

# PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHER EDUCATION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF CONSTANT TRAINING AND UPDATE: A LOOK AT THE ACTORS AT A MEXICAN UNIVERSITY



Perspectivas en torno a la formación docente y la posibilidad de una capacitación y actualización constante: una mirada desde los actores en una universidad mexicana

Perspectivas sobre a formação de professores e a possibilidade de formação e atualização constante: uma visão dos atores de uma universidade mexicana

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## *ABSTRACT*

Teacher education has been questioned in the face of the academic results of national and international assessments in different levels of the average basic and mid secondary education. Teachers' skills have been considered the substantial variable which is liable for the current reality of the educational process. The purpose of this article is to analyze the process of teacher education, assess the efficiency of its education, training and update mechanisms by analyzing their relevance, attention to requirements of today's society as well as philosophical model of the teachers it aims to train. The study consisted of a questionnaire for teachers in educational institutions of basic and mid secondary levels; a statistical analysis support program (SPSS) was performed; sample selection was casuistry and the criteria considered teachers in service. Thus far, teacher training and update mechanisms have parted from the absence of a needs assessment; moreover, although education is now a bachelor's degree and postgraduate studies in education have proliferated, results are insufficient; in the same way, it is considered that teacher

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## *RESUMEN*

La formación docente ha sido muy cuestionada a consecuencia de los resultados académicos que reflejan las evaluaciones nacionales e internacionales en los diferentes niveles de la educación básica y media superior. La capacidad del maestro ha sido considerada la variable sustancial donde se concentra la responsabilidad de la realidad actual que vive el proceso educativo. El propósito del presente artículo es realizar un análisis del proceso de formación docente, valorar la eficacia de los mecanismos de formación, capacitación y actualización, analizando su pertinencia, su atención a los requerimientos de la sociedad actual, así como al modelo filosófico de maestro que se pretende formar. El estudio consistió en la aplicación de un cuestionario a docentes de instituciones educativas del nivel básico y medio superior; se realizó un análisis estadístico con apoyo del programa (SPSS), la selección de la muestra fue casuística, considerando como criterio docentes que se encontraran en servicio. Los mecanismos de capacitación y actualización docente han partido, hasta el momento, de la ausencia de

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## *RESUMO*

A formação de professores tem sido muito questionada como resultado dos resultados acadêmicos refletidos nas avaliações nacionais e internacionais nos diferentes níveis do ensino básico e secundário. A capacidade do professor tem sido considerada a variável substancial onde se concentra a responsabilidade pela realidade atual do processo educativo. O objetivo deste artigo é realizar uma análise do processo de formação de professores, para avaliar a eficácia dos mecanismos de formação, formação e atualização, analisando a sua pertinência, sua atenção às exigências da sociedade atual, bem como o modelo filosófico do professor que se pretende formar. O estudo consistiu na aplicação de um questionário para professores de instituições de ensino dos níveis básico e secundário superior; uma análise estatística foi realizada com o apoio do programa (SPSS); a seleção da amostra foi casuística, considerando como critérios, professores que estavam em serviço. Os mecanismos de formação e atualização de professores têm se baseado, até agora, na ausência de uma avaliação das necessidades; da mesma forma,

involvement and commitment are essential for efficient teaching.

un diagnóstico de necesidades; así también, aunque la carrera se haya elevado a nivel de licenciatura y los estudios a nivel posgrados en educación hayan proliferado, los resultados son insuficientes; de la misma manera, se considera que la implicación y el compromiso del maestro son factores esenciales para una enseñanza eficaz.

embora as carreiras tenham aumentado até o nível de graduação e os estudos de pós-graduação em educação tenham proliferado, os resultados são insuficientes; da mesma forma, o envolvimento e o compromisso dos professores são considerados fatores essenciais para um ensino eficaz.

