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Ten Years After the National Accord for the Modernization of Basic Education in Mexico: Challenges, Tensions and Perspectives

Diez años después del Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica en México: Retos, tensiones y perspectivas

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Abstract

By means of the National Accord for the Modernization of Basic Education (1992), the Mexican Educational System (MES) entered into a complex reform. Unlike the previous reforms, this one decentralized the system, renewed the curriculum, produced new materials and introduced compensation programs and new methods of financing and evaluation. Junior high school was made obligatory, and the school calendar was amplified. This reform has revealed the MES's accumulated deficiencies and fatigue, so that it seems impossible to achieve the goals of quality and equity. This essay presents a critical analysis of some elements that characterize the MES at the end of the twentieth century. It focuses on the reasons for the decentralization and the educational reform; on the challenges and tensions facing the system, and especially, it approaches the theme of institutional management and delineates a proposal for its transformation.

Key words: educational policy, educational systems, educational reform.

Resumen

Por el Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica (1992), el sistema educativo mexicano (SEM) ingresa a una reforma compleja. A diferencia de las reformas anteriores, ésta descentraliza el sistema, renueva el currículo, produce nuevos materiales, implanta programas compensatorios y nuevas formas de financiamiento, ingresa la evaluación, hace obligatoria la secundaria y amplía el calendario escolar. Esta reforma ha evidenciado las deficiencias y el agotamiento al que había llegado el SEM, por lo que no parece posible lograr con lo mismo los propósitos de calidad y equidad. En este ensayo se presenta un análisis crítico de algunos elementos que caracterizan al SEM a finales del siglo veinte. Se focaliza en las razones de la descentralización y la reforma educativa; en los retos y tensiones que enfrenta el sistema y, en especial, se aborda el tema de la gestión institucional y se delinea una propuesta para su transformación.

Palabras clave: Política educativa, sistemas educativos, reforma educativa.

Introduction

In the last decade of the twentieth century the Mexican educational system (MES) entered a new stage of development. The signing of the National Accord for the Modernization of Basic and Normal School Education (ANMEB), May 18, 1992, was the event triggering a broader reform of basic education and teacher training. This act was not isolated, but was embedded in a broader context of the Mexican State's reform. It was one of the twentieth century's most important political agreements, in that it had to do with decisions concerning two issues fundamental to the future development of the MES: the decentralization of the educational system, and a curricular and pedagogical reform for obligatory basic education and beginning teacher-training.

The decentralization of basic education and the training of teachers is a political decision, and has led states¹ to assume their new responsibilities in a very different way. The process of decentralization and educational reform has produced a new range of problems, unpublished and heterogeneous scenarios, plus an unstable combination of consensuses, rejections, expectations, uncertainties and old practices that are just beginning to be explored. As new actors appear in the scenario of national education policy, there appear or become evident new difficulties and obstacles, new direction and new opportunities for the leadership of the education system and for its future development.

The education system, educational policy and the actors involved in its development are themes of interest to the public, and to politicians, researchers and educators.

The purpose of this essay is to present a critical analysis of some elements that have characterized the evolution of the MES, especially basic education, in the last

decade of the controversial twentieth century. The work focuses on the reasons for decentralization and educational reform; on the challenges and tensions that must be confronted and overcome, especially concerning institutional management of the system; and finally, it addresses what the possible scenarios of the MES's² future development may be. Before getting deeper into the subject, some key concepts need to be specified.

By *educational system*, I understand the set of policies, institutions, processes, subjects and actors whose purpose is to offer a service that will guarantee the right of every person to have an education. In today's terms, it means ensuring a quality education with equity for everyone.

Following the work of Reimers (1995), educational policies refer to the set of decisions made, and actions taken with the deliberate purpose of changing the inputs, processes and products of an education system. The operation of an education system manifests a set of educational policies that can be explicit or implied. Explicit policies are those designed to produce certain states in the system's equilibrium, while implicit policies are those that, by omission, by not deciding to attend to or change aspects of the system, amount to a decision to maintain a status quo. The reform of educational policies refers to the set of deliberate actions to change the "balance" of an educational system, by the configuration of inputs, processes or products.

