

Training, work and teacher development: What do we know and what do we need to change?

An overview of teacher evaluation

Sylvia Schmelkes
Guadalupe Águila
Laura Delgado
Eduardo Backhoff

Two approaches to teacher training and evaluation in upper-secondary education

Rodolfo Tuirán
Juan Fidel Zorrilla

Three international experiences

Yulan Sun, Chile
María Castro, España
Mioko Saito, África

Four national ongoing-training strategies

Aguascalientes
Baja California
Guanajuato
Tlaxcala

Five overviews of the teacher training colleges

Veracruz
Distrito Federal
Aguascalientes
Nuevo León
Sonora





The logbook

Gazette of National Educational Evaluation Policy

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IN OUR OWN HAND

- 4** **Training, work and teacher development: What do we know and what do we need to change?**
Members of the Board of Governors of the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE)

VOICES FROM THE CONFERENCE

FACING OUR CHALLENGES

- 5** **Chihuahua: Teacher assessment as a tool for improving educational quality**
Marcelo González Tachiquín
- 6** **Guanajuato: Training and evaluating in order to improve teacher performance**
Eusebio Vega Pérez
- 7** **Veracruz: The new educational-policy and teacher-training framework**
Flavino Ríos Alvarado

OUR VOICE

- 10** **The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS): Its importance for the formulation of educational policies**
Eduardo Backhoff Escudero
- 12** **Indigenous Teachers Take the Competitive Examination for Entry to the Teaching Profession**
Sylvia Schmelkes del Valle, Guadalupe Águila Moreno and Laura Delgado Maldonado

ROADMAP

- 14** **Educators' views about the factors that affect their performance**
Arcelia Martínez Bordón
- 16** **A brief overview of good-teaching frameworks and their importance for evaluating teacher performance**
Yolanda E. Leyva Barajas

SPEAKING ALOUD: INTERVIEWS

- 18** **The challenges and successes of teacher training in Mexico**
Fidel Hernández Fernández
- 20** **Assessment, respect and credibility: Foundations of teaching.**
María Esther Núñez Cebrero

IN THE CLASSROOM: INTERVIEWS

- 22** **Three teachers and their struggles in the depths of Cañada Honda**
Raúl Bárcenas Ramírez, José Antonio Pérez López and José de Jesús Pulido Gallegos
- 24** **A noble, worthwhile and complex task**
Alfonso Ramírez Reyes
- 26** **Teacher sensibility is a prerequisite for progress in education**
Ramón Guadalupe Lara Cruz

DOSSIER: TEACHER'S PERFORMANCE AND EVALUATION

WITH OUT A PASSPORT

- 27** **Teacher evaluation: Aims, challenges, and some of the things we have learned from our experience in Chile**
Yulan Sun F.
- 29** **Teacher Evaluation in Spain: The contrasts of a system in flux**
María Castro Morera
- 31** **Teachers and classroom gender dynamics at school in Africa: Evidences for 15 Ministries of Education**
Mioko Saito

OTHER PERSPECTIVES

- 33** **A historical overview of teacher training in Mexico**
Alberto Arnaut Salgado
- 35** **What have we learned from the programs for measuring teacher performance?**
Rosa María Torres Hernández
- 36** **The challenges of ongoing training and the responses to them in Mexican primary schools**
Medardo Tapia Uribe
- 40** **The great challenge is for all our students to learn to work with knowledge**
Juan Fidel Zorrilla

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Training, work and teacher development: What do we know and what do we need to change?

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE EVALUATION OF EDUCATION (INEE)

As educational research has shown us time after time, the main job of a good teacher is to bring about positive learning outcomes in his/her students, but, even so, we have to acknowledge that dedication isn't the only ingredient of good teaching, which requires several interrelated things: adequate initial training that focuses on contents, skills, specialized teaching techniques and adaptability, as well as professional development through ongoing training, wage incentives and social recognition.

Teaching isn't the same everywhere, since circumstances vary: teachers work in different environments, with different types of group and, often, in very difficult conditions where there's almost no infrastructure. Without any doubt, these variables affect their performance, as does their social background, which they shouldn't forget if they want to really understand how things are in Mexico: (a) the type of student that enrolls in teacher-training colleges, taking into account certain basic academic and cultural background features such as previous studies; (b) the type of teacher, their basic academic and cultural background and, above all, how much training they've had; (c) the type of student that goes to that sort of teacher-training college; (d) the job performance of the people who graduate from that sort of place after they've left it; and (e) the effects of the teaching activities and procedures that were part of the teacher training.

The trends in updating and training are clear, as are their limitations and drawbacks: ongoing teacher updating via courses, teacher updating after the curriculum or the textbooks have changed, and the incorporation of "authorized teachers" into the "elementary-school subsystem"...the almost automatic

in-service training of good students who've just been appointed to teaching positions in order to improve their classroom performance in front of a group that typifies the inequalities and differences that are the direct result of the policies regarding ongoing teacher training.

When all's said and done, although improvement programs and initiatives have been in place for several years to follow up on teachers' initial training or develop them as professionals, their wages and the conditions in the schools where they work have been inadequate and not only student performance, but also teacher-evaluation results leave much to be desired, and even now only 39.4% of all the teachers who took the competitive exam in order to join the Professional Teaching Service were accepted.¹

What's the explanation for such a result? How can we change it? What's more, what has the Mexican government done to ensure that teachers are up to scratch? How does evaluation help teachers to improve and which environmental factors affect their performance?

After the recent Educational Reform that regulates entry to the teaching profession, the General Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service places teachers at the center of the debate, as key players in the effort to change education. Thus, Article 12 of the said Law says that it is the job of teachers, school principals and supervisors to provide high-quality education and hence they must have "the personal qualities and professional competencies that they need to elicit top performance from students in varying socio-cultural contexts in keeping with the profiles, parameters and yardsticks that ensure that the latter will acquire the same knowledge, aptitudes and capabilities".

So it would seem that everybody agrees: in order to vouchsafe their students' right to receive high-quality education, teachers are both the problem and the great solution, and so we urgently need to think about the challenges inherent in giving them initial and ongoing training, their working conditions and, most certainly, about evaluating their performance. That's what we're setting out to achieve in this *National Educational Evaluation Policy Gazette* – to foster discussion about teaching and which aspects of it need to be changed?

In this publication, you'll find articles about the teacher-training colleges -the cor-

nerstone of our educational development- their need to professionalize their students, and their day-to-day realities: there is no single teacher-training model. You'll also find an analysis of the challenges faced by ongoing training based on the results of teacher assessment rather than on standard training courses. Also, among other things, this Newsletter presents teachers' views about the challenges they face and the factors that affect their teaching, especially those having to do with the social context. According to the said teachers, it isn't just inadequate school infrastructure and classrooms that affect their teaching, but also other factors that go beyond the school, such as the attitude of parents and the extent to which they get involved in their children's education, child labor and the lack of security.

We at the INEE are convinced that educational evaluation is a viable way to improve educational quality, but we understand that teachers need ongoing support and processes that help them to work more efficiently. Day in and day out they face the task of responding to these great challenges in all our nation's teaching institutions and environments, and of adapting to a changing society and new technologies, but then so do we.

Our March-June, 2015, *Gazette* will delve into the subtleties and realities of teacher training, teaching and teacher performance, which is one of the cornerstones of our endeavor to enrich the National Educational Evaluation Policy.

We welcome you to the pages of this mouthpiece of the National Educational Evaluation System, whose task is to measure progress and pool efforts and knowledge in order to professionalize our teachers and enhance their status. Though we can't cover all the issues exhaustively, our aim is to foster discussion and reflection, since everyone's opinion needs to be heard in the endeavor to formulate policy. €

1 Sistema Nacional de Registro del Servicio Profesional Docente. Secretaría de Educación Pública. <http://goo.gl/uQMjb2>

In remembrance of the late Dr. Raúl Nevárez Grijalva, General Director for Evaluation and Education Policy of the Ministry of Public Education of the State of Puebla, who passed away on the 30th of January, 2015.

In memoriam.

VOICES FROM THE CONFERENCE
FACING OUR CHALLENGES

Chihuahua: Teacher assessment as a tool for improving educational quality

Since geographical and social conditions vary greatly from one part of Mexico to another, treating all teachers in the same way would lead to inequality, and hence Chihuahua, our country's biggest state, with 44% of its schools located in rural and indigenous areas, intends to begin gauging the complexity of the task of improving educational quality so as to comply with the mandates of the Professional Teaching Service.

MARCELO GONZÁLEZ TACHIQUÍN
Minister of Education, Culture and Sport
of the State of Chihuahua
marcelogt@hotmail.com



The professionalization and assessment of teachers: a priority on the government agenda

The timely decision taken in 2013 by Mexican lawmakers to make it a constitutional obligation for the state to provide all its citizens with high-quality education attests to our society's interest in having educational services that are not only effective, but also efficient, relevant and pertinent – i.e. comprehensive education that is vouchsafed to all alike. For the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2007), it is education in this sense—education along with the formulation, development and implementation of government policies aimed at making it a reality— that enables people to exercise their other basic rights.

This mandate should go hand-in-hand with mechanisms that contribute to its success. The Educational Reform envisaged three new systems: the National Evaluation System, the Professional Teaching Service and the Educational Information and Management System. Apart from the term, “quality”, its guidelines included the concept of “teaching function” and also mentioned the National Institute for Evaluation and Education (INEE), thus laying the foundations for achieving its aims and making it clear that our country was embarking on a new age of educational evaluation in which the energetic, proactive participation of the states—in this case of Chihuahua— must take the form of making teacher professionalization and assessment top government priorities.

The topic of teacher assessment has gone from being a complementary teaching-learning concern to become a major social concern, and while the said issue has been rendered more crucial over recent decades by the results of numerous Mexican and international student tests and the dire results thereof, assigning Mexico one of the lowest educational-achievement levels among the member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), it is now clear that teaching is the most important factor in the success or failure of the teaching-learning process.

The teacher and his/her complex task

We in Chihuahua are convinced that we have a duty to ensure that the evaluation of our state's teachers is in line with the various design criteria that take into account diverse profiles, regional sociocultural and eco-

nomie contexts, educational modalities and levels, as well as school infrastructure and equipment and teacher working conditions. Furthermore, if we are to assess teacher performance, we need to clearly define what constitutes “good performance” and ascertain what conditions are needed to foster it.

Nowadays teachers are required not only to possess pedagogic and academic competencies, but also to be researchers, evaluators and planners able to apply their knowledge in critical circumstances and to combine both formal and informal education not only inside the classroom but also beyond its confines, and this indubitably helps to make them more professional.

The task is not an easy one, especially when one considers that Chihuahua's climatic and territorial realities largely define education-service conditions there: 44 of all the state's primary schools are multi-level ones situated in small locales in rural or indigenous areas, where a single teacher must carry out a large number of administrative and pedagogical chores, reprogram class times and master a wide range of teaching strategies. In order to get some idea of how complex the job of teaching in such an environment is, one must take into account that one is dealing with a diverse and multifarious population where 270 thousand people aged 3 or over categorize themselves as indigenous and 76.8% of those who speak an indigenous language and whose age makes them eligible for elementary education do not attend nursery school, while 25.3% do not attend primary school and 32.9% do not attend secondary school.

The task facing the state with the fifth largest population of teachers in Mexico

In this area, the nine institutions formed by teachers in the State of Chihuahua are charged with extending and improving those practices that will enable us to increase the number of high-level teachers and raise teaching quality. While the said institutions are not ivory towers, but rather sounding boards for the processes we must carry out and the challenges that the education system must face every day, both in Mexico as a whole and in Chihuahua, where student enrollments have increased by 20%, to nearly 9 thousand, over the last 4 years.

Furthermore, according to the 2013 Census of Schools, Teachers and Students

in Elementary and Special Education (Spanish acronym: CEMABE), Chihuahua has the distinction of being the state with the fifth biggest population of public-sector teachers with doctoral studies. In terms of education-service provision, our state has benefited from the opening of 568 full-time schools during the 4 years in which the current state government has been in power, with the number of students enrolled, mainly in multi-level and single-classroom institutions, increasing from 17 thousand to 72 thousand. With regard to educational infrastructure, around MXN 1,000 million have been spent both on the building of new schools at all educational levels and also on the refurbishment and maintenance of already existing schools.

All of this means that, in Chihuahua and in the rest of our country, teacher assessment will no longer define a good teacher as one who merely prepares students for examinations or sees his/her job as a matter of prizes and/or economic incentives, but rather as one who employs good teaching practices that suit the context and —and this is very important— strives to become more professional. Having the best teachers should not be tantamount to merely removing bad teachers from the classroom, but rather to providing ongoing training to good teachers, who constitute the vast majority, and acknowledging and motivating them – i.e. fully appreciating them. €

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VOICES FROM THE CONFERENCE FACING OUR CHALLENGES

Guanajuato: Training and evaluating in order to improve teacher performance

According to the Minister of Education of the State of Guanajuato, following an in-context diagnosis of training needs in his state and based on the new regulatory and academic framework stemming from the General Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service, government policies and strategies have been formulated with a view to facing the challenges that exist in the area of teaching.

EUSEBIO VEGA PÉREZ
Minister of Education
of the State of Guanajuato
evega@seg.guanajuato.gob.mx



A reassessment of training processes

With regard to training, the General Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service contemplates many valuable opportunities for training teachers so as to develop them as professionals and key players in the transformation of the National Education System mainly in order to achieve a high-quality education system that ensures learners' comprehensive development within a framework of inclusion and equality.

With regard to professionalization and training, the Educational Reform of the Professional Teaching Service acknowledges that training, which comprises diverse areas, can only be improved if it is redefined as part of a system that detects, chooses and carries out training processes and then evaluates them and provides feedback on them.

Timely information for the design of government policies

In Guanajuato, elementary-level teacher-training priorities are established using various mechanisms which, in the first instance, contemplate the setting forth of reference data in a scoreboard format that brings together the results, satisfaction levels, functional efficiency and academic case histories pertaining to the updating and training carried out in the state as a basis for taking decisions about training and defining government policies, actions and strategies aimed at tackling teaching-related challenges.

In this regard, we have concluded that the task of drawing up a contextualized diagnosis of training needs in our state needs to be tackled forthwith so that we can plot a maximally effective path for the improvement of teacher performance. We realize that this diagnosis must not be a one-sided endeavor on the part of the local education authorities, but must also involve the diverse protagonists, both internal and external, who came up with relevant and innovative proposals about ways of identifying areas of opportunity for providing high-quality training to teaching professionals.

It is worth mentioning the results of the recent competitive state examinations for entry to the Professional Teaching Service, which complement this diagnosis and bear witness to the urgent need to act and to be more assertive in deciding which teacher-training programs should be set up and which actions should be taken.

Based on the aforesaid considerations, one of the first actions taken consisted in designing a diploma course in Professional Teaching Performance as a Key Factor in Educational Quality, with contents based on the new regulatory and academic framework stemming from the General Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service, and offering it to the state's teachers.

We reiterate that teacher training is, and will continue to be, a top priority for complying with the constitutional mandate re-

garding educational quality, which is why we in Guanajuato have opted for collaborative work at the professional-association level, involving supervisors, advisers on teaching techniques, principals, teachers and teacher tutors, as a means of keeping the diagnosis up-to-date. All of the aforesaid people have been trained about the model and, using a tablet computer, will gather precise information about the job performance of teachers.

Support and follow-up in teacher forums

We wish to stress that the Government of the State of Guanajuato is committed to high-quality education and, above all, to providing resources in order to make Educational-Development Centers (i.e. Teachers' Centers) meeting points and forums for areas of professional development that promote and underpin world-class initiative and teacher professionalization.

Among other things, the strategies for reconfiguring these centers include the provision of ongoing support and specialized follow-up to teachers and management, backed by visits to schools for the purpose of assessing conditions there, in a systematic endeavor to boost teacher competencies so as to obtain better results.

Strategies for rural zones and multi-level schools

In order to enable teachers who work in rural zones and vulnerable environments to tackle the challenges that they face there, in the training offered to these people the state Ministry of Education has encouraged the development of competencies and skills aimed at forming learning communities, including one-on-one teacher dialogue, which has become part of a shared effort to achieve educational equality and improve teaching

practices, also managing to include parents and pupils in learning groups where families and school authorities actively participate.

In the case of multi-level schools, a network of roving advisers has been formed to provide direct on-site guidance to teachers using a learn-by-doing approach to develop dialogue-based teaching strategies that focus on fostering independent-learning competencies.

In today's world knowledge is growing by leaps and bounds and indubitably any attempt to raise the quality of education requires schools to become centers of discussion and action, to which end we must provide all the support that is needed in order to transform the set of activities that underlies teaching. In Guanajuato we are convinced that all actions that are taken based on proper training and assessment procedures and ongoing follow-up will invariably lead to better education for our children. €

VOICES FROM THE CONFERENCE FACING OUR CHALLENGES

Veracruz: The new educational-policy and teacher-training framework

Following the amendment of the Education Law of the State of Veracruz, the latter state's Ministry of Education has drawn up new policies, and defined new local actions, aimed at tackling the particular challenges that it faces. This article describes the difficulties inherent in teacher training, in multi-level and junior-high-school education, and in assessment as a tool for improvement.

FLAVINO RÍOS ALVARADO
Minister of Education
of the State of Veracruz
fríos@msev.gob.mx

The beginning: close communication with all those involved

The Educational Reform and its new legal framework imply an in-depth transformation in the educational policies pursued by the president of Mexico, Mr. Enrique Peña Nieto,

at the federal level, and by Dr. Javier Duarte de Ochoa, the Governor of Veracruz, at the state level.

One of the pertinent features contemplated in the laws that go to make up the said reform is the bringing about of conditions whereby more emphasis can be placed, in public education, on educational quality and the fostering of diversity via inclusion as means of furthering human development.

In Veracruz, the state government and the LXIII State Legislature joined in the national effort to bring the different education laws into line with the Reform by amending the Education Law of the State of Veracruz. For both branches of government, fulfilling this constitutional mandate meant making a very big effort to dialogue and reach consensus with the state's teachers, researchers, representatives of social organizations, parent groups and teachers' unions.

There were days of very hard work and discussion with the various blocks in the state congress, each of which tabled proposals aimed at reaching the agreements that made the passing of the pertinent laws possible. As of 2013, daily working sessions were held in our state, taking the form of regional meetings or visits to campuses for the purpose of disseminating the national educational policies set forth in the Reform.

The active participation of the Governor of Veracruz, the authorities pertaining to different state-government entities, the

Education Committee, all the members of the state congress in general, the state's teachers' unions and its education authorities merits acknowledgment.

Close communication with those involved helped us to reach important agreements that have enabled the Ministry of Education of the State of Veracruz to make proposals about educational policy to the federal government in accordance with the distinctive nature of the State of Veracruz on the one hand and to come up with local policies, strategies and actions that meet the challenges of contemporary society on the other hand.

The Reform and the teachers in the Veracruz public-education system

After a period of uncertainty and analysis of the scope, meaning and contents of the Educational Reform and the Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service, the teachers of Veracruz have made an ongoing effort to adhere, in their work, to the approaches and subject matter required by the aforesaid the said Reform and Law.

In keeping with national guidelines, the Veracruz Education System promotes the taking of concrete actions, in ongoing collaboration with the pertinent federal entities, for the consolidation of an evaluation culture as part of ongoing training stemming from the processes of entry, acknowledgment, promotion and continuation that are stipulated in the Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service.

Information about the Veracruz Education System

The Veracruz Education System is one of the biggest ones in Mexico, with 24,471 schools and 139,384 teachers who attend to 2,348,216 students in 13,229 locations in 212 municipalities.

In the 2013-2014 school year, elementary education was provided to 1,651,794 students in 20,854 schools by 88,585 teachers, while high-school education was provided to 317,020 students in 1,756 schools by 20,468 teachers.

It should be borne in mind that, as well as the system's size, the implementation of educational policies is hampered both by asymmetries in human development in the different parts of the state and also by the sparsely distributed population, with 90% of the places where education services are provided being rural townships with less than 2,500 inhabitants. Over half of all the elementary schools have only one teacher who simultaneously teaches at more than one level and education is provided to 15 local ethnic groups – i.e. the Chinantecs, Choles, Mazatecs, Mixes, Mixtecs, Náhuatl (from the Huastecan, Zongolica-mountain-chain and southern regions), N̄hañhús, Popolucas, Téneks, Tepehuas, Tutunakús, Zapotecs and Zoques.

Evidently the heterogeneity and size of the Veracruz education system translates into a plethora of needs, making it a challenge to attend to pupils at every school levels. In order to provide increasing levels of attention to them, it is necessary to coordinate federal state and municipal efforts so as to take both short- and medium -term action.

