

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: WHO GOVERNS EDUCATIONAL CHANGE? THE PARADOXES OF STATE POWER AND THE PURSUIT OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN POST-NEOLIBERAL ECUADOR (2007-2015)

Jorge Grant Baxter, Doctor of Philosophy, 2016

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This study identifies and compares competing policy stories of key actors involved in the Ecuadorian education reform under President Rafael Correa from 2007-2015. By revealing these competing policy stories the study generates insights into the political and technical aspects of education reform in a context where state capacity has been eroded by decades of neoliberal policies.

Since the elections in 2007, President Correa has focused much of his political effort and capital on reconstituting the state's authority and capacity to not only formulate but also implement public policies. The concentration of power combined with a capacity building agenda allowed the Correa government to advance an ambitious comprehensive education reform with substantive results in equity and quality. At the same time the concentration of power has undermined a more inclusive and participatory approach which are essential for deepening and sustaining the reform.

This study underscores both the limits and importance of state control over education; the inevitable conflicts and complexities associated with education reforms that focus

on quality; and the limits and importance of participation in reform. Finally, it examines the analytical benefits of understanding governance, participation and quality as socially constructed concepts that are tied to normative and ideological interests.

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POWER AND THE PURSUIT OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN
POST-NEOLIBERAL ECUADOR (2007-2015)

by

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Dedication

For Adri and Isa, my real teachers.

For the impressive education reformers in Ecuador: I admire their idealism and pragmatism.

For those that challenge and critique: their role in Ecuador is now more critical than ever.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background to the Study

Rafael Correa took office in the year 2006. The twenty-four-year period prior to his rise to power represented a time of increasing economic crisis and political instability in Ecuador. Beginning with President Osvaldo Hurtado in 1981, local conservative administrations adopted a series of neoliberal reforms promoted by the World Bank and IMF, such as fiscal austerity measures, deregulation, privatization, and decentralization. These reforms aimed to curtail state intervention in the economy and social sectors (Minteguiaga, 2012). Despite the original intent of enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of public policies, the cumulative effect of these reforms has undermined both quality and equity in public education.

Government funding for education was cut substantially by neoliberal leaders and reached one of the lowest levels in the region, with 2.5% of GDP investment in the sector. As the state's budget, authority, and capacity to intervene in the education sector diminished, other actors (primarily international organizations) moved in to finance education and social programs in the poorest regions of Ecuador. Central government activities in education were outsourced to civil society organizations and private entities (Minteguiaga, 2012; Mejia Acosta, 2009). Schooling at all levels became increasingly unregulated and privatized. Costs for public schooling shifted to local communities and families in the form of school fees.

Governance capacity, the ability to formulate and effectively implement policy, was severely hampered by incessant conflicts between the Ministry and the Unión Nacional de Educadores (National Teachers Union referred to as UNE) and the lack of internal state bureaucratic capacity and resources. Although UNE played an important role in defending the right to education, the from the Movimiento Popular Democrático (MPD), the Marxist Leninist party (founded in 1978) co-opted it in the early 1980s and used the union's fees to advance their own political agenda aimed at institutionalizing a socialist revolution (Ministry Official, personal communication, January 22, 2013; Mejia Acosta, 2009). High turnover of education ministers, some lasting only a few months, led to little or no policy continuity. As one participant in this study described, “anarchy reigned as policy was made de-facto by different groups outside of government, from private actors to international donors, to the teacher's union (personal communication, March 2, 2013).”

From the 1980s to the early 2000s, international donors contributed to undermining the authority and capacity of the ministry of education. The World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank set up alternative structures outside of government to manage externally funded education reforms and programs, paying consultants far more than a ministry official would earn for the same functions. Most of these donor-supported programs were implemented piecemeal and there was little attempt to build institutional capacity for system-wide reform (Grindle, 2004; personal communication, January 22, 2013; Mejia Acosta, 2009, Minteguiaga, 2014).

In this context, characterized by a lack of governability, that the state has concentrated on reestablishing what the government calls *rectoria* (authority and control) over actors within and outside of the education system. Main educational actors include international organizations and donors, the national teacher's union, prominent civil society groups, social movements, and schools themselves. In the short-term, the re-assertion of state authority and control over education reform has contributed to important gains including increased equity, increased public investment in education, and a reduction in macro-level conflict in the education sector allowing for policy stability. After five years of reform, the UNESCO regional exam on the quality of education (conducted in 1999, 2006, and 2014) released initial results in December 2014. The study showed that Ecuador has had one of the highest gains in improvement in educational quality in the region. The test measures third and sixth grade scores in math, reading, writing, and science in 15 countries in Latin America. Despite these advances, the evidence of this study indicates that there is still much more to be done to sustain and deepen quality.

Research Questions

This study focuses on education politics during the Rafael Correa administration from 2007 to 2015. The study was conducted starting in 2013, six years after Correa assumed the Presidency and implemented the first phase of education reforms. It will address the following research questions:

- 1) How do different groups perceive shifts in governance towards increased state intervention and control in terms of their impact on educational reform processes and outcomes, especially those dealing with quality?

- 2) What are the competing narratives around governance and what do these reveal about the politics of the reform?
- 3) What are the competing narratives around the role of social participation and what do these reveal about the politics of the reform?
- 4) How is quality framed and contested by competing groups and what do these responses reveal about the politics behind the reform?
- 5) What are the implications for educational change and governance theories?

Study Significance

Over the past twenty to thirty years, Latin American countries have made important advances in expanding access to basic education. Most policymakers and citizens agree that simply getting people into school is not enough. They argue that the quality of education matters because it enhances opportunity for individuals and groups and has the potential to create more just and equal societies. That said, most efforts to improve learning outcomes at a system level fail (Fullan, 2007; Levin, 2001).

In Latin America, educational development can be characterized by the phrase “quantity without quality” (PREAL, 2006). Recent international assessments such as the Program for Student International Assessment (PISA) put Latin American countries at the bottom of the list in math, reading, and science when compared to other countries that participated in

regions such as Europe and Asia (PISA 2012; 2014). When Latin American countries are compared with other nations of similar economic development levels, we see a decline in educational performance in Latin America over the past four decades. In 1960, Latin American and East Asian countries had similar secondary education completion rates (6% Latin America and 11% in East Asia). Forty years later, East Asia had an estimated 44% completion rate in basic education while Latin America is at a mere 18% (Vegas & Petrow, 2008).

These lackluster results are not due to effort or knowledge failures. Over the past decade, many countries in the region (Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, Colombia, Costa Rica) have attempted reforms to enhance quality (Grindle, 2004; Minteguiaga, 2014). Investment in education has also risen in Latin America over the past 15 years from an average 2.4% of GDP to around 4.5% of GDP (PREAL, 2006). Policymakers in most countries now have access to supposed global “best practices” and to technical assistance from groups such as UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and other international nongovernmental groups involved in education reform. However, despite access to knowledge, technical assistance, and rising levels of investment, very few countries in Latin America have seen sustainable improvement in learning outcomes. Why?

One possible reason for this poor educational performance in Latin America may have less to do with adopting the “right” package of policies and more to do with broader governance issues. Several decades of neoliberal reforms undermined the capacity of states to effectively implement policy reforms (Rhodes, 1997). Within the education sector, power

was increasingly fragmented and dispersed among non-state actors, including international donor agencies, teacher unions, civil society organizations, and even private companies. In the case of Ecuador, this fragmentation of power went to extremes prior to the arrival of Correa. Many interviewed of those interviewed for this study (across government, international organizations, and civil society) characterized this period as one of “anarchy.” This had long-lasting negative effects on quality and equity in public education in Ecuador.

Since the elections in 2007, President Correa has focused much of his political effort and capital on reconstituting the state’s authority and capacity to not only formulate but also implement public policies. In discourse, Correa’s state-building project is not intended to recreate the welfare state of the 1960s, and is instead inspired by a new set of principles outlined in the constitution of 2009 and positioned as an alternative to neoliberalism, drawing from socialism and Andean indigenous principles of sustainable development called *Buen Vivir*. In practice, social policies can be characterized as mainstream, aligning with global education reforms in many countries focused on enhancing equity and quality. Internal critics from social movements, the National Teacher Union, and activist civil society organizations such as Contrato Social para la Educación have characterized these reforms as centralized, technocratic, and state-centric. These groups also critique the reduction of spaces for dialogue, opposition, and local community and teacher participation. This concentration of power undoubtedly has important consequences for sustaining educational improvement, which this study will explore further.

Despite his fiery populist socialist rhetoric, Correa recognizes that the state achieves legitimacy through its ability to deliver results through reform. This pragmatic approach to policy and development differs from those of other leftist leaders in the region (such as Venezuela under Chavez) who have grown their political power solely through populist politics and handouts. To focus on policy results, Correa has restructured the government bureaucracy in a number of sectors including education in order to ensure that its officials are selected by merit, demonstrate results, and are held accountable for their actions.

Education reforms have focused on equity and quality. Equity reforms include abolishing school fees; increasing public funding for education; school-feeding programs targeting those schools in communities most in need; developing a more equitable and rational system of resource allocation; and school distribution. Quality enhancing reforms include creating a national autonomous entity responsible for evaluation; developing national learning standards; renewing the teaching profession through an obligatory retirement program; new teacher recruitment rules; teacher incentives; and reforming teacher education schools (Cevallos & Bramwell, 2015).

Despite increased confrontations on various fronts, Correa's popularity remains strong at the base after eight years. This is due in large part to the fact that his policies have measurably improved the material welfare (roads, infrastructure, schools, income of poorest segments) of ordinary citizens. Initial results in education reform after the first few years showed important gains in equity but negligible improvements in quality as measured in learning. However, five years of consistent efforts may be paying off. The recent

UNESCO regional test on quality in education (initial results released in Dec. 2014) measures learning on math, reading, writing and science in third and sixth graders and shows Ecuador as having one of the largest gains in quality compared to fourteen other countries in Latin America.

Contributions to Policy and Practice

Over the past twenty years, there has been an increasing recognition by the international development field of the importance of the quality of institutions and governance in development processes (Burki and Perry, 1998; Fukayama, 2011; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Iazzetta, 2007). In response to years of “state cutting” in Latin America, an increasing wave of policy analysts and leaders have questioned some of the basic assumptions of neoliberal policy. They have recognized that it failed to distinguish between state size and state capacity and argued for a renewal of state authority, power and capacity to ensure rule of law, secure rights, and implement public policies (IDB, 2006).

One of the main debates around institution building, democratization and development concerns reform sequencing. Should countries first focus on developing effective institutions or should they focus on democratic aspects such as participation, elections, and accountability? Huntington (1968) argued that modernization processes created new demands for political participation in the emerging classes and that the state was unprepared or unwilling to respond to those demands. This lack of institutional response created political instability that undermined governance, political and economic development. More recently, Fukayama (2014) has updated Huntington’s thesis to argue

that governance in developing countries has been undermined by years of state-cutting and not enough attention to state building.

The broader question, within a paradigm of continued democratization in the 21st century, is: What does state-building entail for different sector reforms? In the case of education, what are the specific state capabilities required for successful reforms focused on quality and how are these potentially enhanced or constrained by the broader governance context? What can we learn from the case of Ecuador that can help other small states in Latin America and the developing world who face similar challenges to improve their educational systems?

Unfortunately, many of these broader debates between state-builders and democracy advocates do not address with more specificity how state capacity requirements might differ according to policy goals and governance context. For example, in a highly fragmented policy context, centralization of power and top-down decisiveness may be needed to adopt less popular reforms that redistribute benefits or change the status quo. However, during certain phases of implementation of complex social reforms, a more horizontal approach where the government fosters increased collaboration with networks may be more conducive to policy adaptability, innovation and learning.

Another way to view this problem is through the lens of public administration. Bourgon (2011) argues that more complex problems today require a mix of old and new capacities from public institutions. Governments still need to focus on the basics of compliance and

performance, but at the same time need to foster innovation, systemic learning, and resilience, which require new forms of governance. Similarly, generating sustainable educational improvement at a system-wide level may require a mix of top-down and bottom-up pressure with support, autonomy, supervision, standards and quality control combined with higher order experimentation, innovation, and learning (Fullan, 2010).

Much of the literature and focus on educational improvement has been conducted in places such as Finland, England, Canada, and the United States. While the studies are valid for these specific countries, the institutional, cultural, and political contexts differ greatly from those in Latin America. The focus of these studies is often technocratic in orientation, focusing on the effectiveness of certain policies or packages of policies. Very few studies look more at the political dynamics behind system-wide efforts to improve education. As a result of this trend, many states in the developing world fall into the trap of emulating or uncritically adopting best practices from the United States or Europe, assuming that the institutional arrangements and trajectories of state and society relations surrounding reform efforts are the same (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; McGinn, 2003).

This study aims to contribute to education policy and practice. The results from this policy study may provide insights into the politics that emerge around quality-enhancing reforms as well as contribute to the broader theories around educational change and governance. Given the significant political and institutional changes over the past 20 years, Ecuador provides a unique laboratory to study the impact of different institutional arrangements on social policy outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

Policy reform is a complex, non-linear process. In part, the inherent complexity, from both research and practice perspectives, has to do with the fact that education reform involves collective choices, collaboration and resistance across a variety of policy actors, many of whom have different beliefs, interests and de facto veto power. In this context, difficult reform decisions, such as addressing quality, tend to be rare. Even if a country embarks on an ambitious educational reform project, it may take years, if not decades, to see the results.

Identifying all of the factors that go into successful educational reforms in each context is not an exact science. Educational institutions, understood as patterns of practice, are situated in unique historical and cultural processes. To understand governance in this context requires historical, interpretive and ethnographical approaches. As Mark Bevir and Rod Rhodes argue in *Politics as Cultural Practice* (2008), the study of politics is largely a matter of recovering the meanings that inform actions. Thus historical, qualitative and interpretive approaches are essential for generating a deeper and richer understanding of the politics behind education reform.

Decentered Approach to Governance and Educational Quality

From a state capacity perspective, governance modes and capabilities must be linked with more specificity to the type of problem society is addressing. The solutions proposed depend on how a problem is framed. From an empiricist and positivist point of view, development problems are objective social facts and can be solved through logical reasoning and rigorous scientific processes that isolate independent and dependent

variables. This proposition is dubious from an interpretive post-positivist position, as social reality (to which educational change belongs) is understood by researchers to be constituted by clashing normative values, interests, and personal experiences.

This study draws from Bevir and Rhodes' (2010) decentered theory of the state and governance to explore various competing narratives of governance, development, the state, and education in Ecuador. A decentered theory of governance requires uncovering the meanings, values and beliefs of diverse social actors. Bevir and Rhodes argue for a bottom-up perspective that acknowledges the diverse practices of situated agents. Individuals are embedded in competing webs of belief and associated traditions. From this perspective, policy and authority are constantly contested, negotiated, and remade.

Policy Narratives

One method for uncovering the meanings and beliefs that drive individuals' practices is through analysis of policy narratives. A narrative, in simple terms, constitutes the stories people tell to make sense of their world (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010). Roe defines a policy narrative as "stories (scenarios and arguments) that underwrite and stabilize the assumptions for policymaking in situations that persist with many unknowns, a high degree of interdependence, and little, if any, agreement" (Roe, 1994, p. 34).

There is a growing literature (both interpretive and positivist) that substantiates the use of narratives for policy analysis (Jones and McBeth, 2010). From an interpretive, post-positive point of view reality, concepts such as the state, governance, and educational quality are not objective social facts but rather social constructions with underlying

ideologies. From this point of view, policy change is perceived as an ongoing power struggle of competing narratives that aim to advance certain meanings over others. A more structural approach argues for the need to apply more scientific methods to policy narrative analysis in order to ensure rigor and to contribute with generalizable findings. (Jones et. al 2003)

Roe in particular advocates for a narrative policy analysis approach with the assumption that many policy problems are characterized by their complexity, polarized views, and uncertainty (Roe, 1994). Roe develops an approach to policy analysis that includes identifying a dominant policy narrative and comparing stories, non-stories, counter-narratives, and meta-narratives. The different stories that policy-makers tell help both to secure and endorse certain assumptions needed to make decisions in complex and uncertain circumstances (Roe, 1994). Roe argues that policy narrative analysis works best when applied to policy problems that are complex and polarized. Education reform focused on quality fits Roe's description of a complex and polarized issue.

The Policy Story

This story begins a decade and a half (1990s and early 2000s) before Rafael Correa took office during what was called the neoliberal period. This was a period of severe economic crisis and political instability. Government funding to education was cut substantially throughout the 1980s and 1990s to just below 2% of GDP. During the 1990s, many other countries in the region began to increase investment in education. For example, in this period Argentina went from 250 USD spent per pupil to 385 USD. Spending levels in

Ecuador remained stagnant throughout the 1980s and 1990s at one of the lowest rates in the region, with 45 USD spent per pupil (CEPAL, 2004).

During this time, governability, or the ability to get things done, was severely hampered by incessant conflicts between the Ministry and the Union, and the lack of internal capacity and resources to formulate and execute on policy. Social conflicts in the education sector led to a high turnover of ministers of education (some lasting only a few months) and little or no policy continuity. Under these conditions, public schooling became increasingly privatized and unregulated. Several respondents in this study described this period as “anarchic,” meaning that anyone, from international organizations to NGOs, de facto made policy (personal communication, January 22, 2013; personal communication, March 3, 2013).

The Plot

The subsequent period was one of aggressive re-concentration of power in the state and executive during Correa’s first five years in office from 2007 to 2012. Within education, the government adopted a long-term agenda for educational change produced by a coalition of educational leaders and groups from civil society, ex-government officials and prominent educational actors. This long-term agenda was approved by citizens during Correa’s first election by referenda and has provided a longer-term horizon by contributing to policy stability and accountability.¹

¹ The agenda included eight key policy goals:

Policy 1: Universalization of early childhood education from 0 to 5 years

Policy 2: Universalization of general basic education from primary to tenth grade

Policy 3: Increase in enrollment for secondary students to achieve at least 75% enrollment in the corresponding age group

Over the next few years, Correa and his education team moved to replace this inherited agenda with a new educational agenda that better aligned with the constitution and new education law. Top educational officials reframed the educational agenda as key ruptures of the status quo in education in Ecuador. The set of key ruptures deal with four major changes and include: 1) recuperating the public dimensions of education; 2) reestablishing the authority and control of the state over public education; 3) inverting the top-down dynamic of educational change and creating systems to encourage locally driven change processes while ensuring top-down standards and evaluation systems focused on learning; 4) professionalizing teaching by increasing salaries, establishing criteria for recruitment, developing professional development opportunities and a career advancement system based on merit and performance.

Within each of these strategic change areas there were several concrete policies and actions taken over the next few years, from 2009-2014. They aimed to advance the various components of the reform. The Ministry of Education was restructured within the first 3 years with the aim of refocusing its resources towards improving the system (with new sub-secretariats focused on quality, on evaluation, and on curriculum). A major curricular reform, national standards, and a semi-autonomous entity responsible for evaluation were

Policy 4: Eradication of illiteracy and to strengthen continuing education for adults

Policy 5: Improvement of physical infrastructure and equipment of the educational institutions

Policy 6: Improvement of quality and equity and implementation of a national system of evaluation and social audit of the educational system

Policy 7: Revalorization of the teaching profession and improvement of initial teacher training, ongoing professional development, work conditions and quality of life

Policy 8: Increase of .5 GDP annually in the education sector with the goal of reaching 6% GDP investment in education per year

established. Teacher salaries tripled while simultaneously actions were taken to professionalize the teaching force, including the establishment of criteria for recruitment and career advancement, a new pre-service national university, and national teacher evaluations. Investment in education has increased each year, rising from 2.5% of GDP in 2006 to just over 5% in 2013. This investment was possible due to a more progressive taxation scheme (despite opposition from wealthy segments of the population); to the rise in petroleum prices, which provided additional government revenues; and to a re-prioritization of government spending in the social sectors.

While many of these concrete policies initially implied a recentralization dynamic (national standards, evaluations, retaking national control over intercultural education system, etc.), the ministry initiated de-concentration of administrative functions approximately three years into the reform. Several steps were taken to support a more locally driven school improvement process. Schools were tasked with developing their own improvement plans to meet the general standards established by the central ministry. In addition, the typical ministry supervisors were replaced with “tutors,” whose role was more to facilitate change than to ensure compliance with centralized commands.

The “Apparent” Moral of the Story

After the first seven years of reform, both internal and external observers perceived meaningful results. Although perceptions differ on the extent of transformation, progress is evident in the fact that the education system is functioning, that teachers receive their paychecks on time, that there is a plan in place with goals and a system to track progress,

and that programs are implemented, albeit imperfectly. Given the previous situation of anarchy described by stakeholders in this study, this progress should be recognized as a significant step forward. In addition, educational reports produced not only by the government but also by autonomous actors, both national and international, show that eliminating barriers to access (enrollment fees, uniform fees, textbook fees) has significantly improved enrollment and retention in public schools throughout the country, and in particular among traditionally marginalized groups, namely indigenous and afro-descendants.

Despite initial gains in equity, there was little evidence in the first few years that actions to enhance quality were producing the desired results. During the time that interviews were conducted for this study (2013 and mid-2014), there was clear resistance to the reform from the Teacher's Union and specific civil society actors such as Contrato Social para la Educación. Not surprisingly, resistance centered on elements dealing with the overall approach to quality that includes standards and evaluation. At the local level, interviews with teachers and school directors from this case highlight a mix of positive and negative perceptions on the reform's value and impact.

In late 2014, the UNESCO Laboratory on Quality Education released preliminary results from their regional assessment on learning in math, reading, writing, and science in third and sixth grade. UNESCO conducted the previous test in 2006 just as Correa was being elected, and this test serves as a limited but useful baseline to measure the impact of reforms on quality over the past eight years. In 2006, Ecuador ranked second-to-last when

compared with other countries in the region. By 2014, Ecuador had risen to position 9 out of 15 countries and showed one of the highest improvements in quality in the region.

While the results above show major progress, the counter-narrative perspective focuses on the impacts of these state-led reforms, perceiving them with skepticism. While there is a general consensus that the reforms have led to greater equity in key indicator areas, there is less consensus around the reforms' impact on quality, particularly given the contested nature of the concept. In addition, there is concern that aggressive re-concentration of power in the state may in the long-term undermine the sustainability and deeper impacts of the reform. Some of these critiques, which will be explored further in subsequent chapters, include:

- a) A state-centric and technocratic approach to reform
- b) An over-centralized model of school management that lacks flexibility and pertinence to diverse community needs throughout Ecuador
- c) A reductionist approach to quality
- d) Diminishing spaces for debate, deliberation, and participation around the reform

A Narrative Approach to the Policy Story

I have intentionally described the above moral of the story as "apparent." This is because, from a policy narrative analysis, the story presented above would be told with different emphasis, nuances, and metaphors by different groups and individuals depending on where they are situated. It is not just a matter of getting the facts straight on what the Correa

administration in Ecuador explicitly set out to do and what they accomplished through education reform. The state, its bureaucracies, the administration, civil society, and social movements are not monolithic entities with unified interests and understandings. In a similar vein, civil society groups active in education in Ecuador are also diverse in their origins, allegiances, values and beliefs.

Evidence from the study indicates that top education officials did not always align or agree with President Correa on how to manage the reform. Street level bureaucrats interviewed for this study varied in their reactions to the reform. While some reviewed the reform positively, others were more critical.

This study aims to explore and disaggregate these differences across actors by comparing competing policy narratives around the reform from top to bottom, looking both inside and out. By revealing these competing policy narratives, the case aims to generate insights into the politics of education reforms that focus on quality.

Chapter 2: Methods

Policy Narrative Analysis

Policy analysis, from constructivist and socio-cultural frameworks, involves unpacking how individuals and groups “make sense” of policy and act upon this understanding in different contexts (Sabatier, 1999). Language and discourse not only help structure meaning in a chaotic world, but can also have constitutive power. Communicative power defines fields of action through words, power, and language (Fischer, 2003).

One approach to revealing how power and influence are wielded in policy is to look at the stories and narratives people tell. Political theorist Deborah Stone (2002) argues that political reasoning is not based on a model of rational-decision making. Politicians and political actors often pursue contradictory objectives and act in paradoxical ways. Stone writes:

Political reasoning is reasoning by metaphor and analogy. It is trying to get others see a situation as one thing rather than as another. It consists of metaphor making and category-making (Stone, 2002, p. 2).

Applying a rational decision-making model cannot fully capture the textures, richness, and complexities inherent in the policy process. Yanow (2014) argues that positivist approaches are based on the assumption that instrumental rationality guides political actors’ intentions, decisions, and statements; in the real world, policymaking often follows

another logic related to the expression of values, identity and meaning. Here she articulates in more detail this distinction:

Interpretive policy analysis shifts the analytic focus in policy studies to meaning-making – its expression as well as its communication – seeing that policies and policy processes may also be avenues or vehicles for human expressiveness (of identity, of meaning). From an interpretive point of view, public policies can be understood as embodying and expressing the stories each polity tells itself and other publics, near and far, about its identity. (Yanow, 2014, p. 7)

This study uses the narrative policy approach (Stone, 1989; Roe, 1994; Hajer, 1995; Fischer, 2003; Jones et. al, 2003). There are various approaches to narrative policy analysis. Stone, Hajer and Fisher exemplify the interpretive approach while Roe and Jones et. al (2013) utilize a more structural approach. The interpretive approach argues that social reality is constructed and attempts to move beyond an objectivist conception of reality (Fischer, 2003). Interpretive approaches argue that the combination of language, discourse and power represent a constitutive force that acts upon the social world. Therefore, an interpretive approach is not just concerned with the explanation of reality, but rather brings different perspectives to bear on an issue, thus promoting policy argumentation and deliberative democracy (Fischer et. al, 2014; Yanow, 2014).

The post-positivist approach to policy narrative analysis has been criticized for lacking scientific standards and the ability to produce generalizable knowledge (Jones et. al, 2003). Sabatier (2000), for instance, argues that anything qualifying as science requires clear

concepts, testable hypotheses, and falsification. Jones et. al (2003) have attempted to address this critique of narrative analysis by embedding empirical elements into their approach.

In the book *Science of Stories*, Jones et. al (2003) present a structural approach to what they call the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). They describe the NPF as applying objective methodological approaches (i.e. science) to subjective social reality (i.e. policy narratives). Structuralists such as Jones et. al (2003) argue that reality consists of scientific facts, which are more stable in nature, as well as contested socially constructed concepts which are unstable and susceptible to changing and competing interpretations. From this ontological position, understanding policy implies systematically tracing “variable meanings that individuals or groups give to processes associated with public policy” (Jones. et. al, 2003).

According to Jones et. al (2003), these meanings are bound by belief systems, ideologies and norms and thus are not random. Furthermore, they identify structures within narratives (characters, plots, settings) that are generalizable (Jones et. al 2003).

From an NPF approach, universal structural elements include the setting, characters, plot, and moral of the story. The *setting* is essentially the background that sets up and frames the policy problem within a context. This consists of less disputed facts that provide context to the issue. *Characters* are portrayed as heroes with the solution to a policy problem, villains as who created and caused the problem, and victims. The *plot* usually includes a

sequential revelation of situations moving from beginning, middle to end. The *moral of the story* includes the final policy solution or lessons learned (Jones et. al, 2003).

Deborah Stone (1989) identifies two main types of narrative stories that are used in politics. The first are “stories of decline.” Here policymakers highlight a crisis and decline associated with past policies and approaches. Empirical data is often used to help bolster the argument. The education white paper “A Nation at Risk,” issued at the height of the Cold War in the United States, could be considered an example of a story of decline. This white paper argued that the decline in educational quality in the United States, as measured in international assessments, posed a national economic threat. The second type of story is one that highlights human helplessness. These set up the rationale for increased social control and intervention of some sort. An example would be the National Development Plan in Ecuador developed in 2009 by the Correa government. The preface of the plan begins by describing centuries of exploitation of underprivileged groups in Ecuador, from colonialism to neoliberalism. The National Development Plan then proceeded to present the current administration’s proposed policies as a set of progressive democratic alternatives to this exploitation.

Various scholars have highlighted the different rhetorical and literary devices that storytellers use to advance their political projects and interests (Stone, 1998; Laclau 2014; Fischer, 2014; Yanow, 2014). These may include metaphors and tactics such as framing and reframing. For example, political actors often frame a situation or institutional setting as “fragmented” in order to rationalize restructuring or reorganization. Ambiguity is also

a commonly used tactic. Ambiguity allows for multiple meanings for different groups in different contexts. Opposition and contrast is another common tactic, particularly when narratives are situated within the discursive approach to meaning (Wagenaar, 2014). Here the identity of an element is shaped through differences and opposition in language use (Saussure, 2000).

Summary of Approach

The approach taken here is situated within the interpretive approach to policy narrative analysis, but draws on some of the NPF elements proposed by Jones et. al (2003). Rather than producing generalizable concepts, the principle aim is to generate useful insights into the politics of education change. Some of these insights may be context specific and relate to the unique historical, cultural, and political contexts in Ecuador while others may aid in understanding the dynamics behind educational change in other settings.

Criteria for Quality and Credibility

To address standards of quality and credibility, this study is guided by criteria identified in the literature on methodological approaches from a critical interpretive tradition. These are included below:

(Critical Interpretive Approach adapted from Pozzebon, 2004)

Criteria	Aspects of Interpretation (Based on Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000)
Authenticity	<p>Interaction with empirical material</p> <p>Was the researcher present? If not, did the researcher have enough interactions with participants to compensate for the lack of direct immersion?</p> <p>Was the researcher genuine in writing up the account?</p>
Plausibility	<p>Sound interpretation</p> <p>Does the history make sense?</p>
Criticality	<p>Critical interpretation</p> <p>Does the text encourage readers to re-examine assumptions that underlie their work? Does it stimulate and examine differences?</p>
Reflexivity	<p>Reflection on text production and language use</p> <p>Does the author reveal his or her role and selection process of the voices/actors represented in the text? (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000).</p>

Yanow (2014) describes interpretive inquiry as not necessarily having a singular starting point. The process of inquiry is organic, iterative and akin to what Yanow (2014) describes as a “circle-spiral.” In this study, the research questions and conceptual frame evolved and were refined as I immersed myself further in the process of data collection and analysis. The research cycle (not necessarily in a linear order) covered the following:

- 1) Data collection to identify various artifacts that serve to communicate the policy’s meaning:
 - a. Formal official documents, speeches, blogs made by various political actors.
 - b. Data from semi-structured interviews.
 - c. Studies published by various actors on the reform.
- 2) Identified policy communities:
 - a. I identified the policy communities that share basic understandings and beliefs as they emerged around the reform. The first policy community consisted of government reformers (high-level elite decision-makers) and the second consisted of prominent opposition groups (civil society actors, union representatives, and local school community actors, specifically school directors and teachers).
- 3) Writing up the account:
 - a. I reviewed the material (interviews, official policy documents, newsprint,

etc.) to reconstruct the competing narratives across policy communities. The narratives emerged around those structural elements listed above in the NPF framework (setting, characters, heroes and villains, plot, moral of the story).

- b. I aimed for authenticity as I wrote up the account. It was inevitable that my own voice and background knowledge played a part in the construction of the narratives. However, I try to compensate by sharing the participants' own words and interpretations as much as possible and aimed for "fairness," or a balance of stakeholder views and voices (Cresswell, 1998). I also shared the evolving transcript with key informants to add their reactions and alternative explanations to my interpretations.

4) Critical and reflective analysis:

- a. The analysis identifies the rhetorical tactics used by the various political actors to advance their ideas and values, including framing and reframing strategies, the use of metaphors, oppositions, ambiguity and floating signifiers, among others.
- b. The final analysis also situates and evaluates these competing narratives in historical and theoretical perspectives, with a particular focus on underlying ideologies and power.

5) Reflexivity and Reciprocity

- a. The final dissertation manuscript will be shared with those who participated in the study with the hope that it will contribute to further reflection and

praxis of those involved in education reform in Ecuador in the future.