Change, reform and innovation are the three vertices of a triangle whose geometry we have not yet been able to decipher fully. Still, it is worth a simple differentiation. By *educational reform* we mean the policy interventions proposed and conducted "top down", at the macrosystemic level, and designed or promoted by states/governments or international organizations; while *innovation* refers to the interventions that take place "bottom up", in the local environment or the strictly institutional setting of a school. The term *change* refers to the effects observed as a result of reform processes, innovation, or both (Torres, 2000a, 2000b).

Processes is a term that refers to the "set of successive phases of a natural phenomenon or an artificial operation" (Royal Academy of the Spanish Language, 1994). In the educational systems it is possible to classify processes as: pedagogical, administrative-bureaucratic, technical-professional, and political.

Another important concept is the "actor" of the education system, which concept is linked to the notion of a subject inescapable for understanding the direction that educational policies acquire in a specific context and time.

Many actors can be found.

[...] looking for a meaning for education and the plot woven in it between policies, institutions, processes and actors. For some, the plot seems tangled, as if it were a sitcom in which they could be trapped or alienated. [...] the idea of a crossroads puts us on a map that allows a choice, an option: as actors, we can choose. [...] Education can be thought of, then, as the territory of the possible, understanding

that the possible is that which includes the desire, knowing it will not be fully achievable. The possible takes the form of little concrete, daily things that can offer, for everyone, a better future. The possible can be defined in reflection and action—in Arendt's terms of the subjects/actors—(Frigerio, Poggi and Giannoni, 2000, pp. 10-12).

When we speak of the “actor”, we always mean a subject who has margins of freedom to:

...deploy practices and discourses in institutions, to account for the possibility of believing, inventing, and escaping contradictions and determinisms. The notion of the subject acquires its distinctive notes both from the psychic/subjective field and from the objective/social field [...] The subject/actor attributes to his/her practices not only the possibility of reflecting the world, but that of transforming it fundamentally, even when this transformation may be minimal or partial [in the eyes of other authors] (Frigerio et al., P. 12).

The term “actor” requires coupling its meaning with that of “citizen”, in which democracy is founded and sustained. Thus, “actor” necessarily refers to members of a community. It is important to recall the concept of subject/actor, which translates into a living reality in the MES and in the institutions, since the subject/actor, individually and collectively, is the one who constructs possible meanings for the educational policy and the system's actions by means of different practices.

Finally, by *political obstacles or difficulties* I understand the set of interests of the various subjects/actors motivated by the desire for power—a power that translates into the handling of privileged information, into the disbursement of funds, into the coordination of persons, and in some cases, into the value of service. The degree of success of educational policies, which must be observed in the efficient and unique function of individual schools, will depend on the resolution of the balance between the different interests, always in play.

Policies, institutions, processes, subjects/actors are elements constituting the complex machinery of an educational system. Understanding each one of them, as well as the interrelationships between them, is a condition necessary, although not sufficient, to orient the transformation of education in a particular space and time.

1. Why decentralize the MES, and why a curricular and pedagogical reform?

The crisis of the welfare state has provoked two reform movements that were sequential in time. The first was characterized by a reduction in the environment of the state's competency; the most well-known is the privatization of parastatal businesses. The second is identified by the urgency for the state to change its function, i.e., that it change from being an administrator to being a supervisory body. While privatization assumes transformations from outside the state, changing its function implies an internal reform.

Moving from the traditional State—authoritarian, patrimonial and clientelist—to one that is established as a genuine instrument of government, that is, distinguished by shared leadership, its ability to build consensus and distribute authority and power, as well as to be responsible for the results, involves a thorough reform of its structure, organization and daily modes of action.

The educational systems of Latin America have not been strangers to these processes of reform. The best known has to do with decentralization, i.e., with a stance that gambles on a greater autonomy of the schools, and for that, there is required a transfer³ of the decision-making power of the central (federal government) to intermediate levels (state governments.)

In the case of Mexico, the arguments put forward in favor of decentralizing basic education and teacher-training are no different from those used in other countries: the great size of the system and the impossibility of reducing it, since its expansion is not over yet; the bureaucratic complexity of the administrative procedures; the enormous gap between the problems, and the decisions to address and resolve them, are among the most important.

Thus, in 1992, the political decision to reform education was structured along three lines: the reorganization of the education system through decentralization⁴ and the inclusion of social participation; the reformulation of educational content and materials—which has resulted in the most important curricular and pedagogical reform of basic education and teacher training in the second half of the twentieth century—and the reevaluation of the teacher's role, underscoring the "Teaching Career Program" as a mechanism for the horizontal promotion of teachers.

