and the development of new higher educational institutions, which could diminish the opportunity cost of this level of education (SOBEL, 1982).

policy. Consequently, studying on receptiveness becomes a study on selective policy borrowing. Policy borrowing is always selective and it reflects the context-specific reasons for receptiveness (STEINER-KHAMSI, 2004).

In recent decades, Latin American countries have implemented a set of reforms in their education systems which have reached to secondary education and have also become an axis of this transformation. Precisely, the *lost decade* is the term to design the financial period of crisis that this region suffered at the same time that new democracies started (1980s), which had consequence into the subsequent decade. Promoted by neoliberal governments in the region, the State reform policies were introduced by the end-1980s and during the 1990s. Those policies have had important consequences on the Latin American schooling systems, which were subject of several educational reforms since then. Most educational systems in the region have implemented various types of administrative and institutional reforms. Among the most important transformation that have been taking place in Latin American educational systems, as a consequence of the '90s reforms, are the following:

- The steady privatization of education and changing of financial supports
- The diversification of educational providers
- Parental choice in educational markets were created
- The educational decentralization
- At the higher education level, the development of graduate courses
- The introduction of accreditation and evaluation criteria and agencies, and even regional programs to do it

Looking at the policy documents we can identify several educational acts during the last three decades. Until the 1980s, only four countries have had educational acts (without counting the higher education acts).⁶ During 1980s, three countries passed general education acts: Venezuela in 1980 (Act 2.536), Ecuador in 1983 (Act 127), and Uruguay in 1985 (Act 15.739). Major changes have occurred by the 1990s, when twelve countries have approved educational acts by their Parliaments, introduced reforms which re-structured their whole education systems. We could call them the *first cycle* of educational reform. Starting with the new century, a *second cycle* has started since nine countries have passed ten educational acts in order to reform (again) their educational systems. Some of them have cancelled earlier ones; others have partially modified those from the first cycle. Finally, in cases such as Bolivia and Venezuela we can observe very specific modifications, in national and revolutionary directions, which are not related to the others Latin American educational reforms.

⁶ Panamá passed its educational legislation in 1946 (Act 47); Costa Rica in 1957 (Act 2.160); Cuba in 1961 (Act for nationalizing General and Free Teaching); Honduras in 1966 (Act-Ordinance 79).

Table 1. Historical and Current Educational Acts. Period 1990–2014.

Year	Country	Educational Acts
1990	Chile	Act N° 18.962, Organizing Constitutional Teaching
1991	Guatemala	Legislative Ordinance N° 12, Act for National Education
1993	México	Act General for Education
1993	Argentina	Act N° 24.195, Federal Education
1994	Colombia	Act N° 115, General Education
1994	Bolivia	Act N° 1.565, for Educational Reform
1995	Panamá	Act N° 34, for Amendment Act N° 47 (1946)
1995	Argentina	Act N° 24.521, Higher Education
1996	El Salvador	Act N° 917, General Education
1996	Brazil	Act N° 9.394, Direction and Bases for Education
1997	Dominican Republic	Act N° 66, General Education
1998	Paraguay	Act N° 1.264, General Education
1999	Venezuela	Act N° 313, Bylaw for Organizing Education
2003	Peru	Act N° 28.044, General Education
2004	Peru	Bylaw for General Education Act
2005	Argentina	Act N° 26.058, Technological-professional Education
2005	El Salvador	Legislative Ordinance N° 687 for Reform of Legislative Ordinance N° 917 de 1996
2006	Nicaragua	Act N° 582, General Education
2006	Guatemala	Act N° 12, in order to Reform Education National Act
2006	Argentina	Act N° 26.206, National Education
2008	Uruguay	Act N° 18.437, Education
2009	Chile	Act N° 20.370, General Education
2010	Bolivia	Act N° 070, Education
2010	Paraguay	Act N° 4.088, Education

