CHAPTER 8

ELT AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN ARGENTINA

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ABSTRACT

The English language has a long history and prestigious status in Argentina. Its presence as a foreign language is closely linked to the birth of the country as a nation. As a consequence, the teaching of English has always been widely encouraged in Argentina. Today, English is part of the curriculum of private and state-run schools. Within the private sector, there is a large number of bilingual schools, some of which were established as ethnic schools by the first English settlers in the 19th century. The success of the first bilingual schools has encouraged many other schools to copy, to varying degrees, their bilingual curriculum and thus create a large network of English-Spanish schools in the country. Education in Argentina has undergone extensive changes in the last decade. The new Federal Law of Education of 1996 has had a special impact on the teaching of foreign languages. Based on this law, English is now compulsory in all Argentine schools—a clear sign of the government's recognition of the importance of mastering the world's lingua franca. In this chapter, the implementation of the new education law and its impact on the teaching of English in public schools is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The English language has a long history and prestigious status in Argentina. Its presence as a foreign language dates from the early years and is closely linked to the birth of the country as a nation. As a consequence, the study of English has always been widely encouraged in Argentina.

Today English is part of the curriculum of all schools in the country. In this sense, special attention must be paid to the 1993 educational reform; one of the premises of which claims "a systematic-linguistic construct for language development, which is able to accommodate mother tongue acquisition, second and foreign languages, pidgin and Creole varieties, alongside English as a global language" (Dirección General de Investigación y Desarrollo Educativo, 1998a, 1998b). Following the distinction by the linguist Braj Kachru (1985), we can say in Crystal's (1997) words that Argentina belongs to the *expanding* circle "which recognises the importance of English as an international language though they do not have a colonization by members of the *inner group* (UK, USA, etc.), nor have given English special administrative status" (p. 54).

Within the private sector of the Argentine educational system, there is a large number of bilingual schools, the origin of which lies in the first 20 British-founded schools (British Council Argentina, 2000). The first part of this chapter will discuss the success of these early bilingual schools, which has encouraged many other schools to copy, to varying degrees, their bilingual curriculum and thus create a

large network of private English/Spanish schools in the country. The main features of bilingual schools will be presented.

Education in Argentina has undergone extensive changes in the last decade. The new Federal Law of Education (Ley Federal de Educación N° 24.195), enacted in 1993, brought about a long-awaited reform that would decentralize education and outline a curriculum in light of global trends as well as in the national context (see Pini & Cigliutti, 1999; Rhoten, 2000). The educational reform has also reflected a greater awareness of the different linguistic and cultural realities not only in the country but also in the world, a perspective that made the ministries of education of each province think both locally and globally. A global perspective highlights the importance of implementing EFL throughout the entire educational system. Based on the new Federal Law of Education, English is now compulsory in all Argentine schools—a clear sign of the government's recognition of the importance of mastering the world's lingua franca. The second part of this chapter will present the law and discuss its implementation and impact on the teaching of English.

ENGLISH IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The southernmost and second-largest country in South America, Argentina, covers an area of almost 4,000,000 km^2 and is divided into 24 provinces. The overall population, 36 million inhabitants, is dispersed with varying rates of density throughout the country. Strikingly, one third of the population lives in one city, Buenos Aires, the country's federal capital (Instituto Nacional De Estadística y Censos, INDEC, 2002).

Private schools in Argentina constitute an important part of the educational system. Out of a total student population of 10 million, 24% of the students attend privately run schools. The percentage of private schools is higher in the wealthier provinces. In the city of Buenos Aires itself, almost half of the schools are private (46%) (INDEC, 2002). Unfortunately, many Argentineans do not view the public education system as adequate and they are willing to pay for higher standards of instruction, especially when it comes to learning English. Even though, as will be discussed later, ELT has recently become compulsory for both the private and public sectors, the latter still lags behind the former in the mind of most Argentineans. Moreover, the large network of English/Spanish private bilingual schools provides an attractive option to those who want their children to achieve a high proficiency in English.[1]

The English Side of Argentine History

The Argentine population has been greatly influenced by European immigration that arrived in the country between 1860 and 1940. The two largest immigrant groups came from Spain and Italy towards the end of the 19th century, but the presence of English-speaking people dates from earlier times. Besides some aboriginal languages (see Baker & Prys Jones, 1998; Ethnologue, 2003; Hornberger, 1994), English is the second most widely spoken language in Argentina after Spanish, the official language. English is deeply rooted in the country's history of independence struggles and its political relations with Great Britain.

