

The National System for the Evaluation of Education (SNEE): paths to high-quality education

From the Institute

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Latin American panorama

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Some thoughts from outside

Jeaniene Spink (Australia)
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Experiences in the different states

Sinaloa
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A tour of evaluation

Roberto Rodríguez
Otto Granados
Bonifacio Barba
Rodolfo Ramírez
Ana María Aceves
Gretta Hernández

3th.
anniversary

With translations into the Puebla-Popoloca, Chiapas-Tojolabal and Oaxaca-coast-Mixtec languages





The logbook

National Educational Evaluation Policy Gazette in Mexico

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The purpose of evaluation is improvement: our roadmap

THE MEMBERS OF THE INEE'S BOARD OF GOVERNORS

When deciding on the subject matter for this ninth edition of the Gazette of the National Policy for the Evaluation of Education in Mexico, reflecting on the fact that we have spent three years discussing topics that we have considered important for decision-making, we concluded that we should now take look at the strategies that the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: INEE) has designed within the context of its new empowerment to coordinate the National System for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: SNEE).

In this regard, this third-anniversary edition of the Gazette reveals the progress achieved, the challenges faced, and the paths mapped out, in the endeavor to make high-quality education a reality for more Mexican children and youths.

The ground covered by the INEE so far

The Institute was created on the 8th of August, 2002, for the purpose of providing the education authorities with suitable tools for evaluating the different aspects of their education systems. It operated as a decentralized body of the Ministry of Public Education until May of 2012, thereafter functioning as a decentralized non-sectorial entity until its strategic conversion, in 2013, into a self-governing agency with its own legal standing and assets.

Eleven years after its establishment, during this new phase of its existence, the INEE was endowed with new powers to: (i) evaluate the quality, performance and results of the National Education System (Spanish acronym: SEN); (ii) coordinate the SNEE; (iii) issue evaluation guidelines; (iv) disseminate information; and (v) design and issue directives, all of which tasks constitute pertinent actions aimed at supporting evaluation.

High-quality education

The amendment of Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution set a new course for Mexico's educational policies. The three secondary statutes —i.e. the General Education Law, the General Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service and the Law Governing the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education— constituted the groundwork where- by the State could guarantee the availability

of high-quality education, defined as the combination of conditions enabling students to achieve optimal learning outcomes, and making it possible to foster ongoing improvement in teaching materials and methods, school organization and educational infrastructure, while guaranteeing the availability of suitable teachers and school principals.

Coordinating the SNEE: progress and challenges

Within this normative framework, one of the INEE's main tasks is that of coordinating the SNEE so as to convert it into a tool that will enable all those who form part of the SEN to have access to the information that they need in order to take informed decisions aimed at improving education via research and the use of evaluation results.

As a first step, we designed the National Policy for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: SNEE), which orients educational evaluation in our country and has facilitated cooperation between the INEE and the federal and local education authorities. Hence, since 2016, 170 projects for the evaluation and improvement of education have been proposed that currently form part of the Mid-Term Program of the SNEE (Spanish acronym: PMP SNEE 2016-2020), furthering the aims and main tenets of the PNEE, and adhere to the path for the improvement



of education plotted by the INEE, which consists of: (i) promoting educational-improvement projects; (ii) designing strategies for using and disseminating evaluation results; and (iii) designing interventions.

The said projects are backed by a series of processes, instruments and actions aimed at facilitating their implementation, which is where the different areas of the INEE come in.

In order to coordinate the SNEE and the tasks related thereto, the INEE has strengthened its structure so as to develop valid, reliable evaluations, follow-up on, and disseminate, educational benchmarks, design and validate evaluation methods, parameters, instruments, procedures and guidelines, and promote strategies for the use and dissemination of results, and build a national evaluation culture, while at the same time issuing guidelines for improving education and promoting the development of local evaluations that take stock of the conditions in each of Mexico's 32 states, and also liaising with the latter's institutions and helping them to increase their capacities.

One of the main challenges that we face in this great endeavor is that of changing people's concept of educational evaluation. While the latter should be seen as a useful tool for producing information and becoming familiar with the different realities of the SEN, it also serves many other purposes, since the use of evaluation and the dissemination of its results are key actions that need to be strengthened in order to come up with relevant proposals for improvement that focus on the shortfalls in our education system. All of these things must form a clear part of the evaluation culture that we are striving to create.

Since these things are part of our brief, but not all of it, we are continuing to consolidate ourselves, to which end we welcome the views of different specialists and are keen to learn from the experiences of other countries, and other protagonists within our country, in their endeavor to build enduring systems.

The goal is clear, the paths have been plotted, and we are on our way. €

FROM THE DESK

Evaluation paths: stories that should be told

Every text should tell its reader a story, and that is what the Gazette does. For three years now, it has not only been a tool for facilitating discussion among those playing a part in the Educational Reform, but has also recounted people's experiences of education in its different aspects and areas, via articles in which education authorities, teachers, school principals, Mexican and foreign specialists, members of civil society and representatives of international agencies have shared their views on this important stage in Mexican education.

Since 2011, there has been an increasing concern in Mexico with achieving a high-quality education system that satisfies the current generation's developmental needs. Evaluation has become one of the keys to improvement and, hence, the National Educational Evaluation System (Spanish acronym: SNEE) has been updated under the supervision of the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: INEE).

Against this backdrop, this 9th edition of the *Gazette* is endeavoring to tell the story of the paths that have been plotted in order to achieve the great aim of achieving high-quality education, how they have been followed, which people are playing a part in this task, how evaluation is being used to bring about improvement, and which challenges it faces.

Since all of these experiences need to be recounted, in this edition, the members of the INEE's Board of Governors give us an overview of the things that the said agency has done in order to coordinate educational evaluation, and, in the *Roadmap* section, two areas of the INEE talk about the ways in which evaluation is being used to achieve improvement thanks to the innovations that have been achieved and the guidelines that have been issued. Also, the Minister of Public Education and Culture of the state of Sinaloa tells us how the different states conceive of evaluation, and explains why it was



decided to move forward with the State-level Program for the Evaluation and Improvement of Education within the framework of the Mid-term SNEE program, while, for his part, Roberto Rodríguez, an academic, describes the challenges in the area of governance that must be overcome by the current National Education System (Spanish acronym: SEN).

The *Special Report* focuses on one of the components of the SEN that has most impact on the quality of education and one of the first evaluation paths set forth in the Reform. In it, Otto Granados, Teresa Bracho and Rodolfo Ramírez analyze the initial proposals regarding teacher evaluation, the results achieved, and the challenges still to be faced, while, based on his experience at the international level, Ricardo Cuenca talks about the need to go beyond evaluation and opt for strengthening teacher identity and teacher training. The said *Report* is also supplemented with an account of classroom experiences and comments on evaluation by teachers from Mexico, Colombia and Argentina.

In *Other Perspectives*, Bonifacio Barba, Jeaniene Spink and Barbara Bruns talk about the things that need to be taken stock of in order to strengthen educational policy and evaluation in their country, while the *Without a Passport* section describes the successful evaluation strategies that have been implemented in Brazil, Uruguay and Colombia.

In this way, just as it has done over the last three years, the *Gazette* gives a first-hand account of the paths plotted in order to improve education, and reports the views and opinions of the key players, thus using the printed word to help consolidate this new stage in Mexican education.

We welcome our readers to this ninth edition of the *Gazette*, thank them for accompanying us on this journey, and invite them to go on helping us to write our story. €

THE SPECIAL GUEST

Educational governance and federalism: a challenging agenda

We require models of governance that meet current social, economic and policy needs. One of the goals that countries such as Mexico should pursue is the replacement of its centralized system of government by a decentralized one that is more pluralistic and attainable, and this includes redesigning the education system in order that it may achieve the goal of guaranteeing high-quality education.

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Some aspects of the analysis

Contemporary democratic régimes are all facing the problem of how to meet the growing demands of society for access to—and participation in—the distribution of wealth while, at the same time, meeting goals for economic growth and fulfilling commitments to achieve effective, transparent management. Much of the academic debate about governability has hinged around this issue, which, among other things, rears its head in the ongoing discussion about the necessary conditions for—and practices pertaining to—democracy.

The relationship between authorities and citizens in the specifics and generalities of the decision-making process determines the limits of institutionalized democracy. As a solution to this problem, the conventional republican model of democracy offers citizens representation via political parties and the separation of powers, though this system is becoming increasingly threadbare as non-governmental organizations spring up alongside national governments and the State, which is why alternative governance-



focused models have appeared. (Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki, 1975; Hirst, 1988; Bekkers and Edwards, 2007).

The modern governance model is based on the principles of governance and public management, actively supported by groups and organizations that are not an integral part of the government and operate independently of the government structure or the party system. The growing role played by special-interest groups in the processes of government comprises a wide range of practices that range from the implementation of opinion polls about given policies, reforms, innovations and other change-related processes, to more or less regulated involvement in decision-making. (OECD, 2004; Aguilar, 2014).

While governability is deemed to be the main purpose of political activity, governance is one of the ways of achieving it, since the latter legitimizes government actions by garnering more social backing, renders public administration more efficient, supports the design of policies and programs with increased knowledge and expertise, and helps the government to make decisions.

One of the more notable things linked to public governance is the development of mechanisms for overseeing and controlling government actions and fostering transparency and public accountability. (Peters 2001; Malena, 2004). Thus understood, governance has proved to be a useful tool for systematizing and guiding government processes at both the national and the supranational levels. Given the worldwide tendency to form and operate blocks, alliances and other multinational systems that are mainly commercial in nature —though they also affect the labor sector, personal mobility and cooperation in areas of shared interest, among other things—, transnational or global governance is seen as comprising things such as the regulation of international trade, the development of sets of legally binding international norms, the implementation of treaties and agreements on a wide range of things, including globalization mechanisms, as well as systems for cooperation, management, negotiation and the settlement of conflicts and controversies, to mention just a few. (Koenig-Archibugi and Zürn, 2006; Risse, 2006).

Although offers advantages in theory, it runs the risk of becoming bureaucratic and inefficient in practice, above all in cas-

es where mandatory cooperation between government entities and civic organizations prevails over effectiveness. Various authors have pointed out that governance mechanisms can be monopolized by cartels that represent dominant economic and social sectors and used to weaken democracy rather than strengthening it. (Hughes, 2011; Santos, 2007).

The approach that sees governance as a means of broadening the foundations of government via the participation of the private and social sectors in decision-making is supplemented by the models of government management that focus on “new public management”. This approach, developed in Europe and the USA in the 1980’s, stresses the need to apply the lessons learned from the business world about organization and management so as to achieve more efficient and effective management of public policy and better government organization.

In the view of the OECD, the concrete applications of this concept hinge around: (1) developing competencies and making those in charge more flexible; (2) fostering the ability to guarantee results, control and accountability; (3) encouraging competition and offering more choice; (4) offering a service that meets the public’s needs; (5) improving the management of human resources; (6) optimizing the use of the information sciences; (7) raising the quality of regulations, and; (8) reinforcing central management.

As a result of this endeavor to transform government by using methods developed in the business world, the public sector is feeling the pressure of having to implement a reform that is based on market principles. (Osborne y Gaebler, 1993; OECD, 1995).

The contemporary reforms of government management —above all, of government planning and policy design— have led to the setting up of various fully autonomous, or relatively autonomous, authorities and organizations charged with providing advice and forging links to support government actions, as well as overseeing and controlling them.

The different institutional links, both formal and informal, that exist between government and non-government protagonists and hinge on shared interests having to do with the design and implementation of policies, tend to give rise to governance networks that result in public policies being the

product of negotiations between the members of the said networks. (Rhoades, 2007; Vázquez, 2010).

The processes pertaining to increased governance and “new public management” have multiple points of convergence (Cabrerro, 2005), since they both have the same aim of coming up with ways to foster democratic governability.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the instruments associated with such processes tend to expand their sphere of action, “extending it from the field of public administration to the rest of the government entities, the NGO’s, the autonomous public agencies, and, in some cases, the private sector that has links with the government” (Zadek, 2006; Zimmermann, *et al.*, 2008). In the view of some authors, the proliferation and strengthening of these models (i.e. the governance one and the new-public-management one) has given rise to a new period of government ‘regulationism’ — i.e. a trend towards a form of government that is based on the development of mechanisms for the exercising of joint control by all the participants. (Marjone 1997; Lodge, 2004; May, 2007).

The governance and new-management processes have proved to be adaptable to different public-management systems and levels, and even to individual organizations. In this regard, reflection on the problems posed by governability and the options for exercising governance over institutions concentrated in structures or systems, as is the case of the education system, obliges us to consider different factors — i.e. the relationship between the State and the different professional-training institutions, the internal governance of the said institutions, and the actions of special-interest groups in their organization and guidance.

By “governance of the education system”, we mean adaptation to specific ways of relating to the government agenda, and also the adoption of solutions for administering institutions.

The challenges posed by the exercise of governance over the education system

As occurred in other areas of social organization, the recent evolution of national education systems has involved the simultaneous, and often parallel, dynamics of diversification, differentiation and convergence. While there are different reasons for

this phenomenon, the growing importance of education for the economy and for social development is seen as a common underlying factor.

Education systems are currently subject to the different demands of the economy, of government and of society. Education is expected to foster economic growth, social development and cohesion, training in citizenship, cultural integration and environmental protection, to mention just a few things. Hence, it is not surprising that the control, supervision and coordination of education systems have become priorities of the public policies relating to the said sector.

In the first place, it is acknowledged that the possibilities of achieving systematic coordination vary in accordance not only with the degree of centralization, but also with the extent of government control over the institutions. Furthermore, countries with federal systems face the problem of achieving coordination between the national and the regional or state-level systems — i.e. of knowing how to foster quantitative and qualitative standards in the different systems and institutions, which criteria and procedures to adopt in order to rationalize the distribution of government resources and funding among the said systems and institutions, and which types of institution can more efficiently ensure the existence of a chain of supervision that makes it possible to govern the overall system. It is these and other similar problems that policies pertaining to coordination via governance seek to solve.

In addition to the aforementioned issues, one must take stock of the general tension between the State and the educational institutions that is generated by the policies in question due to the said institutions' perception that they risk losing their autonomy as a result of interference in their running, either real or perceived, by the government entities that form part of the putative or existing coordination system. As a rule, the greater the autonomy of the institutions affected vis-à-vis the State, the greater the tension. This type of problem is often solved by the adoption of coordination systems that are both weaker and more complex than those in which the government agency exercises direct control over the institution.

In contexts where the local authorities or institutions enjoy a high degree of independence, either under law or in practice,

from the central authority, coordination is often based on the relationship between the central authority and its local office, in such a way that it is not with the autonomous institutions themselves, but, rather, with the bodies that represent the central authorities, that negotiations take place about the amounts and modalities of the subsidies provided, the policies and programs to be pursued, and the extent to which the said institutions are held accountable, among other things.

Such relationships tend to be based on trade-offs whereby, for example, more funding is provided in exchange for commitments to adopt and implement certain policies or programs. The negotiation of this type of incentive requires a mode of coordination that eschews bargaining between the two sides as the sole or main means of implementing the initiatives that the government wishes to promote.

The case of Mexico

In Mexico, despite the progress achieved, the ongoing processes of decentralization and federalization generate a lot of tension and give rise to *sui-generis* problems, stemming from the particular nature of each institution, that need to be solved. One of the most serious problems is the lack of a federally focused coordination mechanism that governs the system. Though the government authorities acknowledge the existence of this developmental option, it nevertheless retains control over the types of curriculum to be used by the entities that it coordinates, and, indeed, tends to exercise ever greater control in this regard.

The policies on quality that have been adopted are of a centralist kind, being exclusively regulated and governed by the federal authorities, and there is also a clear lack of any regulation governing either the respective powers of the federal government and the different states overall, or the components thereof. Equally significant is the perceived tension between educational federalism and the impact of the centralized public policies on the different institutions.

In very hierarchical systems such as the Mexican public-education one, the adoption of new governance models, either at the institutional level or at that of the system, obliges the authorities imposing the said new models to change the power structures and the decision-making procedures. The

most important change, and the one that has the biggest practical effect, concerns the decision-making process, which is concentrated at the top levels of the central authority and should be replaced by a process whereby decisions are taken by different political entities and diverse organizations throughout the country.

In this regard, improving governance means democratizing the important decisions. In other words, the new governance models require that we change both the traditional forms of governance, and also the conventional decision-making chains and processes, failing which the said new models serve as mechanisms for government communication, systems for the formal exercise of accountability, or, in the best of cases, means of settling conflicts and controversies.

In the face of these challenges, if we want to improve the governability of our education system, we must begin by acknowledging its complexity and its heterogeneous nature, as well as taking stock of the many different ways in which the different institutions respond to the particular needs that exist in the environments where they operate. We also need to promote public policies that the different institutions can adapt without losing their identity, set shared aims the pursuance of which is grounded in the common perception that they are appropriate, adopt common rules whose observance is based on the shared conviction that they are fair, exploit and effectively channel the processes of innovation and change that occur within our institutions, and, last but not least, forge links that facilitate cooperation among the different institutions.

The size, diversity and complexity our current education system militate against the pursuit of centralized policies beyond those that aim to achieve the coordination and regulation that are essential. Rather, one encouraging possibility that exists in the context of the said system —of course, one that is not without its risks— is the adoption of a federalist approach in order to consolidate the state-level education systems and render the state-level governments more capable of properly building and managing them.

By developing the necessary competencies, we can increase our chances of finding new solutions to the problems of coverage, relevance, quality and fairness that afflict

education in Mexico. Furthermore, the realities of our country, as it pursues greater democracy, oblige us to open up more channels for action, which, perforce, imply updating our Constitution.

At the international level, there is a renewed awareness of the importance of adopting new development priorities, including ones pertaining to further growth and job creation, the strengthening of regional systems—in our case, the state-level one—which connect the available educational programs with the creation of solid linking structures, the formulation of local development policies, and the setting up of comprehensive training, research and technical-development systems.

We are talking about a new decentralization paradigm that does not limit itself to adequately distributing educational programs, but also sets out to lay the foundations for the creation of potential regional systems, assesses the particular economic potential of the different local environments, and fosters new economic and social conditions that enable the latter to develop and be productive in today's globalized, knowledge-based environment. €

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From evaluation to high-quality education: specific ways to achieve results

Many years ago, I wrote: “Educational evaluation doesn’t determine the quality of education, but, without it, there can be no high-quality education” (Schmelkes, 1994). For this to be achieved, we need measurements — i.e. actions that link results to strategies.

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The paradox of educational evaluation

Some people think that the existence of evaluation suffices for quality to increase, but that is not the case. Some people criticize evaluation because they believe that those who implement it suppose that, in itself, raises quality. However, those who carry out evaluations know that this is not the case.

Evaluation is essential, because, without it, we would not have any idea of the extent of the problems in our country’s education system. Neither would we have any way of showing the inequalities of the said system —ones that should not exist under any circumstances—, or of ascertaining the effectiveness or impact of those programs that seek to raise the quality of education and make it more equitable.

The ability to size up problems, discover shortfalls, and evaluate educational programs is a basic prerequisite for fostering evidence-based public policy. Without evaluation results, researchers have, no basis on which to make hypotheses about the causes of the problems that evaluation discovers and measures.

However, no matter how indispensable it is, evaluation does not suffice to improve education. To do that, measurements, of which I present some examples below, are needed.

Curriculum review

Evaluations of students’ achievement in school have two basic yardsticks: tests such as the ones pertaining to the National Plan for the Evaluation of Learnings (Spanish acronym: PLANEA), and ones that form part of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) or the ones designed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

The results of the said evaluations question the curriculum and should lead to its revision, since, if the competencies or aims set forth in it are not developing the said competencies in every student, it can be assumed that there is something wrong with its design. Hence, one of the purposes of educational evaluation is curriculum review.

Academic planning by the school

The purpose of a school is that all its students learn the things that the curriculum and the school authorities define as aims. The results of tests of learning outcomes should enable each teacher to plan his/her classes in a coherent, cumulative way in order to improve learning outcomes in the areas with the worst evaluation ratings. This implies reflecting on the results, identifying the contexts in order to overcome physical and material obstacles, determining the ongoing-training needs of the teachers, changing the atmosphere in both the school and the classroom, and modifying lesson planning, all of which make it possible to design a monitoring process that helps the school to better achieve its main aim.

Each year, the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: INEE) carries out evaluations at a different school level, analyzing infrastructure, equipment, and matters related to staff, institutional life, parent participation and interpersonal relations. Analysis of the results of these evaluations by the school principal and the different school committees yields interesting reflections based on self-diagnosis, the overall results and the individual results of the schools that contribute to the said all-round results (the sample defines the different types of school as domains). This process, in its turn, enables the school to create working plans and plot improvement paths, at least with regard to those things that fall within its

scope (i.e. social relations within the school, teachers’ committees and joint decision making, and participation by parents and the community).

Since the school is the determiner of what happens in the classrooms -where the teaching takes place-, improving its functioning helps to create the right conditions for untrammelled teaching-learning to take place.