Source: Personal compilation

Focussing on the five countries that are analysing in this paper, it is possible to assert that these educational acts have challenges according to the region general characteristics and inequalities because of the *discursive definitions* these acts have made regarding to: (1) the role of State in the regulation of formal education, (2) the full political commitment from national to local leaders to promote the right to education, (3) growing financial, human, and physical resources to sustain the processes of reforms in each country, (4) more years of compulsory education, and (5) teacher education policies which included new curricula definitions and more financial resources to this sector. In these five cases, it is possible to see that these education reforms are embedded in shared ideas about educational development and options of academic and political changes for their schooling systems. However, important in all reforms is the time factor and in these countries we can see that the exigencies of political forces sometimes require results before reforms have had time to become effective. This is one major reason for the swings evident in countries such as Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay which have changed their educational legislation several times from 1993 to 2010 (see Table 1). Additionally, this type of singularity with back and forth of education changes and unequal operational procedures after passing educational acts does not allow thinking of MERCOSUR as a region with homogeneous global mechanisms of influences, following Dale (1999) conceptualization. At least it could be possible to find an incomplete type of *installing interdependence* since there are general agreements among these nations to achieve common goals but each country does not act in

accordance with them when the national government applies its own public policies, in each country (DALE, 1999).

On other hand, these five countries of South America have made progress in educational coverage; almost all children attend to primary school (around 90 % of population) and access to secondary education has increased considerably (see, e.g. SITEAL, 2013). Despite progress that has happened in the last decades, education coverage remains a challenge in these five countries because of the persistence and even increasing social inequalities, exclusions, and poverty (CEPAL, 2014).

4. THE EXPANSION OF COMPULSORY SCHOOLING

There is much more to education than compulsory schooling or academic success. Schools and colleges should be enabling young people to live their lives and work together as fellow citizens. What counts as an educated 18 years old person? Is an educated person one who has been trained to pass tests? We should not confuse assessment for accountability with assessment for learning (ALKIN, 1990). Education is about acquiring qualities, which make people distinctively human: knowledge through which humans are able to understand their physical, social and moral worlds they inhabit, the practical knowledge through which they could be able to act intelligently within the world. Those educational aims require a wider vision of teaching and of learning: deeper understanding through the grasp of key ideas and concepts, appreciation of the diverse voices, which make up the conversation between the generations, practical and technical activities engagement with social concern issues. Furthermore, the role of the State in order to promote the right to education for secondary students should imply that, all individuals, not just those privileged with wealthier social background, are capable of acquiring those qualities to some extent.

How much secondary education is shaped depends on several issues of concern. First, the change at the age of 11/12 from one environment to another is smooth for most, but somewhat disconcerting for others (CROLL et. al., 2010). The shift from a small environment to a larger, more impersonal one with a variety of teachers and a complex timetable can be difficult to cope with. Thus, secondary education for all shall attend to this transition and to the larger and less personal nature of the schools.

The countries we are analysing here have significant differences in the way of how primary and secondary education were historically developed. Brazil had a late development of primary education. By the mid-20th century, it was provided 4-5 years of primary education (children 7 to 12 years old) (1946 Decree-Law # 8.529). The goal of the secondary education was to prepare students for higher education (1942 Decree-Law # 4.244). The 1961 reform established directives for secondary education to be organized into

two cycles: the middle school (a minimum of four years from the age of 11 that required taking an entrance examination) and upper high school (minimum three years). Secondary school certificate or an equivalent certification was required in order to entrance into higher education. The secondary education curricula included teacher education for the pre-school and primary level and also technical education.

Under the military government, the 1971 Act extended compulsory education through the expansion of primary education (which was re-called *first degree school*), which was increased from four to eight years (for kids at the age from 7 to 14). The *second degree school* (junior high school) was organized into three years. That act established that the first years would provide elementary education and the later years would include general education. Finally, the *second grade* (upper high school) would vary according to the economies of each Brazilian State. In this sense, the reform should be understood in the context of a government that pursued a developmental economic model through the implementation a professional education system (CABRAL, 2006). It provided some curricular flexibility, setting a number of core common subjects at the national level and at a regional level in accordance Federal Education Council.