One of the first big initiatives taken by the state government in order to ascertain the system's needs was the Census of Schools, Teachers and Students at the Elementary and Special Levels (Spanish acronym: CEMABE), in which the participation of Veracruz was outstanding, with the said survey being carried out in 97% of its schools.

This action led to an unprecedented investment aimed at reducing the backlog of elementary public schools in need of repair that the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Computing (Spanish acronym: INEGI) detected in the census data. Via the Educational Reform Program, The Ministry of Public Education has invested MXN 1,740 million in Veracruz, building 3,114 schools – i.e. 1,926 primary schools, 719 secondary

schools and 469 campuses belonging to the National Council For Educational Development (Spanish acronym: CONAFE).

State teacher-training targets

In Veracruz the initial and ongoing teacher training contemplated in the national policies needs to focus on developing curricula adapted to state conditions, diversifying pedagogic-intervention strategies, extending and redefining educational-evaluation mechanisms, and incorporating information and communications technologies.

The state is also striving to provide individualized attention, strengthen the cultures and languages of its ethnic groups, and make schools more able to consolidate inclusive-education practices, doing so mainly via indigenous- and special-education services at the elementary level and through the High School Distance Learning system (“Telebachillerato” in Spanish) and the Community High School Distance Learning “Telebachillerato Comunitario” System (Spanish acronym: “TEBACOM”) at the Upper Secondary level.¹

The challenge for indigenous education is to encourage teachers to learn about the cultures and languages of the 15 ethnic groups found in our state and consolidate them in their jobs, especially the best teachers in the locations where such education is offered.

In special education, one of the outstanding needs is to open ancillary groups in places where disabled children have been found, while another one is to offer counseling and training about educational options to elementary-level teachers, families and community members and design strategies and adjustments for helping special-needs students, all of this in order to eliminate learning impediments and enable the people with them to play a bigger role in society.

Challenges in multi-level and Upper Secondary Education

The challenges in the multi-level schools concern curriculum updating and the choice of key learnings that satisfy the needs of students in different levels and with different skills in a timely manner.

At the primary-school level, workshops entitled “Gaining Experience of Multi-level Planning” and “Academic Tutoring as a Strategy for Autonomous Learning in the Multi-level Classroom” have been given.

Upper Secondary Education in Veracruz is provided by the College of Baccalaure-



ate Studies (“Colegio de Bachilleres”), the “Telebachillerato”, Baccalaureate Distance-Learning system, the General Baccalaureate system and the Teachers’ University (Spanish: “Pedagógico”), as well as via the Federal Jointly Administered Federal Subsidy system (Spanish: “Cooperación de Subsidio Federal”), the Online Baccalaureate system, the Community Distance-Learning Baccalaureate system (Spanish: “Telebachillerato Comunitario”) and the Open Senior High School system (Spanish: “Preparatoria Abierta”).

By their very nature, the High School Distance Learning system and the Community High School Distance Learning System operate in rural areas, often with indigenous populations, and in locations marked by backwardness, hence being hard to reach and lacking funding, infrastructure, materials and technical resources, in the face of which the teachers have fostered a synergetic everyday teaching-learning environment that enables their students to gain access to institutions of higher learning.

The evaluation process and the Educational Reform

One of the tools for improvement and for achieving educational aims in the state is evaluation, understood as a coherent, comprehensive process involving the whole community.

The Ministry of Education of the State of Veracruz considers evaluation to be an asset that makes it possible to assess the performance of all the aspects of the system and is necessary for the obtaining of valuable information about teachers’ ability to adapt and comply with the new performance standards

posited by the Educational Reform, taking into account the contexts in which the teaching takes place and their impact on student performance.

Evaluation enables us to ensure that the teachers entering the education service are those most qualified to do so, and that they continue to be assessed during their time in it to ensure optimal performance. Furthermore, they receive support via training strategies that are suited to the environment in which they work.

Veracruz has been a national yardstick so far as education is concerned, being at the forefront in teacher assessment, and for this reason the Ministry of Education of the State of Veracruz, jointly with the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (Spanish acronym: INEE) and the Professional Teaching Service, is establishing systems for the promotion and recognition of teachers.

Adequate dissemination has proved to be a very important means of enabling us to comply with the Educational Reform, since it leads people to trust that, thanks to the collaborative efforts of those involved, our education policies will promote high-quality evaluation and training in Veracruz.

Actions taken in Veracruz

The teachers of Veracruz have continually taken part in several national evaluation programs, including updating activities and the National Teaching Career Program (Spanish: "Programa de Carrera Magisterial").

In the 2013-2014 school year, a "training-track" program, in which 71,085 elementary-school teachers enrolled, was offered via an online system set up for the said purpose, with Veracruz having the largest number of participants in the said program.

During Stage 22 of the National Teaching Career Program, 7,344 elementary-level teachers applied either to join the teaching services or to be promoted within it, being enrolled in Stage 23 of the said program, for which there were 63,140 applicants in all.

As part of the Professional Teacher Development program, a state diagnostic survey was implemented in order to detect problems and needs regarding the training of teachers, management staff and technical-didactic consultants. This survey was the starting point for the training policy that envisages professional training, updating and development in both Elementary and Upper Secondary level education.

We are seeking to encourage the 24 Teachers' Centers located in different parts of the state to provide services aimed at furthering the development of the elementary-level teachers' cooperatives through tutoring, consultancy and technical support.

As a result of the national policies laid down by the Mexican Ministry of Education, since 2013 school, sectorial and school-zone elementary-level technical councils have been in place, at different levels and in different modalities, in each school, sector and school zone.

In Veracruz a strategy of state-level follow-up on the aforesaid 3 types of council is being implemented, enabling us to detect strengths and weaknesses. Currently, we are formulating a strategy for following up on the teachers' collectives.

In Veracruz, as part of our nation's priority commitment to strengthen school oversight, a total of 597 supervisors have completed the two stages of the diploma course offered by the General Department for the Ongoing Education of In-service Teachers.

Furthermore, the process for selecting and training the academic staff who tutor teachers who have just joined the Professional Teaching Service, via both an induction workshop and also a countrywide workshop entitled "Tutoring New Entry Teachers and Teaching Technicians", is now underway in our state. Those chosen to be tutors participate in the diploma course offered by the National Pedagogic University (Spanish acronym: UPN) and the state's Department of Teacher Training.

The Ministry of Education of the State of Veracruz is currently engaged in other initiatives stemming from the Educational Reform – i.e. the strategy aimed at distributing resources in order to improve school infrastructure via the "Educational School Reform" program; the funds awarded via tender through the "Summons to Bidders for the Promotion and Financing of Innovative State Projects in Support of the Educational Reform", which enabled us to develop the program entitled "Mobile Education. Digital Skills for High-quality Education" and the "Program for Educational Inclusion and Equality" aimed at furthering teacher professionalization.

In the area of Upper Secondary Education,² strategies have been successfully implemented to raise education-service quality – i.e. the forming of a team of teachers

to coordinate different school activities; the running of start-of-semester, mid-semester and end-of semester pilot tests; encouragement to Upper Secondary campuses to take advantage of free time; the carrying out of standardized Mexican and international evaluations; the holding of meetings for the purpose of supporting teachers and administrative staff in schools; the holding of a "Galileo" mathematics competition and a Communications competition; academic visits to schools in order to support and strengthen activities that are underway; the use of the results of the National Evaluation of Academic Achievement in Schools (Spanish acronym: ENLACE) to serve as a diagnostic basis for the formulation of academic strategies.

Moreover, 52.5% of all our state's teachers are enrolled in the Training Program for Upper Secondary Teachers (Spanish acronym: PROFORDEMS), which covers competencies that professional teachers need to develop in order to endow young people with values, skills and competencies that are in keeping with today's world.

We still face significant challenges so as to achieve the aims set by the State and Federal Governments with regard to the actions that need to be carried out in order to implement the Educational Reform and achieve the other aims set forth in the 2013-2018 National Development Plan and the 2013-2108 Sectorial Education Program.

In response to the needs and aspirations of teachers, students and society in general, the Ministry of Education of the State of Veracruz confirms its commitment to Veracruzans to keep striving for high-quality education with equality via efforts oriented by a strategic, forward-looking vision. €

- 1 The Distance Learning ("Telebachillerato") system of the State of Veracruz, which is mainly charged with providing Upper Secondary Education to rural communities, ensures that cheap, high-quality education is provided that enables youngsters to prepare for entry to higher studies and obtain jobs that will enable them to succeed. Thus subsystem was set up by the State of Veracruz over 35 years ago and currently provides Upper Secondary Education to 89,069 students in 96% of the state's municipalities.
- 2 MINISTRY OF EDUCATION OF THE STATE OF VERACRUZ (2011). *Proyecto Estratégico de la Subsecretaría de Educación Media Superior y Superior, periodo 2011-2016* (Mimeograph). Xalapa: Ministry of Education of the State of Veracruz.

The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS): Its importance for the formulation of educational policies

How, and in what way, have teachers and school administrative staff been evaluated? There are variables that can be modified in order to improve student performance when decision makers have access to information about teachers' characteristics, beliefs and practices. In this article, we review the results of the TALIS study with a view to plotting paths and starting to make decisions.

EDUARDO BACKHOFF ESCUDERO
Member of the Board of Governors
of the National Institute for the Evaluation
of Education (INEE)
backhoff@inee.edu.mx

Introduction

Every day more countries are becoming interested in evaluating the education services that they offer to their populations so as to improve them.

For several decades, we have had access to various educational yardsticks for measuring things such as the overall level of schooling of the population, illiteracy, educational lag, the percentage of students taught by age and sex, exit efficiency and dropout levels. However, these measuring instruments have not provided us with information about one of the most pertinent educational components, which is student performance.

Over the last twenty years we have begun to pay more attention to student performance, and the gathering of information about it has become an accepted way of evaluating countries' education systems. Hence, international organizations such as the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

Development and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have carried out international studies comparing the academic achievement of students of different ages, and in different school levels and education systems, the results of which have shown that student learning levels vary enormously, not just between countries, but also within them.

The said international studies have shown that learning levels correlate closely with student's socio-economic levels. For example, private schools in Mexico obtain far better academic results than public ones, and students in schools in urban areas perform far better than those who study in rural or indigenous zones. These differences are linked to two important factors: (1) the socioeconomic make-up of the students in the different types of school, and (2) the type of teaching in the various schools.

Until very recently, no international studies had been done of the characteristics of schools and their internal processes – above all of the make-up of students and school principals and their beliefs and teaching practices.

TALIS-2008

In 2008, the OECD commissioned the carrying out of the first Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), in which 23 nations and economies, including Mexico, took part. This purpose of this study was to gather information about salient aspects of secondary schools – especially their academic management and teaching processes.

Since the survey consisted of questionnaires individually administered to a representative sample of teachers and school principals in 23 countries, the responses to them consisted of self-reports about the respondents' opinions, perceptions and beliefs. They were drafted in English and French and also translated into the different languages of the participating countries and adapted to their cultures. The ones for school principals contained 37 topic sections containing a total of 180 items, while those for teachers contained 44 topic sections with a total of 190 items. Figure 1 shows topic section 18 of the survey for teachers, which is representative of the types of questions and possible responses that are used in the TALIS.

Figure 1. Section of the questionnaire for teachers about training (or professional- development) needs

18. Thinking of your own professional development needs, please indicate the extent to which you have such needs in each of the areas listed

Please mark one choice in each row

	No need at all	Low level of need	Moderate level of need	High level of need
a) Content and performance standards in my main subject field(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
b) Student assessment practices	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
c) Classroom management	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
d) Knowledge and understanding of my main subject field(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
e) Knowledge and understanding of instructional practices (Knowledge mediation) in my main subject field(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
f) ICT skills for teaching	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
g) Teaching students with special learning needs	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

The first TALIS focused on five aspects of academic life in secondary schools: (1) professional teacher development; (2) teachers' practices, beliefs and attitudes about teaching and learning; 3) teacher and school evaluation and feedback; 4) academic leadership by school principals, and 5) the relationship between academic variables and the efficiency of teaching.

Two different samples of schools and teachers participated in TALIS-2008, the first of these being a country-wide sample consisting of 191 schools and 3,368 teachers, and the second a state-level sample consisting of 6,645 schools and 62,650 teachers. The nation-wide survey, the results of which were used in the international report (OECD, 2009), was administered in 32 Mexican states, with secondary schools from 32 states participating, though institutions belonging to the "Telesecundaria" distance-learning system were not included. The second survey covered secondary schools from 31 states. While not including the state of Michoacán, it did include institutions belonging to the "Telesecundaria" distance-learning system, and its results were used in the national report (Backhoff, Andrade, Bouzas, Santos y Santibáñez, 2010).

TALIS-2013

As with the test pertaining to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the OECD intends to carry out TALIS surveys from time to time. In 2013 a second study was done in which 34 countries and economies took part. The aims and methods of this were the same as those of the previous study, which mainly focused on secondary schools. However, this second study gave the participating countries the option of extending the surveys to primary and upper secondary-level schools, and Mexico administered it to 8,697 teachers and 728 school principals at three compulsory-education levels, in addition to which the five Mexican states of Nuevo León, Jalisco, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí and Tamaulipas, plus the Mexico City Federal District, asked for independent samples be used to study their schools in more detail.

It should be stressed that the phrasing of some of the questions and number of items in the scales were changed in order to improve the instruments that had been used in TALIS-2013. However, these changes in the instruments render it impossible to compare

the results with those of the surveys carried out in 2008 and 2013.

Results of the TALIS carried out in Mexico

Up to now, two international reports have been published on the TALIS results (OECD, 2009; OECD, 2014), plus one the first study done in Mexico (Backhoff, *et al.*, H). The report on the 2013 TALIS carried out in Mexico will be published early this year.

The report on the first TALIS done in Mexico contained information about Mexican secondary schools that had not been available before the Census of Schools, Teachers and Students in Elementary and Special Education (Spanish acronym: CEMABE), as well as information that the latter did not provide. It was very useful to compare the results pertaining to the Mexican schools with the results for similar institutions in the other countries that participated, above all those having to do with the characteristics of teachers and school principals, beliefs about teaching, the teaching practices and attitudes towards their jobs of teachers, how often, and in what form, the latter are evaluated, and how frequently, and in what way, they are given feedback about their work.

Finally, one of Mexico's contributions to TALIS-2008 was that, in our country, it was possible to study the correlation between some school-related variables and students' academic performance, using the information previously provided by the National Evaluation of Academic Achievement in Schools (Spanish acronym: ENLACE). This is one of the reasons why the countries that took part in TALIS-2013 were given the option of carrying out a special study aimed at relating the PISA results with the TALIS ones.

Conclusions

In order for those who make decisions to know the variables that are open to modification so as to achieve better academic results, it is essential to have information about the characteristics of teachers and school principals and their beliefs about teaching and teaching practices, the leadership displayed by school principals, school and classroom environments, and, in general, the various educational processes that occur within schools.

For this purpose the OECD proposed using TALIS, which set out to respond to the need to have educational yardsticks —espe-

cially regarding teachers and students in secondary schools— that would make it possible to compare different countries. The first international report on secondary-school students, teachers and principals (OECD, 2009) provided valuable information about the way schools function that made it possible to identify areas of opportunity for improving the education available in the countries that took part.

As occurred with PISA, the OECD decided to carry out periodic TALIS surveys and the second one —whose international results have just been published— was carried out in 2013. We are now waiting for the publication of the report on the national study, which will enable us to detect the differences between primary-level schools, teachers and principals, lower-secondary ones, and upper-secondary ones.

Hopefully the TALIS results will serve as a foundation for the taking of evidence-based decisions on educational policy that will help us to raise the quality of the education services in Mexico and hence to achieve a better educated society. €

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Indigenous Teachers Take the Competitive Examination for Entry to the Teaching Profession

SYLVIA SCHMELKES DEL VALLE

Chairperson of the Board of the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE)
schmelkes@inee.edu.mx

GUADALUPE ÁGUILA MORENO

Project Head A, Board of Governors, INEE
gaguila@inee.edu.mx

LAURA DELGADO MALDONADO

General Director for Measurement and Data Processing of the Unit for the Evaluation of the National Education System, INEE
ldelgado@inee.edu.mx

The Competitive Entrance Exam mandated by the General Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service -which required candidates to possess a bachelor's degree, to show proficiency in the indigenous language they wished to teach, and ensure that teachers are sent to zones where their students speak the same indigenous tongue as them -constituted an unprecedented opportunity for improving indigenous education in Mexico.

On July 13th, 2014, for the first time in Mexico's history, candidates for positions in indigenous schools took a competitive examination for entry to the National Teaching Service. Before that date, indigenous teachers were initially required to have completed lower-secondary-school studies in order to be accepted, and, as of twenty years ago, to have completed upper-secondary-school and speak an indigenous language. Upper-secondary graduates who entered the teaching service were given a 3-month induction course and required to

take a part-time bachelor's-degree course in Pre-school and Primary Indigenous Education at the National Pedagogic University, attending each 15 days for counseling. According to data from the Department of Ongoing Statistics of the Ministry of Education (Spanish acronym: SEP), 20% of all in-service indigenous teachers had still not finished their bachelor's-degree studies in the 2013-2014 school year.

For the first time, at the beginning of the 2004-2005 school year, aspirants for positions as indigenous teachers were afforded the opportunity to take initial training for posts as indigenous teachers as such, in the form of a bachelor's-degree course in Bilingual Intercultural Education, but the said program is available in only 20 teacher-training colleges in a total of 15 states and so far very few people have enrolled in it.

The lack of professional teachers in the indigenous schools is assuredly one of the reasons why the results of all the studies of academic achievement carried out in by the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: INEE) are low in all the subject areas and at every level, with the grades of the children who attend these schools being lower than those of all the other children in the primary-school system.

The Competitive Examination for Entry to the National Teaching Service, held in accordance with the regulations set forth in the General Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service, was seized as an opportunity for taking steps to raise the quality of new indigenous teachers. The implementation of the aforesaid competitive examination constitutes the following three important innovations: (1) since the candidates must already have obtained a bachelor's degree, they in fact took the same examinations as applicants for positions as pre-school and primary teachers in the normal subsystem, albeit with some variations; (2) the candidates took a complementary examination covering speaking, listening, reading and writing in the indigenous language; and (3) shortlisting for teaching positions was done by language and variant so as to avoid speakers being assigned positions in zones where the indigenous language spoken was not the same as the one they mastered since, currently, the latter phenomenon prevents bilingual education from being established in around 30% of the schools pertaining to the indigenous subsystem, since the teach-

ers there don't speak the same indigenous language as their students.

The indigenous candidates were tested on their teaching knowledge and skills, using an examination whose items test knowledge of the contents and teaching approaches that pertain to the educational level they will be teaching at (i.e. pre-school or primary), along with the ability to solve teaching problems. They also took an examination testing intellectual capacity and ethical-didactic sensitivity, the items of which test communication skills, study and reflection skills and aptitude for ongoing improvement, as well as skills relating to the teaching profession such as school administration and community-linkage. Jointly, the aforesaid tests are in accordance with the 2104-2105 Entry Profile for Teachers and Teaching Technicians, being administered to all the aspirants to join the Service – not just the indigenous candidates.

The main purpose of the complementary indigenous-language examination is to vouchsafe the right of indigenous populations to be taught in their native tongue at the elementary level,¹ as well as to raise the quality of the education that they receive. The test in question consists of various tasks designed by highly proficient speakers of indigenous languages invited by the Office for the National Coordination of the Professional Teaching Service (Spanish acronym: CNSPD) to sit on the committees charged with creating and validating the instruments for testing oral and reading-writing skills both in the indigenous languages spoken by the candidates and in those spoken in the schools requiring their services, and it accords with Dimension 1 of the Profile, Parameters and Yardsticks pertaining to "teachers who know their students, how they learn and what they most need to learn", of which complementary parameter 1.1 covers "communication with students and their families in an indigenous language, complementary parameter 1.11 covers "fluent communication in the indigenous language of the community where the school is located", and parameter 1.1.2 concerns "identification of teachable learning contents". The test instruments and tasks were presented in formats that could be self-administered under the supervision of a tester-reviewer who spoke the language being tested.

The items in the first group were used to evaluate the suitability of the candidate to occupy a teaching position, while those in the

Table 1. Examination tasks

- Speaking and listening comprehension
 - Reading out loud and reading comprehension in the indigenous language
 - Writing in the indigenous language
-
- Scale grading attitudes to the indigenous language
 - Multiple-choice test: the indigenous language and culture in the classroom
 - Context evaluation

second group were used for diagnostic purposes not pertinent to the issues discussed in this article (Table 1).