Historical, professional, cultural, and commercial factors have always encouraged Argentina's connection with English-speaking countries. Britain provided aid in arms and supplies in the independence wars which culminated in Argentina securing its independence from Spain in 1824. In 1825, the Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation Treaty brought Argentina and Britain even closer by not only recognizing Argentina's independence, but also by allowing the British in Argentina the same commercial freedom and expression of their creed and culture as that of the Argentine population. This treaty encouraged the arrival of many British settlers and a few years later a total of 3,500 English-speaking people lived in Argentina (Moyano, 1997).

As a result of poor harvests and extended famine in Ireland, the Irish also decided to emigrate in 1840 and settled in the west of the province of Buenos Aires, concentrating on the raising of sheep and the wool industry and keeping to themselves. This attitude favored the maintenance of their native language. Welsh and Scottish expeditions to Argentina were also undertaken in search of better prospects in the new continent. The first Welsh ventured to South America in the hope that there they would be able to defend their ideals and save their language and culture (Moyano, 1997). In a similar vein, the Scots settled in Patagonia (the southern part of the country) to rear sheep.

Further immigration from Europe and foreign investments continued in subsequent years. Investments were primarily British and came in areas such as railways and ports, shipping companies, banks and insurance companies, all of which became important pillars of the nation's wealth (Subcomisión de la Historia de la Escuela Escosesa San Andrés, 1988). Without a doubt, this boost in the Argentine economy increased the power of the English language.

The Birth of Bilingual Schools

As noted above, the presence of English-speakers in Argentina has influenced many fields including trade, banking, and transportation. It has also left a legacy of many bilingual schools. The first English-speaking communities in Argentina were very concerned about educating their children according to their own traditions and culture and thus founded their own schools. The Scottish settlers, in particular, were pioneers in terms of educational initiatives.

In 1838, 13 years after the arrival of the first Scots, the Scottish community set up, at the premises of their Presbyterian church, an ethnic group school (Fishman & Nahirny, 1966) called St. Andrew's Scots School. Their instructional methods became popular and the number of students increased rapidly. In 1860, they decided to add the teaching of Spanish to the regular curriculum. By 1909, 1.5 hours a day were devoted to Spanish instruction while 3.5 hours a day were for English, including time spent preparing for Cambridge Local examinations. In 1938, the state mandated that the official curriculum be taught and that classes taught in Spanish be extended to 3 hours per day. That year, all students sat for official examinations in Spanish. Out of 261 students, 244 (93%) passed the exam (Subcomisión de la Historia de la Escuela Escosesa San Andrés, 1988). Such results and ensuing interest in bilingual education encouraged the founding of many other Spanish/English schools and further enrollment in St. Andrew's. Over the years, however, the characteristics of the student body changed. Whereas in 1899 the school reported a majority of first and second generation immigrant students (82%), in 1944, those

students represented only 28% of the school population (Subcomisión de la Historia de la Escuela Escosesa San Andrés, 1988). This change in student demographics resulted in a new student community with respect to language background and thus presented a new challenge to the school.

In recent years, St. Andrew's Scots School has become more integrated into the wider Argentine community. Monolingual families started to recognize English as a world language and bilingual proficiency as an asset in their children's upbringing. In 1963, a kindergarten in English was established and, in this way, the school became a viable option for non-English speaking parents (St. Andrew's Scots School, 1999). Implementing total immersion in the second language in kindergarten was the key stepping-stone for students to move into the bilingual curriculum in later years. St. Andrew's is the oldest and most vivid testimony of English schooling in Argentina. It has striven for high quality of education and for the maintenance and appreciation of English as have other bilingual schools, such as St. George's College, St. Hilda's College, Northlands, Belgrano Day School, to name but a few. These schools were also founded to teach according to the methods and discipline of schools in England.

