Implementing reform amidst resistance: The regulation of teacher education and work in Mexico

Maria Teresa Tatto*, Sylvia Schmelkes, Maria Del Refugio Guevara, Medardo Tapia

Michigan State University, College of Education, 509B Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI48824, USA

Received 16 November 2006; accepted 19 February 2007

The data reported in this paper was collected over a period of 3 years from 1993 to 1997, and more recently since 2003. The first layer of data comes from an intensive study of reform implementation in the state of Guanajuato and was financed by an AURIG (All University Research Initiation Grant) grant from Michigan State University. In this first phase of data collection, Tatto did an in-depth study of reform implementation in the state of Guanajuato. The focused on this state was important it was one of the first to carry out the process of decentralization in the municipalities, allowing to more clearly see how the reformers were trying to reach the schools and their teachers. The data were collected at two distinct times over a period of 2 years, via observations of first, third and fifth grade classes in Mathematics and Language in three schools; one suburban, one urban and one rural; interviews with teachers, principals, and supervisors in these schools, and observation of two sessions (1 year apart) of the Consejo Técnico de Zona, and three sessions of the Consejo Técnico Escolar (CTE) in two schools (suburban and urban). In addition, interviews were conducted with Ministry of Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública or SEP) officials on two different occasions in an effort to understand their views on the progress of the reform. The data also include observations of classes in the Normal School, six instances of supervised practice, and intensive interviews with a professor from the Normal School and a focus group session with professors there. The second layer of data was collected in four states undergoing vigorous reform changes as a result of the decentralization movement in México in 1992 and as a result of a compensatory policy for the four poorest states in México. The data include interviews with focus groups of reformers, principals, teachers, teacher educators, and supervisors. The discussion in the focus groups evolved around how the different policies implemented as a result of the educational reform were working for them and how decentralization seemed to help or hinder the reach of the reform. Interviews were also conducted with program designers, policy-makers, and teachers; and observations of a selected number of teachers to see how the reform looked in practice. In addition to field work, this article includes data from a content analysis of official and other pertinent documents related to reform aims and philosophy, implementation mandates and structures, as well as empirical research findings of programs and policy initiatives related to the reform. Funding for this latter data collection came from the World Bank. Data from on-going research studies about the Carrera Magisterial, and the implementation of the reform and its impact on the current Mexican Education system were provided by Schmelkes (García Manzano, 2004; Santos, 2001; Schmelkes & Ahuja, 2001); Guevara (Guevara & Gonzalez, 2004); and Tapia (Tapia, 2004).

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 517 353 6418; fax: +1 517 353 6393.
E-mail address: mttatto@msu.edu (M.T. Tatto).
Abstract

Influenced by worldwide globalization forces new structures of control have emerged in Mexico at the school level, and career ladders reward teachers’ compliance with testing and training schemes; nevertheless the long-standing institutions of initial teacher education continue to show a strong resistance to change. Increased accountability is necessary to improve the quality of Mexican education, but a focus on performance and testing may rest legitimacy to indigenous ways of teaching and knowing.

For close to a decade, the Mexican state has implemented a comprehensive education reform characterized by a decentralization of the educational system of governance and the development of local accountability systems to regulate teachers’ education and work (see Tatto, 1999). The central state still maintains financial and evaluation functions over the educational system. The reform, which was centrally designed with broad cross-country consultation, asks for changes in schools, teachers and curriculum in response to the demands of an increasingly sophisticated global economy. Key to the reform has been the introduction of a curriculum where disciplines such as mathematics, technology and science are increasingly emphasized.

Curricular changes in schools are reaching, albeit slowly, the teacher preparation curriculum which has for the most part been dominated by a pedagogical approach at the expense of the more disciplinary approach now pursued by the reform. Much of the external impulse for change is influenced by worldwide globalization forces via international discourse and agencies, internally by the central Secretariat of Education and a gradually more public discourse on the need to increase accountability in schools, classrooms, and lately on the schools and systems that prepare teachers. The incorporation of Mexico into the OECD in 1994 was yet another source of pressure to join the globalization “horse race.”

