

Advances and Challenges In Teacher Evaluation in Mexico

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BRIEF HISTORY

The first formal experiences of teacher evaluation in Mexico came out of the National Teaching Career Program (PNCM), created in 1992 to evaluate, among other things, professional preparation. The program did this with an exam that was widely used for 20 years, and the results determined teachers' bonuses.

In 2006, the National Examinations of Academic Achievement in Learning Centers (Enlace) were established; these

were given each year to students from third to sixth grades. The test results were correlated to teaching performance and PNCM economic stimuli. That correlation introduced a perverse incentive: teachers who wanted bonuses concentrated their efforts on preparing the students for the test, ignoring the established curriculum; prevented low-performing students from taking the tests; and manipulated students' responses. This contributed to eroding Enlace test results' credibility.

In 2010, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported on the need to implement a rigorous system of teacher evaluation based on useful, applicable standards that would define good teaching in Mexico. It also called for designing a support system to that end. For this reason, in 2011, the Mexican government took three actions that put teachers at the center of the evaluation: the

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general PNCM guidelines were adjusted; a universal exam was established to develop a comprehensive diagnostic analysis of teachers’ professional competencies; and the Program of Stimuli for Quality Teaching was created to reward and encourage those rated among the top teachers and whose students advanced significantly.¹

The rigorous PNCM analysis showed that, “from a statistical point of view, salary incentives associated with hiring or promotion show little or no impact on student learning.”² It also noted that the instruments used to gauge student performance and teachers’ professional training were limited in design and implementation.

The universal evaluation sparked complaints from teachers, which is why the powerful National Educational Workers Union (SNTE), with its over one and a half million members, decided to reject the test being given in 2012 and created different controversies. This meant that by June of that year, only nearly 370 000 PNCM-registered public school teachers had taken the test. The rest of the teachers ended up taking the test voluntarily, with the result that only 30 percent of the 260 000 registered primary school teachers took the professional training test.

THE 2013 EDUCATIONAL REFORM

The new federal administration launched the legislative process that concluded with amendments to Articles 3 and 73 of the Constitution in February 2013. Backed by the main political parties in the framework of the Pact for Mexico, as well as by a broad consensus in society, these amendments gave constitutional autonomy to the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE); created the Professional Teaching Service; universalized obligatory evaluation; and established competitions as the only basis for being hired or promoted. The last point *de facto* hit at the heart of the SNTE’s main source of power: control over hiring.

It was no surprise that, in contrast with past experiences, this reform was not the product of a political agreement with

the national SNTE leadership. Quite to the contrary: to move ahead, it was necessary to neutralize the union’s veto power by removing the head of its national leadership. In fact, the reform was publically touted as an effort by the state to recover its control over educational policy, which had been seriously eroded by the alliance between the SNTE and the federal National Action Party administrations between 2000 and 2012.

The 2013 reform was not strictly speaking “educational”; but neither was it merely an administrative adjustment: it changed the terms of the political pact with the union and modified the relationship of forces. This is no small matter, although its real merit will only be possible to measure in light of what it can achieve in terms of:

- a) more solid diagnostic analyses of the state of education based on objective, independent evaluations from a perspective of rights;
- b) the recovery of teaching as a valued profession in society and significant improvements in processes of training, ongoing training, and tutoring for teachers;
- c) the effective establishment of merit as the sole criterion for hiring and promotion in educational services, eliminating corruption and the patronage system;
- d) a significant decrease in educational inequality, expressed on every level, such as infrastructure and equipping according to the kind of school, the quality in the education offered, and, of course, in terms of opportunities and results; and
- e) sustained improvement in all students’ academic performance, regardless of their ethnic origin, socio-economic condition, or other variables.

TEACHER EVALUATION: TRAITS, ADVANCES, AND CHALLENGES

The Professional Teachers Service (SPD) created by the reform stipulates that teachers will be hired and promoted to supervisory positions through a competitive selection process that guarantees that each candidate will have “the ideal knowledge and skills” for each post; also, honors, incentives, and job security will be subject to mandatory evaluation. This has all been regulated in the new General Law on Professional Teaching Service (LGSPD).

One of the aspects of this law that has divided public opinion is the stipulation that teachers who do not pass the

test after three attempts will be suspended from educational service.³ This is the reform's most controversial point since some people have interpreted it as affecting teachers' labor rights, while others think it is indispensable for ensuring quality teaching.⁴

A MERIT-BASED SYSTEM

Today, the SPD decides how teachers move ahead in their careers, and the evaluation system comes under the aegis of the constitutionally autonomous INEE as well as both federal and state educational authorities. The system has been perfected in order to use the evaluation to ensure that every teacher who needs to improve his/her work and students' performance can do so.