Educational reform was legitimized at the national level not only by political-administrative decision—the signing of the ANMEB between the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP), the governors and the teachers' union—but also by a political-legislative decision that culminated in the amendment to Article 3 of the Constitution which includes compulsory junior high school education, and the enactment of the General Law of Education adopted in 1993.

The federal government, through the SEP, retained the regulatory, compensatory and evaluatory functions, and left to the states the system of operation. Some analysts believe that the decentralization of the Mexican educational system is defined and regulated from the center, i.e. it is a "centralized decentralization." However, there are reasons that justify the partial transfer of autonomy to the states; these have to do with the need to: a) protect national interests, b) exercise the compensatory function between regions c) to avoid the problems that might arise because of an imbalance of information and lack of local competencies. Thus, in the Latin American context, Mexico moved from a *central level to an intermediate level* in decision making, similar to the situation in Argentina (Di Gropello, 1999).

On the other hand, the curricular and pedagogical reform was already a need that could be put off no longer: the plans and curriculums renovated in the seventies were fatigued. The new reform was fresh and of ample dimensions, both for basic education and for beginning teacher training. The contents were reformulated and newly organized by subjects. The production of educational material for students and teachers was amplified and diversified. The pedagogical work was proposed with a constructivist focus; furthermore, there was incorporated an institutional vision of the school that demanded new forms and work content of under the school's supervision and management.

Ten years into this huge and complex process of the reform of education and the MES, it can be confirmed that its effects have been positive. These can be seen especially in the increase of enrollment, in the improvement of the final indicators of efficiency and in the indices of absorption from one educational level to another.⁵ However, from a structural perspective, the most profound changes required by the MES and the transformation of modes of action of the different actors require more time and strategies clearly oriented to achieve them.

2. Challenges and tensions facing the MES

The educational system is a living entity, and therefore has an inherent dynamism. As pointed out by Carlos Ornelas (1995):

[...] One of the distinctive features of the educational system at this century's end is its movement. Not only is it possible to observe growth and development, but also the transition from one stage—apparently fatigued—to another shape achieved with clarity, but on which various forces act, attempting to determine its future (pp. 11).

This reflection has concrete references that today, in the political framework of democratic transition, can be seen both in the central body—the Secretariat of Public Education—and in the states.

The questions that guide the development of this section are what aspects of the MES can be rated as positive, and what challenges and tensions are yet to be resolved.

An analysis of the MES's evolution during the twentieth century permits us to summarize briefly its most important accomplishments.

First it should be noted that education has been a priority for the Mexican state. The aspiration to ensure equal educational opportunities for all has been a goal of all the revolutionary governments, even for the current federal government.⁶ This aspiration is reflected in the quantitative expansion of the MES in all its types, levels and modalities;⁷ achieving universal, primary education, was the only compulsory level up until 1993.

All told, the MES enrollment increased from 11,538,871 students in 1970 to 30,206,150 students in 2001. For the same period, primary education increased from 9,248,190 to 14,833,889 (SEP, 2001, p. 56-72). In fact, enrollment at this level was able to stabilize in the eighties. On the other hand, the expansion of enrollment in secondary and higher education has been spectacular over the same period. Before the nineties, since the late sixties, the emphasis was placed mainly on the expansion of the MES; in the mid-eighties there was a diversification in educational modalities to meet a demand characterized by its heterogeneity.

While the quantitative expansion of the MES is a reflection of population growth, there is still no direct relationship between the two, i.e. the population growth has been greater than the response of the MES. In this sense, the XII National Census of Population and Housing showed that of 20 million children and young people ages 6 to 14 years, about one million are outside the compulsory basic school; while in relative numbers this represents 5%, the absolute number is not negligible.