In fact, some studies explain that this change in the structure was only a nominal change. The first four years of primary education were taught by a teacher who possessed a secondary education certificate and in the last four (the former high school) the curriculum was organised by subjects-disciplines, which required separate specialized teachers who at least had to have a college degree (CUNHA, 1995).

Uruguay extended compulsory education in 1973, establishing compulsory the first three years of secondary school without altering the academic structure of six years of primary education and six years of secondary education. The origin of this decision was related to university access, even after 1912 when high schools were opened inland. They were under the university supervision until 1936.⁷ In 1942 the entrance examination to secondary education was abolished (RAMA, 2004). Until then, the lyceums were organized into two cycles: the first four years with common contents and the second one was orientated towards distinct tracks. The 1973 Act (14.101, passed after the military coup) established compulsory the first three years of secondary education. The diversified upper secondary school would last three years (ROMANO, 2010). The curriculum was organized by subject-discipline, which was maintained by the educational reform of the 1990's. It became one of the main matters to reform, including proposals to redefine the basic cycle of secondary education.

⁷ Even at the present time, there is only one public university in the country.

In the case of Paraguay and Argentina, the progressive quantitative growth of the education system was not associated with changes in its academic structure. Although there were different tracks and student trajectories within the educational system, in both countries secondary education rose from a tendency towards differentiation with a limited chance of mobility from one track of secondary education to another. In Paraguay, the baccalaureate lasted six years and it was closely related to the entrance to the university. In 1931 it was organized into five common years and one additional preparatory year. Also, in the 1920s it was added three years to the middle high school in order to get teacher credential for primary education. This education programme was absorbed into higher education (non-university) in 1973.

In Argentina, the secondary education had at its beginning, in the 18th Century, different tracks: high schools (baccalaureate), technical, commercial and normal (teacher education) schools. They were separated tracks, for different students, until 1941 when a 3-year-duration-common cycle was established by the national government, postponing the choice of orientation to the second cycle (which had a 2-year duration course). In turn, by the 1950s and 1960s, three-year-subjects with common cores were added. Like in the others countries, in 1969 teacher education programmes for primary school were absorbed by higher education (non-university). However, and unlike Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay, in Argentina there was a larger academic diversification since provinces start to create more secondary schools with different curricula than those which applied to the national secondary schools. Thus, there were national and provincial secondary schools, without national curricula, which have promoted more academic dispersion since the 1960s. After the 1992-1994 educational decentralisation a larger academic dispersion has taken place since not national curriculum was approved by the federal authorities, and different types of secondary schools (with different quantity of years and contents) were developed by the provincial States.

Finally, Bolivia constitutes a different case in comparison with the educational development of the others four countries that we are studying here. Historically, public education was not at the spotlight of governmental authorities of Bolivia. A poor educational development and high rates of illiteracy were the consequences of persistence policies that did not focus on educational expansion during the 20th Century. In this historical context, at the same time, we can see the continuity of ancient educational practices, those from pre-colonial periods but in lowly indigenous schools. One of the experiences that have had major impact was the *Ayllu School* in Warisata, which had reached 898 associated institutions between 1936 and 1943. These schools had pre-colonial backgrounds and were based on values of reciprocity, solidarity and communitarian models of institutional organisation. In 1952, in a revolutionary political context, the Urban and Rural Education Code was passed by the national government in order to promote literacy campaigns in rural areas and for indigenous populations. However, *common culture* and

cultural diversity did not merge at the curriculum policy. By 1964, a military dictatorship started and all the social and educational reforms initiated in 1952 were annulled by the authorities. The 1994 education reform (Act 1565) tried to incorporate an intercultural approach and bilingual education programmes. However, it was not implemented by the national government; at the contrary, religious education was introduced into public schools along with accountability policies. The educational un-equality and segregation have persisted in a neoliberal context of reform (IMEN, 2010).