While new structures of control have emerged at the school level, and career ladders reward in-service teachers’ compliance with testing and training schemes, the long-standing institutions of initial teacher education for elementary and secondary school teachers, the normal schools (NS), continue to show a strong resistance to change. The NS, with support from the formidable Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educacion (SNTE), the Mexican teachers’ union,1 have strongly reacted against what they perceive as “the beginning of the end,” as concern with disciplinary knowledge argues for moving teacher education to the university level. This resistance brings beginning teachers and their educators at odds with the aims of the reform, displaces the problem of low quality to practicing teachers and their schools, and leaves the government with limited avenues to implement the reform.

The progress of the reform since the late 1990s has been—according to Mexican scholars—in some cases promising and others negligible (Arnaut, 2004; Tapia, 2004). The case of the NS is a perfect illustration as throughout this period, they have reasserted their power, and have positively resisted the transformation of the curriculum to a substantially

---

1The Teachers’ Union in Mexico is the strongest Union in Latin America, with 1,200,000 affiliates.
more academic one. In this regard, the “new” reform and accountability movement receive mixed reviews in their attempts at fighting the ingrained traditions of the NS and the SNTE. However, as we show below, the Mexican state continues to use the arguments put forward by the “global discourse on educational quality” (e.g., via studies such as TIMSS and OECD-PISA) in its attempts at increasing its influence over the system, much in the manner lately suggested by Weiss, Murphy-Graham, and Birkeland (2005) via “imposed use.”

1. Teacher education reform

Teacher education in Mexico has itself been subject of a number of reforms since its origins in the last century (Secretaria de Educacion Publica, 1990). Normales to educate teachers in Mexico had existed in both rural and urban areas since the early 1900. In the early 1920s along with the creation of the Secretaria de Educacion Publica (Secretariat for Public Education or SEP), the Escuela Nacional de Maestros or Normales (National School for Teachers or NS) was created and has since served as the model for the initial preparation of teachers in Mexico. There are currently 457 NS where more than 169,000 students attend; 60% are publicly supported and the rest private. These provide a bachelors degree on several programs such as pre-school education (45%), primary education (55%), secondary education (33%), physical education (14%), and special education (10%). Just over 17,000 faculty teach in the NS with 70% working in the publicly supported Normales.

Especially important for teacher education was the primary school reforms of 1969, 1972, 1975, and 1992 because of the impact they had in the curricular changes of the NS (Secretaria de Educacion Publica, 1990, 1992). The curriculum became increasingly oriented toward a traditional pedagogy based on the relation of the teacher with contents and later on with methods; the use of the “principles of educational technology” reaffirmed the notion that the improvement of education resided in learning how to teach rather than in what to teach. The effects of this philosophy currently affect the impact of teacher preparation especially at the primary level.

The creation of the Universidad Pedagogica Nacional or the National Pedagogic University (UPN) in 1978, represented a response to the perceived need to improve teacher preparation thus creating a bachelors degree program for teachers. However, the lack of union support to UPN’s graduates regarding job placement effectively sabotaged the mission of the UPN and insured that the level of preparation of those teaching in schools remained the same. Consequently, in 1984, the NS were formally charged by presidential decree with providing the bachelors’ degree to its graduates (Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1984).

Currently, initial teacher training in basic education at the bachelor’s level is provided exclusively by the NS and by the UPN which also “upgrades” teachers who were trained under the NS program previous to the reform of 1984. Additionally, sixteen Centros de Actualización del Magisterio (CAM’s), which were originally created to offer professional improvement, are working as NS.

The Education Modernization Program (PME) of 1989, the reforms on teacher education which began in 1992 were later consolidated in the National Education Program of 1995–2000, and the Program for the Academic Transformation and Strengthening of NS (PFT) created in 1996, represent attempts at improving basic education by introducing
a number of important changes at different levels in the educational system (see INEE, 2003).

The impetus for these reforms was to bring about a re-conceptualization of teacher education and of the teacher’s role toward a problem solving orientation, inquiry, experimentation, and research “in order to foster the development of scientific and technical aptitudes” (World Bank, 1991, p. 52).²

1.1. Policy instruments to introduce compliance in reforming teacher preparation

The Mexican state has begun, for the first time in the history of the institution, to exert strong pressure to reform the NS (see Ezpeleta & Oria-Razo, 1997). In 1996, the PFT was initiated and restructured in 2002. The program established six lines of action to reform teacher education and to develop institutional accountability. It mandated the: reform of syllabi and curricula for the initial training of basic education teachers; training and development of teaching and administrative staff; improvement of institutional management; regulation of academic work in NS; internal and external evaluation of teacher education institutions; and regulation of the services offered by the NS.