English-Spanish Bilingual Schools Today

Bilingual schools in Argentina fall under two of the types of immersion education as defined by Swain and Johnson (1997): immersion in a foreign language and immersion in a language of power. The latter refers to the fact that, as discussed earlier, the English language is linked to the economic growth of the country. It is recognized as the international lingua franca and a good command of English is regarded as essential both for the upward mobility of individuals and for the economic development of the country. Notwithstanding this, since Argentina has only one official language, English is officially a foreign language (though it has been granted special treatment in the new law of education as will be discussed later). Bilingual schools in Argentina can therefore also fall within the category of immersion in a foreign language. Thus, in a similar way to countries such as Hungary (see Duff, 1997), the current impetus toward learning English in Argentina is oriented towards instrumental goals and has international reference (Johnson & Swain, 1997). In short, the ever-burgeoning interest in Spanish/English bilingual education responds to a desire to boost students' proficiency in a foreign language that is highly regarded, needed, and used worldwide.

The success of the original British-founded schools spawned other private schools and nowadays there is a large network of schools that run both Spanish and English curricula. Bilingual schools need, of course, to abide by the new education law and thus they are required to submit a programa educativo institucional [institutional educational program] (PEI). Therefore, their curricula are evenly divided between what is officially required and what an English curriculum can offer, namely, to teach a second language through content area subjects and not only as a subject itself. Moreover, second language development is reinforced through activities that are common in schools in the UK but are relatively unusual in Argentine schools, for example, sports, music, drama, debate, and other cultural interchanges and competitions (British Council Argentina, 2000).

Generally speaking, bilingual programs in Argentina strive to implement the following core features of prototypical immersion programs as outlined by Swain and Johnson (1997, p.15):

1. *The L2 is a medium of instruction*. English is used as the language of instruction for some school subjects. The ratio of instruction in English and in Spanish varies from school to school and even from year to year within one school (though schools that conform the most to the bilingual ideals offer equal instruction time in each language).
2. *The immersion curriculum parallels the local L1 curriculum*. The English curriculum follows the Spanish curriculum and is defined in terms of the educational norms, goals, needs, and aspirations as outlined by the Federal Law of Education. This law requires that all school subjects be taught in both languages. Notwithstanding this, as will be discussed later, there are a number of schools that also offer an international curriculum, the medium of instruction of which is English.
3. *Overt support exists for the L1*. As outlined earlier, Spanish is one of the languages of instruction and the only medium of instruction for subjects that are part of the Argentine curriculum exclusively, such as *Lengua Castellana* [Spanish Language], *Literatura Española* [Spanish Literature], *Educación Cívica y Ciudadana* [Civic Education].
4. *The program aims for additive bilingualism*. Although the level of proficiency varies, by the end of the program students in bilingual schools graduate with superior English to those who study English only as a school subject.
5. *Exposure to the L2 is largely confined to the classroom*. Students in bilingual programs in Argentina have little or no conversational exposure to English outside the school. However, because English is rapidly becoming the world's lingua franca, students have easy access to sources of authentic input such as movies, TV programs, the Internet, books, magazines, etc.
6. *Students enter with similar levels of L2 proficiency*. As noted earlier, even schools that were originally created for the English-speaking community in Argentina are no longer restricted to English-speaking families. There may still be some families who speak English at home (see Cortés-Conde, 1994) and other English-speaking families that come from abroad temporarily that send their children to bilingual schools; however, a large majority of the students enter the program with very limited proficiency in English.
7. *(Some of) the teachers are bilingual*. The linguistic qualifications of the teaching faculty of Argentine bilingual schools are quite varied. Spanish teachers are not required to know English. Teachers and heads of departments are, in some cases, brought from English-speaking countries; however, they may have little or no command of Spanish, their students' L1. Schools also hire Spanish-speaking teachers trained to teach English as a subject, teachers of particular subject matter who have a good command of English, as well as graduates of their own school, all of whom have varying degrees of proficiency in English. All these teachers are required, however, to hold the appropriate qualifications for teaching the language. Despite the variation in English proficiency, school subject teachers

generally know the course subject matter very well. However, they may not know about second language teaching/learning theory and pedagogy. Needless to say, without this knowledge and systematic planning, teachers may provide inconsistent or random information about language forms, pragmatics, discourse, and culture (Genesee, 1994).