Innovation in the classroom

Every teacher should continuously innovate in order to get better results. Although not all innovations lead to improvement, there can be no improvement without innovation, for which there are all kinds of input, such as exchanging teaching experiences, observing good practices, reading specialized literature, and, without a doubt, analyzing the results of learning-achievement evaluations, both external ones and ones carried out by teachers themselves. For example, teachers can benefit from information about the learning outcomes that are rarely achieved by Mexican children in general, or schools like their own, so as to compare them with their own results. Such information also makes it possible to find out what should be learned, and this enables teachers to make plans in order to achieve these aims. If the data are census-generated, as in the case of the PLANEA school evaluation, the data from the teacher’s school or group can be compared with the overall state-level results, or with those of similar schools, in order to define the set aim more clearly.

Also, we have evaluation information that teachers themselves produce about their students, and this is all the more useful for being compiled on a daily basis. It’s important to be aware of learning shortfalls in the group that need to be remedied.

Initial and ongoing training

Such training is, undoubtedly, the most important way to ensure that the results of evaluations —both of students and of teachers— lead to improvement. Student results show us where teachers should reinforce their training. This is true both for tests based on the national curriculum and for international ones. For example, PISA measures competencies that entail the use of acquired knowledge in order to understand

and solve problems, in areas where Mexican students systematically perform worse than those from many other countries. This means that we need to improve teacher training in the fostering of skills such as analysis, synthesis, deduction, induction, inferring, hypothetical thinking and critical analysis.

Another example is the last PLANEA test, in which two thirds of all the students in the third grade of upper-secondary school had difficulty in solving problems that require algebraic thinking, while students in the sixth grade of primary school who took the said examination in 2015 had difficulty in solving math problems involving fractions or proportions. These results would be expected to lead to changes in the teacher-training curriculum so as to ensure that future teachers are better trained in mathematics, problem solving, and, above all, in the methodology for teaching these things.

In the case of upper-secondary education, the PLANEA results lead us to ask ourselves how we can ensure that our teachers, the vast majority of whom are university graduates without any teacher training, can learn to teach in a professional manner. Other countries demand that their teachers have special training in teaching, and, in Mexico, the task of providing such training could be entrusted to the universities in those areas where one of the career options for graduates is teaching.

In short, test results should determine what training teachers take, with study options that prepare them to apply and strengthen their knowledge about their subject, the curriculum and teaching methodology. The said results should also determine what needs to be done to improve the training of teachers who have no prior teacher training.

Moreover, teacher-evaluation results very amply supplement the information already available. Entrance evaluations are extremely useful in enabling the education system to redesign initial and ongoing teacher training, while evaluations for promotion to the position of school-principal can help to orient training in school management, which should be obligatory for those people wishing to take the competitive examinations for these jobs. What's more, performance evaluations pro-



vide useful information about teachers' shortcomings in the classroom to enable these people to comply with the profile defined by the Ministry of Public Education (Spanish acronym: SEP) in 2014, which didn't exist when they were trained. Similar things can be said about the evaluations that assess the performance of school principals, an area in which one might hope to see the information being used more widely and more creatively.

In-house training: the Technical-Assistance Service for Schools

Classroom-taught and online courses, and courses that combine the aforesaid two modalities, enable teachers to acquire specific subject knowledge, as well as providing them with didactic support. However, changing teaching practices requires critical, constructive support from tutors and technical-pedagogical advisers. Performance evalua-

tion provides input for such support, since the project drawn up by the teacher gives a clear idea of his/her ability to handle his/her particular students in his/her particular context. Also, it provides information about how skillful s/he is at lesson planning and designing relevant activities, the way s/he evaluates his/her students, and also of his/her ability to choose meaningful learning evidence and reflect on his/her teaching practices in a self-critical way. The adviser should supplement this information with observations that do not form part of the evaluation, in order to plan and design classes together with the teacher, observe his/her classroom performance, provide him/her with feedback, foster reflection about his/her teaching practices, encourage the exchange of experiences and comments, and suggest relevant readings. The said adviser should concern him/herself not only with the teacher's ability to plan his/her class and teach it effectively, but also with making sure that all the students are engaged in processes that enable them to learn.

Professional teacher development

The evaluation results can serve as input for the teacher, helping him/her to plot a path for his/her professional growth, which can take many forms. One such path consists in exploiting the areas of opportunity mentioned in the individual reports. Though decisions about how to grow are indubitably personal ones, nonetheless, based on the evidence stemming from his/her evaluation indicating the desired profile, the teacher can decide to undertake formal study, in the form of courses or group seminars, in order to formalize and systematize his/her reflections about his/her teaching practices. Professional development starts when one begins teaching, and should continue throughout one's teaching life. This is one of the keys to improving students' results.

Educational policy and Guidelines

Some of the conditions governing the functioning of schools and of teachers in the classroom are determined by the education system as a whole and by the educational policies pursued by the current federal and local government administrations.

While a lot of things can be changed by initiatives coming from the classroom, there is a ceiling in the schools and zones that attempts the change if certain things doesn't change. I talk about budget apportionment,

the provision of material and teaching resources to the different types of school, the opportunities afforded to school-zone staff to maintain a dialogue about pedagogical matters with the schools for which they are responsible. Also, I refer to the real opportunities for teachers and school principals to have access to ongoing training, and the extent to which schools adapt in order to serve vulnerable groups. For example, disabled students and students in need of special education, children who work, street urchins or indigenous children who have a different culture and/or speak another language besides Spanish, all of whom have different educational needs and rights.

These conditions must and can be changed if there is evidence available from evaluations and research that explains the problems and determines their extent, orienting policy decisions in order to tackle the obstacles that prevent education from becoming the tool, par excellence, for achieving social equality.

Evaluations of educational programs and policies have precisely this purpose of making those responsible for top-level policy-making aware of the problems and convincing them to make take necessary decisions. The results of the evaluations of educational policy carried out by the INEE have been embodied in Guidelines in compliance with the latter organization's legal mandate to "disseminate information and, based on it, issue educational-policy Guidelines" for the purpose of guiding the educational planning carried out by the authorities.

This latest evaluation, pertaining to *Educational Policy Guidelines*, is one of the most important ones, forming part of the new educational-governance plan stemming from the establishment of the INEE as an Autonomous Institute under the Constitution, and constituting an innovation that is very important for the future of Mexican education. The Guidelines are drawn up in adherence to the best public-policy-design practices, based on the evaluation results, up-to-date knowledge, both Mexican and international practices, analysis of the different policies that have been put in place to tackle the problem in question, and consultations with those who will be working to implement them and their end beneficiaries.

Closing remarks

While it is true that evaluation alone does

not redound in high-quality education, one can assert that higher-quality, more equitable education is unlikely to be achieved without educational evaluation. Interventions are necessary in order to link evaluation results to concrete actions so as to build the necessary bridges between evaluation and improvement.

Some of the most important interventions are mentioned in this article, the first one being the forging of links between evaluation and educational research, the results of which enable us to make hypotheses and propose solutions to problems. The knowledge stemming from educational research, part of whose input comes from evaluation, constitutes the main means of building the aforesaid bridges between evaluation and improvement.

I hope that I have succeeded in making it clear that the interventions to which I have referred require not only political and individual will, but also the creation of specific structural conditions, so that they can succeed.

What remains to be done is to ensure that the interventions can work, and this can only be achieved by means of appropriate policies. It would be regrettable if our emphasis on evaluation -as one of the links in the improvement chain- leads us to neglect the other bridges that need to be built between evaluation and improvement, and causes us to fail to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the knowledge that we are acquiring about the problems that our education system currently faces. The building of the aforesaid other bridges is the key to making good on the universal right to high-quality education. €

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VOICES FROM THE CONFERENCE

Commitment and continuity: the participation of the state of Sinaloa in the 2016-2020 Mid-Term Plan* of the National System for the Evaluation of Education**

[*Spanish acronym: PMP; **Spanish acronym: SNEE]

In the interview transcribed below, **Dr. José Enrique Villa Rivera**, Minister of Public Education and Culture of the state of Sinaloa, talks about the challenges that are posed in his state by the education reform, describes the steps taken to ensure the continuation of the State-level Program for the Evaluation and Improvement of Education (Spanish acronym: PEEME), and suggests what should be done to improve education.

Dr. Villa Rivera believes that Sinaloa, whose government is continuing the endeavor to design the State-level Program for the Evaluation and Improvement of Education, has become a pace-setting state, since, faced with the challenge of implementing the said program, it has redoubled its efforts, established clear aims, and determined which actions should be taken vis-à-vis the New Educational Model.

The context and the current situation

In 2016, the state of Sinaloa held some unique elections aimed at bringing local and

federal elections fully into line, choosing its governor for the next four years and ten months (rather than the customary six-year term), its mayors and city-council heads for the next year and nine months, and its local congressmen for the next two years.

This new short-lasting administration took on the challenge of implementing the PEEME, on which the previous administration had already started to work, in four years and ten months.

What could be done in the face of a panorama in which the state's unique political realities were compounded by the need to take stock of the results of the examinations pertaining to the Program for International Student Assessment (English acronym: PISA), the National Plan for the Evaluation of Learning Outcomes (Spanish acronym: PLANEA), and other standardized examinations? Which actions could make a difference in four years?

The plan

Villa Rivera acknowledges that it will be impossible to achieve all of the above during his short tenure, but says that his ministry has come up with a plan that focuses on three key lines of action, which consist in:

1. investing to improve school infrastructure.
2. increasing the quality of the education provided to children and youths.
3. supporting teacher's professional development via updating and training schemes.

In order to achieve these aims, he and his team carried out a detailed analysis of the PEEME and its Evaluation and Educational-Improvement projects, on which the previous administration had already begun working, in order to adapt them and link them to the sectorial educational policy formulated by the new state administration. Subsequently, they created a State-level Development Plan and thus ensuring the existence of a comprehensive project.

Hence, the following six Educational Evaluation and Improvement Projects (Spanish acronym: PROEMES) came to form part of the PEEME, which Villa Rivera defines as a policy that orients the evaluation proj-



ects so as to make it possible to later define the improvements to be made to the components, processes and aims of the state-level education system. The aims of the respective plans are to evaluate:

1. the processes whereby diagnostic studies of students are carried out in order to meet their needs and take their interests, learning styles and rhythms into account

so as to enable them to achieve significant learning outcomes, complementing this process with an early-warning system and the development of socioemotional skills.

2. the available study options at the secondary level by means of learning management so as to increase school intake, augment coverage and retention, and reduce failure and dropout rates.
3. the information and benchmark system pertaining to quality, inclusion and equity, as part of a joint effort to achieve high-quality education that is inclusive and effective by designing and implementing a comprehensive system that helps to improve school management so as to provide attention to vulnerable communities.
4. the processes for the detection, systematization, dissemination, use and improvement of information systems in upper-secondary education, in keeping with the State-level Development Plan, by means of a cutting-edge unified information system with key benchmarks so as to achieve timely improvements in the management of schools and teaching at the said level.
5. the processes for providing counselling and support to principals and teachers in upper-secondary schools, in line with the concern expressed in the State-level Plan for broadening coverage while increasing quality and relevance, and promoting the training and updating of teachers and school principals via a school-management system (Technical-Support Service for Schools [Spanish acronym: SATE]) that operates near to schools.
6. ways of retaining upper-secondary students at risk of dropping out via a comprehensive early-warning system with key benchmarks and effective mechanisms for anticipating and tackling risk factors that result in dropout, by means of policies and strategies at the different levels in the classroom, the school and the subsystem.

Concrete actions

Dr. Villa Rivera asserts that the state of Sinaloa interprets quality education as:

“Education that is effective and inclusive — i.e. that which produces good learning outcomes that permit young people to become successful members of society, endowing them with knowledge, competencies

and values that enable them to function in society and successfully navigate the higher levels of education, since one of the most common complaints is that they graduate from secondary-level education with a lot of shortcomings.

Given the above, and since there are important gaps between Sinaloa and other states, we have specifically focused on achieving improvements in the following areas while also developing socioemotional skills and values: (a) the teaching of reading and writing; (b) the teaching of mathematics, and (c); the teaching of science.

Currently, while defining the base —i.e. the starting point that enables comparative levels to be established over four years— we’ve taken concrete steps to improve these benchmarks in the mid-term, and are endeavoring to:

1. improve the teaching of reading and writing, to which end Sinaloa has committed itself to training teachers both in teacher-training colleges and in other institutions.
2. maintain our state’s clear commitment to evaluation, since we consider that it enables us to ascertain the current level of our education and plot out an improvement path
3. work hand-in-hand with the INEE, which, being the entity that evaluates our teachers and tells us where we stand, helps us to develop improvement strategies.
4. seek out sufficient human, material and financial resources. Though we don’t have all the resources we would like to have, we’ve taken all the necessary steps to optimize the PEEME, for example by:
 - a. having the said plan officially approved by the INEE.
 - b. appointing a liaison for the National Project for the Evaluation and Improvement of Multi-level Schools (Spanish acronym: PRONAEME).
 - c. forming a state-level technical team that currently consists of nine academics who are exclusively devoted to carrying out the aforesaid tasks. Setting up this team on a permanent basis, for the sole purpose of carrying out research and analysis as a basis for reflection, has become a crucial factor.
 - d. setting up specific academic working groups to develop the evaluation projects.

- e. providing eight portable computers, and a high-volume multifunctional color printer for the aforesaid activities.
- f. setting aside a specific physical area in the Santa Fe External Education Unit.
- g. asking the Sinaloa Ministry of Administration and Finance to provide the financial resources needed for 2018 via the Annual Operational Program and the Budgeting Program.
- h. keeping close track of developments in the other states vis-à-vis the Educational Reform, since the current administration things that we can learn a lot from them, observing how they solve their problems and achieve their aims.

In our search for financing for the aforesaid activities, we’ve considered asking the federal Ministry of Education for funding or applying for international loans.

Finally, the public presentation of the PEEME, and the signing of cooperation agreements with universities and research centers within the framework of the SNEE, are still pending.

Institutional cooperation

Villa Rivera asserts that the PEEME coordinator for Sinaloa, who is the liaison with the INEE, was confirmed in his post so as to ensure the continuity of the PEEME, since the forging and maintenance of a close link with the INEE has made it possible to structure activities and have access to information that can be shared with all the teachers, school principals, supervisors and sector heads who form part of the state-level educational infrastructure, thus enabling the school councils to establish the results and goals that they must achieve.

“Those of us who are working on the 32 PEEMES that form part of the 2016-2020 PMP SNEE will follow the logical path, evaluating, producing and disseminating information and planning interventions aimed at improving student learning outcomes and the education system in general. We have to achieve better results.

In this regard, I believe that the federal and state-level education authorities have done the right things, given that the Educational Reform has barely got underway and

will only yield positive mid-term results to the extent that each state takes concrete actions”.

He also opines that the INEE should become even more involved in fostering consensus and mutual feedback between the SEP and the states, so that homogeneous progress is achieved in all of the latter:

“Progress in closing the gaps that we’ve identified in the PMP SNEE —gaps where we’re going to make specific interventions— should be systematic throughout the country”.

With regard to teacher evaluation, the Minister affirms that it’s here to stay, but requires effective support, for which purpose each state’s PEEME evaluation is crucial.

“Evaluation helps us to plan. We have to know where we stand. How can we make a proposal about improvement without information? Evaluation is important for this reason, but so are the use and dissemination of its results, which must reach all the key people involved, from the teachers on up. Moreover, the results must be expressed in a way that makes it possible to understand and use them”.

Future challenges

The biggest challenge faced by Sinaloa is that of ensuring that the improvements that the current administration is striving to achieve are carried over to the next

administration regardless of who wins the state’s elections in 2021. In the face of this challenge, the authorities in Sinaloa have decided to empower those people who will continue in their posts under the next administration – i.e. school principals, supervisors and sector heads. They are working with these key players in order to implant the evaluation culture in such a way that they learn how to use the information that is produced and become increasingly involved in the interventions that are carried out in their schools. On this point, Dr. Villa Rivera comments:

“We’re changing things so that supervisors, who are the people closest to the schools, stop doing managerial work and devote their energies to these fundamental tasks”.

In this way, he explains, Sinaloa wants to adhere closely to the INEE’s guidelines and its representatives’ recommendations, since it considers this the best way to improve its results over the coming four years in order to boost the performance of its children and youths in future evaluations. €

The prospects for improving education

Below, some of the ministers of education of the states that make up the educational zones formed within the framework of the Educational Reform —i.e. the North-western, Western, Central and South-Southwestern regions— share their opinions about the prospects of improving education based on the 2016-2020 PMP SNEE.

Northeastern Region

“One of the aims of the PMP SNEE 2016-2020 should be to design and carry out interventions and produce valid information about the components, processes and results of the National Education System — a process that is only just starting”.

Rubén Calderón Luján, MINISTER OF EDUCATION OF THE STATE OF DURANGO

Northwestern Region

“The PEEME is a contextualized-evaluation approach designed to suit the realities of our states. We know that this process depends on keeping information flowing so as to become aware of our mistakes and needs, and thus be able to find ways to satisfy our region’s needs”.

Héctor Jiménez Márquez, MINISTER OF EDUCATION OF THE STATE OF BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR

Western Region

We’re taking big strides on this route set out in in the PMP SNEE and the PEEME, and we’re not just doing this to improve our measurements, but, rather, to provide more initial training to our teachers and adequate teaching to our children and youths.

José Alfredo Botello Montes, MINISTER OF EDUCATION OF THE STATE OF QUERÉTARO

South-southwestern Region

Among other things, we need to provide teacher training, implement new strategies for teaching mathematics and early literacy, and improve the physical conditions in our schools in order to achieve high-quality education.

Ricardo Miguel Medina Farfán, MINISTER OF EDUCATION OF THE STATE OF CAMPECHE

Central Region

We can use evidence to foster, systematize and evaluate good practices in order to share them and ensure that they are adjusted to suit each state’s conditions.

Luis Ignacio Sánchez Gómez, HEAD OF THE EDUCATIONAL FEDERAL AUTHORITY IN MEXICO CITY



The reader can find more information about the SNEE at: <http://www.inee.edu.mx/index.php/pnee-peeme>



More information about the 2016-2020 PMP SNEE is available at: <https://goo.gl/292r8T>



About the PMP SNEE: <https://goo.gl/SiD9jc>



For more information about the PRONAME, visit: <https://goo.gl/16NmKN>

THE LAUNCHING OF THE MID-TERM PROGRAM OF THE NATIONAL SYSTEM FOR THE EVALUATION OF EDUCATION*: TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE-LEVEL PROGRAMS FOR THE EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATION**

On the 17th of October 2017, the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education [Spanish acronym: INEE] presented the 2016-2020 Mid-term Program of the National System for the Evaluation of Education [Spanish acronym: PMP SNEE 2016-2020]. This instrument sets forth the core principles of the National Policy for the Evaluation of Education [Spanish acronym: PNEE], includes 170 evaluation projects that contemplates the improvements to be made by the INEE, the Ministry of Public Education [Spanish acronym: SEP] and Mexico's 32 local education authorities, and based on a long-term plan, comprises three successive stages that will take 4 years each to complete: a launch stage, a consolidation stage and a sustainability stage.

The 2016-2020 PMP SNEE

Since 2013, the INEE has been working to coordinate and link the evaluations to be carried out by all the members of the SNEE (See Fig. 1). Its efforts have resulted in the designing of Projects for the Evaluation and

Improvement of Education [Spanish acronym: PROEMES] at the state, national and international levels, designed to remedy educational shortfalls and to evaluate the following six basic aspects of the National Education System [Spanish acronym: SEN]: (1) student learning outcomes; (2) the performance of teachers, school principals and technical-pedagogical consultants; (3) school organization and learning management; (4) curriculums, materials and teaching methods; (5) the availability of educational programs; and (6) policies, programs and information systems.

The 170 PROEME projects

130 projects at the state level

The 32 states cooperated, designing their PEEMES in order to meet their specific needs, and each educational region will implement an average of 26 PROEMES (See Fig. 2) as follows:

- 31 of the PROEMES concentrate on learning outcomes and are implemented in

accordance with the National Plan for the Evaluation of Learning Outcomes [Spanish acronym: PLANEA].

- The results of the evaluations of the Professional Teaching Service [Spanish acronym: SDP] will be used in 34 state-level projects for evaluating teachers and school principals.
- 43 projects related to educational-program availability and learning management will be closely linked to the Evaluation of the Basic Conditions for Teaching and Learning [Spanish acronym: ECEA] and the Evaluation of Educational-program Availability [Spanish acronym: EVOE].
- 22 projects related to the evaluation of policies, programs and information systems will adopt the methodology and technical and normative criteria established by the INEE.