1.2. Reform of syllabi and curricula for the initial training of basic education teachers

The curricular reform was carried out in 1997–2004 for pre-school, primary, secondary and physical education teachers,³ and called for improvement of future teachers in five areas:

1. Specific intellectual abilities.
2. Mastery of teaching contents.
3. Teaching competencies.
4. Professional and ethical identity, and
5. Perceptive ability and response to social and school conditions.

The study plans were organized into eight semesters and included classroom-based study, and practicum work carried out inside the normal school during the first 3 years; and an intensive practicum under real work conditions in the last two semesters. The curriculum for both bachelors of education (primary and secondary) contain an area of “general training” for all basic education (includes K-12) teachers (mostly history and ethics), a specific area according to the primary and secondary levels (mostly

²These were implemented through the SEP’s action plan to educate teachers as reported by the World Bank (1991, pp. 53–54), and include: (1) A revised curriculum, and courses of studies in formal teacher training programs; (2) new in-service programs for all teachers in the country, and their principals, and supervisors; (3) special courses for teacher educators; (4) development of new television and radio distance education programs dealing with teaching methodologies for teaching science and technical skills directed to those teachers in indigenous and rural schools; (5) development of effective evaluation systems for teacher education programs; (6) improvement in the system for teacher supervision; (7) the formation of a single teacher training system; and (8) a stronger coordination role of teacher education institutions by the National Council or Teacher Training (CONACEN).

³The curricula for the areas of primary education with bilingual, bicultural focus, and special education are under development.
pedagogy). In what is seen as important progress, the primary education curriculum includes courses on content pedagogy, that is, on the teaching of the disciplines. In the bachelors of secondary education, there is additional preparation by specialization related to the specific contents as well as on the content pedagogy by each specialization.

1.3. Training and development of teaching and administrative staff of normal schools

Teacher educators and administrative staff have received workshops from the SEP at the national, regional and state levels regarding the re-definition and content of the new curricula. In addition, new printed materials have been distributed; TV programs have been produced related to the curricular contents. A web page has been made publicly available to all, and especially to the academic personnel of these institutions. According to recently released statistics, these workshops have reached 6500 faculty (40% of the teaching staff) who in turn, following the “cascade” strategy, have “duplicated” these actions at the regional and state levels. In addition, the Program for training and upgrading of teachers and administrators of NS began in 2004 which among other things included the establishment of a network to stimulate the development of both basic education teachers and NS faculty.

1.4. Improvement of institutional management

The most important action in this area was the creation in 2002 of the Program for Institutional Improvement of the Public Normal Schools or Promin. After introducing changes in infrastructure, the Promin was designed to improve the planning and evaluation of the NS by promoting self-diagnosis to improve future teacher learning. This is expected to be a comprehensive strategy that offers technical, pedagogical, material and financial support to the NS. The total national amount allocated to the Promin is 75 million pesos (about 7,500,000 million dollars) or an average of 350,000 pesos (or 35,000 dollars) to each participating school. Promin was implemented in 188 normal schools in 2002–2003, and 207 in 2003–2004.

1.5. Regulation of academic work in the normal schools

Importantly, this area seeks to raise academic standards by selecting teaching staff to NS by means of rigorous academic competitions and according to profiles to be established; distribution of academic loads in NS according to the type of hiring and the needs of the students; linking faculty incentives with student outcomes; and the establishment of merit competitions to fill administrative positions.

1.6. Evaluation of the normal schools

These evaluations are of internal and external character. The internal evaluations focus on the monitoring of the application of syllabi and curricula, an initiative which began in 1997 and was carried out by the central Secretariat of Public Education or SEP. An internal monitoring evaluation is carried out by a specialized team who visits the NS to observe the development of academic activities related to the new curriculum, as well as the schools of basic education where future teachers do their practicum. The evaluation
activity includes observing the work of the faculty in front of the group of future teachers in the NS; observing the future teachers in basic education schools; interviews with administrative staff, faculty and future teachers in NS; and interviews with teachers and students of basic education schools; and monitoring and evaluation of the practicum (teaching practice). These are low stake evaluations which have mostly instructional purposes seeking to help future teachers recognize the characteristics and reach of their practice, to act or determine actions for change, and to assess the impact of their actions.