Besides the specific characteristics of the historical development of secondary education in each country, these processes were accompanied by slow and progressive increases in the access to secondary education. By 1980,⁸ Argentina and Uruguay were countries where among 5/6 per 10 students attended high school. On the other hand, Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay show fewer ranges because only 2/3 per 10 students attended to secondary school. Some authors argue that quantitative expansion was made on the basis of a limited ability to change the structure of the secondary education, especially when compared with comprehensive reforms that have taken place in European countries after World War II (ACOSTA, 2011b). However, local processes were very different from one to another, particularly the differences in the expansion of primary education, the role of central authorities –military dictatorships in many cases–, which have affected in distinct ways the academic structure of the education systems of these five countries (RUIZ & SCHOO, 2014).

In sum, these countries show a gradual increase of the secondary education but with important differences among them. On one hand, there are countries (Brazil) that have extended compulsory by associating it with basic education (modifying their respective academic structure). On the other hand, in others countries it was established a mandatory secondary school (Uruguay). Also, in others cases (Argentina), the educational increasing was not a result of the extension of the compulsory education but of the role of the State promoting more education with more resources (more schools, more teachers, and more graduates from primary education).

5. COMPULSORY SECONDARY EDUCATION: POLICY AND CURRICULUM

One main academic aspect that explains the diversified origins that shaped middle or upper-high school in these five States is the curricula. Historically, lyceums or high schools were associated with university preparation. However by the mid-20th Century other educational tracks with little relation to each other (even in Paraguay this has occurred in the early 1920) began to constitute a common core cycle (beyond localization either primary or secondary education), which tended to postpone the decision that all the

⁸ There is not comparable data, among these countries, until the year 1980.

students should make in order to choose one specialization/orientation. The curriculum was organized by subjects/disciplines. Another common feature is that teacher education programmes for pre-school and for primary school were organized within secondary education and then, in the late 1960s and 1970s, they became part of higher education. Although there were several differences among these five countries since in some cases – Brazil– there was only university higher education institutions and in others –Argentina and Paraguay– there were both (a) universities and (b) non-university institutions.

In these five South American countries, the academic structures of the educational systems have acquired new configurations since the educational reforms that have taken place by the 1990s; it had been also showed changes in the curriculum policies according to the new academic configurations. In 1996 Brazil passed the Guidelines and Bases Education Act (Act 9.394) which distinguishes two educational levels: the first level is related to basic education, which includes early childhood education and kindergarten (0 to 5 years), primary education (6 to 14 years) and secondary education (15 to 17 years), while the second level comprises higher education. The levels that are compulsory include two years of preschool, nine years of primary education and three of secondary education. It means that compulsory education is extended to 14 years.

In Paraguay the academic structure has three levels. The first level covers the early childhood education (with two cycles: one up to 3 years old and another up to 4) and basic school education,⁹ the second and third levels correspond to secondary and higher education respectively. According to the General Education Law, compulsory education just comprises the basic school education, but the Act 4.088 (passed in 2010 and regulated in 2011 by Decree 6.162) establishes that education during pre-school and secondary school has to be compulsory and free. Thus, since the year 2011 there has been a change: education became compulsory not for nine years but for fourteen years.

The Argentine educational system is organized in four levels (preschool, primary education, secondary education, and higher education) and has eight tracks (technical-professional education, artistic education, special education, young people and adult education, rural education, intercultural-bilingual education, academic education in correctional setting, and hospital education). The 2006 National Education Act (Act 26.206) states that each province may choose between two academic options: a) six-year primary education and six-year secondary education or b) seven-year primary and five-year secondary. Compulsory education spreads for thirteen years (one year of preschool

⁹ The class of 5-year-old children is compulsory and it is included into the Basic School Education.

education, six or seven years of primary education, and five or six years of secondary education).¹⁰

In the case of Uruguay, the education system has a structure with five levels included in the formal structure: preschool education (from 3-4 to 5-year-old children), primary education (from 6 to 11-year-old children), basic secondary education (from 12 to 14-year-old students), upper secondary education (from 15 to 17-year-old students and with three orientation areas: general education, technological education and technical-professional education), higher education (which includes technical programmes that are not delivered at university, associate degrees, and higher technological education, university education, undergraduate education degrees), and graduate education. Education for children from 0 to 3 years old is not included in the formal structure. The compulsory education has fourteen years, which comprise two years of preschool education, six years of primary education, and six years of secondary education.