*Spanish abbreviation: PMP SNEE; **Spanish abbreviation: PEEMES

Fig. 1: Diagram of the 2016-2020 PMP SNEE

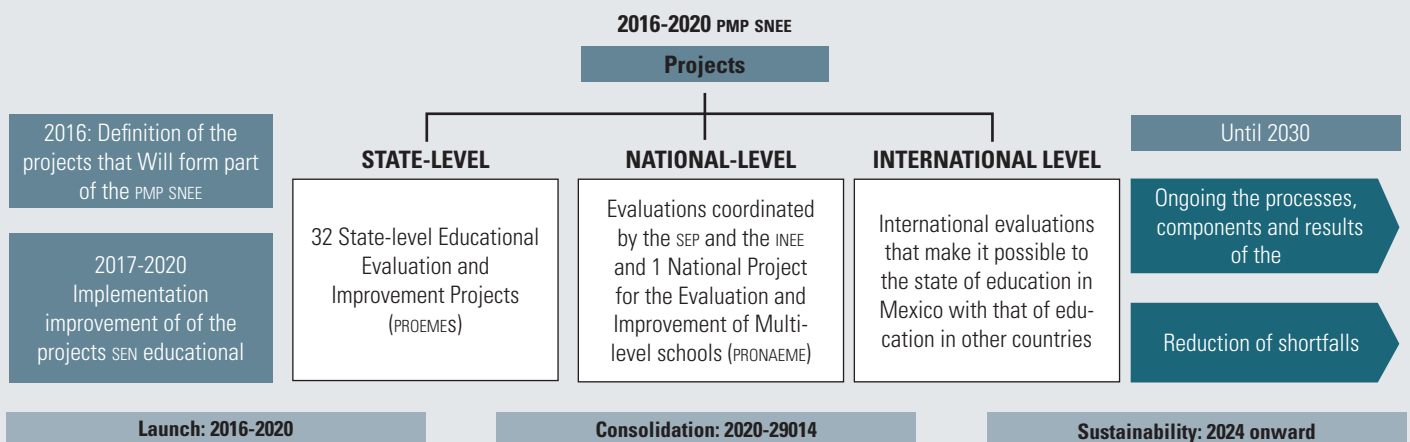


Fig. 2: PROEMES by educational region



- Northwest: 31 PROEMES** (Baja California, Baja California Sur, Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Sonora).
- Northeast: 20 PROEMES** (Coahuila, Durango, Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas).
- West: 23 PROEMES** (Aguascalientes, Colima, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, Querétaro, Zacatecas).
- Central: 26 PROEMES** (Mexico City, the State of Mexico, Hidalgo, Morelos, Puebla, Tlaxcala).
- South-southwest: 30 PROEMES** (Campeche, Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Veracruz, Yucatán).

Source: General Direction for the Coordination of the SNEE, INEE.

Fig. 3: 9 Types of Multi-level Project (to be developed at the national level)



The 5 states of Aguascalientes, Mexico City, Chihuahua, Nuevo León and Tamaulipas will not participate.

No.	Aspects evaluated
1.	Professional competencies of school supervisors and technical-pedagogical consultants
2.	Actual time devoted to teaching
3.	Effectiveness and effects of supervision
4.	Applications of the curriculum
5.	Textbooks, teachers' books and information-technology support
6.	Teaching practices
7.	Specialized training of teacher trainers
8.	Infrastructure and equipment
9.	Infraestructura y equipamiento

34 projects at the national level

- 11 coordinated by the SEP and 14 by the INEE.
- As part of the National Project for the Evaluation and Improvement of Education in Multi-level Schools, 9 other types of project will be implemented in 27 states (See Fig. 3).

6 projects from the international level:

- The International Student Evaluation Program
- The International Program for the Evaluation of Adult Competencies
- The Comparative and Explicatory Regional Study

- The International Study of Civic Education and Citizenship
- The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS): the TALIS survey and the TALIS video study.

To ensure the success of the PMP SNEE:

The implementation of the PROEMES is underway and the INEE will oversee the process by:

- using the platform for monitoring and following up on the progress and benchmarks of the PMP SNEE projects.
- providing technical consultancy and support to the education authorities.
- strengthening institutional capacities. €



All the publications pertaining to the PMP SNEE and the PRONAEME can be downloaded at: <http://www.inee.edu.mx/index.php/publicaciones-micrositio>



The reader can find more information about the 2016-2020 PMP SNEE at: http://www.inee.edu.mx/images/stories/2017/Gaceta7/suplementos/PAUTAS_27_de_junio.pdf

Our ideal scenarios

You think you'll walk into the classroom, stand a moment, wait for silence, watch while they open notebooks and click pens, tell them your name, write it on the board, proceed to teach.

You'll be nominated for awards: Teacher of the Year, Teacher of the Century. You'll be invited to Washington. Eisenhower will shake your hand. Newspapers will ask you, a mere teacher, for your opinion on education. This will be big news: A teacher asked for his opinion on education. Wow. You'll be on television.

...and our challenges

Professors of education at New York University never lectured on how to handle flying-sandwich situations. They talked about theories and philosophies of education, about moral and ethical imperatives, about the necessity of dealing with the whole child, the gestalt, if you don't mind, the child's felt needs, but never about critical moments in the classroom.

What is education anyway? What are we doing in this school? You might say that you want to graduate to go to college and prepare for a career. But, fellow students, it's more than that. I've had to ask myself what the hell I'm doing in the classroom. I've worked out an equation for myself. On the left side of the blackboard I print a capital F. I draw an arrow from left to right, from FEAR to FREEDOM.

SPECIAL REPORT: THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN EDUCATION
REPORT

Teacher evaluation in Mexico: approach, results and proposals for improvement

The 13th of September 2017 marked the holding of the first session of the Seminar on the Educational Reform, an initiative of the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: INEE) aimed at taking stock of the progress achieved –and challenges still existing– in the implementation of this new stage of the reform of the Mexican education system. The first topic covered in this forum for dialogue and reflection was teacher evaluation. Here we briefly summarize the progress in that area.

Progress and challenges in teacher evaluation

The participants in the first session of the Seminar on the Educational Reform, which was chaired by the journalist and political commentator, Ricardo Raphael, were Otto Granados, the Undersecretary for Planning, Evaluation and Coordination of the Mexican Ministry of Education, Ana María Aceves, the Coordinator of the Professional Teaching Service, Teresa Bracho, a member of the INEE's Board of Governors, and Rodolfo Ramírez Raymundo, a researcher at the Mexican Senate's Belisario Domínguez Institute.

At the outset, Dr. Eduardo Backhoff Escudero, the Chairman of the INEE Board, reminded those present that the starting point of the Educational Reform in 2013 was the nationwide educational crisis, which gave rise to the Professional Teaching Service (Spanish acronym: SPD) and the conferral of autonomy on the INEE so that it might serve as an independent, critical counterweight to the education authorities.

He also reminded them that since, among other things, the INEE's strategic mission in-

cludes the task of evaluating the National Education System, the said Institute has supervised and evaluated the processes of entry to, acknowledgment and promotion within, and continuation in, the SPD, commissioning external studies and evaluations for purposes of detailed follow-up.

Teacher evaluation

Talking about developments in teacher evaluation and presenting comparative statistics for recent years, Undersecretary Granados and SPD director, Aceves, gave a detailed account of the problems encountered, the current situation and the challenges still to be overcome, emphasizing the links between the evaluation process and the New Educational Model (Spanish acronym: NME). The presentation, which was split up into six parts, covered evaluation from 2014 to the present.

1. Make-up and drafting of the laws that gave rise to the Educational Reform

Granados began by pointing out that the Educational Reform and the founding of the SPD comprised: (1) a legal component, since the Mexican Constitution stipulates that the development of a Professional Teaching Service is a prerequisite for increasing the quality of education, (2) an administrative component aimed at governing entry to –and promotion within– the Professional Teaching Service via competitive examinations, and (3) a quality component that seeks to ensure that teachers possess suitable knowledge and skills.

The complicated part of the process, he explained, consisted in building a system that could take stock of the aforesaid three components in the midst of a political restructuring of the National Education System, which had remained unchanged from the 1950's to 2013, and in a context of defective administrative, technological, budgeting and managerial structure.

The first problem to be faced was a system where people outside the Ministry of Education (Spanish acronym: SEP) assigned posts and participated in some of the latter's management procedures, while the administrative problem was a bottleneck in entry-level, performance and post-assignment



evaluation, added to which were the signing of a decentralization agreement in 1992 and the matter of social conflict, which attracted the most media attention. While the magnitude, type and degree of the latter may vary, the processes described above give rise to such conflict all over the planet, and Mexico, which has the world's fifth biggest education system, is no exception.

This was the context in which the technical and conceptual design of the teacher-evaluation system occurred.

2. Conceptual design of the Educational Reform, the Professional Teaching Service and the Teacher-Evaluation Processes

In this part of the presentation, the speakers went into detail about the progress achieved in the development of the SPD and the latter's strengths, weaknesses, problems and challenges.

Why carry out teacher evaluation?

The academic literature asserts that teacher quality is one of the most important factors affecting student achievement. Authors such as Pritchett and Hanushek have argued that teacher incentives are a good idea.

How is the SPD structured? It is conceived of as an entity that ensures that teachers possess suitable knowledge and teaching skills, improves their performance, acknowledges the work they do, increases quality and enhances learning outcomes, to which end it was proposed to analyze the experiences of other countries whose systems reward teachers' merit, performance and efforts.

What is the scope of the SPD? It envisages different evaluations to identify professional-development needs and reduce the gaps between the qualities that are desired in teachers and those that they currently display. The aim is to build a comprehensive policy that includes a stimulus program coordinated by a decentralized entity such as the SPD.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the SPD? The Professional Teaching Service envisages a system of norms (profiles and benchmarks) that is officially recognized and can identify the specific attributes of an effective teacher based on good-teaching practices. Based on this, it comprises a comprehensive policy governing teachers' entry to, acknowledgment and promotion within, and continuation in, the education system,

envisaging various methods and types of evaluation, including examinations that test knowledge, teaching projects and files, self-evaluation questionnaires and a mixed-evaluation system that includes diagnostic, summative and formative components. In this way, the SPD constitutes a substantial change in government regulation of the teaching profession aimed at building a system based on merit, effort and performance.

Benefits of the Professional Teaching Service

- **Entry to, and promotion within, the SPD** upon fulfilling the profile requirements, getting an evaluation grade indicating suitability and placing first on the selection list.
- **Diagnosis, feedback on performance, support and tutoring** in order to develop professional aptitudes, self-criticism and good teaching practices.
- **Incentives and acknowledgment** based on merit and job performance. Appreciation by society of the job that is done.

3. Experiences of teacher evaluation in the last two years.

Granados remarked that various instruments –including the surveys carried out in December of 2015 and January and February of 2016, a study of the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (Spanish acronym: OREALC) commissioned by the INEE, a survey carried out by the latter in 2016 on a sample of over 10,000 people, and an analysis carried out by the Belisario Domínguez Institute in 2016– have been created to evaluate the first process.

One common finding of the aforesaid instruments is that, due to cultural and geographic differences and variations in the level of technical development, communication between the education authorities and the teacher is important during the evaluation process. Measurements were made with respect to the problems detected and there were all-round improvements in the 2016 evaluation.

On the other hand, the 2015-2016 performance evaluation was an enormous technical, operational, political and logistical challenge. It was found that 25 components needed to be improved, and these were split into the following 5 big groups that coincide with the evaluation components:

Technical, operational and logistical difficulties

Worst evaluatees	• Design of evaluation instruments
	• Guides and supports
	• Recording
Best evaluatees	• Evaluators
	• Use of instruments

Undersecretary Granados explained that, in order to tackle these difficulties, an attempt has been made, over the last two years, to create a more efficient teacher-evaluation system that yields the desired results. The most complicated challenge is that of designing the evaluation instruments, since the said evaluation contains psychometric components that affect the measurements.

4. Rethinking the 2017-2018 Performance-Evaluation Model.

Aceves explained that, based on the experiences, learnings and challenges detected in previous years, the New Model modifies the evaluation to accord with the current legal framework. The said evaluation model, which retains the strengths of the previous one while heeding the opinions and suggestions of teachers and experts so as to make it more user-friendly, is currently being applied to some 160,000 teachers. The changes to the model included:

- reducing the number of evaluation stages from four to three, of which only one is applied, in an evaluation center chosen by the teacher.
- Including features that link the performance evaluation to the everyday work done by the teacher in his/her school.

- Strengthening training to make it more relevant, link it to the evaluation, and ensure that it serves to improve teaching practices.

Participants in the Professional Teaching Service

- To date, around 1.1 million teachers have been evaluated via one of the four processes stipulated in the law governing the SPD.
- Currently, 160,000 teachers need to be evaluated to determine whether they can remain in the SPD. This year's goal is to apply performance evaluations to 160,000 teachers on at least one occasion and 42,500 diagnostic evaluations.
- The estimated total number of teachers evaluated by the end of 2018 is just over 1.3 million
- The proportion of people attending the evaluations has increased from 88% in 2016 to 95% at this point in 2017. These figures show that an evaluation culture is being created among our country's teachers.

5. Pertinent findings of the 2014-2017 evaluations.

Between 2015 and 2016, there was an improvement in the results of all the evaluations. Some of the data presented during the first session of the Seminar were as follows:

Competitive examinations for promotion

- The people with the best evaluation results were principals of elementary schools, 71.9% of whom were found to be eligible for promotion in the 2017-2018 competitive examination.
- The biggest challenges were detected among middle-school principals and supervisors, less than 30% of whom were evaluated, though the performance level has risen, with between 40% and 50% of those evaluated being found to be eligible for promotion.

Diagnostic evaluation

- The best evaluation results were obtained by secondary-level teachers.
- Given the uneven results, in the 2016-2017 period three achievement levels were established so as to provide more specific information to each teacher (the basic levels still need to be developed and are expected to be ready soon).

Entry evaluation

- Four competitive entry examinations have been held, with some 130 thousand candidates taking the last three of them.
- The number of candidates classifying as eligible has been lower than expected, though there has been some improvement; with 40% initially being considered suitable for entry to the SPD, as against 59% now – i.e. a 20% increase.
- There is a high repetition level due either to the candidates not being deemed suitable for entry to the SPD or failing to obtain a teaching post, or to their previous result having expired. The trend is towards better results with each repetition.
- More candidates at the primary, secondary and preschool levels have been deemed eligible than ones from primary and indigenous-preschool institutions.
- More graduates from government teacher-training colleges have been classified as eligible than ones from other institutions.
- Mexico City and the states of Querétaro, Colima, Baja California, Baja California Sur, Nuevo León, Aguascalientes, Jalisco and Hidalgo have consistently obtained the best results in all the evaluations.
- The states of Tabasco, Chiapas, Guerrero, Campeche, Michoacán, Oaxaca and Sinaloa have obtained the highest number of 'unsuitable' results.
- All of the country's states and districts, without exception, have got better results in the last evaluations than in the first ones.
- An average of 76% of the candidates in the competitive examinations come from secondary, primary and preschool institutions, while 7% either come from special-education institutions or the "Telesecondary" distance-learning system, or teach physical education; 1% come from pre-school, indigenous-primary and adult-education institutions.
- The best results were obtained at the pre-school level, followed by the primary level.

- There has been more improvement at the "Telesecondary" level than at the general secondary one.
- The candidates from indigenous-preschool and indigenous-primary institutions have obtained the lowest number of "eligible" ratings, though their performance has improved over the period in question.

Continuance or performance evaluation

- Teachers have obtained better results than school principals.
- Though more progress was achieved by secondary-level English teachers, the percentage of them classified as "outstanding" is still very small.
- Preschool teachers have obtained the best evaluation results.
- Women get better results than men.
- The younger the candidates, the more "eligible" classifications they obtain, while the oldest candidates get the worse performance gradings.
- The states can be split into at least three groups according to their level of participation in all the evaluations.
- The 5 entities with the highest participation levels are Querétaro, Baja California Sur, Quintana Roo, Aguascalientes and Mexico City.
- The 5 states of Hidalgo, Puebla, Nuevo León, Tlaxcala and San Luis Potosí have medium participation levels.
- The 5 states with the lowest participation levels are Sinaloa, Michoacán, Guerrero, Tabasco and Chiapas.

Undersecretary Granados observed that these figures reflect our country's political, economic and social realities, pointing out that there are, in reality, many Mexicos, and that, since the asymmetries in –and the institutional, administrative and technological capacities of– the different states vary a lot, the most backward ones face a big challenge in their efforts to successfully implement the Educational Reform, and will have to support these efforts with additional policies.

6. Looking to the future

The six kinds of challenges faced are:

- 1) **technical and logistical**, having to do with reviewing the constitutional reform and its governing laws in order to ensure that the processes are transparent and of high quality.

- 2) **educational**, having to do with increasing the validity and reliability of the instruments and guaranteeing the equity and usefulness of the results while not forgetting that evaluation is a means of promoting professional teacher development, and also with harmonizing the evaluation process with the other components of the Educational Reform pertaining to study plans and programs, textbooks, continuous teacher training, etc.
- 3) **cultural**, having to do with exploring the idea of granting more operational autonomy to the INEE, extending beyond its current normative functions. The Undersecretary cited the following text issued by the Belisario Domínguez Institute in 2016:

“Why is the institution responsible for administering the SPD also charged with determining evaluation contents and instruments, while the INEE, which has expertise in this field, only has normative and supervisory powers?”

This, he continued, also implies exploring the idea that the SPD, which is currently an autonomously operating agency, might become a decentralized government entity.
- 4) **operational**, having to do with harmonizing evaluation in all the states despite their political and institutional heterogeneity and the varying nature of their involvement in the Educational Reform, and also with providing more regulatory support via strategies such as proposing a reform of the Law Governing Fiscal Coordination or the updating of the payroll system. Currently, asserted Granados, efforts are underway to design a comprehensive personnel-management system that will change the current managerial model.
- 5) **pertaining to coordination** and having to do with the fundamental role of teacher evaluation, though, since this is only a part of the Educational Reform, it is necessary to strengthen the link between it and the other educational programs and policies.
- 6) **pertaining to the use of evaluation results**, and having to do with adopting teacher evaluation as a valuable form of input that provides feedback to other components of the Reform per se, as well as with the need to use the results of teacher evaluation to strengthen ongoing training, design educational policies



that focus on achievement, and align government policies with needs at the state level.

Discussion

Granados stated that, according to a survey carried out by BGC and Associates, teacher evaluation –the most controversial part of the Educational Reform– currently enjoys a 76% level of public acceptance. In view of this affirmation and of the remarks made by the SEP, Rodolfo Ramírez, of the Belisario Domínguez Institute, remarked that all educational policies must be seen as “intervention hypotheses” which, when implemented, reveal unforeseen issues, which, he said, is why new proposals are now required, four years after the Educational Reform.

In the presentation, it was asserted that the underlying problem was the system, and Ramírez asked why the response was a decision to evaluate the teachers, which he did not consider to be the right way to lay the foundations of the Educational Reform. He also pointed out that the following problems needed to be addressed:

- The development of the evaluation instruments, which should be owned by the National Evaluation Center.
- The fact that performance evaluation fails to take stock of the teacher’s work, his/her communication with the students and ability to challenge them intellectually and get them interested, as well as all the other things teachers do in the classroom.

He asserted that, despite the surprisingly high level of participation, there are serious problems regarding the overall application of the evaluation, since there is no way to guarantee the candidate’s eligibility if the instrument, the induction period and the tutorials are not validated.

INEE board member, Teresa Bracho, said that she considered the merit-based model to be positive both at the individual level, since it instils confidence in teachers who take up a post based on their abilities, and also at the collective level, since it makes it clear that a mechanism exists for ensuring that the candidates who enter the teaching profession are the most qualified ones.

She stressed that, as an autonomous entity, the INEE exercises authority over evaluation and has the job of working hand-in-hand with the education authorities to regulate it and issue guidelines with which the said authorities must comply.

She pointed out that, since evaluation is a teamwork activity in which the functions of different agencies overlap, so that the said entities must be able to cooperate, exercise joint coordination, and assume joint responsibility, the INEE’s is basically a regulatory, rather than an operative, body.

Points to be considered

The debating points arising from the questions asked by those attending the Seminar were:

1. Should the Constitution be amended in order to avoid the overlapping of responsibilities among the different entities involved in evaluation, or would it suffice to amend the secondary laws?

The overall view was that such an amendment would be worthwhile, and Undersecretary Granados opined that it would be a good idea to carry out the said modification at the end of the current government’s six-year term, saying: “I’m not sure whether it’s necessary to amend the Constitution, but we should review it to find out exactly which things should be updated”.

For his part, Rodolfo Ramírez said that it is necessary to review the secondary laws

which stipulate that, since the SEP or the different government ministries are employers, it is up to them to decide what they require of their employees and how the latter should be evaluated. He explained that the SEP has an excessive workload, and that the INEE could coordinate evaluation without there being any need to subcontract other entities, and also said that different states could share in the technical work, as well as the operational functions.

Teresa Bracho emphasized the need to amend the General Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service, which contains some ambiguous sections, as well as ascertaining why the SEP has not done all the things that the said law mandates. She said: “A lot of things, including the tutorials, don’t work. The INEE has insisted that initial training doesn’t work either. Let’s just say that a lot of things are still pending, such as the splitting up of teaching posts – something that is countermanded in the Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service, which, in fact, mandates that teaching positions be compressed”.

2. With regard to the discussion about federalism and the clear differences between the southwestern states and other specific cases, could the speakers give a more detailed explanation?

Ramírez pointed out that the Educational Reform proposed a simplistic solution to the problem of low teacher-competency levels, giving rise to social discontent that aggravated the violence and insecurity that already prevailed in some parts of the country. He suggested that teacher performance is not being adequately measured and proposed that the system be changed so that teachers are evaluated during their first years of service and for purposes of voluntary promotion, affirming that better laws are needed to tackle inequality, poverty and political conflict, since the current ones haven’t been effective throughout the country.

Bracho said that it’s important that federalism be strengthened based on an analysis of how the states got into their current situations, such as that of Baja California, which is currently facing the problem of a financial-deficit crisis, while Oaxaca and four other states celebrated agreements in the 1980’s to create a job for members of Section 22 of the Teachers’ Union.