Before 2013, the purpose of the evaluation was mainly to create incentives for teachers to improve the quality of education. The rules the SPD is establishing now for hiring, promotion, continuing in their positions, and recognition make merit and capability central and also attempt to reverse the loss of control of the process by federal educational authorities.

We should reiterate that, before 2013, to be hired or promoted, teachers and other education officials depended on the possibility of inheriting or purchasing a post, being promoted by friends, or because of their links to the union leadership; all these practices conferred enormous power on the SNTE, whose control extended to the very nerve-center of the Ministry of Public Education (SEP). The challenge is to cut out any kind of practices in granting positions, promotions, etc., in ways other than the competitive selection process and evaluations.

LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IN EVALUATION PROCESSES

The INEE maintains that the 2015 competitive selection processes and tests were carried out in an atmosphere of social stability and achieved significant legitimacy among those evaluated. There were 360 359 participants, including primary, middle-school, and high school teachers who applied for jobs or promotions, as well as those who were tested so they could remain in their jobs.⁵ However, in several states, the atmosphere surrounding the tests was tense due to the

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demonstrations against them and the intimidation suffered by participating teachers on the part of groups opposed to the educational reform.⁶ This led to test venues being changed at the last minute and the deployment of strong police detachments for security. The states with the most adverse conditions were Michoacán, Guerrero, Chiapas, and Oaxaca, where educational authorities to set new test dates.

This makes it all the more necessary to improve coordination, planning, and logistics among local educational authorities, decentralized bodies, the SEP on a federal level, and the INEE. Also, given the operational problems such as mistakes in notifying those who should take the test, it is important to be sure that stakeholders are informed in a timely manner about the different stages of the process so that they have the conditions and time they need. In addition, it will be necessary to review the digital application platform and the facilities in the test venues in order to ensure the appropriate human, technological, physical, and infrastructure resources be available to guarantee participation in equal conditions. No less important is safeguarding participants' security. But perhaps the greatest challenge is to foster a new culture of evaluation among educators, which would in turn give rise to teachers' greater, more decided participation.

EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

In 2014, the tests for basic education were printed. This implied a delicate security protocol for their printing and an important outlay of human and financial resources for their transportation and storage. During the testing itself, different problems arose, such as the test books having been printed on red background, making the questions difficult to read. In some cases, the answer sheets did not correspond to the notebooks; personalized materials were given to people who should not have received them; and some participants had to share a single test book. For all these reasons, it was decided that the tests should be given on line in order to guarantee better security and more efficient reporting of test results.⁷

A comprehensive evaluation must be capable of linking the test results with teachers' training, their performance in the classroom, the curriculum, and student performance test results among other issues.

When complaints are made about mistakes or ambiguities in some of the questions on the different tests, a thorough review of the instruments' quality and contents, the technical aspects of their construction and make-up, as well as the mechanisms for applying them is required. The aim of this is to move toward a comprehensive, fair, technically trustworthy evaluation of what each test subject knows considering the complexity of the circumstances in which they teach.

EVALUATION RESULTS

The first results were announced in February 2016; each person could go on line and use his or her personal password to find out his/her result. It is fundamental that they be delivered in an appropriate format, with contextualized information and the analytical and interpretational tools needed to understand them, and that they provide the guidance that will allow teachers to see their strengths and where they should improve.

It is also to be expected that the added information will give educational authorities elements for designing training and professional follow-up programs that will differ greatly from the old ongoing training. The latter were mass-based and formalist because they were related more to getting monetary bonuses than to reviewing teaching practices; also, they had no impact on improving education whatsoever.

Controversy has also arisen around the issue of disseminating the general results of the performance evaluation, with some people invoking the right to protection of their personal data. For this reason, educational authorities have limited themselves to providing aggregate data (how many people took the tests, how many did not, what proportion of test subjects came from each of the different educational levels and performance groups, etc.). However, civil society organizations, notably the group called Mexicans First, under the banner of accountability, have asked for each person's test results to be published. Although at first glance this seems

reasonable, it does not seem to contribute to strengthening an evaluation that has been conceived of essentially as a learning exercise (for improving education) and only secondly as a tool for taking specific action (positive action, such as promotions and incentives, or negative action, such as reassigning teachers or removing them from their posts).

An important number of complaints have appeared in the media and social networks alleging that several of those who took the tests, obtained *suitable* results, and were placed on pre-selected lists have not been hired. This may be due to the fact that hiring does not depend on the test results alone, but also on the needs for personnel at different levels, kinds of work, and workplaces in primary, middle-school, and high-school education, as well as to the nature of the openings, whether permanent or temporary. Nevertheless, it may also be due to the persistence of the old patronage-based practices by officials and union members who are trying to perpetuate their power.