Sample Selection

Access to elite decision-makers within and outside the Ministry of Education was a key factor in my decision to study Ecuador's education reform, and my personal career experience made it possible for me to pursue this project. From 2004-2009, I worked as an education specialist at the Organization of American States (OAS). In that capacity, I facilitated international cooperation between ministries of education throughout the region and developed relationships with high-level officials in several countries, including Ecuador. I helped organize a Ministerial Meeting in Ecuador in 2009 and interacted personally with Correa's first education minister, vice minister and executive team. While at the OAS, I also built relationships with individuals in international organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, the Inter-American Development Bank, and PREAL.

I found most of these officials were eager to share their experiences with the reform. Despite my personal relationships, obtaining access was slow and challenging given the hectic schedules of the Minister and her team. It took over two years of intermittent email exchanges and face-to-face meetings with the Minister of Education for me to conduct the necessary interviews for this project. On one occasion, I traveled from New York City for eighteen hours to Paramaribo, Suriname, where the Minister of Education of Ecuador was meeting with other regional Ministers of Education. After the long journey, I met with Minister for 3 minutes to reiterate my interest in interviewing her and her staff. On a different occasion, I worked my way into a closed internal meeting at the headquarters of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in Washington D.C., where the Minister and

her team were meeting with various officials. I again reiterated my interest in interviewing officials in Ecuador and was finally able to coordinate my first interviews.

These connections and previous experiences provided me with insider knowledge and social capital that facilitated access and interactions. I was aware that my background likely influenced how various stakeholders perceived and interacted with me. I carefully assessed each situation and responded accordingly. In some instances, I downplayed certain past affiliations; in other instances, I used them to gain access. I also was aware that links to international organizations such as the IDB likely provided me with initial credibility that opened up subsequent opportunities with the Ministry. By the time I conducted my fieldwork and interviews, I was no longer with the OAS and was working at the Latin American division of Sesame Workshop, an international non-profit organization that uses the media to improve children's access to education in marginalized areas around the world.

Once the Minister signaled her interest and willingness to “share the Ministry's story,” other top-level officials opened up and were generous with their time. One official in particular was generous with her time and became a key informant. She helped confirm certain basic assumptions and connected me to other participants both within government and in the opposition. Initial contact was made via email, over the phone, and via Skype. These initial interviews helped provide context and to supplement the official documents and statements. Over the next year, I had the opportunity to travel twice to Ecuador, where I interviewed various individuals inside and outside of government in person. A few

respondents asked for anonymity but the majority were not concerned with being identified.

There are other compelling reasons beyond access to key decision makers for choosing to study the politics of education reform in Ecuador:

- 1) Ecuador has undergone significant political change over the past twenty years, with different institutional arrangements and transformations in the state (authoritarian military rule with a welfare orientation in the 1970s, neoliberal regimes in the 1980s and 1990s, a centralized socialist state under Correa starting in 2007).
- 2) Under Correa, there have been substantial education reform efforts. These efforts generated highly charged policy conflicts and debates, which are useful for understanding the education politics behind reform.
- 3) Results from the 2015 TERCE examination, which evaluates quality in education in Latin America, show Ecuador as having one of the highest gains in educational quality in the region over the past eight years.

Participants

I developed an initial list of key stakeholders based on a review of historical documents around the reform. I generated a broader list of stakeholders to interview and survey using a snowball sampling technique (Cresswell 1998). I asked key informants within and outside of the Ministry to review the list of stakeholders to ascertain its representativeness and make further suggestions. Before conducting my fieldwork, I secured Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval on January 15, 2013. All participants signed informed consent forms

prior to interviews. All interviews were conducted in Spanish. I am fluent in both Spanish and English, and all interview and primary document citation translations are my own.

Various key individuals within and outside of government were keen to help and ensure that I had the opportunity to speak with certain individuals and groups. This curiosity about my research on the part of a few individuals and their assistance to set up subsequent meetings could indicate a vested interest in supporting a certain side of the story. However, I felt that most of those interviewed were genuinely committed to educational improvement in Ecuador, and while they may have had different values and understandings on the best way to achieve these goals, they were also open to facilitating my access to the other side of the story. To ensure the quality of my argument, I followed the research guidelines of Merriam (1991) and continued to visit sites, analyze documents and to interview individuals until saturation and redundancy were achieved.

This study includes semi-structured interviews with 24 individual participants and 2 high-level ministerial teams. These include:

2 Ministers of Education from the Correa period;

2 Vice-ministers of Education from before and during the Correa period;

4 Sub-secretaries of Education (three from the Correa period and one from the previous administration of Alfredo Palacio);

2 high-level Ministerial teams (one focused on educational standards and the other team on the traveling cabinet);

- 2 active teacher union leader members (President of the National Teacher Union (UNE) and UNE's national representative for indigenous communities);
- 4 representatives from prominent international organizations (UNICEF, UNESCO, Care, and the German Cooperation);
- 4 representatives from prominent and active civil society organizations in the educational space (Contrato Social, Grupo Faro, Educiudadania, and PREAL);
- 1 academic with expertise in education;
- 3 school directors (Two rural school directors and one urban director);
- 2 school teachers (one from an urban and the other from a rural school).

Participants were encouraged to first situate themselves and their views within their own personal histories, institutional, or other contexts. In most interviews, initial conversation was more general and aimed to elicit a broad assessment of educational reform efforts and impacts during Rafael Correa's time as president. Participants were then asked six questions dealing with normative aspects and perceived empirical aspects of governance, participation, quality and the interactions between these elements in the context of Ecuador's reforms. Responses from the participants elicited further questions and conversations around certain concepts, themes, and events. Most interviews lasted between 1 hour and 1.5 hours. With a few key informants, I conducted several follow-up interviews, some more structured than others. In addition to interviews, the study draws on official policy texts, policy debates around the reform in the media, as well as secondary studies on education reform in Ecuador during this period.

Limitations

Any methodological approach has limitations, some of which the author of the study may be aware and others less so. Each research tradition has its own set of criteria for credibility and quality. From a critical interpretive perspective, there are certain methodological limitations or weaknesses to this study.

- 1) Observation: The study is based on an analysis of the stories told by various stakeholders, from ministers to teachers about the policy reforms. However, the data collected did not include thick description and observations of practices in bureaucracies, schools, classrooms or communities.

It is well documented that policymakers may say one thing and actually do another, making confirming narrative fidelity critical. This will be addressed to some extent by triangulating what policymakers say with what has been reported to have actually happened in independent reports and accounts from other sources (documents, interviews, press, etc.).

- 2) National elite actor skew: The interviews were predominately with policy elites, both within government and outside among representatives of civil society, international organizations and the Teacher's Union. I did have the opportunity to interview three school directors and two teachers who were attending a seminar in Quito. These individuals were from different parts of the country, but do not represent a greater swath of the diversity characteristic of Ecuador (for example from Amazon region).

3) Selective Memory: Another major limitation is the retrospective nature of the study. Several years elapsed after some of the initial reform events and the stories told by the participants. Memories of events and key issues are likely to be obscured by time and selective.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Introduction

Education policy analysis is often conducted without an explicit theory of power. This is strange given that politics is, at its core, about power. Recasting educational policy and reform as a social construction opens up a whole new set of possibilities for understanding the power dynamics behind policy reform.

Positivist research and its epistemological position on reality starts with the assumption that clear understanding requires the separation of facts from values and a distinction of phenomena from their context. Positivist approaches reduce the complexity of politics and policymaking to a set of independent and dependent variables, and this process can lead to unsatisfactory descriptions of what and why something happens in real world conditions. Some comparative education scholars have claimed that more rigorous and randomized trial research is needed in the field of education (Chabbott, 2014).

Unfortunately, calls for more scientific research are based on the assumption that educational processes are predictable recurring patterns across diverse cultural, historical, and other contexts. They also assume that many of the goals of learning across cultures and groups are the same (McCowan, 2010). Finally, there are important methodological weaknesses involved in isolating possible intervening factors in complex social processes, which by their nature are fluid and contingent on unique historical and cultural subjectivities. This complexity makes reliable statistical controls

in RCTs and regression analysis problematic (Klees and Edwards, 2015). In sum, given that pedagogy and learning are deeply embedded in unique webs of meaning and beliefs, and given that politics itself is a form of expression and meaning-making, an interpretive approach is best suited for understanding the links between power, language, knowledge, and education.

The literature review that follows summarizes approaches to policy analysis that:

- 1) Draw on social constructivist, critical and interpretive approaches.
- 2) Focus on how power manifests itself through educational discourses.
- 3) View interpretive narrative policy analysis as a method to promote a more deliberative form of policymaking.

These three criteria are developed below in more detail to inform the subsequent approach to this study's analysis.

Power, Ideology, and Practice

More broadly, this study deals with the ways in which power and authority are structured and addresses the possible impacts of these different organizational arrangements on policy discourses relating to educational governance, participation and quality. The line of inquiry taken in this study draws loosely on various elements of social constructivist and critical theories that focus on the intersections of language, discourse, social institutions and power.

Critical theorists view education as both a source of cultural reproduction as well as a potential catalyst for social change. The origins of critical theory are diverse and extend back all the way to Plato. The Frankfurt School, founded in the early 1920s, is often cited as one of the key modern sources of critical theory (Bronner, 2011). Critical theorists focus on the role of ideology in supporting the interests of the dominant classes. Ideology, transmitted through socialization processes and institutions such as education, serves to promote certain sets of social, economic, and political interests and values over others. For instance, a critical theorist might look at the role of ideology in promoting capitalism over socialism.

For critical theorists, social conditions give rise to ideas and problems that shape practice. Thus the methodological focus of critical theorist is to highlight the contexts from which practices emerge. An orientation towards practice leads to the rejection of the idea that facts and values are separate, as practice is constituted through an amalgam of values, beliefs, and socially constructed knowledge. The aim of critical theorists is to “understand a fact within a value-laden context where it assumes meaning” (Bronner, 2011, p. 25).

Discourse and Governance Technologies

Several critical theorists (Gramsci, Foucault, Habermas, Laclau) emphasize the hidden aspects of power and hegemony in language and discourse. In essence, language and discourse,² work to legitimize certain forms of knowledge over others, shaping our

² Discourse is understood here as repeated patterns of social practice (not just texts) that shape what can be thought and said.

understandings of reality, imagination and social practices. Some discourses constrain dissent and difference while others enable diversity and new ideas.

Antonio Gramsci put forth several concepts that likely inspired the work of subsequent critical theorists. Perhaps the most influential of Gramsci's concepts is hegemony, or the process by which ideology is used as social control. In most modern societies, governors cannot depend solely on direct coercion to control groups and mediate conflicts. Consent must be acquired through other indirect and invisible means, namely ideology and discourse. Certain discourses contain knowledge claims framed as "truths." Once these discourses are accepted, they are considered "common sense," or as unquestioned knowledge (Stromquist, 2014).

Gramsci's work on hegemony and ideology had a strong influence on the work of Foucault. The idea of "normalizing" discourses became an important concept for critical and interpretive policy analysis. Normalization is the process via which certain discourses are internalized and thus become "normal" and uncontested. The process of normalization obscures the origins of a discourse, thus becoming an effective means of social control. Once discourses are internalized, subjects self-regulate their thoughts and behaviors. Thus, discourses can be seen as governance technologies (Foucault, 1995). Discourses are one of the ways in which certain ideas are institutionalized or stabilized. By challenging normalized discourses through the creation and circulation of counter-discourses, individuals and groups can "destabilize" dominant structures that shape social relations (Stromquist, 2014).

Theories on the Construction and Circulation of Educational Discourses

In addition to critical theory, world culture theory also places emphasis on the normative and discursive aspects of policymaking. Ramirez, Boli, Meyer (1985), and more recently Chabott (2015), focus on the construction and global circulation of policy discourses around schooling. The whole notion of the modern school, its structure around time, levels, rows, evaluation and grades, and tracking is based on a set of logics and assumptions around what constitutes modernity, progress, and knowledge. The modern model of schooling in its various characteristics is said to have emerged out of Prussia in the 1800s as a military state bureaucratic imperative. However, one could argue that the idea of the modern school actually emerged out of longer-term cultural processes in the Judeo-Christian tradition. This tradition privileged a secular, scientific and rationalist discourse (Milojevic, 2005; Chabbot, 2015). These ideas took hold in Europe first during the Renaissance and with more force during the Age of Enlightenment, where rationalist critiques of previous social doctrines prevailed (Chabbot, 2015).

The essential structures of the modern school have been remarkably persistent despite significant social and technological changes. The modern school model has been adopted in most countries around the world through processes of institutional isomorphism (Ramirez, Boli, Meyer, 1985; Chabott, 2015). Isomorphism has been defined as the process of increasing institutional conformity. It occurs due to various factors including global supply and demand pressures, country and individuals mimicking each other, and through professionals who establish “best practices or

norms” (Chabott, 2015). As international organizations emerged and interacted with one another in the latter half of the 20th century, a world culture was formed based on Western Enlightenment norms such as rationality, individualism, and professionalism. Chabott (2015) describes the impact of this world culture on education policymaking:

This world culture produces and diffuses models of reality, blueprints, identities, and scripts that circumscribe the legitimate activities of individuals, organizations, and nation-states, privileging those that conform to the Western Enlightenment notion of individual human rights and that claim science as the basis for rational decision-making (Chabott, 2015, p. 393).

The origins of mass schooling emerge from the need to legitimize the structure of society. In the case where there was a strong centralized State, this legitimating process was focused on the constructing the ideal individual citizen with allegiance to the state and appropriate behaviors associated with the model citizen. At the same time, this political project enhanced the legitimacy of the state as the protector of citizen welfare. It achieved this through the universal claim that mass public education was a source of equality and opportunity. Underlying this symbolic legitimation act, the State’s real intention was to take control and authority over children and their socialization processes from other institutions, such as the Church. In essence, the political project of mass schooling and its diffusion across the world can be explained in part by secular state formation and the need for legitimacy, which was achieved by a discourse of modernity. The simplified discursive rationale is as follows: In order for states or

societies to be modern they should have educated citizens. In order to provide all citizens with mass education, you need a strong state. More recently, concerns with educational quality and associated concepts such as standards and evaluation, situated in a world culture perspective, can be interpreted as a new form of legitimization activity. The convergence of policy prescriptions to address quality matches the isomorphic tendency described in previous decades with the diffusion of mass schooling.

Carney et. al (2012) critique world culture theory for its underlying emphasis on change through consensus as opposed to more coercive processes associated with power. They also point to its lack of rigor in describing local national variation in education systems based on the predominant use of comparable macro-level data. Other researchers, such as anthropologists of education, have critiqued world culture theory and instead emphasize increasing divergence, local variation and individuals who subvert, re-signify, contest global policy according to their own local meanings (Anderson- Levitt, 2003).

The policy-borrowing literature provides a similar explanation, looking again at symbolic legitimation. As a certain set of policy reform ideas gains currency, often due to the fact that powerful organizations or individuals support them, they circulate globally and are adopted locally by policy makers. Steiner-Khamsi (2014) argues that most policymakers adopt outside ideas through a process of “externalization”, whereby during moments of heightened contestation, policymakers make references to other external systems and international standards in education in order to certify their own

policy choices. Concepts such as “education for the 21st century” serve as empty vessels that are adopted and then filled with local meanings. This policy borrowing process, rhetorical or real, often facilitates external support and funding. From this perspective, globalization is redefined not as a top-down global imposition but rather as a bottom-up and sideways certification tactic:

In short, globalization is not an external force, but rather a domestically induced rhetoric that is mobilized at particular moments of protracted policy conflict to generate reform pressure and build policy coalitions (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014, p. 157).

Policy Analysis

The first wave of modern policy analysis (1960s and 1970s) aimed to provide information to rational bureaucratic decision-makers. Policy analysis was conceptualized as a technocratic problem-solving process whereby a government (understood as a unitary actor) evaluates various policy options based on available facts. Values were separated out from facts and the ultimate goal was to create generalizable knowledge independent of context. In this model, policy was understood primarily from a formal government decision-maker’s point of view and as a staged process of problem identification, policy solution generation, implementation, and evaluation. One of the most influential models from this wave is the Stages Heuristic Model developed by Jones (1970). It divided the policy process up into discrete stages including agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation.

Critics of the first wave of policy analysis argued that it is had a top-down bias and was overly simplistic (Sabatier, 1999). In real policy-making, this rational linear cycle is not nearly as neat (Grindle, 2003). In general, the first wave of policy analysis provided very little “usable knowledge” (Fischer et. al, 2014). From this critique, a new field emerged to focus on research utilization (Weiss, 1977; McGinn and Reimers, 1997).

The concerns have been motivated by evidence that mass production of research information has not generated significant patterns of decision-making. The quality of policy choices that have been made is not commensurate with the volume of research findings available (McGinn and Reimers, 1997, p. xiv).

The second wave of policy analysis focused on actual implementation and was informed primarily by technical concerns over how to reduce the gap between formal official policy statements in documents and actual practice in the field. Pressman and Wildasky’s seminal work on policy implementation (1984) refocused attention away from policymakers’ intentions towards thinking about the design of policy and the levers of change available. This second wave still conceived of policy as formulated by leaders within the top-levels of bureaucracy and implemented by teachers and administrators at the local level. The task of analysts was to identify the factors that constrain or facilitate implementation. One method that attempted to blend both top-down and bottom-up concepts of policy was Elmore’s backward mapping. According to Elmore, closing the implementation gap was essentially about clarifying goals; ensuring a plan and performance standards at all levels; developing a process to measure performance; and establishing sanctions for those that do not meet the standard (Elmore, 1978).

The third wave of policy analysis was influenced by work done around organizational change and public choice theory, such as neo-institutionalism. Here, research on effective organizations and institutions focused on rules; norms within institutional settings that provided incentives and sanctions; and carrots and sticks that shaped the behavior of policy actors at the macro and micro levels. Policy analysis from this perspective is heavily influenced by neo-classical economics and assumptions that assume that individuals are self-interested rational actors that seek to maximize utility. Here the focus of analysis is on situated agents who make decisions based on imperfect information. Those at the top of the bureaucracy in particular frequently lack relevant information on what is needed or occurring at the local level. Some of the techniques employed by this tradition include cost-benefit analysis, game theory, veto theories, and bargaining models (March and Olson, 1989; Meyer and Rowan, 2006; North, 1990; Ostrom et. al, 2002).

Finally, alternative approaches inspired by new sociologies and critical theory emerged parallel to the three waves discussed above. From these alternative perspectives, problems of policy could only be understood from the various actors' perspectives on the ground, and in particular from the point of view of traditionally marginalized populations. Formal policy was redefined as normative discourse, and official authorized statements of what should happen (Levinson et. al. 2009). From this perspective, the study of policy requires reframing it as social practice.

Levinson et. al. (2009) reframe the unit of policy analysis as the “practice of power.” Their approach involves asking two fundamental questions: Who can do policy? And what can policy do? From this perspective formal policy extends and codifies the interests of those in power. It often takes the form of a series of statements of what should be done and is accompanied by rewards and punishments. Thus Levinson et. al. argue that policy: (a) defines reality; (b) orders behavior; and sometimes (c) allocates resources accordingly. Studying policy as a “practice of power” implies mapping it in its different forms, both visible and hidden. Gaventa (2006) delineates three forms of power which include:

Visible: This includes observable decision-making and definable aspects of political power, institutions, structures, procedures, and authorities.

Hidden: This form of power centers on agenda setting and structuring participation to pre-determine who participates in decision-making and who and what is excluded.

Invisible: This deals with the ideological and psychological aspects of power and hegemony. Those with this power can shape people’s beliefs about what is possible; their place in the world and sense of identity; accepting the status quo; what is safe and acceptable, etc.

In sum, the approach to studying policy is determined by how policy is defined and understood. From the social constructivist and critical theory perspective adopted in this study, policy is understood as the practice of power and can be defined as normative

discourse. Policy is constructed and institutionalized in order to legitimate certain governance practices. To study policy from this perspective is to conduct a genealogy of power. This involves tracing the “cultural histories of discourses that inform current practices to reveal their contingency, and undermine any suggestion of their being neutral, humanitarian, or scientific” (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010, p. 67).

Governance

The capacity of public institutions to manage or respond to change is arguably the central problem of education reform in much of the developing world, including Latin America. Managing educational reform within the context of globalization implies looking at governance at various levels (community, national, international) and examining the various actors that engage and attempt to influence the direction and substance of decision-making around education reform. Governance theories shed light on different organizational arrangements (hierarchies, networks, market) and the various policy instruments (soft and hard) available to leaders who aim to exert their control, authority and direction over reform agendas and trajectories.

Governance has multiple meanings and uses, but in this study governance refers to the changing boundaries between public, private and voluntary sectors (Rhodes, 2012) and in particular the changing role of the state since the 1980s (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010). In modern societies, collective choices must be made around many different types of issues, including education. Governance theory emphasizes three main ways in which societies organize to make collective decisions: hierarchy, markets and networks.

The welfare state of the mid 20th century epitomizes a hierarchical mode of governance. This mode of governance is state-centric, bureaucratic, top-down and focused primarily on command and control. Compliance is achieved through official laws and rules, systems of control and enforcement, and the distribution of resources. Within education systems in developing countries this continues to be the dominant mode of governance. Hierarchical governance has been instrumental in advancing educational development in terms of the expansion of educational access to all citizens. Research over the past few decades has shown that centralized planning and control may be more appropriate for ensuring equity across an education system (Carnoy, 2007). Such research conclusions are drawn when compared to decentralized or market approaches.

Since the late 1970s, the role of the state as a centralized hierarchical system of planning and policymaking has been challenged by a group of reform efforts that aim to increase efficiency and effectiveness within the state. These reform efforts are underpinned by neoliberal ideology. The core belief of neoliberals is that markets (as opposed to states and bureaucracies) are the most effective and efficient mechanisms for resolving collective problems and allocating resources, both public and private. New Public Management (NPM), underpinned by neoliberal ideology, focuses on the introduction of quasi-markets and competition into public service delivery, primarily through outsourcing of program delivery to private and civil society actors. NPM also focuses on performance and accountability of public institutions, introducing outcome-based and user satisfaction orientation (Tolofari, 2005; Spreen, 2001).

More broadly, the application of neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s (deregulation, structural adjustment, fiscal austerity, decentralization, privatization) weakened states' control over social actors and increased fragmentation in political and social arenas. An unintended consequence of neoliberal policies was the growth social movements and third sector organizations, or groups outside of government. In part, this growth can be seen as a response from social actors to defend basic political, civic and social rights that were under attack by neoliberal policies. On the other hand, policy networks or groups of organizations, such as lobby and interest groups, multiplied and grew in strength under neoliberalism as a consequence of an increasingly fragmented state and vacuum of power. During this period, scholars emphasized a new form of social organization, called network governance (Ball and Juneman, 2012; Sorenson and Torfing, 2007). Network governance refers to more organic informal and spontaneous collaboration between a large number of interdependent social organizations. Compliance in network governance is achieved through trust and affiliation. Network governance is perceived increasingly as an alternative to other forms of governance to address so called "wicked problems" that emerge in a context of increasing complexity and uncertainty (Bourgon, 2011).

Some governance scholars have argued that the increasing diffusion of political power brought about by globalization and neoliberalism did not necessarily lead to a "hollowing out of the state," but rather to a shift in how states exert their influence and control (Peters and Pierre, 2000). These scholars argued that a new "metagovernance" emerged in states that shifted from direct forms of coercion and policy instruments to

“govern through governance,” steering social actors in more indirect forms through regulatory powers and policy networks to develop policy agendas, co-produce and implement policy, and increase legitimacy.

All three forms of governance (hierarchy, market, network) coexist and overlap. In some cases, new forms of governance are perceived to emerge. These are termed heterarchies, or the combination of hierarchy and networks (Ball and Junemann, 2012). We also see the emergence of the “new regulatory state,” which in its polycentric and decentered nature is distinct from the “old” centered and hierarchical state (Levi-Faur and Gilad, 2004). Certain discourses associated with one form of governance may predominate during periods with important consequences on policy. From a historical perspective, state-centric hierarchy governance discourse predominated from the 1950s to the 1970s with the rise of the welfare state and modernization discourses. Starting in the early 1980s, a market governance discourse emerged to dominate policy and planning for the next twenty years. In the early 2000s, network governance gained in currency among policy makers and scholars. Most recently, there has been a return of attention to the importance of state-building and institutional capacity with the perceived failure of democracy promotion and development efforts in certain regions of the world such as the Middle East, Africa and Haiti for example (Collier, 2007; Fukayama, 2004).

The Stateless State

This study borrows from Bevir and Rhodes approach (2010) that redefines the State not as a sovereign authority, but as a series of contingent and unstable cultural practices.

These cultural practices can be studied by looking at the diverse meanings and practices of actors, which are based on their beliefs and traditions. As Bevir and Rhodes (2010) argue, the state is really stateless, and so “stateness” is a continual social construction. Stateness is created, sustained and modified by individuals in their discourse and practice. Stateness is also contested by different individuals and policy communities with competing traditions and beliefs. Traditions are inherited webs of beliefs that shape practice by limiting what is believed to be possible and desirable or not. Thus, individuals are not necessarily autonomous, but rather have situated agency. Tradition bumps up against competing beliefs that challenge traditions. This creates what Bevir and Rhodes refer to as “dilemmas.” These ongoing dialectical processes occur at micro and macro levels and reshape practice. Studying the state then involves tracing how individuals within webs of tradition confront dilemmas in their daily practice. Similarly, the study of governance practices involves understanding these practices as “contingent constructions of actors inspired by competing webs of beliefs and traditions” (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010, p. 124).

Civil Society

Important to governance theories is the concept of civil society actors and their perceived role in policy. In more general terms, the function of civil society is “to expand social equality and liberty” and serve as a force for “restructuring and democratizing of state institutions” (Calhoun paraphrasing Keane, 1992, p. 454). Social equality and liberty are expanded through marginalized groups’ demands for participation in offensive decision-making and simultaneously through defensive actions aimed at maintaining autonomy of civil society from the coercive tendencies of

the state and market. Democratization of state institutions occurs through both civil society's public sphere function (independence, critique, dissent, opposition) and its public space function (interdependence, collaboration, consensus building, deliberation).

Iris Young (1999) distinguishes civil society from both state and the market. Civil society is relatively autonomous from both the state and the market and consists of associations that are voluntary and not for profit. In civil society, associations are formed through "communicative interaction" while state associations come into being through "authorized power" and private associations through the medium of money. Young makes an important distinction between associations in civil society, delineating three types: private, civic, and political. Private associations tend to be inward looking and particularistic, organized for members only. Examples would include activities of religious groups, private clubs, and families. Civic associations are outward in their orientation, with activities aimed toward the larger community. They are voluntary and sustain themselves through donations and tend to be more inclusive. Some civic organizations take on political issues that can be partisan, such as environmental issues or those related to sexual and reproductive rights. For this reason, Young terms them "proto-political." Political association (parties, lobbyists, special interest groups, etc.) encompasses activities that aim to make political claims regarding social arrangements, policy, and government and private sector accountability. One single organization may engage in private, civic and political activities. Thus, from an analytical perspective it makes sense to view civil society in process terms instead of separate institutions,

spaces, or spheres. Finally, civil society, according to Young, has two main functions:

- 1) To promote self-organization, which cultivates skill development, identity and well-being;
- 2) To promote public spheres, where ideas, images, criticism, dissent and new social practices emerge.

In the context of democracy, civil society has traditionally exerted influence over political decisions through indirect means in public spheres (Habermas, 1989). In his work “Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,” Habermas (1989) defines the public sphere as “social spaces where individuals gathered to discuss their common public affairs and to organize against arbitrary and oppressive forms of social and public power” (Kellner, 2014, p. 264). These discussions come together in the formation of public opinion, which serves as a potential counter-weight to the state and officials through the ability to delegitimize and deploy social sanctions.

The work of critical and feminist theorists such as Nelly Stromquist (1993) and Nancy Fraser (1990) challenge the Habermas concept of a hegemonic single public sphere and argue that there are many types of publics within modern democratic and capitalist societies, including “subaltern counter publics.” Stromquist views democracy as a negotiated process that cannot be understood solely at the macro-level in terms of political institutions and formal rules and argues that it must also include analysis at the micro-level. This means examining politics of power in homes, schools, and other private spaces where authoritarian or democratic practices are cultivated and norms are internalized. Fraser’s work highlights how power unevenly distributed among social

groups leads to the exclusion of certain groups from the public sphere. Fraser criticizes public sphere theory's emphasis on "talk" and "rhetoric" as opposed to more direct participation of marginalized groups in decision-making. According to Fraser, the defensive and self-organizing function of counter-publics is to generate "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 1997, p. 81).

Participation in Policy Discourses

The notion that citizen participation is important for policymaking and development emerged several decades ago. Like many ideas, it has been recycled and recast in different moments with different rationales and emphasis. Cesar Montufar (2004) argues that participation in development discourse since the mid-1960s has had three moments: 1) Participation seen as a way to mobilize political and material resources for the fight against poverty; 2) Participation as decentralization or a means to close the gap between state bureaucracies and the poor; 3) Participation as a vehicle for learning and societal empowerment. This study adds a fourth moment linked to Montufar's third moment of empowerment, expanding it to include participation as a means and end for social justice. Participation as a means and end for social justice differs from the first three moments outlined above in that it emerged primarily bottom-up and from social movements and civil society. Top-down influence was exerted by external international actors, such as global civil society, social movements, and rights-based movements. Participation as "empowerment" has been co-opted by international organizations and governments and recast in terms such as "partnerships" (Torres, 2006).

With regards to the first moment, participation of civil society and the private sector is linked directly to political modernization and national development. The assumption was that inclusion of civil society and the private sector in development and policymaking would bring more and different types of resources to development. These resources would be not only financial, but also human and technical. Civil society was seen to have certain comparative advantages over government. It is valuable because of its lack of bureaucracy, greater flexibility to change as circumstances evolve, and proximity to rural and marginalized communities where poverty reduction programs were focused. Organizations could be enlisted to help deliver key services to communities where the government had no reach or infrastructure.

The second moment (decentralization and social participation) emphasizes the need to close the gap between bureaucracies and local needs. By including community organizations and NGOs in policy and program development, the “voice” and demands of the poor could be addressed in government plans and programs. Civil society and private sector participation would lead not only to more “democracy,” but also to increased efficiency, accountability and transparency. Transparency related interfaces emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, with increasing emphasis on “new public management” and efficiency reforms promoted by international organizations (Larbi, 1999). Within education, NPM principles were applied in numerous reforms around the world (Spren, 2004).

Transparency refers primarily to the extent that stakeholders can understand the basis on which government resources are allocated and used as well as how public decisions are made. Transparency and accountability in education became increasingly important in the 1980s and 1990s in the context of reductions in public spending. The education sector represents one of the largest public expenditures, consuming on average 10% to 20 % of total budgets and employing more than any other sector (UNESCO, 2005). Within education systems in Latin America, there has been a lack of institutionalized transparency mechanisms. In particular, this includes a lack of clear norms and procedures for decision-making, adequate systems of information and reporting, and overall low salaries for teachers and public officials. This failure in institutionalized accountability mechanisms, combined with a strong tradition of clientelism and patronage, has facilitated corruption in many contexts. Decentralization and social participation are seen as mechanisms that can inject competition and “voice” into the public provision of services, thus promoting increased transparency and accountability. International donors, primarily the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, promoted social participation and decentralization as part of loan conditionality and structural adjustment reforms during the 1980s and 1990s. Countries that adopted these education reforms include Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Bolivia, Argentina, Mexico and Nicaragua (Digropello, 1999).

