

## **Teaching Politics and Citizenship: The Political Uses of the Curriculum in Argentina**

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### **Abstract**

Curricular policy has traditionally been a source of controversy, certainly in Latin America. Among scholars the politically contested contents of the school curriculum have been the object of sustained analysis and discussion. This article examines a relatively new phenomenon related to the politization of the curriculum—namely, the political use of curriculum by public actors. The incident analyzed recently took place in Argentina following proposed changes in the subject *Politics and Citizenship* in the upper secondary cycle in the province of Buenos Aires. After a draft document containing suggested curricular modifications was released, public actors who were opposed to the government initiated a spurious public debate aimed at distorting the spirit of the document, and questioning the inclusion of various concepts and social phenomena. This paper examines the main features of the political debate as well as its policy consequences, in light of Argentina's recent curricular history.

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this article is to analyze the features of the current debate on curriculum design and development in Argentina. In particular, we will focus on the political discussion surrounding the contents of the subject *Politics and Citizenship* in the fifth and penultimate grade of secondary education in the largest district in the country, the province of Buenos Aires. Our purpose is to recognize the recent political uses of the curriculum in the political arena, to analyze its consequences and point to lessons and new questions to improve the quality of the scholarly debate.

Hotly contested elections at several levels (national, provincial, local) recently served as a propitious ground for bringing sensitive public topics into the political arena by political parties and other relevant actors, such as the media. One of these topics, which had rarely been on the political agenda, was the school curriculum. In this instance, the school subject under scrutiny was *Politics and Citizenship*, taught in schools in the province of Buenos Aires. The preliminary contents of the curricular subject were released and then promptly seized upon by different political actors to pursue their overtly political goals.

To analyse the debate that followed the document's release, we have reviewed the main national newspapers in Argentina (i.e., *Clarín*, *La Nación* and *Página 12*), TV programs and institutional documents defining the position of different stakeholders and other social organizations. We further analyzed the aforementioned curriculum in detail, plus other official documents, norms and laws framing curricular policies in the province of Buenos Aires.

## **Politics and Citizenship in the Curriculum**

The necessity for a well-developed citizenship education in the 21st century has been discussed by many authors (Cox et al. 2005; Reimers et al. 2005; Tedesco 2011). At the same time, empirical data about democratic attitudes in the region indicate that sustained efforts need to occur in order to develop better proposals to our students and nurture relevant competences. According to the Latinobarometer 2010, support for democracy is not extensive in Latin America, ranging from 40% to 84% of surveyed respondents depending on the country. In Argentina, only 66% of the respondents believes that democracy is preferable to any other political system. Positive attitudes towards the importance of the Congress and political parties are weak; an overwhelming majority--the highest in the region--believes that governments strive to privilege an elite. Only a quarter of the population feels satisfied when voting and trust in democratic republican institutions is limited (Latinobarometer 2010).

In this context, subjects related to citizenship education are viewed as critical for the development of key competences such as fully exercising rights, understanding complex social problems, being committed to the improvement of the whole society, and fulfill democratic duties (e.g., voting, testifying or paying taxes).

The school subject *Politics and Citizenship*, implemented in the last grade of secondary schools in the province of Buenos Aires, seeks, among other things, to stimulate the development of these competences. As we discuss below, an intense public debate ensued when its preliminary content was disseminated, thus overshadowing the intent and spirit of the document.

## **Curricular Changes in Argentina: A Brief History**

It is possible to observe two major models or regulatory configurations of curricular policy in Argentina. The first--the initial centralised model of curricular regulation--fit well during the consolidation and quantitative expansion of the education systems of each province, a period embracing the last decades of the nineteenth century up to the 1960's. This model sought to guarantee the teaching of the same contents to every student in each system, and thereby homogenise classroom instruction to inculcate common values, language skills and other knowledge perceived as necessary for civic life. The leading motif was to give equal opportunities to all students by offering equal educational

contents. The Argentine elite sought to shift from a “traditional” scattered society to a united “modern” nation that was in step with the rest of the world. This project required the creation of new citizens who would be united by their common feeling of love for the *Patria* (nation). Teachers not only had to transmit particular knowledge for citizenship, but also convey specific norms, values and principles. The basic idea was that every school in Argentina should behave as one, using the same time schedule and teaching with the same methods to every student (Narodowski 1999).