The modernizing policies of the last decade of the twentieth century significantly boosted the development of the educational system: by giving new priority to basic education; by planting quality and equity as the objectives of the reform; by decentralizing the operation of the MES; by promoting a greater presence of parents and community in the school; by perceiving institutional reform as a starting point and a support for curricular and pedagogical reform; by designing and implanting a curricular and pedagogical reform with a strong orientation toward the development of competencies (know with, know-how); by entering the evaluation of results and accountability; by increasing instructional time through extending the school calendar to 200 days; by producing and diversifying textbooks and educational materials for students and teachers; by encouraging innovative projects for the introduction of modern technologies in the school; by introducing new schematics for the career development of teachers, such as the teacher-training B.A. program, and activities for teacher updating and reform of initial training; by increasing public funding for education (5.7% of GDP in 1994) and the raising of teachers' wages (SEP, 1996); or by designing and carrying out a series of programs tending to compensate for inequalities.⁸

With this huge effort and the deployment of energy, and of material, financial and human resources, it has been possible to increase the figures for coverage of basic education and indicators of completion rate. However, the purposes of quality and equity are still far from having been achieved.

Some issues are clear: secondary education reform is delayed, funding increases for education were interrupted in 1995, continuous social participation is still an unsatisfied desire, the results of various programs of national and international evaluation have not been analyzed and have been even less disseminated, the known results are unsatisfactory and the federalized decentralization design is insufficient and incomplete.

Despite the fresh impetus for education reform in the last decade of the twentieth century, the results have not been what we expected. The public school, in general—although with notable exceptions—has failed to renovate its pedagogical practices, the quality in terms of the students' learning is still far from meeting the standards outlined in the curriculum, and the uneven levels of scholastic achievement among regions, states, municipalities and schools speak of an inequity in the distribution of opportunities to learn, something which as a country we have defined as “basic” (SEP, 2001).

Ten years after the signing of ANMEB, Mexico has an educational system with lights and shadows. Its challenges are sometimes viewed with greater clarity; at other times, people would rather ignore them.

From our point of view, the fundamental challenges which the MES must confront with all its resources—human, material, financial—are the quality and the equity of education. These are intimately related; the one does not exist without the other, nor can they be dealt with in an isolated manner.

The challenge of quality will be, for a long time, that of making the extensive coverage of basic education a real opportunity to learn—that is, that it not be simply a privilege nor an element for differentiation or a social filter, but that there be equity in access to comparable learning experiences. Quality is also based on relevance. Furthermore, in a pluricultural country like Mexico, it is necessary to promote interculturality for everyone, and in indigenous education, conservation, and the development of their own culture.

At the same time, given the diversity of demands for knowledge on the part of society, basic education must guarantee *learning how to learn* as an essential competency; which implies situating in an important place the development of intellectual and cultural competencies that assume the full mastery of fundamental codes of communication and relationship with knowledge.

Therefore, this education must:

...reclaim the universal achievement of the competencies on which the contemporary school was established: the mastery of the written word of mathematical language. Along with these basic masteries are the attitudes and values of solidarity, respect for differences, service, the search for truth, the responsibility to complete a task individually and collectively; habits and ethical behavior (Rangel, et al., 2000, pp. 45-46).

In Mexico as in other Latin American countries, equity occupies a central place in the educational and social challenges. Social, and therefore educational inequalities, are an endemic problem, systemic in nature. Equity is not only a problem for education; however, the MES has no choice: it must face the problem and resolve it from its area of competency.

Although socioeconomic factors have an important specific weight in explaining scholastic achievement, it is also true that the *school does matter*, and can make the difference. Studies on scholastic effectivity or efficacy show that various factors of school performance (the director's leadership, shared goals, learning environment, teaching with purposes, teachers of a high professional level, high expectations for students' scholastic achievement, among others), explain the variations in educational achievement between schools.⁹

To overcome the challenges of quality and equity in education, the MES must necessarily resolve another type of challenges that have to do with its forms of organization and operation. These are the issues pertaining to decentralization (or decentralized federalization); the need for effective and up-to-date information and evaluation systems on which to base decision-making; the training of cadres for systems management both at state and federal level; diversified fund-raising, and of course, the quality of beginning and in-service training of teachers and school directors. Without adequate means, quality and equity in education will be able to continue only as hopes and dreams.

It would seem that there is a question we are obliged to ask: What prevents the MES from achieving its proposed quality of education with equity for all? The issue is that the MES faces simultaneously a set of tensions or dilemmas that, if they are not resolved, impede or even prevent its operation. It is of interest here to highlight just some of these tensions or dilemmas.

a) Tension between the local and national levels; between the federal, state and municipal. This tension is shown, for example, in the unfinished process of decentralization. The federal government, in retaining the regulatory function and the distribution of resources, restricts in actual fact the scope of action of the state (or local) governments, leaving them largely to carry out the federal government's plans and purposes. In the past five years, we seem to be witnessing a re-centralization process, by which the central organization—the Secretariat of Public Education—is not only establishing the lines of educational policy, by also the goals and programming. Nevertheless, the official discourse explicitly affirms the need to “strengthen federalism”. This tension, along with the ways sought to resolve it also has implications for what is called *institutional management*, together with its peculiar form of organization and operation, characterized by a hierarchical and linear structure. This sort of institutional management is found at all the structural levels of the MES, from the headquarters of the SEP and the states, to the regional and zone dimension, and right up to the school itself.