Both decentralization and social participation reforms in education center around the establishment of decision-making bodies at different levels of the system. These include national education commissions, state and municipal level boards, school

councils, and mandated participation from different groups such as teachers, parents, students, community leaders, and officials from the ministry. Levels of decentralization vary from country to country. Within countries, there is typically further variation in terms of the different functions that have been decentralized, from finance, to governance, to curriculum. In some cases, such as in Nicaragua and Argentina, reforms involved decentralization to the local level, where schools became “autonomous” (King et. al, 1999). While in discourse many of these reforms have been framed as democratic in practice, they have failed in many contexts to extend real authority, resources, and decision-making power to local groups and civil society actors (Fiske, 1996). In many cases, scholars have argued that the real aim of these reforms has been to shift the financial burden of education to local communities, to fragment the collective bargaining power of teacher unions, and in some contexts to regain “political legitimacy” without handing over real control (Tatto, 1999; Cepal, 1998). Over time, results have shown that these reforms did not necessarily contribute to enhanced educational quality. In many cases, they actually had a negative impact on equity by enhancing the probability of local elite capture.

The third moment for civil society participation emphasizes the empowerment of marginalized groups in the development process. In part, this new rationale for participation came out of decades of critiques on the ways in which aid is dispensed and controlled by donors, who typically follow their own interests rather than focusing on the needs at the local level. The “aid effectiveness” agenda focused attention on the national capacity to negotiate the terms of aid based on broad demands and interests of

citizens (not only the elite) and to effectively implement aid funded policies, programs, and projects (Riddell, 2007). From the perspective of international organizations and donor agencies, some form and level of citizen participation in the construction of national development plans and sectoral plans was recommended to ensure “inclusive ownership” on the recipient country of external aid and assistance. Participatory processes (i.e. stakeholder consultations, PRSPs) have been incorporated into the first stages of the aid process.

At a more “technical level” in the discourse around aid, cooperation and assistance, there has been a shift away from discrete projects to supporting broader institutional capacity to manage reform. Within this context, international actors and national governments talk about and use citizen participation primarily for instrumental purposes. It is viewed as one of several strategic tools available to policymakers as they seek to set policy agendas and build support to implement reforms. In education, a growing body of work, sponsored primarily by international donors, emphasizes the political nature of education reform and presents various tools and techniques to strategically manage education reforms (Corrales 1999; IDB, 2008; DeStefano and Crouch, 2006; Grindle, 2004). These groups of policy experts emphasize identifying stakeholders, their interests, developing communication and political strategies to bolster support for reform and marginalize opponents.

The USAID sponsored Education Reform Support (ERS) series, as elaborated by Joseph DeStefano and Henry Healey in the early 1990s and updated in 2006, is

exemplary of this approach. ERS is defined as a model of “informed decision-making” that “integrates public policy analysis (using known information and analytical techniques) with public policy dialogue, advocacy, awareness, and political salesmanship, and to build indigenous institutional capacity that can strategically use this integration for purposes of effecting purposeful education reform” (DeStefano and Healey, 1997, p. v). According to the authors, ERS was developed to “specify how a collaborating external agent can help strategic elements within a host country steer events toward coherent, demand- driven, and sustainable educational reform.” They also write of its use to motivate reform minded agents within a country by providing a framework and tools to help them interpret and influence complex policy processes (DeStefano and Healey, 1997, p. v).

Finally, a new discourse around social justice and participation emerged in the context of globalization and the growing influence of global level civil society, social, and rights-based movements. The participation of marginalized groups in policymaking is seen as a right and a substantive end in and of itself. Instrumentally, participation leads to more socially just outcomes, particularly with regards to more equitable distribution of resources. One of the key activities of social justice civil society organizations is social auditing, which focuses on how public resources have been used to reach certain social objectives (reach, impact, and equity, among others). In addition, social audits may be focused more on ethical issues such as child labor, working conditions, discrimination, and freedom of association (UNESCO, 2005; Perozzoti and Smulovitz, 2002).

Within this context of a “discourse around participation,” we can distinguish two overarching rationales for participation: the efficiency discourse and the social transformation discourse. The first, promoted primarily by international organizations and governments, sees citizen participation, collaborative dialogues, and deliberation primarily in instrumental terms, as a means to promote increased effectiveness of reforms. Participation and deliberation from this perspective is seen 1) A “vital element for leading to more broadly owned reform processes that are sustainable” (Pruitt and Thomas, 2007, p. 15); 2) To bolster support for reform and marginalize opponents (Corrales, 1999; Grindle, 2004); 3) To promote more coherent and demand-driven policies (Destefano and Healey, 1997). The social transformation discourse, promoted by certain civil society groups and social movements, views citizen participation and deliberation in education as a means to social justice and equity. Participation is conceptualized in a broader sense to include various mechanisms, such as voting, public debate and deliberation, protests and conflict.

A more detailed framework for categorizing the various discourses around participation in the education sector was developed by Edwards and Klees (2015). Edwards and Klees present a tripartite framework to classify the diversity of participation perspectives and practices. Their framework is as follows:

Neoliberal perspective on participation: This perspective is inspired by the neoclassical school of economics and centers on school privatization, public-private

partnerships, parental choice, user fees, and school management decentralization to the community level. This perspective focuses on individual participation in the market and community participation in school councils.

Liberal perspective on participation: The liberal perspective views participation as something that existing governmental, non-governmental, and international institutions can structure and promote. These participatory processes aim to gather input to strengthen and legitimate policies and plans. These processes tend to reinforce the status quo as opposed to restructuring the state apparatus so that it serves the interests of citizens.

Progressive perspectives on participation: Progressive perspectives critique existing structures and look at participation as a means to social justice and redistribution of power among social groups. Approaches vary from more radical (working outside of the state) to more pragmatic (working within institutions to restructure them). The focus is on the empowerment and transformation of groups and individuals (Edwards and Klees, 2015).

Within these discourses around “participation,” there are differing normative assumptions about what constitutes appropriate types and levels of democratic participation, the proper role of the state and civil society in the policy process. “Thinner” conceptions of democracy place emphasis on minimum participation of citizens and stakeholders through representative democracy while “thicker”

conceptions emphasize that voting and representation are necessary but insufficient for a more robust form of democracy. Advocates of thicker versions of democracy emphasize the need for citizen participation in developing policy agendas and priorities through mechanisms such as town hall meetings, referenda, and deliberation. When government elites are not responsive to citizen demands channeled through formal mechanisms, other more adversarial tactics such as strikes and protests are seen as valid and viable.

Studying the social construction and discursive evolution of the concept of “participation” illustrates its normative discursive power. Over the past sixty years, there has been an increasing global normative commitment to participation within the context of democracy and the expansion of global discourses such as human rights. However, in practice, the use of the word and its implications on policy decisions differs depending on its link to associated traditions and beliefs. This diversity and ubiquity indicate its symbolic potency for legitimating regimes and governance practices. Interestingly, despite its global ubiquity, empirical arguments that causally link participation to desirable social or economic policy outcomes are still weak (Norris, 2012).

Quality as a Social Construction

Educational quality understood as a social construct highlights its historical and philosophical origins in competing pedagogical movements. Educational quality as a normative concept has existed throughout human history, even though the term was not

widely used until the 1990s in international education discourses (Mintegiaga, 2014). The definition of quality in education or learning is directly associated with what societies define as “knowledge,” how this “knowledge” is supposed to be used, and prevailing notions on the best ways to transfer this knowledge to the next generations. There have always been alternative visions of what constitutes “knowledge and its uses,” but in most societies throughout history these alternative definitions were treated as a threat. In fact, certain areas of knowledge, such as reading and writing, were reserved for a select few, usually elites or priests. Those individuals were close to the center of power and their function was to preserve centralized power through knowledge. During the Middle Ages, for instance, the circulation of texts was prohibited (Burke, 1985).

More broadly, one can divide the history of pedagogical thinking into several camps each with its own vision of the purpose of education that, in turn, influenced concepts such as quality. The camps include the liberals, the conservatives, and critical pedagogues. Within each of these traditions, there are smaller subsets of theories and schools with diverse assumptions and interests. In the latter half of the 20th century, theories on the development of societies such as modernization, human capital, dependency, neoliberalism, and human rights all influenced the development of discourses around the content and form of educational development and quality.

Early Liberal Influences

Early Latin American school reformers went to the United States to observe educational practices. For example, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, who was Minister

of Education and then President of Argentina in the mid-19th century, traveled to Massachusetts to visit Horace Mann and did several study tours to compare schools in France, Holland, Prussia, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, and England (Bravo, 1994). Through his study tours, reflections and writings, he was one of the first to bring the idea of mass secular and free primary education supported by the state to Latin America. For Sarmiento, mass primary education was a catalyst for civilization and the cultural progress of society. Prior to this period, members of the general population in colonial and post-colonial Latin America were excluded from education. Concepts of educational equity and quality were tied to the 19th century discourse of modernity and progress. From this perspective, the aim of mass public education was to improve the intellectual, physical and moral development of the common man. In his educational writings, Sarmiento discussed various pedagogical techniques borrowed from Europe and the United States that were focused on literacy. For Sarmiento, the capacity of the teaching profession was a key driver of this educational quality. He went on to Chile in 1839 to co-found Escuela Normal, the first teacher training school in Latin America (Sarmiento, 2011; Bravo, 1994).

In the United States and Northern Europe, reformers and ideas were also likely tied to the ideals of modernization, which in the late 19th century took on a specific form given the Protestant background of many citizens. Modernization was not just seen from the optic of societies per se, but also from the perspective of individuals. The protestant ethic created a culture of individualism, hard work and excellence (Weber, 1958). Measuring one's progress on individual goals was seen as desirable. After visiting

Massachusetts, Sarmiento imported 26 female young Protestant teachers in order to bring new pedagogical methods to the region (Schiefelbein and McGinn, 2008).

Sarmiento formed part of a growing set of educated elite liberal reformers in Latin America who reached out to like-minded progressives in other parts of the world to exchange ideas and build a common set of principles and norms on what constituted excellence in education. To these early liberal reformers, education was a tool for the integral development of man, a catalyst of social progress, and a key promoter of democracy. Social and cultural progress was embedded with secular and rationale scientific values, but the reformers also emphasized a strong moral component. In this paradigm, educational quality focused on a broader concept of the individual in his or her intellectual, physical and moral development. The modernization and democratization of societies implied an active role of the state in providing free basic education to the masses. The search for enhanced pedagogical practices and models that could be applied at a large scale could lead to not only individual learning and excellence, but also to social progress and democratization.

In many places, liberal elites were involved in a historic ideological struggle with conservatives. Education policy became a proxy battleground for ideological and sometimes violent wars around broader state formation. The well-educated conservative elites aligned with the Catholic Church and saw secularization as a threat to the social order. Their political project focused mostly on advancing moral, religious, and basic vocational education. Under this vision, more advanced opportunities to

access education and culture would continue to be reserved for elites, and in most cases white males. This ideological struggle would go on to define educational policy debates until the early 20th century in many countries (Reimers, 2001; Ossenbach, 2014).

Conservative Influences

As educational expansion occurred in the 19th century in places such as North and Latin America, organizational efficiency became an inevitable concern, as did rationalizing the growing expenses that were funded through taxation. As education systems grew in size, there was a need to standardize processes such as curriculum and evaluations. Organizing children by age and ability was an inevitable step in standardization. Written tests became important tools to help sort children and ensure increased efficiency and fairness across the system (US Congress, 1992).

The industrial and business sectors influenced a more traditional conservative concept of educational quality in the latter half of the 20th century. Many of the original ideas can be traced to Frederick Taylor and his work on scientific management and efficiency. John Franklin Bobbit later applied these ideas to education and curriculum in the early 20th century (Au, 2011). According to Taylor, efficiency required creating clear objectives and then breaking up those objectives into discrete tasks. Taylor's ideas influenced Bobbit in his influential writings on curriculum based on hierarchical objectives and learning assessments through standardized tests (Au, 2011).

Another development that had a profound influence on the concept of quality in education was the field of psychology and its concern with measuring intelligence. France's Alfred Binet was the first to measure in intelligence. Binet measured intelligence through the "scientific" testing of various items, including discriminating between items and vocabulary. Scholars in the United States at Stanford University adopted these techniques for use on children in California. This later led to the development of the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test that became widespread (Sheshagiri, nd).

Ultimately, the adoption of educational developments on a mass level led to the need to organize and structure educational processes and learning for efficiency purposes. The use of tests and standardized curriculum helped to make education more efficient and also lent legitimacy to certain pedagogical practices over others. The combination of these developments shaped a discourse around educational quality that focused on individual achievement, the mastery of tasks and specialized knowledge, and a narrowing of what constituted curriculum, with an increasing emphasis on the cognitive and intellectual aspects of education.

This vision of the purposes of education and what constituted quality contrasted with the earlier more holistic approaches of liberal progressives. This conservative vision also privileged the knowledge and objectives of technical experts over teachers. Standards and tests became key levers for education reformers early in the 20th century and led to a displacement of teachers in reform. Over time this more conservative version of educational quality would be recycled in the late 20th century through

outcome based reform movement (Spreen, 2004) and the high stakes testing movement in places such as the United States (Au, 2011).

Theories of Development

The rise and growth of international organizations in the second half of the 20th century such as UNESCO, the OAS, the World Bank and the increasingly dense networks of experts and exchanges between countries through international conferences promoted the circulation and wide-spread adoption of certain definitions of educational concepts such educational quality and equity at a global level (Ossenbach and Boom, 2011). Evolving definitions of quality can be traced to the broader evolution of development discourse over the past fifty years, the institutionalization of different models of the state (development state, the welfare state), and concepts such as central planning and integral planning (Ossenbach and Boom, 2011). These discourses include education equity and quality as drivers of economic growth; as a tool for political development; and as a human right.

Modernization theory

One of the main development theories that had an influence on the concepts of educational quality and development in Latin America was modernization theory. This is a theory of societal development. In essence, it envisioned a linear economic, social and political path of progress from traditional to modern societies. Underlying the theory were notions of progress and modernity based on 19th century enlightenment values of rationality, equality, freedom, science, and secularism.

The intellectual contributions of modernization theory are wide and varied and include scholars such as Durkheim, Herbert Spencer, Talcott Parsons, Max Weber, and later Walter Rostow and Seymour Lipset. Within this tradition, education was seen as an engine of modernization. As citizens are educated, they become more rational and abandon their ties to the social values and institutions of family and community that sustained a traditional feudal society. Adherence to a state nationalistic ideology replaces traditional ties. This socio-cultural transition allows for the specialization of skills needed for modern bureaucracies and economies. Learning how to “be modern” could be achieved through the “modern school,” where one acquired the tastes, attitudes, knowledge, and skills seen as desirable in Western modern society at the time.

The underlying assumptions of modernization and progress helped provide the initial impetus for the birth and growth of international development. One assumption was that modern societies were those that were most advanced economically, technologically, and politically. Citizens in these countries were happier than in less developed societies. Less developed nations, on their path towards development, should emulate and adopt practices from Europe and America. More developed countries should assist less developed countries through the transfer of ideas, knowledge and practices.

During the first few years after the founding of the United Nations in 1945, a global spread of ideas and debates around economic and social development occurred. One of

the most influential was human capital theory, inspired by neo-classical economics. Essentially, human capital theory reframed education as a driver of economic growth and productivity. Human capital theory posited that skills development through education could enhance the productivity of firms, organizations and countries. By the 1950s and early 1960s, many countries around the world rationalized their efforts to expand access and improve the quality of education on the argument that it was critical for the economic growth of the nation. This theory would be recycled and recast in the neoliberal era, during which education quality was often framed by the World Bank and governments as a driver of economic competitiveness. Within this vision, quality focused on a narrower set of knowledge and skills, including literacy, math, and science. These core subjects were seen as the base of human capital and productivity. (Becker, 1962; Shultz, 1988)

Dependency theories and critical pedagogy

In response and as a critique of modernization theories, a new set of ideas emerged out of Latin America. The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and influential economist Raul Prebisch were behind this critique. Prebisch (1950) argued that periphery countries produced primary goods for the center while these central countries exported secondary goods with an added value to the periphery, creating trade imbalances and an economic dependency. Prebisch advocated for a protectionist economic model called import-substitution, arguing that it could break the colonial cycle of dependence on foreign exports and the associated political meddling in internal affairs. The central idea of this model was to tax imports and to subsidize the growth

of endogenous industries. Another key aspect of this model was the importance of state central planning. Centralized planning was seen as a technical task and as the responsibility of national governments. It involved developing economic and social development plans, including educational reforms, for each country (Prebisch/UN, 1950).

This planning process implied an increased analytical capacity on the part of the state to define economic and social goals based on a scientific assessment of needs in the country. Systems of national development and educational indicators were created along with processes to collect information from citizens and communities. The definition of key indicators and measurement methods were strongly influenced by exchanges between countries in international forums and a growing world culture in education. International organizations and donors reinforced a convergence around notions of best practices and desirable policies for educational development. The primary means to shape these discourses occurred through knowledge production and the use of loans and technical assistance (Klees, Samoff and Stromquist, 2012).

This initial set of ideas on economic dependence inspired subsequent theories of dependency and world systems. These theories, advanced through the works of authors such as Frank (1966), Cardoso (1979), and Wallerstein (2004), argued that the world capitalist system consisted of unequal historical and economic relationships between periphery, semi-periphery, and core powers. They posited that financial and technological penetration by core countries leads to constrained endogenous

development in the periphery and semi-periphery. These unequal relations manifest themselves in the structure of the state and unequal capital and labor relations.

Paulo Freire (2000) applied these critical approaches to education, developing a critical theory of pedagogy. Freire defined narrow approaches to educational training and knowledge transfer as “banking models” of education. In this banking model, teachers view children as empty vessels to which they must transfer knowledge. Freire developed a philosophy and approach to education that aimed to create critical consciousness of the sources of oppression. In essence, this approach to education reframed definitions of quality in education not as the acquisition of a set of narrow skills, but as political empowerment through critical praxis. Freire’s work influenced a whole generation of critical educators who described both the reproductive and emancipatory potential of education.

Education quality as a human right

With the rise of international organizations, a new discourse emerged around universal human rights. Education and health were seen as universal human rights that all states were obliged to uphold. Initially, the rights discourse in education emphasized the goal of achieving universal primary education. Most international declarations up until the 1990s were silent about quality. The 1990 *World Declaration on Education for All* recognized the importance of ensuring educational quality as a prerequisite for attaining equity, but the concept was underdeveloped. Emphasis was primarily on the cognitive development of children. Not until a decade later in Dakar was the concept of quality

fleshed out in terms of the educational characteristics of learners, processes and outcomes (UNESCO, 2004).

UNESCO commissioned two of the most seminal reports that influenced broader educational discourse. These reports were written within the tradition of enlightenment, universal values, rationalism, progress, and humanist concepts of man as a master of his or her own destiny (Elfert, 2015). The reports were commissioned with the task of imagining educational futures so that policymakers could prepare and plan accordingly. The first was the 1972 Faure report, entitled *Learning to Be*. This report envisioned education as a vehicle for social solidarity. It argued for a broader vision of education beyond just schooling. This was a time when social movements, Paulo Freire, and Marxist thought were gaining influence in certain intellectual circles. Twenty-four years later, the second report was published. The Cold War had ended and Neoliberalism was on the rise.

The Delors Report was called *Learning, The Treasure Within*. It reiterated this broader more expansive vision of the purpose of education and was also seen as a direct response to the more utilitarian economic vision of education promoted in two other reports: the World Bank's *Priorities and Strategies in Education* and the OECD's *Education and Economy in a Changing Society* published in 1995 (Elfert, 2015). The Delors Report argued that there are four essential pillars of education: Learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be. The emphasis was on providing a broad base of education so that an individual could effectively learn

over the course of his or her entire life. Both reports were prompted by the concern for the dehumanizing effects of technology and globalization. They emphasized a concept of quality that went beyond cognitive development and formal schooling.

Finally, in the late 1990s, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education Katarina Tomasevski developed a framework for education within the human rights tradition. The report was widely discussed and its guidelines were adopted. Tomasevski's framework presents a more holistic vision of quality and equity in education through a 4A framework:

Availability: Education is free and government funded and there are adequate resources and trained teachers to support educational delivery.

Accessibility: The system is non-discriminatory and accessible to all, and positive-steps are taken to include the most marginalized.

Acceptability: The content of education is relevant, non-discriminatory and culturally appropriate, and of quality. The school itself is a safe space and teaching is a respected profession.

Adaptability: Education can evolve with the changing needs of society and contribute to challenging inequalities, such as gender discrimination. It can also be adapted locally to suit specific contexts (Tomasevski, 2003).

In sum, the notion of educational quality presented from this framework understands educational quality as inclusive (sufficiently funded, child-centered, responsive to diversity) as well as critical (challenging inequalities). The framework questions the logic of children and communities adapting to a mass education system and its institutions and instead puts the onus on governments to invest more resources and thought into how to reach children with tailored high-quality educational experiences.

The rights discourse around education has positioned itself as a new paradigm that has, along with universal rights, become part of global discourse. This global discourse has become a powerful alternative to the utilitarian discourse that subjects education to the logic and demands of markets. However, the rights discourse in education has also been critiqued from all sides of the ideological spectrum. Amartya Sen (2004) categorizes more universal rights critiques around three main areas: 1) legitimacy (only legal rights exist) 2) coherence (that it is difficult to specify the duty-bearer) and 3) cultural (some traditions developed in a different direction and imposing rights which are often individualistic in orientation is problematic). Another critique is that rights remain mainly rhetorical and a discourse of the powerful (politicians, academics, technocrats) about the powerless. Lastly, a common critique from the right is that rights often reduce liberties and also may place too many demands on already precarious governmental systems. On the left, the response is that rights are too minimal and that governments use the rhetoric of rights but very often are not held accountable for following through on those commitments (McCowen, 2010). Despite all of these critiques, the right to

education has provided a powerful paradigm to approach educational development. It has expanded the conversation around educational quality beyond formal schooling to encompass a more holistic child-centered view that places attention on inputs, content, processes, and outcomes in contrast with other traditions that have focused predominantly on pre-specified contents and learning outcomes.

Summary

As highlighted in this chapter, a social constructivist, critical and interpretive approach to policy analysis highlights the ideological and normative origins of policy. From an interpretive point of view, the reification of concepts such as state, civil society, governance, participation and even quality is problematic from ontological and epistemological points of view. Analysis instead aims to uncover the ideological assumptions behind certain discourses and thus reveals how certain interests and worldviews are advanced over others.

This line of inquiry provides a fruitful and sensitive method for capturing the political dynamics behind educational reform focused on quality. The contentious and politically controversial nature of reforms that focus on quality have to do in a large part with the fact that quality is an ambiguous concept tied to different groups' visions of the ideal society and citizen. Conceptions of what constitutes quality in education have been shaped by dominant discourses over the past fifty years linked to progressive enlightenment; economics, efficiency, state-building, democratization, and empowerment rationales; and universal rights.

A growing global society and culture, produced through increasing frequency and density of exchanges between international experts may in part explain a global convergence in terms of discourse and institutional qualities in education. However, transnational and local social and civil society movements with alternative visions contest this global convergence (Mundy, 2001). Finally, politicians, in a process of externalization, may simply be borrowing reform ideas and discourses as a political tactic of legitimation.

From an interpretive and critical perspective, the links between governance, participation and quality in education become clearer. If educational quality is charged with normative meaning and if it is a complex and perhaps even wicked social problem, then sufficient levels of participation, debate, dialogue and deliberation are necessary for societies and communities to generate certain levels of social consensus on the goals of education and the associated processes and strategies linked to those goals. Without this level of social consensus, policies may not have the legitimacy needed to support implementation. That said, full consensus, in particular in more diverse and unequal societies, is not only unlikely but undesirable.

Chapter 4: Historical Context

Understanding the educational governance practices of actors in Ecuador today requires situating them within a broader historical context. The purpose of this chapter is to trace key factors in the historical evolution of Ecuadorian political and social actors as they coalesce in more or less stable patterns of governance in the context of education reform in Ecuador.

This chapter is organized into four parts, with each part representing a key period of state formation and educational development:

Part 1: State building and public education in the 1800s

Part 2: The Welfare State and education in Ecuador 1944-1979

Part 3: Neoliberalism and education in Ecuador, 1980-2006

Part 4: The Return of the State: Education under 2017-Present

This section is not meant to be an exhaustive account of Ecuador's educational history, but rather aims to identify the competing educational development narratives that emerged in the background of state formation in Ecuador. This will serve to inform the analysis of competing narratives in Ecuador's educational development in subsequent chapters.

Part 1: State-building and Public Education in the 1800s

With independence in the early 1800s, many elites found themselves having to construct the concept of a state with territorial boundaries. This construction of the

state implied developing central authority and control over internally disparate groups such as regional caudillos and establishing sovereignty from outside groups such as neighboring states. It also involved developing a national consciousness where historically there was none (Torre and Striffler, 2008). Building and/or maintaining authority and control from the 1800s to early 1900s was inspired less on a vision of a new social contract and more on the logic of dominant elites maintaining economic and political interests. Education under this conservative vision was seen as a mechanism to preserve the social order (Reimers, 2001; Ossenbach, 2014).

Throughout the 1900s and even early 20th century, large haciendas organized the economic, social and political life of Ecuadorians. These large haciendas depended on cheap indigenous labor in order to survive. As a consequence, the early constitutions of Ecuador created two Republics, the Ecuadorian Republic and the Indian Republic. Through this arrangement, indigenous groups retained some level of autonomy to govern themselves within their own traditions but at the same time were forced to pay an Indian tax and were not granted citizenship rights. Over time, this political arrangement based on economic exploitation created a deep mistrust between indigenous groups and the State.

Regionalization was another key aspect that shaped early state formation in Ecuador and would have a lasting impact on politics. Ecuador is divided into four key regions: the Amazon, the Galapagos, the Pacific coast, and the Highlands. These regions are isolated from one another by the Andes mountains and not only exhibit great

differences in terms of geography, but culturally and politically (Clark and Becker, 2007). The first Constitution of Ecuador defined the state as a loose federation between these regions. However, in practice, the Highlands dominated national life. At different points in Ecuador's history, major cities in each of these regions claimed rule over the entire national territory.

By the mid and late 19th century, a strong centralization project emerged in response to the threat of regionalization. The project focused on the need to exert political and economic control over the various regions and over ethnic groups. This centralization of authority and control is arguably one of the first steps in state formation in Latin America (Kurtz, 2013). By the end of the 19th century in Ecuador, an oligarchic type of state emerged (Ossenbach, 2014). An oligarchic state is characterized by a political society that is formed by dominant classes who exclude all other members of society (Ossenbach, 2014). The Ecuadorian oligarchic state consisted of a pact between wealthy landowners (mostly in the highlands) and a growing urban wealthy merchant class. The main source of wealth in this state model was the exportation of primary resources, first cacao and then bananas.

From the mid-19th century to the second decade of the 20th century, 80% of Ecuador's income came from cacao exports. Labor for cacao plantations was based on a form of indentured servitude called "Huasipungo," whereby labor was exchanged for land parcels. By the mid 20th century, a crisis in international prices for cacao led to the growth of banana exports, and bananas soon became the next mono-crop. The

Huasipungo system eventually faded out in the early 20th century with the modernization processes spurred by the banana industry (Correa, 2012; Luna, 2014; Torre and Striffler, 2008).

Conservatives, Oligarchy, and Education

Within the context of an oligarchic state, the expansion of public education as part of the modernization project was seen early on as a means to build legitimacy and create social order and cohesion in societies marked by cultural and ethnic diversity (Ossenbach, 2014). The politics of the time were shaped by the ongoing historical conflict between the Liberals and Conservatives. These conflicts also played out in public education. During colonial times and into the first few decades of the newly formed state, the Catholic Church, supported by the conservatives in power, remained the main promoter of education in Ecuador.

No significant progress was made in Ecuador in terms of the expansion of public education until the presidency of Garcia Moreno in the 1860s. Garcia Moreno was the founding father of the Conservative party in Ecuador and promoted the concept of universal literacy and education based on the French model. In 1871, free and compulsory primary education was established in Ecuador. Under Moreno, the number of primary schools grew from 200 to 500, expanding enrollment from 8,000 to 32,000 students. Moreno also reformed the universities and established the first teaching college.

The Progressive Era and Education

During the progressive era a new vision of the role of education in supporting the formation of a secular state and modern society emerged from liberals who took power, in particular under President Eloy Alfaro. In 1906, the Ecuadorian Minister of Public Instruction expressed alarm that children “were ignorant of the fact that they were Ecuadorian Republicans, but well aware of the fact that they were Roman Catholics” (Ossenbach, G. quoting Monge, 1906). Eloy Alfaro was the first president of Ecuador to establish public non-religious schools in 1896, essentially eliminating the Catholic Church’s control over education. The expansion of public secular primary education became the priority. During the government of Caamaño (1883-1888), the National Ministry of Public Education was established, the Department of National Public Teaching by Flores, and provincial ministries by Rocafuerte (Freile, nd). A teacher training university was established in Quito and the government sent teachers abroad, primarily to Germany. These exchanges brought new pedagogical ideas to Ecuador, contributing to the professionalization of teachers (Freile, nd).

Velazquez and Populism

Beginning in 1920, Ecuador suffered increasing political and economic instability. During this period, increased urbanization created important changes in social structures and values, producing a general uncertainty and anxiety among many citizens. Velazquez Ibarra took advantage of this general sentiment and developed a populist platform that catapulted him to the presidency over five different times in the 20th century. During his five periods as president, he focused education on restoring

national values. The establishment of the Catholic University in Quito was approved by the government and helped ease the growing tensions between the State and the Church from the previous liberal era.

Part 2: The Welfare State and Education in Ecuador, 1944-1979

The growth of the exportation of bananas in the early to mid 1900s and later the discovery of large deposits of petroleum in the 1960s provided Ecuador with revenue to accelerate modernization processes. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, Ecuadorian political elites, influenced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) and neo-Marxist economist Raul Prebisch, became increasingly concerned with Ecuador's economic dependence on foreign markets. The perceived solution was stronger state intervention in economic and social spheres. Import substitution industrialization (ISI) was applied as a strategy to replace foreign imports with locally produced ones. ISI required state subsidization of local industries, increased taxation on imports and protectionist policies (Correa, 2010).

Proactive intervention in the economy implied a strong state and centralized planning. During Velazquez's second period of rule in 1954, the National Board for Planning and Economic Coordination was founded. This board was the first to develop assessments of the social and economic reality in Ecuador at a national level. Within the Ministry of Education, the Department of Integrated Planning was established in 1960. The role of this division was to formulate ten year, five year and three year education plans for the country (Luna, 2014).

Starting in the 1950s, public education was framed as a generator of wealth (human capital framework) and of social stability (Ossenbach, 2014). The provision of education, particularly primary, was seen by both leaders and citizens to be a state responsibility. The Ecuadorian bureaucracy in Quito quickly became the nation's largest employer. As the state grew in size, educational expansion saw unprecedented growth. Over the next three decades, various administrations focused education policy reforms on two main areas: expanding access to education at all levels and promoting literacy. This policy agenda remained consistent across different administrations with different political orientations. As a result, enrollment in primary school doubled in the 1960s from 560,000 children to 930,000 and illiteracy rates dropped from 44% in 1950 to 24 % by 1980 (Cabrera, 2008).

The progressive government of Galo Plaza (1948-1952) was the first to link the role of education to Ecuador's economic and political development (Luna, 2014). During this period, education reforms focused on expanding access in rural communities and creating technical and vocational tracks that would be more relevant for those populations (Cabrera, 2008). Galo Plaza and international organizations such as UNESCO also framed educational development in the post-world war era as a promoter of peace and cooperation between nations.

From 1963 to 1966, Ecuador was ruled by a military junta backed by the United States. The educational agenda in Ecuador was increasingly shaped by international aid and cooperation, starting with the US based Alliance for Progress in 1961. The Alliance for

Progress was an aid and reform package launched by John F. Kennedy as a means to promote economic cooperation between the United States and Latin America. Democratization and development were seen as key pillars of the aid program and included boosting economic growth, eradicating illiteracy in adults, agrarian reform, and drafting national development plans. The underlying strategic aim of the aid and cooperation program was to curtail the influence of communism in the region after the Cuban Revolution.