This was, therefore, a highly centralized model of curricular regulation in which the national State monopolized all decisions about the objectives and contents of education. Curricular documents were designed by the State and sent directly to schools, or rather to teachers, who were expected to closely follow the national curricular prescriptions. All other agents--for example, provincial governments, municipalities, schools and teachers--were excluded from any meaningful participation in the decision-making process of what and how to teach. Argentina’s education system therefore followed a vertical model of curricular regulation, which allowed little room for curricular adaptation by schools or teachers. The latter were expected to be obedient executors of detailed curricular and pedagogical instructions designed by the State.

By the end of the 1960’s, and even more intensely by the early 1970’s, the country’s education systems experienced a general crisis as their ability to provide relevant knowledge to all students was criticized. These critical diagnoses brought about changes in curricular policies though insufficiently integrated into the centralised model of regulation. However, curricular reforms continued to be carried out under the old centralized model in which teachers were expected to teach highly specified contents with little consideration for student differences.

Only in the 1990’s, when wide-ranging reforms were implemented in Argentina (and in other Latin American countries), the centralized model of curricular regulation was abandoned and replaced by a decentralized model. The *Ley Federal de Educación*, passed in 1993, aimed at a complete reform of the education system, including curricular regulation. The overall rationale guiding this reform was that the design of general objectives and regulatory processes should be as centralized as possible, while the execution of educational services should be as decentralized as possible. This model would guarantee--at least in theory--an improvement in the quality of services being offered to citizens and a more optimal use of resources.

Since the Law’s passage, the central State was no longer in charge of defining every content detail to be taught in every Argentine school. Instead, it was the Federal Council of Education, formed by all the provincial ministers of education, which established a series of common basic contents (CBCs) defining the minimum levels of knowledge and skills that every Argentine student would be expected to acquire in school. The CBCs then acted as a guideline for each province to elaborate according to its own curricular design and priorities. At the same time, provincial curricular policies should leave—at least in theory--some space for schools and teachers to include a number of differentiated

contents according to the school's locality and the characteristics of students and teachers (Braslavsky 1998). Thus, the reform not only prescribed a reorganization of the levels of curricular definition, but also included new actors, such as provinces, schools and teachers, in the process of defining and developing the curriculum.

This new model of curricular regulation soon encountered various practical problems. Even though the CBCs were supposed to act as guidelines for the design of the actual curricula in the provinces and then in schools, in practice they became the new curricular policy used by schools<sup>1</sup>. In short, the CBCs themselves were taken as the new curricula in Argentine schools. And, as a result of the slowness in defining curricular details at the provincial and school levels, the new textbooks effectively performed this function and became a basic guide for teachers when they planned their lessons.

In 2006, a new national law regulating education--*Ley de Educación Nacional N° 26206*--was passed. Among its many revised stipulations, the law introduced the concepts of *common curricular contents* and *cores of learning priorities* (CLP) to guide education at all levels across the country, leaving to the provinces the power and space to define curricular contents in their jurisdiction, according to their context.

## **The Politization of the Curriculum**

The ways of selecting the contents and the modes of categorizing them according to discipline are not the result of pedagogical ignorance or some fleeting matters, but to particular ways in which ideological conflicts were resolved. What appears to be carried out by chance (i.e. the distribution of subjects in the textbooks) is instead the result of curricular policies designed to form a specific cultural profile in the population and of the processes of the scholastization of knowledge.