**Keywords:** Teacher training, professionalization, attitude, innovation.

**Palabras clave:** Formación docente, profesionalización, actitud, innovación.

**Palavras chave:** Formação de professores, profissionalização, atitude, inovação.

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## *INTRODUCTION*

The national educational system is facing a crisis in terms of academic results, national and international standardized tests show weaknesses in education processes among different contexts. Based on the analysis of the main spheres and levels, teacher education is believed to be the main axis of the deficiencies resulting from the tests applied to Mexican students.

Education is understood as a social and cultural process that follows the developmental nature of human beings' transforming capacity, which is present in the dynamics of constant and systematic relationships between society's members, and that is capable of boosting and transforming a person's behavior by knowing, doing, being and coexisting (Vargas, 2010, p.3). Training is defined as the teaching-learning process undertaken to acquire knowledge and strengthen abilities. Lastly, an update is the activity of catching up, being at the forefront and tapping into new information in the education field.

The holistic perspective establishes that many factors intervene in the development of the educational process; the system becomes very complex and methodological, and psychological, social, curricular, cultural factors, among others, converge. Also, participation and commitment by the actors in the process (students, teachers, parents, authorities and society in general) is considered significant since each -directly or

indirectly- takes part in the education of the members of society.

Several professionalization, training and update practices have been proposed in Mexico, some entail theoretical and academical loopholes that are unrelated with the practicalities of education for life; the last proposal is oriented towards competence development, with the aim of schools offering a service of quality with well-prepared teachers (to whom frequent updates are offered).

## *PERCEPTION OF TEACHER EDUCATION*

“Some studies isolate the teacher factor as the key element in educational transformation, the main actor in the renovation of teaching models” (Aguerrondo, 2004; Fullan, 2002; Vaillant 2005). Whatever the change intended, the approach guiding it or society's capacity to understand it, “teachers are always questioned, whether they act as executors, mediators of the plan or as active and reflexive protagonists of the transformation” (Vezub, 2007, p.3).

Lately, teacher education has been challenged and teachers themselves have been accused of lacking the competences required by the teacher of the 21st century. For the OECD and UNESCO, the ‘ideal teacher’, the ‘efficient teacher’ is characterized by a multipurpose individual, a competent professional, an agent of change, a reflexive practitioner, a researcher, a critical and intellectual critic with

transforming nature (Barth, 1990; Delors et al., 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Gimeno, 1992; Jung, 1994; OECD, 1991; Schon, 1992; UNESCO, 1990, 1998): someone who masters the knowledge and content that he/she intends to teach, facilitates learning, knows and interprets the school's curriculum, understands culture in its context, develops an active pedagogy, works in teams, etc. Based on the results projected by national and international standardized tests, it can be said that education has failed to achieve the ideal teacher model.

Anderson states: "an efficient teacher achieves objectives focusing on students' learning, direct or indirectly, with sufficient consistency" (1991, p.18); from this perspective, the teacher must succeed in quality learning, since this is education's overall purpose. This requires the teacher to develop a set of competences to fulfill the development of his/her teaching practice following the principles of quality; Dunkin (1997) defines teacher competence as the necessary knowledge and skills, and teacher performance as the way in which he/she behaves throughout the process of teaching.

and programs, training and update mechanisms of the faculty.

The second report by PREAL concluded that: In average, Latin American teachers are not prepared enough for their function. They have less professional education hours than its peers in developed countries and the training they receive is oftentimes of poor quality. These statements contrast the expanding importance given by regional governments to this issue. Despite large efforts and investments, results are far from what is expected. It is common to speak about the "low impact" of teacher training in the transformation and advancement of teaching practices (Vezub, 2007, p. 5).

Research has shown that teachers with an attitude that benefits innovation, professional development, continuous education, self-assessment as reflection and improvement strategy, and with a capacity to incorporate new ideas in his/her practice, reflect on absenteeism and rotation, among others, largely influence student success and their attitude towards school (Harris, 1998; Stronge, 2002; Thijs & Verkuyterm, 2009).