Aceves asserted that the teacher-training colleges in the state of Campeche need to be checked, since 70% of their graduates who

took the evaluation were classified as “non-eligible” in 2014, while most of the candidates in that state came from private teacher-training colleges and other non-teacher-training institutions, which was why the percentage of failures was so high, though the current “eligible” rate for candidates from government teacher-training colleges is 50%.

3. Regarding the proposal to the effect that the SPD and the INEE should grow, should the former cease to be a decentralized agency and become a centralized entity with more control over its management and governance, taking on the task of teacher evaluation?

Bracho unequivocally stated that the Institute should continue to be a regulatory agency, saying: “The current delimitation of the INEE’s normative functions is the right one, since, otherwise, the Institute will not only have to be responsible for evaluation instruments, but also be subject to political pressure from both the unions and the state-level education authorities. It is not in any condition to cope with such enormous pressure. What it can do is provide more support for technical work, but, in my opinion, assuming the aforesaid additional responsibilities would seriously weaken it, rather than strengthen it”.

On the matter of the SPD, her view was that, as a decentralized agency, the INEE has its own legal standing and funding, as well as technical and organizational autonomy, while, as an autonomously operating agency, it is dependent on the SEP, a centralized entity whose head makes the critical decisions regarding it.

For her part, Aceves explained that the SPD has a very limited purview, for example when it comes to assigning teaching posts, since the different states are, in fact, the teachers’ employers, and the office responsible for coordinating the SPD cannot intervene, just as it cannot intervene in the decisions made by the Governing Board jointly with each undersecretariat.

Granados, on the other hand, said that the INEE and the SPD should take on more powers without fear of the resultant political pressures.

4. Some members of the audience expressed the fear that the next government could undo the work done so far when the current six-year presidential term ends, and asked whether the Reform is irreversible.

Teresa Bracho assured the audience that she was not worried that Article 3 might be amended, but said she thought it would be a good idea to amend some parts of the Law Governing the Professional Teaching Service, and above all the wording of the said law, an opinion shared by Rodolfo Ramírez, who said: “Laws aren’t written in stone. Of course they can be amended, and, given that a lot of the evidence that we’ve seen and the information that we’ve received indicates that there are a lot of problems, let’s reform the Reform”.

Aceves reaffirmed that the evaluations had improved and said that she believed that things were moving in the right direction, asserting: “To sum up, I’d say that 75% of the one million one hundred thousand teachers taking the evaluation do so voluntarily, 653 teachers have just entered the SPD and are also taking the evaluation voluntarily, and the candidates taking the evaluation in order to be promoted are seeking a permanent teaching position. I think it’s important that this be made clear”.

In conclusion, Granados asserted that the INEE is the institutional mainstay that will enable the Reform to move forward in the coming years, also stressing that the government had prevailed in all the appeals filed against the said Reform in the Supreme Court. He said: “Whether this suffices to ensure that the Reform is irreversible will depend on who wins the coming election – who becomes the next president of Mexico.

Thus ended the first session of the Seminar – with a lot of questions, but also with the certainty that the evaluation is working and now forms part of our country’s educational heritage. €



More information about the first session of the Seminar on the Educational Reform can be found at: <https://goo.gl/g89BBh>



More information about the 2017 Evaluation of Teacher Performance is available at: <http://www.inee.edu.mx/index.php/servicio-profesional-docente>



For more information about the SPD, the reader should consult: <http://servicioprofesionaldocente.sep.gob.mx/>

Teachers' experiences of high-quality education

Gretta Penélope Hernández, a chronicler, photographer and firm believer that we should “educate to create societies where we can all fit comfortably”, has contributed to several newspapers and writes an opinion column for the online publication, *HuffPost Mexico*. Below she describes four experiences of “high-quality education”.

1. Will, dedication and resources

When the sun is high overhead and the whistle signalling the end of classes is about to be blown in ‘Telesecondary’ school number 190, an institution located in the municipality of Nezahualcóyotl in the State of Mexico. It forms part of Mexico’s distance-learning system. José Reynado González, a polite, soft-spoken teacher who has been working in the said school for 13 years, talks about his concept of high-quality education:

“Having a right isn’t the same as exercising it. How could this be done? The government would have to take young people from their homes to the classroom and find out what’s preventing them from attending classes? On top of that, there’s the matter of ‘quality’, a word that I don’t like, because it’s associated with business. What does a student need in order to receive a high-quality education? First, a human structure, consisting of a team of secretaries, assistants, teachers and school principals with the right training. The ‘Telesecondary’ schools are a special case. Here, we face enormous challenges. A teacher here has to handle 30 students and teach mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, Spanish, English, art and physical education, so s/he has to know a lot about a lot of things. That’s where you come up against reality”.

González, who, after studying Telecommunications Engineering at the National Polytechnic Institute, obtained a Master’s Degree in the Teaching of Mathematics from

the said institution’s Center for Research and Advanced Studies, as well as studying music, painting and theater, affirms:

“In my view, before teaching mathematics to our students, we should teach them civics and ethics in order to engender a sense of social solidarity in them. You don’t reach the productive stage of your life saying two for me and one for you, but one for you and one for me. That’s why we don’t charge enrolment fees or monthly school fees; for ten pesos, we give all our students breakfast. The principal of our school, José González Figueroa, and myself pay the drama and computing teachers out of our own pockets so that our students can receive a more complete education”.

The school has 3 groups with 15 students each, although, as González points out, it previously had 7 groups. This reduction occurred because some teachers retired and the Ministry of Education (Spanish acronym: SEP) hasn’t replaced them. However, he explains that, despite this situation, enrolments have increased, reflecting the trust people have in the school and increasing the challenges faced by it:

“Despite the lack of teachers, we haven’t stopping giving our best for our students. What I give in the classroom is more humanization than quality. We strive to prepare our students for life. Teachers in the distance-learning system have to be patient, since the said system consists of televised lessons on which we have to provide follow-up. Since television moves at a different pace than our students, we have to pause to re-explain what they’ve seen, because, if we let the TV courses keep running without pauses, there comes a point when the students have no idea what they’ve seen”.

But that isn’t all:

“Besides, we have to tackle learning problems and bullying. This school year, we have an autistic student and one with epilepsy. We’re helping them to fit in with their classmates and trying to adapt our teaching to their rhythm. Last year, we made a movie about bullying with the scant equipment that we have in our school, and the response was incredible. We do such things because it’s essential to give young people a chance to develop in a healthy way and enable them to benefit from the solidarity



that exists between the school, the parents and the community in general. We also endeavor to bring our students' parents closer to the school. If a student misses a class, we contact his/her home to find out what happened. We don't leave them alone. We do all these things through willpower, dedication and resources".

Reynado takes the time to keep updated and is enrolled in courses that offer platforms such as the Scholastic and Coursera ones. Thanks to this, his students are taking a workshop in robotics. He believes that it's important to look to the future and equip students with the technical skills that they'll need tomorrow for tasks such as repairing drones:

"I did my own secondary-school studies in the distance-learning system, so I understand it very well. The students are ones from poor backgrounds who don't progress in the other schools or don't want to study, and the technical-school system doesn't help them".

Regarding the things his school needs, he says:

"This school opened 30 years ago. Fortunately, the earthquakes haven't damaged it, but, it hasn't received any maintenance since it was built. We do our best to keep it in good condition, but there's no money for cleaning, paint, roof repairs, etc."

"The whistle has blown and the uproar that marks the end of classes rises into the air like the heat from the sidewalk outside. The school gate opens, and, as the students leave in dribs and drabs, a small group of parents and youngsters enters and seeks out the school principal, José González, greeting him with a mixture of affection and respect. A pair of ex-students have come to tell him that they're going to take the entrance exam in order to study medicine. In a soft voice, smiling all the while, González comments:

"After they graduate, our students come back here to do their social service, and that's how we manage to cover some of the subjects in the curriculum. They know that this is their home, and we always give them a warm welcome".

Taking short, quick steps, the principal proudly gives us a tour of the school, showing us the guava trees whose fruit will be used to make the punch for the Christmas party and the mural that the students painted on the fence.

"I've been working in the education system for 50 years; I graduated from the teach-

er-training college in the town of Iguala and am one of the founders of the 'Telesecondary' system, in which I deeply believe. My children studied in it, and also my grandchildren, and now they're all successful professionals in different areas. One of our aims is to help and guide the new generations, and make them understand that education is essential".

2. Harmonious development of abilities and skills

Its 4:00 p.m. and, except for a small group of semi-boarders, most of the students have left the Ahatzin Cultural Institute. Sara Chávez Hernández, the head of the pre-school and primary sections, bustles back and forth in a seemingly endless flurry of activity. In her little office, there are books for preschool teachers back to the 1930's and 1940's:

"I like to have these books here to remind the new generations of what the required reading for teachers was in those days," says Chávez. She studied pre-school education in her teacher-training college, as well as holding a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Mexico's National Pedagogic University, a Master's Degree in Preschool Education, and also a Ph.D. in Educational Sciences, from Santander University in Mexico City. For her, high-quality education has always existed:

"In accordance with Article Three of the Mexican Constitution, I have to ensure that my children develop everything —knowledge, abilities, physical capacities, artistic skills, and values— harmoniously, since high-quality education comprises all these things".

The Ahatzin is a private school located in the Iztapalapa municipal district —an impoverished, densely populated zone that suffers from severe water shortages— on the eastern edge of Mexico City. The earthquake that struck on the 19th of September of this year made the situation in this area even worse, and Chávez comments:

"Our biggest problem is the shortage of water. We haven't had any since the earthquake, and every three days we order a tanker of it that costs 720 pesos, and then we also have to pay our staff, which we always try very hard to do in full".

Chávez considers that the teaching of art is essential in such a context:

"Artistic education is the key to teaching the other subjects. For example, music

is linked to mathematics and helps children to listen, concentrate, and add and subtract. Dance improves coordination and spatial awareness, while making our children stronger and improving their balance and powers of observation, all of which helps, for example, to improve their handwriting. Movement fosters the development of both sides of the brain and up-down and left-right movement, as well as spatial orientation. We have both cognitive and physical abilities, and, if we develop them in unison, we can really engender all-round learning".

As a school principal, Chávez is demanding and says:

"Although I give the teachers the freedom to develop their own teaching methodologies, we look at the group profiles together and develop a method that will enable all the students to learn. A teacher should never stop learning; updating is an ongoing quest. Right now, I'm studying Law at Mexico's Open University, while, at the same time, taking some courses offered by the teacher-updating centers and participating in an additional workshop in order to gain a full understanding of the scholastic-improvement track.

If we've kept going, it's because we've given the children a different kind of experience. Most of our graduates who take the secondary-school entrance exam are able to enroll in the areas that they chose. Other schools have praised our educational model and we've won 'Knowledge Olympics' competitions".

Based on her experience and the context in which she operates, she concludes:

"Some people say that the Educational Reform is just more of the same and has nothing new to offer, but it's up to each one of us to make it work for our children".

3. Producing critical citizens who are able to make decisions

Adriana Flores, who holds a Bachelor's Degree in Spanish Language and Literature from The national Autonomous University of Mexico, is a shrewd-looking 31-year-old secondary-school Spanish teacher who doesn't mince her words:

"Providing high-quality education means enabling most of one's students to learn according to their possibilities and equipping them with tools for life. However, in the place where I work, the third grade of secondary school, which is the one I teach,

will be the final year for a lot of students, so it's our duty to equip them to face life outside the school."

This is Flores' second year as a teacher at the Emilio Rosenblueth Secondary School in Xochimilco, one of the most marginalized municipalities in Mexico City. She also teaches tertiary-level classes on the Santa Martha campus of the Mexico City Autonomous University, which is also known as *Casa Libertad* (Liberty House), and has the following to say about her job:

"One of the biggest problems I face is absenteeism; there are a lot local festivities for which they cordon off neighborhoods, with the result that the children there stop attending classes. Besides, I have 40 students in each group, some of whom have learning difficulties. Last school year, I had 4 children who couldn't read the set texts and were barely managing to learn Spanish."

To tackle this situation, Flores organizes project work and depends on team planning:

"At the beginning, I let the students form their own teams. Generally, the members of the color guard* seek out the ones who work hardest, while the less hard-working children bunch together, but end up not handing in any project. A couple of months later, I change the rules and form groups made up of the most advanced students—including some hard-working ones, some with good spelling and some who are good drawers—where the best-performing students help the slower ones. [*Translator's note: The 'color guard' is an honored tradition in Mexican schools, whereby students who earn good grades and impeccably follow school rules form part of the escort in the daily flag-raising ceremony and are chosen to lead group projects, etc.]

However, she comments that, despite all her efforts:

"I sometimes think that, while we teach our young people to obey their teachers, and be punctual and neat and tidy, we fail to produce critical citizens who can make decisions. I try to encourage my students to question things, and literature is essential for that."

Hence, the last book she sets during the school year is an anthology of poetry:

"I give them 5 poets, and each group decides which one it wants to read. Besides choosing a specific poet, the students have to write an introduction explaining why they chose the particular poems in question. I lend them my books and take them

to the school library. The Turkish embassy donated several very good books, but, sadly, the school librarian retired and hasn't been replaced, so now the library is closed, and this has slowed us down a lot. You have to understand that the school library is the only place where many of these young people come into contact with books."

Flores asserts that, at the end of the course, the students make an effort to write well and worry about their spelling and grammar:

"That's because they learn that writing is a means of expression whereby they can communicate with their girlfriend or boyfriend, complain, or research a topic. I've always insisted that literature isn't a luxury, but a necessity, since it enables us to forge links with other people and relate to ourselves. I try to transmit this to all my students and keep telling them 'Read! Read! Not to show off, but because you need to ask questions in this life.' Reading and writing make us freer."

She looks at her watch. It's 1.45 p.m., the time when her afternoon classes begin, and, before leaving, she says:

"I once came across a pair of my old students doing somersaults and cartwheels at a traffic light to earn a few pesos, and that made me so sad. We have to encourage them to enroll in senior high school and go on studying. The third year of the secondary cycle is crucial. If you can't provide high-quality education, you just shouldn't be a teacher."

4. Being sensitive to the demands and needs of the group you're teaching

In the Benito Juárez full-time primary school, which is located in the center of Chetumal, the capital of the state of Quintana Roo, very close to the seafront that looks out on the Caribbean ocean, fifth-grade teacher, Lizbeth Alvarado Estrada, asserts:

"As a teacher and a mother, I'm a passionate defender of the public-school system, which has better-trained teachers, is supported by the Unit for the Provision of Support Services for Ordinary Education, and has high-quality supervision and incorporated teachers who are committed to the community."

Alvarado, a graduate of the Bacalar Regional Teacher Training College, believes that specific challenges lie behind this general image:

"You have to know your surroundings: You can't use the same teaching strategies in one school as in another, even within the same city. Everything is different – the parents, the premises, the number of students. When trying to find ways to provide high-quality education you face different challenges, the main one being that of teaching in overcrowded classrooms, closely followed by resistance from parents, who should support the teacher's efforts. Some of my colleagues are afraid of making demands on their students, because a complaint from a parent can cause them to lose their job. What's really sad is that the parents have no idea what goes on in the classroom. There's confrontation instead of communication, and that affects the children's education"

Alvarado exploits her comprehensive training in her teaching:

"Since I was a girl scout, I love playing, and this has enabled me to get to know each of my students well and identify with them. For example, this year I'm teaching a group of 8 children who are lagging behind when it comes to solving problems involving fractions, decimals, division and multiplication. The intention is to use strategies that go from the concrete and visual to the abstract – i.e. to work separately on the concrete and visual aspects with the children who are having difficulties during two sessions a week, and to cover the abstract part in the mathematics with the whole class in the actual mathematics class, in accordance with the Singapore Method"

She explains that she wants to use play as an integrating tool both in the classroom and in the community as a whole, and assert that, while she believes that what happens in the classroom is important, violence and discrimination also occur in the home:

"Scolding doesn't work. We do exercises so that the children who aren't having difficulties can appreciate how threatened their classmates feel. Of course, you have to know how and when to use this tactic to prevent the more advanced students from mocking the more backward ones. It's not a question of exposing the latter to aggression, but, rather, of demonstrating scenarios that show how different situations develop. As a teacher, it's my job to work with the bully, the victims and the onlookers to show them what's happening. Finally, the bullies become aware of their actions and end up offering sincere apologies to their victims for

SPECIAL REPORT: THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN EDUCATION
BACKGROUND ARTICLE

what they've done. I use the Kiva program, which was invented in Finland and has produced excellent results.

Parents should be able to spend more time with their children. I have children in my classes who spend a lot of time alone. Employers should also be more sensitive and implement more suitable working hours. Sometimes, my students' parents can't attend meetings during the week aimed at showing them how to support their children's learning, and I have to ask them to meet with me during the weekend, but only on national holidays devoted to the family or the environment. We hold competitions, play and have a really good time. It's very enriching".

In such circumstances, the lack of teachers of children with special needs is also a problem:

"I have a ten-year-old daughter with severe hearing impairment who uses a surgically implanted electronic device in order to hear. I wanted to send her to a government school, but had to enroll her in a private one because of this problem. I know what my daughter's needs are as a student, and am also aware of the problems faced by teachers who lack the specialized training needed to teach her. It's a big challenge to handle children with this kind of impediment without suitable training. Sometimes, we have children with special problems that haven't even been diagnosed, so that we don't know which problem we're trying to tackle".

In Alvarado's view, a high-quality teacher is one who knows what the needs of the group that s/he is teaching are:

"In other words, you have to be familiar with the age, interests, family background and socioeconomic circumstances of the children. The teacher should develop the skills and strategies needed to deal with different abilities and learning rhythms, as well as knowing how to deal with the school authorities. Besides serving as a liaison between the school and the parents, s/he should never stop learning, keep up with syllabus updates, and learn both from the experiences of his/her colleagues and from his/her own research. €

Beyond evaluation: strengthening identity and teacher training

"Teachers are the most important agents in the education system. Their evaluation is a very powerful instrument for ascertaining their level of performance, and the information it yields should be used to improve their training and strengthen their identity; this is the true aim of evaluation," asserts **Ricardo Cuenca**, the General Director of the Institute for Peruvian Studies, in the interview transcribed below.

How can we define high-quality education?

The concept of high quality has been behind several educational reforms and given rise to different debates about how to define high quality, achieve it, and evaluate for it. While it has not been easy to agree on a definition of high quality, a large majority of the world's governments are working hard to foster it. Ricardo Cuenca, who holds a Ph.D. in Education from Cayetano Heredia University in Peru, comments:

"Education has been the most important instrument available to governments for the purpose of shaping nations, and, through it, the said governments have managed to foster certain kinds of citizenship. In its current form, education has become a basic means of developing competencies in people, and thus strengthening democratic institutions and turning growth into development.

Against this backdrop, the notion of high quality is complex because, among other things, it fuels battles for power, and will only be defined via a vigorous hegemonic discourse.

There is a consensus in Latin America about some of the things that should be required of education, including expectations that it develop student competencies in reading comprehension, mathematics and, of



course, citizenship. I believe that high quality is achieved when an education system develops the aforesaid competencies in everyone, respecting all kinds of diversity. This accords with the proposals made by UNESCO regarding the efficiency, effectiveness, high quality, equity and pertinence of education”.

What role do teachers play in the fostering of high quality?

“I’ve always argued that, without teachers, education cannot develop. They are the ones who promote a better school environment and set learning processes in motion. Thus, besides being the most important factor within the school, they are the main key to the success of education systems, though there are risks, since, in systems which lack adequate supplies and infrastructure, the teachers do not work in optimal conditions, so it is harder to produce the results that are expected of them.

Clearly, there are other factors besides teachers, both inside and outside the school, including basic working conditions that affect the extent to which high quality education is achieved. Teachers will not be able to give effective classes in a school that has no water or electricity and minimal classroom furniture. Academic leadership, the amount of support from the school principal, and the curriculum, are all things that affect the daily work of teachers, while the factors outside the school that affect student performance are the socioeconomic conditions of the family, conditions of the neighborhood and, indeed, of the country. It has been clearly determined that countries with high levels of per capita income obtain better results in standardized tests.

Hence, one must ensure that the basic infrastructure exists for enabling students to study in optimal conditions – i.e. nutritional and health programs, access by parents to more resources in order to support their children’s education, and cultural manifestations whereby families have more contact with education-related issues. If an education system includes these things, students will have more support in their endeavor to learn.

What role does teacher evaluation play in the achievement of high-quality education?

Teacher performance and its evaluation are essential if an education system is to achieve the high quality that it seeks. Education sys-

tems and the countries in which they operate define high quality in accordance with a set of criteria with which teacher evaluation must be aligned, failing which they will be unable to forge the positive link that enables them to strengthen the teaching profession so as to achieve the high quality that they seek.

For example, if an education system conceives quality in terms of results in mathematics or reading comprehension, to accord with this idea all teacher evaluations should focus on those two areas. However, if a country decides to adopt a much more complex definition of high quality, including civic education and intercultural competencies, teacher evaluations also need to be more complex, aligning themselves with the aforesaid subjects the teaching of which also requires high quality.