In this sense, it is possible to see how certain subjects have been politicized during different periods of Argentina's history. In regard to the so-called "social sciences", the politicization of the content material in subjects such as "History" (Braslavsky 1992; 1993) or "Moral and Civic instruction" (Rein 1998), and even the political manipulation of material involved in the teaching of reading (Wainerman and Barck de Raijman 1987; Brafman 2000) have been widely studied. The natural sciences have also been an arena of political and religious conflicts. Far from being a question of "politically neutral" material, contents in these subject areas contain specific instances of politicization (Gvirtz and Narodowsky 1998; Gvirtz et al. 2001). While the social sciences have often been a target of political party indoctrination (Rein 1998), the natural sciences have also been involved in these types of issues, though less frequently.

Indeed, historians of scholastic disciplines (Chervel 1991; Goodson 1997) have pointed out that the fields, branches or subjects which make up a plan of study are nothing more than a collection of themes—some cultural, others scientific in content—which

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of how this came about, see Gvirtz and Beech (2004).

are gathered together for teaching. Scholastic disciplines cannot be considered simply a means of spreading science and culture throughout society. The succession of disciplines and scholastic branches that constitute various curricula in the Argentine education system are a finite combination of subjects with clearly defined limits in each historical period. Political-ideological confrontations between the social agents that influenced the decisions of the education system are rather important in these processes.

The current phenomenon, emerging in the province of Buenos Aires, is distinctive. Although the non-neutrality of the curriculum is still an important issue, the use of curricular subjects for political purposes has gained ground. Below we examine how political parties and other socially relevant actors, who are aware of the widespread perception of the politization of curriculum, decided to use a preliminary version of the new upper secondary syllabus for the subject, *Politics and Citizenship*, to gain political visibility.

## **The Political Uses of the Recent Curriculum: A Case Study**

### *Socio-Political Context*

Since 2003, following the country's devastating economic crisis, Argentina has been governed, first, by Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and then by his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who was re-elected for another term in December 2011. This process gave birth to a new force in the national political arena, the *kirchnerismo*, which gathered strength throughout the country.

### *Curricular Policy in Buenos Aires*

The *Ley de Educación Nacional*, passed in 2006, states that “in order to assure educational quality, social cohesion and national integration, and to guarantee the validity of each degree, the Minister of Education, Science and Technology, together with the Federal Council of Education, will delineate structures and common curricular contents as well as cores of learning priorities (CPL) for all levels and grades of compulsory education...” The Law also establishes that “the provinces and the autonomous city of Buenos Aires will define curricular contents according to their social, cultural and productive reality, and will promote the design of institutional projects allowing educational institutions to propose their own curricular developments, in the framework of the objectives and common norms established by this law.”

Within this framework, the CPL, which emerged as a consensus document among the National Ministry of Education, the provinces and the city of Buenos Aires, stressed common bodies of knowledge, which are viewed as necessary from the national perspective and which served as a scaffold for curricular design in local jurisdictions. Provinces were, thus, supposed to be in direct charge of the detailed specification of the curriculum.

In the case of the province of Buenos Aires, the General Director of Culture and Education set forth a mechanism to elaborate the designs, proposals and materials for curricular development at each level, according to the provincial law regulating education (*Ley Provincial de Educación N 13688* from 2007). As a result of this process, it was established that, among other things, the curricular contents should be “common, prescriptive, paradigmatic and relational” (General Framework for Curricular Policy 2007).

Of these four features, the *prescriptive* aspect needs special attention and further elaboration. Under the provincial mandate, curriculum contents are supposed to set a direction, to guide and also to limit. In a clear attempt to create some distance from the previous period, the new directive intended to expand but also circumscribe the role of teachers. The underlying assumption is that the State’s withdrawal during the 1990’s actually translated into an avoidance of its responsibility. Prescription--accompanied by the offer of support to teachers--is thus conceived as a way for the State to assume responsibility for curricular processes and learning outcomes. A space for teacher’s professional autonomy remains at the local level through the construction of an Institutional Curricular Project, where each school can set achievement ideals as well as appropriate contents, teaching strategies and evaluation criteria (General Framework for Curricular Policy 2007).