The national education program at the time aimed to revert the growth of communism and to re-instill nationalistic values. There was a marked shift away from education as a tool for political development and emphasis was placed on education as a tool for economic growth (Reimers, 2001). In part, this shift could be seen as a response from conservatives to the increasing social mobilization and political activity of youth and labor groups. The focus of national authorities continued to be on access and the expansion of schooling, particularly at the secondary and primary levels in rural zones and the creation of two tracks at this level (general secondary and a vocational). Reform efforts also focused on strengthening teacher-training colleges, and some attempts were made to strengthen local education officials' authority and capacity. The growing rates of school retention and dropout also became a policy concern of some ministers, but little was actually done in practice to curtail these issues. Student uprisings in 1966 led to the overthrow of the military junta (Luna, 2014).

In 1967, a new constitution was approved. The constitution articulates the main educational priorities of the time, many of which were consistent with previous decades. These include a focus on the right to education and the state's role in ensuring free access to primary and secondary education expansion; a renewed emphasis on reducing illiteracy (prompted in large part by UNESCO's increasing influence); special attention to education in the countryside; recognition of the need to provide education to indigenous groups in their own language; and recognition of need for work stability and fair compensation to teachers, as well as laws for recruitment and advancement.

The following six years represented a time of increasing economic and political instability; several presidents came and went. Even the populist leader Velasco Ibarra appeared on the national scene again, declaring himself this time a dictator in 1970. He advocated for a strong state and a strong executive in the midst of what he and the older generation perceived as social decay and disorder. Increased social unrest destabilized his government and the military junta once again stepped in and took power. The second wave of military rule from 1972-1979 continued with many of the same education reforms as before. This nationalistic military junta was anti-elitist and advanced redistribution reforms, as well as a significant agrarian reform. However, the military junta was also increasingly hostile to labor and student groups. Labor unions declined in the 1970s and in several instances social protests were met with violence and repression from the state. The petroleum boom in Ecuador provided the military junta government with considerable resources to invest in educational expansion (Luna, 2014; Ossenbach, 2014).

Over time, a combination of factors led to an economic and political crisis and the end of the dictatorship at the turn of the decade in 1979. Despite ISI policies from the 1950s-1970s, consumer imports continued to outgrow exports creating a growing fiscal deficit. In addition, the petroleum boom created easy access to foreign credit. Foreign debt went from 229 million USD in 1970 to approximately 4 billion USD in 1981. During the petroleum boom, the Ecuadorian government in the 1970s tripled public spending in real terms. When global petroleum prices plunged at the end of the decade, the government experienced severe reductions in their main source of revenue, an over-bloated bureaucracy, and an unsustainable foreign debt.

Table 1. Evolution of the percentage of the national budget dedicated to education

1940	1950	1960	1970	1975	1979
15.64%	19.77%	15.41%	21.26%	22.61%	25.21%

Ossenbach (2014) citing Fuente: L.F. Bilbao, *Economía y educación en el Ecuador a partir de 1960*, Quito, Banco Central del Ecuador, 1980, p. 105.

Part 3: Neoliberalism and Education in Ecuador, 1980-2006

Ecuador returned to democracy in 1979 after seven years of authoritarian rule. The political transition opened a window for proponents of a new model of development based on neoliberal thought. Neoliberal policies such as decentralization, liberalization, and privatization focused on dismantling the Ecuadorian welfare state. The first wave

of recommended neoliberal reforms included structural adjustment and fiscal austerity. Cost-cutting became the norm in public social sectors such as education. Public funding for education declined by almost 50% over a ten-year period from 1980 to 1990.

Table 2: Education budget as a percentage of total state budget, 1980-1990 (%)

1980	33.02%
1981	31.26%
1982	29.32%
1983	25.67%
1984	25.04%
1985	22.65%
1986	20.67%
1987	21.29%
1988	19.57%
1989	19.14%
1990	17.01%

From Ossenbach (2014) citing the Ministry of Education.

During the 1980s, education reform focused again on a new national literacy campaign, with emphasis on rural and indigenous populations. In addition, the other main reform in the 1980s centered on intercultural bilingual education. Under this program, local indigenous communities were given limited autonomy to manage their own educational processes in accordance with their own languages, customs and community needs. In

1988, the government established the National Division of Intercultural and Bilingual Education of the Ministry (DINEIB). In many respects, the intercultural bilingual reform presented an innovative model for an alternative education within the parameters of the liberal state. This model included provisions to provide relevant and pertinent curriculum and administrative processes for each community. Unfortunately, implementation was uneven due to conflicts at the local level with existing schools and teachers, lack of full funding from the government, and Teacher Union opposition (Isabel, 2011).

In the 1990s, the main education reforms focused on quality. Three of the most prominent of these were funded through World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank loans, totaling 160 million USD. In line with global trends of the time, the program change theory espoused that decentralization would lead to enhanced quality and efficiency. These programs focused on the poorest sectors in both rural and urban settings. They advocated creating semi-autonomous local networks of schools (a form of decentralization) and providing educational materials and teacher training to these schools (Minteguiaga, 2014).

The main goals of the programs centered on building the capacity of the Ministry of Education. Evaluations from the World Bank, the IDB, and subsequently by other outside evaluators (Whitman, 2009) found that these programs actually undermined the Ministry's authority and capacity to manage reform. The World Bank and IDB lacked confidence in the capacity of the bureaucracy to implement these programs and as a

result set up parallel units outside of the control of the Ministry. Consultants were hired and earned much higher salaries when compared to their ministry counterparts, creating conflicts and cynicism within the Ministry and low buy-in rates by key local stakeholders. Ultimately, these externally funded projects contributed to the growing rift between the Ministry and the Teachers Union, which was excluded throughout the entire design and implementation process (Whitman, 2009).

During this period, indicators showed growing levels of inequality between different ethnic groups and between rural and urban populations. They also showed overall low levels of learning outcomes when compared with other countries in the region. Despite a decentralization reform initiated in the 1990s, various reports indicated little participation in decision-making from teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. Grade repetition rates in rural areas were double the rates of urban areas. Enrollment rates for indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians were around 85% while for whites and mestizos the rates were above 90%. By secondary education, the disparities increased: 50% of mestizo and white youth were enrolled in school while only 25% of indigenous students and 30% of Afro-Ecuadorian youth enrolled (Luna, 2006; PREAL, 2006).

Infrastructure for public education was also lacking. Five out of every ten rural schools did not have electricity; two out of every ten schools did not have water; and 98 out of every 100 rural schools did not have functioning latrines. Teaching conditions were poor (lack of training, lack of professional development opportunities, low wages, low morale) (Contrato Social Para La Educación, 2006; Luna, 2006; PREAL, 2006). More than 40% of teachers in bilingual schools spoke only one language and most of these

teachers had difficulties communicating with their students (Luna, 2006). The average salary of teachers rose between the year 2000 and 2005 from 156 USD per month to 482 USD, but teacher salaries continued to be the lowest in the public sector (Luna, 2006; PREAL 2006; Torres, 2006). Investment in education at 3% of GDP was one of the lowest in the region. Allocations of funds across the system lacked transparency, were inequitably distributed with no clear criteria, and often disbursed with delays or, in some cases, never disbursed (PREAL 2006; Luna, 2006; Contrato Social para la Educación, 2006; Bustamante et. al., 2006).

Frequent tensions between the government and the National Teacher Union (UNE) led to strikes and short tenure of the ministers of education, who spent an average of just a year in office. Between 1979 and 2005, there was on average at least one national teaching strike per year. From 1999 to 2003, there were seven ministers of education, and each of those ministers had to deal with national teacher strikes, some of which lasted several months. This instability led to a lack of coordination among key educational stakeholders and a lack of continuity in any reform. Several education reports indicate that the government and Ministry of Education lacked the administrative, technical and political capacity to implement change (Grindle, 2004; Luna, 2006; PREAL, 2006). Administrations attempted several times to forge national consensus around education reform by bringing together key stakeholders and issuing overarching statements that reflected a consensus for a need to prioritize education reform. Unfortunately, limited or no mechanisms were put into place (governance, financing, monitoring, etc.) to actually implement the agreed upon changes (Grindle, 2004; PREAL, 2006).

The educational crisis mirrored the growing broader political and economic instability in Ecuador. In 1996, 1998, and 2002, presidents were forced to resign before the end of their tenures because of social unrest, military intervention and a governance crisis. Between 1996 and 2007, there were nine governments, some of which only lasted a few hours (Mejia Acosta et. al., 2005).

Part 4: Return of the State, 2007-Present

With the election of Rafael Correa in late 2006, a new development agenda and set of reforms were implemented based on a combination of social democratic and leftist principals. Correa was elected by a coalition of the democratic left, the indigenous “Pachakutik” party, and socialist parties. Correa ran on an anti-neoliberal platform that prioritized reducing the burden of foreign debt, investing in social programs, political sovereignty, and regional integration with like-minded leftist governments. He vowed to launch a “citizen revolution,” instituting profound economic and political reforms starting with a referendum to gain citizen approval to rewrite the constitution.

The cornerstone of Correa’s political project was framed as an alternative model for economic and social development based on a rejection of neoliberal principles. This alternative vision was articulated in the Constitution of 2008 and in the National Development plan “Buen Vivir 2009-2013.” It espouses a politics of redistribution with a strong emphasis on social inclusion, citizen participation, and diversity. It also calls for a return of state central planning in economic and social development.

Initially favorable economic conditions, including low-inflation and increased oil revenues, provided Correa with substantial resources to invest in social policies and to

reduce poverty. Social investment rose from 4.8% in 2006 to 8.1% in 2009 (Ponce, 2010). In 2012, Ecuador had the highest rate of investment in social programs in the region, at 10% of its GDP (Black, 2012). In 2014, total public spending was at 44% of GDP, again the highest in the region. Starting in 2015, oil prices began to drop, seriously affecting government revenues. There was also a reduction in public spending with the 2016 national budget and an attempt to consolidate several ministries.

Education Reform Under Correa

It was clear from the beginning that education was to play a key role in Correa's so called "Citizen Revolution." Social policies were seen as key drivers of the new model of development that was defined in discourse as anti-neoliberal. When Correa took over in 2007, the education sector was in disarray. Neoliberal policies combined with increasing economic and political instability had severely compromised the institutional capacity of the ministry to control and regulate the provision of education services at all levels. As a consequence, the 1990s and early 2000s included a rapid privatization of the education system and overall deterioration of quality and equity (Whitman, 2009; Luna, 2014; Cevallos, 2015).

In late 2006, Correa appointed Minister Raul Vallejo. Minister Vallejo served previously as Minister of Education in 1991-1992, representing the "democratic left party" under President Rodrigo Borja Cevallos and again as Minister from 2005-2006

during the end of Alfredo Palacios' term just preceding Correa.³ Minister Vallejo remained in his post for nearly four years from 2006 to April of 2010.

Vallejo's priority was to establish stability, continuity and legitimacy in the system. He first adopted a long-term (10-year) education plan that emerged from various previous national consultations in Ecuador (the first Pedagogic Encounter for Ecuador in 1992; the Declaration of Galapagos in 1996; the Ecuadorian Educational Change agreement in 2004, and a national consultation in 2006). This 10-year plan agenda was framed by the government as a move away from an individual administration policy towards a long-term policy of the state. The policy agenda gained general legitimacy through a referendum that was included on the presidential election ballot of 2006. The 10-year Education Plan, approved in 2006 and signed by Rafael Correa in 2007, contained the following 8 policies:

Policy 1: Universalization of early childhood education from 0 to 5 years.

Policy 2: Universalization of general basic education from primary to tenth grade.

Policy 3: Increase in enrollment for secondary students to achieve at least 75% enrollment of youth in the corresponding age group.

Policy 4: Eradication of illiteracy and strengthen continuing education for adults.

³ Raul Vallejo is a writer and poet. Under a Laspua Fullbright scholarship he received a Masters in Arts at University of Maryland, College Park.

Policy 5: Improvement of physical infrastructure and equipment of the educational institutions.

Policy 6: Improvement of the quality and equity and implementation of a national system of evaluation and social audit process of the educational system.

Policy 7: Revalorization of the teaching profession and improvement of initial teacher training, ongoing professional development, work conditions and quality of life.

Policy 8: Increase of 0.5 GDP annually in education sector spending with the goal of reaching 6% GDP investment in education per year (as mentioned above, investment in 2006 was around 3% of GDP).

The Ministry focused on a set of three main policies in order to advance the 10-year plan (Cevallos, 2015). These are summarized below, but will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 5-7.

The first set of policies dealt with reestablishing the state's control and authority over the educational system. Here the stated objective was to revamp the Ministry's role from a mere administrator of public funds to a generator of educational policy and reform. The central ministry was restructured to reflect different areas of reform (quality, evaluation, etc.) and a new model of management based on de-concentration was designed. The ministry also focused on implementing a more rational distribution of schools throughout the country based on population and demand, as opposed to a

basis on supply-oriented impulses. A new legal framework for education was also passed, called the Organic Intercultural Education law. This framework positions education as a right and public service (Cevallos, 2015).

The second set of policies dealt with universalizing school enrollment, particularly in areas such as early childhood and secondary education, which were neglected in previous systems. These policies focused on eliminating fees associated with enrollment and with schooling. The state provided free textbooks and school uniforms and also focused on hiring more teachers and enhancing infrastructure (Cevallos, 2015).

The third set of policies deals with enhancing the quality of education. Here the state focused on national curriculum reform; standards for learning and management; revamping the teaching force through recruitment and retention policies including tripling teacher salaries, pre-service training, and establishing a new teacher university; and setting up a national system for monitoring support and evaluation. Traditional supervisors were replaced with mentors for teachers and school directors. Finally, a national autonomous institute of evaluation was established. Evaluations were reframed as a tool to generate a sense of co-responsibility and to provide schools with data that could help them improve as opposed to the traditional punitive and high stakes approach (Cevallos, 2015).

There have been important results across these three areas that are worth highlighting. First, the results showed significant advances in terms of the state's ability to formulate and implement an education policy agenda. There is increased policy stability, continuity and, to some degree, citizen support around the educational agenda put forth by Correa. Ministers of Education have on average lasted three or four years, which is a significant break from the past and from the region where the average is around 1.5 years. However, critics have accused the government of being too centralized, hierarchical, and top-down.

The second set of policies has been successful in advancing equity in the system and particularly in improving the educational chances of marginalized populations, namely indigenous and afro-descendants. Enrollment in pre-primary, primary and secondary programs have increased substantially in all groups. This progress is due in large part to the elimination of school fees and the provision of broader incentives (conditional cash transfers) to low-income families to offset the opportunity costs associated with schooling. Even opposition groups have acknowledged that Correa has been successful in recuperating education as a public good.

Results have been controversial with regards to promoting social participation in the education reform. Correa's state-centric approach has resulted in the weakening of political parties, the Teacher's Union, and civil society organizations. Correa has also worked to reduce the role of international donors and organizations in response to their excessive interference during the neoliberal period. It is unclear whether Correa will

establish new mechanisms of citizen participation consistent with the greater democratic and deliberative vision set out in the Constitution or whether he will continue the trend to centralize power in the executive.

With regards to quality in education, the jury is still out. In the first few years, opposition groups, including the Teachers' Union, acknowledged that Correa's policy agenda had made gains in equity. Despite this, conflicts quickly emerged around the administration's conception of quality and the specific strategies used to pursue improvement from evaluations to standards. However, recent initial data from TERCE has shown significant improvements in quality, measured in learning in math and science at the 3rd and 6th grade levels. This test only measures some limited aspects of learning on standardized tests, but it does provide evidence that the changes implemented may be starting to deliver results. The infrastructure for longer-term educational improvement, such as the Autonomous Institute for Evaluation or the New University for Pre-service Training, took several years to design and set up but is now operating. These institutions will have initial growing pains, but in the longer term could play a positive role in pressuring and supporting change for educational improvement.

Discussion and Summary

The late 1800s and early 1900s experienced the birth and consolidation of a national education project. This project emerged out of the struggle between two competing narratives, the conservative and liberal. The conservative narrative aligned with the Catholic Church and saw education as a means to preserve the social order. Citizenship

was conceived in terms of conservative values of the oligarchic state, the church, and colonial values. Citizens with political and other rights were literate, mestizo, and male. The liberal narrative, on the other hand, framed education as a key driver of state building and modernization of society. Education under the liberal vision was secular and also served to promote cohesion at the national and international levels. The liberal project placed emphasis on the role of education in developing citizens, political society and democracy while the conservative project saw education playing a role in economic growth and inculcating values (Reimers, 2001).

From the mid to the late 20th century, Ecuador experienced important societal transformations, transitioning from a hacienda-based social and economic system to a more industrial and commerce based system. The growth of the welfare state, with its emphasis on central planning, contributed to the rapid expansion of educational opportunity and growth of the middle class. Urbanization trends starting in the 1950s and accelerating in the 1960s and 1970s contributed to an increased demand for education and social mobilization of students, teachers and indigenous groups in the countryside.

Three narratives influenced educational development during the next period from 1950-1980. The first narrative, often referred to as human capital, was promoted by international organizations such as CEPAL and later the World Bank. This narrative linked the modernization of the state and economic growth to educational development. This narrative was adopted by both liberal and conservative elites over the period. The

second narrative saw education as a human right. The State's role was to secure this right for all citizens through the provision of basic quality education. Education was seen as a tool to promote mutual respect and understanding between groups and also to promote peace between nations. This narrative was primarily promoted by international organizations such as UNESCO. The third narrative, emerging out of the social unrest in the 1960s, saw education as a space for political mobilization and engagement. This last narrative was rooted in social movements.

Four decades of dominance of the welfare state and central planning led to the growth and consolidation of a centralized national Ministry of Education and to the expansion of education. However, as the ministry bureaucracy grew in size, it did not simultaneously grow its capacity to implement and follow-up on reforms, especially those dealing with enhancing quality. Several ministers of education in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s expressed concerns with the quality of teaching and learning. There were attempts to revert the centralization of education by creating local networks and administrative centers in the various regions of Ecuador. However, there is very little evidence that much was done to significantly improve educational quality and to build the capacity of local officials to manage educational processes (Minteguiaga, 2014).

Urbanization and industrialization led to the development of the first labor unions, which grew rapidly in number and in their political activity in the 20th century. Prior to 1929, there were only four labor unions, but over the next decade over 70 labor unions were formed (Torre and Striffler, 2008). Over time, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s,

these unions became more politically active on the national scene. Similarly, the massification of education in the 1960s and 1970s, in particular at the higher education level, led to growing student organization and political activity. The student union was one of the most politically active and influential political groups in the 1960s and 1970s, organizing large-scale protests and contributing to the downfall of the military junta in 1978 (Luna, 2014).

As the teaching force grew in number, its members also became increasingly political. However, the political agenda of the Teacher Union over time became almost solely focused on wage related issues. Ossenbach (2014) argues that the emergence of the economic technocratic approach in the early 1950s shifted the locus of decision-making on substantive education issues (policy formation, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment) away from teachers. It began to focus on technocrats in the central planning ministry and international organizations. As a consequence, teachers lost their protagonism and abandoned the fight for educational change and reform (Ossenbach, 2014).

Another key trend evident from the 1950s through the 1970s was the increasing influence of international actors over Ecuador's development and education agenda. The growth of the "developmental state" and the adoption of central hierarchical planning was due in large part to the influence of international actors such as CEPAL. In the 1960s, larger geopolitical struggles of the time, including the Cuban Revolution and subsequent Cold War, contributed to increasing US influence over national policy decisions through programs such as the Alliance for Progress and later through

increasing loans in the 1970s that led to an unsustainable foreign debt. In the late 1960s and into the 1970s, UNICEF and UNESCO played an increasingly important role in influencing the educational agenda in Ecuador.

The 1980s ushered in nearly two and half decades of neoliberal reforms. These market-based approaches aimed at rolling back the welfare state and were premised on the idea that free markets would lead to higher economic growth and prosperity for countries. Educational development discourse linked global economic competitiveness with national educational excellence. The neoliberal market ideology emphasized efficiency, performance, quality, individual choice and achievement. These attributes and outcomes could be achieved through the injection of quasi-markets into the education sector. Privatization and decentralization of education would empower consumers of education. At a local level, parents and communities would force accountability on schools and teachers. Schools would compete with one another for school attendance fees, vouchers, and overall reputation. In practice, this educational discourse focused on effectiveness and efficiency was manifest in Ecuador in externally financed reforms by the World Bank and the IDB. As mentioned above these programs failed to achieve their objective of improving teaching and learning and strengthening the capacity of the Ministry.

Several groups in Ecuador countered the neoliberal narrative at the time, the most important voice of dissent coming from indigenous organizations and the Teachers' Union. During the early 1980s, indigenous groups in the countryside organized into a

confederation called CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador). Where labor unions had failed previously (given their focus on single issues), the indigenous social movement was able to effectively articulate demands across various groups. The overarching discourse of CONAIE protested an elitist democracy and fiercely criticized neoliberal policies. CONAIE's political power and demands led to the implementation of the *Intercultural Education Program* which was supported by the National Government through funding but based on principles of cultural diversity and local autonomy. The program was not fully developed, but the broader indigenous movement of which this formed part helped usher in vast political and social change in Ecuador, including the rise of Rafael Correa to the presidency (Rodriguez, 2012).

Despite the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, neither the developmental welfare state nor the neoliberal model fully took root in Ecuador. Important cuts to the educational sector public budget during the neoliberal period actually coincided with the growth of the state bureaucracy from 150,000 public employees in 1992 to over 250,000 in 2000 (Paladines, 2002).

The cornerstone of President Rafael Correa's political project was framed as an alternative model for economic and social development based on a rejection of neoliberal principles. This alternative vision articulated in the Constitution of 2008 and in the National Development plan "Buen Vivir 2009-2013" espouses a politics of redistribution with a strong emphasis on social inclusion, citizen participation, and diversity. It also calls for a return of the state in articulating and leading economic and

social development. Education reform is one of the main cornerstones of Correa's so-called "Citizen Revolution." Reforms in the sector focused initially on equity and resulted in important gains. Quality reforms have been formulated and partially implemented but have been met with fierce critiques and resistance.

Chapter 5: Governance Narratives

When a Minister of Education in France, Belgium or Japan begins his or her term they position themselves on a system that is already working and in implementation. The difference in Ecuador is that when a Minister of Education comes in they have to rebuild the system from zero. This minister has to put the tracks down so the train can run.

(Minister of Education Under Correa paraphrasing President Rafael Correa, personal communication, March 6, 2013).

This chapter looks at competing narratives of governance that have emerged in the context of education reform in Ecuador since Correa ascended to the presidency. Since 2007, there has been a vigorous discursive battle around national development and this has been mirrored within the education sector. This battle centers on the definition of the role of the state in development, on who is involved in setting the policy agenda, and on the meanings of concepts such as governance, public, participation, and educational quality.

The dominant narrative argues that it is the state's sole responsibility to recuperate the public nature of the education system and to set the policy agenda. This role requires a strong state to retake control over key policy decisions from international donors and local corporatist actors. The story told by those interviewed begins by describing the governance crises in education in Ecuador during the neoliberal period, from roughly 1980-2006. The villains in this narrative are international donors, local oligarchic elites,

corrupt political parties, the teacher union and various civil society organizations. These groups are framed as obstacles to change. In this story, they exploited the educational system to pursue their own private interests to the detriment of the public interest. The heroes in this case are the President and a group of reformist bureaucrats who actively intervened on behalf of all citizens to wrest power from these groups and transform the state to serve the public interest and advance a “citizen and education revolution.”

The main counter-narrative questions a state-centric definition of governance and “public.” It argues for a broader conceptualization of governance where social actors, local communities, and the state co-define the educational policy agenda, goals and strategies. The conservative counter-narrative sees the possibility of collaboration and coordination between social actors, the state, and private sector to advance the educational agenda. While this narrative recognizes the importance of reconstructing the institutional capacity of the Ministry, it advocates for more balance between the state, markets and networks. The more radical of these narratives argues for the need for an oppositional politics to counterbalance the concentration and abuses of state power under Correa. This narrative points to the contradictions in Correa’s rhetoric that distort the terms “citizen revolution” and “Buen Vivir” to mask a more neoliberal and conservative educational and political project. Collaboration, from this narrative, is seen as a threat to social actors’ autonomy and identity. Both of these sub-counter narratives criticize the state under Correa as technocratic, centralized, hierarchical, insular and exclusionary.

The Setting: The Long Neoliberal Night

According to nearly all of those interviewed for this study, particularly Ministers and high level officials in the Correa administration, the story begins with the period prior to Correa, from the 1980s through 2006 and during the so-called “long neoliberal night.” Neoliberal policies including fiscal austerity and structural adjustment did not lead to a more efficient and better run state, more productive markets, or better social policy outcomes. On the contrary, according to many of those interviewed, neoliberal policies were perceived to contribute to political instability and social unrest, undermining the state’s authority and capacity to manage reforms and ultimately leading to declines in social welfare outcomes. The ongoing crises of the Ecuadorian state benefited a host of groups, particularly international donors and organizations, civil society organizations, and the National Teacher Union (UNE).

Under the neoliberal regime, social sectors including education and health were the hardest hit. Despite rhetoric on the need to enhance the quality of education, education spending as a percentage of government spending dropped by almost 50% between 1980 and 1990. This occurred despite rhetoric on the need to enhance the quality of education. While the educational bureaucracy was reduced in size, it remained hierarchical and its capacities were severely limited. As one sub secretary of education in the Correa administration explained:

The Ministry was a pyramid. At the top was the Minister of Education and there was only one person below, which was the Sub Secretary of Administration and

Finance. The minister's job was to go to cocktail events and say hello. The Sub Secretary's job was to pay salaries. The Ministry was so centralized that the Minister had to approve personally the vacations of all of the teachers in the country. A document would be sent which had to be signed personally by the Minister. It was a disaster! (Sub Secretary personal communication, Jan. 23, 2013).

In addition to these structural issues, most ministry personnel lacked the qualifications and competencies required to manage reforms. The same Sub Secretary highlighted this point:

Similar to other places in Latin America, we did not have a meritocratic system to select qualified officials. In the case of the Ministry of Education, it was basically a system that paid salaries and that is it. It was essentially just a bureaucracy. (Sub Secretary, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2013)

Given the structure and composition of the bureaucracy, the Ministry focused mostly on low-level administrative functions such as paying salaries. While some meritocratic criteria were in place for hiring civil servants, they usually were not applied. Bureaucratic posts and other limited resources were exploited for political patronage. An IDB governance evaluation around the region characterized Ecuador's bureaucracy as low in autonomy and low in capacity (Lora, 2007). Many of the basic inputs and services required to make an education system work (salaries, materials, etc.) were

lacking. According to one respondent within the Ministry leadership, teachers were sometimes not paid for months and this inevitably led to absenteeism and teacher strikes (Ministry official, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2012).

The Beneficiaries of Anarchy

As several participants noted, the diminished institutional capacity of the Ecuadorian government and its ministries benefited a whole host of actors outside of the state, starting with the international organizations themselves and moving down to local NGOs and private organizations (civil society organization representative, personal communication, Jan. 22, 2013). During the 1980s and 1990s, international organizations' influence over social policy grew, and, according to several Ecuadorian analysts, the educational agenda increasingly was de-linked from national and local issues and priorities (Luna, 2014; Torres, Dec. 2006). Here one Civil Society Organization representative from a prominent NGO describes further the situation:

Most of the agendas for social policy were done in the United Nations offices, education in particular with UNICEF. UNESCO had less of a presence. (Civil society organization representative, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2013)

Three large reforms funded by the World Bank and the IDB focused on decentralization and the creation of a network of schools. The premise was that these reforms would enhance quality and the capacity of both the Ministry and teachers in schools. The programs not only failed to improve learning, but contributed to increased conflicts that

undermined the governance capacity of the Ministry (Whitman, 2009; Ministry official, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2013).

The increasing influence of international organizations and donor agencies over the sector combined with growing interference of the Teacher's Union and NGOs in setting educational agenda and goals. Here the first education minister under Correa describes the consequences of a lack of state authority and control:

A weak Ministry with no authority and capacity led to excessive intromissions from the Teacher's Union in administrative and bureaucratic decisions on the one hand and on the other to excessive presence of international organizations and NGOs in the definition of education policies.

It is not that participation from social groups is bad, but when the Ministry does not have institutional strength and is not clear on institutional policies, then it's serious because each group has an opinion based on their own particular interests and not necessarily the interests of the overall public (Education Minister under Correa, personal communication, April 15, 2014).

Correa's second Education Minister under Correa echoed similar themes:

There were many anarchical issues with the lack of governance in the system. Any person, any institution, even international organizations de facto made

public policy. Without a strong ministry, anyone (NGOs, municipalities, mayors) made policy. This made the system chaotic, with a whole variety of actors supplying education with different criteria. Private education proliferated with indiscriminate growth and was privileged over public supply. (Minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

During this period, public education was semi-privatized and schools lacking resources charged fees for admissions, textbooks, materials, and uniforms. Inequality was also reproduced through what appeared to be an unorganized supply of education with no common core curriculum that would allow children to gain the skills needed to be more proactive agents in their own futures. The Vice-Minister of Education under Correa explains the ministry rationale for curriculum reform through this equity frame:

The previous system of secondary education, like many of those in Latin America, was diversified, each with its own emphasis. Within this curricular anarchy, there was no common core curriculum in areas such as math, literature, science, [or] history. So you had a subsystem of secondary schools that focused just on science, others that were for the middle class and above. There were technical and vocational schools, intercultural bilingual schools for the indigenous communities, and we had the “popular secondary schools” which in theory were for adults, but were really for marginalized populations. Each of these systems had its own level of difficulty, their own standards, and they all focused on different things. So we had a clear situation of enormous inequality,

and the only thing this type of segregated system did was to maintain those inequalities and opportunities. (Vice-Minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013)

Bermeo (2008) published a study around the time that Correa took office and assessed the situation of educational governance at the local state, municipal, and district levels. The study included input from local territorial officials and experts. The report highlights the lack of coordination and decision-making power at local levels:

There is no articulation with the territory between schools, between levels of schooling, between local and national entities. There are no learning processes and exchange that allow schools to learn collectively. There are no collective processes of teacher development, or learning between students. To talk about the Educational system in Ecuador is an aspiration, because really what you have is profound fragmentation and atomization of educational establishments (Bermeo, 2008, p. 11).

Another Sub-Secretary of Education under Correa official spoke about of how this lack of central governance affected decisions around pedagogy at the local school level.

There was no control before. The federal schools did what they wanted; the private ones too. There was a Ministerial decree and all of sudden all schools were declared educational experiments! There were absurd pedagogical

experiments such as giving apples to students during recess so they would wake up and be more alert (Sub-secretary of Education, personal communication, March 3, 2013).

Before his days as a professional politician, Rafael Correa worked as an economist and showed a special interest in educational development. Correa even worked as an education loan officer for the Inter-American Development Bank and had a brief stint as Minister of Finance under President Alfred Palacio. Correa resigned from his post as Minister and criticized the President for bending to international donors' demands.

When Correa won the election in 2007, he did so with the support of a coalition of leftist parties, social movements, and even various sector union leaders. He ran on an anti-neoliberal platform, which he later presented and published in the book, *From Banana Republic to Non-Republic* (2010). As Correa took office, he declared that the so-called "long neoliberal night" was over.

The Plot: Recuperating the "Public" in Education

In 2006, Correa was elected on a broad based coalition of the left. Given the loose organization of this coalition, Correa was perceived by citizens as semi-independent from any one particular party and economic powers. When Correa took power, he faced a large conservative opposition in congress. Given Correa's combative campaign and discourse, it was almost certain that the majority in congress held by conservatives would block any attempts at reform.

State Autonomy

In his first few days in office, Correa made several political moves that allowed his government, including the education minister, some autonomy and space to govern. The opposition framed these steps as anti-democratic. From the government's perspective, these actions were necessary to rebalance the scales and regain power from entrenched groups that had captured the state and economy (Ramirez Gallegos, 2010).