The web of relationships between the central structures, the intermediate ones,¹⁰ and the school is complex, and is refereed by various interests: the education of children and youth is not always the top priority. While there have been some advances, these are still precarious and fragile. Until there are created new structural and political conditions for the functioning of the educational system, it will be impossible to produce a school that works with autonomy, that will be responsible for the learning of its students, and that will render accounts for what it

has done to achieve these things. Which will change, the educational system or the school? The answer is obvious. Both must change. The central and intermediate structures of the national and state educational systems must be changed to support the transformation of the school and its actors (Zorrilla, 1999).

Another problem is the timing of the labors of the federal government and that of the state governments. In some sectors, educational change is *not* a priority for their governments, while in others, actions (sometimes called innovation), are produced—disconnected and dispersed. Furthermore, work periods of the state governments do not coincide with those of the federal government. The states that have their own educational development programs usually adjust them or change them to meet the demands of the federal programs.

b) Tensions between the political, the bureaucratic administration, the professionally technical and the pedagogical. It is interesting to highlight the tensions produced between the different types of knowledge and times, since they are related with the subject/actors in the system. There are difficulties in identifying these components, because of which it has been impossible to construct a complementarity of knowledge. We are talking about the knowledge of policies related with the skills of negotiation, consultation and consensus-building; the tecnico-professional knowledge about institutional management, strategic planning, informatics, measurement, evaluation, the pedagogical and curricular and more; the bureaucratic-administrative knowledge related to the trajectory to complete with all the steps defined by the regulations and that are found in the personnel who have gone through many government administrations; and the pedagogical knowledge that refers to the processing of the new information derived from the reform and the ways in which the subjects/actors in the everyday life of the system redefine the new policies and educational programs.

In the case of the times—classified in the same way: political, technical-professional, administrative-bureaucratic and pedagogical—it is enough that we illustrate the MES's great difficulty in installing in the classroom a curricular and pedagogical reform such as this, since the times for re-training teachers, directors and supervisors, and even middle managers, do not coincide with the political times (governmental or union) usually associated with elections...the technical-professional time needed to design and operate, for example, a new scholastic information system based on individualized data or the incorporation of the new technologies in schools, or to design and operate an evaluation system, among other things...the administrative-bureaucratic time required for each process (staffing, incident management, payroll processing, distribution of books or certification) in accordance with regulations, so as not to incur administrative and even legal deviations...and the pedagogical times, which are the longest, since they have to do with the processes of learning or re-learning and are often those least considered in making decisions.¹¹

c) Tension between the purposes of quality with equity, and efficiency in the use of resources. In spite of the fact that the official discourse alludes to such

purposes, when the educational results are reported, the references are quantitative: educational spaces are constructed, scholarships and the amounts awarded, textbooks distributed, and similar issues. This can mean that the efficiency of resource management is seen to, but not the policies and actions really oriented toward quality improvement, or that, in spite of the existence of important federal, state, and school efforts directed toward educational improvement, there are still no indicators to measure and evaluate their results.

Other tensions or dilemmas faced by the MES, and which are important for understanding its development, have to do with resolving the dichotomy between public government responsibility and social participation; between compliance with the regulations and action; between need, availability and use of competencies and knowledge; amid the tensions existing between designing the educational policies and programs, and evaluating their results; concerning the search for greater professionalism in a context of economic restriction; between thinking and doing, in regard to education, or in promoting such changes as to allow little change.

To overcome the challenges, there is a need to resolve the tensions or dilemmas, because these have a direct effect on decision-making and action modes from the highest level of the MES administration to the level of the school, including the classroom. The next section will address an element of the educational system deemed vital for its transformation.

3. Transforming institutional management in the MES

The management of the education system can refer to the organizational and legal structure, and to the modes of action found at the root of its operations.