### *MEXICAN TEACHERS' EDUCATION*

In the Pre-Columbian era parents were responsible for educating their children, the purpose of this was to educate the heart, meaning, caring for the feelings and emotions of the human being, to teach the main chores from the perspective of gender,

and to educate human sensitivity in the values of respect, obedience, etc.

In colonial times, education became eminently religious, the main objective was to raise children abiding by the principles of the Christian doctrine, following the ideas of obedience, love for others, and knowledge of reading, writing and basic mathematical operations; the process of educating was in the hands of religious communities. Thus, teaching was still not considered a trade.

The arrival of the Lancaster Company in 1822 was an opportunity for Mexican society, which had been trying to reduce illiteracy levels. The responsibility of educating students fell on teachers who were hired by the city hall under certain indicators. The first normal schools (institutions that educate future teachers) came with the Lancaster system and they offered a course that lasted 4 to 6 months.

After teaching became a career, the Normal School for Teachers was inaugurated in the City of Mexico in 1887, it became responsible for educating the teachers at that moment. Since 1921, two key moments influenced the preparation of elementary teachers' education: firstly, the rural, missionary teacher who is committed with a humanist and social conception of the teaching profession; since illiteracy was widespread during the revolution, personnel was constantly required to conduct literacy campaigns and only literates were recruited to participate, this is when cultural missions first

appeared, the caravans took people from town to town in order to teach how to read and write and even some trades. Up until then, it could be said that teachers were not subject to any type of training, much less update.

Secondly, when normal studies were granted a bachelor's degree, changing the status of many of its subjects and the excessive emphasis on theoretical and speculative disciplines.

In 1958, Jaime Torres Bodet founded the Federal Training Institution for the Teaching Practice with the purpose of improving the intellectual capacities of practicing teachers and enhance their knowledge on educational content; the concern at that time was for teachers to master knowledge to be taught in the classroom, yet in the 50's and 60's, only people who had graduated elementary or secondary were hired as teachers. By 1958, there were 18,000 teachers in service, 9,000 of which had graduated elementary school, 3,000 had incomplete secondary studies, 3,000 had graduated from rural normal schools and only 2,000 had been educated in full-time normal schools.

Teacher preparation and training has changed along with the educational project implemented in each period of time, be it nationalist, socialist, 11-year plan, educational technology, educational modernization, comprehensive reform, etc., which have intended to unify teacher education study plans and favor the development of certain skills and knowledge required in this initial moments of

the teaching practice. An example of which is the foundation of Universidad Pedagógica Nacional and its Plan 75: a curriculum that focused on mastering basic higher education knowledge.

The development of Plan 99 focused on benefiting the methodological process as well as knowledge; teaching techniques appear as instruments and tools that guide the process. Educational technology gave relevance to implementing study techniques and dynamics but failed to prioritize teacher training; basic education had to wait for the educational modernization project to establish the need for teachers to have permanent training in its study plans and programs.

Teachers' training and update mechanisms became known as General Update Workshops and were taught at the beginning of the academic cycle, these included topics that were considered necessary, and lasted several academic cycles, yet, results continued to be unsatisfactory. Subsequently, strategic planning was believed to solve the problem deriving from poor academic results, in this context, the design and roll-out of an improvement route was devised. Designed during a week at the beginning of the academic cycle, and intended to help improve academic results, the improvement route has also failed to make significant progress: Perhaps the Lipman perspective has become real? "Pedagogy schools seem to suffer continuous identity crises, are seemingly trying a new personality depending on

the fashion of the moment" (Lipman, M., Sharp A., & Oscanyan, F. 1992, p.48).

### *TEACHER EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS*

There is an imperative need for teachers to receive adequate education as per the requirements of today's society and constant training to enhance knowledge, skills and dexterities needed for teaching (while keeping in mind the type of student that is being taught). Teachers must own and live by the educational approach in order to develop their practice, master their area of knowledge and of teaching techniques and strategies in compliance with the chosen educational model, encourage hard-working, demanding and intensity attitudes, etc.