The results of the evaluation

The first competitive examination was taken by 2,199 applicants for positions in indigenous schools, of whom only 22% had graduated from teacher-training colleges, with the rest having graduated from various public and private universities.

In order to be deemed suitable to enter the Service, the indigenous candidates must get a level-II score in each of the 3 evaluations of the knowledge and skills necessary for entering the teaching profession— i.e. intellectual capacity, ethical-didactic sensitivity and proficiency in the indigenous-language, and only a very small percentage of them –15.8%– obtained satisfactory results .

As shown in Fig. 1, 18.4% of all the applicants for pre-school positions got satisfactory results, while 14.5 % of those applying for primary-school positions obtained satisfactory results.

Table 2 shows that the examination that the aspirants found easiest was, precisely, the indigenous-language one (Complementary examinations), with 67.9% of them getting level-II and level-III scores. Likewise, 60.5% of the examinees got level-II and level-III scores in the evaluation pertaining to Teaching Knowledge and Skills.

On the other hand, the most difficult evaluation for the candidates proved to be the one testing intellectual capacity and ethical-didactic sensitivity, with only 28.5% of them obtaining level-II and level-III scores – i.e. 17% lower than the average nation-wide result of 46%.

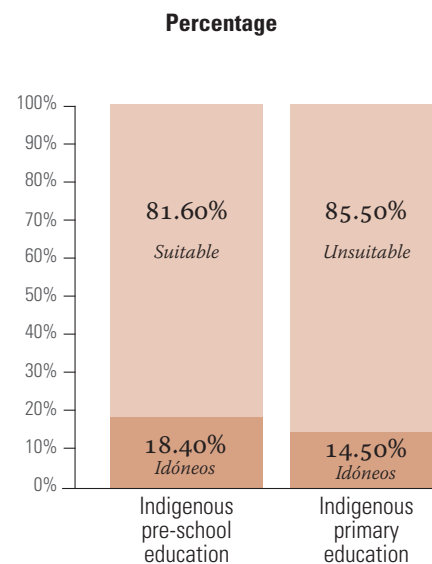
Subsequent analyses of the examination reveal that there is no ethnic bias that unfairly discriminates against the indigenous

candidates due to their origins; rather, their performance levels on the test were lower, revealing deficiencies in knowledge and skills that need to be remedied.

Final comments

One of the main aims of the Educational Reform is that of ensuring that the best aspirants are admitted to the teaching profession. Based on the scores obtained in this first competitive selection process for aspirants to teach in indigenous schools, we can say that the people who were admitted to the Profession were, indeed, excellent candidates who possess the requisite teaching knowledge and skills and intellectual capacity, are aware of their ethical-professional responsibilities and –most importantly– master the language of the ethnic group with which they will be working. Hence, we can be sure that Mexico's indigenous students will be taught by 347 excellent teachers who are perfectly proficient in the languages that they speak and can thus give them a truly bilingual education.

However, the low overall percentage of candidates who got satisfactory scores raises various questions.

Figure 1. Competitive Examination, 2014. Results of candidates for positions as indigenous teachers.**Table 2. Indigenous Education – national and complementary examinations**

Performance level achieved for each type of invitation for applications							
Examination	Performance level	Indigenous pre-school		Indigenous primary		Total indigenous education	
		Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Teaching knowledge and skills		1	0.1%	5	0.3%	6	0.3%
	NI	138	19.3%	723	48.8%	861	39.2%
	NII	385	53.8%	381	25.7%	766	34.8%
	NIII	192	26.8%	374	25.2%	566	25.7%
Totals*		716	100.0%	1 483	100.0%	2 199	100%
Intellectual skills and ethical-professional responsibilities		1	0.1%	5	0.3%	6	0.3%
	NI	502	70.1%	1,064	71.7%	1,566	71.2%
	NII	199	27.8%	394	26.6%	593	27.0%
	NIII	14	2.0%	20	1.4%	34	1.5%
Totals*		716	100.0%	1 483	100.0%	2 199	100%
Complementary examinations		34	4.7%	75	5.1%	109	5.0%
	NI	217	30.3%	379	25.5%	596	27.1%
	NII	272	38.0%	503	33.9%	775	35.2%
	NIII	193	27.0%	526	35.5%	719	32.7%
Totals*		716	100%	1 483	100%	2 199	100%

Source: *Panorama Educativo de México*

Those queries regarding the evaluation process were explored and, based on the said analysis, there is no sign of any bias against indigenous candidates, and neither can it be claimed that the latter were subjected to an additional filter –compared with the two filters applied to rest of the candidates– that constituted an unsurmountable or unfair obstacle, given that they did relatively well in the complementary examination. Rather, the area that gives food for thought is that of the initial training that these aspirants received in their teacher-training colleges or universities.

It is in that area that we need to improve their content learning and, above all, their intellectual skills and ethical-professional sensitivity so that we may be sure that more aspirants to indigenous teaching positions get a “suitable” score in the competitive examination for admission to the profession. €

1 Article 11 of the General Law Governing the Linguistic Rights of the Indigenous Peoples

ROADMAP

Educators' views about the factors that affect their performance

In the coming months, as part of its legal mandate, the INEE will issue guidelines aimed at helping to raise the quality of education and foster greater educational equality by improving teacher performance. Below we summarize the opinions expressed by educators during group interviews carried out in order ascertain which factors they see as affecting their performance

ARCELIA MARTÍNEZ BORDÓN
General Director of Guidelines
for Educational Improvement
National Institute for Educational
Evaluation (Spanish acronym: INEE)
amartinezb@inee.edu.mx

The indispensable task of issuing guidelines: the opinions of different educators

Sometimes we need to make history, to drastically change our direction, and to map out

roads along which can advance. Nowadays this is one of the functions of the INEE, which it performs with conviction and in keeping with its powers and its mandate, which charges it with drawing up, issue and disseminate public-policy guidelines for the purpose of orienting or redirecting the political decisions taken at different levels by the National Education System.¹ In other words, it is a matter of issuing guidelines aimed at improving education, the creation and verifying of which requires varied input, including the opinions and impressions of teachers nation-wide.

Hence, during the second half of 2014, the INEE's General Directorate for Educational Improvement consulted teachers and other people involved in education, such as school principals, supervisors and technical-educational consultants — i.e. a total of 436 people, in 42 groups, in the Mexico City district and the nine states of Baja California, Nuevo León, Durango, Sinaloa, Nayarit, Jalisco, Puebla, Chiapas and Yucatán, in order to ascertain which factors affect teacher performance.

This article sums up the contents of the document entitled Teachers' views about the factors that affect their performance, an analytical report about the information obtained from focus groups of teachers and other key informants (school principals, supervisors and technical-educational consultants) compiled by the General Guidelines Department, and gives an overview of the opinions expressed by those faced with the daily task of teaching the children and youths who study in our country's schools.

Recording the opinions of hundreds of educators: using the focus-group technique

Using the focus-group technique as a methodological tool for the gathering of information, four two-and-a-half-hour focus-group sessions were set up at each school level — i.e. preschool, primary, secondary and upper secondary- in each state, while, in the case of Mexico City, six independent group-sessions were set up with teachers working at the indigenous-pre-school and indigenous-primary levels, upper secondary principals and supervisors and technical-support staff from various districts.

An interview script, covering topics such as “the characteristics of a good teacher and of good teaching”, “factors that influence teacher performance”, “actions

and policies for improving teacher performance” and “the relationship between teacher performance and educational improvement”, was used.

Teachers' views: their opinions and recommendations

All the opinions expressed, which were recorded and transcribed without revealing the interviewees' identity, were subjected to a quantitative-interpretative analysis that focused on two sets of issues —ones pertaining to the internal context of the Mexican Education System and ones pertaining to the external socioeconomic and cultural context.

With regard to the *Internal Dimension* of the Mexican Education System, the educators interviewed identified the issues having to do with schools and the management thereof that are set forth in Table 1 below, and range from teachers' commitment and personal motivation to matters having to do with school and classroom infrastructure and organization, as affecting their performance.

With regard to the *External Socioeconomic and Cultural Dimension*, the factors mentioned are set forth Table 2 below pertaining to family and sociocultural environment, being split up into the subcategories of *parents* and *community*. In the former, the educators stressed the importance of parents' participation in their children's education, their expectations about their children's education, their educational levels, and family disintegration, while in the latter they mentioned cultural issues, poverty, migration, child labor, drug-trafficking and lack of security.

Factors inherent to the Mexican Education System

Which factors and areas of opportunity do teachers stress within their sphere of action? Students, the main participants in, and focus of, teaching, are considered by the teachers to be a factor that affects their performance: their attitudes, economic and social problems, behavior, special educational needs, significant divergences from average group age, values, previous education, views about, and interest in, education, and, in the case of indigenous communities, the languages they speak, all affect their performance.

Likewise, teachers, their dedication, professional ethics, knowledge, competencies, experience, updating and reflective

**Table 1. Categorization of internal-dimension information:
Mexican Education System**

Dimension	Categorías	Subcategorías	Factores
Mexican Education System	School-related factors	The teacher and his/her performance	Commitment to teaching. Teaching competencies. Diminished esteem for the teaching profession: unease and lack of motivation.
		School organization and administration	Multi-level school. Work atmosphere. Dual functions. Director leadership. Technical Councils and faculty meetings. School shifts. Educational and administrative procedures.
		Classroom organization and administration	Group size. Class time.
		Student features.	Attitudes towards teachers and classroom study. Personal motivation. Addiction and violence. Students with different abilities.
		Infraestructura.	Premises. Classroom furniture and materials. Technical resources and Internet connection.
	Institutional management	Infraestructura.	Administrative workload. Initial training and professional development. Lack of staff (teaching, support, administrative). Changes in Study Plans and Programs. Linkage between school levels. Financial resources. Supervisors, Technical-Pedagogic Advisers and Subject Heads.

processes when planning and implementing teaching-learning processes, and attitude towards the educational and social challenges that they face within their sphere of action, are all seen by the interviewees as affecting performance.

Among the adverse factors pertaining to school organization and functioning, the interviewees stressed the complications that arise in multi-level schools, the importance of the work environment, the performance of various jobs —ranging from teaching, serving as principal, carrying out management tasks and acting as janitor— the lack of collaboration among teachers.

With regard to elementary education, the interviewees stressed the need for support and leadership from school principals—who are responsible for promoting, and may or may not help to create, spaces where members of school staff collaborate in order to find solutions to their schools' particular problems—, along with the effectiveness and functionality of Technical School Councils, while, with regard to upper secondary education, they identified faculty meetings and differences between school shifts as factors that affect performance.

Additionally the interviewees considered group size, class times, lack of adequate infrastructure in schools and classrooms, lack of classroom furniture, teaching materials and teacher support, lack of technical resources and Internet connectivity, and lack of the electronic media and equipment needed for teaching to be factors that negatively affect their performance.

Family and community factors

Indubitably, the socioeconomic and cultural context, which includes family and community factors, plays a decisive role in teacher performance, since students' socioeconomic and cultural conditions translate into manifestations and behaviors that affect the said performance.

According to the interviewees, the main external factors at the community level that affect teacher performance are parent participation, parents' expectations with regard to their children's education, parents' educational level and family disintegration, while the factors at the community level that affect teacher performance are issues having to do with culture, poverty, migration, child labor, drug trafficking and lack of security.

**Table 2. Categorization of the external-dimension information:
socioeconomic and cultural context**

Categories	Subcategorías	Factores
Family and sociocultural environment	Parents	Parents' participation in their children's education. Parents' expectations and educational level. Family disintegration.
	Community	Cultural aspects. Poverty Migration and child labor. Drug trafficking and lack of security.

Main challenges and recommendations

The focus-group interviewees stressed the importance of strengthening initial training, of processes for enabling trainees to join the profession, of ongoing-training options and of professional-development support.

They considered that there are not enough initial-training options available, and that those that do exist do not endow them with the competencies that they need in order to face the challenges of the classroom.

In this regard, they mentioned that they attach a high value to spaces where they can share experiences with their colleagues, even when the latter work at other school levels. Furthermore, they stressed the importance of professional-association activities as “a basic tool for the joint construction of solutions to the particular needs and problems that exist in schools”.

They also considered that it is essential to improve initial training by choosing better candidates who, among other things, have a vocation for teaching, are responsible and possess the necessary qualities for joining the teaching profession. As well as suggesting that the teacher-training colleges should review their selection procedures in order to ensure that the best possible applicants are selected, they also stressed the need to work harder at linking theory, research, reflection and practice.

With regard to ongoing training and professional development, the interviewees asserted that the professional-development model is defective, being centralized and consisting of courses and workshops which, for the most part, are given by people with inadequate training and pedagogical grounding. They also stressed the need to design ongoing-training models, based on the areas of teacher improvement identified, that are more relevant to the particular characteristics of each context, modality and educational level.

Finally, the interviewees who work in high schools mentioned the need to develop “pedagogical-upgrading” and tutoring strategies that allow those graduates of teacher-training colleges who do not receive a basic grounding in psychopedagogy to better consolidate themselves as members of the teaching profession.

Factors in the drawing up of guidelines

Mexico will be the first Latin American country to have produced a legally mandat-

ed road map for educational improvement via the issuing of guidelines that, in the first instance, will, indubitably have a strong impact on that protagonist in the educational process, the teacher, who, in the view of the INEE, though not the only party responsible for educational performance, is indeed a key player who needs to be duly supplied with all the tools that are needed improve the said performance.

Hence, in order to come up with guidelines that will help to improve the teacher’s lot, professional development and job performance, it is essential that we listen to teachers, school principals, supervisors, advisers and technical-pedagogical consultants in order to get to know, first-hand, their viewpoints and opinions about the evaluation of their performance, and, above all, about the factors that affect it.

We conclude that efforts come up with alternatives and strategies aimed at improving education should take more stock of the contexts in which teaching-learning occurs. Based on our interviews with teachers and other people involved in education, we re-assert that teaching is done in complex, diverse, demanding, constantly changing environments, and that, while many of manifold factors that affect teacher performance can be identified, it is hard to ascertain specific relationships of cause-and-effect.

For this reason, not only is the work done by teachers devalued, but also their effectiveness is placed in doubt, while they are held disproportionately responsible for educational results without taking into account the contexts in which they actually work or considering how much support they receive to help them do their jobs. €

- 1 *Construyendo una metodología para la emisión de directrices para la mejora educativa*. Working document. DGDME-UNPE, INEE, 2014, p. 9



ROADMAP

A brief overview of good-teaching frameworks and their importance for evaluating teacher performance

What is good teaching? How can we evaluate the performance of Mexican teachers in accordance with the present regulatory framework? This article talks about some of the useful experiences gained in Mexico and other countries that can serve as a basis for developing teacher-evaluation processes both in our own country and in the rest of Latin America.

YOLANDA E. LEYVA BARAJAS

General Director for Teacher Evaluation and Standards of INEE’s Unit for the Evaluation of the National Education System
yleyva@inee.edu.mx

Introduction

In discussions about, and analyses of, Mexico’s education policy, there has been growing interest about what constitutes an effective, professional teacher, given that such figures are cornerstones in the endeavor to raise the quality of education and that it has been recognized that it essential that we take into account their working environments in order to produce them. This article first discusses some immediate forerunners of the current policy for the evaluation of teacher performance, and then talks about some of the experiences of other countries that have developed good-teaching frameworks as part of their teacher-training and teacher-assessment processes. Finally, it describes the current regulatory framework underpinning the creation of a framework for defining effective, professional teacher performance that serves as a yardstick for the evaluation of teachers working in our country’s compulsory-education system.

Background and experiences at the international level

Outstanding among the antecedents of Mexico's current regulatory framework is a study carried out at the behest of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that concluded that any endeavor to formulate good policies pertaining to the teaching profession must focus on making high-quality education available to everyone (2012). The document containing the findings of the aforementioned study describes the situation in which teachers and their organizations in the region function and, having discovered that they face similar problems, proposes criteria and policies. One of its main recommendations concerns the creation of common standards, stressing that teacher training should be linked to classroom practice and the exploitation of areas of opportunity detected during teaching observations (UNESCO-OREALC, 2012).

With regard to experiences in the rest of the world, countries such as the United States, Canada, Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, Australia, Chile and Peru have set up projects aimed at defining the criteria included in their frameworks for evaluating teacher performance and initial—and ongoing—training procedures (Vailant, 2004).

Insofar as these frameworks define standards (parameters), the performance yardsticks and guidelines can serve as a basis for the development of teacher-evaluation processes that have a strong impact on the incorporation, retention, promotion and formative evaluation of teachers, with a view to identifying training needs and encouraging reflection on teaching practices (Ingvarson, 2013). They may also serve as a basis for action, since they link the knowledge, skills and core values that teachers should apply to their practice and constitute a shared definition of good teaching, also enabling us to regulate the teaching profession and thus design teacher-training programs and joint policies aimed at compliance with the standards.

Regarding the frameworks' main uses, Meckes (2013) carries out a comparative analysis of the countries that have created teacher-performance frameworks, and also looks at how teaching standards are organized and the types of competency that most countries define along with the ways

of evaluating them. The most valuable contributions made by this analysis constitute a series of learnings for the building of the frameworks in question and are useful for purposes not only of teacher evaluation, but also of teacher training.

Teacher-performance profiles, parameters and yardsticks in Mexico

In Mexico, the most recent efforts to create performance yardsticks are linked to the Alliance for Quality in Education (Spanish acronym: ACE) that was signed in 2008 between the Ministry of Education and the National Union of Education Workers, who agreed to establish teacher-performance and management standards. The 2010 report of

the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on how to improve Mexico's schools stipulates performance standards aimed enabling professional teachers and society in general to be clear about the core knowledge and main skills and values associated with good teaching in this country. The 2008 Comprehensive Reform of Upper-secondary Education established a teacher profile based on eight competencies (*Official Federal Government Gazette*, 2008).

Currently, as part of the lead-up to the Educational Reform, Articles Three and Seventy Three of the Mexican Constitution were amended "for the basic purpose of guaranteeing high-quality, equitable education in Mexico". The General Law Governing the

Aspects of teaching contained in the good-teaching frameworks

Country	What it evaluates
Chile	The standards have to do with aspects of teaching based on the complete teaching-learning cycle — i.e. (a) class preparation; (b) creation of an atmosphere that favors student learning; (c) teaching that focuses on learning by all the students; and (d) professional responsibility.
Peru	The areas of teaching to be mastered are: (a) class planning; (b) learner-focused teaching; (c) participation in community-oriented school management, and (d) the development of professionalism and teaching vocation.
United States	The yardsticks for assessing teachers are: (a) commitment and a focus on learning by all the students; (b) creation and the maintaining of environments that are conducive to learning; (c) understanding and organization of contents; (d) planning and a focus on learning by all the students; (e) evaluation of learning, and (f) professional development.
Australia	The standards focus on three areas of teaching: (a) professional know-how; (b) professional practices, and (c) professional commitment.
Singapore	The model focuses on the basic ability to foster the child's all-round growth, and on four other competencies: (a) building knowledge; (b) winning hearts and minds; (c) working with others, and (d) knowing oneself and others.
Canada	The aspects evaluated are (a) commitment to students and their learning; (b) professional know-how; (c) professional practice; (d) leadership of learning communities; and (e) ongoing professional training
England	The standards are split into three interrelated sections: (a) professional values and practice (based on the General Teaching Council's Professional Code); (b) knowledge and understanding (standards that require recently qualified teachers to be confident and master the subjects that they teach, to have a good understanding of how students should progress); and (c) teaching (standards related to planning, supervisory and evaluation skills and classroom teaching and management).

Source: Compiled by the author based on the following source documents: *Good-teaching framework* (2004), *Good teacher performance framework* (2012), *On evaluation and teacher performance. Some international experiences* (2012); *National Professional Standards for Teachers* (2011); *Using Competency-Based Evaluation to Drive Teacher Excellence. Lessons from Singapore* (2010); *oecd review of educational-evaluation frameworks policies for improving learning outcomes. A comparative international overview of students, teachers, schools and education systems* (2013), and *Teachers are important: how to attract, train and retain efficient teachers* (2009).

Teaching Service was published in 2013 for the purpose of regulating Section II of Article Three of the Constitution and ensuring that “all activities having to do with the administration and supervision of elementary and upper-secondary education serve the purpose of providing high-quality education” (Official Federal Government Gazette, 2103).

Article 14 of the General Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service sets out to create profiles, parameters and yardsticks so as to define the main functions of teachers, school principals and supervisors respectively, “including, in the case of teachers, planning, mastery of subject contents, control of the classroom environment, teaching practices, student evaluation, responsibility for students’ learning outcomes, in-school cooperation, and communication with parents and guardians”, along with “the establishment of competency levels for each of the categories that apply to the positions of teacher, school principal and supervisor and the stipulation that teacher-performance evaluation must take into account the economic and socioeconomic and cultural context of the school “in order to achieve adequate learning outcomes and the inclusive development of all the students”.