After the 2010 reform (Act 070), Bolivia has three education subsystems: regular education, alternative and special education, and higher professional education. Regular education includes: 1) preschool-in-family/in-community education, which has two periods, not-schooling (0-3 years old) and schooling (4-5 years old); 2) vocational-community primary education (6-11 years old); and 3) professional-community secondary education (12-17 years old). There are 14 years of compulsory education, from 4 to 17 years old.

It is interesting to highlight that, as from the reform that Paraguay made in the year 2010, all the assessed countries reach fourteen years of compulsory education. The exception is Argentina where, according to the schooling trajectories, it is possible to have thirteen or fourteen years of compulsory education (see Note # 10).¹¹ All the government policy documents show that there is a regional tendency to increase the number of compulsory years in education and that the quantity of years of compulsory education coincides among these countries (see Table 2).

As regards the preschool education for children, which lasts for 4 years, all the assessed countries have included it as part of compulsory education. On the other hand, it is important to note that although the four countries have a broad offering of postgraduate studies, only Uruguay distinguishes this level as a different one in the educational system.

¹⁰ The lack of precision lies at the national legislation, which says that each province can choose between 7 years of primary education and 5 years of secondary education or between 6 years for each (primary and secondary). The problem arises in the provinces that have 5 years of secondary education compared to technical-professional education area at the secondary level, which lasts for six years in all cases.

¹¹ In December 2014, the Argentine Parliament passed the Act 27.045 which established that Pre-school for age 4 is compulsory.

Table 2: Academic structure and compulsory education

COUNTRY	AGES OF STUDENTS																
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Argentina	Early Childhood Education -			Preschool		Primary Education						Secondary Education					
Brazil	Childhood Education			Preschool		Primary Education						Secondary Education					
Bolivia	Childhood Education			Preschool		Primary						Secondary Education					
Paraguay	Childhood Education			Pr		Basic School Education						Secondary Education					
Uruguay	Childhood Education			Preschool - Primary Education						Basic Secondary Education			Higher Secondary Education				

Source: Personal compilation

Note: **Range of Compulsory Education.** In Argentina due to the technical-professional track lasts 6 years in twelve provinces (that have an academic structure with 7-year Primary and 5-year Secondary Education) the total years of compulsory education for those provincial states is fourteen.

As it is possible to see, these cases show the re-contextualized versions of similar decisions (compulsory preschool education, increasing of secondary education but with different years and names, and diverse options for adaption inside each country) that tell us something about local contexts but also about the policy process and change in each nation-State of this region. Again, in these cases we find how decentralized systems (Argentina, Brazil) make differences in relation to unitary and centralized States (Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay) in the education reforms implementation.¹² In federal countries, the provinces and the local states have diverse grades of autonomy and even institutions or municipal authorities can define specific educational contents. However, in the current educational reforms these countries have defined national standards for curriculum definitions. Thus, they make a shift regarding curriculum designs from one unique, homogeneous and centralized curriculum (which has historically characterized the curriculum policies in these countries) to guiding curriculum frameworks (DUSSEL, 2001). Thereby, in this region, making intra-national comparisons could be as significant as the inter-national ones.

Further the centralized or decentralized organization of education systems, in all of these States there is a certain margin to define the curriculum contents in different levels: region, province, state, department, local authority/institution. Thus, after decades of homogeneous and centrally definitions of curriculum designs, at the present reforms we can see curricular dispersion which is different in each country. The main curricula convergences, among these countries, are taken place at the: 1) values and skills regarding productive development and citizenship education; 2) new education tracks after primary

¹² Argentina and Brazil are federal States; Argentina has 23 provinces and one autonomous city (the capital of the country) and Brazil 26 states and the federal district (the capital city). In both countries, each province/state is responsible for its own educational system. Moreover, in Brazil each municipality has legal responsibility for primary education.