The fundamental challenge for educational authorities, upon which their own legitimacy largely depends, is to ensure that opening the competition process for new hires, the allocation of posts, and assignation of contracts be transparent and unequivocally linked to the results. This implies the need to publish notice of all newly created jobs and the permanent and temporary vacancies that occur every school year, both on a federal and state level, assigning new teachers to the places where they are most required, strictly following the pre-selected lists.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHALLENGES: A COMPREHENSIVE, FORMATIVE EVALUATION

The ultimate aim of achieving quality education depends not only on evaluating teachers, their training, and their performance, but on a series of very diverse factors. For that reason, it is necessary to advance toward a comprehensive evaluation capable of linking in a non-linear way the test results with teachers' training, with their performance in the classroom, with the curriculum, with the conditions in which teaching and learning take place, with educational policies and programs, and with student performance test results. This is the only way will we have diagnostic analyses capable of having an impact on the design of new educational policies oriented to making all children's and young people's right to a quality education a reality. ■■■

FURTHER READING

- INEE, "Informe de supervisión y observación de los procesos de evaluación del Servicio Profesional Docente" (Mexico City: INEE, 2015), https://acrofobos.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/informe_de_supervisi3b3n_10abril2015.pdf.
- Ramírez, Raymundo, comp., *La reforma constitucional en materia educativa: alcances y desafíos* (Mexico City: Instituto Belisario Domínguez-Senado de la República, 2013).
- SEP and SNTE, "Lineamientos generales de Carrera Magisterial," Mexico City, 1998, http://www.alianzacivica.org.mx/guia_transparencia/files/pdf/educacion/14_lineamientosobrecarreramagisterial/lineamientos_carrera_magisterial.pdf.

NOTES

- ¹ See "Programa Nacional de Carrera Magisterial. Lineamientos generales," Mexico City, SEP/SNTE, 2011, http://www.sep.gob.mx/work/models/sep1/Resource/2241/1/images/LINEAMIENTOS_GENERALES_2011.pdf; and "Acuerdo para la Evaluación Universal de Docentes y Directivos en Servicio en Educación Básica," Mexico City, SEP/SNTE, 2011, <http://www.evaluacionuniversal.sep.gob.mx/acuerdo.pdf>; and "Programa de Estímulos a la Calidad Docente," Mexico City, SEP/SNTE, 2011, http://estimulosaianza.sep.gob.mx/docs/Lineamientos_Estimulos_Calidad_Docente.pdf.
- ² Lucrecia Santibáñez, José-Felipe Martínez, Ashlesha Datar, Patrick J. McEwan, Claude Messan-Setodji, and Ricardo Basurto-Dávila, *Haciendo camino. Análisis del sistema de evaluación y del impacto del programa de estí-*

mulos docentes Carrera magisterial en México (Santa Monica, California: Rand, 2006), p. 116.

- ³ It is also one of the most misunderstood stipulations: the only teachers who will be separated from service are those who do not pass the test and entered service after the 2013 constitutional and legal reform was passed. For those who were already employed and who do not pass the test after three attempts, the option will be their relocation within the system in non-teaching occupations. In addition, according to the new legal stipulations, those who have been notified and have not taken any of the tests that are part of the evaluation will also be separated from service without legal responsibility on the part of educational authorities. A little over 3 000 teachers have already been fired for this reason.
- ⁴ It should be pointed out that the Supreme Court has already ruled that the General Law on Professional Teaching Service is constitutional and does not negatively affect labor rights.
- ⁵ INEE, "Presenta el INEE balance sobre las evaluaciones docentes aplicadas en 2015," Press Release 41, http://www.inee.edu.mx/images/stories/2015/calendario_2015/Comunicado41.pdf, p. 2.
- ⁶ Although the educational reform significantly reduced the SNTE's power, its new leadership opted to support it and not confront the federal government, which was only possible after its top leader, Elba Esther Gordillo, was jailed in February 2013. In contrast, the National Coordinator of Educational Workers (CNTE), a strong teachers' union current mainly based in the states of Michoacán, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Chiapas, the historic opposition to the official leadership, strongly rejected the reform. To show that opposition, it has resorted to different tactics, including the boycott of testing.
- ⁷ The tests for indigenous primary and pre-school teachers continue to be printed since, to be able to evaluate their command of the written language, it would be necessary for the computer keyboards to have enough symbols to be able to write in the whole gamut of the indigenous languages' alphabets.