Based on these legal precepts, an initial official document was drawn up stipulating the profiles, parameters and yardsticks for the appointment of elementary-school teachers (SEP, 2014a) and upper-secondary-school teachers (SEP, 2014b), while, this year, guidelines are being drawn up governing the promotion of school principals, supervisors and technical-pedagogic advisers to other positions in accordance with The Medium-term Program drawn up by the Institute and the Office of the National Coordinator of the Professional Teaching Service (INEE, 2014).

Also, this year, the profiles, parameters and yardsticks pertaining to teacher performance will be established, forming part of the framework for whatever performance-evaluation model is considered appropriate and feasible in the country’s present circumstances and conducive to the implementation of the processes stipulated in the General Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service. €

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SPEAKING ALOUD: INTERVIEW

The challenges and successes of teacher training in Mexico

During the more than one hundred years since it was founded, the “Benemérita Escuela Normal Veracruzana, Enrique C. Rébsamen” has faced all sorts of challenges. Interviewed for our Newsletter, its director, Fidel Hernández Fernández, talked about the strategies that have enabled his institution to succeed and identified some areas in which the education and evaluation system needs to improve.

The Benemérita Escuela Normal Veracruzana, Enrique C. Rébsamen (Enrique C. Rébsamen Teacher Training College of Veracruz; Spanish acronym: BENV) was founded 128 years ago. Through it have passed some very worthy people, such as its founder, Enrique C. Rébsamen, and other great teachers who laid the foundations of what was destined to become Mexico’s first nation-wide teacher-training system.

In 1886, based on the system and principles advocated by Rébsamen, the Governor of the State of Veracruz, General Juan de la Luz Enríquez, made it very clear: “Teachers in our public schools should receive every attention from whichever government is in power so that we may ask them to sacrifice themselves in order to provide a good education to our children and youths.”

In this regard, our teacher-training college is a stronghold of education in Mexico, in Latin America and worldwide, because the pedagogical principles enunciated by great teachers who have graduated from it —such as Moisés Sáenz Garza, who founded Mexico’s secondary school system, and Rafael Ramírez Castañeda, a great reformer of rural education in Mexico— have led the way forward in various areas.

Currently we have 1,372 students and offer five undergraduate programs – in Primary Education, Pre-school Education, Physical Education, Special Education and Upper-secondary Education with a specialization in Dis-

tance Education. Having recently broken new ground by venturing into graduate studies, we also have two master's-degree programs and will soon be opening two special programs, and also a doctoral program, as part of an agreement with the University of Málaga.

In a study that we carried out, we noted that the area with the biggest shortage of teachers was physical education, and hence we decided to set up a master's-degree program to develop competencies in that area, while also establishing a second master's-degree program in educational innovation. It is in this way that the BENV keeps at the forefront. The knowledge society sets us the challenge of innovating education in Mexico, and therefore we have been working hard in four areas:

The administrative staff

A director's main task is management. As Serafín Antúnez has said, in one of his excellent presentations, that 'A director should come up with a practical democratic model. The mechanism, methodology and procedures whereby formal leadership is exercised are very important. We have strived to ensure that the management and organization of our [teacher-training] center is based on consultation with its faculty. We have a technical committee and an academic board, and we always have recourse to them so that the best, most participatory and democratic, decisions may be made based on the intelligence, experience and know-how of our teachers, students, and management and maintenance staff.

The students

"Traditionally teachers in Mexico —as in my own case— have humble beginnings as far as their socioeconomic levels are concerned. Many of our students come from rural areas and from other states, being hired when they graduate thanks to their good grades. For example, in the last period of evaluations for the purpose of hiring teachers, our graduates ranked first.

The Teachers

Our teachers are split into two categories. Those who joined our faculty before the 1970's were graduates of teacher-training colleges, and those who joined when our school became a higher-learning institution in 2005. Now, those university graduates joined our staff in response to the needs aris-

ing from the new educational models, curricula and study plans.

Originally, we offered non-degree programs in primary-school and pre-school teaching. The first proposal for conferring undergraduate status on these programs nation-wide came from our institution, but the said proposal was rejected because the conditions still weren't right, being taken up again in 1984.

Since we need teachers with computing skills, given the current boom in educational technology we teach our students computing skills, which they find very useful in their work.

Humanistic training

In the 1970's, the education sciences —including didactics— were a basic underpinning of our teacher training programs. One of the areas that has been seriously neglected has been the humanistic aspect of education. It's true that we needed to become more efficient, but everything we do should be based on humanistic values. In the BENV we've striven not to lose sight of these and to instill them in our trainees.

The outlook for teacher training

Our top priority is to produce professionals. Teachers should study every day and there are two ways of doing this: (a) professionalization via ongoing training in other institutions of higher education, and (b) self-directed teaching, since many teachers are unable to engage in ongoing training, mainly for financial reasons.

Most of our teachers pay for their own undergraduate and graduate courses. Fortunately, there are some opportunities for subsidized study, such as the Program for Professional Teacher Development (Spanish acronym: PRODEP), in which our institution has obtained the best results nationwide. Indeed, many of our colleagues are enrolled in graduate courses in Canada and Spain.

The main obstacles to high-quality initial training.

For training to be adequate, it must be based on scientific knowledge. We can't proceed via trial and error, and hence there must be some trainings or parts of the curriculum devoted to thinking skills. Philosophy and logic, which are fundamental, have been left out, and hence one of our big challenges consists in reviewing this reform to ensure that students also learn, or relearn, how to think. We also face



the challenge of engendering social awareness in young teachers, so that they live up to their obligations responsibly.

Furthermore, since Veracruz has at least 3,000 multi-level schools, we need to produce teachers who master the right strategies for such situations.

The BENV constantly receives visitors from teacher-training colleges in other parts of Mexico that want to update themselves in this area. Also, we have visited Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero and Yucatán, since these states have a lot of problems relating to schools in which a single teacher covers several levels or even all of them.

Indeed, our institution was asked to provide input for the national multilevel-teaching program. One of our faculty members, Cenobio Popoca, visited the single-classroom schools that are dependent on the BENV to carry out observations, interview teachers and pupils, and gather specialized materials about multi-level teaching. In northern Spain, for instance, among the cornerstones of teacher training are the ideas of Rafael Ramírez, who graduated from our institution.

We also need to produce teachers of students with different abilities. In our undergraduate course in Special Education, we have two areas —one pertaining to the teaching of pupils who are mentally challenged and the other to that of pupils with hearing or language difficulties. In our library, we have a module for people who need to read in braille, manned by blind or visually impaired teachers. The BENV has made progress in this regard, serving teacher-trainees with these kinds of needs, who will later work in the Unit for the Provision of Support Services for Regular Education (Spanish acronym: USAER) or in the special-education sector.

Current overview of the BENV

As an institute of higher-education we now have to concentrate not only on teaching, but also on dissemination, outreach and



research. Currently we have five academic faculties, and another four that are being registered.

Our young graduates are aware and committed, and hence they take a very responsible approach towards their work and produce good results. In the future, we will have to provide even higher-quality results, based on principles of equity and with a humanistic focus. If our school manages to prove itself worthy of the trust that society has placed in it, we will be more than half-way there.

Just a few years ago, we were in a state of crisis, but we have managed to overcome it. Our young graduates happily go wherever they are sent, even to the most remote mountains, valleys and coastal regions. We have followed up, and the results are very satisfactory. Some things —such as responsibility, a proactive, democratic attitude, and a commitment to gender equity— can't be learned in books.

In the last document that we handed over to Emilio Chuayffet, the Minister of Public Education of México, in La Paz, Baja California, on June 6th, 2014, we made recommendations regarding teacher training in Mexico. One thing that we placed great emphasis on was the need for young teachers to conceive of themselves as educators and trainers, since in that way they'll do their utmost to educate not only the children in their schools, but also the societies where the latter are located. I believe that this is one of their fundamental roles.

The needs of the people of Mexico are many and diverse, but above all, they need good training, and that is what our teacher-training colleges should provide.

We have had to enrich our curricula because the ideas about teaching that were handed down to us by the great educators that our institution has produced, and by their colleagues elsewhere, have gradually been lost in the last reforms. For example,

we've now revived the practice of school vegetable gardens, a teaching system created by Rafael Ramírez.

The future of our country's teacher-training colleges

Our main task with regard to our students is: *a)* to train them with a humanistic focus; *b)* to make them aware that they must strive to continually update themselves based on scientific principles; and *c)* to encourage them to do research in order to provide high-quality teaching to the children in their classrooms.

The new education model would benefit greatly from broad consultation both with teachers and with the different sectors of society.

I respectfully make this suggestion so that the teacher-training colleges and in-service teachers may be heard, since they know what the real on-the-ground problems are for education and can suggest viable solutions to them.

It's important that there be more support in the area of teacher updating, since most teachers have to pay for it out of their own pockets. The State should shoulder its responsibilities in this regard, because teaching is a state profession; our institutions are public ones and they must produce the best teachers to serve the people — above all, to serve those who are most in need.

Right now, the teacher-training colleges are the best means of improving education in our country. Mexico's big conflicts will be settled via high-quality education. €

INTERVIEWED BY JUAN MOISÉS MORENO GUZMÁN

Fidel Hernández Fernández

I worked as a rural teacher trainer around 1975, as part of a volunteer project. Many of our efforts in the areas of research, teaching, dissemination and outreach helped us to develop as professionals. I've been in my post at the benv for 4 years and I wish to stress that the latter's directors are democratically elected.

SPEAKING ALOUD: INTERVIEW

Assessment, respect and credibility: Foundations of teaching

All the sectors involved in education and in teachers evaluation must jointly and actively implement the scenarios envisaged in the Educational Reform. Speaking about "repositioning ourselves *vis-à-vis* society as people and teachers with credibility", María Esther Núñez Cebrero, the director of the "Benemérita Escuela Nacional de Maestros" (National Teacher Training College) located in Mexico-City, was interviewed about the threats facing —and opportunities for— the said institution.



“There is no art that can't be built with passion and love. When you love what you do and are sensitive enough to understand your fellow men, which is what we try to encourage our students to do in the National Teacher Training College — to feel that love of teaching that will enable them to walk a mile in their students' shoes and open up worlds of learning to them. It's a matter not just of standing in front of a group and talking about practical issues, but rather of finding ways to motivate its members.”

Thus affirms the director of the National Teacher Training College, María Esther

Núñez Cebrero, sitting behind her desk, as she talks about teacher-training methods

“Through dialogue and listening, we can create communities of sense to motivate young people to do something for themselves and their environment. When you let somebody tell you their life story, they will conceive of teaching as a humanistic activity. The human touch makes all the difference. Dialogue and listening are the keys to success in every profession, but even more so in ours, because we work with people who have feelings and need to be heard.

The strategies with which we equip our young people are dialogue, reasoning and reflection. Of course, we also cover the syllabus, but the fact that the members of our faculty have teaching experience and give these little tips to their students is very important.”

Having grown up in a family of teachers, Núñez Cebrero, who is very aware of the daily challenges that teachers face in their jobs, says:

“Our students must be aware of the diversity that exists in Mexico. Each group of students is made up of different personalities, customs and beliefs, and teachers must be aware of this in order to give each pupil what s/he needs: That is the first big challenge.

Secondly, they must be able to engender a favorable atmosphere. When students respect their teacher, learning becomes easier. However, how is respect earned? Through hard work, honesty, responsibility and love of one’s profession.”

She points out that in order for teachers to face such challenges, it is essential that they have received all-round training provided not only by competent teacher trainers, but also by committed supervisors:

“You need to have credibility, which comes from practicing what you preach. A school principal should be close to his teachers and students so as to be realistic, familiar with the issues and assertive when making decisions. Administrative work is important, but when we become desk-bound we forget what is most important, which is classroom teaching.

Success is also achieved by reaching decisions in collaboration with maintenance staff, teachers and students. Notwithstanding all the changes that the teacher-training colleges have been through, our institution is hard-working, committed and unworried, because we have based our decisions on dialogue and listening.

All of us who are educators are facing a big challenge –that of repositioning ourselves *vis-à-vis* society as individuals and teachers with credibility.”

Núñez Cebrero asserts that assessment should serve to analyze teaching and transform it, rather than to discredit teachers.

“Assessment should be conceived of as something that is necessary in order to appraise the services provided by the Ministry of Public Education, to solve problems, to guide decision making, and to foster participation. This implies placing the stress on analyzing the information that is gathered, rather than accumulating numbers, averages and statistics, and obliges us to adopt certain axiological viewpoints as yardsticks. Why are we assessing? Do we assess the process or the results? Do we assess in order to narrow the parameters and exclude those who fail to comply with them? Do we assess without any consideration of the context? Do we assess in order to hold people accountable or in order to understand them?”

Assessment is key to the building of a critical outlook. It has to do with not being complacent and with the ability to fully play one’s role as a citizen and participate in society. It implies making value judgments, reflecting and analyzing one’s own achievements and successes, along with the obstacles faced, so as to identify areas of opportunity where we can establish aims and change things.”

In this regard, she lists the following changes that evaluation has brought —or is bringing— about in her institution:

- a) Adjustments to the curricula of the undergraduate programs in Pre-school Education and Primary Education (2012 Primary-Education Law).
- b) The transformation of teaching and improvement of educational processes.
- c) Fulfillment of students’ training needs.
- d) The design of meaningful training activities and tasks.
- e) Effective linkage with practice.

She affirms that assessment is a means of finding out the views of members of educational communities about what they do and discovering how they conceive of and approach goals and challenges, thus being aimed at taking the right actions based on the best available information.

“The National Teacher Training College has been developing assessment procedures

since the 1997 plan was implemented. In the first phase of the said plan, the focus was on improving teaching. In 2012, we realized that we needed to carry out a similar process so as to ascertain the extent to which the new plan had been put into practice. Since it stressed competencies, we needed to understand what this meant for assessment. If we are to be congruent with the contents of Decree 649, we cannot conceive of the implementation of the plan as a mere conceptual task involving the repetition of contents or as an adding up of grades or results on standardized exams.

Traditional assessment — i.e. the measuring of accumulated knowledge, the noting down of end products, the averaging out of grades- does not suffice as a means of bringing about improvement and developing skills and abilities in an all-round, authentic way. In this regard, we agree with the decree in question, which very pertinently states: ‘In a competency-based approach, assessment is a process whereby evidence is gathered about a student’s performance in order to make value judgments based on a referential framework consisting of competencies and their units or ingredients and on performance criteria, and so as to identify those areas that need to be strengthened so as to reach the necessary developmental level, as set forth in the profile and in each course pertaining to the curriculum [...]. In this regard, all-round, comprehensive assessment of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in action is needed.’

Taking the above into account, assessment is done *in situ* using *ad hoc* parameters, there is reflection about the products, the individuality of each subject is respected without making them compete against others, and the process is enriched by various fact-finding procedures such as interviews, observations, case follow-up, problem solving and real, meaningful challenges.”

Aware that assessment processes imply high levels of responsibility, Núñez Cebrero reflects on certain issues:

“How can we be fair and not just take the easy way out of merely using instruments? To start with, there is the simple consideration that, since we teachers at the National Teacher Training College are experts in assessment with a lot of experience, we set out to exchange ideas in order to create shared assessment yardsticks based on the evaluation and implantation of the aforesaid plan and the difficulties inherent in it.

It has not been easy. Assessment can be biased towards *grading* or misunderstood as an exercising of power against the uninitiated person who dares to encroach on the sacred confines of the classroom. Any reform that does not see teachers as individuals and engage in a respectful dialogue with them is bound to engender resistance.

For this reason, we have formed a team of teachers who represent the community in order to talk about the best way to assess, create and use instruments, and reflect and make value judgments as a basis for recommending actions. The said instruments include impressionistic interviews, consideration of the social context, and reflection about how to improve training. A complex social environment needs a broad viewpoint, and hence it's essential that everybody participate – not just a closed group.”

Since she teaches a group as well as being the director of the National Teacher Training College, Núñez Cebrero understands how teachers feel and endeavors to support them:

“The reforms and changes are disconcerting and engender fear and uncertainty, since we think that the function of assessment is to approve or disapprove, which is what we've experienced in our institution. Therefore, it is not easy to create an assessment culture that enables us to identify opportunities for positive change.

Nevertheless, our young people are using platforms to evaluate, which enables us to get a general overview of our institution and of our teaching practices so as find out what we are doing well and where we need to improve. The challenge is to keep on working with our country to produce reforms that commit us to improving public education.

Now the teacher-training colleges can't all be evaluated in the same way, since each one is *sui generis*. We would have to begin

by finding out which processes are in place in each institution and identifying certain features that would serve as foundations for building and transformation.

The processes can't be totalitarian; they have to proceed gradually in order to identify parameters or features that will render them efficient. The people who are to be assessed would also have to play a part in the evaluation of the teacher-training colleges, since this would create more trust and confidence.”

Núñez Cebrero ends by reemphasizing the importance of evaluation, respect and credibility as foundations for both teacher training and teaching. €

INTERVIEW WITH MAGDALENA ALPIZAR

María Esther Núñez Cebrero

I had the good fortune to grow up in a family of teachers who encouraged my personal development. Being a teacher enables you to have a different view of life and to develop as a human being. Working to overcome your weaknesses makes you grow.

This is what happens when teachers put their heart and soul into what they are doing and walk in the shoes of others. So why am I a teacher? Because I was strongly influenced by my family and because, from a very early age, I was fated to stand in a classroom. Today I am still convinced that teaching is a wonderful profession. What I can do with my students is to encourage them to create better human beings starting in primary-school.

IN THE CLASSROOM: INTERVIEWS

Three teachers and their struggles in the depths of Cañada Honda

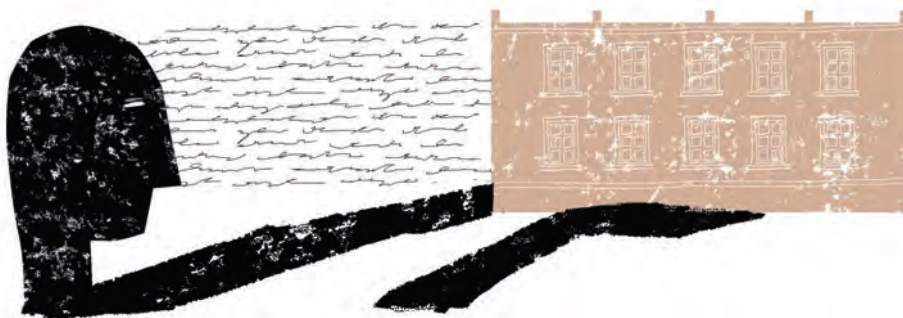
In an interview with us that is split up into six sections, Raúl Bárcenas Ramírez, the Director of the Justo Sierra Méndez Rural Teacher Training College in the state of Aguascalientes, along with the head of the latter institution's Teaching Department, José Antonio Pérez López, and the head of its Department of Ongoing Training, José de Jesús Pulido Gallegos, asserted that changing an educational culture is a team effort in which it is essential to take into consideration the individual nature of each school and provide ongoing support.

A teacher-training college with a difference

Founded 78 years ago, the Justo Sierra Méndez Rural Teacher Training College offers a Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education and has only female students. Currently there are 140 trainees, 90% of whom come from 11 states — mainly from Durango, Guanajuato and Zacatecas.

A distinctive feature of this school — which receives both state and federal funding and gives full scholarships to its students, covering food, clothing and in-school boarding— is its graduates' willingness to work anywhere in Mexico.

Due to its special characteristics, the institution needs to have a different infrastructure and offer a different type of teacher training. When the Program for the Institutional Improvement of Public Teacher Training Colleges (Spanish acronym: PRONIM) was set up in 2006, the college put together a strategic plan, including a diagnostic study and a project, in order to be funded. This constituted a watershed for the college with regard to expanding and improving some aspects of its infrastructure and equipment, as well as giving better training to its teachers — who currently number 65— and supporting them in their postgraduate studies and research endeavors, as occurs in all universities.



Teaching demands

It is necessary to evaluate performance, productivity and commitment, essential areas in which teachers constantly need to strive to get good results by constantly updating themselves, doing research and analysis, constructing texts and generating knowledge.

From our classrooms we have to be managers — managers of our students' learning and managers of resources. The director's job is to make things happen, but he shouldn't be responsible for doing everything. Teachers have to make sure that the things they teach are put into practice, that competencies are deployed in real life. We need to change things —to be leaders of change— because we teach teachers. A change of culture is needed, a change in our way of thinking and a constructive attitude *vis-à-vis* our institution and also *vis-à-vis* society. This is our main challenge as teachers: now we can't expect the school to give us everything; we have to use what we've learned in our training to communicate our way of thinking and ideas to our students, and of course we have to deal with authorities, parents and society in general.