On his first day in office, Correa convened a referendum to rewrite the constitution. From the start, Correa signaled his intention to take on traditional elites and political groups. These included political parties, labor unions, commercial elites, as well as international donors and organizations. Correa's combative stance against the political establishment contributed to his popularity among citizens. After six months in office, Correa had an 85% approval rating in citizen polls (Ramirez Gallegos, 2010).

Through a series of political maneuvers, including the removal of 57 congressional members substantiated on the grounds that they illegally blocked the referenda for the National Assembly, Correa obtained a majority in congress for his party, the Movimiento Alianza País (AP). On the day of the national referendum, 82% of citizens voted yes to constitutional reform. As a result, the National Assembly was able to rewrite the constitution with three notable changes: 1) the central planning role of the state in economic and social spheres was strengthened; 2) the concept of a plurinational and intercultural state was legally enshrined; 3) progressive social, economic and political rights, including collective and environmental rights.

The new Constitution of Montecristo was finalized and approved in 2008 and a new election was held in 2009. Correa won by a large margin. However, the President's party, AP, lost its majority in congress, making the implementation of the "citizen revolution" challenging. In response, Correa moved to concentrate power in the executive branch. Since Correa's election in 2006, more than 50% of legislation has been passed through executive decree without congressional approval (Pachano, 2011).

Correa implemented a number of key actions that significantly shifted the power between the state and various actors. These actions include the creation of public enterprises in strategic areas such as energy, mining and public services; reducing foreign debt; and implementing a series of institutional reforms aimed at recuperating the state's capacity to govern, regulate and control the public agenda (Ramirez Gallegos, 2010).

Within the education sector, Correa also worked to reconfigure power between the state and various actors, including international organizations and donors, the teachers' union, and civil society. An ex minister of education described this as creating a broader "policy of the state":

If I have a foundation and fix 20 schools in the neighborhood and develop a nice looking program, then I am someone who is concerned with education. This isn't bad in and of itself, especially in poor societies. But when a policy of

the state says, “No sir, this is a broader policy,” or “No Mr. International Bank, I don’t want your loans for education, I want you to invest in hydroelectric infrastructure, but I’ll finance education myself,” this implies a substantial shift in public policy (Ex. Minister, personal communication April 14, 2014).

In sum, Correa maneuvered to create some autonomy in decision-making. Correa’s overwhelming public support gave him the support needed to redistribute power. However, Correa’s success in gaining political autonomy from traditional political parties and corporatist groups also came at a price. Correa weakened the various institutional mechanisms for citizen participation, such as political parties and collective organizations. These were not replaced with alternatives that would allow a more deliberative and democratic society as envisioned in the Constitution (De la Torre, 2013; Ramirez, 2010). In addition, Correa’s unilateral actions distanced the President from the base of his political party and the social movements that brought him to power, setting up a whole new series of conflicts with different groups in the country from the right to left. In 2010, the UNE (the National Teacher’s Union) paralyzed the education system with a nine-month strike. Similarly, in 2011, 2012 and 2015, indigenous movements organized strikes to protest new environmental laws regarding water resources. Business elites also stepped up their opposition, particularly through the media, which has become the main field for political dispute (Ramirez Gallegos, 2010).

State Authority

Once Correa gained some political space and autonomy in national policymaking, he moved to consolidate the power of the state and the central authority of the executive and in key legal documents such as the *National Development Plan Buen Vivir* and eventually a new education law.

The overarching governance narrative of Correa's government is articulated in the *National Development Plan Buen Vivir 2009-2013*. The plan begins with a description of the old paradigm of development and its faulty linear assumptions about progress, modernization, industrialization, and overemphasis on economic growth. This old development paradigm was replaced with a new humanist model of societal organization loosely based on the indigenous concept of *Sumak Kawsay*, or in Spanish translated as *Buen Vivir*.

The concept of *Buen Vivir* connotes the idea of a full life, beginning with the balance and harmony of men and women as and with themselves. A key notion embedded in the re-signification of *Buen Vivir* is the satisfaction of basic necessities for the entire population. This notion opposes the neoliberal emphasis on economic growth and individuality and provided a conceptual argument to bring the state back to the center in order to recuperate public services and goods privatized under neo-liberalism.

As Correa entered into office in 2007, many of those representatives from civil society and social movements that once opposed the government found themselves in government. With them, they brought a previously socially validated educational

agenda in the 10-year education plan. This educational agenda was developed through a process of 3 years of social dialogue (prior to 2007) and was ratified by citizens during the presidential election on a special ballot. One respondent who played a central role in the process describes the experience:

We didn't propose anything new; we just captured the aspirations of everyone. We visited all of the presidential candidates and we asked that they make this plan their own. While the plan also reflects the gaps and shortcomings of the time, it was successful in elevating education to a national level (Ministry Official, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

Correa selected the Plan's main advocate, Raul Vallejo, to be Minister of Education. Vallejo had support among various groups and had demonstrated the ability to bring together different actors including the union, ministry, private sector and social actors. Vallejo had been Minister of Education twice before, and so he also had the requisite political skills needed to advance educational reform. Here one civil society representative highlights how Vallejo served as a bridge for broader educational demands from social movements:

I think Correa opened up space for some of the social actors and movements that allowed for his ascension and they imprinted things on public policy which they had fought for before (Civil Society Representative, personal communication, Feb. 23, 2013).

However, after the first few years, it was evident to the Ministry that the 10-year plan needed to be updated to align more with the new Constitution and National Development Plan. By the second and third year of the reform, more attention would need to be placed on quality. In part, the delay in tackling the quality issue may have been a strategic political decision on the part of Correa and Minister Vallejo. Before tackling the more politically complicated reform elements dealing with quality, Vallejo wisely chose to sequence the reform, ensuring that some short-term successes were in place, as well as other conditions such as bolstering broader citizen support for reform. The Vice-Minister explains:

When this government first started, one of the first objectives was to achieve the promise that education could be an equalizer of opportunity (Vice Minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

By 2009, due in part to growing critiques of the 10-year plan on the issue of quality, the Ministry began to transform its plan once again. With Correa's backing, it began to turn its attention to establishing the legal basis for deepening certain aspects of the reform. Here the Minister of Education situates the passing of the new education law as a fundamental step in recuperating the Ministry's rectoria (authority and control).

There was a complicated and very difficult process to recuperating the Ministry's authority and governance. It started with legislation and the creation

of a new education law. This was a real triumph! Several key elements were added to this law, like the concept of citizen participation, the concept of interculturality and the principle that education is not only a right but also as a public good. An absolute majority in the assembly approved the law despite their very diverse political views. This is interesting. (Minister of Education, personal communication, March 2, 2013)

The law helped to consolidate the authority, jurisdiction and power of the State over education while establishing principles that would begin to address the issue of quality with more precision. These new principles included teacher recruitment criteria, setting up an autonomous national evaluation institution, creating a career ladder for teachers based on performance, and also limiting teachers' and students' right to protest.

Liberating the Education System from “Mafias”

One of the more interesting twists in Ecuador's education reform story is Correa's complicated relationship with the main Teacher's Union, or UNE. UNE became an influential political actor on the national scene in the 1980s and 1990s. With 113,000 members, it was the largest, most powerful union in Ecuador by the turn of the century. In the early 1980s, the Teacher's Union was co-opted by a group of militants from the Movimiento Popular Democrático (MPD), the Marxist Leninist party (founded in 1978). The MPD militants exploited the Union for its finances, primarily through teachers' dues. They also capitalized on its singular ability to organize national protests. Union Membership and dues became obligatory during the simultaneous rise to power of the UNE and MPD. The Union, not the Ministry, also maintained control over hiring

and firing teachers. In several instances, UNE became so powerful that it physically took over the offices of the Ministry of Education during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The Union also blocked two of the main reforms in the 1990s: literacy and bilingual education because they viewed these as imposed from the outside. According to many of the participants in this study (including those on the left and outside of government) over time general fatigue set in over continued protests, weakening the legitimacy of the UNE in certain social sectors and more broadly among the general populace.

In the face of the exertion of power outlined above, Correa and Vallejo established a number of strategies to weaken the Union. The first was to implement a law in 2009 that outlawed collective contracts for hiring teachers, essentially taking away their main source of revenue. In 2009, the new education law also reiterated a clause that outlawed any type of protests (by teachers, students, etc.) during school hours:

According to number 15 article 326 of the Constitution, and considering that education is a human right and a fundamental public service, it is prohibited that any member of the educational community promote or provoke the intentional paralysis of educational services. No cause or circumstance, except chance or greater force, will justify the interruption of educational activities (Organic Intercultural Education Law, 2009).

Correa and Vallejo skillfully reframed the old ministry teacher union conflict in new terms, declaring that the right to education trumps teachers' right to protest.

As Vallejo and Correa shifted their attention towards quality enhancing reforms, they anticipated strong opposition from the Union, in particular around the issue of teacher evaluations. Preparing themselves for an inevitable conflict in 2009, the President and Minister carefully began to make their case in different speeches and settings. Below is an excerpt from Correa' letter of introduction to the 2009 annual government progress report:

We will never return to the past. We will rescue public education and ensure that it is of quality and warmth (*calidez*). Once and for all we will obliterate mediocrity in this country, liberate the educational system from the mafias that have dominated it for years. This new country belongs to everyone, that at its core has an education that liberates, *hasta la victoria siempre!* (Correa, 2009).

In the same document and using similar motifs, the Minister of Education Raul Vallejo connects the idea of a new paradigm with the idea of the need for reform starting with teacher evaluations:

Today we are celebrating the reconstruction of our public education, a public education of quality. We are here to say no to mediocrity, no to fear of change, no to paralysis. We are here once again to leave behind the old country. To dismantle the corporatist scaffolding that has propped up the old country for so

many years. Today we say yes to educational excellence. (Ministry of Education, 2009)

From an outsider perspective, the battle between Correa and the Teacher's Union is perplexing. Correa came to power with the help of the Union and the MPD leftist party. He also ran on a leftist socialist discourse that is regionally aligned with labor unions and social movements with a progressive participatory democracy discourse. However, practice did not represent reality. Once in power, Correa quickly distanced himself from the Union, arguing that its political behavior ran contrary to public interest. In a historical context in Ecuador, this legislation against collective organization is more understandable. As one academic explained:

To understand this legislation, we have to put this in historical perspective and understand the behavior of the MPD for the last 20 years to understand why people today have applauded and accepted this new law. You see, Ecuadorian society is super authoritarian. No, no no, it is not like that, it is more complicated. Maybe in ten years, legislation will change. This legislation responded to a historical moment. Maybe in ten years the legislation will change with other teachers, with another type of teacher education, with other teacher practices, with teachers that realize that they have social responsibilities, with a teacher that is responsible for education results (Academic, personal communication, March 3, 2013).

Retooling for Performance

Correa and Minister Vallejo realized that they needed more than legislation and strong rhetoric to move the educational reform forward, especially when it came to quality. His executive team focused on building the internal capacity of the Ministry to execute reforms by instituting various key changes, including restructuring the Ministry, developing strategic planning capacity, and establishing recruitment criteria and performance standards.

The first step involved restructuring the actual Ministry of Education to reflect its new intention to formulate and execute policy:

When Raul Vallejo entered, he created a Sub-secretary of Quality, then a Vice-Ministry of Education. Wow! It was a big shift. Now we were thinking of producing and administering educational policy. (Ministry Official, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2013)

As part of this restructuring, there was a concerted attempt to begin to develop internal capacity to generate and manage new projects:

Recuperating governance does not only happen by passing a new law. We had to reorganize the system with a series of strategies that had an impact on a changing Ministry that only paid salaries to generating a series of projects that

had a direct impact on citizen's lives in the educational sphere. (Ministry Official, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2013)

There were internal institutional challenges and tensions in this process, particularly when it came to changing work culture and expectations within the Ministry. Here one of the younger new officials in the top-ranks of the Ministry describes the changes in expectations:

We had two groups within the Ministry. The old bureaucracy began to mix with the new bureaucracy. The old cadre was not used to the new pace of work. To be fair, many of them never had the basic resources to do their work, not even pencils and paper. All of a sudden they had these things and more. Expectations changed. We were now asked to manage programs and resources and deliver results. This was a challenge for many of them (Ministry Official, personal communication, Dec. 22, 2012).

Correa, with a background as an economist, stressed efficiency and transparency in government. A National Institute of Meritocracy was established with the mission “to promote excellence in public service, strengthen and control the application of a technical system of merits in the selection and evaluation of public servants, and to improve the competitiveness of institutions of the State” (INM, website). The Ministry designed and implemented a performance-based system, and the new laws established criteria and minimum requirements for the recruitment of different government

officials, including teachers, school directors, supervisors and even key ministry officials. Here the Minister of Education at the time explains how a results based performance system was applied to high-level officials including herself:

The president has obliged us to have a perspective of quality and efficiency in our management, something that has traditionally had more to do with the private sector than with the public sector in Ecuador. Today we have a scorecard called *Government for Results*.

Today the President knows how I am doing on my goals, what objectives I've set for myself, if I have challenges and how I have overcome them. Let us say there is now a type of traffic light system that tells the President I am in red, yellow or green, as well as what obstacles I've encountered. The word of an authority, in this case the President, is reflected in the commitments that I acquire with some territory or teacher, and this system now obliges us to keep our word. If I choose to put the budget towards one thing instead of the other, then I have to justify why I have done this. Every time I buy a good or service, I need to know if it has a guarantee. We are moving towards a modern state in Ecuador, something never seen before (Minister of Education, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

Various reports and respondents highlighted the overly centralized decision-making in the Ministry, both prior to and during Correa's presidency. The Ministry, well aware

of these critiques when I was conducting my field research, was in the midst of launching a deconcentration reform of the education system. Here the Minister of Education explains the initial response and feedback from citizens:

It is very early to tell if this is working well after just three months. However, people feel it's giving life, that they can approach an institution and get a response, that they have services that for the first time are designed for them, for the first time they know how the process works, that for the first time they don't have to travel to the capital of a province to file a procedure, and this doesn't take months, and you don't have to pay. In terms of transparency, I think what is happening is interesting and that the fact that citizens have these deconcentrated services and this participation is a start. It is the first thing to reach them and has opened the door for what will come after (Minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

In these first few years of reform, bottlenecks and implementation issues did crop up. Several high level officials acknowledged shortcomings, but also reframed the issue as a capacity gap and credited the reform for having contributed to growing expectations from society around education:

Increasing demands and lack of prioritization are creating problems. For example, one of the main goals of the 10-year plan is to increase investment in education to 6% of GDP from its initial level of 2%. However, it is evident that

there is a lack of capacity to manage these funds. Many areas have budget surpluses at the end of the year. They haven't spent the money (Civil Society Representative, personal communication, Feb. 2, 2013).

Even local school officials recognized the challenges. They did, however, also express hope:

In implementation there are issues. There are still lots of people who lack information. There are bottlenecks. But it is an ongoing process. With the new model to decentralize management, the flow of information should improve. At least now there is aspiration to improve, to play a bigger role (Rural School Director, personal communication, March 4, 2013).

Most stakeholders (and even the fiercest critics) acknowledge that Correa's government made important progress in the first few years in terms of recuperating the public dimensions of education and enhancing equity. Specific strategies involved abolishing school fees, providing free text books and uniforms to all students, implementing a school feeding program that targeted low-income communities, and improvements to school infrastructure and planning. These were combined with a larger conditional cash transfer program to help address the underlying poverty of many families. In Ecuador, poverty affected school attendance, dropout rates and performance. The implementation of this package of policies resulted in measurable gains in educational opportunities for marginalized groups such as indigenous and

Afro-Caribbean citizens and the rural poor. Various groups outside of government recognized this progress and attributed it to the strengthening of the state:

Strengthening the role of the state has allowed for a general increase in equity and for recuperating education as a public good (through the elimination of school fees and other barriers) (International Organization Representative, personal communication, March 4, 2014).

Media and the Battle to Shape the Narrative

A critical component of the education reform effort has been public communication. Under Correa, the Ministry continues to refocus resources and efforts on crafting public messaging to help build support for the policy reform agenda among general citizens. This communication, combined with Correa and his Ministers' constant use of the bully pulpit, has bolstered the government despite fierce opposition from both the right and leftist interest groups and the media.

There are a few aspects that are worth highlighting. The first is that the President himself has instituted several mechanisms to keep his political agenda present in the minds of citizens. Given the anti-statist stance of the mainstream private press, Correa has channeled funds towards state-run television and radio and has worked to pass legislation that mandates that all channels, public and private, are obligated to provide the government with several hours a day to "inform" citizens on "progress made."

In addition, Correa instituted what he calls a “traveling cabinet.” Every week, he and his ministers travel to a different part of the country to meet with local citizens in round-table sessions to listen to their claims, respond, and to simply inform people of the government’s agenda. The combination of these actions has created an opportunity for the government to continually shape the narrative. In theory, it also serves as a participatory mechanism to collect information from the field on how citizens perceive policies, where implementation is successful or where it needs further reform, and to gather new ideas and proposals from citizens. The high level of resources and attention invested in communication in Correa’s government indicates its strategic importance for governance.

It is also interesting to note that Correa’s first choice of Minister, Raul Vallejo, is a poet, writer, and experienced politician. Minister Vallejo’s adept use of discourse and symbols no doubt played a role in captivating the imagination of citizens and strategic groups, garnering their support. While impressive in their technical credentials and educational trajectory, many educational ministers throughout the region have not lasted long in their posts because they lacked the political and rhetorical skills needed to persuade groups to support change or to marginalize groups that posed as a threat to change. Olson (2007) argues that rhetorical leadership and the strategic use of symbols are critical for promoting cooperation between groups.

Executive Leadership

Many reforms in Latin America can be criticized as primarily symbolic. Political leaders have little incentive to implement education reform, particularly those that deal

with transforming the system. This is because of short time-horizons and also the fact that these types of reforms are difficult and usually generate conflict. Several of those interviewed attributed executive leadership as a key factor for reform success. While his rhetoric was fiery, it is evident that Correa backed it up in many cases and committed real political and financial resources towards advancing education reforms.

During difficult moments in the reform, Correa came out in public to defend the reform and his Minister of Education. The President directly organized and attended several counter-protests against those groups opposing the reform. The President's reform fervor also inspired many high-level bureaucrats to believe in their political projects and to persist despite the low pay, long hours, constant political battles and opposition. Many of the high level officers that I interviewed truly believed this was a unique historical opportunity for Ecuador to make significant educational change. We observe this here in a 2013 quote from the Minister of Education as she speaks on Correa's leadership:

We have shown that real change is possible if you have the political support. The President has been key in this area. His strength and vision has been significant. Yesterday in his speech the President said that if he had to choose only one thing to do, he would focus on education; he would not do anything else. He has said publicly: 'If I am forced out of office because I bet on education reform then so be it.' When we were implementing the teacher evaluations, the President stood up for the reform and stated publicly that he

was betting his presidency on the reform. He said: ‘If I am toppled from power because I wanted a process to evaluate teachers, because I wanted a better education for my country, then so be it.’ He is very strong in these types of affirmations. If we did not have such a strong and decisive figure, I would have quit a long time ago. I am here because the president has supported me. He has also been critical, but he has supported the processes we have undertaken in the ministry; he recognizes that in the government we are the area that has best adopted his vision (Minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

The Moral of the Story: Governance as “Laying Down the Train Tracks”

The moral of the story in this narrative is that successfully advancing educational reforms in a post-neoliberal context characterized by weakened public institutions requires first and foremost recuperating the institutional authority and capacity of the state. Re-establishing the authority of state institutions over a sector requires taking power away from entrenched groups that have a hold over public institutions. In this case, this means weakening the influence of international donors and agencies as well as local unions and social groups. There are several key lessons that can be derived from this story from a governance of education reform perspective:

- 1) In the case of Ecuador, a historical opening allowed Correa to centralize power in the executive and central ministry, essentially increasing policy decisiveness

in the formulation stages. This meant that Correa could circumvent a messy and dysfunctional political process characterized by political fragmentation, regionalization, and pork-barrel politics.

- 2) Initial high citizen approval ratings provided Correa with political capital to take on powerful veto actors and neutralize them.
- 3) Correa's effective rhetorical leadership and activist stance, as well as his strategic use of communication, were critical reform support components.
- 4) Creating space for reform was important but not sufficient. Correa and his ministers focused on enhancing the capacity of the Ministry to formulate and implement policy changes and to reform the culture of the bureaucracy to focus on results.
- 5) Strategic sequencing of the reform was critical. Increasing investment and tripling teacher salaries helped to create momentum and counter-arguments that would serve usefully for the second more contentious phases of reform.

The net result was the ability for the central government to formulate and pass universal policies that could benefit all of Ecuador's citizens, particularly those most in need. State centralization enabled reformers to advance a qualitative reform agenda that incited increased opposition from entrenched groups. State centralization allowed the reformers to maneuver in the face of reform opposition. Ensuring basic compliance across the system in basic educational inputs and processes (infrastructure, salaries, core curriculum) is a fundamental stepping stone to higher-order and more complex reforms focused on quality. To paraphrase Correa's metaphor: recuperating governance

in the education sector in a post-neoliberal era is like laying down the tracks so that the train can run.

Counter Narrative: Correa the “Techno-populist”

Correa came into power through the support of a leftist coalition that included social movements, labor unions, leftist and socialist parties and intellectuals. Many of the individuals from these groups joined Correa’s government, and most of these groups actively collaborated to drafting the new Constitution.

The alternative and progressive language in the Constitution and even in the National Development Plan *Buen Vivir* broadly highlighted the possibility of a more humanist and alternative conception of education and development. However, by 2009, several groups became discouraged with what they perceived as increasing contradiction between Correa’s “citizen revolution” and specific policies pursued by his administration.

Alberto Acosta, considered one of the main socialist intellectual contributors to Correa’s government platform and who led the drafting of the Constitution as President of the Constitutional Assembly, was one of the first high level political figures on the left to split with Correa. Acosta had deep connections and alliances with leftist social movements, and his departure signaled a broader cleavage between Correa and social movements on the left.

Some of the main critiques by Acosta of Correa and his administration focused on Correa's development model, which is based on the extraction of primary resources (petroleum and minerals). They also criticized him for the lack of a more horizontal form of decision-making. Acosta has referred to Correa as a "caudillo of the 21st century,"⁴ arguing that his blend of populist discourse of a citizen revolution masks his more conservative political project: consolidating power.

Resignifying Buen Vivir

The concept of *Buen Vivir* has been used as an overarching guiding metaphor of the Correa governance narrative to signal a shift in the development paradigm away from neoliberalism. However, critiques quickly emerged around Correa's co-option and re-signification of the indigenous term. Here the national representative of indigenous teachers in the Teacher Union describes this as a distortion of their symbols:

Correa learning a few words in Quechua is simply a revalorization, a sort of joke, a sort of folklore, a trick. If they really respected our cultural and linguistic diversity, they would have maintained the autonomy of the intercultural system of education as it was before. Their distortion of our symbols is a type of folklore that is used to convince citizens. We interpret it as a commodification of our symbols, of our intangible culture (Indigenous Union Leader, personal communication, March 5, 2013).

⁴ Caudillo is a term used to refer historically to local military landowners who ruled through force. They were prevalent throughout the 19th century in Latin America. A common pejorative translation is strongman.

Within the education sector, Correa's administration retook control over the intercultural education system under the rationale that quality in this sub-system had degenerated and adversely affected some communities over others. One of Correa's ministers interviewed in this study described the previous administration's policy of providing each community with funding to do whatever they pleased without accountability as "irresponsible." However, the reaction on the part of social movement leaders to Correa's education reform agenda was negative:

The intercultural organic law states that the authority (*rectoria*) for policymaking lies in the hands of the state, and so this leads to a monocultural policy, a policy of massification in which the diversity of the curriculum from the communities and different ethnicities is not considered. The richness of our culture and its diverse nationalities is not even maintained in the Ministry's policy of school uniforms, where we see a loss of cultural identity (Indigenous Union Leader, personal communication, March 5, 2013).

The Buen Vivir concept in the political sphere in Ecuador became a floating signifier defined by different groups in different ways. Within the first few years, the Minister of Education often referred to Buen Vivir in national and international forums. One of the concepts readapted to the education sector within this discourse was the idea of *calidez*, or warmth. *Calidez* implied improving relationships between the education

system and local educational institutions, between teachers and students, schools and communities.

For the Teacher's Union, Buen Vivir was defined as socialism based on principles of equality, social justice, and non-discrimination (Pallasco, 2012). However, others argued that Buen Vivir implied neither capitalism nor a centralized socialism, but rather an intercultural democratic state that respects the local autonomy of governments yet creates a sort of unity through interculturality.

Over time, the broader concentration of power and the state-centric approach of the Correa government undermined the potential power of the Buen Vivir metaphor to inspire collective action, deeper democratic transformations, and the emergence of a clear educational alternative. Here one international observer describes the governance style:

Overall, as the government pursues Buen Vivir politics, they can be characterized as utterly centralized, hierarchic and technocratic. They aim at maximum control, stability through social and public management-type planning and accountability, while regarding every opposing force as threat (Waldmuller, 2014).

Not a “Zero Sum Game”

Given the shift in power between the state and social actors during Correa's presidency, it is not surprising that new areas of conflict opened up around education reform. These

conflicts became more visible about two years into Correa's first term in 2009, when the Ministry began to focus on implementing various strategies related to quality. The most contentious points were around implementation of a national evaluation of teachers and students and the creation of standards.

Within education, critics saw a turn towards a more neoliberal education reform package that included teacher evaluations, merit pay, and educational standards. These neoliberal reforms were combined with increased centralization of education policymaking in the state under the rationale of strengthening institutional authority.

A report from the meeting of a large forum of civil society organizations in education introduces one of the emerging cleavages around the state's concept of governance:

After decades of deterioration, there has been a rapid race to renew the strength of the government since 2007. However, one of the costs of this new process is the diminishing role of society and its gradual eclipsing. Due to this Administration's style and their emphasis on political expediency, effectiveness and results, only one actor (the central government) has dangerously remained on the stage (Contrato Social, 2009, p. 16).

An interview with a former high-level ministry official from the Alfredo Palacio administration expressed a similar critique:

Correa has a very centralist and statist spirit. He defines education as a sector that is not decentralizable. Under this understanding, education is the responsibility of the national government and not the local government, and everything that is done in the territories is part of that sectoral governance. The current process is one of deconcentration. Really this is solely administrative, not content related or centered on educational quality. They have created districts to pay salaries, administer resources locally, and to comply with what the center says (Ex-official from Palacio Administration, personal communication, Feb. 23, 2013).

Many critics on the left recognized the historical importance and significance of rebuilding the state's authority as a necessary means to recuperate public schooling. However, they also expressed consternation that in that process of the state consolidating its power, spaces for democratic dialogue and debate around education were reduced. Here one representative from a prominent civil society organization pointed to an important difference in how recuperating governance is perceived by the government as a zero sum game:

We do not share the idea that strengthening the state is a zero sum game, that the power that the state has to recuperate they have to take from someone else. So the strengthening of the state implies the weakening of civil society organizations, universities, social movements that were traditionally present in

public deliberations (Civil Society Representative, personal communication, Feb. 26, 2013).

Correa the “Technopopulist”

Many critics accuse Correa and the Ministry of Education of being technocratic. They make these claims despite the progressive rhetoric of a new model of development based on *Buen Vivir* and a new Constitution that prioritizes citizen participation.

In 2009, when the Ministry initiated the reform strategies that dealt with quality, including teacher evaluations and standards, there was increasing opposition from various social actors such as the Teacher’s Union, indigenous movements, and educational activists. Many of the critiques were leveled at the style of government that had taken shape during Correa’s presidency. They had hoped for an alternative and a new vision of society and saw Correa’s reform strategies as more of the same. Here an ex Minister of Education and prominent leftist critic in education summarizes her view:

The term “educational revolution” has been used in various countries and processes over recent years as a substitute for educational reform, which is fatigued and discredited. Let us reserve the term educational revolution for a more substantive and radical change, which implies a change in the educational paradigm. In the Ecuadorian case, there has not been change to the paradigm. It is an educational reform with classic characteristics. It is centered on the formal educational system, vertical, authoritarian, technocratic, homogenous,

not participatory, and generated from the outside (Torres, 2014).

A perceived disjuncture between policy rhetoric and action is commonly cited in education. Many refer to it as the policy implementation gap. From this perspective, Correa's progressive leftist discourse serves to mask an underlying conservative political project. The government uses several rhetorical tactics, including delegitimizing the opposition by framing them as political actors pursuing private interests as opposed to the public interest. The government's agenda is presented as advancing the public interest. This claim of representation of the public interest is questionable given the lack of a broader and deeper democratic process. The tension between technocratic and participatory approaches to policy is highlighted below by one civil society representative:

I think people in the Ministry do not have a vision of public policy, a vision of the politics of education. There is a strong technocratic spirit in this government; they speak of standards, norms and indicators (which I believe are important), but their conceptualization is devoid of politics. I think this is insufficient when it comes to a public policy on quality (Civil society organization representative, interview, Feb. 23, 2013).

How do we explain these contradictions? From a meta-governance theory perspective, this disjuncture can be seen as the state attempting to reconfigure its power and maintain control over social actors within the context of globalization. Carlos de la

Torre refers to Correa as a “technopopulist.” De la Torre (2013) extends Weber’s concept of charisma as a form of domination, arguing that Correa’s discourse and style of governance is a combination of populist charisma and technocratic rationalism. De la Torre argues that these are not necessarily opposing systems of dominance. Populism is defined by de la Torre as a “polarizing and manichean discourse used to arrive in power and govern while technocracy is a discourse used by experts that appeals to science as a way to transform society in order to benefit the common good (De la Torre, 2013, p. 10).” Correa effectively combines both tactics to consolidate and legitimate the concentration of power.

The Moral of the Story: A Conservative Political Project

The moral of the story from the counter-narrative perspective is that Correa has constructed a political discourse based on populist elements that masks a more conservative political project of centralization in the state and executive. This populist discourse employs a unique blend of socialist, social movement and indigenous symbols and rhetoric. However, from the counter-narrative perspective, reforms have become less participatory over time and in substance reflect a more conservative agenda that focuses on a narrow technocratic concept of educational quality.

The irony in this story is that most civil society members and even social movement leaders called to strengthen the state as Correa took power. They supported Correa, and through a coalition helped him win the election. However, Correa’s aggressive concentration of power was more than they bargained for. The historical mistrust

between both the state and civil society has not helped relations between the state and civil society groups. This mistrust likely continued and encouraged Correa to further focus on control as opposed to pursuing a more democratic route. And this mistrust likely shaped the adversarial political identity of key social movements and groups, including the Union. This, in turn, deepened the rift between the government and social sectors.

Chapter 6: Participation Narratives

This chapter identifies and discusses two competing narratives around participation and education in Ecuador. The dominant government narrative employs the metaphor of “citizen revolution” to imply a shift away from a state and politics controlled by national elites to one that serves the “public” interest. This narrative puts emphasis on direct individual citizen participation through state- sanctioned channels. Participation from groups and collective organizations is framed as pursuing private aims as opposed to representing public ones. The villains in this narrative are leaders of collective opposition groups who use unsanctioned channels of participation and unsubstantiated claims to derail reform. This narrative argues for limiting the participation of citizens, parents, communities and NGOs. It advocates setting broader goals and leaving the more technical aspects to experts and government officials.

The counter-narrative challenges the state-led definition of participation and the lack of inclusion in education policy-making processes. It also focuses on the lack of autonomy and freedom to collectively organize. The main villains in this narrative are President Correa and ministry officials who have implemented a top-down technocratic policy agenda without authentic participation from communities, organizations, and most of all, teachers. The plot highlights the oppressive measures taken by Correa and the government to quell opposition and critique.

The Setting: A Citizen Revolution

When Correa took over in 2007, he declared in his first speech before Congress:

Today, the country belongs to everyone. The struggle begins. November 26 was not the point of arrival; it was the point of departure. The citizen revolution has begun, and as long as we have a united *pueblo* that is decided on change, no one can stop it (Correa, Speech before Congress, Jan. 15, 2007).