Understandably, society evolves and adapts to new scientific, technological, social and economic advancements, among others, yet it is necessary to generate teacher education models that are suitable for the historic moment and that respond to the specific social requirements of the time. If education in the future is to have strength, teacher education shall demand more integrity than nowadays (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1992, p.48).

For Gorodokin (2006, p.2) another aspect to consider in teacher education is that it must "make an effort to educate competent subjects". Therefore, teacher education represents more than

just the accumulation of knowledge since representations, identifications, methods and attitudes are also structured throughout the process, all of which impact the trained subject in the cognitive and socio-affective aspect.

For the Secretary of Public Education, there are basic competences teachers must have in order to develop the pedagogical practice, as follows: mastering the content intended to be taught, creating learning environments, being able to work collaboratively, handling and incorporating ICT, mastering a second language, etc.

Vaillant (2004) states that teachers at teacher education institutions do not undergo a special preparation to fulfill their functions, some don't have classroom experience because they began teaching as soon as they graduated the institution, a large percentage still teach as they were taught to teach: with dictation, master classes, using few books and offering scarce practical experience regarding efficient teaching methods.

“Teachers, from their professional actions, must reflect on their pedagogical practice in order to enhance it and/or strengthen it, based on this proceed to acquire new knowledge” (Diaz, 2006, p.89); thus leaving room for questions such as: What are we doing? How are we doing it? How well or badly are we doing it? Are we promoting research? etc.

The hypothesis that was proposed for this study is as follows: if there is a lack of clarity in the teaching model required by modern society (and if the teacher is unaware of it or misunderstands it) an efficient or pertinent professional education is unlikely to happen.

The objective of this research was to analyze the teachers' education and training processes in order to propose improvement alternatives in driving efficient learning.

## *METHODOLOGY*

A questionnaire with closed-ended questions was applied; two questions asked the respondents to argue or justify their answers with the aim of obtaining more elements to qualitatively assess the following variables: ‘To what do you attribute the efficiency or inefficiency of the courses taken?’ and ‘Is the educational system clear enough in terms of the model of teacher it intends to educate?’ The first variable offered elements that allowed identifying possible causes regarding the efficiency of teacher education or training tools; the second showed the perspective of the teacher regarding the clarity of the teacher training prototype that may or may not exist in the educational system.

67 teachers in 6 elementary level institutions, 3 preschool level institutions and 1 mid secondary institution were surveyed; 2 of these were part of the state system and 8 of the federal system; 5 were located in rural areas and 5 in urban areas. The

institution's characteristics were varied, 6 have a total organization and the rest are multigrade. The main characteristics of the respondents were to be in service and to be part of the basic and mid secondary education, the reason for these criteria was that in 2004 a transformation process began in elementary education, which focused the educational process in the development of skills, thus the philosophical approach that justifies the 4 levels is precisely based on competence development, based on a humanist philosophy.

The selection of the respondents was casuistic, the criteria for being selected was being a teacher in service.

### *ANALYSIS OF RESULTS*

The instrument used for the collection of information was subject to a reliability test using the Cronbach's alpha technique, the result was of 0.786.

The largest percentage of respondents (42.1%) had been in service between 1 and 10 years, which means they recently graduated, young teachers with an education that focuses on the approaches required by the system. 24.9% of respondents had been in service between 11 and 20 years, and 26.3% between 21 and 30 years. In terms of the respondents' academic degree, 71.9% have a bachelor's degree, 15% have a basic normal school degree and 7% have a postgraduate degree; the bachelor's degree percentage is similar to the percentage of teachers that have up to 20 years of

service, meaning that this amount of teachers have not continued studying and have neglected their academic training altogether.