The essential nature of the rural teacher-training college

If we don't change in our teacher-training college, it's going to be hard to promote change in the primary schools. Our teachers' lack of basic training or preparation must be remedied if our students are going to be able to compete with graduates from other schools who are well trained.

The PROMIN program was put in place precisely to bring us up to par as an institute of higher education, but there were also adjustments in order to afford individualized treatment to the different teacher-training colleges.

Now, with the educational or labor reform, they're planning to evaluate us, but not the higher-level institutions because they're still autonomous. The view of the work we do is changing again, though evaluation is the key to getting a job or receiving training to help us to satisfy teachers' real needs.

In the teacher-training colleges we train our students to teach a lot of very poor, marginalized people who live in rural zones and in the mountains. If the rural teacher-training colleges are neglected, these groups will continue to be excluded and condemned to be poor forever.

In this regard, education is still the only way for people to make progress; it gives them a chance to have a better life. If the rural teacher-colleges are done away with, who on earth is going to help these areas and the many marginalized people who live in them.

No other institution offers the same character-building education and encouragement to be daring, enterprising, assertive and patriotic as the rural teacher-training colleges.

The work done by rural teacher-training colleges makes a real difference and has a big impact, but that's been forgotten now. We have to do away with this situation where there are two Mexicos. If we want to change things, as is happening now thanks to radical, robust decisions, then people need to recognize that Mexico belongs to everybody and not just to a few people. Mexicans don't all live in cities, but also in the mountains and in marginalized communities. We mustn't forget that the rural teacher-training colleges were a product of the Mexican Revolution. They are a legacy that's still alive and kicking after more than a hundred years and they're still needed, albeit it with a new structure and a different type of teaching. They have to be saved.

It's obvious from what happened in Guerrero that the problem is a serious one. These situations make people drop out of school. When the government doesn't provide you with the funding that they're supposed to get, people head out in search of it. That's happened here too. There are times when they don't deposit our funds, and if there's no money, then nobody sells you food. Why do kids go out with tin cans to raise money, hold sit-ins, hijack buses? Because the government doesn't do its job and we accustom our students to the idea that that's the way to get things. If each of us did our job, kids wouldn't need to do such things and all the things that we're going through now wouldn't have happened. But they happened, and now they've taken notice of us. Unfortunately, it was because of what happened. It should have been different. Now we have to see what difference these changes make.

The role of diagnostic studies

At the teacher-training colleges in Aguascalientes —there are five of us— work based on the same ideas. Right now a study of our teachers' real needs is being carried out in order to help them to do a better job. When we look at our teachers' needs, we realize that

they're a lot, that we've been left behind, and that society needs different things from teacher-training-college graduates, which is why it's important for us to carry out a diagnostic study, since you can't change something without basing the change on something.

Without an evaluation, perceptions are personal or very subjective. In these circumstances, we do need an instrument —an external one— to tell us how we are, but it's important for this evaluation to take particularities and regional conditions into account. I mean, the Regional Teacher Training Center in Aguascalientes (Spanish acronym: CRENA) isn't the same as Cañada Honda; and we aren't the same as the teacher-training college in Saucillo. Although we're both rural, our conditions aren't the same.

In order for an evaluation to be meaningful, there'd have to be a better understanding of the differences between the two institutions and their natures, dynamics and institutional life and synergies.

Another thing that needs to be taken into account is the difference between *wanting* to train, and *having* to train, to be a teacher. The idea that we have of teaching changes completely: it's called vocation.

Implementation of the evaluation culture

We've created instruments inside our institution to find out where we are. Recently we designed a serious research project, using specialized educational-research programs to find out which competencies graduating students should have. What we discovered were priority needs such as mastery of information technology. We also found out other things about students' work and performance. These evaluations provide us with feedback on achievement levels. We also evaluate teacher performance at the end of the semester.

The person responsible for making these measurements bases them on the professional competencies established by the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (Spanish acronym: ANUIES) for professional teachers in higher-education institutions. Using these, the students evaluate their teachers.

We use these results to help our teachers to exploit their areas of opportunity during the next school year. This way, we're trying to implant an evaluation culture.

We've evaluated technical and pedagogical computing competencies – i.e. the skills that our teachers say they have, their knowledge and mastery and their use of computers in the classroom. We recently designed an instrument for use in the classroom and for following up with our teachers and assessing their classes. What are we trying to achieve with these observations? Obviously, if we improve our practices, that will have a direct impact on our students, who, for their part, spend their days practicing, and we're also creating instruments to evaluate their planning.

As planning evaluators, we see what their strengths and weaknesses are in this area and later, when we observe them, we make quantitative and qualitative judgments. We're beginning to carry out a sort of SWOT analysis of their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

All this happened when the PROMIN and its resources appeared on the scene. At the beginning, most of the trainings were planned by those of us who drew up the programs, without having much idea of what we were doing. Bit by bit, things have been changing. We've done research into —and follow-up on— teacher and student performance inside and outside the classroom, and this has given rise to courses that strengthen requisite teacher-trainer competencies.

The results

Using these instruments we found out that we teachers in the Justo Sierra Teacher Training College in Cañada needed support, even though we're professional educators.

The fact is, for example, that students have been evaluating their teachers for years now, but only as a matter of form, because these evaluations didn't have any real impact or result in changes or improvement; they were merely informative. There was no link between the findings of the evaluations and decisions by administrative staff to implement programs to remedy the defects detected. Now we respond to the needs that are detected.

Since 2005, the teacher-training colleges have been running training courses and infrastructure-improvement courses. Certainly progress has been made, but very slowly. Although our budget has been increased, it's really nothing compared with the funding for universities – really nothing, and we almost totally depend on it.

When the 2012 Plan came into force, we started a pilot study and they gave us an incentive because we were pioneers at that stage – i.e. 3.5 million pesos for the specific purpose of strengthening our infrastructure in terms of the networks, equipment and books that we needed to implement the reform, because the Plan requires technology, and how were we going to have it if the conditions made it impossible? With that, we grew a bit, but it isn't enough. We need a lot of investment to be able to compare with a higher-education institution.

The first generation of students taught after this Plan was implemented is only just going to graduate and it would be a far stretch to say that we've fully developed the required competencies. Some time will have to go by for us to see how much progress we've made. But we did manage to implant an evaluation culture in our community, as well as training ourselves, carrying out a needs analysis and working with each of our teachers.

Every semester we also encourage our teachers to tutor their students, finding out their needs and helping them to hone their comprehension skills and reflect on what they've learned. €

INTERVIEWED BY LAURA ATHIÉ

Raúl Bárcenas Ramírez

I received my Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education from the Aguascalientes Regional Teacher-training Center (Spanish acronym: crena) 17 years ago, and then obtained a Master's Degree in Elementary Education from the Autonomous University of Aguascalientes. I was a teacher in Cañada Honda and then they offered me a job as a Head of the Department of Follow-up, Planning and Curricula and then I became director of the Justo Sierra Méndez Teacher-training College in 2012. I'm convinced that the rural teacher training colleges are the ideal places for training teachers capable of working in impoverished rural and mountainous areas. If these institutions are neglected, these groups will continue to be marginalized and all but doomed to be poor forever. Education is still their only means of advancement.

IN THE CLASSROOM: INTERVIEW

A noble, worthwhile and complex task

The “Centenaria y Benemérita Miguel F. Martínez” teacher-training college, which is located in the center of the city of Monterrey in the state of Nuevo León, offers degree courses in Pre-school, Primary-level and Physical Education and is about to launch a graduate program. In an interview, its director, Alfonso Ramírez Reyes, who graduated from the institution that he now heads, explained how the latter, which is one of the most important regional teacher-training centers in Mexico, conceives of, and tackles, teacher assessment.



Innovative students and teachers who continually update themselves

Research indicates that our students all share two typical features: they have very high emotional-intelligence, being sensitive and well balanced, and also very well developed intellectual skills. This description gives a very clear picture of the people who study

in our institution, who have an honest, balanced and healthy attitude regarding what they want – an attitude that constitutes one of the cornerstones of our college, where we have noble, valiant, innovative students who are very keen to learn.

We are talking about a total of 1,857 students, 1,327 of whom are enrolled in 3 undergraduate programs (Pre-school, Primary and Physical Education), while the remaining 530 are enrolled in graduate ones.

The main challenge with which training these young people faces us consists in the ongoing updating of our teachers, whom we must motivate, and encourage to be sensitive and to take part in the training of teaching staff in order to strengthen our main activities as an institute of Upper Secondary Education – i.e. teaching, research, consultancy, the organization and promotion of cultural activities, and cultural outreach- which mean that we must help them to come up with proposals, draft texts and presentations, take part in congresses and publish in international scholarly journals, which they are motivated to do via incentives stipulated in the State Plan for the Strengthening of Teacher Training College Education and also using our own funding.

Thanks to our faculty, consisting of almost 200 professors teaching at the undergraduate level and over 40 teaching specialized courses, many of whom hold master's degrees or doctorates, we are a very enterprising and innovative institution.

For example, due to the efforts of our innovative students and the ongoing updating of our teachers, we have developed a particularly successful practice whereby, as part of their teaching activities, our staff work, in the seventh and eighth semesters, on a project which, among other things, involves the production of teacher diaries, portfolios, and evaluation and planning folders, as well as the setting up of classroom “resource nooks” and the carrying out of systematic group work focusing on observation journals and teaching-practice sessions. Likewise, our teacher-trainees keep similar diaries where they record observations and note down their experiences.

Besides promoting analysis and reflection in the course of teaching, since our students work in varying contexts, we also have a dialectical approach to experiential evaluation, so that there are critical factors, such as the impact of the environment, work in

the classroom, and materials, that we take into account and assess.

It bears mentioning, here, that we have two teacher-training colleges in the rural part of the state of Nuevo León -the “Serafín Peña” college in Montemorelos and the “Pablo Livas” college in Sabinas Hidalgo- as well as our own college in the center of the city of Monterrey. Notwithstanding our different locations, the conceptual and organizational challenges are the same everywhere.

Evaluation, improvement and professional identity

I believe that, when evaluating teacher-training, we should take into account contexts, infrastructures, surroundings, human resources and cash flows, with special emphasis on human resources, since we need to ascertain what kind of students, teachers and groups we are dealing with, so as to come up with yardsticks for analyzing the other features.

Nowadays, in this regard, teachers need to change their classroom practices based on other parameters and concepts –i.e., in the words of Edgar Morin, based on uncertainty, complexity, error and turbulence— so that, in our teacher training, we may aspire to produce professionals with profiles suited to elementary education, based on a very clear idea of what we want them to be – i.e., among other things, innovative, critical, self-critical teachers, able to vary their teaching approach so as to achieve the desired aims while taking stock of socioeconomic and cultural contexts and stressing features such as globality, governability, sustainability and equality; teachers who, regardless of their ideology, are committed to their work, constantly evolving, and in full control of the available technical resources and able to make use of them in the classroom; teachers devoted to their fellow men who are able to base their teaching on democratic values and principles while evaluating their interaction both with themselves and with others; teachers imbued, among other things, with a spirit of justice and inclusiveness.

As to how we can achieve this, according to Michael Fullan's theory of change, educators must be open and sensitive both to changes and innovations from outside and to those innovations and changes they need to bring about jointly with their students in order to modify their surroundings.

In this regard, I wish to revisit and link two classical concepts that I believe to underpin all teaching: the humanistic ethic of respect and love for the student and, based on the latter, a love of teaching itself. We must redefine our concepts of what it means to be a teacher and reassess our professional identity.

The roads to strengthening

For some years now we in the teacher-training colleges have been jointly engaged in processes such as the exchange of success stories that we need to affirm and consolidate. We must be humble, cooperative and sharing; why not talk about our successes and share them with our colleagues in other environments, institutions and states, doing so humbly rather than arrogantly, since only thus will we be able to strengthen our nation-wide teacher-training system. I am convinced that teaching is a noble, worthy and complex task that involves loving our fellow man and identifying with others in the fullest sense. This is its great value. €

INTERVIEWED BY MAGDALENA ALPIZAR

Alfonso Ramírez Reyes

I'm the son of peasant farmers and attended primary school in the mountainous region where the Jimulco canyon is located, in the Laguna district. I was very keen to get a good education and longed to be a teacher since my senior year in primary school.

I liked the atmosphere in the rural school near Nazareno in the Lerdo municipality of Durango. In 1978, I accompanied my grandparents to Monterrey, in the state of Nuevo León, where I attended secondary school at night in one of the neighborhoods near the city center. After that, I enrolled here, in the “Centenaria y Benemérita Miguel F. Martínez” teacher-training college, where I graduated as a primary-school teacher. I managed to do this mainly thanks to the vocational-guidance counsellor in my secondary school, because I really liked the idea of teaching other people.

IN THE CLASSROOM: INTERVIEW

Teacher sensibility is a prerequisite for progress in education

Evaluation strengthens schools, but it also brings challenges, said Ramón Guadalupe Lara Cruz, Director of the Rafael Ramírez Castañeda Teacher Training Center in the state of Sonora, when we interviewed him about his experiences in his alma mater, which he now heads.



“Evaluation is a process of dialogue, understanding and improvement. In this regard, improvement means moving forward. Rather than ending an existing cycle, we must start another one, because, though evaluation is sometimes a sore point for teachers, it is a fact that institutions do not function adequately without measuring pro-

cesses. For this reason, I believe that teacher-training colleges should be evaluated based on dialogue, in accordance with their context, and taking into account the kind of students who study in them.”

So says Ramón Guadalupe Lara Cruz, director of the Rafael Ramírez Castañeda Regional Teacher Training College in Sonora.

Lara Cruz, who has a bachelor’s degree in Primary Education and a master’s degree in Pedagogy, and is currently working on his Ph.D. in Education, graduated from the institution that he now directs and describes as follows:

“The Rafael Ramírez Castañeda Regional Teacher Training Center is located in an urban area. Its students are graduates of upper-secondary-level institutions such as the “Centro de Bachillerato Tecnológico industrial y de Servicios” (Spanish Acronym: CEBTIS) and the “Colegio de Bachilleres” (Spanish acronym: COBACH). We offer degree courses in Primary Education, Pre-school Primary Education and Bilingual Intercultural Primary Education. Since our students come from poor communities far from the city, our approach to them is special but not marked by favoritism, since evaluation is a process of dialogue, understanding and improvement. In order to properly assess these students, we must bear in mind the fact that these are hard-working young people who come from remote villages and have studied in upper-secondary-level agricultural schools. As far as their exit profile is concerned, they need to be student-centered, able to teach in different types of school at different levels and have an aptitude for working in primary schools or kindergartens. However, this demanding job profile becomes even more complex in the case of teachers who have to work in multi-level or indigenous contexts.”

To illustrate the main professional conflicts faced by his graduates, Lara Cruz mentions, as a case in point, the lecture on human interaction that is given in his institution:

“According to our findings, teachers in multi-level schools face four main problems: (i) the children are vulnerable; (ii) since both their parents work, they can seldom attend meetings during normal school hours — i.e. between 8:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.; (iii) the teachers have to teach two different levels at the same time or alternate between two different levels; (iv) as well as living in conditions of extreme poverty, resulting from, and

reinforcing, all of the aforesaid circumstances, the children also have very poor communication skills”. However, before they go out and face these realities, the trainees have to take intensive training in the Center, which itself faces the challenge of ensuring that its graduates are fit to teach.

“The bachelor’s-degree program in Bilingual Intercultural Primary Education, the implementation of which has been one of the biggest challenges the Regional Center has faced, has been a success because the students have enriched it with contributions from their own culture. Another crucial project is the 2012 bachelor’s program in Primary Education, since we are the only teacher-training college in our state piloting it. The teaching materials, trainings and all the other aspects of this program continue to be the greatest challenge I have ever faced during my time as director. Fortunately, we’ve had a very positive response from our teaching team, whose members are very capable — “real sloggers”, as we say here in Chihuahua; very practical people, with strong theoretical underpinning, who are devoted to their jobs.”

And, indeed, the implementation of programs for the purpose of evaluating the Center’s performance has been one of the biggest challenges. Lara Cruz mentions some key moments in this process:

“It was when I was assistant academic director, at the time when our institution began to implement the evaluation system, that the Inter-institutional Committees for the Evaluation of Upper-secondary Education (Spanish acronym: CIEES) were set up, constituting a complete turnabout in teacher training. The implementation of the ISO quality standard was also a big challenge; we had to do everything at the same time — assessment forms, diagnostic documents, etc. These projects, carried out by government institutions such as the Department of Technical-Industrial Education (Spanish acronym: DGETI) have helped educational schools such as ours to move ahead. The director, administrator or assistant director don’t head the institution any more, but, rather, coordinate it, and all these developments have made us a high-quality school.”

Thanks to his experience as a CIEES evaluator, Lara Cruz has visited many regional teacher-training centers and got to know their strengths and weaknesses. Based on these experiences and the developments in

his own institution, he makes some suggestions as to improvements:

“The implementation of the ISO standard is a success because teachers behave more responsibly when information and communications technologies are in place. For example, a time clock in a teacher-training college does not make teachers more inherently responsible, but it does make them turn up for work punctually and start and finish classes on time. In our case, using timeline scheduling, we’re able to set up an annual education forum with speakers from different parts of Mexico who supplement our teacher-training program, and, of course, at the beginning of each semester we need to program a series of courses on topics such as assessment, human relations and school management.”

Having talked about improvement processes in teacher-training institutions, Lara Cruz lists the most important challenges in this area:

“I think that one of the biggest challenges is for teacher-training colleges to become familiar with the curricula and ensure that their students cover them properly. Full curriculum coverage enables primary-school teachers to work more confidently and helps teacher trainers to be more sensitive. I am convinced that teacher trainers with the right profile result in more effective education. I believe that, in order to achieve improvement in education, we need teacher trainers who are more sensitive and humane and, above all, ones with practical experience in the field.” €

INTERVIEWED BY MAGDALENA ALPIZAR

Ramón Guadalupe Lara Cruz

I came to the Regional Center after working in primary education for seven years and, based on my experience there, I now coordinate the Rafael Ramírez Castañeda Regional Teacher Training College, having previously held the position of assistant academic director there. I believe that the work I’ve done there has been successful because I know all the staff and maintain an ongoing liaison with them regarding their work and how to provide the best possible education to the boys in our institution.

DOSSIER

WITHOUT A PASSPORT

Teacher evaluation: Aims, challenges, and some of the things we have learned from our experience in Chile

“Docentemás” is a program set up to foster professional teacher development based on performance strengths and weaknesses. Its director explains the summative and formative aims, and also the achievements of—and challenges facing—this project, which constitutes a learning opportunity for those of us facing the challenges posed by ongoing training in present-day Mexico.

YULAN SUN F.

Director of the “Docentemás” project, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile
ysun@uc.cl

Identifying the most and least effective teachers

Over the last few years, there has been a growing conviction that teaching quality is crucial to improving education. It is universally acknowledged that teachers are the most important of all the educational factors that determine teaching results, and also the most modifiable one. The following widely cited sentence from the Kinsey Report sums it up very well: “The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.” (Fig. 1) (Barber & Mourshed, 2008).

Attention has increasingly focused on the matter of how to identify the best and worst teachers, with teacher evaluation assuming a prominent role in educational research and policy, as evidenced by the proliferation of seminars, publications and research projects over the last decade, and the development of new teacher-evaluation programs both in the English-speaking countries (Especially the United States) and in Latin America (e.g. Colombia, Chile, Mexico and Peru).

The different expectations for these programs, and the varying aims assigned to them,

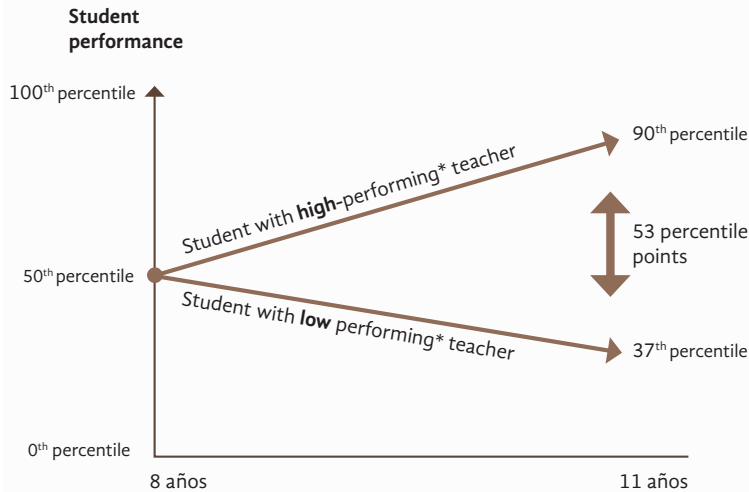
have not always been clear. For some people, teacher evaluation is basically a means of holding people responsible, a quality-assurance mechanism expected to serve as a justification for taking necessary actions that have previously been put off, such as removing teachers who totally fail to produce acceptable results—or to develop minimum competencies—from the classroom, or giving financial stimuli to those who prove to be very effective. Other people think that evaluation should be preeminently formative and improvement focused, that it should foster reflection and good teaching practices, providing feedback to teachers, teacher trainers, school principals, etc., and giving them tools and information for achieving improvement.