Correa then went on to articulate four areas for revolution including the constitution, economy, education and health. Critical to the overarching narrative of a citizen revolution is the idea that Correa and his administration were ushering in a fundamental transformation of the state controlled by corrupt elites towards a state that serves the needs of everyday citizens.

As highlighted in the last chapter, one of Correa's first steps in this transformation of the state involved convening a Constitutional Assembly to rewrite the constitution. Many groups on the left, including indigenous groups, labor unions and social movements, participated in the drafting of the document that resulted in Ecuador's most progressive Constitution to date from a social rights and participatory democracy point of view.

The Constitution recognizes the pluricultural and plurinational character of the state and gives indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian populations specific collective rights. It contains a section on participatory democracy, establishing a series of new institutional mechanisms such as citizen planning councils for each sector, referendum, popular consultation, and the ability for citizens to directly present bills.

Within the document, the articles dealing with education articulate a vision of the education system that should be responsive to linguistic, ethnic and other diverse communities in Ecuador. It calls for decentralization and deconcentration and establishes that parents, communities, teachers and students have the right to participate in the development of educational processes.

The degree to which these legal documents (the Constitution or educational laws) promoted participation in the education sector is debatable. Despite their formal establishment, some of the mechanisms, such as the National Council for Education (NEC), were never convened nor did they function in practice. However, there have been other attempts to foment participation in the reform, some initiated by the government and others created through pressure from civil society and the media. Most of those interviewed for this study referred to government initiated participation within the context of policy formulation or more generally. There are likely other instances and examples of participation during the education reform that could be evaluated, both sanctioned and unsanctioned, but here the focus is more on capturing the overall narratives on both sides.

A Citizen Agenda in Education

When Correa was elected President, his government adopted a long-term educational reform agenda called the 10-year Plan. This plan was formulated through a participatory process just prior to his presidency, and the agenda emerged and evolved over a decade of previous consultations with education actors both within the formal government and outside. The final agenda was formally vetted through a national

dialogue in 2006. In that year, citizens had the opportunity to provide input on the plan through approximately forty citizen forums at regional and national levels and through a national referendum during the 2006 presidential election.

The final plan was ratified by a national referendum in November 2006, when approximately 66% of voters approved the plan (Ministry of Education, 2006). Subsequent participation of citizens has focused on monitoring the implementation of the plan, and in some arenas has included participation in decision-making around refining the policies in order to increase their effectiveness. The Correa government positioned the plan as “citizen endorsed” and as a “policy of the state.”

Citizen mandate obligates us to institutionalize the 10-year-plan in education. This implies that the plan’s programs, goals, and objectives are developed within the framework of existing state policies. It also implies that we, as a country, give continuity to the plan irrespective of what minister is in charge of the education sector. The good news for Ecuador is that a citizen agenda, which we have been talking about for at least a decade, has finally been produced and validated by popular will in the ballot boxes; we, the leaders of government, have the inescapable responsibility to implement it.

(Raul Vallejo, Minister of Education, Preface to the 10-Year Plan in Education, 2007)

While the process of constructing and validating the agenda had its critics, overall the participatory process behind the formulation of the agenda and the vote to ratify helped lend credibility to the plan amongst citizens and in general civil society.⁵

The Plot: The Limits of Consensus and Participation

Despite the initial rhetoric around a citizen revolution, Correa's top-level officials were weary of the unmediated participation of social actors given the previous decade of political turmoil. Several top-level officials in Correa's administration were keenly aware (as authorized decision-makers) of the potential destabilizing effect that social movements could have on governability. They were also sensitive that divisions in Ecuadorian society (political, economic, social, ethnic) contributed to social unrest. They had to strike a balance between recuperating the ability and authority to make decisions (for example, shifting resources from one group to another) and the need to legitimize policy decisions through participation. Here the Ex Minister of Education under Correa describes the need to balance participation with decision-making:

I think there are limits to participation. In our societies, particularly after the destruction of the state in the neoliberal years, we come to the conclusion that society has to govern itself. This is not possible in certain moments. I consult. I

⁵ One of the main critics of the plan was Rosa Maria Torres, a former Minister of Education representing the "Pachakutik" party of indigenous movements. She wrote a public letter entitled "Porque Voté en Blanco" (why I did not vote for the Ten-year plan). The letter contained sixteen critiques of the plan, including: its "emphasis on quantitative aspects (coverage, access, enrollment and budgetary increases) leaving aside aspects related to content, pedagogy and learning; its emphasis on educational supply without attention to demand and needs as voiced by citizens; because it is financed primarily through external funds from the World Bank and citizens were not informed or consulted regarding the implications; because consultations with citizens were badly planned, the policies of the plan were not properly explained and disseminated throughout the country, in particular in rural zones (as a consequence many people did not understand the issues or the overall significance of the consultation); because the consultation was not institutionalized in order to ensure involvement and participation from social groups in implementing and monitoring the reform" (Torres, Dec. 15, 2006).⁵

compare consultations. I compare peoples' opinions. But in a certain moment I am responsible for making a decision. I, as a responsible politician, make a decision. This decision can be criticized, but it represents the moment when you exercise what is called *rectoria* (authority and control) and good government in a positive sense. What a governor cannot do is wish for unanimity. That doesn't exist. Our decision will make some happy and will be criticized by others. Others will be indifferent. This is what I think is what is at stake.

(Ex Minister of Education, personal communication, April 15, 2013).

Critiques of both the process and content of the proposed reform agenda were reframed by the government as the inevitable consequence of the shifts in power. Here, Alberto Acosta, one of the original architects of Correa's initial political project explains:

You criticize the government for lack of dialogue and consensus, but how can you have dialogue and consensus with sectors that have such different interests? In principle, I think you can have a conversation with all sectors if national interest is at stake. But to seek consensus with those who are against a process is impossible. In the context of profound and radical transformations, it is difficult to achieve consensus with those who stand to lose their privileges. Frankly, it's a waste of time. But if the citizen revolution has a deficit, it is in citizenship. There needs to be more participation, and decisions should not be taken from a desk (Acosta, nd).

Furthermore, several interviewed warned of the dangers of having a naive concept of civil society. Despite the democratic commitment, they were aware of the dangers and pitfalls of participation:

I assume that people who participate have good intentions and really want to collaborate. But of course this is naïve, because those who have done this for years know that the social organizing capacity of some groups is broad. They can organize to sabotage and boycott reforms. This is our social reality in the end (Government Official, personal communication, February 23, 2015).

In a similar vein, an academic interviewed for this study highlighted the need to recognize that all social relations and spaces are penetrated by power and inequality. She also raised an important question, which circulated in many of the interviews with government officials, around who really constitutes or claims to represent civil society:

With all due respect, the participation of parents and the community and civil society has limits. It is as if the unrestricted participation of civil society for some people is the large umbrella that guarantees a public and democratic education system. But participation can't be unrestricted. There are things that civil society can't guarantee because civil society, just like the state, is penetrated by relations of inequality and power. Unless we think of civil society as a panacea of equality, what is civil society? (Academic, personal communication, March 6, 2013)

Delineating Roles

Correa and top-level officials did make efforts to build participation into the reform. In this process, they were careful to explicitly delineate roles. From top-level officials' perspectives, the role of the state was to set the policy agenda while civil society's role was mostly to provide feedback and monitor implementation:

I think that non-governmental organizations are fundamental for the life of the country, but these can continue to vary their posture and this could be a very critical and respectable posture. While NGOs have a role in providing feedback, to serve as a watch dog on implementation, and to demand transparency in the execution of that public policy, they should recognize that it is the national government 'who makes public policy.' NGOs have many leveraging points, but their role is not to generate policy; this corresponds to government (Minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

Another high level official also echoed the same sentiment:

In various instances, the recommendations we were given [from civil society] were very useful. However, public policy has to be situated in the state. The power of decision-making and of where to allocate resources has to be situated in the state (Ministry official, personal communication, Feb. 23, 2012).

In part, these views can be interpreted as an inevitable reaction against several decades of meddling by international and national groups in formal decision-making in the sector, as highlighted in the last chapter.

Types of Participation

One of first opportunities for citizen participation in education during Correa's presidency occurred during the formulation of the secondary education reform. The government decided the best approach would be to develop the general goals and content of the reform and to then present the policy document to citizens in the media, online forums and in several face-to-face forums:

I think with regards to participation, we analyzed various options; we determined the way to reach the most people so that they would debate the topic (Vice minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

Sharing the draft policy document opened up space for critiques, but it was also an opportunity to get input and adjust the reform. Here the Sub Secretary of Education who was charged with the secondary education reform frames opening the process to input as a risk:

It was a hard process; through the media, interviews, and debates and at the end they did not spare anything. It was a challenge to put our entire proposal online. It was a risk because it made our errors and weaknesses evident. It wasn't a finished document. It was a proposal for discussion and dialogue, and it showed

our weakness in the social sciences (Sub secretary, personal communication, March 5, 2013).

Despite several months of consultations, discussions and adjustments to the final policy, the Ministry was criticized in the main media and other spaces for the lack of participation in the process. Below the Vice-minister offers several reflections, including expressing some frustration with critics:

Many people get comfortable in a position of opposition. They begin to repeat the notion that this reform was never consulted. The idea that the secondary education reform was not participatory is particularly painful because I know it was one of the reform proposals that was most debated and discussed. Maybe one has to question more deeply the notion of finding consensus. Consensus is an ideal that we aspire to, but it is often difficult or even impossible to achieve (Vice-minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

Expertise and Participation

One of the key distinctions in the discussion of appropriate types, levels, and moments for participation was the differentiation between technical decisions and goal setting. Not all ministry officials interviewed shared this view, but in general across government interviews the notion that experts should be designing specific reform elements was common. Here one high-level official differentiates when participation is appropriate and when it is not:

Content knowledge is a technical issue. It shouldn't be open for discussion. If you are an English teacher in Ecuador, you should have passed at least the B2 level. This is not an issue that should be open for public discussion. This does not imply that some form of collaborative process is required. For example, to develop math standards you need a process of construction and validation with experts on the topic (High Level Official, Personal communication, December 23, 2012).

Similarly, the role of expertise and knowledge emerged often when referring to the media and some civil society actors. From the government's perspective, many of the claims made in public by media or by some prominent civil society education activist groups were not substantiated with evidence or facts. This seemed a very important (if not an annoying) issue for high-level bureaucrats within the Ministry. At the time that I was conducting interviews, high-level officials were spending a lot of energy and time responding to these claims in public media and forums. We see this in the following quote from the Sub-secretary of Education:

It is necessary to elevate the debate in Ecuador. Unfortunately, the debate does not focus on important points. Groups do not use data and evidence to support their claims. The media, for example, took a picture that was in one of the textbooks and said we were going to teach Islam to Ecuadorian children. They took something out of context. We had a section on Islam during our chapter on the Middle Ages because you can't understand the Middle Ages without talking about Islam. So instead of presenting the substantive content of the

reform, I had to spend two weeks clarifying to the media and the public that we did not intend to teach Islam. The debate was sidetracked (Sub-secretary, personal communication, March 5, 2013).

How Much Participation?

Another debate is around defining not only the type of participation and the role that it should serve, but also how much participation was actually desirable. Several top-level officials expressed frustration over the unreasonable expectations from organized civil society groups, including the Minister here below:

Correa was critical when the issue of participation came up the other day. He said that we can discuss laws: we can discuss public policy. We can have lots of discussions, but the prevailing notion in Ecuador is that if an idea is not adopted in a discussion then there is not participation.

If I have 350,000 students at the secondary level who are directly affected by the reform, and in the last 2 years of consultations, I have received over 400,000 visits on my web page, is that participation? Is that significant? What would you consider sufficient levels of participation? Let us define this. If in Ecuador we have 14 million citizens and I get at least 1 million to give me feedback on what I am doing, is that sufficient participation? How about half a million? Is that participation? (Minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013)

With the reform of secondary education, the feasibility question faces anyone who tries to design participatory reform processes. Here, the Sub-secretary of education explains the Ministry's differences with the Teacher Union's definition of proper levels of participation:

The Union defines participation as having to include everyone in the process. This is impossible. There are 200,000 teachers and 30,000 educational institutions. We changed the concept of participation to give everyone information and whoever is interested in participating can participate. We convene a meeting with students and those interested in participation. We cannot obligate those who aren't interested in participating. We can't do a national census, referendum, or election every time we have to make a decision. So in light of this, we decided to let the draft policy document loose through an absolutely transparent process. I conversed with the Union President and they had observations, some of which were included. The whole consultation process lasted five months (Sub-secretary of Education, personal communication, March 5, 2013).

Those responsible for the education reforms rationalized the critiques around participation in the reform in various ways. The most common form was simply to explain that certain individuals and groups, despite the facts or reality or efforts made by the government to be inclusive and responsive, continued in their rigid role as critics:

What happens when a state disarms and assumes a different discourse and practices? Well, civil society doesn't know what to do, and it begins to have a discourse and practices that, how shall I say this, even have neoliberal elements. It is as if this civil society cannot decipher the new context and it begins to defend positions that under this new context and meaning are situated on the right of the ideological spectrum (Academic, personal communication, March 5, 2013).

Who Represents Whom?

Several groups from civil society emerged on the national scene to monitor progress on the plan, the most prominent and critical being the *Contrato Social Para La Educación (Social Contract for Education)*. The Contrato, founded in 2002, consists of prominent leaders from various sectors. This includes policymakers, academics, private groups, media and journalists, educators (teachers, students, parents), and over 100 organizations from around Ecuador that include non-governmental organizations, federations, parent groups, and international organizations. Several of the actual initial reform agenda strategies adopted by Correa came out of the Contrato's previous public forums and publications.

Given the Contrato Social's adept use of media and its broad-based coalition, the government was often compelled to engage and respond to its public statements and documents in various public forums and the media. Below the Minister of Education at the time describes their evolving role. He describes its value, but also questions their commitment to reach common ground and collaborate:

Contrato Social for Education emerged at a moment when there was no strong policy on the part of the state in relation to educational themes. In this sense, the Contrato had a lot of value. But with Contrato we have to explain, discern, and analyze how its role has changed in the moment there is a state that recuperates its authority. We at the Ministry have had numerous meetings with the organization, and it seems that these are never sufficient. (Minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013)

Furthermore, some ministry officials and even academics interviewed for this project questioned the internal democratic structures of Contrato Social and the Teacher's Union.

When formulating policy, we have consultations with a few actors, such as the Teacher's Union and Contrato Social, who claim to represent civil society. In reality, some of these groups are controlled by smaller groups that do not represent the broader interests of the sector itself, for example teachers. Contrato Social has evolved into a political actor as opposed to an autonomous actor from civil society that plays the role of social auditor (Vice-minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

The Vice-minister continues:

We believe profoundly in civil society, but we do not believe in oligarchy that says it represents civil society. With all due respect, what they have created is a "modus vivendi" based on the general good perception that the world has of

civil society. If I go out and start my own NGO tomorrow, does this mean I can claim I am a representative of civil society? In my opinion, a new profession was invented in Ecuador called representative of civil society. The paradox is that groups like Contrato Social and other actors in private institutions have self-nominated themselves as representatives of citizens through the logic of dibs and 'I called it first.' So de facto they represent citizens, but in reality they don't represent anyone except themselves (Vice minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

Part of the battle around defining participation is focused on questioning representatives of civil social groups while shifting the focus on participation to individuals. Here the Vice-Minister questions those who make broader claims of representation:

Most of us in the Ministry came from civil society. We are educators, economists, sociologists, and professionals, and most of us had no previous government experience. We are people that love education and want to change it. So when a person comes and says to us 'I represent civil society,' I'm sorry but no. We know who civil society is. They are teachers, students, and families of students. We fervently believe in civil society and we are convinced that no change will come without them, their approval, and their complicity (Vice minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

The Minister of Education also highlighted a similar theme in her response:

I can organize participatory consultations all over the country, but if I don't invite Milton Luna (Head of Contrato Social), then will he say there isn't sufficient participation? I give the same weight to these representatives of influential civil society organizations as I do to any mother, because she has nine kids, seven of which are in the school system (Minister of Education, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

Moral of the Story: The Paradox of Power

The overarching metaphor for this narrative is the citizen revolution. However, citizen revolution in the context of education reform in Ecuador does not imply unrestricted participation. Participation in education reform has both technical and political limits. From a technical perspective, the roles of government, influential civil society groups, and citizens need to be differentiated. In this narrative, the government's role is to set the policy agenda and in most cases to ensure that the "public" dimensions of schooling are protected. Groups can provide feedback during the formulation stage and they may also serve as a watchdog during implementation. The voices and interests of everyday citizens, including teachers and families, should be incorporated and equally considered alongside those of more organized groups. That said, there are specific technical issues in education that are not appropriate to open up for discussion and debate with all citizens. These include pedagogical strategies, the definition of learning

standards, or legal administrative issues. Collaboration with experts is an important aspect of participation when it comes to these more technical issues.

In the specific case of Ecuador, calls for increased participation from civil society organizations and unions may be interpreted from this narrative as a discursive strategy of oppositional groups that aim to delegitimize the government's agenda for change. Many of the critiques and claims leveled against the government in the public sphere are often unsubstantiated by evidence or are even intentionally inaccurate. Self-appointed representatives of civil society organizations and unions make many of these false claims, which is problematic.

The moral of the story from this narrative is that participation in education reform needs to be situated within a specific political historical perspective of state and society formation. While there may be a normative commitment to democracy in general, participation has to be evaluated in terms of its costs and benefits in different historical moments, settings, and circumstances. For example, ensuring democratic ends such as equity through redistribution policies may under certain historical circumstances require limiting certain forms of participation that are often dominated by elites and influential groups. It also may involve lowering expectations on building consensus around such policies.

The neoliberal era essentially created a power vacuum that undermined certain basic conditions needed to ensure a more equitable, just and participatory Ecuadorian society.

The political fragmentation that resulted disproportionately benefited organized groups such as unions and specific influential civil society groups. Political fragmentation, compounded by a historical dynamic of regional fragmentation and great ethnic diversity, also made it impossible to advance universal social policies in education, health and welfare.

In this context, a rationale emerges for recentralizing power and authority in the state to allow for redistribution policies, including ensuring a quality education for all citizens. Ideally, this is accompanied with a project that reconstructs both the formal participatory mechanisms and autonomy of civil society groups and the opposition. The end goal is that this would lead to a healthier mix of both collaborative and adversarial forms of countervailing power. As one of the participants of this study highlighted, this is perhaps the paradox that confronts Ecuadorian political society today:

President Rafael Correa and current government leaders were brought into power through the strength of social actors and movements that claimed that Ecuador needed a stronger state. The paradox is that today, as state power grows, these social actors and movements are the weakest when Ecuador needs them the most (International Organization Representative, personal communication, Feb, 25, 2013).

Counter Narrative: The Participatory Deficit

The counter-narrative criticizes the lack of opportunities for participation in the education reform under Correa. These critiques vary from broader comments on the

attempts of the government to co-opt groups through state sanctioned participation to more instrumentalist and limited conceptions of participation, such as information sharing.

In general, those interviewed across civil society organizations and at the community level, including teachers and school directors, did acknowledge that the last few years had ushered in important political changes in Ecuador in terms of the historic rise of social movements and leaders to unprecedented positions of power in government and the resulting constitutional process. These changes were attributed to a larger process of social change driven by progressive social movements and not Correa himself. Many of those interviewed recognized and supported the notion that after the neoliberal period the state needed strengthening, but were increasingly critical of the lack of participation in public policy. Some groups recognized that the role of civil society actors also needed to change during this historic period of reforms. In the following quote, one of the less adversarial organizations speaks on how they adapted to the new context:

We recognize that there needs to be a change in civil society, but what is missing are meeting spaces where we can come together and have a broader conversation to redefine our roles together in this new moment of Ecuador's development. Our original mission was to strengthen the state, but now it is focused on other actors in the public sphere civil society and private sector. This change in our mission speaks to the broader changes in Ecuadorian society.

Unfortunately, the state has restricted the functioning of social organizations. More or less, this sends the message that if you move away from what we consider politically permissible, we will dissolve you (Civil Society Organization representative, personal communication, Feb. 25, 2013).

In Ecuador, different types of actors critiqued the opportunities for participation around the education reform, calling them superficial. These critiques came from international organization representatives, union leaders and teachers themselves. Despite a participatory democracy discourse, in practice there was little evidence that the government was actually considering deeper and broader participation in policymaking in various sectors, including education.

One clear example is the Council of Education. Despite a formal legal mandate to set up a Council and to incorporate various civil society organizations and government representatives, no Council was ever convened to set education goals and policy directives.

Two years after Correa's election, the political situation in the education sector became tense when the Government initiated obligatory teacher evaluations. This resulted in major teacher and student protests throughout 2009. The Union finally backed down on the evaluation, but negotiated certain conditions for those who failed the test, such as early retirement. It also eventually incorporated some salary adjustments. Both sides

claimed victory, but it was clear that Correa and the government were pressing on. Soon thereafter they introduced standards (Torres, 2009).

In the following quote, one of the most vocal critics of the government and ex Minister of Education, Rosa Maria Torres, believes the Teacher's Union essentially caved in to Correa on the evaluation. She called for a broader debate by social actors on education:

The absence of debate and this trashy agreement require more reflection. Just as water and natural resources are a topic of relevance for not only indigenous groups but all Ecuadorians, education is also a topic that concerns everyone. It is a topic of life or death. It is necessary to ensure an open debate involving all social actors on education and to go beyond the formal teaching force and the government (Torres, 2009).

This concept of widespread unstructured debate with all social actors was certainly not compatible with Correa or with the Ministry's imperative of recuperating the state's authority and control over the education policy agenda.

As highlighted above, the government's discursive strategy was to shift emphasis of participation away from traditional influential civil society organizations and unions and to focus on teachers and local communities. Part of this strategy also included framing the union and civil society leadership as corrupt and mediocre. However, in

practice this shift in emphasis towards the participation of individual citizens and teachers did not result in deeper or broader participation:

During the last few years, there has been a real education deficit here. Participation is understood as a threat, as something related to the teacher's union and as something that generates increased conflicts. It is not understood as an opportunity to deepen learning and transform those groups responsible for implementation (International organization representative, personal communication, Feb. 23, 2013).

The same representative also indicated the lack of deeper engagement with teachers, as we see from the following quotation:

Participation has to do with the sustainability of the policies. This is perhaps one of the problems with the view from the current ministry. While they have reassumed some level of control over the process and opened some spaces for dialogue, they really have not opened space for teachers to feel that they can fully discuss, reflect, or appropriate policies as their own. This approach makes a deeper transformation in classrooms unlikely (International organization representative, personal communication, Feb. 23, 2013).

The Tension Between Social Cohesion and Diversity

There is an inherent tension with a political project that aims to secure some level of social cohesion and equity through universal state policies and an approach that

embraces diversity and pluralism in the supply of education and pedagogical models. Similarly, there is a tension between education reforms promoted from the state top-down and innovation in education, which often occurs from the bottom-up.

Democratization of the education sector and participation can be key drivers of educational innovation by nurturing bottom-up experiments, debates, and alternatives. Part of the dilemma from a systemic policy point of view is that diversity and the unregulated supply of education can also exacerbate inequalities. Thus the overarching objective of equity and standardization of quality as enforced through a central ministry can often be in tension with alternative community run experiments in education. In the following quote, a teacher from an alternative community school expressed frustration about the lack of dialogue around alternative models of schooling:

A participatory and democratic citizenship allows for the possibility of alternative currents. Despite many positive aspects in implementation, many of which will take time, the answers and solutions don't always come from above. There are experiences that have been around for years, with rich experience that can contribute. Unfortunately, these are often ignored and now they are being controlled. We hear all the time: "you have to do this, you have to do that."

I feel that people are often afraid of authentic participation because in authentic participation there are conflicts, there are debates, different points of view. But unfortunately there is a generalized fear of these things happening here. I was

just speaking with some colleagues about the importance of struggling and fighting. In spaces like ours, micro spaces are where we generate another type of response and alternatives to offer the country and the world (Teacher from an alternative community school, personal communication, March 7, 2013).

Participation as “Information Sharing”

The formulation of the secondary education law in 2011 was one of the first main opportunities for social actors and citizens to participate in the education reforms. As highlighted above in the government narrative, the Ministry structured the participatory process over a 3-month period. The primary vehicle for participation was through an online consultation:

The government claims they have developed some innovations to promote input from citizens, such as consultations on the Internet where maybe 5,000 people participate. But this is a very reduced conception of participation. This is not participation that involves deeper discussions around the concept of education, concepts of quality, and the model of education (International Organization Representative, personal communication, February 23, 2013).

Some closed meetings were held with key actors in the Ministry, including the Teacher’s Union and Contrato Social. There were also meetings with the press during the process, but as noted in the quote below, the press really did not have the technical expertise to ask substantive questions. The draft policy document was posted online in

December of 2010 and at that point citizens and groups were invited to provide input and feedback. In March of 2011, the secondary education reform was incorporated into the Intercultural Organic Education law.

Every day citizens, beyond the circle of participants invited to organized meetings of socialization (information sharing), did not participate. The press was unprepared to ask key questions and interact in an informed way with the proposal. And students and youth were not consulted or properly informed. In a country of low Internet usage and a weak digital culture, especially amongst teachers, the “citizen consultation” online was not really the way. It isn’t even the way in countries with more connectivity and an advanced digital culture. The number of visitors and clicks are not indicators that people have read the policy, even less that they understood what was being proposed and what was at stake (Torres, 2011).

Essentially, the government under Correa has worked to reduce the concept of participation to “socialization,” or informing citizens about the proposed plan:

There is a sensation that groups of technocrats have developed policies and then the Ministry organizes some consultations, but these are really to validate existing decisions. This approach to participation is instrumental and does not align with a vision that opens up spaces. It does not facilitate the appropriate policies by different sectors, especially those responsible for implementation,

such as teachers (International Organization Representative, personal communication, Feb. 25, 2013).

The Moral of the Story: A Citizen Revolution without Citizen Participation

With the rationale of recuperating control and authority over the sector, the government under Correa has reduced participation, dialogue and debate. This occurred despite the rhetoric around progressive participatory democracy in the Constitution and the so-called citizen revolution and *Buen Vivir* discourse of an alternative development model. The government has been fairly successful in neutralizing, weakening and even in some cases delegitimizing oppositional forces, but it has not simultaneously looked to foster new collaborative spaces, both autonomous and linked.

This lack of participation and dialogue, in particular with teachers, in the long run will affect not only the sustainability of the reforms focused on quality but also limit their possible impact on a deeper and wider transformation. There is, of course, as most recognize, a tension to manage between local diversity and national cohesion, in particular in a historical setting of inequality. Managing this tension through more collaborative and authentic forms of participation has not been possible in the context of Ecuador under Correa. Perhaps this again may have to do with broader and deeper cultural and historical factors that some of those interviewed for this study point to,

essentially concluding that Ecuadorian society (both the government and civil society) continues to be very authoritarian.

Chapter 7: Quality Narratives

This chapter presents competing narratives around the definition of quality in education and reforms under Correa. The battle over quality has played out in policy discourse arenas and more intensely during the implementation of specific reform strategies from curriculum, standards, and evaluations to teacher related reforms. At times the conflict has been intense, generating threats of imprisonment or being fired. Such tensions were initiated within the government, in mass mobilizations and as disruptions from the social groups and the Union.

The first narrative, constructed by the government, focuses on casting the reform focused on quality as an issue of public interest and equity. The package of reforms pursued aligns with global trends and includes establishing formal learning standards, using evaluation as a tool for educational change, renewing the teaching profession through a combination of strategies such as enhanced pre-service teacher education, establishing recruitment criteria and a voluntary retirement program, and developing a teacher career ladder. Most of these reform strategies were applied top-down, but with opportunities for structured participation and input from teachers, directors and parents. The villains in this narrative are the Teacher's Union and other corporatist groups that hijacked the public education system for their own private interests and gains. The heroes in this narrative are Correa and the government, who have undertaken a set of bold reforms to challenge vested interests and the status quo.

The counter-narrative challenges the government definition of quality, framing it as technocratic and reductionist. From the counter-narrative perspective, quality is defined from a broader human rights point of view. It encompasses learning, teaching, infrastructure, administration, formal and non-formal education. While standards and evaluation are seen as useful and desirable tools, there are fears of the homogenizing impact and of punitive uses of these instruments given the diversity in Ecuador. The villains from this perspective are Correa's officials, who have pursued a neoliberal technocratic approach to quality. The heroes are the Union and other social actors that resist, protest, and have presented an alternative vision of reform based on a more progressive vision of quality.

The Setting: High Levels of Inequality and Poor Quality

Ecuador made impressive gains in expanding basic education during the welfare state period from the 1950s to 1978. However, over time there were increasing concerns on the part of policymakers about the quality of basic schooling, particularly during the early 1980s and 1990s. Despite a few attempts to implement quality-enhancing reforms, very little progress was made. In 1998, public expenditures on education as measured by GDP were among the lowest in the region, at just above 2%. On the second regional assessment of quality in education conducted by UNESCO, Ecuador scored among the lowest five countries in reading and math tests. In math, nearly half the surveyed population scored only at basic math proficiency (level one of five levels) (Serce, 2006). Other indicators of educational development in Ecuador from around 2000 indicate the weakened state of the overall education system and one of the lowest performing in the region:

- 1 in 3 children did not complete primary education.
- Only 30% of the population had completed secondary education.
- 9 out of 10 children had no access to preprimary education.
- 9 out of 10 children from rural sectors did not go on to secondary education.
- In bilingual intercultural schools, 40% of the teachers were monolingual.
- Learning outcomes (Spanish and math) are low, as shown by Aprendo tests. Pupils in 2nd, 6th, and 9th grades scored lower than the minimum.⁶
- In urban settings, 2 out of 10 schools had no electricity or clean water. 3 out of 10 schools lacked plumbing. In rural settings, 5 out of 10 lacked electricity and 9 out of 10 lacked phones or any means of communication.
- Half of Ecuador's teachers lived in poor or vulnerable settings. Average pay was 350 USD per month.
- Students lost one month a year in classes due to teacher strikes.

(Torres, 2005)

There are different hypotheses to explain why educational quality in Ecuador lagged behind most of the other countries in Latin America despite several attempts to improve quality. One hypothesis has to do with the possible impacts of broader economic and political crises since the 1980s during the neoliberal era. During this period, Ecuador was characterized by high political and economic turmoil and instability. A minister

⁶ The Aprendo Exam is a national exam of education quality. This exam was applied through a census sample of third, seventh and tenth graders at the primary level and of third year secondary school students in math, language, communications, science and social studies.

of education lasted on average eight months in his or her post. There were several reforms in the 1990s that focused on quality, including a curricular reform, a new pedagogical model, decentralization, and social participation (Grindle, 2004). However, most of these reforms were interrupted by these broader crises and as a consequence were not implemented.

Another related hypothesis attributes neoliberal policies (fiscal austerity, liberalization, structural adjustment, decentralization, and privatization) to the central Ministry's weakened institutional capacity and resources. In the 1990s, the public fiscal crises meant there was little funding available for reform. More than 90% of the budget was reserved for teacher and administrative salaries, which were already extremely low. The weakened state and bureaucracy under neoliberalism allowed groups such as the Union to co-opt the ministry. Many ministry officials were old teachers without any professional policy-making experience or training and had secured their positions through Union and MPD party patronage. These officials had little incentive to take risks and they lacked the requisite skills to manage educational reform and change (Grindle, 2004). Thus, despite formal declarations and statements, the Ministry never had adequate resources (financial, human and other) to support implementation. Below, Grindle (2004) quotes an interview with a Union Leader, which illustrates the lack of state penetration at the local level:

Since 1963, Ecuador has had twenty education reform projects. When you ask the most experienced teachers which one they remember, they barely remember even two or three. (Grindle, 2004, p. 83)

A third thesis on why Ecuador's reforms failed to materialize or produce any significant improvements in education, however defined, deals more directly with the politics within Ecuador and the sector. The fragmented nature of political parties, combined with lack of longer-term horizons and rules of the game (given the volatile political instability and constant changes in executive leadership and constitutions) created a lack of incentives for politicians to come to a consensus on any universal social policies. If they did come to consensus, they tended to only agree on targeted programs that could benefit certain political constituents. Therefore, comprehensive reform, particularly those that were politically charged and with a long-term horizon, were never adopted. Most of the quality-enhancing programs adopted by the Ministry were blocked during the implementation phase by the Teacher's Union.