1. The characteristics of evaluation

Teacher evaluation must take stock of three basic things: (1) technique, since there must be no flaws in the methodological and technical aspects of the evaluation; (2) the aim of the evaluation, which is usually to improve teacher performance, and (3) the need to be transparent and instill trust in the evaluatee. Since evaluation is a very sensitive matter, the said evaluatee must clearly understand the technical strategy pertaining to the evaluation (i.e. its purpose and aims), and perceive that it is transparent and ethical.

2. The aims and uses of evaluation

People misunderstand that evaluation sets out to raise quality, thinking that improvements in a teacher’s performance will lead to overall improvement of his/her school or have a direct cause-and-effect impact on student-learning outcomes. Over the years, we’ve discovered that other factors besides teacher performance are associated with learning, and hence we need to be clear about the aims of evaluation. The first of these, which is the least talked about –albeit the most important in my opinion– is to produce valid, pertinent information that serves to foster professionalization – i.e. to transform teacher training. Based on performance-evaluation results, we can restructure the teacher-training curriculum, propose new ongoing-training programs, or seek out postgraduate-study options.

Another aim of evaluation is to create a merit-based career structure based on the information stemming from it. Mexico, Chile,

Peru and Ecuador have already begun to do this in our region by creating a pyramid, the apex of which will be reached by some teachers based on a set of evaluation results that clearly indicates that they are doing a good job.

Finally, teacher evaluation could serve as a basis for research whose findings make it possible to identify teaching practices and, based on them, design strategies and public policies that improve teaching.

While it is a fact that evaluation has traditionally been associated with fear and punishment, since teachers believe that they might lose their positions in the government teaching system, experiences in the region –above all, in Chile– show that only a very small number of teachers lose their jobs in the education system.

Evaluation should be a tool for professional development, and thus conceived of, has more benefits than risks. Hence, its ultimate purpose is to gather information so as to improve teacher performance, which, along with other things that the system should take into consideration, ensuring their high quality, will yield better student results”.

How can we regain the prestige once enjoyed by teachers?

Cuenca, who is currently a member of the Technical Committee for Norms and Guidelines for Improving Education of Mexico’s National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: INEE), and also the chairman of the Peruvian Society for Educational Research, asserts:

“Teacher evaluation isn’t tantamount to educational reform, but, rather, a tool for achieving it. A series of actions need to be taken in order to really strengthen the teaching profession and radically reform it. Though I’ve already mentioned some of the said actions –i.e. ones pertaining to teacher training, the development of a merit-based career structure, the dissemination of good practices, etc.–, there are other important things, such as the crucial need to boost the prestige of teachers and reassess their role.

The building of identity is a work in progress that changes in keeping with the context in which it occurs. Nowadays, the first thing we must do is to ensure that the teaching profession is afforded the high status it deserves. While some people affirm that the said profession is usually extremely vulnerable, and believe that professionals from other areas



are automatically qualified to teach, or that other means of learning, such as computers and other information-technology resources, will replace teachers; it is the teaching profession, par excellence, that relies on such resources in order to develop new competencies in students. While those countries that allow professionals from other areas to teach without any prior pedagogical training do, indeed, obtain fast results in certain subject areas, the use of such people sends a contradictory message regarding the level of pedagogic expertise and professionalization that teachers are required to possess.

It must not be forgotten that, since knowledge about pedagogy is what imbues the teaching profession with a sense of identity, it is incumbent on the State to ensure that all its citizens acknowledge the importance the said profession, paying special attention to the two important aspects of know-how and professionalism. The former of these pertains to the technical expertise that teachers should acquire in order to be accepted by their fellow experts, while the second has to do with the social status of the teaching profession and the need for teachers to assume responsibility for the results that they produce. Finally, acknowledgement of the professional status of teachers is also linked to working conditions, healthcare, security, support for those working in problematic or remote areas, etc.

What can Mexico learn from the experiences of other Latin American countries?

Most of the experiences of teacher evaluation in Latin American countries are rela-

tively recent, at least those in this second evaluation generation. The most traditional ways of evaluating teachers were via competitive examinations or the accumulation of certificates. The most complex evaluations have been developed during the last few years, which is why few countries are implementing them, with Chile probably having the most experience in doing so.

The lessons learned pertain to very specific things, the first of which is the use of multiple instruments –including files, videos and classroom observations– that can take stock of, and obtain a panoramic view of, the complexity of teaching. There are other types of evaluation that are more complex and more expensive, but more accurate and more aligned with the ultimate aims of the process. However, for relatively big education systems such as the Mexican and Peruvian ones, these systems are too complex and costly.

Some other experiences have been in countries that have compiled basic performance standards, either in the form of frameworks, as in the case of Chile and Peru, or of profiles, standards and norms, as in the case of Mexico, Ecuador and Colombia. These systems constitute great progress, since all effective evaluation is based on the setting of standards and performance criteria.”

How can we ensure that evaluation is ongoing?

Based on his experience as coordinator of the research component of the Regional Program for the Formulation of Policies for the Teaching Profession of the UNESCO of-

fice in Chile and also of the Peruvian Educational Program for Cooperation with Germany, Cuenca says:

“In my view, what makes the policies less vulnerable, and thus ensures their continuation, is people’s perception that they are legitimate. When policies are considered legitimate by society, it is usually more difficult for the authorities to change them.

It’s a fact that, when people think that public- and educational-policy decisions make sense, we have more time and leeway to put them in place and develop them, and thus make them less vulnerable to changes imposed from outside. Also, policies become more important when they are backed by a reform, as is the case with teacher evaluation.

We don’t just need to change the system; to make changes in the Professional Teaching Service, it must be clearly understood that it’s a matter of changing how teachers conceive of their job, because the policies might be modified. Therefore, public acceptance and clarity job-wise are the things that should help us to render the policies ongoing, as well as making us aware of the challenges we face in our efforts to consolidate education and teacher training in Mexico and other Latin American countries.” €

Interview by Lizbeth Torres Alvarado



The web address of the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos is: <http://iep.org.pe/>

IN THE CLASSROOM

Educational evaluation as seen by teachers in Mexico, Colombia and Argentina

Various Latin American countries have implemented educational reforms that have adopted evaluation as a strategy for improving teacher performance and increasing professionalization so as to help improve education. Below, we present the viewpoints of seven Latin American teachers in order to promote more constructive discussion about this topic.

The interviewees

MEXICO:

Reyes Ricardo Campuzano (RRCB): Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education; 10 years as a third-grade teacher; deputy academic director; promotor of information and communications technologies and reading. **Arnulfo Hernández Jiménez (AHJ):** retired teacher from the State of Morelos, with 32 years' experience as a teacher and principal in elementary schools; certified evaluator since 2015. **Olimpia Fernández Castillo (OFC):** Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and Master's Degree in Education; 16 years' as a secondary-school teacher in the State of Mexico; certified INEE evaluator.

COLOMBIA:

Quira Alejandra Sanabria Rojas (QASR): Bachelor's Degree in Chemistry; Master's Degree in the Teaching of Chemistry; specialist in Teaching at the University Level; candidate for Ph.D. in Education; 20 years' experience in primary and secondary education, initial and ongoing teacher training. **Javier Mauricio Ruiz (JMR):** Master's Degree in the Visual Arts; postgraduate studies in Teaching at the University Level and the Management of Educational Projects; Master's Degree in the Educational Sciences and Ph.D. in Law; President of the Guillermo León Valencia

College in Bogota; university teacher. **Mercelena Hernández Sierra (MHS):** Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics; specialist in Applied Mathematics; Master's Degree in Education; 19 years' experience as an elementary-, secondary- and university-level teacher.

ARGENTINA:

María Silvia Vacchieri Mecchia (MSVM): a teacher of Biology and Geography with 27 years' experience as a secondary-school teacher.

I. Teacher training in each of the countries

Question: Has your teaching been evaluated? Answers:

MEXICO:

RRCB: Yes, in my teacher-training examination and by the principal of my school during the school year. When the Educational Reform began, I voluntarily took the examination in order to be certified as an evaluator.

AHJ: I took a competitive examination when I graduated from teacher-training college. Career teachers had to take examinations in order to get pay increases. Now, there's a performance evaluation and an examination leading to certification as an evaluator.

OFC: Yes, I was in the first group of teachers to be evaluated in 2015, and I got an "outstanding" grade.

COLOMBIA:

QASR: Yes, teachers have had to be evaluated since the 1994 General Education Law passed in this year, and they can sit on committees that evaluate other teachers.

JMR: There are two types of teacher in my country: those governed by Decree 2277, issued in 1979, who aren't subject to evaluation, and those governed by Decree 1278, issued in 2002, which, among other things, mandates evaluation. Having been hired under the latter statute in 2005, I've been evaluated for the last 12 years. **MHS:** Yes, between 2010 and 2014 I underwent two competency evaluations, passing both of them.

ARGENTINA:

MSVM: No, in Neuquén, the province where I work, we've never been evaluated.



Question: What does the evaluation process consist of in your country?

Answers:

MÉXICO:

RRCB: The model covers group diagnosis, the external context and the sociocultural aspects of the community, didactic planning, evidence and analysis.

AHJ: It consists of three instruments that are administered either face to face or online – a questionnaire answered by the school principal and the teacher about their execution of

the tasks pertaining to their position, a project grading the planning and implementation of lessons and reflection on the said project, and, finally, an examination testing knowledge of syllabus contents.

OFC: The evaluation consists of three stages: (1) a report on the fulfillment of professional responsibilities, (2) a teaching project, and (3) an examination covering knowledge of course and curriculum contents.

COLOMBIA:

QASR: The 1991 Founding Charter mandates respect for scholastic autonomy, meaning that there is no uniformity, though, with regard to teaching, it mandates the planning of aims and deadlines for their achievement, the effective use of resources, punctuality, strategy design, feedback on the evaluation of students, teachers and managerial staff, and self-evaluation.

JMR: You're evaluated from the moment you join the teaching profession, via a competitive merit-based examination that tests knowledge (which can be taken by teachers from any area) and an examination that covers job and personal skills. There's an annual evaluation, and, if you fail to get a minimum of 60% on it two years running, you can be dismissed.

MHS: Each decree contains regulations governing promotion. The classification for Decree 1278 stipulates three grades, each of which consists of four salary levels. The problem is that salary increases are subject to funding limits. For example, if 20,000 teachers apply and there's only enough money to promote 1,000 of them, then only 1,000 of the candidates get salary increases, although many more have passed the test. Thus, evaluation, which is depicted to society as measuring quality, really depends on whether or not funds are available.

ARGENTINA:

MSVM: Teachers' meetings are held in Neuquén once or twice a week for the purpose of filling a post. The teachers have to enroll in June and the Evaluating Council of the Provincial Education Board evaluates their documents, awarding the position to the teacher who has most points.

II. Experiences of evaluation

Question: How do you see teacher evaluation? Answers:

MEXICO:

RRCB: It was more complicated before because the assessment was subjective. However, a case study and an examination focusing on competencies were used to certify evaluators, and I liked that.

AHJ: I have mixed feelings. I was a member of the first generation of teachers to be evaluated and there was no course to help us, added to which there were problems with the platform. Looking back, my problems were political and organizational ones, but now I have a positive view of teacher evaluation.

OFC: My experience has been a pleasant one. As an evaluator, I've seen the process very close up and appreciate the effort that teachers make. I've seen the products, the different types of student, contexts, ways of evaluating and intervention strategies, and also the teachers' dedication.

COLOMBIA:

QASR: I've been evaluated in both private and government schools. The first time, I was evaluated in accordance with the ISO 9000 standard for private schools, where improvements can be more easily seen.

JMR: Evaluation is a strategy and its instruments are tools for fostering policy discussions. This merit-based model is a response to the globalization of education: evaluation becomes a tool for subjugating people to neoliberal-type policies in the medium term. It depends on who evaluates, what the interpersonal relationships are, and if the teacher has reached a prior agreement with his/her superior.

MHS: In the evaluations that I failed, I asked for an explanation of the result, but they just mentioned a numerical score without providing any feedback to improve my teaching.

Question: Do you think the way teachers are evaluated is relevant? Which aspects would you improve? Answers:

MEXICO:

RRCB: It's relevant because it stresses two types of evaluation – formative and summative.

AHJ: Generally, I focus on the activities that I need to pay attention to in order to pass the evaluation, but, once I've passed it, I go on teaching the same way I did before. I think it's a good thing that the process has changed.

OFC: I think the way teachers are evaluated is appropriate. Each stage of the process gen-

erates specific information that enables the evaluator to assign a grade for performance and provide the evaluatee with an individualized report on the results.

QASR: The areas that need to be improved or changed can't continue being expressed in general terms, above all if the evaluation continues to be a blend of the qualitative and the quantitative. All qualitative judgments translate into quantitative judgments that become criteria for exclusion.

JMR: I think that all of us who are teachers or school principals should engage in the three processes of self-evaluation, peer evaluation and evaluation of others. All teacher evaluation is imposed from outside.

MHS: The focus of diagnostic-formative evaluation is qualitative and it takes the context into account, replacing the model that only took stock of theoretical variables.

ARGENTINA:

MSVM: The transparent way that the Neuquén Provincial Education Board operates is very interesting. We'd need to evaluate teaching practices and subject knowledge at regular intervals, because academic levels are dropping.

Question: As a teacher, what do you expect of evaluation? Answers:

MÉXICO:

RRCB: I expect it to reflect on teaching practices, since the aim is to achieve improvement from the inside.

AHJ: I expect the results to provide me with some guidelines in order to find out what my strengths are and which things I need to correct, as well as encouraging me to change my teaching practices. The feedback should serve to enrich my activities in the classroom, and the training courses should be forums for analysis and reflection that equip me with theoretical, methodological and didactic tools to improve my performance in the classroom. I've been disappointed by the feedback that we get after being evaluated, since it's been very general.

OFC: I expect to receive better training, but, due to the limitations of the process, this expectation hasn't been fulfilled. The results have only had an impact on those teachers who have received salary increases after joining the Program for Incentive-based Promotion at Post.

COLOMBIA:

QASR: I would expect my dignity to be safeguarded and abuse of power and workplace harassment to be reduced, as well as having a better chance to pass. There are regulations governing these things, but discrimination continues to exist.

JMR: I expect it to provide me with feedback for improvement, since, having to provide evidence of my performance, I evaluate myself continuously.

MHS: I expect it to determine whether there's a scenario that fosters learning. According to the Ministry of Education, one of the purposes is to provide feedback

ARGENTINA:

MSVM: In Neuquén, we've had online training courses. The problem is that the tutors we get after these courses aren't qualified enough.

III. The impact of evaluation

Question: Do you think that evaluations are useful ways of making good on the right to high-quality education?

Answers:

MÉXICO:

RRCB: They're definitely a good way to start changing things, ranging from teachers' attitudes to classroom practices.

AHJ: Yes, as long as we make them formative. We can't generalize.

OFC: Yes. The results provide us with useful, timely information about student learning outcomes and the state of our schools, enabling the government to plot paths for formulating policy and raising the level of education in our country.

COLOMBIA:

QASR: The problem when it comes to seeking high-quality education is still one of investment versus results. High quality is defined in terms of more financial resources and a better infrastructure, but the value of the individual is almost never mentioned.

JMR: I don't think evaluation per se raises the quality of education; however, I do believe that it's a powerful instrument that may or may not be used to achieve improvement depending on who wields it.

MHS: Evaluation should lead to improved teaching practices, but student performance is associated with several things, including

the social and family context, the student's people skills, etc.

ARGENTINA:

MSVM: The few evaluations that have been carried out in Argentina haven't helped to rectify the situation, and our teacher training is very weak. It's important that families become more committed, but one also has to take into account the geographical, social and cultural contexts in which our schools operate.

Question: How should evaluation be used and for what? Answers:

MEXICO:

RRCB: Evaluation results are used to improve teaching – for example, to set up courses. However, one thing we need to improve is the feedback given to teachers, so that their teaching gets better.

AHJ: We need evaluation in order to get to know the situation and detect problems, but there's no sense in carrying it out if no subsequent changes are made.

OFC: The information helps us to make decisions aimed at improving teaching strategies and achieving the desired learning outcomes in the areas of Language and Communication, Mathematics and Science, since it enables us to ascertain what the status quo is, what progress has been made, and which things need to be improved.

COLOMBIA:

QASR: Each evaluation needs to provide information about the kinds of evidence that exist regarding the achievement of goals. Not only does one note that people now understand this procedure better, but also that physical and human resources are being managed more effectively, and that there's a better understanding of the obligation to provide high-quality services to students and their parents.

JMR: A few days ago, I was thinking about how wonderful the job I do is, though it's the last link in the educational chain. In order to provide high-quality education, we need a coherent, harmonious system that conceives of education as a national heritage. That's what evaluation needs to help us to achieve.

MHS: Evaluation is a space for feedback and one of the most effective tools for fostering learning. Therefore, it should focus on students and on the learning process.

ARGENTINA:

MSVM: If we get evaluated, I'd like the results to reflect shortfalls and needs and support our country's education. We need compulsory training in methods and contents.

Question: Has evaluation led to improvements in the education system?

Answers:

MEXICO:

AHJ: There's been gradual improvement: they've started to draw up guidelines for teachers that enable us to identify the areas where we need to improve.

OFC: There's been an important change in the way we teach. Evaluation seeks to optimize performance.

COLOMBIA:

QASR: There's evidence pointing to improvements in the management of resources. People have a better understanding of the issues and it can be affirmed that the education system has also improved.

JMR: Evaluation is a key to control, which is one of the factors that determines what kind of citizens we want to produce, above all in a country with freedom of expression and a mixed education system composed of private, public and licensed institutions.

MHS: Evaluation should be an ongoing, cumulative process – something inherent in, and parallel to, teaching. Done in isolation, it isn't effective.

ARGENTINA:

MSVM: There's a very serious clash between the unions, the teachers and the government authorities in every province in my country. The basic demand is for salary increases, since it's believed that high salaries will lead to improvements in education – something that I personally don't believe will happen, since this confrontation prevents quality from being raised and hampers the implementation of evaluations. €

The *Gazette* thanks Cecilia Mariel Bossi, Jersson Arnulfo Guerrero Nova and Alejandro Gamboa Juárez, from the INEE's Unit for Normativity and Educational Policy, for their help in setting up the interviews transcribed above.

ROADMAP

Territory: functionally structured evaluations for innovation based on the 2016-2020 Mid-term Plan of the National System for the Evaluation of Education

María del Carmen Reyes and Enrique Muñoz Goncen, specialists in Geographic and Geometric Information Systems, explain how educational policy can be evaluated based on geographic and territorial considerations with reference to the 32 State-level Mid-term Programs for the Evaluation and Improvement of Education (Spanish acronym: PEEMES)

“We were accustomed to talking about territory, for example in maps, without being explicit,” says María del Carmen Reyes Guerrero, Head of the Unit for Divulging and Fostering an Evaluation Culture of the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: INEE). “One of my lines of research is cybercartography, a paradigm change that sets out to switch from traditional maps to more complex ones that enable space to be communicated much more effectively. At this point, it bears pointing out that one of the topics in which the INEE is interested is context, since all schools operate in a specific context”.

Reyes Guerrero first broached this issue in the Mexican Ministry of Education (Spanish acronym: SEP) in the 1970’s, when she faced the challenge of creating the first system in the world that would enable the said Ministry to understand where education and the evaluation thereof were taking place. At that time, this pioneering system operated at the municipal level, since no suitable technology existed at the local

level. Cartographic renderings –i.e. simple maps marked with educational- planning yardsticks for the purpose of policymaking– were produced. As the years went by, the outlines took shape and the mapping continued in the Arturo Rosenblueth Processing Center, where the system was redesigned to function at the local level.

“When we did this work in 1975,” Reyes Guerrero went on, “it was very innovative. The Canadian specialists said it was the first time they’d seen a geographic-information system that really worked. After all these years, it seems to me to be crucial for education, in which it’s important to know *where* the learning is occurring – at home, in school, in a museum or elsewhere. Now we’re more focused on the school, because that’s where systematic learning takes place, but the latter process should be studied in terms of territory, being understood to extend beyond the physical geography that is taught in the classroom – the location of volcanoes and rivers and the names of the different states. Modern geography goes beyond that. For example, we’ve paid a lot of attention to *where* and *how* built-up spaces appear, how they are organized and how all sorts of social, cultural, physical and political phenomena are expressed in them, including, of course, the learning environment, since it is this *where*, this spatial dimension, that characterizes modern geography. Of course, space can be expressed in very different ways – via narratives, videos, photographs, images or maps that include epistemological models”.