The external evaluations seek to make the NS accountable in a more deliberate manner as these evaluations are designed to respond to the government proposals to the Mexican people on the Social Commitment to Improve the Quality of Education. These evaluations are unprecedented and include the evaluation of the Promin; the curricular evaluation of the bachelors in secondary education, and the general exams of knowledge for the bachelors of pre-school education which began in 2003, and for the bachelors of primary education which began in 2004. So far these evaluations have been done in an annual basis since 2003 and with an increased number of participants (e.g., 218 in 2005). More needs are to be done, however. The evaluation of the bachelor’s of secondary education curriculum assesses the developed curriculum in the different specializations but not its implementation. Unfortunately, our analysis of the report shows that the disciplinary content seems to have been submerged into the pedagogical or general didactics preparation (confirming observations by other scholars, see Arnaut, 2004). The general knowledge exams currently implemented for the bachelors of pre-school education, are an attempt at introducing teacher testing as an outcome-indicator of the accountability and reform measures introduced until now. In 2003 the SEP asked the National Evaluation Centre for Higher Education (CENEVAL) to design and apply a general knowledge exam to 6547 future teachers in the 7th semester for their bachelors program in pre-school education which amounted to the evaluation of 91% of these future teachers. The test was prepared according to the exit profile indicated in their course of studies. The design of the test and its results are presented below:

Composition of the general knowledge exam for the bachelors of preschool education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Areas of competency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic training</td>
<td>Purposes of pre-school education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Didactic intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Knowledge of student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perception of and response to the school surroundings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical–practical</td>
<td>Purposes of pre-school education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Didactic intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Knowledge of student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perception of and response to the school surroundings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution of future teachers by level of competence reached in the EGP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>% correct</th>
<th>Number of future teachers</th>
<th>% of future teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient</td>
<td>Fewer than 50</td>
<td>1746</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient</td>
<td>From 50–59</td>
<td>2188</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>From 60–69</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>More than 70</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


By the end of 2004, 11,082 students in the 7th semester of the bachelor in primary education were evaluated (results are available at http://normalista.ilce.edu.mx). The argument by the SEP is that the results of these examinations will be used to improve the quality of the training of future teachers, but eventually these exams will become high stakes as they will be used to select teachers to be admitted to service.

1.7. Regulation of the services offered by the normal schools

The final line of accountability as it regards the NS, is an evaluation of the implementation of its services in terms of appropriateness, quality, and access in each state (in the areas of academic quality, planning and development of program quality standards). Although it is not specifically discussed, the quality standards are presumably worldwide standards.4

2. Regulating teacher’s work

In addition to the elaborated program to re-make, evaluate and control the education of future teachers via the reform of the NS, the Mexican authorities have developed a number of policy instruments to regulate the work of teachers in-service. These include a “mandated” meeting of teachers in schools to plan and assess school progress via the Consejos Tecnicos Escolares; the reformed curriculum which requires new knowledge and skills from teachers presumably to be acquired via in-service training and rewarded by the third accountability mechanism, a career ladder known as the Carrera Magisterial (CM).

2.1. Consejos tecnicos escolares

The Consejos Técnicos Escolares (CTEs) or technical councils represent re-designed hierarchical governance structures and professional development vehicles in the implementation of the reform, and function at two levels: the schools and the zone or district. The CTEs responsibilities are the elaboration of a long-term Proyecto Escolar (school project) which incorporates a Plan de Trabajo Escolar (yearly school plan) for short-term goals and objectives such as school organization and administration; the school’s relationship with the community; the reformulation of curricular contents and corresponding teaching methods; and teacher upgrading (SECyR, 1992, p. 26). The

---

4The criteria for evaluation and the development of performance standards have remained up to now loosely defined as documented by Latapi (1997) and Loera and Sandoval (1999).
teacher, does a third and complementary level of planning, in the annual Plan del Maestro (or the teacher’s plan) which should be congruent with the yearly school plan and, consequently, with the Proyecto Escolar. The reform asks teachers to include in their plan the basic curricular contents teaching methods proposed by the modernization program. The CTEs are aimed at developing “organic accountability” while serving as a way to introduce checks and balances in teachers’ implementation of the changes in curriculum and pedagogy advocated by the new wave of educational reform (for a more detailed discussion see Ezpeleta, 1991; Tattoo, 1999).

