

**MARCO AURELIO NAVARRO-LEAL & ZAIRA NAVARRETE-CAZALES****THE MEXICAN EDUCATION REFORMS AND THE TEACHER EDUCATION SYSTEM AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY****Abstract**

The paper reviews the Mexican reforms to basic education during the last decade of the last century as well as the first of the new century in relation to the implications that they have for the teacher education system. After a brief description of the system, the paper examines the modernization reform in the government of Carlos Salinas and the educational reform of the President Enrique Peña.

**Introduction**

As the rest of the countries, during the last decades Mexico has undergone through a series of reforms in different sectors of public administration aimed to contend with the process of globalization. The education sector has not been refrained from reforms (Navarro & Contreras, 2013) and is the purpose of this paper to briefly review the case of the teacher education system in this country at the turn of the century.

To accomplish the task, we start with a brief description of the system and then go to analyze the modernization reform of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the current reform after the first decade of the new century, to finish the paper with some thoughts in relation to this particular reform.

**The current structure of Mexican teacher education**

Nowadays there are 464 Normal Schools with a total enrolment of 131,025 students and 18,253 faculties (SIBEN, 2013). From that number of schools, 273 are public and 191 private. They train teachers for preschool, elementary, bilingual and intercultural elementary, secondary, special, initial, physical and artistic education. The enrolments of the public schools count for more than 93,000 students (SEP, 2013). Both, private and public schools operate the official subjects and do not have research as an institutional duty, like universities do. There are no regulations for entrance and promotions of academic personnel. There is an average of 32% of full time faculty in these schools and 30% of them are graduate diploma holders: 246 hold a PhD, 3382 hold a master's degree; 10,684 hold a four year diploma; 401 normal basic school teacher; 1,830<sup>1</sup> have less than a four year program (*Cf.* SIBEN, 2013). The largest teacher education school in Mexico, established 35 years ago, is the National Pedagogical University (UPN) which works with 76 Academic Units and 208 Sub-Units all over the country, as a nationwide network to face regional and local demands (UPN, 2013). On the other hand, 45% of the students come from

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<sup>1</sup> There is a lack of consistency in the figures; about 2000 teachers are missing. Nevertheless all the data was taken from the same source: Sistema de Información Básica de la Educación Normal (SIBEN).

families with a monthly income of 250 US dollars, or less; with a schooling average of the father of 9 grade and 6 grade for the mother (*cf.* Santillán, 2012).

Graduate studies for teachers and for faculty of normal schools, are very recent. With the reform of 1984, when normal education became a four year program like university programs, normal schools were allowed to offer this level of education. Normal schools became centers for re-training of teachers in specialization, masters and doctoral programs. The starting point was in Mexico city, where the normal schools were the first to have specialization (Diploma) programs in 1997 and master's programs in 2000 (Ávalos, 2011).

Nowadays, continuing education and graduate studies are compulsory requirements to be a "good teacher", according to the international criteria that permeates educational policies and its correspondent "credentialist" movement (Navarrete, 2013).

During the last decade, it can be noticed a remarkable reduction in the normal schools enrolments, while in the school year 2002-2003 there were 166,873 students, for the school year 2011-2012, enrolments were 133,770 students. The downsizing could be motivated by: 1) the creation of new universities, technological institutes, technologic universities, polytechnic universities that are attracting more students; 2) the diversification of programs in all higher education institutions; and 3) the loss of reputation of teachers, sometimes perceived as annoying, sluggish, strikers, in contrast with the generalized perception of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **The program of Modernization**

With the name of "modernization", the government of Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) carried out a number of reforms as a process of updating structures to surpass the severe economic crisis of the previous years. The modernization of the country included the privatization of public enterprises and industries. From then onwards, the next regimes adopted the neo-liberalism as an economic doctrine and the neo-conservatism as the moral orientation. This thinking was the inspiration for the entrance application of Mexico to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, in spite of the armed opposition by the Zapatista Army. In this context the educational system was demanded to design policies for the new world order.

Since 1991, the National Union of Workers of Education had a proposal to mend the disarticulation among normal schools by means of creating a common core segment of the curriculum and a set of different options with paths for the fields of specialization of teachers. The aim was to cancel the encyclopedic design of the curricula and to orient teacher education towards the development of intellectual competences for continuous and independent learning. This proposal also had the aim to articulate theoretical and methodological contents with a critical practice in real school processes. This proposal was included in the National Agreement for the Modernization of Basic Education in 1992 (ANMEB, for the Spanish initials) that was signed for representatives of all stakeholders, with the aim to build an educational system of high quality which will be the major support of a self-reliant, prosperous and just country, and to compromise resources for this sector, excellence in teaching, updating of contents and the implementing of a new educational

federalism. With this agreement, the governments of the States were in charge of the schools that formerly were in hands of federal government, which kept the duty of enforcing in the Republic the Article Third of Mexican Constitution, arranging with the States some programs and actions to surpass the educational lags.

The modernization process went on with the reformulation of contents and approaches of basic education with new challenges for the education of teachers and the gap with what was taught in normal schools. These challenges were also taken into account for the 1997 normal school curriculum (Czarny, 2003).

Articles 3 and 130 of the Constitution were amended in relation with the legal personality of churches. Modifications made possible the participation of church in education, leaving behind all the problems between conservatives and liberals during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the inconveniencies between the church and the government with the Constitution of 1917. In 1990, the National Pedagogic University implements the four year programs of preschool and basic education for the indigenous populations.