At the contrary, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay are unitary States; they are territorially divided into 9, 17 and 19 departments respectively.

and basic education. The school timetable is divided into periods, each period filled with a distinctive subject – mathematics, sciences, literature, history, and so on.¹³ The learning which goes on in those periods would lead to public examinations in those respective subjects. However, one divergent aspect is the organization of knowledge which is not similar in the countries because in Brazil and Paraguay it is organized by areas, grouping of subjects: social sciences, humanities. Although Argentina and Uruguay have promoted a similar organization by areas in the 1990s, their current curriculum policies returned to the subjects by discipline.

6. SECONDARY EDUCATION IN SOUTH AMERICA: CRITICAL ISSUES

With the increasing demand for further education, during the 1990s the first cycle of secondary education –in most countries grades seven through nine– has become an integral part of an introductory or compulsory cycle of six to nine years of schooling. Since then, these five South American countries were increasingly moving away from channelling post-primary students by means of tests. In fact, since the 1950s the trend was toward homogenisation of the different branches of secondary education with regard to content and function up to grade nine; and university-preparatory studies have become standard. Such studies represented over 70 % of secondary school enrolment in 1950 and over 80 % by 1988 (UNESCO, 1991). This pattern has unfortunate consequences for the substantial number of students who drop out or were otherwise unable to go on to higher education. And these students were ill prepared to enter the workforce. In the second cycle of education reform (since the first decade of 21st Century), secondary education became compulsory. Thus, in these five countries the former upper cycle of secondary school has become part of a new *secondary education for all*.

Over the past decades the countries of this region have developed several focus policies in order to improve the entrance of diverse social groups into secondary education. They have also expressed concern that the secondary school for all implies on quality of education. However, the extension of compulsory secondary education still based on selective mechanisms that appear naturalized. We refer to the selective ways of access to secondary education that can strengthen educational differentiation/segregation, as well as

¹³ Understanding the curriculum as a collection of traditional subjects is criticised by those, on the one hand, who see subjects as but the social constructions of people who are in positions of political control (YOUNG, 1972), and those, on the other hand, who undervalue the role of subjects in favour of themes, interests or relevance. Nonetheless, in both cases, there is rarely a clear analysis of what major subjects represent. Subjects are convenient ways of organising the process of learning. The problem, however, is to take the product or abstractions of others' enquires and to present them as propositions to be learnt, as formulae to be remembered (PRING, 2013). Following Dewey's conceptualisation (1916), we can assert that learning process has psychological and logical aspects. The first refers to the state of mind of the child. The second represents the organised bodies of knowledge arising from different traditions of enquiry.

proof of graduation and ways of regulating the articulation both with primary school and with higher education.

A particular feature refers to the countries that have decentralized education systems because there are different entrances modes (to secondary schools), which are defined by the autonomous states and even by the schools. Indeed, in federal States such as Brazil and Argentina, the states/provinces have the authority to set entrance requirements, fulfilling the provisions of national legislations. It means that there are substantial differences among states/provinces and even within each of them. In Argentina there are provincial public schools with entrance examination and others requirements.¹⁴ The case of Brazil is even more complex. Besides the requirement of having elementary school certification, it also operates different forms of entrance according to each Brazilian State. In some technical schools, for instance, students must take an entrance examination but this may differ if the school depends of either the federal government or the municipalities (KRAWCZYK, 2013). In addition, on the Ministry website it is possible obtain information about school results in federal examinations and their general characteristics. In Argentina, the publication of school results, either both national and international assessments, is forbidden by the national legislation. On the other hand, in Uruguay it is necessary to have passed the primary education and the access to secondary education is free and students are redistributed according to the existing places in public schools (RUIZ & SCHOO, 2014).