Each of these positions favors particular evaluation instruments: in the case adherents to the first of the above positions, standardized tests for measuring student progress, hopefully using value-added models; in the case of those favoring the second one, classroom observations and the reviewing of teaching aids and portfolios. In this regard, most people agree that it is better to use a wide range of instruments and sources, since this makes it easier to make sounder, wiser judgments (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013).

The debate about the purposes of evaluation is more complicated. It would seem difficult for the same system to adequately fulfill both summative and formative aims, and a combination of systems would seem more feasible—and is sometimes unavoidable—in the context of education systems that are still striving towards educational quality and equity. In such systems there is both a need to promote teacher training and professional development and heavy pressure to improve student results.

Furthermore, conditions don’t always permit schools to autonomously implement systems for formatively evaluating and improving their teachers and it is usually the education authorities who assume responsibility for implementing teacher-assessment systems that require a great deal of political, economic, technical and logistical support. This was the case in Chile, which, in 2002, began to implement a voluntary teacher-certification program called *Asignación de Excelencia Pedagógica* (The Pedagogic Excellency Assignment) (www.aep.mineduc.cl), which was followed up the next year by the *Sistema de Evaluación del Desempeño Profesional*

Fig. 1. Teacher quality is the most important level for improving student outcomes



Source: Barber, M. and Mourshed, M. (2008). *Cómo hicieron los sistemas educativos con mejor desempeño del mundo para alcanzar sus objetivos*, Document No. 41. Santiago de Chile: Program for the Promotion of Educational Reform in Latin America. <http://goo.gl/GxlxAM>

Docente, an obligatory national program for the evaluation of all classroom teachers in public schools, known as *Docentemás* (www.docentemas.cl).

Since its inception, the *Docentemás* program had a combination of both summative and formative aims (Avalos and Assael, 2006). On the one hand, its main stated objective was to foster professional teacher development by identifying strengths and weaknesses in performance. On the other hand, it included explicit criteria or standards – i.e. the Good-teaching Framework (Spanish: “Marco para la Buena Enseñanza”: Ministry of Education, 2004); as well as using various instruments – i.e. self-assessment, pair interviews, school principals’ reports, and a structured portfolio including written evidence and a recording of a class. At the same time, this evaluation has potentially drastic consequences, since it can result in the dismissal of teachers whose performance proves to be below standard in successive sessions, while enabling those who get good results to receive economic incentives if they pass a knowledge-based test.

Docentemás: the System for Evaluating Professional Teacher Performance

Having been in use for almost 12 years, the *Docentemás* program constitutes a learning opportunity. The law that stipulates its basic features and declares it obligatory ensures that it will continue and thus makes progressive

experience-based improvement of it possible, with the result that, within the bounds of the law, there have been interesting developments in this program with regard to the creation of instruments, the procedures used for choosing and training assessors, the reporting of results, etc.

There have been changes in the guidelines that govern the evaluation and its consequences and in the program itself, and the evidence gathered during the process has served as a basis for numerous research projects (Manzi, González & Sun, 2011). Moreover, it has led to the development of hefty research agendas covering things such as the program’s consequential validity and the technical make-up of its instruments and corrective processes (Taut & Sun, 2014). For example, the studies carried out reveal that the evaluation’s results –above all those pertaining to the portfolio– correlate with student results- and show that it has face validity among teachers, most of whom feel that it accurately reflects their teaching practices.

However, notwithstanding the aforesaid achievements, the program still faces challenges regarding its usefulness for improving teaching.

A new evaluation component that focuses on improvement

In 2011, a panel of experts convened by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

Development (OECD) carried out a study commissioned by the Chilean Ministry of Education aimed at “evaluating evaluation”. The conclusions of the report on this study cite, as its strengths, its usefulness as a normative framework for teacher performance and alignment with the latter, its combined use of instruments and source materials, its success in promoting an evaluation culture among teachers, who accept the process and are keen to receive feedback on their teaching, the important role it allows teachers to play in the process, and the inclusion of an external institution that has helped to assure its technical quality and the public’s trust in it (Santiago *et al.*, 2013).

On the other hand, the report points out that the evaluation has failed to consolidate itself as an improvement tool, with many teachers perceiving it to be more focused on accountability than on improving performance. The experts state that the program should do more to foster professional discussion about evaluation and the use of its results as a basis for drawing up development plans for all the teachers assessed, rather than just for those with unsatisfactory results, as the present guidelines stipulate. They also recommend more linkage with processes for improving schools, stressing the role of school principals.

In general terms, the study in question recommends adding a new assessment component specifically focusing on improvement, to be implemented entirely within the confines of each school based on the yardsticks of the Good-teaching Framework and leading, mainly, to the provision of feedback to –and the creation of a development plan for– each teacher. This would result in two different and hopefully synergic, evaluation systems, one for summative purposes, and the other for formative ones. This recommendation seems to indicate that the OECD panel believes that it is impossible to use a single system for both the aforesaid purposes, at least in the current context in Chile.

Following the publication of the study, several of its recommendations are now beginning to be implemented and those that are more focused on structure may be embarked on this year, in the course of which the authorities will roll out a new policy that contemplates an institutionalized Teaching Career and, most probably, a new phase in the evaluation process.

Meanwhile, the program that is currently in place cannot eschew the task of improv-

ing teaching practices and fostering teacher development, to which end new steps have been taken to bolster the system's formative effects and increase its potential for generating improvement opportunities. Indeed, it has already been doing this to some extent by helping teachers to become familiar with teaching standards and use them as a basis for reflection and analysis. Likewise, each year around 1,300 teachers are trained in pair-interviewing, and a further 600 are trained to grade portfolios. Furthermore, teachers state that preparing portfolios encourages them to reflect on them, and they also value feedback reports that do not just include their final score (which is pertinent from the summative point of view), but also describe their performance in accordance with specific yardsticks, as well commenting on their ability to design high-quality instruments for evaluating their students, or to ask the latter thought-provoking questions.

Moreover, in an endeavor to create more linkage between evaluation and school improvement, trainings for school principals have been set up, new support materials and tools have been developed—including examples of the practices observed in portfolios, which are available on the program website—along with a library of videos showing teaching practices, based on recordings of well-taught classes. Likewise, some changes have been made to the evaluation instruments, along the lines suggested in the OECD study.

The benefits of having an initial design

The Chilean experience is illustrative of all the challenges and difficulties faced by teacher evaluation and the opportunities that it engenders. Though sociocultural variations and education-system differences make it impossible to directly transfer this experience to other contexts, certain aspects of it would appear to be sufficiently universal and relevant to merit attention. Outstanding among these are: ensuring that teachers play a substantial, direct role in designing and implementing the evaluation; ensuring that it is widely disseminated in a variety of ways (training of local protagonists, websites, printed media, etc.) to ensure the informed participation of all the teachers; encouraging rigorous independent research into the evaluation and its instruments – above all concerning their validity; constantly gathering information while the system is being implemented so as to verify that is working as expected and detect unex-

pected effects and thus provide feedback for its ongoing improvement, taking into account the opinions of different people involved in the process, ranging from the teachers evaluated, to the portfolio graders, to school principals and class-recording technicians.

In particular, since teacher evaluation is highly a complex, multidimensional endeavor—involving political, technical and logistical considerations, as well as variations in the educational and professional culture of the teachers evaluated—its core definitions should be concise and clear, though it should also be open to gradual experience-based correction and constant updating, so as to ensure that it achieves its ultimate aims and does not lose touch with the overall educational context. €

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DOSSIER WITHOUT A PASSPORT

Teacher Evaluation in Spain: The contrasts of a system in flux

When evaluating would-be teachers, the Spanish authorities examine their specific knowledge about the special subject they wish to teach, their aptitude for teaching and their mastery of teaching techniques. However, the author of this article explains, the evaluation of in-service teachers is one of the issues that the education system has still to address.

MARÍA CASTRO MORERA

Director of the Department of Educational Research Methods and Diagnosis CPF-Faculty of Education: Universidad Complutense de Madrid
maria.castro@edu.ucm.es

Choosing the best candidates

Any review of teacher evaluation in Spain calls for some comments on the teaching profession in that country.

First, it should be pointed out that, in Spain, the profession of teacher "is one of those that are classified as "regulated"¹, meaning that it is one of the professions whose members' competence is governed by a guideline – i.e. by law, there is a set of functions that that can only be undertaken by a professional who holds an academic certificate or fulfills certain requirements and is officially authorized, upon passing an aptitude test, to join a profession" (González Cueto, 2007).² In this way, the Spanish authorities acknowledge that education is a basic, inalienable right and reserves unto itself the faculty of granting authorization, and establishing legal requirements, for the exercising of the teaching profession.

Hence, those wishing to be kindergarten or primary-school teachers must possess a Master's Degree in Kindergarten Education or in Primary Education – qualifications that normally require four years of study in a Spanish university.

Secondary-school teachers must be university graduates in one of the subjects contained in the secondary-school curriculum and also have passed a one-year master's-degree course in secondary-school teaching.

Once the above requirements have been complied with, the Government of Spain—which is one of the many countries that authorizes applicants to become teachers *after* they have graduated in pedagogy, choosing the best candidates— regulates entry to the teaching profession.³

The process for entering the teaching profession in Spain

Indeed, the aforementioned procedure constitutes the first evaluation of would-be teachers, since those wishing to join the teaching profession must also pass a series of demanding competitive public examinations.⁴

Would-be teachers must pass two big tests. Likewise, the first of these, which requires applicants to *demonstrate specific knowledge* in the subject that they wish to teach, comprises two parts – (a) a practical test aimed at verifying that the candidate possesses the requisite academic knowledge, and masters the technical skills, pertaining to the subject that s/he aspires to teach, and (b) a writing task on a subject chosen by the applicant from among a list of topics chosen at random by the examining board. The second part of the examination is also split into two parts, consisting in the presentation of a lesson plan and the giving of a spoken presentation about the said plan.

Clearly, the official process for entry to the teaching profession in Spain are demanding. However, as mentioned by Francisco López Rupérez (2014),⁵ the processes are surprisingly lax in the case of temporary or private-school teachers, which means that there is a double standard that is at odds with the regulatory rigor of the official government requirements described above.

Indeed, the evaluation of in-service teachers is one of the matters that the Spanish education system has still to address, for the Spanish education authorities do not systematically use evaluation as an instrument for improvement. Nobody questions that feedback should be one of the cornerstones of professional-teacher-development policy and, indeed, evaluation of teacher performance and in-service teacher development are part of the *process for the promotion of*

teachers within the profession (i.e. vertical mobility), as are entry to the said profession, to school-principal positions and to positions abroad, but there is an almost total lack of feedback within the horizontal process of teacher development.

Teachers prepared for a change in the evaluation culture

We are beginning to see significant changes, at least at the lip-service level, regarding the importance that teachers attach to evaluation. The results of the TALIS survey, with regard to Spain, indicate that new teachers attach more value to professional evaluation, and feedback based on it, than experienced ones.⁶ However, 50% of all the [Spanish] teachers surveyed in the 2008 TALIS survey said that they are never evaluated or that they never get feedback on evaluation from any source (i.e. inspectors, school principals, or the like),⁷ and Spain has the second highest score, in this regard (with Italy having the highest one) among all the countries surveyed – significantly above the average score of 13.4% for the total population of teachers who state that they are never evaluated or given feedback.

Therefore it would seem that Spanish in-service teachers are ready for a change of evaluation culture, and also that the Spanish education authorities need to respond to this fact by developing an effective and appropriate teacher- evaluation system.

Societies value education as a lever for change and improvement

Spanish society is turning the page and subjecting its teachers to closer scrutiny, while Spanish teachers, in turn, are starting to demand reliable and validated feedback on their performance. There is now a debate about who is fitted to teach and how to afford entry to this profession so crucial to our country's development. In this regard, the two political parties that currently hold the most seats in parliament have placed bills before the latter proposing legislation that is very much in keeping with the recommendations set forth in the 2007 McKinsey Report regarding high-performance education systems.⁸ Essentially, leaving aside contextual considerations, teachers should be chosen *before* they enter teacher training, ensuring that they already possess ample linguistic and arithmetic competencies, a broad mastery of the subject that they wish to teach, good communications

and people skills, a desire to learn, and the motivation to work as teachers. The main idea underlying this whole process is that of attracting the best people to the teaching profession. Indeed, the widely renowned McKinsey Report concludes: "School systems, from Seoul to Chicago, from London to New Zealand, and from Helsinki to Singapore, show that making teaching a preferred career choice depends less on high salaries or 'culture' than it does on a small set of simple but critical policy choices: developing strong processes for selecting and training teachers, paying good starting compensation, and carefully managing the status of the teaching profession. Above all, the top performing systems demonstrate that the quality of an education system depends ultimately on the quality of its teachers."

I would like to think that the mechanisms for improving and strengthening the teaching profession are as simple as the McKinsey Report suggests, since this would mean that we are dealing with a society that values education as a crucial lever for change and improvement. Certainly, attracting the best teachers is one of the ways to support and bring about this basic change in any society that wants to aspire to—and work for—a better future. €

- 1 Royal Decree No. 1665/1991 of October 25, 1991, Regulating the General System for the Recognition of Higher Education Teaching Qualifications of Member States of the European Economic Community that Require at least Three Years of Study.
- 2 González Cueto, T. (2007). *Informe: El concepto de "profesión regulada" a que se refiere el documento "La organización de las enseñanzas universitarias en España"*. Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia.
- 3 We give a detailed explanation of the official requirements, since, in Spain, the Spanish Government is, in fact, the biggest employer in the teaching sector. The "*Informe 2014 sobre el estado del sistema educativo*" issued by the Spanish Council of State for Education, asserts that around 70% of all Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary teachers work in public schools, which is why teachers are over-evaluated, beyond the official requirements.
- 4 We give a detailed explanation of the official requirements, since, in Spain, the Spanish Government is, in fact, the biggest employer in the teaching sector. The "*Informe 2014 sobre el estado del sistema*

educativo” issued by the Spanish Council of State for Education, asserts that around 70% of all Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary teachers work in public schools, which is why teachers are over-evaluated, beyond the official requirements.

- 5 López Rupérez, F. (2014). *Fortalecer la profesión docente. Un desafío crucial*. Madrid: Narcea.
- 6 OECD (2012). *The experience of new teachers. Results from TALIS 2008*. Paris: OECD.
- 7 OECD (2009). *Creating effective teaching and learning environments: First results from TALIS*. Paris: OECD.
- 8 McKinsey Report (2007). *How the world's best-performing schools come out on top*.

DOSSIER

WITHOUT A PASSPORT

Teachers and classroom gender dynamics at school in Africa: Evidences for 15 Ministries of Education

In this article, the teacher quality has been operationally defined by selected variables, which include teacher's reading score, percentage of teachers who give homework most days of week, who always correct homework, who give more tests per week, and who meet parents more per month, but furthermore, some gender teachers facts, evidences to be considered as a key policy options in many educational systems.

MIOKO SAITO

International Institute for Educational Planning, unesco-Paris
m.saito@iiep.unesco.org

Introduction: The relationship between the teacher sex and pupils' learning achievement¹

The feminization of teachers has been a world-wide phenomenon often seen at the primary level. Engagement of women within the teaching profession has been also

considered as one of the strategies for strengthening the girls' education, not only to increase access and participation, but also to overcome stereotypes especially in the domain of mathematics and science at all levels of education (UNESCO, 2003; UIS, 2010; Kelly, 2011). Yet Hungi (2010) and Zang *et al.* (2008) alerted about the persistent large gap between the proportion of female teachers and that of female school heads.

Furthermore, there have been mixed results on the relationship between the teacher sex and pupils' learning achievement. Some argue that both boys and girls perform better with female teachers probably due to the female's 'motherly' and 'caring' approach (Kelly, 2011; Zang *et al.*, 2008). Others claim the opposite due to the female teachers' anxiety toward the subject matter, especially in science and mathematics, perceived by the pupils (Beilock *et al.*, 2010), while others considered the teacher sex as not an influencing factor (Dickerson *et al.*, 2013). Some others established the 'gender role model' in which girls perform better with female teachers while boys perform better with male teachers (Dee, 2006). In terms of teachers' performance, Antecol *et al.* (2012) has found out that girls' mathematics performance was influenced by female teachers' competency in the subject, while it was not the case for other subjects. In terms of boys' performance there was no influence regardless of the level of teachers' competency, teacher sex and the subject area.

61,000 pupils and 4,000 teachers: Gender, teaching practices and learning achievement

Based on these studies, the current article aims to examine the gender differences in learning achievement in Southern and Eastern African primary schools based on the gender dynamics in classrooms and the quality of teaching practices. Especially, the

following research questions have been addressed:

- (i) What were the gender differences in reading and mathematics achievement of Grade 6 pupils according to the sex of school heads and teachers? What were the characteristics of the teachers and teaching practices in each combination?
- (ii) Do the sex of teachers and their performance matter equally for boys' and girls' achievement in reading and mathematics?

The basis for the study is the data archive of over 61 000 pupils at the Grade 6 level and about 4 000 Grade 6 teachers from some 2 000 schools in 15 Ministries of Education, who participated in the third large-scale assessment of Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) in 2007, known as SACMEQ III: Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania (Mainland), Tanzania (Zanzibar), Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.²

In this article, the teacher quality has been operationally defined by selected variables, which include teacher's reading score, percentage of teachers who give homework most days of week, who always correct reading homework, who always explain reading homework, who give one or more reading tests per week, and who meet parents once or more per month. The teacher's reading score was based on the teacher reading test that has been equated with the pupil reading test. These teacher background variables and school-level variables have been compiled for analyses to be carried out at the pupil level in the SACMEQ data archive.

It could be hypothesized that pupils' early years' experience with different teacher sex may influence the perception towards teachers as well as image of the role model, and in



turn the pupils' motivation and achievement. However, the SACMEQ data do not allow investigating this notion since the data collection involved only the teachers of Grade 6. For this reason, any revealed association in the current study may risk an overestimation.

Finally, in the current exploratory descriptive analyses, observed results were controlled for neither the school location nor the socio-economic status. Further studies would be required in order to analyse the relationships after taking out these factors.

Gender: Its impact on teaching practices and learning achievement in reading and mathematics

The first research question deals with the gender differences in pupils' learning achievement based on the sex of school heads and teachers. These are some of its results:

At national level, there was no gender differences for reading achievement in Uganda. However, the significantly high performance (531) was achieved by the group of pupils who were at schools headed by female school heads and taught by female reading teachers. Other pupil groups did not yield a high performance (only ranging from 467 to 482). In terms of the differences in achievement between boys and girls, there were systematic gender differences with boys in favour, except when the pupils were in schools headed by the male school heads and taught by female reading teachers, where achievement of girls was in favour.

The reading teachers in schools with men or woman as a school head, there were some particular characteristics. It is worth noting that the female teachers who teach at the schools headed by female school heads had the highest reading score, and highest percentages for the frequent classroom monitoring practices. Especially, the way to handle the homework (not just giving, but also correcting and explaining) for this group had a remarkably higher percentages (59 percent and 54 percent respectively compared to some 30 percent in other groups) than other groups.

It can be also seen from the research evidence that in Mozambique, the reading achievement of boys and girls were almost the same when they were taught by female reading teachers, regardless of the sex of their school heads, while the gender differ-

ences were considerably large (with boys in favour) when they were taught by male teachers.

The most remarkable result (in terms of the level and the spread) was achieved by the pupils taught by female reading teachers in schools headed by female school heads. These reading teachers were the ones who also scored the highest mean out of the four groups in Mozambique. Similarly, the gender differences in Tanzania was much larger (boys in favour) when the pupils were taught by male teachers, regardless of the sex of school heads. However, no pattern was evident from these female teachers' practices in Tanzania.