2.2. The reformed curriculum

The main organism in charge of the curricular reform (1992 to date) was the central SEP, which designed and coordinated the implementation of the so-called Programa Emergente de Reformulación de Contenidos y Materiales Educativos (emerging program to reformulate educational contents and materials). Teacher guides for primary school teachers were used in conjunction with the educational programs and textbooks to implement a more disciplinary oriented curriculum, at least for the lower grades.

The federal government gave the states responsibility for proposing to the Secretariat of Education the design of regional curricular content for its possible incorporation in educational plans and programs. Thus, 1992 marked the shift from a tradition of central control to one of state control, regarding the development of regional curricular content, as well as control of school operations.

In an attempt to reward teachers’ work and cooperation in the curriculum reform, the federal government working with the teachers’ union decided to implement the CM. This important instrument of compliance and control in the educational reform is discussed below.

2.3. The Carrera Magisterial

CM is a horizontal promotion system for teachers. It began in 1992 as one of the policies of the National Agreement for Basic and Normal Education, signed by the Federal Government (SEP), the Teacher’s Union and the 31 States of the Republic.

The CM assumes that teachers will perform better if they obtain higher pay in return for higher effort. It seeks to stimulate teachers’ interest in in-service training and professional development, and assumes that more training brings about improved teacher performance. Participation in CM is individual and optional. Its operation was revised in 1998 after 5 years of existence and ample across the country consultation. The most important change at that time was an increase in the number of points attributed to student achievement (from 7 to 20), which clearly signals a move toward student performance-based accountability.

There are three tracks and five levels in CM. The first track is for teachers who work at the classroom level. The second is for headmasters and supervisors. And the third is for teachers that are assigned to technical and pedagogical activities within the educational system. Regarding the five levels in CM, all teachers begin at the first level (A). In order to be promoted to the next level a certain number of years must be spent in the previous

---

5 Information in this section is taken from Secretaría de Educación Pública (2000, 2002); and from García Manzano (2004).
one, according to the region (urban or rural and marginal) in which the teacher works (see Table 1). The factors evaluated in Carrera are shown in Table 2.

A teacher in level A of Carrera receives an income 30% higher than a teacher that is not in Carrera. When one reaches level C, the income doubles that of a teacher without Carrera.

The CM relies on two basic assumptions (a) that teachers in Carrera are better trained, and (b) that the performance of trained teachers is above that of teachers that have not received in-service training. In a study of 24 schools (their students and their teachers) carried out in the city of León, no correlation was found between total schooling and participation in Carrera (Schmelkes & Ahuja, 2001). However, teachers taking the graduate examination at the UPN who belong to Carrera obtained higher scores than those who do not. In this same study, teachers who held technical and pedagogical functions and were enrolled in the CM and the UPN scored above both teachers and headmasters. This information, at least as applies to the state of Leon, leads us to conclude that teachers in CM are in fact better trained and more knowledgeable than those who are not in Carrera.

We have found no support for the assumption that teachers in Carrera perform better. Our data comes from two different on-going studies: an evaluation of the Telesecundaria schools (Santos, 2001) (a national sample), and the study of factors that explain student achievement in 24 urban schools in the city of León, Guanajuato presented above

---

**Table 1**  
*Carrera Magisterial* years needed for promotion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Years needed</th>
<th>Total number of years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban and rural</td>
<td>A: 3</td>
<td>B: 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C: 4</td>
<td>D: 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E: —</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2**  
Factors evaluated in *Carrera Magisterial*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Classroom teachers</th>
<th>Headmasters and supervisors</th>
<th>Teachers in technical functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Points</td>
<td>Points</td>
<td>Points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Previous</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Previous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in service</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional training (direct assessment)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In service training courses</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional performance</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ attainment</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School performance</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research, training and design of materials</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total points</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Schmelkes & Ahuja, 2001). In both cases teachers in Carrera did not have a better performance than those who are not in Carrera as measured by their absenteeism and by student achievement measured by a national standards test (criterion-based) in reading and mathematics. Teachers might be better trained when they belong to Carrera, but this relationship does not directly translate to better results among their students.

