Democratic Citizenship, Youth Identity, and the Disappointments of Secondary Reform in Mexico

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The Context and Dilemma of Secondary Reform
Key moments of reform

- 1974 Chetumal Reforms—from asignaturas (individual subjects) to áreas
- 1992 ANMEB leads to curricular reform (back to asignaturas!) and constitutional amendment making secundaria attendance compulsory (obligatoria)
- 1999 reform of teacher training and pedagogy (escuelas normales)
- 2006 Reforma de la Escuela Secundaria (RES)
- 2011 Reforma Integral de la Educación Básica (RIEB)
- 2013–14 Reforms in evaluation and teacher hiring; curricular reforms ????
The Promising Principles, Aims, and Methods of Secondary Reform
Key new structures and practices for implementing the 2006 reform

- The conformation of “state technical teams” and state coordinators for each “modality” (‘General’ and ‘Technical’)
- The new relationship between the “federation” and the states, from 2004 (CONAEDU): Consulta y “convencimiento”; The power of pursestrings
- The Seguimiento: Gathering data (mostly qualitative) and drawing conclusions and recommendations for possible modifications
- The Inter–Institutional Consultative Councils (CCIs): Input into curriculum and practice across civil society, government sectors, and academia
To assure that adolescents acquire the necessary tools for life-long learning regardless of whether they will continue their formal education or enter the work force. These tools include:

- the capacity to reflect and analyze critically,
- the exercise of civil and democratic rights,
- the production and interchange of knowledge through diverse media,
- the ability to care for one’s health as well as the health of the environment,
- the acceptance of diverse cultural practices, and
- the ability to participate in a labor market which is becoming increasingly more diverse every day.
Key terms and principles of the 2006 reform (my compilation)

- Constructing competencies (*competencias*)
- Educating the whole person (*perfil de egreso*)
- Focus and **build on students’** prior knowledge, interests, concerns
- Focus on projects and collegial work (*proyectos y trabajo colegiado*)
- Create a school community and a sense of belonging (*pertenencia, identificación*)
- Create a **critical, questioning, autonomous** student
Desired characteristics of the “graduate profile” (*perfil de egreso*)

- Utilizes oral and written language clearly and fluently
- Uses reason and argumentation
- Selects and analyzes information from diverse sources
- Uses knowledge acquired to interpret and explain social, economic, natural processes
- Knows the values and human rights that strengthen democratic life
Recognizes and values culturally distinct processes and practices (*interculturalidad*)

Knows and values his/her own characteristics and potential as a human being, and identifies as a member of a group

Appreciates and participates in diverse artistic activities

Recognizes him/herself as a person with physical potential that permits him/her to favor an active and healthy lifestyle
Competencies, competencies!

- Competency = knowledge + ability (knowing how to do) + values/attitudes. A competency involves the conjunction of ability (habilidad), knowledge (conocimiento), attitudes, and values to achieve a purpose in a given context.
- Specific competencies: for lifelong learning, for managing information, for solving problems, for living together harmoniously (convivencia), for assuming democratic values, for participation and critical thinking
New pedagogical guidelines (Orientaciones didácticas)

- Incorporate the needs, interests, and prior knowledge of students
- Attend to diversity
- Promote group work and the collective construction of knowledge
- Diversify didactic strategies: projects
- Optimize use of time and space
- Select adequate materials
- Promote student autonomy
- Practice meaningful evaluation
Characteristics of the 2011 RIEB reform

- Projection of 20 year time frame
- Greater emphasis on meeting periodic curriculum “standards” through regular evaluation of ‘expected learning outcomes’ (aprendizajes esperados)
- Emphasis on education for the ‘new knowledge society,’ and a greater harmonization between ‘internal diagnostics and international experiences’
- Emphasis on ‘articulating’ curriculum from pre-school through secundaria
- Creation of new “Management Regions” (RGEB)
- State-level ‘technical teams’ become Coordinaciones Estatales de Asesoría y Seguimiento (CEAS)
How and Why Reform has Disappointed
Learning assessments like PISA and ENLACE: Small upward changes, but still highly unequal by region (D.F.—Guerrero)

Retention and graduation rates: Significant improvement between 2003 and 2012 (58% to 70%), but still quite low

Anecdotal assessment by teachers: “Los muchachos siguen ahí desanimados, no le hallan motivo de estar aquí”; “Cada día se ponen mas agresivos”; “Lllegan mal preparados, y salen mal para la prepa”
Why?: Institutional structure and organizational practice

- Centralized, ‘expert’ curriculum planning process
- **Contradiction** between competencies-based and student-centered curricular reform, on one hand, and both the organizational culture of schools and new standardized assessment regimes
- Poorly articulated teacher training
- De-professionalization of teaching, along with opaque and fragmented systems of teacher hiring
- Overly politicized and personalized system of regional supervision
- Lack of institutional democracy; lack of coherence between principles and policy process
Cultural correlates: Cynicism and frustration in teacher attitudes and beliefs

‘Ya se acabó el tiempo de los dictadores’
‘Es una reforma hecha por los detrás de escritorio’
‘Nos mandan a la guerra y sin fusil’
‘Es una mera simulación’
‘¿Trabajo colegiado? ¿Cuál? ¿Cuando? ¿Cómo?’
La cultura de ‘aguante’: Waiting out the latest wave of reform since things will go back to ‘normal’ eventually anyway
Youth Identity, Democratic Learning: A Purposeful Secundaria

- Youth relationality and democratic yearning
- The breakdown of the mobility narrative and the imperative of powerful situated learning
- Pertinencia para el presente: La pertenencia
- Recovering Dewey and Sáenz: The school as democratic community for youth
- Recovering the ‘transversal themes’ of 2006: gender equity, interculturality, and environment
- Local and global citizenship as rooted cosmopolitanism