The mathematics achievement in Kenya revealed that boys and girls taught by female mathematics teachers at schools headed by female school heads tend to have more gender equal learning outcomes than other combinations. In terms of their teaching practices, the female reading teachers in schools headed by female school heads had the highest mathematics test scores, highest percentage for the frequent homework assignment and meeting parents. In Mozambique, the female mathematics teachers in schools headed by female school heads were the ones who gave mathematics homework and mathematics test most frequently, but met the parents least frequently.

Male and female teachers; boys and girls

The relationships between pupils' and teachers' test scores have been separately reviewed based on their sex. The study considered the correlation coefficient of reading and mathematics scores between boys and male teachers, boys and female teachers, girls and male teachers, and girls and female teachers.

In South Africa, for both reading and mathematics, strong positive relationships were observed for all the combinations, indicating that whatever the sex of pupils and teachers and whatever the subjects, the higher the teachers' scores, the higher the pupils' scores, and vice versa. This type of systematic result was not obtained in many of the countries.

For the reading results in Botswana, the positive relationship between pupils' reading scores and male teachers was stronger that with female teachers' scores. The slope was steeper with boys and male teachers, indicating that the each unit of increase in the male teachers' score would contribute the

most on boys' achievement. This seems to suggest that in Botswana, where around one-thirds of pupils were taught by male teachers and boys were dragging behind in reading achievement, hiring male teachers with high reading competency could be considered to be a key policy option for boys' advancement in reading.

On the other hand, for Namibia the positive relationships were stronger with female teachers for both boys and girls. This means that both boys' and girls' scores are closely associated with the female teachers' reading scores.

For the mathematics results in Zambia, the while boys' mathematics results were consistent regardless of teachers' performance of any sex. Girls' results were associated only with the female teachers' mathematics performance. Zambia's results were coherent with the conclusion by Antecol *et al.* (2012). This indicates that for girls in Zambia, for the female mathematics teachers to be the role models, they have to be competent, rather than just being present.

Anxiety and confidence toward the subject matter: Some conclusions

In this article, an attempt was made to evaluate the relationship among sex of pupils, teachers, and school heads, teachers' performance in subject knowledge, teaching practices, and pupils' achievement. While the results were not systematic in all the countries, some interesting patterns emerged in certain countries. While at the country level, most of SACMEQ countries showed girls outperforming boys in reading, and boys outperforming girls in mathematics, when aggregating by sex of school heads and teachers, it was possible to assess for each country which gender mix group would yield an improved gender equality.

It was also possible to see that certain good teaching practices might be also related to either the general good performance of pupils or the improved gender equality. Therefore, inspectors and teacher advisers may be interested in periodically monitoring these teaching practices.

In addition, it was demonstrated in certain countries that teachers' competency in subject knowledge is strongly associated with boys' or girls' achievement. This has an important implication especially for the mathematics achievement for girls in these countries.

While stereotype still exists, the meaning of the 'role model' should take into consider-

ation not only the existence of more female mathematics teachers, but also their competency level, which may lead to more confidence for teachers themselves, that could be also perceived by their pupils. It is therefore important to stress the teachers' subject knowledge training in order to overcome mathematics anxiety during the pre-service and in-service teacher training.

Furthermore, as mentioned by Saito (2011a; 2011b), there has not been much change in the pattern of gender differences since the previous SACMEQ study (Ross *et al.*, 2004; Ross & Makuwa, 2009). Therefore, it is recommended for the SACMEQ Ministries of Education to review all the gender-related interventions through detailed analyses on budget for quality improvement as opposed to parity improvement.

Finally, in order to monitor and evaluate the teacher quality, the SACMEQ model of assessing the teacher subject knowledge together with the pupils achievement could be validly applied in other international, regional, and national assessments. €

- 1 This article is based on the author's presentation during the 57th Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES), 2013. The author thanks sacmeq for granting the use of sacmeq iii data archive.
- 2 A probability proportional to school (PPS) sampling was utilized in order to draw samples of schools and pupils (Ross & Saito, in press). Tests on reading and mathematics were based on the curricula of 15 countries in Southern and Eastern Africa. The tests have been calibrated using Rasch measurement approach during the second SACMEQ study (known as SACMEQ II) in 2000 to have a SACMEQ pupil mean of 500 and standard deviation of 100. The tests during SACMEQ III in 2007 were equated to the SACMEQ II calibration, allowing the valid comparison over time (Ross *et al.*, 2004).

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DOSSIER OTHERS PERSPECTIVES

A historical overview of teacher training in Mexico

Since their creation, the rural teacher-training colleges have seemed to be survivors from bygone days, asserts Alberto Arnaut Salgado, a research fellow in the Center for Sociological Studies of the Colegio de México, who, in an interview with the *Gazette*, gives us a historical overview of this educational system that many people perceive to be the last glimmer of hope for the survival and betterment of our country's poorest groups.

Though the teacher-training colleges were set up at the end of the XIX century, it was in the XX century, as part of the post-revolutionary agenda, that they assumed the mission and functions that still characterize them today, explains Alberto Arnaut Salgado, who holds a Ph. D. in History from the Faculty of Law of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico; Spanish acronym: UNAM) and a Master's Degree in Political Science from the Center for International Studies of the Colegio de México (Spanish acronym: Colmex).

"A new teacher-training system or sub-system of federal rural teacher-training colleges, directly dependent on the federal government's Ministry of Education was added to the old teacher-training system set up at the end of the XIX century. The basic task of these institutions was to train teachers for zones where there were still no public schools and no supply of graduates from the urban state teacher-training colleges. Unlike the teacher-training colleges set up under the liberal governments of the late XIX century, these new colleges were creations of the post-revolutionary régime that was committed to modernizing the country's rural communities and incorporating them into the rest of the country, and also, in the most radical period of the said régime, to achieving the same social transformations, at the



regional and national levels, as occurred during the Russian Revolution.”

As Dr. Arnaut—who is a teacher-researcher in the Law Department of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (Autonomous Metropolitan University; Spanish acronym: UAM), in the Mexican branch of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (Spanish acronym: FLACSO), and in the Center for International Studies of the Colegio de México (Spanish acronym: Colmex)—explains, the relationship that existed between the teacher-training colleges and the State during the administration of President Lázaro Cárdenas in the mid-1930’s changed in the 1940’s when President Manuel Ávila Camacho was in power.

“In that period, when both government policies in general, and educational policies in particular, were focusing on humanistic and scientific education and the promotion of national unity, the rural teacher-training colleges became a sort of uncomfortable lingering leftover from the most radical period of the post-revolutionary régime. We’re talking about institutions that were entering a period of almost uninterrupted crisis – since they were a stone in the shoe of the educational establishment, prevailing local interests, which were generally conservative, and in that of the equally conservative state governments, as well as becoming irksome for the federal administrations that followed that of Cárdenas.”

As evidence of the distancing between the rural colleges and the State, Arnaut points out that their numbers shrank from 39 to 30 during the 1940’s, and then from 30 to 14 in the period after the 1968 student conflict.

“During this century, two more rural teacher-training colleges have been closed, leaving only 14 nation-wide – survivors from bygone days, in a country that has changed radically in the period stretching from the 1930’s to this, the second decade of the XXI century.”

He explains that in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s both the public and the private teacher-training systems underwent diversification.

“The teacher-training-college system was supplemented by other teacher-training institutions, such as the Centers for Teacher Updating (Spanish acronym: CAM’s) that were set up by the Federal Teacher Training Institute (Spanish acronym: IFCEM) in the 1940’s, the Regional Teacher Training Centers (Spanish acronym: CRENS) in the 1960’s, the Experimental Teacher Training Colleges in the 1970’s, and the Distance-teaching Units of the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (National Pedagogic University; Spanish acronym: UPN) that began to appear at the end of the 1970’s, along with a plethora of private institutions.”

He points out that one of the important changes in teacher-training dynamics concerns access to teaching positions, which became more and more difficult to find, so that graduates were no longer guaranteed a job, but had to compete for the positions available:

“All the graduates from the public and private teacher-training colleges were guaranteed a job in a federal or state-level public school. As time went by, there began to be more graduates than newly created positions. We went from a period where jobs were guaranteed to one where they were more and more difficult to find, then to one where there was more and more competition for them, then to the passing of the 2013 General Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service (Spanish acronym: LGSPD), which mandates a national system of competitive exams for applicants wishing to join the said Service. As of next year, under the LGSPD, graduates from the public teacher-training colleges will have to compete with graduates from private teacher-training colleges and from other institutions of higher education, both public and private.”

Arnaut, author of *Los maestros de educación primaria en México* (“Primary-school Teachers in Mexico”) and *La federalización educativa en México* (“Educational Federalization in Mexico”), enumerates some of the challenges that will be faced by teacher training institutions in the age of performance evaluation and teacher assessment.

“The new challenges facing the teacher-training colleges sprang up in the early 1990’s and got worse at the turn of the century. One of them is the transition from an educational policy that favored universalization – i.e. expansion accompanied by homogeneity. That change began in the 1980’s, when policy prioritized quality, relevance, equality,

respect and diversity. Furthermore, as of the beginning of the 1990’s, assessment became a strategic tool for the administration of the National Education Service (Spanish acronym: SEN) and the management of teachers. The latter were affected by the establishment—initially somewhat simplistic—of two modes of assessment, one of which was classroom assessment, for which they began to prepare their students, thus perverting the purpose of evaluation, which is to improve educational policies, curricula and practices. The other type of assessment that had an impact consisted in the establishment of competitive examinations for applicants wishing to join the National Teaching Service and the putting in place of a teacher-incentive system that was closely linked to teacher and student performance.

It was in this way that the evaluation culture was implanted among the teachers, who have now accepted that it is here to stay. However, a lot of improvement is needed if this evaluation régime is to have a more positive impact on the performance, recruiting, retention and mobility of in-service teachers. Above all, we need evaluation that enables us to choose the best teachers and improve their classroom practices in a way that would impact the performance of the SEN.”

With regard to the role of the rural teacher-training colleges in the XXI century, Arnaut remarks:

“I doubt whether any other type of teacher-training institution can produce people able to work in the adverse conditions that the graduates of the public teacher training colleges—and above all of the rural teacher-training colleges—work in. I believe that what we have to do is, on the one hand, to create better study conditions for the students in the rural teacher-training colleges, and, on the other hand, to place emphasis on their social make-up and ancestral culture.

The rural teacher-training colleges still have much to do. They came into existence in order to reduce the current social abyss and I believe that they can go on doing so in the measure that we acknowledge their special historic—and current—role as institutions that train teachers who are marked by a strong commitment to social justice and to their fellow men.” €

INTERVIEWED BY LAURA IRENE GONZÁLEZ MENDOZA

DOSSIER
OTHERS PERSPECTIVES

What have we learned from the programs for measuring teacher performance?

What has been done, and what still needs to be done, to strengthen teacher abilities? What has been learned from the policies, programs and strategies implemented, and the activities carried out, to promote teacher training? This article reviews some of the said training initiatives and mentions some of the things that were learned from them.

ROSA MARÍA TORRES HERNÁNDEZ
Teacher-researcher at the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (National Pedagogic University)
rrmth2000@gmail.com



The tension between formative and summative evaluation

Teacher evaluation has become a subject of debate and controversy in the countries of Latin America where there are millions of teachers, and where the teaching profession is held responsible for educational shortcomings and deemed to be an area characterized by both poor students and poor

Since Mexico's Educational Reform in 2013, with its creation of the Professional Teaching Service (Spanish acronym: SPD), assigns a central role to evaluation, it seems fitting that one should attempt to define the said process, which inevitably entails acknowledging its guiding principles. Indeed, teacher evaluation—as various studies have confirmed—is torn between two principles— that of summative evaluation and that of formative evaluation, the former being associated with performance and the latter with career advancement, though it does not appear that the teacher-evaluation systems favor one over the other, since they assume that they can both trigger positive changes in education.

The Professional Teaching Service is a response, in the areas of elementary and Upper Secondary Education in Mexico, to the aforementioned principles. Given the importance that is attached to evaluation and its implications, we need to reflect on some of the lessons learned over the last 20 years with regard to the formulation of policies and programs, and the planning of actions, aimed at improving teacher performance. During that period, education in Latin America was regulated via policies and programs pertaining to ongoing training, professional development, the setting up of teacher-assessment systems, and the establishment of new yardsticks for linking wages to merit.

In that period, teacher training and the improvement of teacher performance became veritable political problems that not only necessitated the study of processes, mechanisms, purposes and aims, but also required an understanding of the rationales and lines of argument that underpin improvement programs, since there has never been any long-term policy to guide initial training, define professional-development paths, and link teaching results to career advancement.

The conflict between utilitarian and reflective evaluation

The lessons learned in the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty first century concerned the need to:

- acknowledge that teacher-improvement and teacher-performance policies must create conditions that engender viability and encourage educational institutions and protagonists to unite in a sustained, long-term effort
- reconsider the lack of linkage between initial and ongoing training, which is based on an over-narrow vision of professional teacher development.

Ongoing training has mainly focused on satisfying the needs engendered by curriculum reform, on teacher support, and on improving school management, with courses and workshops being set up for the purpose of implementing plans and curricula. These mechanisms turned into privileged types of training and, perhaps unintentionally, became, in practice, merely utilitarian, when they could have served as opportunities for reflection about teaching practices and about needs and opportunities for improvement. Though subjects such as the distance-education (“Telesecundaria”) systems, interculturality or special education, it is necessary to experiment with different approaches in order to gain experience in teaching students of both sexes, and from different backgrounds, ethnic groups and social levels, and to develop culturally sensitive practices.

Both the National Program for the Ongoing Updating of In-service Elementary-level Teachers (Spanish acronym: PRONAP) and the National Ongoing-training System for In-service Teachers included things such as training, updating and professional improvement in their training, and this helped to ensure that specific courses were available for each area of endeavor. In the case of the National Ongoing-training Catalogue for Elementary-level teachers, added to the above, with the very positive inclusion of higher-education institutions in the training of Elementary-level teachers, was a wider range of training options (courses, diploma courses, specialized courses, master's-degree courses), but there was a tendency towards commodification and the offering of disjointed courses of a clearly remedial kind that did not encourage teachers to engage

in self-training or autonomously choose the type of training programs that they needed, as well as impeding the consolidation of training paths.

We now know that performance-improvement processes are also subject to commodification – a lesson that we should not forget if we are to avoid fostering a “market for entry to, and continuance in, the teaching profession, and for promotion and the awarding of incentives within it.”

The discontinuity between inside and outside

The National Program for the Ongoing Updating of In-service Elementary-level Teachers showed us how important it is to create conditions for changing educational practices by establishing different training mechanisms (a teacher-updating libraries, nationwide examinations, training programs and teachers’ centers) both inside and outside schools. It also made it clear that the changes in question are conditioned by the rules of the game that govern interaction among the protagonists (associations, organizations, unions, state authorities, etc.). Not only because negotiation forms part of all actions regarding educational policies, but also because teaching is still at the core of the Education System, interaction among the protagonists hinges around the tension between centralization and decentralization and the types of shared responsibility and public debate that the decision-making process requires.

The focus on training enabled us to reflect on the mismatch between the programs offered and actual classroom realities and teaching practices. The focus on in-school training gave rise to expectations of group work based on training paths embarked on from inside the school – i.e. by following a continuous, progressive training path.

Today, in the same spirit, work within the School Technical Committees, in-school learning led by school principals, pair work (i.e. working and thinking with other people) and supervisor support are all encouraged. However, experience tells us that there is a discontinuity between inside and outside: on the one hand, schools stress education, but on the other hand they are set up based on organizational concepts determined by other times and other contexts, be these bureaucratic, strategic or normative. Knowing where the possible meeting points are still constitutes a challenge for training and

evaluation. Perhaps an understanding of this mismatch would help us to avoid limiting the improvement of teacher performance to currently existing institutions and organizational structures.

The difference between teacher incentives and academic achievement

Despite the reforms and the political agreements with the unions, Mexico has still not managed to achieve an ongoing-training system that ensures the underpinning of high quality and equity not only by the theoretical approaches that are adopted, but also by the mechanisms whereby the different courses that teachers take in order to increase their earnings are provided. The teaching profession is illustrative of this. The earnings of its members increased and they set out to update themselves, which is no small thing, but, notwithstanding this, there is no evidence showing that they are improving their students’ academic performance.

Maybe the linkage between ongoing training and the teacher-incentive program resulted in a kind of disassociation of sensibility, which is, and will continue to be, difficult to rectify. Nevertheless, it is absolutely essential that we do so, since this phenomenon not only led teachers to attend courses and workshops, but also resulted in their losing their perception of teaching as a vocation and epistemological discipline, devoting themselves to the pursuit of incentives *per se*, and thus, in a way, yielding ground to a vision of teaching as a matter of unions and administrative procedures.

The discontinuity between initial training and ongoing training

A review of the programs, actions and protagonists in the effort to improve teacher performance in Latin America reveals weaknesses in the training process. Furthermore, there is a discontinuity between initial training and ongoing training, which faces us with the challenge of:

- conceiving of initial-teacher-training institutions (i.e. Teacher Training Colleges) as non-university centers with their own characteristics charged with training students according to their specific nature.
- making detailed recommendations for institutions whose graduates will join the teaching profession via competitive entry examinations, taking into account

the complexity inherent in building the knowledge, know-how and practices required by teachers.

- taking into account teachers’ career paths, and the contexts in which they work, when designing performance-improvement programs.

Moreover, one can see that, for several decades now, there has been a tendency to promote programs and actions which, with the best of intentions, are based on belief in a single panacea. Hence, at one time or another, management, training, curriculum changes, have all been held out as guarantees of educational quality. A review of the programs’ achievements and limitations shows that this is not the case, teaching us the valuable lesson that there is no panacea for teacher evaluation either. €

DOSSIER

OTHERS PERSPECTIVES

The challenges of ongoing training and the responses to them in Mexican primary schools

Ongoing teacher training presents big challenges that must be faced from both a broad and a specific perspective, so that the solutions come from the same protagonists and thus result in better student learning. This article presents an initial overview of this area.

MEDARDO TAPIA URIBE

Research Fellow at the Regional Center for Multidisciplinary Research of the Autonomous National University of Mexico
medardo@unam.mx

Effort and dissatisfaction: the results of a nationwide research project

The greatest challenges in the ongoing training (OT) of elementary-level teachers in Mexico have existed for many years now – so much so that they have been a longstanding part of the specialized federal authorities’

nation-wide endeavor —now perceived as urgent— to create OT courses aimed at improving educational processes and student results.

In this paper —the full version of which will be published by the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education, and was written as part of the studies produced by the General Directorate for the Gathering and Analysis of Information and the Unit for the Dissemination of Information about, and the Fostering of, an Evaluation Culture (Spanish acronym: UIFCE)— I provide a preview of some of the findings of a nation-wide research project about the OT practices of primary school principals and administrators.

Seven decades: the value that teachers attach to ongoing training

For over seven decades, the Ministry of Public Education has acknowledged that having well trained professional teachers is a prerequisite for achieving student success and improving learning processes. This long historical process has comprised several stages – an initial one in which teacher OT was conceived of as a training process (1944-1971), a further, professional-improvement, one (1971-1978), then a phase where training and professional development were combined (1978-1988), and then a phase where the focus was on the OT of In-service Teachers (1978-1988), which engendered the National In-service-teachers' System, mandated by the General Education Law in 1993 and giving way, in 1995, to the National Permanent Updating Program (Spanish acronym: PRONAP), with the later addition of the programs pertaining to In-service Elementary-level teachers¹ and the National System for the Ongoing Training and Professional Improvement of In-service Elementary-level Teachers.

Nevertheless, one of our informants/authorities believes that this long process could be divided into two major stages — one pertaining to OT prior to linkage with the institutionalized Teaching Career and another following the establishment of the latter. The incentives that formed part of the aforesaid Teaching Career became distorted by being added to processes that were becoming more and more devalued. Teachers took part merely because of the said incentives, though they attached little value to the national updating courses and workshops or to the courses offered in the Teachers' Centers in the various states.

Over time, this situation became the first big challenge to teacher OT. Both teachers and authorities are very much in agreement that teachers attach little value to these processes and that they do little to improve learning or student results.

Nevertheless, although teachers attach little value to these courses and consider them to be inadequate, they take a total of between 100 and 300 hours of them each school year. According to our informants and to teachers, administrative staff and top officials in the Ministry of Education, this has happened all over Mexico. Furthermore, teachers don't even consider the Teachers' Centers to be of any use in preparing them for the National Updating Exams for In-service Teachers (Spanish acronym: ENAMS).

Yet "The Ministry of Public Education acknowledges that elementary-school teachers continuously learn by reflecting, by solving the problems they encounter every day in the classroom, by taking about their experiences with other teachers, and by consulting specialized publications that provide them with feedback about their ideas and experiences."²

This is also widely acknowledged and attested to by elementary-level teachers and those in charge of OT training, who are the key players in the aforesaid training and professionalization processes, and in the National Updating Courses and Workshops and other courses and workshops that are held in the Teachers' Centers.