### *The political uses of the curriculum in Argentina.*

The latest guidelines of the *Politics and Citizenship* subject for the 5<sup>th</sup> year of secondary education were established under the aforementioned framework. The draft document was released in 2011 after various pilot tests had been implemented in the lower secondary cycle (the first three years of secondary education).

Based on both the national and provincial legal frameworks, the preamble to the guidelines quotes a paragraph from the national law which states how a person should be educated to exercise meaningful citizenship: “To offer a citizenship education compromised with ethical and democratic values of participation, freedom, solidarity, peaceful conflict resolution, respect for human rights, faithfulness, honesty, respect and preservation of cultural and natural patrimony” (Art.11, *Law of National Education*). To this the provincial norm was added: “(an education) that habilitates each person to develop in the social and productive spheres, and to continue their education in subsequent stages and modalities” and “to guarantee a whole education forming citizens through the development of all dimensions of life including those contemplated by the... United Nations Convention on Children Rights, which has constitutional rank” (Art. 16, *Provincial Law of Education*).

The specific contents of the subject were designed in light of these ideals, detailing the need to teach and learn concepts such as society, politics, market, private and public, identity, inequality and exclusion, human rights, participation, social struggles and

demands, a republican political system, political parties, social movements, media, and so on. These concepts are broadly studied under three structuring concepts: *Subject* (rights' construction), *Action* (actual sociopolitical exercise) and *Power* (citizenship) in a given socio-cultural context. The theoretical foundation of this approach has been inspired by the work of some critical theorists, such as Hannah Arendt. Among its many teaching objectives, the guidelines mention that students should be able to critically analyze historical and current social struggles, power formation, language construction and other political dynamics. The subject is organized into four teaching-learning units: (1) Politics; (2) State and government; (3) Citizenship, participation and political organization; and (4) Human rights and democracy.

As previously mentioned, the charged political context, exacerbated by the proximity of national elections in 2011, began influencing the type and quality of public debate, including in the educational arena. With the publication of the draft guidelines<sup>2</sup> in February 2011 by the Provincial Director of Culture and Education political controversy was generated in what some referred to as a strike against the quality of education. National newspapers--in their opposition to the national and provincial governments--wrote critically of the concept of *escraches*<sup>3</sup>, which was included in one of the four main units, the one on *Citizenship, participation and political organization*. This particular unit focused, according to the document, on "the study of citizenship building and diverse forms of political action. It includes the analysis of forms of participation and political organization in different socio-historical contexts." It also states that "the aim of this unit is to let students understand the logic of social struggles as political action for the fulfillment of their rights and duties" (*Politics and Citizenship*, 5<sup>th</sup> year, Preliminary Version 2011, p.28). This unit is organized into two blocks: a first one on citizenship and a second one on participation and political organization. The specific contents of this second block include: the relationship among participation, action and political organizations; the party system; social movements in Argentina; and social protests. The item social protests specifies "diverse means of socio-political participation: marches, marches of silence, *escraches*, graffiti, paintings, among others" (*Politics and Citizenship*, 5<sup>th</sup> year, preliminary version 2011, p.30). The *escraches* are conceived as a form of political protest through which activists go to a person's address to denounce him or her. Sometimes it is viewed as a way of persecuting a person.

The public debate that followed the release of the draft guidelines was mainly defined by two positions: those in favour and those against the inclusion of *escraches*. The official position stated that the teaching of this concept helps enrich students' learning by acquainting them with all kinds of social and political manifestations and, as such, it is not directly linked to its promotion. Positions against its inclusion in the curricula came

<sup>2</sup> This draft guidelines was submitted to revision.

<sup>3</sup> According to the Argentine Language Academy, an "*escrache*" is "a public denouncement of a person who is accused of violating human rights or committing an act of corruption, and it typically consists of a protest at the person's residence or in a public space."

from members of parties and groups who were openly opposed to the government. In their view, teaching about *escraches* implied a support for this form of social/ political activities.