The National Education Program 2001-2006 reads:

The proposal of *An Educational Approach for the Twenty-first Century* involves making changes from two perspectives: that having to do with each of the major types of education, and that having to do with changes in the management of the educational system. The proposed reform contains important changes in those involved in the three levels of government (federal, state and municipal), educational actors (authorities, parents, students and teachers) and different sectors (public, private and social). The aspects contemplated by this reform are: educational federalization; financing; mechanisms for coordination, consultation, and society's participation; legal framework; evaluation, research, and educational innovation; and the integrated management of the system (SEP, 2001, pp. 84).

While the statement of purposes announced a structural and organizational reform of the educational system which, it says, places in the school or institution's center of gravity, in the expression of goals and specific actions there is still perceived the survival of a hierarchical organization with a strong central component.

Educational reforms of a decentralizing type have sought to put the school in the center of education systems, but their structures have remained virtually unaltered.

Regardless of this reality, it is important to recognize the fact that decentralization highlighted the deficiency and exhaustion reached by the traditional structure which is built on national education systems. Mexico has been no exception.

A recent study of the organizational structure of ministries of education in various parts of the world provides an accurate diagnosis of their features and considers a reform proposal.¹²

Aguerrondo holds that a proposal that overcomes the tension between centralization and decentralization:

...combines the need for the coexistence of a body of decentralized operations (schools) with a central steering body, each of which must be properly organized and orchestrated to account for the tasks that belong to them (Aguerrondo, 2002, p. 15).

The schools are committed to offering a service suited to the characteristics of a diverse demand, which means that their teaching proposals, their modes of everyday action, their materials or their organization would not be uniform. On the other hand, the central body of educational management has a definite task for a double commitment: the first relates to the need of all operational units (schools) to overcome fragmentation, and could be made up of a system with three basic functions: protect the unit in terms of integration, protect the quality depending on the needs of demand, and protect the equity in terms of socio-economic trends of differentiation; the second commitment would foresee the need for this system to sustain a directorship to oversee changes. For this, the central authority should have the ability to propose, that is, to innovate, to find out the status of the system, i.e., to measure results and monitor the digression, which means to reprimand (Aguerrondo, 2002, p. 16.)

An educational-systems management modality cannot be carried out with the institutions we know. It does not have to do with denying the existence of a central body, but requires changing the current hierarchical structure, improving the institutional conditions, and achieving the substantive purposes of a quality education with equity for all.

In this sense, Aguerrondo's (pp. 16-29) proposal consists of a systemic-type model made up of three large components: executive, technical assistance, and control. The executive component represents the line of hierarchical executive relationships, also existing in this type of models, and includes the governing and decision-making body with the defined ruling function; the professional body which organizes information of a different type (statistics, qualitative research, surveys, opinion polls, of the financial situation and similar aspect0073) for making decisions; the administrative body which takes care of the affairs of human, material and financial resources, and will have different features according to the decentralization of the system, and the body of operation, which is made up of the schools and institutions.

The other two components are technical assistance and control. The first concerns the need to produce the inputs required by schools to improve their performance or innovate their practices; some of those would be the production of materials, advice concerning the implementation and curriculum development, professionalization and others. The control has to do with the responsibility of the central authority of education (federal or state) to assume the political leadership of the educational processes as well as the responsibility of accountability. This is related to the control of students, schools and teachers, for which they have been developing different types of assessment systems, accreditation or certification.

In other countries it is observable that the components of technical assistance and monitoring are performed by independent agencies.¹³ This way of resolving or addressing these functions of the education system is called tertiarization, which means the existence of ad hoc groups hired for a specific task or also the case of “specific institutions.”

In the case of Mexico and other Latin American countries, the movement derived from decentralizing education reforms at least made it possible to distinguish between routine and regular management and innovation, yet without implying substantial changes in organizational structure of ministries of education.

Enunciated very succinctly, the proposal allows a glimpse of the winding roads which would have to be traveled in order to transform the management of the Mexican educational system.

In this sense, Tedesco (2002) prudently plants the possibility of working on institutional designs for transition; these have not yet been explored in the reality of our educational reform. For that, he says, we would have to consider “two fundamental variables: the financial resources and the human resources”. This idea of transition institutions is different from the creation of new institutions such as councils, or the mixed autonomous or semiautonomous institutions. In any case it would be necessary to give critical study to the experience in other countries, and to evaluate various alternatives for the case of Mexico.