Besides the differences that it can be observed in these countries, it seems that one of main common characteristics is the existence of differentiated educational tracks according to the diverse ways of schools entrances. Looking at the educational differentiation, it is possible to find that some schools are weighted positively and others are left in the negative stigma (NEUFELD, et al., 1999). Some of the criteria using in order to classify schools refer to: how much and how long each curriculum subject is taught; social and cultural characteristics of students who are admitted in each school; teacher attendance; school resources; school location; among others. In Brazil the existence of rankings of schools based on results of national/federal assessments can also be included among those criteria. Thereby, these criteria classify schools, teachers and students and they contribute to define institutional identities, which are expressed by labels such as "dropout schools", "poor schools", "prestige school" (MONTESINOS & PALLMA, 1999). Even though they were known for decades by authorities and policy makers, these

¹⁴ In addition, there are university secondary schools that have their own requirements for entrances without other supervision by the University Council. Private secondary schools, in turn, may also establish particular requirements.

educational and segregated sectors are not at the spotlight at the public debate on compulsory level.¹⁵

7. CONCLUSION

With regard to schooling at the secondary level is where the greatest advances and challenges that countries in this region have faced over the two last decades are observed. In fact, between 70 % and 85 % of adolescents between 12 and 17 years are enrolled at this level. However, there are still many efforts to do to ensure that everybody access to the secondary education. If it is observed the age group ranging from 18 to 24 years of age, is displayed that the number of youth who are in school drastically reduces, either because they are behind finishing high school or because they have had access to higher studies. Brazil is the country with the lowest percentage of students of this age (only 15.3 %). However, when we analyse the internal efficiency of the system, differences among the countries are observed. The greatest inequalities are detected by analysing the percentage of middle school students who are lagging behind the corresponding age year of study. Argentina and Uruguay have the worst indicators with 1/3 third of secondary school students in this situation implying that this value has deteriorated in both countries by about five percentage points in the last decade (SITEAL, 2013). Indeed, it is important to note that this indicator might be showing the re-entry of young people who, first, had left school and, then, they were returning (older) to secondary school. In Brazil, 13 % of students enrolled at the secondary education are two or more years than the theoretical age that they are supposed to be. The school repetition rate is high, although it has decreased in the last decade more than a half in comparison with the one at the beginning of the 2000s. Something similar is observed in Bolivia and Paraguay: in the year 2000 school repetition rate above 30 %; by 2011 it fell 10 points in each case (SITEAL, 2013).

Completion rates for primary and secondary education have important variations among themselves within each country. The largest differences are observed when it focuses on young people between 20 % and 22 % to finish the secondary school. In Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay the rate of secondary school graduation is around 70 %. In Brazil this value is 66 %; the lowest is Uruguay: only 20/22 % of those were admitted into

¹⁵ The articulation with higher education is another of the major issue that has expressed concerns by the populations of these nations. The five countries have different types of university education and they have diverse entrance systems. In Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, the universities regulate their own entrance requirements without national-State regulation. In the Uruguay's case, the entrance into certain university programmes requires specific courses at the secondary education. In Argentina, some public universities have entrance examinations for some programmes. Argentina has university free tuition at the public and national institutions.

At the contrary, in Brazil each state defines selective mechanisms for university entrance (besides the specifications that each university has). Brazil uses two types of national tests: the oldest *Vestibular* which is used by all Brazilian universities to receive new entrants and the *National Secondary Education Examination (EMEN)*. In recent times it has been discussed the possibility of replacement the *Vestibular* by the ENEM.

the secondary school, finished it. Following Filardo & Mancebo, indicators show that the problem is not located at the entrance of the secondary school (because the 98 % of children from 12 to 15 years old get into secondary schooling after finishing the primary education). The problem is located at the transition of these populations inside the secondary education (FILARDO & MANCEBO, 2013).

In sum, what counts as progression inside secondary education depends on the aims of education. On one hand, being prepared for further education is part of the content of the right to education. On the other hand, being prepared for permanent employment is valuable from the point of view of the learner. Being prepared to contribute to the general economic welfare is also important from the point of view of society. There is a dearth of skills, knowledge and qualities which contemporary society needs. But those educational aims, through which progression is defined, also should include those personal qualities, the commitment to serving the wider community relevant to all young people, whether or not they will advance to higher education or high-level apprenticeships.