A review of articles published in the leading newspapers and websites about the topic illustrates the crystalizing political conflict. The largest opposition newspapers followed three strategies to undermine the official position: (a) quoting opposition leaders; (b) writing op-ed pieces and publishing letters from readers who rejected the potential changes in the curriculum; and (c) distorting official statements. For example, an op-ed piece published by *Clarín*--the main opposition newspaper--clearly states that instead of teaching civic education, the course supports these kinds of social manifestations; it also despises the theoretical framework under which the curricular changes were built<sup>4</sup>. In the same page, other social and political opponents' opinions were depicted. Particularly controversial were the city of Buenos Aires' Minister of Education and the Archbishop of the capital city of Buenos Aires province, who provided an extreme interpretation of the changes<sup>5</sup>. The zenith of this approach was reached by the main news program on Channel 13, which titled the newflash as "*Subject: Escraches*", which presented an exceedingly distorted view of the discussion (*Telenoche* 02/18/2011).

In the ways they communicated to the public, the media saw these curricular changes as having consequential effects. Indeed, many letters sent to the newspapers by readers reflected the impact that this issue was having on society, further enhancing the political debate. Their opinions clearly supposed underlying assumptions that directly reveal a biased perception about the roots and spirit of the curricular change<sup>6</sup>. A clearcut example of this bias can be seen in the results of an online survey carried out by the *La Nación* newspaper (*La Nación* 02/17/2011), where 70% of the readers answered affirmatively to the question: "The governor ratified the curricular modification. Do you think it should be removed?"

As previously mentioned, the political uses of the draft guidelines can also be detected in how official declarations are interpreted. In this case, for example, an

<sup>4</sup> "What should be a course on civics and an apology to participation, it is used by the Province to discuss the use of *escraches*, pickets and graffiti as different forms of political participation". It added that "a project dyed by intellectual quotations from Arendt, Foucault, Gramsci, Weber, Marx, Hobbes, among others, conceives the abolition of all the juridical mediations implied by the use of the *escraches* as an effective way of political participation" (*Clarín*, 16/02/2011).

<sup>5</sup> The Minister of Education in the city of Buenos Aires, from an opposite party, distinguished that "the school mission is to create citizens" while "*escrache* means persecution", in his speech at a school by the beginning of the academic year (*Clarín*, 03/09/2011). Accompanying this assessment, the archbishop of the capital of Buenos Aires Province, La Plata, asserted that those modifications could end up creating "little critical theorists uniformed under a pseudo-progressive conception" (*Clarín*, 02/27/2011).

<sup>6</sup> "Do we want a society that institutionalizes violence, that disregards dialogue, that despises genuine negotiation, which is characteristic of democratic institutions?", rhetorically asked a letter sent by a reader to one of the newspapers (*Clarín*, 02/18/2011). In a letter to *La Nación*, a principal at a secondary school assured that "it is too hard to guarantee children an, at least, serious education" (*La Nación*, 02/17/2011).



interview with the Director of Culture and Education of the Province of Buenos Aires<sup>7</sup> emphasized the need to understand today's society. The journalist's explanation went further and inferred that he supporting fascist methods of political participation<sup>8</sup>.

Originally, the word *escraches* was coined by the group H.I.J.O.S.<sup>9</sup>, an organization founded by the sons and daughters of people who were kidnapped, tortured and/or killed during the last dictatorship. In the context of this discussion about its incorporation in the provincial curriculum, an op-ed piece by this group was published at *Página 12*--a newspaper close to the national and provincial governments--clarifying the meaning of the concept, specially underlying the non-violent origins of the word and pointing out how the media had misused it. Although this organization did not have any obligation to explain the actual curriculum proposal, this op-ed piece perfectly illustrates the extent to which this concept became so central to the detriment of the rest of the document's content<sup>10</sup>. In short, these examples of the public debate illustrate how the understandings and discussions about the topic were diverting attention to minor points, even by those who sought to defend the document.