Explanations for these results may be found in a number of difficulties in the operation of the system:

- Student achievement is not measured adequately. 6,000,000 students are tested each year. Tests are not well constructed, emphasize memorization, and are not comparable in time, or consistent with the content now taught to teachers.
- There is a lack of transparency in the way the system compensates for poverty in student achievement results which only legitimizes inequality.
- Teacher evaluations are based on available material and imply reading certain books and authors. Theoretical knowledge and not skills are emphasized.
- The urban bias of CM that we have discussed is a consequence of excluding multi-grade schools, Cursos Comunitarios and Indian schools.
- In spite of the establishment of the Consejos Tecnico, there is no encouragement for schools to operate as a team and achieve good results at the school level.
- Being in Carrera is time demanding, a resource that teachers can only take from their teaching time.

In spite of these difficulties, teachers overall agree that there are a number of advantages to having a scheme such as CM, teachers: earn more than with previous union-administered promotion schemes; can improve their salary without having to abandon teaching (which was the only way to seriously increase their earnings before Carrera); and are better informed and more aware of the pedagogical literature.

On the side of the system, Carrera has: stimulated the design of in-service training courses to improve teaching; offered these courses all over the country; established 500 teaching centres; teacher training is now accessible to most teachers; made available policy documents and pedagogical literature for teachers. All these are unprecedented and important achievements.

It is clear however that CM, as well as other similar schemes, is not a direct route to improving quality of educational results. It cannot become the single mechanism for improving teacher performance. Quality of educational results continues to be a multi-determined phenomenon that requires heavy investment and intensive and systemic approaches.

3. Reforming teacher education and work through “imposed use” of effective policy

The saying, “the more things change, the more they remain the same” has characterized educational reforms in Mexico. Educational systems are by nature conservative and change represents small but significant achievements over relatively long periods of time. This article has illustrated this difficult dynamic. While the Mexican educational reform

---

A modality of primary education designed for disperse rural communities that operates with para-teachers (high-school graduates).
and its various policy instruments have been faithfully developed and accountability systems and structures are gradually being put in place, the very institutions in need of change find accommodation in the old and familiar ways. This situation is characteristic of the Normal Schools and the teachers’ union or SNTE (its major supporter). While in the last century most teacher education has worldwide moved to the universities, the Mexican NS has managed to resist this global push and to stay the course. Albeit with a higher education credential and presumably with a new curriculum, it is still an open question whether these changes in the NS are of substance or only of form—answers that may be partially known once future teachers are assessed for their subject matter knowledge and how well they teach it.

In the case of the NS and the general teacher education system in Mexico, a context-relevant system of honest and rigorous accountability has to be considered a positive development. However, it remains to be seen whether evaluations—internal or external, formative or summative—currently undertaken will achieve their intended purpose.

Weiss et al. (2005) recent proposal that evaluations may influence policy through the “imposed use” of those interventions that prove effective is likely to become more common as government agencies make greater demands for accountability. The current climate of evaluation of teacher education and teacher work in Mexico suggests the beginning of an important discussion that needs to take place as the Mexican state makes greater demands for change. While Mexico’s reform argues for rational change accompanied by increased evaluation and accountability, the urgency to comply with these mandates may force educational institutions such as the NS to adopt policy without enough attention to appropriateness, usefulness, and context.

Mexico’s educational reforms have primarily been highly effective in serving a political and symbolic function. This current wave of reform may be not different. Paradoxically, the proposed wave of reform with greater demands for accountability, also provides the possibility to influence educational policy through instrumental and conceptual routes, and indeed, albeit initially, via “imposed use.”

References
CENEVAL/SEP. (2004). Examen general de conocimientos de la Licenciatura en Educación Preescolar. Resultados (Síntesis ejecutiva), México, DF.


Schmelkes, S., Ahuja, R. (2001) Factores que inciden en el rendimiento escolar de 24 escuelas urbanas de León, Guanajuato. Unpublished on-going study which is part of a comparative study coordinated by Laura Randall and Joan Anderson in four Latin American countries.


