Every Child Learns
UNICEF Education Strategy 2019-2030

Learning and Skills - Innovation, Data and Evidence. Through PLaNEA, UNICEF Argentina is supporting an innovative model of inquiry-based learning for adolescents in secondary schools in urban areas. It aims to promote learning and skills development by improving the quality and relevance of lower secondary education opportunities.

Improving the quality of lower secondary through inquiry-based learning and skills development

The problem: Only half of adolescents in Argentina graduate from secondary education before age 20. Those that drop out see the traditional secondary school offer as unnecessary or unenjoyable. Of those that do graduate, 40% have not acquired the minimum skills in Spanish; rising to 70% in Mathematics.

The solution: Adopt an innovative approach— inquiry-based learning in projects – to improve the quality of the educational offer and, thus, learning and skills development UNICEF designed the PLaNEA model and is helping local education authorities to implement it. PLaNEA aims to make schooling more relevant and engaging to stimulate learning, prevent dropout and, thereby increase secondary completion rates. In traditional secondary schools, only 50% of students graduate.

The details: PLaNEA changed teaching and assessment practices through the introduction of inquiry-based, project-based pedagogy accompanied by formative evaluation in Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Spanish and Computer Science. Implementation involved in-service teacher training, the establishment of peer groups for both teachers and students as well as a component on adolescent health care.

In addition, school networks comprised of school directors, supervisors and school counsellors were formed to facilitate exchange on common issues of concern. This body is also intended to ensure the educational leadership necessary to sustain an innovative approach.
40% of adolescents in their final year of secondary education are not achieving minimum proficiency levels in Spanish in Argentina.

70% of adolescents in their final year of secondary education are not achieving minimum proficiency levels in Mathematics in Argentina.

Further components include the provision of technical assistance to public officials to adjust regulations including in relation to school schedules, learning environments and teacher work, and promotion criteria in keeping with this innovative teaching model.

PLaNEA also seeks to use data (academic grades, attendance, surveys) to identify issues that require special attention and ensure policies and interventions are evidence-based and specific.

Preliminary results and lessons learnt: PLaNEA began in 16 schools in 2018. By 2019, the programme reached an additional 2,500 students in 24 schools in Tucumán province, as well as 350 teachers, 45 school directors, 8 school supervisors, and 20 provincial public secondary officials. The total enrollment of the schools participating in PLaNEA is 6,610. So far, monitoring has showed an increase in student motivation to learn and positive perceptions among teachers and school authorities. The PLaNEA networks of teachers and school directors are well positioned to foster change at the school level.

Cost effectiveness: The annual cost for PLaNEA is approximately US $482,800 (US $20,000 per school or US $68 per student).

Next steps: In 2020, the programme will expand to 40 schools, reaching approximately 5,000 students and 700 teachers and school principals in Tucumán and Santa Fe provinces. Monitoring and evaluation results will be used to ground further scale-up efforts.
The innovative approach of inquiry-based learning puts adolescents at the center, engaging them in ways traditional methods do not. By actively involving them in their own learning, they are more likely to learn and graduate with a broader range of critical skills, in keeping with the core vision of the UNICEF Education Strategy 2019-2030 - \textit{“Every Child Learns”}.

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