In an effort to shed light over those politicized opinions and provide some objectiveness, non-governmental organizations and academicians presented their views about the revised curricular guidelines. A major national think-tank, for example, declared that "in the text, lineal and mono-causal juridical views on Citizenship Education are redefined according to several authors that are the voice of critical theories in the social sciences. In that context, it seems logical to study diverse means of political participation, that are not positively or negatively judged in any instance of the document."<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

The analysis of the recent public debate over revisions to the subject *Politics and Citizenship* allows us to put forward some conclusions about the conflicts emerging not

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<sup>7</sup> The Provincial Director of Culture and Education is the highest authority in education in the province.

<sup>8</sup> When asked about this topic, the Minister of Education of the Province of Buenos Aires, Mario Oporto, declared that "it (the incorporation of these concepts) was conceived as a way to understand the democratic society in which we live". However, in a clear example of extreme miscommunication, the newspaper added that, thus, "the provincial Minister of Education justified teaching the fascist method as a way of political participation" (*Clarín*, 02/17/2011).

<sup>9</sup> Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio (*Sons and Daughters for the Identity and Justice against Oblivion and Silence*).

<sup>10</sup> According to that organization, the *escrache* was a tool that "was used and spread by H.I.J.O.S. against impunity, with the intention of uncovering what was hidden". "We denounced perpetrators and accomplices of genocides during the last dictatorship, who were enjoying freedom." "The *escrache* was never violent. We only were searching for social condemnation. That their house turned to be a real prison." Nonetheless, "this new tool has been misused by the media and it is now used to define any violent action" (*Página 12*, 02/27/2011).

<sup>11</sup> CIPPEC (Center for the Implementation of Public Policies promoting Equity and Growth), [www.cippec.org.ar](http://www.cippec.org.ar).

only around the use of curriculum for political purposes but also the *political use of this idea*. To be sure, the potential use of classrooms for political gain is not new in Argentina (Gvirtz and Narodowski 1998). What is interesting is how the contents of new curricular guidelines were examined carefully by different groups in an attempt to identify (politically charged) non-neutral elements. A detailed examination of the document in relation to the subsequent discussion indicates two main points: (a) much of the discussion distorted the intent and spirit of the curricular policy and of the norms on which it is based; and (b) The discussion did not seriously consider contextual features, that is, the fact that *escraches* are part of national landscape and, as such, it would be inappropriate to ignore them.

The analysis reported in this paper also highlights some critical issues that emerge when discussing curricular policy. The first point relates to the curriculum's construction: not only changes in curricular content matter, but also the ways it is implemented. In this sense, there are many examples attesting that a broad call to ensure participation has proved to be successful (for example, in Central America, mainly Guatemala and Nicaragua, discussed by García Rivas and Braslavsky 2005), where the institutionalization of the debate about the curricular reform served a larger goal--to promote social cohesion. A similar process took place in Chile, where a previous curricular discussion in large sectors of society helped to prevent the emergence of conflicts about this topic--this would be then seen when student revolts started to be concentrated on other core issues, such as the education system (Cox 2006). That is, the larger the consultation, the more solid the base.

In this regard, we have seen that Argentina's curricular policy has evolved from a centralised and homogeneous model to a decentralised one, where provinces and local actors are expected to specify curriculum's contents in light of their respective contexts. In addition, during this last decade, Argentina went through an interesting curricular change process when the Sexual Education Law was discussed in Congress. This process had two main features: firstly, it supposed an integral view of curricular policy, since it regulated curriculum, textbooks and teachers training. Secondly, it was discussed through a profound and extended debate in Congress, where positions from political parties, social and grassroots organizations, Church, academics and public officers were voiced. Although it is not possible to say that the curriculum was not used politically, it was evident that the depth and quality of the discussion went far beyond that.