"The Teachers' Centers, which seemed to be a model way of getting near to teachers, became a sort of teachers' hideaway. Suddenly teachers no longer go to their schools, they wait for their own teachers to turn up, and, believe it or not, they go there because that's where their participation [in courses and workshops] is formally recorded – i.e. the teachers' centers are the places where the attendance certificates are handed out."³

This has been confirmed by in-service primary-school teachers, and hence, in response to the gradual devaluation, over the years, of this costly, showy OT mechanism provided by the education authorities, teachers have, alongside it, created other wonderful OT processes, with the results described below:

Another of our supervisor informants confirms this poor relationship with the

Teachers Centers (TC's): "Sad to say, but the link that we have [with teachers], and that we complain about...that is the TC's... they [the teachers] ask us for the list of the courses we're giving and they ask us for the list to get official confirmation...they want us to pass them the list...they don't want the Supervisor to sign. Because, if I sign it, I become the coordinator; [if not] it was Ongoing Training and it was the [TC] that offered it."⁴

In such conditions, it's hardly surprising to discover that only a third of all the teachers who took the National Updating Examinations for In-service Teachers over a period of almost ten years passed them, and that, in general, the things that are relevant for their day-to-day teaching are not evaluated.

A survey answered by the same teachers who took their examinations during the 2004-2005 school year found that only 16% [of all teachers] used the TC's to prepare for their exams and that they didn't attend any institution in order to do their OT, although half of them would like the TC's and the Teacher Updating Centers to offer them OT alternatives.

These processes have proved to have very low levels of correlation with improvements in learning and the results thereof. The authorities themselves have acknowledged this in their evaluations of OT in teachers, administrative staff and Technical Pedagogic Advisers (TPA's): the program has ascertained that the main problem that needs to be solved is that there are "teachers, administrative staff and TPA's Pedagogic Advisers who cannot do their jobs properly because they lack the necessary theoretical and methodological knowledge."⁵

This is also attested to in the evaluations carried out in the various states, and, for example, in the document entitled *Actualización de maestros: diez años de experiencia* ("Teacher Updating: Ten Years of Experience"),⁶ in which there is a self-evaluation of the performance of the National Program for the Permanent Updating of In-service Elementary-level Teachers over the ten-year period from 1995 to 2005 before it morphed into the National Ongoing Training and Professional Improvement System.

One of the reasons for the above that is repeatedly mentioned by both teachers and authorities is the fact that teachers who were working as TPA's had not been offered the necessary conditions or training to do that job:

“This situation resulted in big group of over 20,000 people who left the classroom, or were temporarily assigned to non-classroom positions, to do a wide range of jobs that had nothing to do with the original idea of providing pedagogic support. Suddenly you had all these people assigned as TPA’s or whatever working as supervisors, serving on technical boards at the different school levels. The Ministry had structures all over the place with scattered armies of people who might or might not be doing technical jobs. The conclusion is that the technical-pedagogic consultancy system that we’ve been gradually implementing in our country is not a body of advisers that we can, or should, deploy in the coming years.”⁷

Often TPA’s had been assigned for political, rather than academic, reasons. This happened in many of our country’s schools and states.

“I’ve just heard about a state where what they tell me is.... Look, there was a group of people in the union that seized control of the chapter and of the education system; what they did was to appoint department bosses all over the place, appoint supervisors, TPA’s; so just look how a structure based on the idea of providing support for more specific, highly important, things degenerated into a [politically distorted] situation.”⁸

Self-training and extra-ordinary supervisor

The parallel practices that teacher created over the years in response to the aforesaid challenge were proposed [to the teachers] by the same people who had served as TPA’s at some time and were working in state OT entities or Teachers’ Centers and, after working for 20 or 30 years, are now Sector Heads.

These extra-ordinary supervisors have set out to create a big team of advisors in each school-supervision zone to tackle specific learning problems:

A growth process based on team work was set in motion in response to “teachers’ needs...above all to their urgent need to have an impact on their pupils”. The results of this type of training were clearly reflected in improved student performance: “You could see the difference, the

progress. It was very notable... event the school got recognized, because the progress was evident, the progress from one school cycle to the next...we didn’t do it to get points in order to be promoted or obtain pay increases or certificates; it was a commitment as teachers to improve our students’ results.”⁹

However, one TPA pointed out that this kind of training takes a long time: “I had to take a training in technical-pedagogical consultancy that took a lot of years and I even ended up giving advice to administrative staff and teachers; if I hadn’t had all that academic training first, it would have very hard for me to do that job.”¹⁰

Our teacher informants from other parts of Mexico told us that it was a matter of creating groups of teacher-development coordinators, though they also had to strive to acquire the knowledge that they needed to be advisors in group discussions led by their principal:

“That year we received OT training in School Management...in August, a week before school entered. The teacher took all the courses, but it was school Management... School Management 1, 2 y 3 although it was the Improvement Path that year – improvement of [student] learning, educational backwardness and two other courses. They were supposed to train the TPA’s, and they did, but in reality, in our case, it was our school principal who trained us. He’s always encouraged us to work as a team. I don’t think the courses are so efficient, because they [only] teach us two strategies... We always take the courses as a part of the Teaching Career system, but really they’re not designed to help us to perform better in the classroom.”¹¹

In the teachers’ opinion, OT “isn’t just given by the teacher, but also by the member of the administrative staff who knows about the topic, or by the supervisor or inspector who should know about the subject. That’s ongoing training. The key elements are the administrative staff and their continuance in their posts.”¹²

In some other cases the Teachers’ Centers have played a part in facing this challenge by involving advisors and TPA’s in their zones:

“When you went to ask for a workshop, saying ‘Listen, I need a course for my school!’, they’d tell you to go straight to the Teacher’s Center, saying ‘No, teacher, there are TPA’s in your zone. Why did you come here to ask for it?’ ‘But you’re also here for that?’ you’d answer. What was the point in having a team that actually didn’t know what its job was; they didn’t give courses...they didn’t give trainings... they didn’t give guidance, so I’d go back to my zone and design the workshop together with the teachers and advisors there.”¹³

Harmonizing national and state priorities

One of our country’s longstanding problems is that OT has always been available, despite the wide-ranging catalogue of courses and the alleged “freedom to choose” of teachers, schools, supervisors and even state-level ongoing-training coordinators. Though the national course catalogue is a recent creation of OT policy, the harmonization between this external aspect and the internal processes has been carried out collaterally by the teachers, school principals, administrative staff, supervisors and middle managers charged with administering OT and learning improvement:

“Teacher training has two components, one having to do with the internal aspect and the other with the external one – with what comes from outside the school. The law says that the two have to be connected, and hence you can’t develop the external aspect without taking into account what is being produced internally; this is crucial and leads you to a very concrete conclusion: you cannot just have a homogeneous series of courses at the national level.”¹⁴

Besides this essential harmonization between internal efforts and the external range of OT courses, there must also be harmonization with the national and state-level guidelines that will be established in the form of profiles, parameters and professional standards for teachers, school principals, TPA’s, supervisors and management staff. As one of our expert informants states: “The guidelines have to establish the criteria for the national range of available courses in accordance with the needs of the schools and the teachers and in such a way, so to speak, that they make it

possible to achieve this linkage between national and local priorities.”¹⁵

This analysis leads us to a final problem facing OT and the improvement of learning – i.e. the evaluation of teachers, school principals, schools, and middle-level technical managers (i.e. the supervisors and other managerial staff who administer the OT process).

Evaluation is necessary

We may be surprised by the opinions of in-service primary-school teachers, who say that they need to be evaluated in order to find out their training needs, since the latter mirror the needs of their pupils. However, the teachers do not agree that the evaluations pertaining to the National Career system or to the National Updating Examinations provided the diagnosis due to the way in which they were designed and because they were not even informed about their results in them.

The teachers, school principals and supervisors whom we consulted for our research suggest various solutions to the aforesaid problems – i.e. a diagnostic evaluation produced *in situ* in each school by themselves working as a team, at the primary-education-supervisor and sector-head level, at all the administrative levels of the OT system. Thus the OT needs and processes not only of teachers, but also of supervisors and TPA's, have been identified for the purpose of training and professionalizing them in accordance with a profile, as has already occurred.

Subsequently, the teachers—who have designed workshops and catalogues and created some standards and profiles pertaining to the management of ongoing training and state-level improvement processes— suggest another *in situ* follow-up evaluation, which they assert has produced good results, for each school, supervision zone and state. We are aware that this matter is presently being reviewed by the experts/authorities charged with administering evaluation and OT in Mexico, for the purpose of implementing the said outlines mandated in the General Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service, the name of which, indeed, seems, to me, unsuitable from a strategic point of view:

“In my view, with regard to the regularization programs mentioned in the regularization law,” asserts our expert informant, “if we work hard, what we'll get is

a synoptic overview of the internal effort that results in professional learning, but associated with improved practices.”¹⁶

Conclusion: a path built by all of us

Our expert informants/authorities acknowledge how complex these evaluations are, but they might agree that the response to this challenge on the part of the teachers, school principals, schools and extra-ordinary administrative staff interviewed for our research is valid and would have to be harmonized with the national evaluation of the profiles and standards that they propose. On the path that we are all building, the aforesaid *in situ* team-based OT processes that they have called “internal”, which were approved by state-level authorities many years ago—and, curiously coincide with a recently formulated educational policy that greatly resembles them and is very pertinent: i.e. that of the teacher-improvement path— would have to be certified if they are to receive support.

Our informant affirms that the now devalued obligatory national courses that were previously given at the start of the school year have been replaced by the Technical Committees formed by secondary-level teachers that are referred to in the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) of secondary-school teachers that was carried out by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. However, the exceptional primary-school teachers interviewed for our research had already done the same thing, achieving excellent improvements in learning. €

- 1 Del Castillo, G., Azuma A. and De los Heros, M. (2008). *Evaluación externa 2007. Informe Final. Programa Nacional para la Actualización Permanente de Maestros de Educación Básica en Servicio (Pronap)*. Mexico: FLACSO.
- 2 Secretaría de Educación Pública, Sistema Educativo Estatal Baja California, Dirección General de Formación Continua, Programa Nacional de Actualización Permanente. (2006). *PRONAP 10 Años. Actualización Permanente. Baja California. Actualización de Maestros: 10 Años de experiencia*. Mexico: SEP, p. 65.
- 3 Expert informant/Education authority, p. 6.
- 4 Research-project supervisor 38 and 72: Tapia, M. (2014). *La identificación de modelos de formación continua de maestros en servicio, de educación primaria y de criterios e indicadores para su evaluación*. Mexico, pp. 68-69.
- 5 *Ibidem*, p. 5.
- 6 PRONAP. (2006). *Informes oficiales de los estados. Actualización de Maestros: 10 años de experi-*

encia. Documentación del Programa Nacional para la Actualización Permanente de los Maestros de Educación Básica en Servicio. Versión preliminar. Mexico, SEP. <http://www.fundacioncepp.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/La-formaci%C3%B3n-de-los-maestros-mexicanos-en-clave-PRONAP-Silvia-Finocchio.pdf>

7 Informant/Authority, p. 1.

8 *Ibidem*.

9 From the research project *La identificación de modelos de formación continua de maestros en servicio, de educación primaria y de criterios e indicadores para su evaluación*. Tapia, M. (2014), Mexico, p. 53.

10 I5 Director and ATP, Tijuana Focus Group,

11 From the research Project *La identificación de modelos de formación continua de maestros en servicio, de educación primaria y de criterios e indicadores para su evaluación*. Tapia, M. (2014), Mexico, p. 97.

12 I4 M, Tijuana .Focus Group

13 Supervisor 38 and 72, *op. cit.*

14 Informant/National authority, p. 1.

15 *Ibidem*.

16 Informant/National authority, pp. 2-3.



The great challenge is for all our students to learn to work with knowledge

What are the challenges in elementary and ongoing education? How can we evaluate the work and performance of teachers in order to help foster more equality in our country's education and help it to develop? This article talks about paths, challenges and actions with a view to making progress both in schools and in society based on an analysis of teacher performance in one of the areas of education that has been least explored – i.e. upper-secondary education.

JUAN FIDEL ZORRILLA A.
Faculty member of the Autonomous National University of Mexico
fpertinente@yahoo.com.mx

Upper Secondary Education (USE), as compared with other types of education, is well known as being the area least addressed in the Mexican literature. This becomes clear, for example, if one examines the specialized journals published over the last 20 years, such as *Perfiles Educativos*, published by the Institute for Research into the University and Education of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (Spanish acronyms: IISUE-UNAM) and the *Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa* y *Revista de la Educación Superior*, among others. An examination of the aforesaid publications reveals that between 96% and 97% of the articles in them deal with elementary or higher education – proof that USE is looked down even by researchers, as well as having been passed over in the increases in public spending that have occurred over the past 30-35 years.

Interdisciplinary teaching and the necessary conditions for it

In the face of the paucity of research about USE, one must stress the need for work to be done in this area in order to have more solid foundations for making all manner of recommendations and suggestions.

It bears pointing out that, during the time that this neglect and inequity has prevailed, the number of students in USE has increased from just over 2 million in 1990 to around 5 million at the time of writing this, with a significant part of the population in question being between 15 and 19 years old. However, though national and institutional policies have endeavored to achieve the ongoing growth of available education, little progress has been made in efforts to raise quality. The results in reading, mathematics and science, in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), are among the worst ones obtained by any of the member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

We are faced with the task of taking sensible and efficient action in the face of the dire ongoing decline in the education offered by our schools. Experience tells us not to trust the aims overtly pursued in the subject curricula and study plans. While current efforts to observe and systemize teachers' knowledge do not extend beyond the identification of student and teacher practices and their characteristics and results, we also need to ascertain whether the teaching thus analyzed really enables students to work intelligently with knowledge, both in general and in the sciences, language, and applied mathematics in particular. Indeed, the subjects in the curriculum don't just serve as a propaedeutic mechanism for crossing the threshold to higher studies, but also constitute an overall training aimed at equipping students with life and job skills and enabling them to take charge of their own learning and to handle higher studies.

So as to achieve this much desired result, we need to focus, as a society, on the processes for achieving the aforesaid comprehensive training and making sure that all our students get it. In order to do this, we need to realign teaching so that it becomes less fragmented and subject-based and more holistic and comprehensive. An interdisciplinary approach is a prerequisite for working in the classroom on reading and argumentative writing, on the appropriate areas of applied

mathematics for each subject, and on the interdisciplinary application of knowledge about various subjects —above all scientific ones— for the purpose of solving epistemic, technical, practical and political problems. However, it should be pointed out that these aims are not going to be achieved by expanding and complicating the national and state-level systems of guidelines, but, rather, via courses and programs aimed at promoting and facilitating such interdisciplinary work at the local level. Wanting students to develop abilities is not the same as reifying educational progress as a type of bureaucratically conceived enforcement of standards that takes little stock of people. Doing this —above all, leaving a gap between the norms and the means, support and flexibility that are necessary for their local implementation— tends to produce serious imbalances that lead to increasingly vicious circles.

Hence, one needs to consider certain inherent problems. On the one hand, more resources, programs, mechanisms and stimuli are needed for preparing teachers. I deliberately use the word “prepare” to cover all the types of support that is needed – i.e. training, updating and other types of formal and informal input that serve to enrich the available teaching resources. The aim is to achieve teaching that more effectively elicits intelligent student output. We need to improve the image of teachers, paying them extra hours so that they can engage in interdisciplinary activities with their fellow teachers and their students.

The USE teacher in his/her different types of environment

One way to achieve the aforesaid is to stop seeing some of the new functions that have appeared on the USE teaching horizon over the last 20 years as opportunities for creating new jobs. Rather than just creating assessment and tutoring posts, we would do well to consider paying extra hours to subject teachers, on condition that they first receive training in institutional procedures — something that is pertinent now that there is a greater awareness of the role that schools need to play in training citizens, whose informed, rational participation —when made known to the community and underpinned by technical, scientific and humanistic knowledge— can greatly help to overcome national crises that threaten the physical integrity and legal and political rights both of people and of

their possessions. Neglect of this duty to the nation has serious consequences for social coexistence and manifests itself in sundry difficulties in the areas of communication, accountability and free speech, and even in the administration of justice and the analysis of national problems and possible courses of action – consequences that seriously affect everybody, but above all our country's most disadvantaged groups.

Indeed, my second question has to do with the abovementioned issues and with the matter of education for disadvantaged groups: how do teachers in rural areas, multi-level schools and indigenous zones, and teachers of students with different abilities, manage to do their jobs?

Upper Secondary Distance Education (USDE), the “Telebachillerato” distance-education system, and the intercultural secondary-education system are three different modalities that have started to affect the availability of education in rural zones, though, unfortunately, the aforesaid intercultural secondary-education system, set up by the Ministry of Education's Department for the General Coordination of Intercultural and Bilingual Education, has had a limited impact, since only a few of our country's schools have adopted this system.

The USDE has had a bigger impact in rural zones, usually being administered by the State Preparatory School (Spanish: Colegio de Bachilleres) or the State Preparatory School for Scientific and Technological Studies (Spanish acronym: CECTE). Usually it takes the form of a center with two teachers and a coordinator, and though the latter can teach, and is often willing to teach, it's difficult for him/her to do so due to the red tape he has to comply with in the state capital, so that, in practice, all the teaching is done by the two teachers.

Clearly there's an urgent need to review the organization, its workings, and the curricula it designs in such circumstances. It's pointless to pretend that the subjects that are meant to be taught in urban preparatory schools, which are clearly organized into subject areas assigned to teachers with the type of training that is overwhelmingly prevalent in higher education, can be taught in these centers.

For its part, the “Telebachillerato” is essentially a system that operates at the state level, and has been in place longer than the other two systems, especially in states such

as Veracruz. However, it would appear that the said system has devoted itself to offering a cheaper version of preparatory-school education, since it has campuses with hundreds of students, which, in many ways, could justifiably be turned into institutions with classroom-taught courses.

Before defining and precisely specifying how the aforesaid three modalities should operate, we need to be familiar with their different circumstances, *modi operandi*, practices and results.

Professional and training prospects in today's Mexico

My third question is: what are the professional and training prospects for teachers in the current political context? The last 25 to 30 years have seen enormous growth in the field of education, resulting in a need for people to do research in that area and to develop, monitor, evaluate, adapt and, in some cases, implement the reforms that are needed so that students may not only learn definitions, procedures and algorithms, but also work with this knowledge. This proliferation has engendered teacher-development paths pertaining to following areas that are clearly not included in the bachelor's-degree training courses that teachers have traditionally taken:

1. The use of teachers' knowledge and skills to organize, evaluate, and talk and write about education.
2. The organization of teaching environments in order to ensure that students develop as expected, and that teachers learn to communicate and cooperate with their colleagues for the purpose of improving the classroom environment
3. The preparation and organization of activities whereby students can express their knowledge about course contents, give spoken presentations, interpret written and spoken texts, write, and learn how language functions
4. The provision of support so that teachers can acquire or consolidate knowledge that extends beyond their subject area about: *i*) pupils and teachers *ii*) fair, equitable teaching environments *iii*) curriculum design and course planning *iv*) evaluation, and *v*) how to reflect about teaching.

However, the bachelor's-degree courses in the teaching of sciences and humanities offered by the higher-education institutions that normally produce upper-secondary-level teachers are very limited and are nowhere near being enriched or inspired by the progress made by other countries in the areas listed above.


Supports for the design of educational policies

Finally comes the question of how evaluation can underpin the design of educational policies that respond to the challenges of teaching. Firstly, evaluation is relevant for the design of policies only insofar as it offers realistic supports for achieving aims and procuring means.

There is an outstanding need to review and update the available teacher education in the areas of training, updating, and so on, which implies a big increase in the above forms of training for classroom teachers, and likewise, there is a real need to enhance the status of subject teachers by paying them extra hours to engage in interdisciplinary tasks and student follow-up.

Facing and overcoming these challenges implies overcoming resistance on the part of discipline-based approaches based on dense subject study programs and a narrowly propaedeutic focus. Going beyond the core disciplines of the preparatory-level curricula, these approaches will, so to speak, “discipline” a large part of the innovatory endeavors by turning sensible training processes into obligatory study subjects. Along these lines, there are public subsystems that have made tutoring a compulsory subject – a subject that thousands of students fail, thus having to pay for a resit of the examination. The same thing happens with sport and art. Such policies defeat their own essential purposes and result, instead, in shifty, deceitful practices or in sham and corruption. In short, we face the great challenge of finding ways for all our students to learn to work with knowledge. €





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