Additionally, the study found that a very large percentage of teachers (35.1%) has undertaken 1 and 2 courses in the last 2 years, whereas 33.3% has taken 5 or more courses. Interestingly, mid secondary education teachers are the ones who have taken the courses, as it is mandatory in the institutions they work in and is considered pedagogical training. 29.8% have participated in 3 and 4 courses in the last 2 years, taking general and mandatory update workshops into account; this shows the scarce level of update and training received by teachers and the lack of courses they attend.

In terms of the variable 'Assessment of the efficiency of courses or workshops', 77.2% of the respondents assesses them as good, 50.9% believes they are good due to the preparation of the appointed teacher and 26.3% thinks they are good due to participants' interest; yet, 17.6% of the teachers consider courses or workshops to be poor or deficient due to the lack of clarity in content and purpose, 12.3% of the teachers believe these same causes to be problematic in the philosophical model regarding the type of teacher to be educated.

In terms of teachers' perception on whether the courses taken promote development of reflection, innovation, research and debate skills or not, as well as if they include knowledge, skills and attitudes



that draw accomplishments in graduates' profile: 57% answered yes and 8% no, 35% answered that sometimes. This shows that, in the opinion of the majority of respondents, courses do promote the skills required to be applied in the classroom, although some of them fail to identify this type of skills and believe the courses have a very traditional approach.

When asked if the courses attended serviced their training needs, 50.9% of teachers replied yes, 42.1% answered sometimes and 7% said no. For a percentage of these teachers, the topics covered were not interesting.

The last question was: Is the educational system clear enough in terms of the model of teacher it intends to educate? 36.8% said no, 35.1% answered sometimes and 28.1% replied yes.

The respondents who said no justified their answer saying that the courses fail to consider the context and social reality in which the educational practice takes place, seeing as it largely influences it; they also fail to consider teachers' opinion in the design of study plans and programs, moreover, in the implementation of reform projects; those who design educational projects are unaware of the real education needs of the teachers; there is no coherence between the words and the actions of educational authorities; some consider that the educational model intended to be implemented is highly limited and has been taken from other contexts with characteristics and particularities that

largely differ from those in Mexico; other express a constant change in programs and a need for more updates regarding the legal substance of existing reforms; other teachers manifest that this system based on 6-year policies is unclear about the teacher it intends to train.

Teachers who answered yes argued that the topics introduced by the courses strengthen the type of teacher they intend to train because they agree with teachers' learning needs; some say that they aim to train teachers with more problem-solving skills.

## *CONCLUSIONS*

In the face of academic results being insufficient, there is a need for teachers to be constantly trained and updated, yet this aspect was only considered up until the inception of the educational modernization project with the implementation of general update workshops. However, academic results have not shown meaningful improvement since the same practices still take place in the classroom, meaning there has been no efficiency in attaining the educational objectives.

Teacher training and update mechanisms have parted from the absence of a robust diagnosis of training needs. Only until 2015 were diagnosis assessments implemented in the system, but there is no consolidated data in this regard. A large gap exists between educational intentions and educational practice needs.

Moreover, although education is now a bachelor's degree, postgraduate studies in education have proliferated and update workshops have been implemented, results are insufficient; teachers state that, to certain extent, these courses do not fulfill their training needs and lack a model teacher to follow; How does the educational system want its teachers to be? What training needs does the teacher have?, etc. even though the OECD has a series of indicators that apply to teachers, it is necessary to specify them in each course, workshop, diploma course or other training mechanism in order for teachers to be aware, assimilate, appropriate and apply them in each step of his/her education, training or update.

Study plans and programs oriented towards teacher education have been largely inconsistent, teaching requisites have only considered reading, writing and arithmetic to develop competences required to teach. Currently, educational systems follow requirements established by international organisms; Lipman (1992, p.48) mentions “Pedagogy schools seem to suffer continuous identity crises, are seemingly trying a new personality depending on the fashion of the moment”. Is teacher training in the midst of an identity crisis?

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