Reyes Guerrero describes how the aforesaid tools can form part of public-policy design in areas such as communications:

“Territory is narratively communicated via technology. Many people use Waze, Google Maps or some other resource in order to do this. In Mexico, technology has helped us to bring space nearer to people. Before, this was done implicitly, but now it’s done explicitly. You were told how to get from your house to your workplace, using descriptions of specific landmarks such as shops or buildings, but now you can actually see the said landmarks, sometimes in the form of satellite images or computer maps. People think about it. When you say “Chihuahua”, people’s



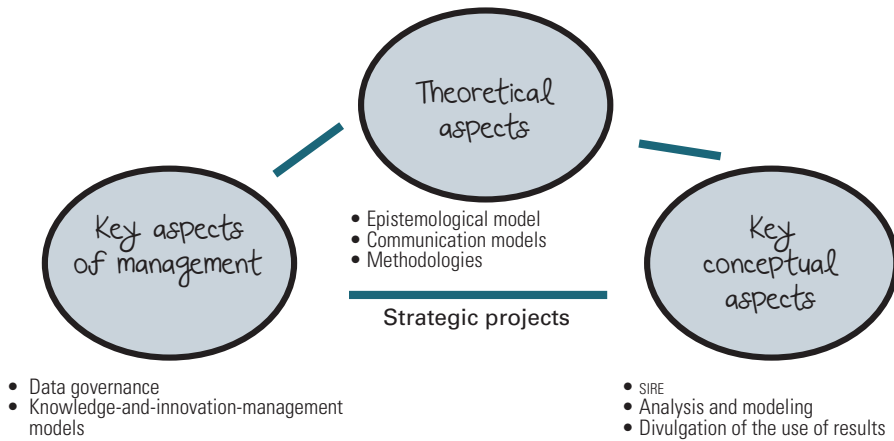
cognitive framework immediately moves there, and they’re aware, albeit not explicitly, that going to San Cristobal de las Casas isn’t the same as going to Monterrey. Insofar as we manifest it via maps, this process becomes a communication tool, since visual communication is something central”.

Explaining that this process also serves to analyze and model space, Reyes Guerrero talks about educational flows:

“There are primary schools, and people graduate from them. Where can I best locate a secondary school so that it can deal with this flow of students graduating from the primary school? If families or education officials say that they need a secondary school in such and such a place, how do you give them an affirmative or negative answer? You need to have analytical tools, which are also a basic part of the educational process”.

She goes into more detail about the essential role played by “where”:

Evaluation and society



“If I were to ask you, for example, some questions about social wellbeing and health, such as “Which hospital is nearest to you?”, you’ll always focus on *where*, and the same thing applies when you’re asked where you’re going to live and where you’re going to work. The new focus on schools in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries provides us with lots of tools to answer these questions more systematically. An emphasis on territory enables different epistemological approaches to converge. In terms of action and public policy, a map enables you to see where there is an impact. Territory becomes a shared place where everything can come together at both the empirical and theoretical levels.

Focusing one’s gaze in order to make decisions

Reyes Guerrero, who received the Samuel Gill Gamble Award for Cartography in 1993, explains how maps are used in public policymaking:

“The first thing you do is make an inventory, modelling risks and other things. This has been done for a long time in the petroleum industry, and now it’s used in the electoral system. For example, in the early 1980’s I played a part in redistributing electoral districts, using spatial and territorial analysis to demarcate the said districts. After I explained that the modern way of doing this was by using mathematical models and data systems, the Mexican Congress unanimously voted to use spatial analysis to redistribute

polling districts, with all the political parties agreeing. In education, public-policy design must, perforce, take stock of territory. Of course, you can think in an abstract manner and just focus on the school, but when you get to the policymaking stage, you have to look at the territory, since we talk abstractly about regions that we haven’t seen in black and white.

Reyes Guerrero goes on to explain how to look the educational territory of Mexico in the context of the 2016-2020 Mid-term Program of the National System for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: PMP SNEE):

“It isn’t an easy task. There has to be a natural convergence between what we know, the existing on-the-ground experiences, and the epistemological framework. We’ve designed a methodology to achieve this – a response to our need to get to know each other and develop a shared language based on our epistemological models, to begin to build bridges so that we can create so-called roadmaps that will be meaningful to the public policymakers in the different states. It’s a collaborative-knowledge construct that plays a key role in ensuring that evaluation feeds into public-policy design, the classroom, and either the school itself or the school zones, using different scales and features. However, it’s an essentially methodological process. There’s a spatial correlation among a lot of the phenomena that we’re observing in the education process, along with a transference of a cultural type

– one of uses and practices pertaining to the appropriation of technologies, as well as in the areas of teaching and learning.

For his part, Enrique Muñoz, who has accumulated 15 years of experience in applying geomatics to the formulation of public policy and in providing consultancy about territorial analysis, talks about the different aspects of territory:

“The idea of territory per se has to do with the spatial and temporal dimensions, which are coherent in every way. When we talk about territory, we’re also talking about time, since the latter comprehends a history that has been meaningful in different periods, informed different educational policies, and taken different shapes. Likewise, public policy behaves differently over time and is based on many factors that change with the years. The challenge is to make it explicit and collaborate in its formulation.

First, we have to make a joint working plan pertaining to the PMP SNEE overall, and then a plan pertaining to each of the people who are designing public policy at the state level. We have to foster conversations that will enable us, for example, to talk about the educational shortfalls detected in each state and about who will be responsible for building bridges”.

Carmen, who holds a Ph.D. in Geographical Information Systems from Simon Fraser University in Canada, points out that a plan also needs to be made pertaining to each of the people charged with public-policy design at the federal level, stating that, in order to go from theory to practice when designing programs, we need to be clear about the information that the implementers in the different states need. She explains:

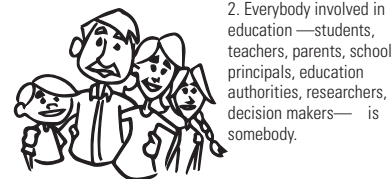
“First, we have to work with the people at the INEE who developed the model and methodology for creating the PEEME’s. We would need to interweave the different methodologies. Since most people have formed a cognitive construct for the notion of space, they can set up workshops and start to hold discussions. When groups talk about the design of a policy and create a map, their members get to know each other and start to get together and reflect on the things that are pertinent. It’s a matter of including spatial features, but in a very natural way, without holding big conferences about theoretical issues. More analytical thinking can be fostered as a basis for empirical work. This can happen with the PEEME and with

1. What is educational evaluation and what does it consist of? Who is it useful for? How is it used? Am I a part of it?



3. The stories told by evaluation. The benchmarks, statistics and analyses that stem from evaluations tell us about the equity, continuance and quality of the education that we provide. These things are not just numbers; they are our stories.

Evaluation and society



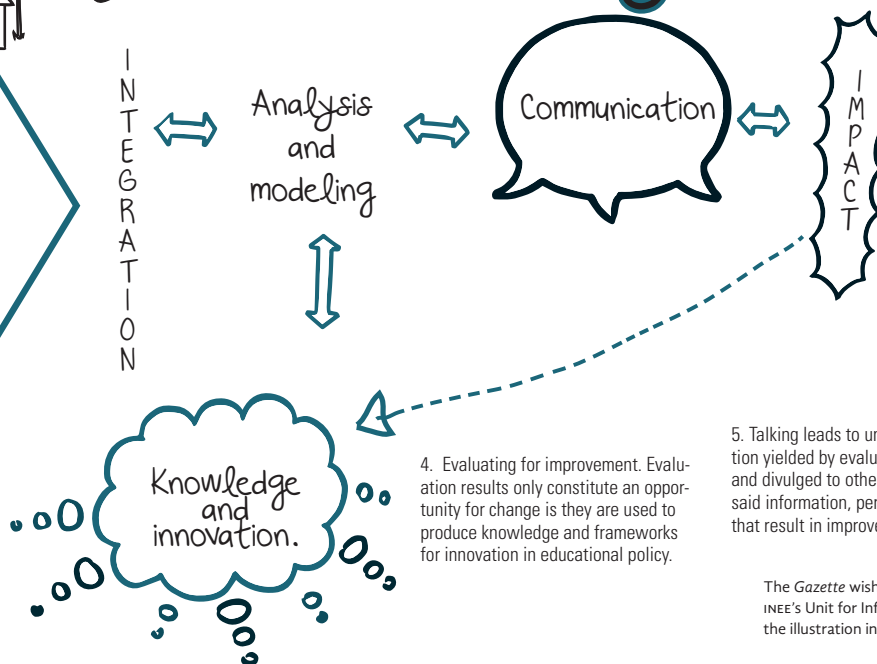
2. Everybody involved in education —students, teachers, parents, school principals, education authorities, researchers, decision makers— is somebody.



6. A State that guarantees high-quality education. The evaluation process ends with the drawing up of guidelines, directives and state-level programs for the evaluation and improvement of education (Spanish acronym: PEEMES), and also with the formulation of educational policies that actually lead to improvements in one or more areas of Mexico's education system.

5. Talking leads to understanding. The information yielded by evaluation should be discussed and divulged to other players. Based on the said information, pertinent actions are taken that result in improvement.

4. Evaluating for improvement. Evaluation results only constitute an opportunity for change if they are used to produce knowledge and frameworks for innovation in educational policy.



The Gazette wishes to thank Carmen Reyes, the head of the INEE's Unit for Information and the Promotion of Evaluation, for the illustration in this section. Illustrator: Alan Jiménez.

the guidelines issued by the INEE, among other things”.

Enrique, who has carried out research into Geomatics and Public Policy at the Research Center of the National Council for Science and Technology (Spanish acronym: CONACYT), chips in:

“Sometimes, when thinking about infrastructure and public policy, conflicts can arise – for example, if I need to talk about building a school, but I’m not allowed to bring the topic up during a discussion. In this case, during the territorial analysis for the purpose of implementing the guidelines, aspects or issues will come up that were not considered during the design phase. In the case of the PMP SNEE, a system is already contemplated – a territorial-management platform that implies explicit regionalization for purposes of educational evaluation”.

With regard to considering political factors pertaining to the spatial dimension, as happens with school zones, Enrique explains:

“It’s very curious, because they tell you that a given school belongs to Zone 2, but

the analysis shows that a school that’s 200 meters away, after crossing five zones, belongs to Zone 1. The criterion of functionality or spatial adjacency is violated. The zoning depends more on labelling by the authority that administers the school in question than on boundaries established in accordance with an administrative jurisdiction or political division. People are aware of the school-zone map, but they don’t see it as an instrument for assigning territory. The people involved have to reach an agreement to the effect that a given zone begins one street further on”.

Carmen comments: “It’s a matter of discussing how to divide the country into regions based on a map, for example. Each person expresses his/her opinion, and then modifies it after listening to other experts, until a consensus is reached about a spatial feature. Territory can be conceived of as a linguistic, demographic or environmental dimension depending on each person’s particular scenario. You can ask questions about educational lag, such as ‘Which part

of the country do you think will have the highest lag levels in ten years?’, and take decisions based on everybody’s experience and knowledge”.

“This is fabulous when it comes to public policy,” says Enrique. “We did something very similar for the Regional Development Unit of the Ministry of Social Development (Spanish abbreviation: SEDESOL), which previously pertained to the Office of the President. Representatives of each of the different government ministries were asked to attend and define their strategic projects up to 2020. Though no solution was forthcoming because there were conflicts of interest, each of the participants was able to find out what the priorities of the other ones were”.

“Furthermore,” says Carmen, “today cybercartography can make use of technology, music, videos and narratives. It introduces you into the territory. People enter this reality and begin to build with you. It’s very interesting, because, in this new paradigm, you can include narratives in which space is

somehow included. They call this ‘storytelling’ in English, but, for us, it’s spatial narrative”.

“It isn’t just a matter of always having a map in front of you,” Says Carmen, “but also of the spatial expressions that evoke the place without you needing to look at a political boundary that is sometimes a tedious and boring division. You’re sharing the territory. When I look at the box containing the PEEMES for example, I think ‘How impressive all the complexity in these documents is!’ They seem like doorways to the realities of each of the 32 states”. Enrique adds: “Reading the one pertaining to Tamaulipas, I get the feeling that I’m in that state. I’m approaching that territory and perceiving all the complexities that its inhabitants have to deal with, so how can I take stock of the said complexities in order to make its PEEME more robust?”

Enrique’s question leads, perforce, to the other question of how one uses this knowledge to strengthen public policy. Carmen Reyes, who has spent over forty years working in different areas of spatial analysis, geomatics and the geographic-information sciences, answers: “Looking at the issue of unity and a little bit beyond it, we have benchmarks, statistics and evaluations. Clearly there’s a very complex process of inclusion. You have to analyze and model. This will yield knowledge and innovation, enabling you to have the kind of impact on the guidelines, and on public policy, that we are witnessing, since it’s via knowledge and innovation that dialogue with political protagonists is achieved, given that the epistemological models have to be interconnected. That’s why research, knowledge management within the institution and innovation are so necessary in order to achieve an impact. There also needs to be a subsequent communication process. Knowledge and innovation can become the institution’s driving force”. €

Interview by Laura Athié



You can find out more about the 2016-2020 Mid-term Program of the National System for the Evaluation of Education at: <http://www.inee.edu.mx/index.php/pnee-peeme>



Integral System of Evaluation Results: <http://www.inee.edu.mx/index.php/sire-inee>

ROADMAP

Guidelines: a way of using evaluation

In accordance with its constitutional mandate, the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: INEE) uses the evidence yielded by evaluation to draw up guidelines that increase the quality and equity of educational services in Mexico. In the interview transcribed below, **Francisco Miranda López**, the head of the inee’s Unit for Educational Normativity and Policy, describes the actions that have been taken with regard to guidelines in the different states.

While there is a close link between evaluation and educational improvement, the former serves no purpose per se unless it enables us to tackle educational problems, helps us to identify educational shortfalls, and improves the performance of those involved in education. The National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: INEE) bases all its actions on the aforesaid premise and seeks, from the very outset, to promote the use of all the evaluations that it designs and/or carries out in order to improve the results of the National Education System (Spanish acronym: SEN) in the areas of pre-school, primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary education.

In this way, it uses the said evaluations to ascertain the state of the different aspects of education and, in order to improve the latter, makes recommendations to the federal and local education authorities in the form of guidelines. Below, we briefly describe the said process.

The legal foundations

Several statutes empower the INEE to issue guidelines. First, Clause C of SECTION IX of Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution mandates that it:



...produce and disseminate information and, based on the latter, issue guidelines that help to inform decisions aimed at raising the quality, and increasing the equity, of education as an essential part of the effort to achieve social equality.

For its part, Section XII of Article 12 of the General Law Governing Education (Spanish acronym: LGE) states that the federal education authorities must heed the guidelines issued by the INEE when “carry[ing] out educational planning and programming, in addition to which Article 15 of the Law Governing the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish acronym: LINEE) stipulates that “the education authorities, within their sphere of competence, shall heed the guidelines”.

The proposals

Among other things, the INEE has focused on setting forth different proposals aimed at making good on the right to education, stipulating that the INEE must make “proposals and recommendations aimed at guiding government actions and increasing the quality and equity of the education provided to Mexican children and youths of both sexes” (INEE, 2017).

It should be stressed that the guidelines focus not only on educational coverage (in terms of access), but also on continuance in school and educational achievement, equity and high quality.

The validity of the said guidelines is rooted in:

1. the evidence provided by evaluations and educational research.
2. other tried and trusted knowledge on the subject.
3. analysis of government actions.

Hence, the guidelines stem from analysis of, and discussion about, what is desirable vs. what is feasible, in which educators and members of society play an active part. This is important since, though we might have good intentions when it comes to improving education after analyzing the needs, feasibility should be the main criterion when issuing guidelines (See Fig. 1).

Thus, the guidelines issued by the INEE follow a cycle in the following six stages of which the education authorities play a role:

Educational evaluation is used to:

- a) raise awareness about the problems faced by education.
- b) encourage educators and the rest of society to discuss education and take part in improving it.
- c) foster responsibility, transparency and accountability.
- d) guide public-policy design.
- e) highlight the challenges faced by education and the possible ways of tackling them.
- f) improve the management of educational institutions and programs.
- g) make innovations to teaching practices.
- h) provide citizens with a tool that enables them to make good on their right to education.
- i) help parents/guardians to support and reinforce the learning of their children/wards.
- j) generate new knowledge.

Source: INEE (2017). *Pautas para el acompañamiento de los Programas Estatales de Evaluación y Mejora Educativa*. Mexico: INEE, p. 15.

1. Creation – i.e. formulation of the proposed guidelines based on the INEE’s conceptual framework.
2. Issuance – i.e. publication of the guidelines by the INEE.
3. Divulcation – i.e. notification to the education authorities of the guidelines drawn up by the INEE via formal mechanisms and an official letter.
4. Response – i.e. approval or rejection of the guidelines in question by the education authorities, which, in accordance with Article 51 of the LINEE, must publish their response within 60 calendar days.
5. Implementation – i.e. proposal and implementation of a working plan by the education authorities.
6. Follow-up – i.e. INEE support for the implementation of the plan.
7. Updating – i.e. improvement or adjustment of the guidelines by the INEE depending on the results achieved when implementing them.

Guidelines published so far

The documents published to date are:

1. *Guidelines for improving the initial training of elementary-level teachers* (2015).
2. *Guidelines for improving the education of the children and youths of both sexes of migrant day laborers* (2016).
3. *Guidelines for improving the education of indigenous children and adolescents of both sexes* (2017).

The following documents are pending publication:

1. *Guidelines for increasing continuance at the upper-secondary level*.
2. *Guidelines for improving policies pertaining to teacher training and development*.

Each of the above documents contains recommendations for solving the educational problems detected during the creation stage, which are aimed at addressing concrete problems with precise proposals.

Finally, in order to ensure that the target results are achieved after implementing the guidelines, the INEE provides support for implementing the recommendations and follows up on the education authorities’ responses.

Case study: Guidelines for improving the education of indigenous children and youths of both sexes

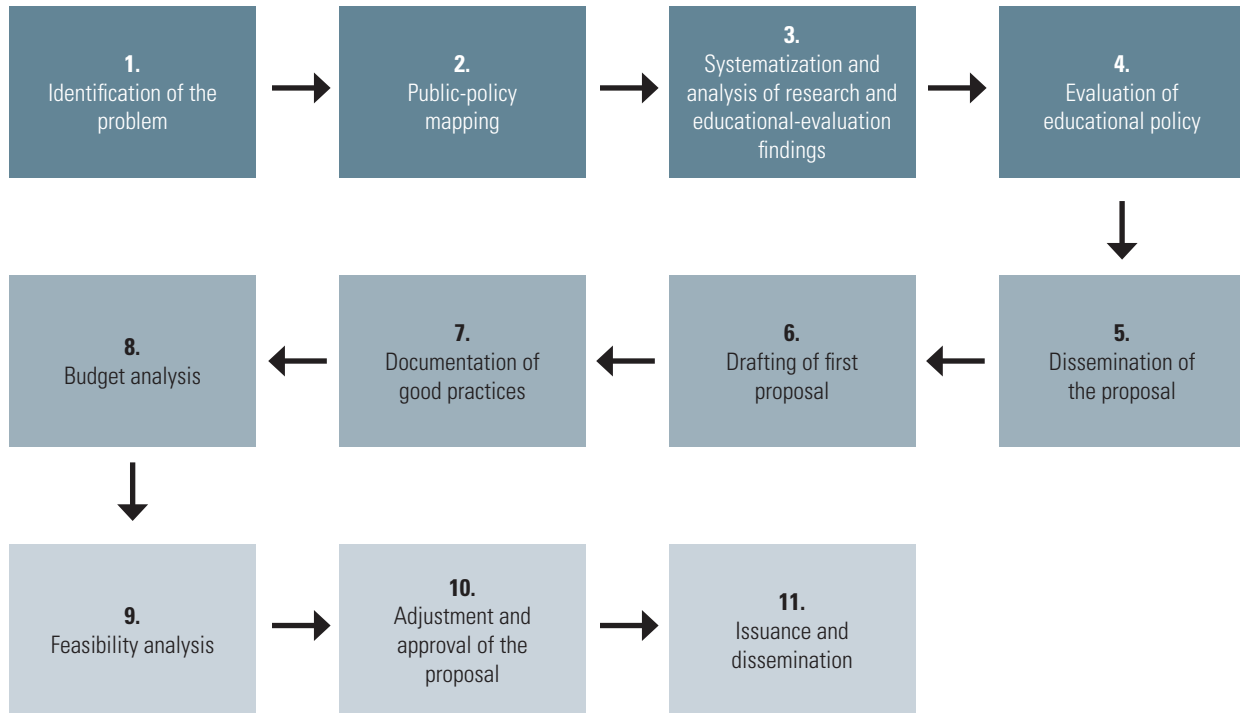
Since the cycle pertaining to the drawing up and dissemination of the guidelines does not end until the target improvements to education are achieved, the aforesaid decisions need to be taken on board by those involved in education, and implemented to suit each specific context.

The Guidelines for Improving the Education of Indigenous Children and Youths of Both Sexes are a good example of how we identify improvements in five steps:

Step 1, pertaining to the creation of the guidelines for improving the education of indigenous children and youths of both sexes, comprises the following five stages:

- Carrying out of the Free Prior Informed Consultation with the Indigenous Peoples and Communities about Educational Evaluation in 49 communities, and the

Fig. 1. Methodology for the creation of guidelines



divulgence of the latter's results to 170 communities and their teachers.

- Review of the results of the National Plan for the Evaluation of Learning Outcomes and Basic Teaching-Learning Conditions, and also of the Study of the Policies Pertaining to the Curriculum Aimed at Indigenous Communities and to the Overview of Indigenous Education.
- Adoption of good teaching practices and analysis of the results and recommendations pertaining to 109 federal programs, carried out in order to improve the teaching of indigenous children and youths of both sexes.
- Evaluation of the educational policies aimed at the elementary-level indigenous population.
- Setting up of round tables with teachers, school principals and supervisors from the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Yucatán, Chihuahua, Morelos, Veracruz and Puebla.
- Consultation with officials from the Undersecretariat of Elementary Education

and members of the National Council for the Promotion of Education, as well as academics and representatives of NGO's.