Another thesis, perhaps related to both of the previous hypotheses, is that most of the quality enhancing reforms have come from the outside, and that locally there was either resistance to this imposition, or possibly a lack of local demand. As outlined in Chapter 5, the various programs focused on enhancing quality in the 1980s and 1990s were financed by international donors. These donors set up a parallel ministry that circumvented some of the key stakeholders in education in Ecuador, including the Ministry of Education and the Teacher's Union. These decisions likely created

opposition, resistance, and mistrust amongst those responsible for ultimately implementing and sustaining the reforms. Given the origins of these reforms, it may be likely that there were not enough calls for reform from a critical mass of local stakeholders.

A final thesis is that educational improvement at a systemic level requires a cultural shift in actors, particularly among teachers, and that this takes several years, if not decades. In the case of Ecuador, because the system was on basic survival mode for many years and was in an acute state during neoliberal period, the orientation and culture of schools, teachers and administrators at all levels was not focused on learning and excellence. Furthermore, a system-wide shift in culture requires certain minimum levels of trust or social capital between actors, and this was often sabotaged or weakened in moments of crisis and conflict.

The question, then, given this context, is: What changed in the broader political and economic context during the new Correa period starting in 2007 that facilitated the adoption of a comprehensive reform focused on quality? Did actual reform packages change substantively in terms of how quality is framed and the proposed solutions? Did the process of designing and implementing change differ from previous attempts? Is there evidence of enhanced capacity to manage change focused on improvement? The next portion of this project turns first to the government narrative and then presents the counter narrative and critiques.

The Plot: 20 Ruptures in the Status Quo

The new model of development in the Constitution and National Development Plan Buen Vivir presented a holistic vision of society and educational development. More broadly, Correa framed this approach as socialism for the 21st century. This included a vision of a new social order based on different set of values, namely indigenous, and socialist values. Correa and key policy documents like Buen Vivir signaled that the new social order would take time to emerge due to the hegemony of global capitalism and policy legacies of neoliberalism.

Within education, the duality of the utopian narrative and reality also influenced the discourse of the first education Minister under Correa, Raul Vallejo. In both national and international forums, the Ministry reframed the discourse around education quality to include the concept of *calidez* or warmth next to a more traditional view of quality as a means of competitiveness:

There is a concept that is very subjective that has to do with “warmth” (*calidez*). This, from my perspective, is linked to the concept in the Constitution of 2008, which is *Sumak Kawsay*, an education for a society in which humans are in harmony with themselves, with their communities, and with nature. It deals, in other words, with public education that can develop human beings imbued with the philosophy of Buen Vivir. It allows them to be capable of navigating through this highly competitive world. This would be the concept of a public

education of *calidez*, together with quality from a philosophical perspective (Ex-Minister, personal communication, April 15, 2014).

In practice, *calidez* implied a different form of educational policy and practice and an alternative concept of educational quality. At the same time, the Ministry also acknowledged that the education system would still have to prepare future citizens to navigate a highly competitive world. *Calidez* translated to a focus on relationships, diversity, inclusion, and intercultural dialogue. Below, Article 27 of the Constitution describes this more progressive vision of education:

Education will center on the human being and will guarantee his or her holistic development in the framework of respect for human rights, sustainable environment, and democracy. It will be participatory, obligatory, intercultural, democratic, inclusive and diverse, of quality and *calidez* (warmth); it will promote gender equity, justice, solidarity and peace; it will stimulate a critical awareness, art and physical culture, individual and community initiative, and the development of competencies to create and to work (Article 27, Constitution of Ecuador, 2008).

Despite this new vision of education and its implications for a different type of governance, the Constitution and the Development Plan also contains articles that focused on regaining the central state's control and jurisdiction over education. This state centralization project was perceived by some groups to be in tension or even

contradiction with a territorial and community approach to defining aspects of quality. The government, however, saw this differently. As highlighted in previous chapters, it rationalized central control (including defining the curriculum, standards, and applying a national evaluation) as a necessary first step towards achieving longer-term equity and quality goals.

Prepping the Terrain for Reform

As indicated in Chapter 5, the first few years of education reform focused on creating some stability and central control over the sector while simultaneously developing the capacity and infrastructure to formulate and implement policy within the Ministry. Two of the goals in the 10-year plan centered on areas that relate more concretely to educational quality:

Policy 6: Improvement of the quality and equity and implementation of a national system of evaluation and social auditing mechanism of the educational system.

Policy 7: Revalorization of the teaching profession and improvement of initial teacher training, ongoing professional development, work conditions and quality of life.

During the first two or three years of reform, critics and even Ministry officials agreed that not enough progress was being made in areas related to quality. The government had not yet set up, as stipulated in the Constitution, an autonomous national entity to evaluate the integral quality of the system. Nevertheless, some essential first steps were being taken that would later allow for a more aggressive approach to quality. To address

teacher motivation, the Ministry approved a significant increase in teacher salaries, almost tripling them. It also took on major curricular reforms to basic education, including secondary education, and aimed to ensure that all children in basic education had access to a common core of subjects.

In the meantime, behind the scenes the Ministry top-level officials focused on designing a much more ambitious comprehensive reform to improve quality. In late 2007, the Ministry of Education convened an international seminar on educational quality. The seminar provided a forum to share different perspectives on quality. Specialists from around Latin America and the world participated. The final document from the seminar recognized the complex, multidimensional and even contentious nature of quality. Alternatives, as well as more mainstream approaches to quality, were presented.

False Start or Necessary Pain?

With mounting criticism from the opposition about the lack of progress on quality by the third year, Correa and Minister Vallejo decided it was time to tackle the issue head on. In 2009, the Ministry decided that the teacher evaluation, which was previously voluntary, was to be obligatory. As expected, the obligatory exam was met with fierce resistance by the National Teacher's Union, which called for national strikes, despite the fact that strikes were illegal and could lead to imprisonment. In response, the Ministry organized a counter-protest and campaign. The Minister of Education and even President Correa fervently defended the evaluations in public. At one point, Correa even stated that he would resign if the evaluations did not proceed (Minister of

Education, personal communication, March 2, 2013). Minister Raul Vallejo also gave several fiery speeches. His speech from Guayaquil is quoted below and was subsequently repeated on different instances and in different other forums. It reveals the government's framing of the issue, which attempts to combine progressive concepts of freedom and *calidez* with the idea of excellence and quality. The speech employs an oppositional language that links mediocrity, fear, and paralysis with corporatism:

That's why we say 'Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes' to the evaluation!

We are supporting our children, our students, our classmates, our fellow citizens. No more fear. We want a liberating education; we want an education that is free from kidnapping, no longer subjected to mediocrity. We want fellow citizens to have a quality education. An education with *calidez* that serves to build a truly democratic society in which we have opportunities, to forge authentic human beings. We want an education directed to that which our constitution has called 'the good life,' or *sumak kawsay*. To live harmoniously among our fellow men and women in solidarity. We say no, no to mediocrity, no to the fear of change, no to paralysis. We are gathered once again to leave behind the old country, to disrupt this corporatist scaffolding that has sustained this country for so many years.

Today, comrades, today we say yes to educational excellence. Today we will reward excellence. We are making this dream a reality. A fate that seemed unattainable is within our grasp. The new task of the citizen revolution, a reason

to get up every day with zest, is to deliver the best of ourselves. Only then we can build a country that is the size of our dreams.

The great poet Federico Garcia Lorca once said: 'Poetry does not want followers, poetry wants lovers.' Paraphrasing him, I say that this educational revolution does not want followers, we want lovers who are passionate about excellence. Let us say yes to quality education as our peers from different parts of the country today are saying yes to excellence, and no to mediocrity. To all you lovers of education and this citizen revolution that is committed to quality education. Yes to excellence! No to mediocrity! Thank you colleagues.

(Raul Vallejo, Minister of Education. Speech at march in favor of teacher evaluations in Guayaquil, Ecuador on May 29, 2009).

The conflict between the Ministry and the Union was eventually settled after several months of disruption, adding up to 22 full days of strikes. The Union agreed to evaluations with some concessions. Correa declared it a smashing victory. Ironically, most teachers who took the exam actually ended up passing. Nevertheless, this first confrontation foreshadowed future conflict and disagreements around the reform. Raul Vallejo, who had ended up spending much of his political capital in the confrontation, renounced his post as minister six months later.

Education as a Public Good

As the Ministry of Education advanced into its first two years, the approach to enhancing quality took form. This reform was formulated in part based on a diagnostic assessment of the overall problems with the system. The assessment was called *20 Ruptures of The Status Quo in Education* (Ministry of Education, ND). This document was essentially a manifesto for change, identifying and prioritizing the key factors attributed to the decline of educational equity and quality in Ecuador.

The first rupture positioned education as a public good and right within the framework of *Buen Vivir*. Education was seen as an equalizer of opportunities and as something that an individual had a right to throughout his or her life. Having confirmed education as a human right, the state had the responsibility to provide and fund it. The privatization of education in previous decades was seen as the antithesis to the new political project focused on redistribution and equity. Public schools charged fees to parents for textbooks, uniforms, and in some cases registration. The Ministry abolished these fees while committing to increase investment in education from around 2 % GDP to 6% GDP over the next ten years. During the first years, the budget for pre-university schooling tripled from US 1,094.6 million in 2006 to US 2908.4 million in 2012 (Cevallos, 2012a). With reforms under Correa, some 75,000 children left private schools and switched to the public system, providing some evidence that the quality of educational offerings was improving (Cevallos & Bramwell, 2014). In addition, as wages increased thousands of teachers who were in private schools moved back to public system.

Banning Teacher Protests

The second rupture dealt with addressing the long-term problem of the disruption of educational services caused by teacher protests. These ongoing disruptions were seen to affect the quality of education in Ecuador. On average, most children over the past two decades before Correa missed a whole month of the school year because of teacher strikes. The constant threat of strikes also took the focus of many teachers and schools away from teaching and learning. To try and break this dynamic, the Ministry pursued a dual strategy. On the one hand, they raised teacher salaries to help diffuse tensions with new quality reforms, such as evaluations and to motivate the teaching force. In parallel, they created a series of laws to weaken and undermine the Teacher's Union, particularly its financial and political power. The first law banned obligatory membership fees that the Union charged teachers. This reduced the financial power of the Union considerably. The second law, present in the Constitution and reiterated in the new education law, banned teacher protests during school hours. Individuals who broke this law were sanctioned with fines and possible imprisonment. This law diminished the political power of the Union. These actions were also combined with a strong discourse that framed the Union as corrupt and as a representation of the status quo. The government argued that the right to education was violated whenever teachers exerted their right to collectively organize and protest during school hours. In other words, the government claimed that certain rights trump other rights. By banning disruptions, the government positioned itself as the savior of the public interest, the protector of children's interests, and as the enforcer of public order. Finally, the Ministry set up its own Teacher's Union, called *La red de Maestros por la Revolución*

Educativa (Network of Teachers for the Educational Revolution). By 2015, this Union had over 50,000 members.

Reverting the Top-down Dynamic

Another key rupture dealt with reverting the traditional top-down dynamic of decision-making. The strategy focused on empowering schools and teachers to become the principal agents of change. This component seems to have emerged a few years into the reform in 2011 and 2012 as a response to strong critiques around the continued top-down, technocratic and centralized form of decision-making. It also reflected recognition on the part of Ministry officials that educational change does not occur simply by top-down directive. Here the Vice-minister explains:

Each school has to be the motor of change. The Ministry issues directions and these have to be followed, but this is insufficient. We cannot create something as crazy as educational police to go to each school to see if things are happening as they should. We have learned from our mistakes and the change we are promoting now is different. We believe that if we do not involve the population, then this educational revolution will not work (Vice minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

The specific strategies included a school annual improvement plan to be accompanied by a dual process of self-evaluations and external evaluations. This process did not imply the automatic autonomy of schools as many decentralization reforms in Latin

America. In theory, autonomy had to be earned over time by demonstrating performance as measured by school improvement. The plan was aimed to help schools develop their planning capacity around improvement.

The Ministry provided support guidelines and templates in 2012 to facilitate the process. The first suggestion to schools is to prioritize problems. The Ministry emphasizes that student learning should be among the main priorities, but allows some leeway for each school to identify key problems. The recommendation is to limit to three key priorities. The second stage involves setting goals based on the problem-identification. Goals are to have certain characteristics. They have to be reachable and measurable; to describe beneficiaries and what needed to be changed; and what process needed to be in place to effect change. The third step involves describing the actions and resources to achieve the goals. The fourth suggested securing commitments from actors within the school. The fifth step focuses on monitoring goal progress. The sixth step measures progress with evidence. The suggested template lists multiple forms of evidence, including exam results from the Prueba Ser; registering participation in workshops or meetings on improvement; conducting pilot model classes focused on innovation; observations from peers; the maintenance of weekly records; and designing micro-projects focused on improvement. The final stage involves integrating the evidence into changes in policies and practice and a sort of meta-reflection.

Laid out, the process is quite comprehensive and impressive in its sophistication and depth. It displays a sort of openness within parameters to use and combine various

approaches to improvement. However, at the same time, one is struck by the technical complexity and demands in terms of time, capacity, knowledge and other elements that this school improvement process likely entails. In an interview, the Vice Minister acknowledged the challenges associated with this but pointed to the importance of this process in the long-term (personal interview March 2, 2013). The ultimate challenge identified by the Vice minister was cultural. In Ecuador, the state centric approach was still ingrained both in government and in schools and communities (Vice minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

Specific Quality Enhancing Strategies

In addition to addressing basic elements related to control, authority, and local accountability for change, the Ministry focused on a series of popular global strategies thought to directly support quality-focused reforms. These consisted of designing and applying national standards of quality tied to evaluations and creating systems to support and pressure schools and teachers. Examples of these systems include new teacher education institutions, career ladders, teacher mentoring systems, external audits of quality of educational institutions, and evaluations. Alongside these strategies, there was a strong emphasis on revamping the teaching profession in Ecuador through recruitment criteria and a voluntary retirement program.

Standards

One key strategy adopted by the Ministry to improve education was to develop national standards of quality to help orient actors in the system and to facilitate social

accountability. The Ministry developed standards and indicators of quality. The national evaluations (based on these standards and indicators) were to be carried out by the new Institute of Evaluation. To complement, each school was to prepare plans for improvement and to evaluate itself. External auditors were also then used to accompany the self-evaluations.

The standards were developed in four main areas including educational management, professional development, standards of learning, and standards of infrastructure. Within each area, a series of indicators were developed. The standards reflect a comprehensive view of quality that encompasses input, processes, and outputs. For example, in the area of professional standards for teachers, some of the following areas and indicators were covered:

- Does the teacher know, understand, and have a mastery over areas that they are teaching, theories and educational research, and didactic knowledge?
- Does the teacher know the national curriculum?
- Does the teacher dominate the language they are teaching in?
- Does the teacher demonstrate the ability to plan for the teaching and learning process?
- Does the teacher promote a climate conducive to participation and debate in the learning process? Does the teacher evaluate and provide feedback to students?
- Does the teacher keep up to speed on progress and research in his or her area of expertise?

- Does the teacher contribute to communities of learning?
- Does the teacher reflect on the impact of his or her work on the students?
- Does the teacher have high expectations of his or her students?
- Does the teacher promote values within the framework of human rights and Buen Vivir?
- Is the teacher committed to the development of his or her community?

(Ministry of Education 2012, Standards Document)

For each of these areas, the Ministry specified several corresponding indicators.

Learning standards were developed for the following five levels of basic education:

- Level 1: End of first year
- Level 2: End of fourth year
- Level 3: End of seventh year
- Level 4: End of tenth year
- Level 5: End of third year secondary education (*bachillerato*)

(Ministry of Education 2012, Standards Document)

The government framed standards first and foremost as tools to promote equity in the system. In a diverse country such as Ecuador, the standards were seen as a minimum reference point that would allow subsequent improvement efforts to be directed to those schools and communities that were most in need. Below, the team responsible for developing the standards explains:

We understand educational quality as equity. The standards represent the minimum that we would like all schools to reach. If we don't know have a reference point, we can't know what we understand by quality. It is fundamental for us to see this from the optic of equity. And one cannot secure equity if one does not know the end point. For example, what is happening with rural educators? (Standards team ministry, personal communication, March 3, 2013)

The process for developing the standards involved both technical experts and opportunities for broader discussion and feedback from different stakeholders. To develop the standards, the Ministry first conducted an analysis of existing levels of knowledge in basic areas, using results recorded from the national exams, or Pruebas Ser.⁷ The Ministry team also received technical assistance from experts and reviewed standards from other countries including Mexico, Chile and Colombia. Based on this initial analysis, a core team drafted the first draft of standards for each area. They then organized task groups with teachers, students, and school directors to review the standards to see if they were relevant and clear and aligned with the curriculum. These consultations were done in different cities with different types of schools and personnel. The Ministry then tested the standards with children and made adjustments. Finally, the proposed standards were published online and consultations were solicited from the general public and national education stakeholders. After integrating comments, the

⁷ Evaluation of quality at a national level did not start in Ecuador until 1996 with the Aprendo Exam of basic education in math, language, and literature. In 2008, the Prueba Ser was designed based on item response theory. This exam was applied through a census sample of third, seventh and tenth graders at the primary level and of third year secondary school students in math, language, communications, science and social studies (Wikipedia. retrieved on May 5, 2015).

final standards for levels 1,2, and 3 were launched in December 2011. In November of 2012, the standards for the rest of the levels of schooling and subjects (math, Spanish, humanities, literature, natural sciences, social studies and English) were launched. Based on these standards, new indicators for quality were developed by the Institute of Evaluation to design evaluations. The participatory construction of the standards helped not only to ensure their relevance, clarity and usefulness, but also contributed to overall support levels from teachers and students. Here the Standards team elucidates:

In general, we have not had too many controversies or critiques of the standards. I believe this is due to the work we have done to enhance citizen participation around the process. This allowed us to generate knowledge and awareness in the general public about the process and importance of standards in terms of knowing where we are now, where we want to go, and how we are going to get there. We selected groups to participate in validating the standards not necessarily with expertise but with experience in the classroom. Perhaps here we made a mistake as we had many applications and could not include everyone. There have been some critics, such as Contrato Social. But we feel that overall teachers and directors and even students have responded positively (Standards Team, personal communication, March 3, 2013).

Once the standards were introduced, they also contributed to a more shared understanding in communities and among parents around quality. In several interviews,

including one with the Minister, the issue of a lack of criteria and knowledge on the part of parents on what constituted educational quality was seen as a factor that previously led to reduced demand for reform and parental participation:

I think one of the challenges in Ecuador has been the following: When you ask a person in Ecuador what quality is, do they think x school is a school of quality? Yes, of course. Very good, but what is quality? People have very diverse answers. Some would say a quality school is a school that has been around for many years. In other words, if a school is around for a long time it must mean it is of high quality. Secondly, because the respondent's grandfather and father studied at that school it must be good. Because it has large buildings. Because it is close to my house. In other words, there is no objective appreciation of what quality is. But the moment you set a national standard and state that by the end of 4th grade all children have to learn x, or a good teacher does x. For the first time people know what a good teacher is. 'Ah, ok,' they say, 'This is what my son has to learn.' (Minister of Education, personal communication, March 2, 2013)

Several of the teachers and directors interviewed for this study echoed the idea that the introduction of standards was initially difficult to adjust to but that they likely contributed to positive change:

The standards and evaluation were very hard for most educators. However, I personally was satisfied to see teachers studying on public transport, in the bus

stops, to see people reading or reviewing notes. This will eventually produce results that are positive. (Director of an urban school, personal communication, March 7, 2013)

Evaluations

Another supposed rupture had to do with the approach to evaluation. The document *20 Ruptures of The Status Quo in Education* (Ministry of Education, ND) describes moving from using evaluation simply to classify and select students and teachers to using evaluation for improving the quality of learning. The first experience with the obligatory evaluation in 2009 did not fully communicate this philosophy. However, the government had future opportunities to change the tone and attempted to do so in 2012, about four full years into the reform.

An Autonomous Evaluation Institute

Within the education sector, an autonomous evaluation institute called the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEVAL) was established in November 2012. The institute, while financed by public funds, is autonomous from the Ministry, both administratively and technically. This autonomy was perhaps critical for advancing the reform because attempts to manage evaluations from the Ministry had already generated extreme conflicts, described above. While the Institute is still associated with the government, its separation from the ministry may have secured additional credibility and perhaps receptivity on the part of society and teachers.

The Constitution and the subsequent Education Law in 2010 outline the basic structure and functions of the Institute, which is tasked with developing and applying a permanent and ongoing integral evaluation of the system (learning, infrastructure, teaching, administration). This evaluation system is based on the national standards and indicators of quality developed by the Ministry.

The overarching mission of the institute is to promote excellence in education through the integral evaluation of the national system of education and its parts. Below, the director of the Institution explains their definition of quality and also the preferred term of excellence, which implies a more client-based focus:

Quality is congruence between goals set and results towards achieving those goals. Quality as a term I don't like so much. I prefer the term excellence, which implies quality from the point of view of client satisfaction. The experience of a client is either excellent or it is not (Director INEVAL, Personal communication, Feb. 25, 2013).

While the law established that the evaluations would be based on the standards, the Institute had some autonomy in terms of how to approach the concept of defining and measuring quality. In philosophical terms, the director of the Institute was attempting to broaden the conversation around quality beyond a static concept of compliance with standards to a more adaptive approach:

In the sense that the system and individuals learn to define themselves and subjects that deliver a service to others, and in the manner in which feedback is received, the system is of high quality when it can adapt to changes, and when it isn't a question of static compliance with standards 1,2, 3, and 4. In other words, quality is an inherent property of the education system, so you cannot refer to it as a standard, but rather a process of adaptation to standards, to the new needs of society (Director, INEVAL, personal communication, Feb, 25, 2013).

The National Institute decided to develop the questions for the evaluation through a participatory process that included teachers, directors and families. This implied a process that lasted several months and included national consultations with citizens in what they called a social validation of evaluation. This social validation process was initially viewed with some skepticism by the government and Ministry. Based on past experiences, both of these bodies were reticent to open up the process to too much participation. They feared it would slow the process down and that it would incite unsubstantiated attacks from opposition groups. However, the consultation process was eventually approved by Correa and the Ministry and carried out.

We are only offering the methodology, but society (parents, teachers, or directors, depending on the instrument) is going to design the questions that go in the survey. We will not develop any of the questions ourselves. That way society will defend what we are doing because they participated; they will be

spokespersons to share the instruments they developed, not us (Director, INEVAL, personal communication, Feb. 25, 2013).

Part of the rationale for undergoing more complicated and lengthy processes of consultations and participation was to promote a different culture. The new system would be based not on punishment and rewards, but on a culture that perceived evaluation as a tool for educational change and improvement.

I have done six months of constant interviews on TV, over the radio, in newspapers, with educated people, with uneducated people, with parents, with children, with everyone, including all my colleagues at INEVAL. And many ask why are we using the same yardstick to evaluate everyone in the country. Is it not completely unfair that we are applying the same test in rural areas where they do not speak much Spanish? Or is it not unfair to apply the same test to *morenitos* (dark skinned) and white students, or to those that have this but do not have that, etc.?

They have this concern because they think the evaluation will automatically translate into punishment or rewards. They argue there should be differentiated assessments without understanding that assessment is like taking the temperature in a system. If we do not use the same thermometer everywhere, we won't be able to recognize where there are needs and differences and compensate. Ultimately, the problem is that we have an ingrained culture of

sticks and carrots (rewards and punishment). We know that the assessment can be used as a stick or it has been used as a carrot and so we have an old system that has not evolved since the 1950s. That is the challenge we face (Director, INEVAL, personal communication, Feb. 25, 2013).

The initial architects and leaders of this institution saw a strong link between social participation and fomenting a culture of quality. Of course, they also recognized that this cultural shift is a longer-term goal. In a political realm, this presents dilemmas for politicians who are hard pressed to act and deliver results in the short term.

We are not worried about what will happen in our institution, but rather about what will happen in the Ministry because demands from society will be greater. We have been provocative on purpose. One question we asked is: ‘Do you know the standards (issued by the Ministry)?’ That question is innocent, but we know that 98% will answer that they do not. This, in reality, speaks badly about the socialization process of the standards carried out by the Ministry. We do not do this to point fingers, but rather to identify where we are not performing well. We want to understand the context where these evaluations will be applied (Director, INEVAL, personal communication, Feb. 25, 2013).

In addition, the adversarial style of President Correa with teachers and students who resisted evaluations has complicated this longer-term shift. In various instances, Correa used the language of threats within the context of evaluations and thus inadvertently reinforced fears and reactive attitudes towards the evaluations.

The Institute's director also identified another complicating factor for the long-term cultural shift around evaluations: Correa's discourse of meritocracy. As highlighted in Chapter 5, Correa established several reforms to revamp the bureaucracy. One of these reforms was to establish a Ministry of Meritocracy. The discourse of meritocracy, as used by President Correa and government, reinforced traditional associations with evaluations as punitive as opposed to mechanisms for continual improvement.

Despite these tensions and contradictions, the work to reframe evaluations as a tool for continual improvement and elements of participation that were designed into the strategy produced some visible results. There is evidence, of course, of continued resistance and critiques, some of which is presented below in the counter perspective. However and importantly, there is also evidence from interviews conducted with teachers and school directors for this study that many recognized the importance of these tools for educational improvement:

I took the challenge of accepting the evaluations. I got low marks on some aspects of the evaluation in relation to legislation even though in practice I am actually quite good in that area. But I think the evaluations are a necessary thing to accept. We are passing through a unique moment politically, and I wanted to demonstrate to the government and leaders that school directors and teachers are not only here to throw rocks in the street. In my case, I have years of pedagogical training and I wanted to show that we could contribute in the

classroom. That is why I continue to support this project of change (Rural director, personal communication, March 7, 2013).

Renewing the teaching profession

Another pivotal issue in the eyes of both government and critics was the challenge of improving the motivation and capacity of teachers. Many teachers in the system had years of experience in the classroom but did not have basic teaching credentials or a minimum level of pedagogical and content knowledge. Many lacked motivation and had low salaries when compared to other professionals in the country.

To start to address this, the Ministry began by raising salaries of teachers from around 250 USD per month to 850 USD. The Ministry also designed a career ladder to motivate teachers to improve their skills and performance. In this career ladder, there are 10 categories that combine academic credentials, years of work, successful performance on evaluations and other indicators, such as in-service training. At the lowest level, teachers must have a bachelor's degree and must have been selected by merit courses or work in areas where there are limited teachers from higher levels. Once admitted, teachers have six years to be certified as a teacher or get a degree in education. If these are not met, then the teacher is let go. Within the first two years, teachers must participate in the induction course provided by the Ministry. The highest level requires 24 years of experience and that the teachers pass all exams, including mentor and evaluation courses. This level also requires a master's degree in education.

Many teachers who had been in the system for years and who were 60 years of age or more were not necessarily inclined to update their skills and go through this process. To encourage these teachers to exit the system, a voluntary program for retirement with an attached bonus was enhanced from previous years. The initial bonus was raised considerably under Correa from around 4,000-8,000 to 12,000- 24,000 USD, depending years of service. In 2008, around 1,291 teachers received their bonus and retired. By 2012, the total number was 12,212. Broader financial cuts from the global recession in 2015 and 2016 forced the Ministry to temporarily suspend the bonus program.

Another step taken to address the quality of teaching was to establish the public National University of Education in 2013, which aims to serve as a model for teacher education by providing high quality courses at a university level. Classes started in March 2014 with 19 students from various parts of the country. According to Cevallos & Bramwell (2015), the University has been slow to enroll students. With only 30 currently enrolled students in 2015, its potential impact thus far has been minimal.

Another strategy used to improve quality focused on improving teaching in the classroom through a mentor program. Experienced teachers with high scores on the national teachers' exam could qualify to become a mentor. They received special training and then would be paired up with a school. Initially, schools that formed part of the program were those designated as most in need and were located in rural and low resource communities. The mentor's role was to support only pedagogic and didactic

aspects in the classroom. Here the Vice-minister explains the theory of change behind the program:

Impact is a micro-process. First there is a change in teachers, not changing them but the change process they manage. We also have a new system of mentoring. These are the best teachers we have identified and they have been trained for six full months. They are deployed in schools with the worst evaluation results. Before a professor could be promoted only to the position of director. Now they have other routes, such as becoming a mentor. This is a form of positive supervision, not policing (Vice-minister Education, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

Finally, the Ministry has used evaluations as a means to weed out the unqualified from the qualified teachers. Teachers were given two opportunities to complete their respective evaluations. If they failed, they were first given a warning and were obliged to take remedial courses to prepare for the exam again. If they failed a second time, they were removed from their positions. In the following quote, the Vice Minister of Education at the time explained:

At this moment, we have 250,000 teachers in the public system, most of whom don't deserve to be there. From a pragmatic point of view in a country with enormous social inequity, what can you do? We are using the system of

evaluation to identify deficiencies; once a teacher has two insufficient evaluations then they have to leave their post.

This is a novelty in Ecuador and in Latin America. Of course, from those on the traditional left, leftist by the book, orthodox leftists, this is neoliberalism. We are accused by the Union of being neoliberals and we are neoliberals because we believe the right of a poor student to receive a quality education is more important than a teacher's right to work stability if they do not know how to teach.

We believe that the right to an excellent quality education for disadvantaged students has more weight. If teachers are an obstacle to achieving this goal, then they will have to lose their jobs. We are in this process, and it is extremely complex, tremendously difficult. A traditional politician would not be interested in doing this because it doesn't give him a single vote (Vice Minister, personal communication, March 2, 2013).

Moral of the Story: Pressure and Support Are Needed for Comprehensive Reforms

From the government's perspective (and even from an outside observer's perspective), a lot has been invested in the change project from political to technical to financial resources. Given the complexity of improving education on a system-wide level, a comprehensive and long-term approach is needed. This is even more true given the

initial poor conditions of the sector when Correa took over. There are several points highlighted by government actors from this perspective that seem to emerge from the narrative above:

- 1) Effective change requires pressure and support. Top-down and sideways pressure is required for system change. Top-down pressure can be exerted through certain policy levers including standards and evaluations. These standards help clarify and unify expectations around quality and may help ensure accountability and participation from other social actors, including parents. However, too much pressure or the wrong uses of evaluations can lead to perverse incentives and increased conflict.
- 2) Systems of support are also required. Support implies ensuring decent basic conditions and wages for teachers, students, and school administrators. It also includes opportunities (pre service, in-service) to enhance knowledge and skills. Creating mentoring processes may be one effective top-down approach to support enhanced teaching in the classroom and incentivize teachers to aspire to different roles.
- 3) Autonomy has to be earned. Pushing accountability down to schools is fundamental for long-term sustainable change. But this is an incremental process of guidance and supervision and ultimately

involves rewarding autonomy when certain benchmarks are met. This process can be challenging in societies with authoritarian traditions and some of the perverse longer-term policy effects of a welfare state. Local communities have become dependent on the center for instructions, resources, etc.

Counter Narrative: A Rights-based Approach to Quality

The counter narrative differs considerably from the government narrative in terms of the definition of quality. From the counter narrative point of view, the government did not spend sufficient time on a national debate on the broader definition of quality. The opportunities that did exist were not structured to be inclusive and participatory “enough” given the critical link between notions of quality and broader visions of the ideal society that groups desire. There were a few technical forums convened by the Ministry to discuss the issue, such as that which occurred in late 2009, but ultimately the Ministry moved forward with a vision and policies that were controversial and problematic. Counter proposals for defining quality and standards from a more integral approach were circulated by groups like Contrato Social (i.e. Education and Buen Vivir, 2012). However, most of the substantive ideas in these proposals were not adopted.