8. *The classroom culture is that of the local L1 community*. Even when schools hire expatriate English-speaking faculty, these teachers (try to) adjust instruction to the students' Argentine culture and community.

Despite these common features, because bilingual schools are privately run and there is no blanket law that regulates these programs, each school is essentially a law unto itself. Therefore, they may differ considerably from other schools in terms of administration and planning and, most importantly, outcomes related to the learning of English and other subject matter. In fact, most of the features that Swain and Johnson (1997) outline as differentiating international immersion programs from each other are similar to features that differentiate the different English/Spanish schools in Argentina. That is, bilingual programs in Argentina differ in terms of the grade level at which immersion begins, extent of immersion, the ratio of L1 to L2 at different stages, continuity across levels within the educational system, resources, commitment to bilingual schooling, and ways of measuring success. What most bilingual schools seem to have in common, however, is a bilingual school ethos and international English exams. These two features constitute requirements for schools to become affiliated with the English Speaking Scholastic Association of the River Plate (ESSARP). This is an association of bilingual schools founded in 1926 to provide a forum for discussion for Heads of the bilingual schools and which now also offers professional development courses for teachers. In 1998, ESSARP undertook responsibility for providing University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate exam services and assessment products to schools in Argentina. The association administers exams such as the International Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE), and EFL exams.

An increasing number of private schools in Argentina have begun to endorse the English language immersion (bilingual) approach and the introduction of international certificates of education rather than simply EFL examinations as the benchmarks of their English curricula. The IGCSE, which has rapidly replaced the traditional General Certificate of Education-Ordinary (GCE-O), is usually integrated with the contents and requirements of the national curriculum. According to the British Council Argentina, "since the introduction of IGCSE, the number of schools offering these examinations has grown from 20 to 96 in 1996" (British Council Argentina, 2000, p. 2). Moreover, the number of candidates has grown from 162 in 1988 to 4,189 in 1997.

With such a great interest in IGSC, consideration has also been given to the development of an advanced course as a continuation of this certificate and a substitute for the GCE A level. In 1996, the first candidates sat for the AICE, and by 1998, 18 schools had already implemented this new set of pre-university examinations (see Garvie, 1998 for an example). Some schools, however, have not opted for the AICE curriculum and have implemented the International Baccalaureate (IB) instead. IB diploma holders are expected to graduate with a sound background to enter university anywhere in the world and, of course, with an

excellent command of English, since the IB curriculum is, in most cases, taught in English.

English Language Schools and EFL Examinations

Because tuition fees in British-type bilingual schools are usually high, many parents are satisfied with the more traditional teaching of English as a foreign language. Therefore, outside the bilingual school system, there are also private schools where English is taught as a foreign language for 2 or more hours per week in the official school timetable. Some of these schools provide more curricular hours to achieve higher standards of English proficiency. Moreover, there is a large number and wide range of institutes outside of the public or private school systems that offer EFL courses of varying degrees of quality. As well, these institutes offer professional development courses and promote the transmission of English culture. There is a national network of approximately 30 Argentine-English/British cultural institutes that teach about 35,000 students (British Council Argentina, 2000). These institutes are independent of each other but are directed by the Coordinated British Cultural Institutes, which works closely with the British Council. Argentina also holds a strong linguistic connection with the U.S. through Instituto Cultural Argentino Norteamericano (ICANA) [North American Argentine Cultural Institute]. Both institutions teach English through modules or cycles with an average frequency of 2 to 3 hours per week. Both British and American English are taught in language institutes in Argentina, but the former seems to prevail because most of the teaching material is British. However, American English seems to be favored in the business arena (Moyano, 1997; 2000).

These cultural institutes and other associations together with the private language schools prepare students to sit for international EFL exams. English exam tuition and publishing constitute a significant business in Argentina. Cambridge EFL examinations such as First Certificate of English, Preliminary English Test, Certificate of Advanced English, etc., are very popular. The overall total of 18,618 candidates for 1995 placed Argentina fourth in the number of candidates sitting for these examinations (after Greece, UK, and Spain) (British Council Argentina, 2002). University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) EFL as well as Education Testing Service (ETS) exams are the most common international exams in the country. Year after year, an increasing number of candidates sit for the TOEFL. Between July 1999 and June 2000, 2,861 students took the computer-based test and 388 students sat for the paper-based exam (ETS, 2002).