Step 2. Issuance of guidelines

Six guidelines were issued for the purpose of guaranteeing the right to high-quality linguistically and culturally pertinent education with a focus on diversity and inclusion, being respectively aimed at:

1. strengthening the focus on inclusion, equity and non-discrimination in national education policy while emphasizing education for — and participation by— the indigenous population.
2. fortifying links between the school and the community and fostering the exercise of the right to pertinent, high-quality education by the indigenous peoples.
3. creating a curricular model that fosters interculturality in all compulsory education and ensure that such education is culturally and linguistically relevant to the indigenous population in question.

4. ensuring the provision of professional teacher development that satisfies the needs of teachers and school principals, as well as according with the educational needs of indigenous children and making good on their right to pertinent, high-quality education.
5. ensuring the availability of schools with the infrastructure and equipment needed to satisfy the needs of indigenous communities.
6. promoting ongoing innovation in the education provided to indigenous children and youths of both sexes.

Among other things, the above guidelines set out to:

- provide more access to education, since 1 out of every 5 indigenous children between the ages of 3 and 17 does not attend school.
- improve the education provided to 7.3 million indigenous children and youths of both sexes and ensure that they achieve learning outcomes that enable

Fig. 2. Responses and working plans of the different states

Source: General Department of Guidelines for Educational Improvement.

them to improve the quality of their lives, since 4 out of every 5 students in primary education do not achieve the target levels in Language and Communication or Mathematics.

- ensure that all Mexican children and youths receive the educational services of the same quality, and that indigenous children and youths receive culturally appropriate bilingual education, since over 50% of the teachers who work in indigenous primary schools do not speak any indigenous language.
- promote an educational model with an intercultural focus that promotes non-discrimination and a renewed appreciation of our country's cultural riches.

Step 3. Promoting the dissemination and adoption of the guidelines by:

- sending them to the federal and local education authorities and other relevant players, and familiarizing people with them.

- ensuring that the INEE provides technical support to the local education authorities that enables them to put together local working plans.
- developing strategies for institutional-liaison among the ministries of education, members of the legislative branches, and other pertinent members of society in the different states.

Step 4. Follow-up to support the guidelines.

- The systematic gathering of information reveals that, 11 months after the guidelines were issued, there has been a positive response on the part of the federal education authority and the 32 local education authorities in the 32 states, in addition to which 27 of the latter and the General Office for the Coordination of Intercultural and Bilingual Education have put together working plans (See Fig. 2).

- The follow-up reports on the working plans that were originally proposed (See Figs. 3 and 4) attest to the specific responses of the states and educational regions to the Guidelines and the recommendations for improvement made in them.

Step 5. Review of the main actions taken in the different states

- The budget devoted to the provision of educational services to the indigenous population was increased by adjusting the aims and actions set forth in the Annual Operating Programs.
- Social Auditing Committees were formed to ensure that resources are used properly.
- The school-control systems were improved so as to more precisely identify indigenous children.
- Agreements were celebrated with universities and the National Institute of In-

Fig. 3: Most heeded Guidelines by educational region

- 
Guideline 4
 South-southwest: Campeche, Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Veracruz, Yucatán.
- 
Guideline 4
 West: Aguascalientes, Colima, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, Querétaro, Zacatecas.
- 
Guideline 4
 Northwest: Baja California, Baja California Sur, Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Sonora.
- 
Guideline 1
 Northeast: Coahuila, Durango, Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas.
- 
Guideline 4
 Central: Ciudad de México, Estado de México, Hidalgo, Morelos, Puebla, Tlaxcala.

Source: General Department of Guidelines for Educational Improvement.

indigenous Languages (Spanish acronym: INALI) in order to improve the teaching of indigenous languages.

- The range of ongoing training courses for teachers of indigenous children and youths of both sexes was broadened to include:
 - courses and workshops for training, updating, sensitizing and professionalizing teachers.
 - training courses on the creation and use of specialized teaching materials.
 - academic-reinforcement tutorials in schools.
 - the active participation of the INALI in courses aimed at professionalizing teachers and enabling them to be certified.

Furthermore, various states carried out specific actions in order to comply with one or other of the Guidelines issued by the INEE (See Fig. 5).

In this way, the Guidelines have been included in the state plans and programs and are becoming one of the most innovative public-policy tools for guiding or modifying the decisions taken at the different levels of the SEN.

The challenges

While it is a fact that the adoption of the Guidelines issued by the INEE has led to progress, nevertheless flaws have been detected and we still need to:

1. forge a stronger link between evaluation and improvement for the purpose of designing and implementing educational policies, as part of good educational governance.
2. make the education authorities —especially the federal ones— more aware of the importance of the guidelines as tools for improving educational policy.
3. involve other key players more in designing and implementing educational policies — especially the members of the

Federal and state-level congresses and the NGO's.

4. Strengthen dissemination mechanisms and promote greater use of the Guidelines, as well as follow up and updating.
5. Forge a stronger link between the Guidelines and government policymaking. €

References

INEE (2017). *Guidelines for supporting the state-level Evaluation and Educational-improvement Programs*. Mexico: INEE.



The reader can find more information about the INEE's Guidelines for Improving the Education of Indigenous Children and Youths of Both Sexes at the following microsite: http://www.inee.edu.mx/images/stories/2017/Gaceta7/suplementos/PAUTAS_27_de_junio.pdf

Fig 4. Key aspects of improvement addressed by the education authorities

Guideline	Key improvement aspect with more follow-up actions by the education authorities
1	Fortify the actions carried out, under the different programs against ethnic, cultural and linguistic discrimination, that are promoted by the Ministry of Education.
2	Encourage the members of the community to become involved in teaching and reflecting about their indigenous language and culture.
3	Based on consultation with the indigenous peoples, develop a culturally relevant curriculum proposal and improve institutional strategies for producing and distributing teaching materials.
4	Redesign ongoing training for teachers and school principals who provide education to indigenous children and youths of both sexes at the different educational levels.
5	Ensure that basic infrastructure exists for all school services in accordance with the Mexican Norm governing infrastructure quality.
6	Include educational innovations and good practices in the policies pertaining to the education of indigenous children and youths of both sexes.

Source: General Department of Guidelines for Educational Improvement.

Fig 5. Key aspects of improvement addressed by the education authorities

Guideline	Actions taken
1	A Department for the Coordination of Indigenous Education was set up in Baja California. In Morelos, an ongoing campaign is underway for promoting the appreciation of —and non-discrimination against— indigenous cultures, languages and world views.
2	In Puebla, indigenous cultures and languages are being disseminated by means of a radio program called <i>Fuego ancestral</i> (ancestral fire). Sonora is setting up meetings with Yaqui leaders in order to consult them about the creation of a syllabus in the Yaqui-language. Wixaritari parents in Jalisco are teaching students about their culture as part of a project called Literary Evenings of Indigenous Wisdom.
3	A textbook called <i>Asignatura maya</i> (Mayan assignment) is being used in the first year of the indigenous primary-education cycle in Yucatán. Veracruz bought educational software that can be contextualized and used either online or at the local level. A Mayan library called <i>Ch'iil 'analte'ob</i> has been formed in Campeche.
4	In Chiapas, teachers and school principals are being trained in the use and management of syllabuses in the Tselal, Tsotsil, Tojolabal and Chol languages in order to be able to contextualize their teaching. The education authorities in Zacatecas are thinking about establishing profiles, parameters and benchmarks for evaluating indigenous teachers
5	In the State of Mexico, the <i>Instituto Mexiquense de la Infraestructura Física Educativa</i> (State-of-Mexico Institute of Physical Educational Infrastructure) is being asked to consider building classrooms for Initial Indigenous Education. San Luis Potosí is endeavoring to guarantee that community opinions and proposals are taken into account when building, refurbishing and equipping schools.
6	In Guanajuato, a Committee Specializing in Indigenous Education will form part of the State Technical Council for Education.



DOSSIER: GOOD PRACTICES IN EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION
OTHER PERSPECTIVES

Learning and experiencing: building citizenship through education

In the interview transcribed below, **Dr. José Bonifacio Barba**, a teacher in the Department of Education of the University of Aguascalientes and a member of the National System of Researchers and the Mexican Council for Educational Research, a non-profit organization, explains why values are an important part of the Educational Reform and why education in citizenship and ethics is crucial for creating better citizens.

In Mexico, the teaching of values, which has always been part of the curriculum, has gone under different names over the years: having, at one time, the name of “Civic Education,” but since 1999, it has been called “Civic and Ethical Training.” In the opinion of Dr. Barba, this title is an improvement, since it reflects an effort to highlight the ethical component in what is often referred to as education for citizenship.

The values that education should foster in accordance with Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution

According to Dr. Barba, the Educational Reform sprang, on the one hand, from the demands of a large number of NGO’s during the Mexican presidential campaign of 2012, and, on the other hand, from the political system, via the Pact for Mexico, which included an agreement that the State would take over the supervision of education, something that implied adopting fundamental democratic values. He says:

“There’s an overlap. In a way, when the political parties included democratic values in the Pact for Mexico, maybe some, if not all, of them were heeding the demands of society that had been systematically voiced by the NGO’s for many years, and not just in the context of the 2012 election.”

The challenge was for education, to effectively transmit and promote the fundamental principles and values expressed in our Constitution as part of the aforesaid recovery:

“The State took on the task of ensuring that education is at the service of the rights enshrined in the Constitution - i.e. of more consistently guaranteeing the said rights. These more rigorous government actions imply “training for citizenship” – i.e. training in politics and the law such as enables students at the primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary levels to become familiar with Mexico’s aspirations as a nation. This can be achieved if educational policy adopts a humanistic and ethical focus that is congruent with the Constitution insofar as it obliges the government to respect and protect human rights. In this way, in school, students will internalize the different values that underpin each and every one of the aforesaid rights insofar as they constitute a philosophical and legal composite that is tantamount to social justice. Thus, becoming critical, informed citizens who demand that government authorities respect their rights and allow them to play a coherent political role in the community. Citizens need to know what their own and other people’s rights are, and what role the said rights play in forging their personal and civic identity, since it is only in this way that rights also become obligations. It is crucial that both the individual and society as a whole learn these things, and, indeed, legal scholars use the term ‘basic rights’ to refer to the rights enshrined in the Constitution”.

Barba explains that the purpose of committing to civic and ethical training was to set in motion a transformation aimed at ensuring that education concerns itself with democratic values in an experiential way, rather than merely presenting them as part of a political code. He stresses that it’s essential for students to learn civic values through socialization in the school, which should foster each one of the said values and explain its meaning in such a way that, at each school level, they are seen as being essential to personal and community development. He remarks:

“The best way to learn values is to experience them at school, complementing this experience with theoretical underpinning”.

What values should Mexican children and youths learn and experience at school?

Barba stresses that the one value that underpins all human rights is human dignity, citing the Constitution to further explain what he means:

“The first paragraph of Article 1 of the Constitution affirms that all Mexican citizens possess the rights set forth in the said Constitution, while the last paragraph states that whatsoever type of exclusion based on gender, race, religion, social status, preferences, etc. must be avoided. Why this repetition? Why begin this article by saying that all citizens possess the rights enshrined in the Constitution, and end it by saying that whatsoever type of exclusion must be avoided? This is because our everyday experience of life tells us that, while the declaration in question is important, it’s also important to stipulate the things that must not be done, since what is at stake is people’s dignity. It isn’t the rights per se that count, but, rather, the people acknowledged in them.

Why, after listing the criteria that should govern education, does Article 3 of the Constitution highlight the criterion of inculcating appreciation of –and respect for– human dignity? Among other things, it does this because it begins by asserting that ‘Everyone is entitled to receive education,’ and hence education –i.e. the opportunity for each citizen to be able to develop– can’t be *given* if it isn’t appreciated and respected. Thus, Article 1 and Article 3 underlie everything: the former asserts that rights are the foundation of the State and all social coexistence within it, while the latter asserts that, among other things, education must acknowledge and respect dignity and foster respect for human rights. In short, the purpose of schooling is to train children and youths of both sexes to be citizens able to live in a state of law. The two articles form a conceptual and legal whole that we can relate to other articles that deal with different rights.

A collective construct: the role of those involved in education (teachers, school principals and technical-pedagogical consultants).

Teachers, school principals, supervisors, technical-pedagogical consultants and managers of education services, at both the federal and state levels, play a crucial role in ensuring that schools operate based on values. On this point, Barba says:

“A lot of emphasis was placed on the need for teachers, school principals, etc., to promote and defend the Educational Reform, but the government didn’t place the same stress on values. We need to pay attention to this aspect in order to ensure that the values of the Mexican Educational Reform imbue the process of teacher evaluation and ongoing teacher training. Teachers possess a set of personal values stemming from their socialization both as citizens and as professionals, and also from their experience in teaching, and it is to be hoped that these values will be congruent with those that inform Mexico’s aspirations as a democratic state”.

Barba points out, however, that this part of the Educational Reform has not been stressed:

“In this regard, teacher training is weak. Some teachers say that they aren’t sure how to inculcate values - how to effectively teach the subject called ‘Civic and Ethical Training’. Indeed, curriculum-wise, more time is devoted to mathematics than to training in ethics and citizenship. This is traditional in the education system and affects student achievement. It’s crucial that the importance of the latter type of training be acknowledged by devoting the same number of hours to it as to mathematics, which is undoubtedly important, but not more so than ethics and citizenship”.

Barba asserts that the education authorities should review the aforesaid imbalance so as to strengthen Mexican democracy and make it more consistent, while also inculcating greater respect for human rights in Mexican citizens, which he believes is one of Mexican society’s most vital needs.

Educational values and their inclusion in the Educational Reform

Formerly, civic education seemed to focus on the teaching of laws and regulations, though there were undoubtedly some teachers who did, indeed, teach civic values to their students. Currently, the New Educational Model sees the teaching of laws and codes as foundational, but we need to ensure that such things are taught not only theoretically, but also experientially, Barba states:

“During the 2018-2019 school year, several hundred schools will administer a sort of test or ‘preliminary implementation’ of the new Educational Model, which will be obligatory for students in elementary and





lower-secondary schools. What happens in those schools will enable us to observe developments in the ‘values’ part of the new programs. The said New Educational Model will continue the initial project that was launched during the administration of the President Ernesto Zedillo, which has been continued, with varying degrees of success, during subsequent administrations. The said model is paramount, since it springs from the exigencies of the Constitution. The core set of principles and values already existed, but the purpose of the Educational Reform was, precisely, to ensure that teaching placed more stress on it – i.e. it’s more a matter of a reform *for* education –one that strengthens a lot of things to ensure that the right to education is respected– than a reform *of* education per se. The fact that it’s important to maintain this emphasis doesn’t detract from everything that’s already been done, but, rather, seeks to achieve the same aim.

The role of educational evaluation in 2018

The current federal administration will end at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, with the Educational Reform already underway. Regarding this change, Barba remarks:

“I hope that all the men and women who become members of the Executive and Legislative branches of government at both the state and the federal levels will see the Reform as something that needs to continue, given that its aim is to ensure that people’s right to education is respected and hence go on transforming Mexican society. The Educational Reform is not a thrall to party ideologies, but, from the legal standpoint, a constitutional imperative, and it should be approached as such. We need everybody to see education as something to be respected, rather than something that everybody can conceive of in his or her particular way”.

He acknowledges that, like all such endeavors, the Educational Reform requires some adjustments, and considers that, along with other instruments, the National Plan for the Evaluation of Learning Outcomes (Spanish acronym: PLANEA) will be of help in the task of evaluating students in the area of Civic and Ethical Training, as well as helping to strengthen educational values:

“At the end of this year, the results of the evaluation of the civic education that is

provided in several of the countries in our region will come out. This information will play an important role in enabling us to see where we in Mexico are vis-à-vis training the students in our schools in citizenship”.

Barba believes that, with time, evaluation will become an instrument for strengthening what’s already been begun, but insists that the essence of the Reform, which is to make good on the right to education, shouldn’t change:

“The next president might want to stress the strengthening of education, or something else that s/he thinks should be achieved by the current Reform. The new members of the Executive Branch will inherit a work in progress, and they need to commit to what’s been achieved in the last few years. It will be a test of how effectively a distinction can be made between political parties and the State, between the project of a given party and our country’s Constitution”.

He ends our interview with this reflection, hoping that in the future, as it unwinds day by day, Mexican citizens will be imbued, both at home and at school, with civic values that strengthen our nation’s democracy, without party interests undoing everything that’s been achieved so far. “This shouldn’t happen,” he asserts, since political parties should behave like “entities devoted to the public interest”, also reforming themselves. €

The New Educational Model defines education for citizenship as the fostering of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that citizens to participate in the civic and political life that is required by a democracy. This kind of education entails “the comprehensive study of different subjects such as Civic and Ethical Training or History, a cross-curricular approach, effective teaching methods, good school organization and the forging of links with both parents and civil society” (Ministry of Public Education [Spanish acronym: SEP], 2017).

WITHOUT A PASSPORT

The SABER* tests of the Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education (Spanish abbreviation: ICFES) and their use in the Colombian education system

[*Acronym of ‘Systems Approach for Better Education Results’]

“When properly used, tests provide basic input that helps to raise the quality of education,” assert the authors, representatives of the Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education (ICFES) who, in the following article, talk about their experiences and describe the challenges that have to be overcome in order to improve education using the evaluation tools that they possess.

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At the Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education —better known as the ICFES, the acronym of the Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Education, which is the government organization responsible for carrying out evaluation at the national level in Colombia— we evaluate early-childhood*, primary, lower-secondary, upper-secondary and higher education, as well as administering the international tests that our country participates in – i.e. the Program for International Student Evaluation (PISA), the Fourth Comparative and Explanatory Study (Spanish acronym: ERCE), the International Civic and

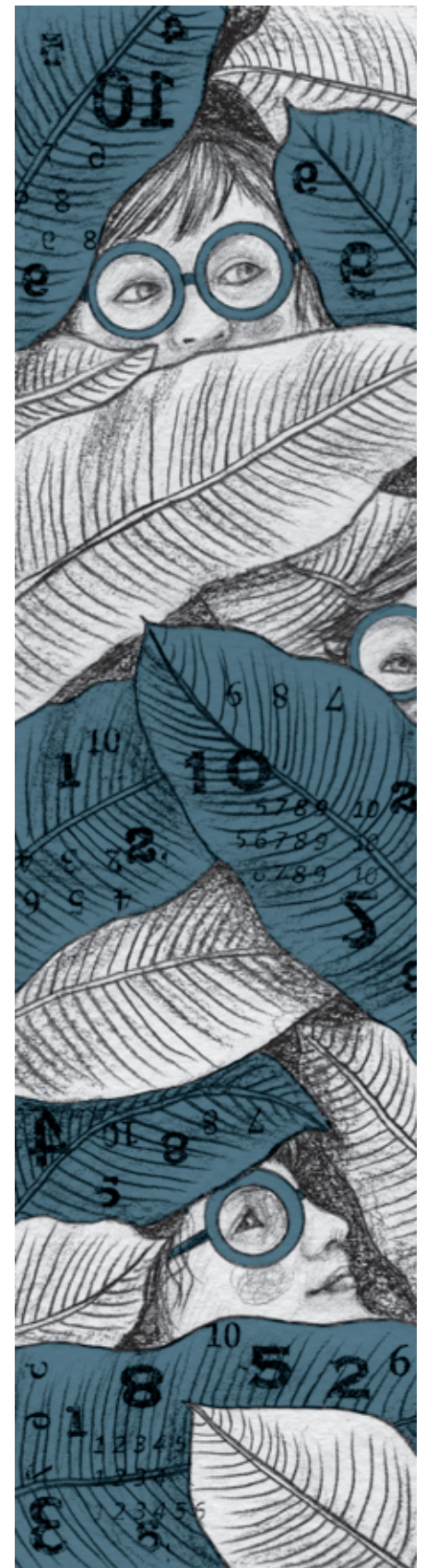
Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), and the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS). [*as of this year]

According to the content guidelines of the National Ministry of Education, the sole function of the ICFES is to carry out evaluation. Although we aren’t responsible for any of the public policies that are developed based on the test results, we feel that our job should go beyond the mere delivery of results, and are committed to raising awareness about the latter’s effective use. When properly used, tests constitute basic input that helps to raise the quality of education.

Before indicating what we can all learn from test results, we should stress the precautions that need to be taken. Insofar as the relationship between educational quality and testing is concerned, examinations assess certain specific competencies that are by no means the only components of educational quality. Nevertheless, their importance lies in the fact that the measurement of students’ knowledge of the said contents is *a sine qua non* for being able to analyze such quality.

We should also remember what the studies in question observe. While readers with technical expertise may require no explanation on the point, it bears pointing out that, while tests enable us to ascertain differences in performance and learning times between one group and another, they do not, in and of themselves, explain these differences.

We at the ICFES evaluate the same contents for everybody and ensure that the difficulty level of our tests remains constant. This way, we can ascertain how we’re doing from one year to the next and how great the variations are among different students. Such knowledge enables us to decide where to focus our efforts, what the priorities are, and which areas we’re being successful in, as well as making it possible to make hypotheses about the reasons for the results detected. However, since we cannot ascertain whether improvements in some schools and backsliding in others are the result of social policies or of factors unrelated to the latter, we should be prudent when using test results to evaluate government policy or to punish or reward students, teachers or schools. It’s essential to be aware of this so, as to make proper use of test results.