During the next years of the Salinas administration a number of actions were taken for reorganizing the educational system: obligatoriness of the secondary school, the enactment of the General Law of Education of 1993, the quest for educational quality and equity with the same priority as coverage; the emphasis in learning scientific, technological and labor competences; the promotion of entrepreneurs participation in school management and more linkages with labor sector. The main objectives were to decentralize education and introduce it into the new world order.

### **The current reform**

Mexico is currently experiencing a restructuration process in relation to composition, development and ends of the education system. This restructuration initiated at the end of Felipe Calderón administration (2006-2012), but it was implemented until the arrival of the president Peña Nieto (2012-2018), and the “deal for Mexico” subscribed with representatives of the parties of the opposition and derived an initiative to reform articles 3<sup>rd</sup> and 73<sup>rd</sup> of the Political Constitution. Among others, the main changes to Article 3<sup>rd</sup> were:

- For compulsory education the State will provide quality, in such a way that educational materials and methods, school organization, educational infrastructure and suitability of teachers warranty the best learning of pupils.
- Additionally, the entrance to teaching service and the promotion to directive and supervising functions, in basic and middle public education, will be on the basis of academic merit competition.
- For the assurance of quality in education services it is created the National System of Educational Evaluation in charge of the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education, as an autonomous public organism.

On the other hand, the modifications of the Article 73<sup>rd</sup> of the Constitution were:

- to establish the professional teaching service;
- to organize and sustain in the Republic, the rural, elementary, higher, secondary and professional schools; scientific research, fine arts and technical education; practical schools of agriculture and mining, arts and

crafts, museums, libraries, observatories, and all the institutes concerned with general culture of inhabitants of the nation and to legislate about these kind of institutions;

- to legislate about vestiges and fossil remains and about archeological, artistic and historic monuments, which conservation is of national interest; as well as to dictate laws for the convenient distribution among federation, states and municipalities of the education function, unifying and coordinating the education of the Republic, to ensure the fulfillment of the ends of education and its continuous improvement in a framework of inclusion and diversity;
- the academic certificates will take effects in the entire Republic;
- to legislate on copyright and another figures related to intellectual property.

These were the most significant issues of the constitutional reform of February 26, 2013 and from which the Legislative Power elaborated on the correspondent regulations: 1) The Law of the Teaching Professional Service, 2) The Law of the National Institute for the Evaluation of education, and 3) the necessary reforms to the general Law of education.

The enactment of these reforms in August 23<sup>rd</sup> in 2013, have created a complex political scenario with the demonstrations of teachers from some of the sections of the Union, against this constitutional reforms, especially the ones that are related with the yearly evaluations that jeopardize their jobs when failing three times.

According to some experts, the General Law of the Teaching Professional Service states that teachers holding an indefinite contract will not lose their jobs when failing an evaluation; but those teachers who reject to be evaluated will be fired; on the other hand, the teachers holding a provisional contract will also be evaluated, like the new teachers, and will have three evaluations to obtain a definite contract. According to Ramirez (2013), the general definition formulated in Article 3 of the Constitution admits different interpretations in relation to the extent of new regulations, particularly on the light of the principle of not retroactivity of laws when they imply damage of the individuals, as it is stated in the Article 14 of the same Constitution.

Some specialists on this subject argue that the acknowledgement of the complex nature of the teaching work should be the starting point to establish just criteria and reliable mechanisms for evaluation. In this sense they argue that the evaluation of teaching work through a mass written exam is notoriously insufficient; and likewise, to assess the work of a teacher as a function of the results on the performance of his students is not tenable, since their performance is highly affected by deficiencies and gains accumulated by students as a product of their previous social experience and school trajectories (Ramirez, 2013: 15).

This argument is sustained by education research carried out in several parts of the world and in successful international innovative experiences that manifest that, among all the factors that impinge on school results, the most important is the performance of the teacher. The intervention of the teacher is decisive, either as an individual or as a collective action; it exerts accumulative effects along the educational trajectories of children and adolescents. Even in the most adverse social and school conditions, to have or not to have a teacher constitutes a radical difference for the pupils (Fuentes, 2013: 20-21).

Teachers' demonstrations continue during the first months of 2014 as a response of what legislators approved last August. According to Raphael (2013), we consider that the principal matter to discuss on this reform should not be the uncertainty or unreliability of teacher evaluation, but a professional career that asserts integral improvement of the teacher work.

### Final thoughts

No doubt that a plan is neither static nor definitive. A plan struggles its implementing on a socio-historical and political reality, where contingencies are part of the process of transformation and where even the plan is adjusted. In this political arena, the educational reform is a planned change that constitutes a referent where institutional programs to educate teachers acquire a sense.

In this educational reform a just evaluation of teachers should concentrate on teaching practice and should be sensible to cultural diversity of Mexican society and to the socioeconomic conditions of students and their families, as well as the conditions where teachers work. We cannot get round the teachers that work in multi-grade schools or those who work with large classes with difficult conditions to ask students for highly cognitive standards. An evaluation focused on the teacher practice should be used also for entrance to teaching service (Ramírez, 2013: 13).

It is important to notice the participation of scholars on this educational reform, either submitting their reflections or proposals from their own research, or from their reflective practice. The participation of scholars as political actors is a relevant advancement in educational issues; usually their participation was null or relegated to the classroom. As experts on Mexican education, their open participation is already a gain from this reform. Normal schools should take note of new demands and discussions to be faced by the new curriculum of future teachers.

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Prof. Dr. Marco Aurelio Navarro-Leal  
Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas  
México  
Mnavarro@uat.edu.mx

Mtra. Zaira Navarrete-Cazales  
Department of Educational Research  
Center for Research and Advanced Studies (DIE-CINVESTAV)  
México  
znavarrete@gmail.com