ENGLISH IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The English language also has a long history in the public sector of Argentine education. In 1818, the first English lesson was taught in the Colegio de la Unión del Sud. In 1826, the University of Buenos Aires inaugurated its first English course (Cardenas De Cantiello, 1997), and 1904 saw the foundation of the Profesorado en Lenguas Vivas, which still boasts one of the finest state-run training colleges for teachers of EFL.

In 1968, some public schools in the city of Buenos Aires started to teach foreign languages, English being the most popular. In 1982, the first Centro Educativo Complementario de Idioma Extranjero (CECIE) [Complementary Educational

Centre for Foreign Languages] was founded to teach foreign languages, mainly English, in those schools that had not yet incorporated them in their curricula. Ten years later, a CECIE was founded in each school district—21 in total—to teach EFL (and, to a lesser extent, French, Italian, and Portuguese) to 7,500 children from grade 4 onwards. These language classes were not and are still not compulsory. They are extracurricular and free of charge ("Sin vacantes en…", 2000b).

In 2001, the city of Buenos Aires, with the sponsorship of the British Council and the embassies of the U.S, France, Italy, Brazil, Portugal and the government of Quebec, launched the pilot of a foreign language teaching project in 12 public schools of low-income neighborhoods designed to enhance students' learning in ways similar to those offered by private schools. The number of hours of instruction in a foreign language increased to a total of 12 hours per week. Half of these schools teach EFL. These so-called "bilingual schools" do not have a bilingual curriculum per se but aim at teaching content in the foreign language. Whereas first graders start their language instruction through songs and play, it is expected that soon school subjects will be taught in the foreign language ("En busca de una…", 2001a; "Escuelas bilingües", 2000a; "La enseñanza bilingüe atrae…", 2001b; Lanusse, 2001).

Language Policy in the New Federal Law of Education

The educational reform of 1993 brought about long-awaited changes for the Argentine education system. For the first time in the history of the country, the federal government worked in tandem with the Ministry of Education of each province on a curriculum appropriate for the entire country, and each province became economically responsible for its internal education system.

The law guarantees free and compulsory education for citizens from 5 to 14 years of age. The organization and names for each stage have changed but the actual number of years of education has remained the same. Mandatory education, however, has been increased from 7 to 10 years, all organized in levels and cycles that form the new structure of the educational system. There are three main levels:

1. *Educación Inicial* [Initial Education]. Though kindergarten years are from age 3 to 5, attendance is only compulsory for the last year of this level.
2. *Educación General Básica* (EGB) [General Basic Education]. This level is compulsory and is organized into three cycles, each lasting 3 years, and focuses on teaching basic competencies.
3. *Educación Polimodal* [Polimodal Education]. This cycle is optional for all the provinces but mandatory for the province of Buenos Aires. It focuses on the skills and competencies that will equip students best for employment and/or post-secondary education (see Table 1).

The reform has had a special impact on the teaching of foreign languages. The Acuerdo-Marco para la Enseñanza de Lenguas [Agreement-Framework for the Teaching of Languages] is a document designed to give a framework for the implementation of the New Federal Education Law (1993) in terms of the teaching of languages in Argentina. It is based on both local and international agreements and declarations of human, economic, social, and cultural rights and it deals with the following issues: multilingualism, linguistic policy and equity, the teaching and

learning of Spanish, the teaching and learning of aboriginal languages, the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

The foreign language project of the educational reform acknowledges the need for students to learn foreign languages and to become aware of different linguistic and cultural realities around the world. Foreign languages used to be included within a section of the Language (Spanish) Chapter of the Argentine Law of Education, but now they are handled as a separate and special case. EFL has always been considered important but was previously taught as an extracurricular activity. Nowadays, English is regarded as the language of international communication and is therefore given special treatment. "The decision to change recognizes the complexity of the processes of teaching, learning and acquisition, although in no way implies that Foreign Languages should be disassociated from Spanish as a mother tongue or second language" (Dirección General de Investigación y Desarrollo Educativo, 1998a, 1998b). The proposal of the Foreign Language Project is based on the following principles:

> An approach that integrates apparently irreconcilable differences, both theoretical and methodological, between language as competence or knowledge and language as use.
>
> A clear position that the languages of the world are essentially similar, although with organized sets of differences that give each one its unique reality.
>
> A systematic-linguistic construct for language development, which is able to accommodate mother tongue acquisition, second languages, foreign languages, pidgin and Creole varieties, alongside English as a global language. …
>
> The logical reconsideration of the value of the mother tongue (Spanish or otherwise) in the processes of teaching and learning foreign languages, while at the same time assessing the phenomenon of transfer in both positive and negative terms.
>
> A shift of focus from teaching to acquisition and learning and to considering the age factor as decisive in the determination of what linguistic and communicative material should be incorporated.
>
> A new look at literary discourse in terms of how culture is currently conceived in the process of globalization.
>
> The incorporation of technology as a necessary component in the development of new communicative abilities. (Lenguas extranjeras –Dirección General de Investigación y Desarrollo Educativo, 1998a)

EGB, which is the compulsory education, is divided into three cycles of 3 years each. Each cycle implies levels or units of learning that are appropriate to the age concerned. Each level represents a unit of learning and implies the attainment of the contents and skills acquired in the previous level. It respects the student's cognitive and social development. Levels are designed to integrate previous knowledge in order to enhance the development of the linguistic and communicative competence expected to be achieved at the next level.

It is recommended that a progressive introduction of foreign languages starts in the second cycle of the EGB, but there is no deterrent to start earlier if deemed appropriate and advantageous to some students in particular. When foreign language instruction is started in the second cycle, at least two levels of foreign languages must be taught, one of which must be English. Because the school guarantees the teaching of three levels of a foreign language, in some situations the third level will be taught in the Polimodal level. A fourth level could also be taught when deemed feasible and appropriate (see Table 1). The levels do not necessarily coincide with the cycles, and the teaching of the first level could be implemented in any of the three years of any given cycle. In sum, the three options or situations for the three levels of foreign language learning proposed by the new law are:

1. one level of English as an International Language and two levels of another foreign language of choice;
2. two levels of English for International communication and one level of another foreign language of choice; and
3. three levels of English.

(Ministerio de Cultura y Educación de la Nación, 1998).

Content-based and Student-centered Instruction: A New Challenge for ETL in Argentina

The Federal law of Education establishes Common Basic Contents (CBC) that emphasize the use of English (or any other foreign language) for international communication. These guidelines outline the methodology, basic curriculum content, and training expectations for EFL teachers. As Snow, Cortés, and Pron (1998) explain, there are three categories for the content to be covered. These are procedural, attitudinal, and cross-curricula:

> The Procedural content refers to the "how to" of language: skills, processes, strategies, and methods. The Attitudinal content refers to the set of rules, values, virtues, and attitudes, both personal and social, that will underlie all the activities in the English classroom. Cross-Curricular content refers to topics or themes that do not belong to any special discipline but reflect the whole of the National Currículo. (p. 10)

Furthermore, contents have been organized into five teaching blocks:

> *Block 1- Oral Language*. This block refers to the teaching of speaking and listening activities that will develop and enhance both student comprehension and production of the language(s) concerned.
>
> *Block 2- Written Language.* As with block 1, block 2 emphasizes the development of both comprehension and production. However, this block deals with the teaching of reading and writing; that is, it focuses on written texts.
>
> *Block 3- Literary Discourse*. This block focuses on the teaching of discourse features and language awareness through various and varied examples of language use.

Table 1. Educational Levels and ELT in Argentina

Age				Compulsory Education									15	16	17
											12	13	14		
							9	10	11	3rd cycle					
				6	7	8	2nd cycle								
	3	4	5	1st cycle											
Level	***Initial Level***			*General Basic Education*									***Polimodal***		
ELT	Not required but can be included			As of the 2nd cycle, two levels of foreign languages must be taught, one of which must be English									Another language or a higher level of EFL must be taught		

Block 4- Procedures related to the comprehension and production of oral and written texts. Besides reflecting the processes and nature of learner input and output, this block focuses on the process of learning a new language and on the language itself. That is, in addition to cognitive and linguistics skills, metacognitive and metalinguistic skills are to be instilled in language learners.