The “E Day” and “Still E Day” of the National Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education has held a so-called “E Day” (i.e. Educational Excellence Day) and a so-called “Still D Day”, on which the summarized educational quality index (Spanish acronym: ISCE) is given to each school along with the respective topic clusters. Each school receives a box with its results and pedagogical comments that help to interpret, contextualize and explain the tests. For example, the box contains the framework matrix showing the results of the evaluations by competence and component, along with the definitions of the topic clusters and teaching suggestions per grade and area. This material enables the teachers to set priorities for improvement and be clearer about how to achieve it.

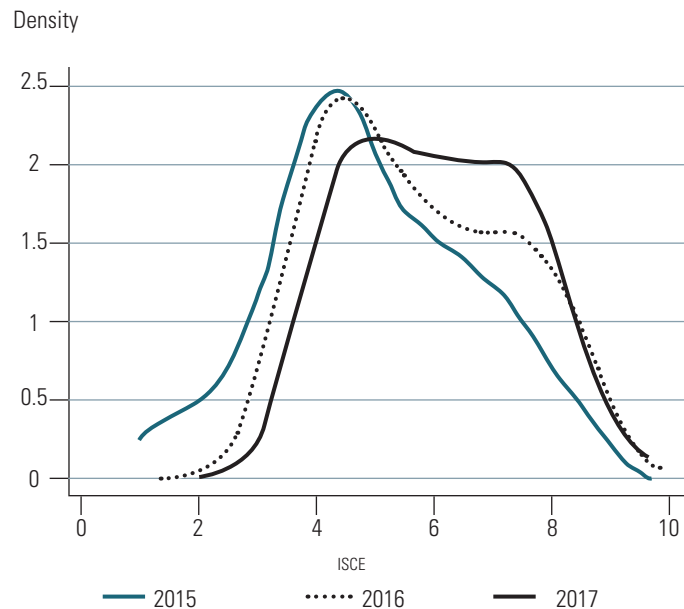
“E Day” helps schools to understand the results and encourages them to use them, while, for its part, “Still E Day”, when the results for each topic cluster are delivered, is one devoted to teaching issues, when the schools and teachers can find out what they need to improve and how. Both days are exercises in learning from, and acknowledging, the test results, so as to use them.

The summarized index of educational quality (Spanish acronym: ISCE)

The ISCE is a number from 1 to 10 that we give to each school in the country for each level. The said index comprises different sources, each component of which stresses one aspect of the teaching-learning process. The Performance component, which constitutes 40% of the total grade, shows the students’ results on standardized tests; the Progress component, which constitutes 40% of the total grade, pertains to improvement over the previous year; the School Atmosphere component, which constitutes 10% of the total grade, pertains to students’ perception of the learning environment and their teachers. Finally, the Efficiency component, which also constitutes 10% of the total grade, pertains to the pass rate.

The Performance component shows the schools’ level. Normally, the communications media use the said component to come up with school rankings, but, for the ISCE, it’s just a part of the index. The emphasis on the Progress component, which reflects commitment to improvement, stresses school growth, especially in the case of those with the greatest potential (which are often the ones with the largest number of shortfalls).

Graph 1. ISCE distribution. Primary - 2015, 2016 and 2017



Source: ICFES, 2017. *Saber en Breve* No. 18, Graph 1. Downloaded at: <https://goo.gl/vfzpTj>

School Atmosphere and Efficiency are meant to serve as counterweights, so that the ISCE doesn’t only focus on evaluation, but also on broader aspects of teaching-learning. Though, empirically, the School Atmosphere component doesn’t vary very much, and is hence almost symbolic, it’s had a big impact in our country. Now a lot of schools are aware that classroom atmosphere and follow-up on learning aren’t tantamount to a school’s physical conditions.

The ISCE sets out to open up a space for follow-up in the school community. In its third version, it’s managed to gain a reputation as a valuable form of input. Its dissemination has facilitated discussion about results, ongoing improvement, and the setting of aims in order to raise the quality of education.

Graph 1 below shows the countrywide improvement achieved via the ISCE. In the case of primary education, it allows us to see beyond the average rating by showing the (smoothed out) distribution of the schools over the last three years. Given the test’s comparability, the fact that performance is improving is good news for our country.

The ISCE of each school, at all the study levels, is accompanied by an annual mini-

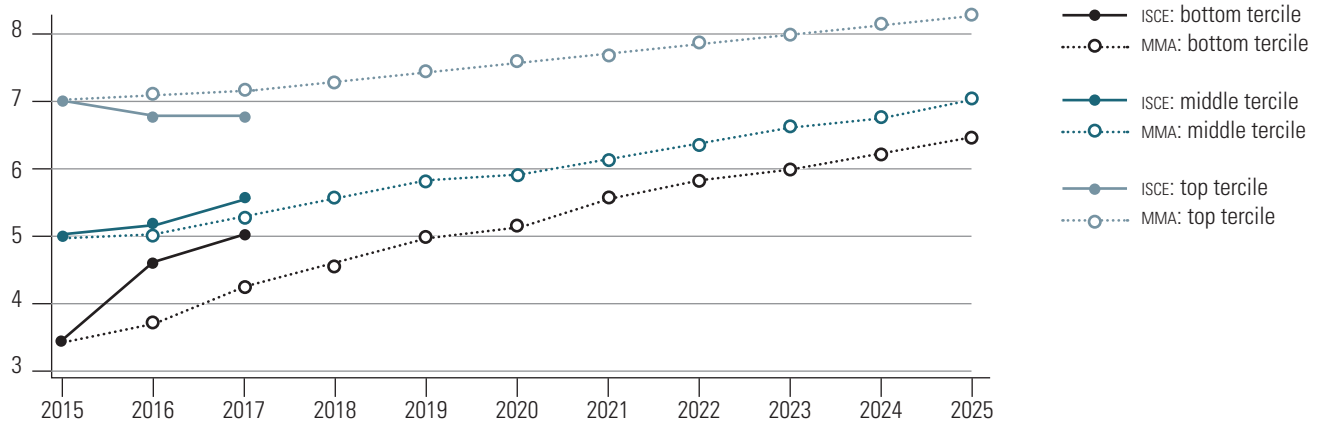
mum improvement aim (Spanish acronym: MMA) which directly depends on the 2015 ISCE 2015, does not change in accordance with subsequent results, and is unique for each school. These goals were established based on a logistical growth function and a comparison of the Chilean and Colombian data with the 2012 PISA information, so that, if we achieve the aims (assuming that are no significant changes in the growth rates for Latin America), we’ll catch up with Chile in 2025.

Graph 2 clusters the ISCE and the MMA in terciles in accordance with the 2015 ISCE, and shows us that the gaps are closing, though they’re still big.

The ISCE has also been used by the National Ministry of Education to award economic incentives to teachers. The participating schools that exceed the ISCE for the immediately preceding year receive an incentive that’s equivalent to a monthly salary for all their teaching staff. We wish to stress that the said incentive is awarded based on the degree of improvement achieved over the previous grade, rather than on the school’s current level, since this encourages schools with low and average ratings, and not just the ones that have had good results over the years.

Of terciles of schools
trained with ISCE 2015

Graph 2. Average ISCE and MMA. Primary level



Source: ICFES, 2017. *Saber en Breve* No. 18, Graphic 2. Downloaded at: <https://goo.gl/mhJtW2>

However, we're aware of the lack of precision inherent in identifying teaching practices based on the results of a school's students. It may be the case that a school improves its ISCE although its teachers haven't changed their behavior or backslides although they've done their best.

The topic clusters evaluated in the tests

The ICFES provides results for each of the topic clusters evaluated in the 3rd, 5th and 9th SABER tests, SABER 11, SABER PRO (for professionals) and SABER T&T (for technicians and technologists), besides multiple grades per subject. The said topic clusters are small parts of the test that share the same theme and are each assigned a grade that makes it possible to learn from the evaluation and take actions based on it. By analyzing these results, we can achieve the ultimate goal of the evaluation, which is that of learning and improving.

Unlike the grades per area, the topic-cluster results are expressed in terms of the percentage of wrong answers given by the students – i.e. a 100 grade indicates that all the questions were answered wrongly by all the students, and a 0 grade indicates that all the questions were answered correctly by all the students, so that 0 is the most desirable grade.

This type of result isn't really a grade, so that the weighting assigned to the result (which is expressed as a percentage) is intuitive. The fact that all the topic clusters are not equally difficult, and that they are not directly

comparable with each other, leads to some drawbacks when interpreting the information. While direct comparisons among the topic clusters yields a percentage that provides us with valuable information (since we can identify the topic clusters in which there are most shortfalls), it does not enable us to ascertain the causes of the said differences between the clusters, which may be due to what happens in the classroom or to the average difficulty level of a given part of the text. On the other hand, if the population finds some topic clusters more difficult than other ones, comparisons between two different difficulty levels can, precisely, tell us more about this feature than about the effort made in the classroom. In order to exploit this valuable information to the utmost, we need know how far we are from a suitable comparator in each level.

Graph 3 shows the percentage of wrong answers for 5 topic clusters countrywide, and also the difference between this percentage and the percentage of wrong answers for 10 of our country's cities. Additionally, it shows topic clusters pertaining to the competency of Communication in the area of Mathematics in the fifth grade, organized according to the percentage of wrong answers countrywide. The purpose of this information is not to tell us which cities are better than others, but, rather, to map out the differences in order to find out which topic groups are priority ones.

In addition to receiving the personalized information on "Still E Day", each of our country's schools and municipalities can con-

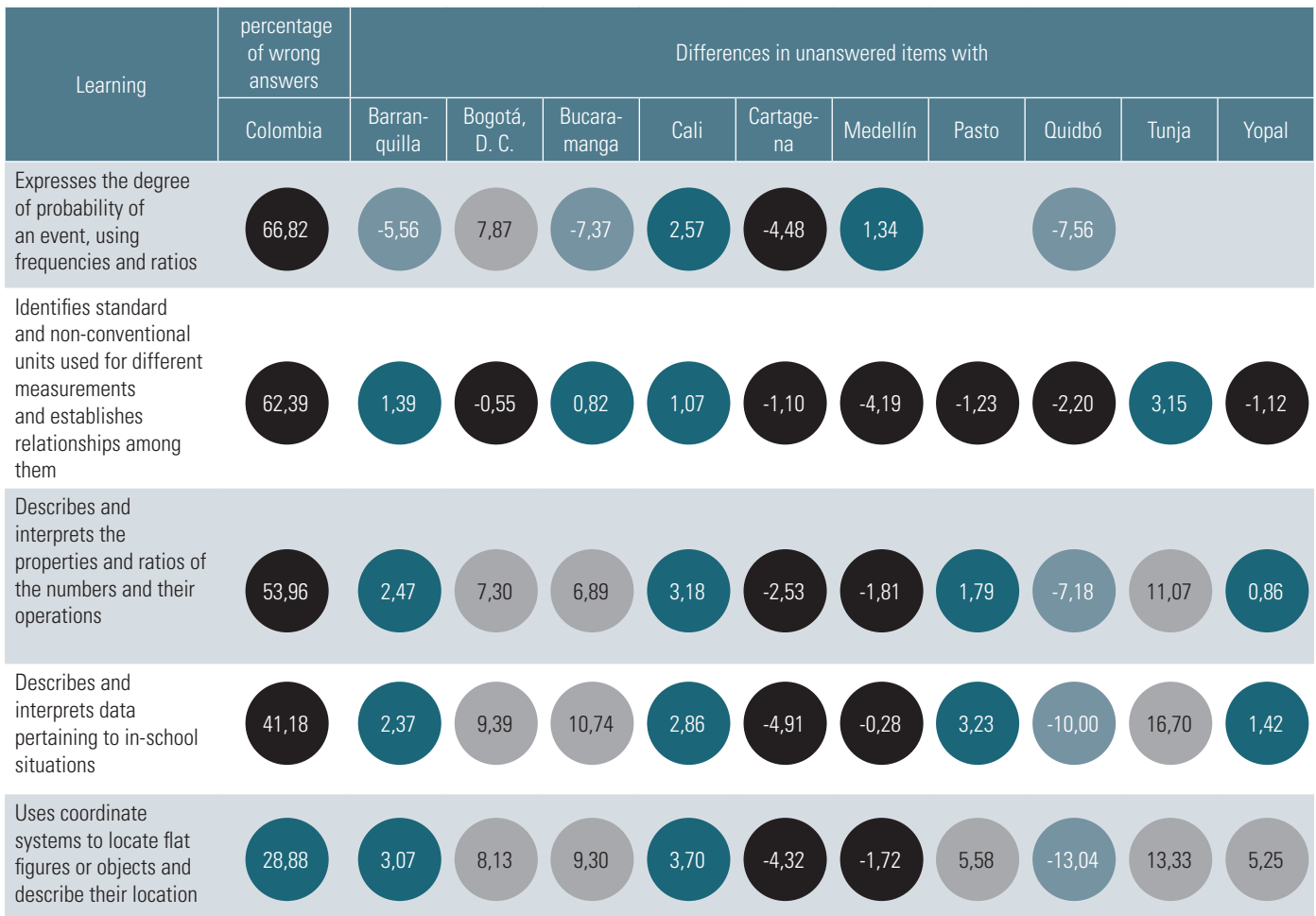
sult this information and carry out whichever analyses and make whichever comparisons it sees fit. Teachers are well aware that the teaching process implicitly involves all of the topic clusters evaluated, and can ascertain which actions they need to take in order to improve.

The dissemination of the information and the factors associated with learning

People use information to the extent that they understand it. Given the large number of potential beneficiaries, we at the ICFES strive to divulge the information in the most user-friendly way, without diminishing its robustness or trivializing it. In the Department of Analysis and Dissemination, we organize it, decide how to present it, and cover the whole country, getting to the public and encouraging them to use it. We also draw up national reports with detailed descriptions of the structure, grading and results of the tests, as well as publishing short newsletters that give brief summaries of the topics in order to familiarize all the different segments of the population with them.

One of the things we've talked about are the factors associated with learning. All the ICFES are accompanied by a contextualized questionnaire, in which there are no right answers, that the students answer at the end of the examination, or when they enroll. This way, we look at a lot of things associated with learning, citizenship, beliefs, perceptions and emotions. This information is invaluable.

Graph 3. Topic clusters pertaining to the competency of Communication in the area of Mathematics. Fifth Grade. 2016



The color associated with the percentage of wrong answers in Colombia is **blue** when it's 70% or more, **black** when it's between 40% and 69%, **blue** when it's between 20% and 39%, and **gray** if it's 19 or less.

In the case of the difference in unanswered items between Colombia and each city, the color is **blue** when the difference is -5 or less, **black** when the difference is between -0.1 and -4.9, **blue** if it's between 0 and 4.9, and green if it's 5 or more.

Source: ICFES, 2017. *Saber en Breve* No. 21, Table 1. Downloaded at: <https://goo.gl/zvvoXD>

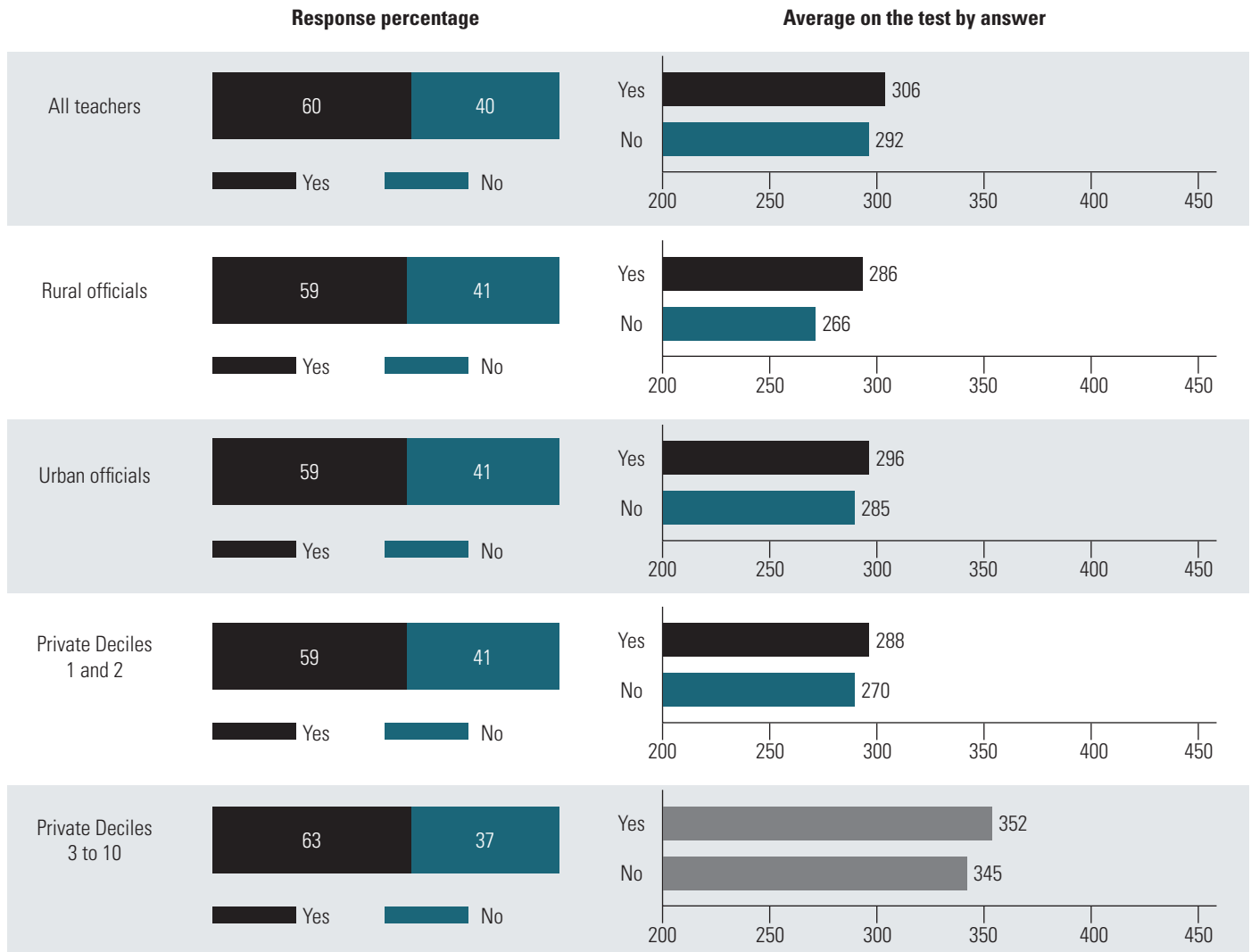
We have a series of documents that cover the topics in a very simple way, and, at least when presenting the results, does not make value judgments. Besides, the relationship with the test result is expressed as an average group grade. The difference between the two is equal to the coefficient of a linear regression of the points obtained for identifying each of them, though readers pay more attention when they see the two averages. Instead of including a socioeconomic control in the regression, we repeat the frequency and the

averages in subgroups of the population. The aim of this is the same as that of the control – i.e. to find out whether other factors intervene in the relationship.

Graph 4 below shows an example. Regarding the relationship between students and teachers, we asked the former whether they agreed with the affirmation that “teachers care about their students’ welfare”. The graph shows that 60% of all the fifth-grade evaluatees in the country responded positively, and that, on average, the said respondents

got 14 more points on the mathematics test than the ones who answered negatively – i.e. almost half a standard deviation on the test scale.

The graph clearly shows that, on average, those students who believe that their teachers care about their welfare do better on the test. The aforesaid sentence does not contain any value judgements, in the sense that we aren't suggesting that a “yes” answer is more desirable than a “no” one. While there are some questions to which we might all give the same

Graph 4. Teachers care about their students' welfare

* Gray bars indicate that the difference isn't significant.

Source: ICFES, 2017. *Las Características del Aprendizaje* No. 2, Countrywide, Graph 7. Downloaded at: <https://goo.gl/uiLxAU>

response, on many subjects—and especially in the area of citizenship—a value judgment can indicate a particular political leaning. We insist on impartiality because the information gathered serves as input for discussion and action, rather than being a matter of right or wrong. It should be stressed that we found a relationship between two variables that are bound up in a universe of other factors. We have no evidence showing a cause-and-effect relationship between them, and hence we cannot assert that students would get better results if we improved their perception

of their teachers. Even so, this information encourages us to delve more deeply into the topics in question, since the difference are very striking.

In conclusion

We at the ICFES in Colombia believe in the potential of evaluation to help increase the quality of education, and we know that standardized tests are a basic tool that enables us to compare different students in a fair way. By measuring all our students with the same yardstick, we can find out where

we stand, where we are different, and hence what our priorities should be and where we should take action. However, as with any diagnostic study, knowledge of the results per se does not suffice to achieve improvement. Furthermore, since the irresponsible use of results can do great harm, we stress the observational, rather than experimental, use of the tests, and hence the difficulty of finding cause-and-effect relationships. Even if we manage to quantify the differences, mere observation of the gaps does not necessarily explain them. €

National Educational Evaluation Policy Gazette in Mexico