For the MES—in good measure—a desirable prospect, in which there is strong political support translated into an expansion of the budget, would be that the role of the school is recognized and valued as the center of the community and has a large measure of autonomy to decide its development. There is a curriculum with learning standards and performance defined and assessed, inequalities are reduced and the educational attention is diversified to meet a claim also diverse, plus there are also developed new forms for the governance of education, with a central body which exercises a leading role, but in which government agencies are actively involved. All this will largely depend, among other conditions, on a major reform of institutional management in all its dimensions. Otherwise, this scenario continues to be located only in the area of what is desirable, since other forces will prevent its implementation.

4. In conclusion

Educational policies, as well as public policies, acquire the peculiarities imprinted on them by the ministries or secretariats of education; for that reason, we can confirm that their organizational structure impacts on the results they achieve.

Both the design and the implementation of the educational policies and programs pass through the people who work in the educational system and through an institution that has a history, a tradition and a culture. Consequently, we must work toward innovation based on tradition.

Certainly the sole purpose of enlarging the coverage—while it requires the mobilization of a great quantity of resources—is more feasible, and thus, a hierarchical and central system of the educational system made it possible. However, to achieve the purposes of quality with equity, we must have irrefutable references, and a different management of education and the educational system.

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Links to materials connected with this article:

Programa de Promoción de la Reforma Educativa en América Latina y el Caribe (PREAL)/Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas. <http://www.preal.cl>

Grupo de Trabajo sobre Estándares y Evaluación del PREAL y GRADE (GTEE - PREAL) <http://www.grade.org.pe/gtee-preal/gteepreal.htm>

Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) in Mexico. <http://www.sep.gob.mx>

Red Iberoamericana de Investigación sobre Eficacia Escolar y Mejora de la Escuela (RIEME). <http://www.mec.es/cide/rieme>

Instituto Internacional de Planeamiento de la Educación (IPE), Buenos Aires. <http://www.iipe-buenosaires.org.ar/>

Proyecto "Actualización de formadores en gestión y política educativa". Instituto Internacional de Planeamiento de la Educación (IPE)-Fundación Ford. <http://www.iipe-buenosaires.org.ar/forgestion>

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¹ Remember that the Federal District has not be decentralized; therefore, we refer only to the “states”.

² This essay recovers information about the development of the educational system, such as reflections and analysis belonging to other researchers and analysts about the dynamic of the MES, in particular, and the educational systems in general.

³ Transfer is a synonym of assign, sign over, turn over, pass on, hand over.

⁴ The decentralization of the educational system has been called “federalización”; the term is ambiguous because in the thirties it was used, but in a centralizing sense. For that reason, some authors like Alberto Arnaut refer to the “centralizing federalization” or the “decentralizing federalization”, according to the emphasis.

⁵ Confronting the reports of work of the Secretariat of Public Education 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 (SEP, 1999, 2000). Also available on the website www.sep.gob.mx systems for the analysis of education statistics.

⁶ The government of the democratic transition, or rather, the partisan transition.

⁷ Educational types are basic education, middle education and higher education. The first consists of pre-school, primary and junior high levels; the middle education has no levels, and higher education includes the levels of Bachelor’s degrees, specialties, Master’s degrees, and doctorates.

⁸ The first compensatory program began in 1991 and was named Program to Reduce the Lag in Education (PARE), which was implemented in the four states falling farthest behind: Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca and Hidalgo. This was followed by the STOP II or PAREB, and the PIARE; the PAREIB is now in operation. As it moved from one program to another, coverage expanded: from four to ten states, then to twenty-four, and finally to all the states.

⁹ See the study Sylvia Schmelkes did in Puebla (Schmelkes, Martínez y Noriega, 1997), as well as the studies developed with the framework of the *Escuelas Eficaces* (Efficient Schools) movement. In Spanish, you can consult the web page of the *Red Iberoamericana de Eficacia Escolar y Mejoramiento de la Escuela RIEME* (www.mec.es/cide/rieme).

¹⁰ The intermediate structural instances relate to school supervision, technical groups and technical boards.

¹¹ See the analysis made by Braslavsky y Cosse (1996).

¹² See Aguerro (2002).

¹³ In Mexico, this is the case of the National Commission of Free Textbooks or the recently created National Institute for the Evaluation of Education.