Block 5- General attitudes related to both written/oral input and written/oral output. This block is intended to foster positive attitudes and motivate learners not only to learn the new language but also to learn about the target culture. Together with block 4, it should be integrated with the teaching of blocks 1 to 3.

Teachers in Argentina have been traditionally teacher-centered and are now facing the great challenge of following the mandates of a content-based, student-centered curriculum as outlined by the new education law. Indeed, the implementation of the new Federal Law of Education has been a difficult task for most schools in Argentina (see Snow, Cortés, & Pron, 1998 for examples). Not only has there been a profound change in the pedagogical approach to ELT but there has also been a lack of information and training and a shortage of appropriate resources for teaching. Moreover, some teachers are reluctant to explore new ways of teaching. Classes can have up to 35 to 40 students with varying degrees of language proficiency, and thus some teachers feel more confident and comfortable with the old ways of teaching for fear of losing control of classroom dynamics.

As Rossetti (1997) points out, some steps are necessary to make the EFL curriculum consistent with the new education law and also to keep up with recent pedagogical trends. For example, teachers require training in designing syllabi that reflect the aims, objectives, and evaluation of the EFL pedagogical theory; pedagogical resources must be appropriately designed for ELT in a developing country, with cultural content that is accessible to both teachers and students; and networking among teachers and administrators should be promoted both within the country as well as with other developing countries to encourage reflection on common practices, challenges, and solutions.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This chapter has discussed two very different realities for English instruction in Argentina. The distinction between private and public education is a reality in almost every country in the world and it is clearly present in Argentina. There is a sizable proportion of the Argentine population that demands and is willing to pay for more effective English language instruction for the advantages a good command of English confers (e.g. bilingual schools, private schools with more English instruction and/or language institutes). The Ministry of Education has recently acknowledged these advantages and shown its commitment to ELT by mandating its implementation in all schools in the country. However, research is required to assess the extent of English instruction in both public and private sectors and its impact on Argentina as a whole.

A positive move towards greater emphasis on English within the public system and even a radical change in pedagogical approach are probably not enough to make

ELT provision within the public and private sectors comparable. The discrepancies between public and private sectors in terms of age of introduction of the language, the resources available, time allocation, and number of years of instruction—to name but a few variables—seem insurmountable at the present time. Notwithstanding this, teachers represent a point of convergence between public and private sectors. The teaching faculty is indeed "the force driving the whole enterprise towards its educational aim because good teachers make good programs" (Pennington, 1989, p. 91).

While almost every teaching context in Argentina currently favors content-based instruction, and thus follows one of the latest trends in ELT worldwide, there is still some uncertainty as to how to integrate language and content and how that integration could be most effectively realized in terms of curriculum and actual classroom practice. Despite the fact that the law now requires an appropriate degree to teach English, the popular belief that anyone who speaks the language can teach it and/or teach in it, still prevails in Argentina. There is insufficient appreciation of the challenges faced by most EFL teachers in Argentina in helping learners understand content in a language they are still learning. Thus, there is an urgent need to address crucial issues in English language teacher training in Argentina. Regardless of the teaching context, language teaching (and more so content-based language teaching) requires a combination of knowledge and skills that is always hard to find. Training teachers who have the necessary linguistic and academic background to develop this specific knowledge and appropriate instructional skills should be the first concern for national and local policy in Argentina.

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NOTES

[1.] The "bilingual" schools in the city of Buenos Aires have been greeted with enthusiasm by both students and parents. Of 900 students who registered in 2001, 622 have been able to receive language instruction in the first year of this project. Overall school registration has increased between 20% and 50% and six more "bilingual" schools will open in 2002 (La Nación, 2001b). Moreover, as reported by Lanusse (2001), 4 months after launching the first school year, the teaching of EFL (and the other languages) had already had a positive impact on the overall school performance of the students. Furthermore, the parents themselves took more interest in their children's schooling and requested language classes for themselves.

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