Quality from a Rights Perspective

From the counter-narrative perspective, quality should have been defined from a rights perspective that emphasizes a flexible, decentralized, intercultural, child-centered system in accordance with Ecuador’s diversity. This is the vision that was articulated

in the Constitution, but was contradicted by other key policy goals such as centralization.

Civil society and the state have had several encounters to define and conceptualize quality. From the civil society perspective, we continue to emphasize the exercise of human rights, which implies the participation of children and parents (International organization representative, personal communication, February 23, 2013).

Those against the government perspective would define quality from a holistic point of view that includes input, processes, and outcomes. From the counter narrative point of view, the Ministry's application of standards and evaluation had too much emphasis on a content-based learning achievement conception of quality:

For these reasons, we critics of the current government think it is necessary to change the discussion. We can accept talking about quality of education, as some have said, so as not to give up terrain to neoliberalism. Ok then, let us talk about levels of investment in education; of its application to certain areas; of differences between public and private education; of teacher professional development and the conditions needed to exercise the profession; of the labor conditions of teachers; of infrastructure; of transport; of the poverty experienced by teachers and students; of their health and nutrition; of institutional and system administrative processes; of social participation and democracy in the formulation of education policies; of school and community

governments; of the pertinence of the curriculum to contexts and the particular conditions of institutions; of intersectoriality in public policy; of free, obligatory and universal education; of the link between levels of education. In sum, let us talk about “quality” seriously, not only as results from exams and learning achievement tests. These are just a function of everything else (Chaves, 2012, p. 141).

As a whole, the content of the current policies adopted by the government is not viewed as an alternative nor is it viewed in terms of its alignment with the vision of Buen Vivir as articulated in the Constitution. We see this in the following response from a civil society representative:

In symbolic discourse, there has been an evolution around the concept of quality, as something more integral. In practice, however, there is a disconnect. We are promoting an evaluation system that follows the old paradigm (reductionist, emphasis on cognitive aspects) and not more holistic and aligned with, for instance, the vision as expressed in the concept of Buen Vivir. Four years later, after the Constitution outlined an approach to evaluation, the institution was formalized and they are starting with evaluations of teachers and students, not the whole system (Civil Society Representative, personal communication, Feb. 25, 2013).

Those who present the counter narrative perspective consider the government’s framing of quality to be instrumental and reductionist. It is instrumental in that it serves

the logic of the market or a centralized technocratic state as opposed to the preferences and values of diverse local communities. It is reductionist in that it focuses just on the education sector and on formal education and does not have a broader concept of education as inter-sectorial. It does not address learning as encompassing non-formal, informal, and formal settings. Finally, several critiques of the Ministry's vision focus on its initial priority on infrastructure and technology (i.e. the Ministry's flagship program called Escuelas del Milenio)⁸ over more complex issues such as pedagogical renovation:

Ultimately, the government vision of educational quality is based on the assumption that diverse children and communities must adapt to changes in the world and not be proactive agents of that change (Civil Society representative, personal interview, March 4, 2013).

This tension over views of quality is most visible in the differences between the government and indigenous communities and their views on the use of evaluations. Below, one of the indigenous leaders from the Union describes how members view the government:

⁸ One of the emblematic programs of the Ministry was Escuelas del Milenio. Essentially, these were considered new models of excellence in terms of their infrastructure and form. In practice, however, because of the costs involved, these schools for the 21st century were not scalable. Critics claim that they shifted the focus away from a more profound and critical revamping of pedagogic practices to a focus on infrastructure and technology (Minteguiga, 2014).

The ministry imposes its books on us, created from some mono-cultural monolingual perspective. The evaluations follow the same logic. Our teachers continue to work with our previous curricular frameworks [in Quechua], but the evaluation from the Ministry is in Castilian Spanish and is based on content and books that we are not using in our classrooms. So the evaluation is frightening for us because none of our teachers pass (Indigenous representative from the Union, personal communication, March 5, 2013).

Several documents from key stakeholders highlight the need to reframe teaching and teachers, not as inputs as economists treat them, but as subjects who have agency and capabilities that cannot be reduced to a few measurable variables or techniques (Robalino, 2009). From the counter-narrative perspective, the government framing of teachers as a “problem” is highly problematic in both technical and political terms. The various reforms that aim to update teacher knowledge and to incentivize teachers through new recruitment and incentive structures do not get to the core of the problem, which essentially lies in changing teaching practices through continual and critical modifications of theory and practice. This ongoing praxis is situational, local, and contextual (Minteguiaga, 2014).

While learning may be an important aspect of quality in the counter narrative definition, it is not equated with school performance as measured on exams per se or good grades. The reforms pushed by the ministry reinforce a concept of learning that focuses on memorization and recalling information, as this school director explains:

I feel that the quality that the government seeks puts a great deal of emphasis on the content of subjects; that students, by knowing more things are receiving a better quality education. For me, quality is a holistic educational process through which all of the participating subjects contribute their experiences from their own reality to construct knowledge for life. Therefore, for me quality is not something that is defined by content. A high quality education as we conceive of it is to form integral human beings that can serve the planet with what they know. It has a moral civil dimension (Alternative Community School Director, personal communication, March 7, 2013).

Standards were less controversial among groups outside of the government, but there were important differences in terms of emphasis. Contrato Social issued alternative standards from the government. The standards are more rights based (with connections to the 4 A's in concept) and they are also more procedural. Evaluation is framed as integral, although in this document it is not clear exactly what that means. It is inferred from other documents that it means a broader form of evaluation that encompasses methods beyond standardized tests. This includes portfolios; self-assessment; and the measurement of items that have more to do with the values expressed in Buen Vivir such as cooperation, solidarity, and mutual respect. It focuses on these methods rather than individual achievement.

Finally, while noting the positive effects, others also highlighted the possible perverse outcomes of standards and evaluation as applied by the Ministry:

Standards and evaluations have had positive elements. They have pressured teachers to focus on improving and updating their skills and knowledge. However, there are potential negative effects if the focus of the standards is overly cognitive and we return to a “banking model of education” (International Organization Representative, personal communication, personal interview February 25, 2013).

The Union leadership also speaks of other perverse effects:

From a pedagogical point of view, excuse the term, they prostituted the concept of evaluation. Teachers were no longer in the process of evaluation to improve or to show their weaknesses so that they could get training, but to get a 1200 US dollar prize. Others went out of fear that they were going to get thrown out (Teacher’s Union President, personal communication, March 7, 2013).

One important contribution from the alternative point of view, although perhaps a bit too late to influence the first phase of reforms, was a study done by Analia Minteguiaga and published in 2014. The report entitled *Oscillations in the Quality of Education in Ecuador 1980-2010* provided a comprehensive summary of school-based programs focused on enhancing educational quality in Ecuador from 1980 to 2010. It included a broader discussion of the origins of quality in global, regional and local discourses. The report presents a description of each of these school-based programs, their theories of

change on quality, and their results. The study ultimately concludes that most of these programs, with the exception of a few isolated examples, were ineffective in transforming pedagogical practices in the classroom. Most the programs were implemented piecemeal without linkages to the broader system and policies, and thus were never institutionalized or sustainable. At the end of the study, Minteguiaga (2014) proposes some ideas for a vision of educational quality and policies that align with the concept of Buen Vivir in the Constitution. Some of these ideas include a different approach to evaluation that is less hierarchical and less competitive; environmental education based on the rights of nature; a focus on renewing pedagogical practices in the classroom through critical praxis; injecting democracy and deliberation into policymaking and program design; and a critical stance of the state, but still with an appreciation of its importance (Minteguiaga, 2014).

Moral of the Story: A Narrow Vision of Quality

The moral of the story from the counter-narrative perspective is that the Ministry has formulated and implemented a narrow vision of quality. At times, there is recognition of a broader discourse from the government on an integral approach to quality (and this is evident in some of the documents, such as national standards) but it is really in the application of these policies that a more traditional conservative and top-down approach is evident. In particular, the issue of diversity and alternative views on what constitutes quality seems to have been given short shrift in the formulation of the current set of quality enhancing policies. The approach is rooted in a top-down logic and view of education from an economic and state centric point of view, stressing inputs and outcomes over processes; technical factors over political aspects;

infrastructure over pedagogical renewal; and standardized methods of evaluation over more integral methods.

Chapter 8: Concluding Synthesis and Reflections

This final chapter examines competing policy stories, applying various lenses (theoretical and historical) to tease out the broader metanarratives and implications for educational change and governance theories that emerge. The implicit argument in the framing of this study is that governance, participation and reforms that focus on quality interact with one another in complex and sometimes unexpected ways. These complex interactions are rooted in historical political power dynamics. Complexity is ripe terrain for interpretive policy narrative analysis. The analysis highlights some of the paradoxes and policy tradeoffs that emerge as discourses and practices in these three areas intersect. By juxtaposing narratives as we have done in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, a more nuanced and intricate picture of the political economy of education reform emerges, allowing for several key insights into policymaking focused on quality.

The Setting: A Story of Decline

The overall policy story began for most of those interviewed with a description of the decade or so before Correa took office. Interestingly, both the dominant and the counter setting as described by those interviewed for this study seemed to overlap. The common background story was what Deborah Stone (2002) would call a story of decline. In general, there was a shared notion that neoliberalism had contributed to destabilizing the political and economic situation in Ecuador. Fiscal crises and austerity had “hollowed out” the state, severely limiting its ability to follow through on any policy. This weakness contributed to policy anarchy, excessive intromissions from

international organizations in setting the policy agenda, and increased conflict between groups.

The ultimate effect of the application of neoliberal policies on education in Ecuador was increased inequality and a decline in quality. Reiterating Bermeo (2008), it was illusory to talk about an education system in Ecuador. There was no evidence of a system per se, but rather isolated schools and actors doing whatever they could or wanted. A few of those interviewed (but not the majority) did not draw a causal link between neoliberal policies and this decline. Instead, they pointed to longer-term historical developments such as regionalization, weak institutions, fragmented politics, political patronage and clientelist traditions that led to gridlock.

When Correa took office, there seemed to be an overall widespread consensus across groups that the sector needed serious reforms to address both equity and quality. There was also a common assumption across groups that the state needed to have a more proactive role and be strengthened. And there was palpable excitement across narratives around the possibility of a new vision of society and development. There was also a growing expectation after the drafting of the Constitution that traditionally marginalized groups would continue to play a central role in reimagining and refashioning a new social order and institutions.

The Plot: What Kind of State? What Kind of Education?

The stories began to diverge and conflicts and disagreement became more acute at about the time when Correa and his government started to advance their policy agenda

in different sectors. The question of the need to rebuild and strengthen the state shifted to the question of what kind of state Correa was actually building in practice. Was it an inclusive, democratic, intercultural and decentralized state or was it a centralized, insular, bureaucratic one? The question of the need to improve educational quality shifted to the question of who got to define quality and what that implied for specific policies and practices.

Governance, Participation, and Quality

Within education, there seemed in the first few years to be a general acknowledgement of the need to be pragmatic. After all, the system was basically on life support and barely had a pulse. As described in more detail in Chapter 5, the first priority focused on recuperating what the Ministry termed *Rectoria*, or authority and control over the sector. Stability, continuity, and rationality were some of the key criteria in discourse that were applied to reshape the sector. But how *rectoria* was constructed in discourse and pursued by the Ministry created new disagreements and conflicts. The Ministry definition of *rectoria* emphasized central state authority and control. Public education became synonymous with “state run,” and not necessarily with broader principles that ensured “publicness” in education such as free, laic, or compulsory (Academic, personal communication, March 7, 2013).

Policy decisions were seen to fall specifically within the government’s purview and domain. Social groups would be consulted, but the decision-making locus was ultimately in the hands of the central policymaker. Participation was recast in most instances by the government as information sharing and validation of existing plans.

Direct citizen participation was seen as desirable while collective group and union participation were framed as a threat. Discursively, the Ministry questioned the representativeness and democratic legitimacy of leaders of influential civil society and union groups. In many ways, this critique was valid. The Union, with its sole focus on wages and frequent use of mass disruption, had fatigued the general public, including progressives. As several respondents highlighted, the discourse of the Union did not evolve with the changing context. Their cognitive frames and identity were entrenched in an excessive adversarial form of countervailing power (Fung, 2002; Kim, 2014).

Rectoria implied a central definition of the curriculum across the country. Discursively, the government painted the previous situation as anarchy (curricular, administrative, etc.), thus justifying a more central top-down approach. This central control was seen as vital for ensuring equity and even quality. This argument made sense in many ways given the past framing of the problem. Previous laissez faire pluralism had led to different education systems for different classes. Those with resources ended up receiving higher quality while those without resources usually received inferior quality services. Equity entailed establishing a common core curriculum for everyone. Similarly, standards and evaluation were framed as a tool to foment participation and to help the State redirect resources to those that needed them most.

The counter narrative disputed this concept of policy formulation and of quality as narrow, technocratic, state-centric, and centralized. From the counter perspective strengthening the state did not necessarily imply centralizing the state. From the

counter-narrative perspective the strengthening of the state was not a zero sum game. Local diverse communities required different solutions. They demanded more agency in determining their own educational ends and means. For decades, teachers and communities had been the object of development and education policies; not subjects with agency to shape and make policy.

Over time, there is evidence of policy learning and adaptation from high-level officials. Several of those interviewed acknowledged that some mistakes were made along the way and blamed a sort of deeper authoritarian cultural tradition that was embedded in the practices of the state and civil society actors. This is a policy story of helplessness in the face of an impersonal weight of history and traditions. Several officials recognized that deeper change could only happen by empowering local agents, schools, and teachers. At the same time, however, they were also convinced that given the experience of abandon and chaos in the 1980s and 1990s, that autonomy without some form of quality control and accountability was a recipe for failure.

Correa and his government's application of *rectoria* was a double-edged sword. With the impulse to advance reform and break through potential gridlock that had characterized the sector for decades, Correa sometimes used force, symbolically and literally. The rhetorical threats employed by Correa may have been effective in the short-term for advancing elements of the reform, but in the longer-term these threats only reinforced the general mistrust of government policies. Even if many of the policies suggested made sense given the context or in the long term would benefit the

public interest, they were often rejected by opposition groups because of their tone, origins, or simply because that is what opposition groups do. They critique, they reject, and they resist.

Moral of the Story: The Grammar of Politics

One possible explanation for Correa and his administration's efforts to insulate the state decision-making process from adversarial social groups could be attributed to a sort of collective, cumulative, historical trauma that eroded trust between actors. This collective trauma came from excesses in prior years during which international organizations and then the Teacher's Union took turns beating up the Ministry; from decades prior when an authoritarian state violently repressed social movements; and from long periods during which teachers' agency and role in policymaking had been marginalized, first by the welfare state's central planners and then by international neoliberal elites. Ultimately, everyone had some complicity in this dysfunctional state of affairs. Everyone took turns being victims and perpetrators.

Decades of political turmoil and mistrust had shaped and thickened political identities and practices. In response, top level officials, particularly the executive, turned to top-down adversarial governance. Civil society over time became increasingly adversarial, entrenched in its role of opposition. And policy arenas became symbolic battlegrounds for "*wars of position*," where groups manipulated discourse, symbols, and narratives as a means of social control or political influence (Gramsci, 1999).

What the Heck is a Neoliberal?

This, in turn, may explain the practice of groups on the left and the right co-opting rhetorical elements or symbols from the others' narratives when expedient, even if it generated contradictions. The conservative elite media has accused the Correa government of being neoliberal. Correa's grand narrative is defined as an anti-thesis to neoliberalism. The Union accused Correa's policies in education for their neoliberal characteristics. Progressive academics described the Union's decadence and abuses of power in the 1990s as benefiting from neoliberalism. In the context of Ecuador, neoliberalism became an empty vessel that meant everything and signified nothing. It was used as a pejorative label to delegitimize the other. Ultimately, understanding governance and education politics in Ecuador involves tracing these rhetorical struggles and sometimes contradictory uses of symbols and meaning.

Quality's Rhetorical Functions

One obvious question is: Why did the proclaimed socialist and *Buen Vivir* government ultimately opt for a more mainstream reform package of standards, evaluations, and core curriculum, that in many other contexts has been associated with neo-conservatism?

One hypothesis is that the case of Ecuador supports world culture theory. Despite the political ideology or discourse of the government, the pull of a global culture was stronger. In global discourses, the issue of quality in education has become the priority. Policy stories of reform success (Singapore, Cuba, Finland) circulate around the world.

International organizations and donor agencies package these stories and highlight the preferred best practices and the state of the art, gathering relevant evidence. In recent years, many of these success stories point to emphasis on teacher quality, standards, and evaluation.

Many of the top-level officials in Ecuador, including Correa himself, were educated abroad at universities in Europe and the United States. Several worked in international organizations. Correa, for instance, was a local IDB education loan officer. Other officials came from the private sector before assuming political positions. Several had been immersed in two decades of national and regional educational policy dialogues in Ecuador that were structured by global organizations such as UNICEF, Care, the OAS, the Inter-American Development Bank, and German Cooperation. The first Director of the National Institute of Evaluation was originally from Mexico. These international connections and personal experiences likely shaped educational thinking and ideas about what was considered reasonable, justifiable or desirable.

This study may also alternatively provide evidence of the policy-borrowing phenomenon of externalization (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Given the high levels of conflict in the sector, the government may have chosen to make reference to other education systems as a way to legitimize and bolster their reform arguments. As Steiner-Khamsi (2004) has observed, externalization tends to happen more during times of political transition. The pressure was on Correa to break from the past and deliver results by implementing a new post-neoliberal agenda.

It may be plausible to think that Correa and these officials were not impervious to the increasing global and regional culture of comparisons and inevitable competition. Through Correa's zeal to prove that his alternative political experiment would work, he has taken a pragmatic but also outcome oriented approach, understanding that legitimacy (both internal and external) can be derived from generating policy results. The early successes on the social policy side (poverty reduction, equity, infrastructure) helped bolster the bigger narrative that something extraordinary was happening in Ecuador under the *Buen Vivir* approach. Many international actors also took note, and Ecuador under Correa in some circles became an enticing model for development, helping boost his power and mystique locally.

Finally, another possible reason behind the specific reform package chosen may relate to De La Torre's technopopulist theory. As the state concentrated power, it looked to use various levers to maintain control over actors in the sector. Standards and evaluations are two effective levers for maintaining control at the distance over a loosely coupled system. This control, and indeed quality, were masked by an equity discourse. The linkage of equity, quality, and meritocracy discourse created an effective blend of populist and rationalist appeals that legitimize a standardized top-down system of control.

The Paradox of Power

One of the central insights of this study is that advancing quality reforms politically may first require the concentration of power, particularly in contexts where there are

strong veto actors, gridlock and a contentious view of the reform package. However, compliance as a top down governance strategy does not necessarily lead to better outcomes over time, particularly in contexts characterized by higher levels of diversity and complexity. Furthermore, top down compliance does not necessarily contribute to policy legitimacy or fuel sustainability. Thus, governors may introduce elements (often market-related in their logic) that shift the focus of institutions and actors to performance outcomes. These outcomes tend to be predefined by experts and governors a priori. They are accompanied by systems of sanctions and rewards, as well as systems of surveillance. The underlying assumption is that competition between individuals and groups for scarce resources will motivate behavior change. Unfortunately, this approach to governance through market competition can create perverse incentives and distortions, especially given that education is a public good. Finally, emergent capabilities deal with the ability to respond to the more complex, unpredictable and locally rooted aspects that characterize the problem of enhancing quality. Here issues of values, identity, morale, and culture become salient. Differences and conflict are inevitable given the diversity of groups. Therefore, emergent capacities may focus more on process and ways to constructively manage conflict and tensions so they contribute to innovation and improvement, rather than undermining them. These emergent capacities thus may be more linked to capabilities that are supportive, responsive, creative, and collaborative problem solving. This approach has advantages, particularly when it comes to promoting collaborative problem solving at the local level, where agents have more information on the specific issues at hand.

This gradually changing description of governance from compliance, to performance, to emergence implies a linear historical process similar to the democratization sequence argument made by Crozier et. al (1975) and later by Fukayama (2004). Without certain levels of compliance, it is difficult to shift towards performance on a system-wide level. If people don't get paid, if the books don't arrive, and if the teacher or student does not attend with consistency, then it is nearly impossible to focus on second-level processes of learning and improvement. And performance, which is achieved often through external pressure, is important but often insufficient for deeper change. Finally, emergence, which deals with the inner core of change (identity, morale, attitudes, affinities), is fostered more through spontaneous organic networks.

The paradox of power lies in the fact that the application of certain forms of power to solve one dimension of the problem (i.e. policy decisiveness) exacerbates other dimensions of the problem, like policy adaptability. It is also multidirectional, meaning that certain policy discourses create counter-reactions, new political identities and new political dynamics over time. For instance, many social actors in the case of Ecuador seem stuck in more adversarial forms of countervailing power. These political identities have been shaped over decades of abuses of state power, institutional corruption, and mistrust. These adversarial identities and politics that once helped transform and democratize Ecuadorian society now may limit the ability of political and social actors to collaborate to construct a new society as envisioned in the Constitution and concept of Buen Vivir.

The Weight of History

In this vision, there is space for agency, but there is recognition of the power of structure, and ultimately the weight of history. Thus, social and educational change are often not governed by any particular group of reformers but rather by impersonal broader social forces that over time have shaped the political beliefs, identities, and practices of actors. Borrowing from what Tyack and Cuban (1995) referred to as the grammar of schooling, these beliefs and practices are embedded in what I would call here a grammar of politics, or patterns of governance. Despite all the best intentions, smart policy designs and institutional innovations, the grammar of politics and schooling are often impervious to change.

Lessons Moving Forward, Ecuador and Beyond

This study highlights the policy dilemmas inherent to educational reforms within a post-neoliberal context. It underscores both the limits and importance of state control over education; the inevitable conflicts associated with education reforms that focus on quality; and the limits and importance of participation in reform. Finally, it examines the analytical benefits of understanding governance, participation and quality as socially constructed concepts that are tied to normative and ideological interests. A deeper understanding of the politics behind education reform requires uncovering the contested meanings behind discursive constructions such as governance, participation and quality.

So what are the lessons learned from this policy study for Ecuador and other states in the process of rebuilding state capacity to manage educational reforms with a post-neoliberal agenda? Wylde (nd.) defines post-neoliberalism as:

Reclaiming the authority of the state to oversee the construction of a new social consensus and approach to welfare and a set of economic policies that seeks to enhance or rebuild the capacity of the state to manage the market and export economy in ways that not only ensure growth but are also responsive to social need and citizenship demands (Wylde, nd.).

This study of Ecuador illustrates the difficult path of reclaiming state authority in a context where local and global pressures pull the state in different directions, and also where the grammar of schooling and politics limit reform processes and outcomes. Ensuring economic growth while being responsive to social needs and citizenship demands likely requires important tradeoffs in the short and mid-term. Both policymakers and citizens need to learn to navigate these tradeoffs.

Situating Ecuador's education reform within this specific historical context helps to provide a more nuanced picture of the politics of education reforms and generates several key lessons. These lessons are contextually bound and additional cases are needed to deepen and confirm their applicability to other contexts.

Lesson 1: Jumpstarting Progressive Reform Processes May Require a Concentration of Power

The first set of lessons deal with the issue of governance in post-neoliberal settings. The policy story captured here makes clear that a weak state with no autonomy or capacity to formulate and implement public policies severely compromises the possibility of reform in social sectors. Furthermore, a proactive and capable state (not to be confused with size) is a pre-requisite for advancing certain types of policy reforms. In certain political contexts characterized by gridlock and political fragmentation, such as in Ecuador in 2006, concentration of power may be needed initially to politically advance reforms dealing with educational quality. The concentration of power allowed Correa and the Ministry to recuperate some of the autonomy that the state lost during previous decades to international donors and local interest groups. This autonomy cleared space for the government to set and advance a bolder reform agenda in the education sphere.

Lesson 2: Building State Capacity to Manage Reform

Centralization or concentration of power in and of themselves will not likely lead to better social policy outcomes. In the case of Ecuador, the government under Correa combined centralization with a focus on rebuilding state capacity. Within the education sector, this entailed a long and arduous process that consisted of a multi-pronged strategy focused on: a) restructuring the educational bureaucracy to better focus on policy reforms; b) renewing the human talent pool within the educational bureaucracy with qualified technocrats and on the front lines with motivated and qualified teachers;

c) focusing on performance and accountability through the use of standards and evaluations.

More specifically, the restructuring of the educational bureaucracy included creating new areas within the ministry with the specific mandate to design, implement and manage specific aspects of the reform (i.e. quality and evaluation). Restructuring also implied the establishment of a more planned and rational distribution of schools across communities in the country. Finally, an important institutional innovation was the formation of an external evaluation institute. By creating some autonomy and distance from the Ministry, the Institute gained legitimacy in an area that is inevitably polemic and charged.

Much of the current global discourse around educational quality stresses the need for high quality teachers and competent school leaders. In the case of Ecuador, the Ministry put into place an integrated package of reforms focused on renewing these professions. This included enhancing motivation through increased salaries and new forms of career advancement; merit-based criteria for recruiting and retaining front-line educational workers; and putting pressure on teachers and school directors through standards and evaluations while simultaneously providing support through professional development (pre-service and in-service).

With such a strong emphasis in global educational discourses on teacher quality, the leadership role of high and mid-level policymakers is often overlooked. In contexts

where institutions and systems are weak or not in place (as was the case in Ecuador), a first logical step likely involves designing and putting into place the institutional infrastructure that will allow for educational improvement at a system level in the long-term.

In Ecuador, the first few years of the reform focused on setting up the institutional infrastructure that could support not only enhanced equity but also improvements in educational quality. The results on the equity side were significant and immediate. On the quality side, the results are still in initial stages, but there is evidence that the reform is beginning to improve overall quality as measured by certain indicators, such as the TERCE exam. The question is to what extent these improvements will be deepened and sustained.

Interestingly, some of the specific policies implemented by the progressive state in Ecuador, such as performance standards and evaluation, have been associated with neoliberal reforms and in particular with new public management. However, in Ecuador there was a clear political prioritization of social policy reforms backed by significant increases in public investment in the sector. These reforms were paid for by a progressive tax scheme. The government also benefited in its initial years by favorable global prices in petroleum. More recent declines in global petroleum prices have increased pressure on government's available revenues, and as such the sustainability of these reforms has been brought into question.

Finally, these reform choices (i.e. centralization of the state, a focus on building the capacity of the state to intervene in public sectors, and significant increases in social sector spending) all contradict the fundamental tenets of neoliberalism that called for rolling back the state through decentralization, austerity in public spending, and privatization of public services.

Lesson 3: Leadership and Continuity in Reform

Correa and his government have invested considerable political and financial resources into education reform despite the potential for conflict that this involved. One key lesson from Ecuador is that leadership, starting at the highest levels, is critical for successfully advancing reform efforts. Correa's rhetorical ability, his activist stance, and his strategic use of communication were crucial for securing support for the reforms. There were various strategic decisions along the way that demonstrate the political savvy of the government, particularly the decision to sequence the education reform. The initial focus on increasing investment and tripling teacher salaries helped to create momentum and counter-arguments that would be very useful for the second more contentious phases of reform.

Finally, continuity and persistence were critical. Initially, Correa's decision to continue with a 10-year plan provided much needed stability and continuity. This agenda was complemented with a more specific set of educational strategies that were pursued with tenacity over the past five years. Correa maintained high level officials (ministers and teams) in their positions for three or more year, on average. This is unusual in Latin America, where the average tenure of a Minister of Education is between 1.5 and 2

years. Continuity in leadership, clarity of vision and persistence in reform efforts are vital for complex social policy reforms.

Lesson 4: Shifts in Governance Need to Occur Over Time

The fourth main lesson from Ecuador and for other progressive states in similar historical situations is that deeper transformations in the education system, such as improvement of educational quality, require strategic shifts in governance over time. Initial concentration of power through hierarchy is required in contexts such as Ecuador in 2006, where there was a total lack of governability and where state planning and decision-making was distorted by excessive international influence and local powerful groups that benefitted from a weakened state. In this context, recuperating the state's authority and control over the sector and ensuring basic levels of compliance across actors in the system is required before advancing to higher order and more complex change. However, at some point, hierarchical forms of governance become limited in their ability to support local problem solving in education at the school and community levels. This shift in governance is fundamental for improving education, not just expanding it. In sum, one of the key lessons from Ecuador is that there is a sort of Maslow hierarchy of needs for education reform. Basic levels of system efficiency, stability, transparency, and continuity are needed before more complex system-wide levels of improvement can be achieved.

The Pending Challenge

The counter narrative has highlighted the tensions that emerged in Ecuador with the concentration of state power. In many respects, one of the biggest challenges moving forward for Ecuador and other progressive states in the midst of significant political and educational change is to foster the conditions to develop more inclusive forms of policy making in education at all levels, but particularly in contexts of high inequality and mistrust between the state and social actors.

As this study has indicated, social participation in education reform is complicated, especially in those societies where public institutions' authority and control have been severely weakened. It is clear from the various interviews and documents consulted here in this study that Correa's government has reduced spaces for participation in education reform. Correa justifies this reduction of collective group participation as a sort of historical means to an end, pointing to decades of social participation distorted by groups who pursued their own individual ends to the detriment of the public interest. However, Correa's government may have assumed too fully that it represents the public interest and can define the educational outcomes and needs for all communities in Ecuador. This is a mistake. While full consensus is not possible, there are important segments of the population such as indigenous groups and social movements that do not agree with educational vision, goals, and strategies implemented by the state.

The counter-narrative criticized the framing of educational quality and the specific

strategies pursued as both narrow and state-centric. The government recognized the contentious aspects involved in defining quality, but ultimately the approach taken (standards and stress on academic skills) still aligns more with mainstream technical methods than with a more alternative, holistic and rights-based approach. From a critical perspective, Correa and his government missed an opportunity to develop a more holistic approach to educational quality that aligned with the underlying principles of Buen Vivir. The initial focus on *calidez* (or warmth) as a complement to quality had the seeds and logic of an alternative paradigm to education. However, the evidence from this study is that the concept of *calidez* was never implemented or fully fleshed out through policy dialogue with educational stakeholders.

Given these gaps and significant policy differences between groups, there is a critical need to open up more public spaces for policy dialogue and learning. Some of these public spaces should be convened by the state, and other public spaces need to be established by autonomous social actors. Ecuadorian social actors are not all alike in their interests and demands. However, the clear predominance of adversarial forms of countervailing power needs to be rebalanced with more collaborative forms. There are some examples of autonomous civil society institutions that can help bridge civil society demands and formal policymaking. In education, the organization called *Grupo Faro* is one of several civil society organizations that has the ability to be both critical and collaborative. Grupo Faro was founded in 2004 by a group of citizens who wanted to create an independent non-partisan institution that could focus simultaneously on strengthening state capacity, civil society and the private sector to create public policies

that are more closely centred on the needs of citizens. Ecuador needs more of these types of organizations in education.

It is naïve to think that political institutions and culture can be changed from one day to the next. Many of the recent progressive reforms undertaken by the left in Latin America are fragile and full of contradictions as the state is more “equipped to control or govern, rather than release, the energies of social movements” (Escobar, 2010, p. 46). As Arturo Escobar (2010) stated, “Latin America is at a crossroads” where new configurations of power open up the possibility for new forms of institutional and social arrangements to emerge. Perhaps the greatest and yet simplest lesson learned from Ecuador, despite the tensions inherent in education reform within a post neoliberal setting, is that when actors combine pragmatism and idealism, increased equity and quality in education become possible over time. Idealism allows actors to re-imagine what is possible, and pragmatism enables reformers, both within and outside of the government, to humbly press on despite the odds.

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