Recent debates, however, have not been as meaningful. As this paper indicates, the discussion about changes in the subject *Politics and Citizenship* in Buenos Aires was spurious and ineffective, and mainly for political gain. Debates of a similar nature have also taken place, and they should alarm scholars and analysts in order to stimulate a more informed and substantive discussion. An important one has been farmers' opposition to the distribution of school handbooks on environment education, which question the use of transgenic soya beans. Furthermore, according to farmers, their activity is presented in a bucolic way, disregarding the industrial machines, technologies and skilled workforce behind it. The conflict with farmers has been one of the most serious undermining forces

of *kirchnerismo*, and illustrates how both actors discussing curriculum are interested in confrontation. However, in this latter case, no serious or neutral documents were released about the topic.

A more recent discussion had to do with the teaching of mining activities. Amidst a national media-centered conflict against mining companies, some provincial governments of mining-intensive provinces (Chubut, San Juan and La Rioja, for instance) supported the distribution of school handbooks that included sections describing mining as a safe activity. They also limited discussions in schools as well as the distribution of books that condemned the activity. There has not been a substantive discussion about this issue either.

A second point relates to the implementation of curricular change. Beyond the problematic quality of the public debate that ensued (even more given the draft nature of the document), it is worth highlighting several important issues. Firstly, one of the main lessons from this debate is that politically sensitive curricular contents, even under revision, should be scrutinized carefully before being released. A small mistake, such as the inclusion of one or two potentially politically unfriendly words in a fifty-page document, can generate an explosive national debate, with a potential negative impact on teachers' views and perceptions of the value of curricular reform. This is not a minor point, since the effective implementation of any public policy--in this case, a curricular reform--is a governmental responsibility.

Moreover, under such circumstances, spurious discussions or unwanted attention about curricular reforms may undermine how, and the motivation with which, teachers implement the policy, given the nature of the public debate. The complex bureaucracy of education systems makes it difficult to reach teachers with new information and releases, which causes many teachers to teach on the basis of what other colleagues had already taught, or on what they had been teaching themselves previously. Given the mass media's impact on public attitudes, it is possible that teachers' perceptions about the relevant topics and the best instruction methods are highly mediated or distorted. In this way, the underlying spirit of the curriculum--democratic, republican and respectful of human rights--could be easily condemned, by exaggerating the importance of a minor topic, thereby diminishing the space for those contents that are the subject's core. In this sense, a debate like this one in Argentina can generate the conditions for the self-fulfilled prophecy: teachers end up teaching "*escraches, graffitis and piquetes*" to the detriment of the values and concepts on which the curriculum is really based.

The nature of the Argentine public debate suggests a third point: there is a clear need to include curricular contents that enable students to critically analyze social, political and cultural dynamics of their communities. However, the analysis of the debate revealed two main positions about the issue: on the one hand, the opposition blamed the provincial government for "teaching fascist methods"; on the other hand, official positions stressed that teaching such concepts does not mean the teacher will apologize for, or even judge, these concepts. Missing is a discussion about the need to teach certain concepts to educate

citizens since they promote certain kinds of values and attitudes while discouraging others. Thus, when teachers teach students to critically analyze society and political phenomena they promote values that are valuable for society--including the peaceful resolution of conflicts or the use of institutional channels as a valuable means for achieving social change.

A final point is linked to the curriculum content and the role of the mass media and politic leaders to generate public discussions, which was not emphasized in the proposed curricular design for *Politics and Citizenship*. Adding such a topic to the syllabus could be valuable in educating the next generation of Argentine citizens.

This article raised several important points that should be taken into account when analyzing the politics of curricular policies and reform. Further research is needed to study the variety of actions that model curricular policy beyond the confines of curriculum design--such as distribution of textbooks or teachers training (Gvirtz and Beech 2004)--which are sometimes selectively used by political actors to achieve electoral goals, to the detriment of a deeper and meaningful public debate.

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