Secondary education is possible for everyone, but it requires a more generous understanding of education, of teaching, of its provision. Teachers are central, not a deliverers of knowledge and skills, but as custodians of traditions of learning, of culture, of criticism and of creativity. To be such custodians, their professional autonomy must not be (as it has been) undermined by government control, performance management and a narrow testing regime (PRING, 2013). Secondary education for all depends on the capacity of the teaching profession to question what this means for all – those presently disengaged and disadvantaged as well as those motivated and able. To this end, teachers should be respected as professionals, with qualifications for schools and further education.

With all the changes over the last few decades (socially, economically, technologically, demographically, social aspiration) in these five South American countries, we should be questioning whether the secondary school which we have inherited is the right sort of institution for educating young people for the 21st Century. In many respects, we can believe that governments believe not, and therefore we are witnessing educational reforms of the system: more years of compulsory education without a deep understanding of the aims of education and the needs of students. In some cases, mostly during the 1990s, private profiteers were moving in and sometimes parental choices in educational markets were created. The current political and social contexts of these five countries seem to be more concern to develop a secondary education accessible for all. However, unequal economic developments undermine these educational and political goals regarding secondary education for all. On the other hand, the cohesiveness of society is seemingly threatened by too much diversity, by the increasing number of ethnic groups inside formal education (mainly in Bolivia, or even in Brazil, or Paraguay cases). The public school would provide a *common culture* shared by the diverse traditions, an overlapping consensus

of values and commitments, one of which would be respect (based on understanding) for the different social and ethnic groups. This could be a major pedagogical challenge for the development of secondary education for all in these countries.

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APPENDICES

Current Educational Acts and Normative Regulations

Argentina

- Ley N° 26.206. Ley de Educación Nacional (2006).

Bolivia

- Ley de Educación Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez N° 70 (2010).

Brasil

- Ley N° 9.394. Ley de Directrices y Bases de la Educación Nacional (1996).
- Portaria 931/2005. Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica – SAEB.
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Paraguay

- Ley N° 1264. Ley General de Educación (1998).
- Ley N° 4088/2010. Gratuidad de la educación.
- Decreto 6162/2011 Reglamenta la obligatoriedad y gratuidad escolar de la educación inicial y educación media.

Uruguay

- Ley N° 18437: Ley General de Educación (2008)
- Ordenanza N° 45. Acta N° 86 Resolución N° 20 de 19/XII/94. Estatuto del Funcionario Docente.

Table N° 1: Administrative Divisions, area and population by country

Country	Capital City	State and Administrative Divisions	Area	Population - 2012
Argentina	Buenos Aires	Federal State: 23 provinces, 1 autonomous city	3.761.274 km ²	40.737.988

Bolivia	La Paz – Sucre	Unitary State: 9 departments	1 098 581 km ²	10.027.254
Brazil	Brasilia	Federal State: 26 States, 1 federal district	8.515.767.049 km ²	195.497.620
Paraguay	Asunción	Unitary State: 17 departments	406.752 km ²	6.459.617
Uruguay	Montevideo	Unitary State: 19 departments	175.016 km ²	3.371.912

Source: SITEAL (2015), CEPAL (2015)

Table N° 2: GDP by countries. Year 2013

Country	Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – % Education	GDP per capita (USD)	GDP (millions of USD)
Argentina	6.5 %	11.452,1	474.812
Bolivia	6,3 %	2.575,7	26.749
Brazil	5,7 %	11.339,5	2425.052
Paraguay	4%	3.813,5	26.089
Uruguay	2,8%	1.4449,5	49.716

Source: World Bank (2015)

Table N° 3: Enrolment in secondary education (ages 12-17). First decade of 21th Century

Country	12 – 14 Years old		15 – 17 Years old	
	Year 2000	Year 2010	Year 2000	Year 2010
Argentina	97,8	97,4	85,2	88,3
Bolivia	89,2	95	76,4	84,9
Brazil	95	97	81,1	85,2
Paraguay	87,6	94,1	63,9	77,6
Uruguay	95	95,3	77,2	77,2

Source: SITEAL (2013, 2015)

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