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**Comprehensive teacher education policies and quality assurance standards:
initial, in-service and continual teacher education in lifelong perspectives**

Background paper for discussion at the 11th Session of the CEART
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Comprehensive teacher education policies and quality assurance standards: initial, in-service and continual teacher education in lifelong perspectives. By Lucio Sia.

This paper served as a background study for the 11th session of the Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel (CEART), held in Geneva 8-12 October 2012.

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Initial, in-service and continual teacher education in lifelong perspectives

INTRODUCTION

The preparation, recruitment, and retention of teachers can be seen as a continuum requiring careful planning in the short, medium and long term. In several developing countries, the number of new teachers cannot keep up with population growth. In Western countries, where sufficient numbers of teachers are prepared, many of them either choose not to teach at all or leave teaching within a few years. In the United States, for example, only 60 percent of students that are prepared for teaching actually choose to go into this activity after graduation. Similarly, 40 percent of teachers in the United Kingdom leave the profession within the first three years. However, teacher retention does not seem to be a problem in other countries (for example, Germany, France, Hong Kong, and Portugal). Until the early 2000s in the United States, policy efforts directed toward meeting the need for teachers have focused primarily on supply issues, such as instituting and encouraging alternative licensure routes into teaching, establishing scholarships and loans for prospective teachers, and increasing salaries to make teaching more attractive. Much less effort has been directed toward improving working conditions in schools, one of the primary causes of teacher attrition. What seems to be lacking is a framework for policy that creates a “coherent infrastructure of recruitment, preparation, and support programmes that connect all aspects of the teacher’s career continuum into a teacher development system that is linked to national and local educational goals” (Darling- Hammond, Berry, Haselkorn, and Fideler, 1999). Congruence and commonality of effort are difficult to achieve in a decentralized system of education. Without a set of common understandings, these education systems will implement teaching policies on an ad hoc basis, with gaps, conflicts, and inefficiencies being inevitable outcomes. Countries with a national system of education find it easier to develop a coherent framework of policies that reinforce and support one another because education policy is under the control of the central government.

Although the challenges of implementing a policy framework that links teacher preparation, teacher recruitment, and teacher retention are great, they must be met. Some of the more important of these challenges have been listed below:

- Align teacher preparation with the needs of diverse learners, content standards, and contemporary classrooms.
- Simplify and streamline hiring processes so teachers are not discouraged from teaching, particularly in “hard-to-staff” schools.
- Ensure that all new teachers participate in quality induction and mentoring programmes.
- Address working conditions so that schools become learning communities for both educators and students.
- Reinvent professional development for teachers so that it supports sustained growth and is organized around standards for accomplished teaching.
- Ensure better pay for teachers who demonstrate knowledge and skills that contribute to improved student achievement.
- Design incentives for increasing the diversity of the teaching force and for teaching in critical shortage areas.

To create and maintain an effective policy framework aimed at teacher quality, governments must develop and use a system for collecting data to inform policymakers of the results of various policy initiatives. Policy coherence is difficult enough when policymakers are dispersed among separate jurisdictions. However, without effective data gathering and analysis, policy coherence is virtually impossible.

TEACHING POLICIES: OUTLOOK AND TRENDS

Currents of thought in UNESCO over the past decade stress the need for high quality initial teacher education oriented towards performance in diverse contexts, attracting talented young people, improving working conditions through effective recognition of the teaching career, with the need to guarantee comprehensive policies that link together initial education, insertion into the profession, and continual training. UNESCO also proposes the implementation of a performance assessment system for teachers based on basic standards agreed with teaching unions and social organizations, and the creation of remuneration and incentive policies that permit the recovery of the social and professional value ascribed to teachers.

In the same light, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states that education policies should be centred on changes in teaching and learning, which will result in better outcome for students. In all scenarios this improvement requires selecting, hiring, training, developing, and supporting educators. The organization suggests placing emphasis on making teaching an occupation that attracts highly qualified young people, and establishing solid professional training programmes related to everyday work in schools, and applicable throughout the teaching career. The development of specific teaching standards is one of the principal means of establishing a clear commitment and achieving teaching with excellence.

Parallel to UNESCO and ILO, the OECD proposes five policy objectives that concern the teaching profession as a whole: 1) Making teaching an attractive career choice by improving the image and status of teaching and by improving working conditions and making teachers' remunerations more competitive; 2) Developing teachers' knowledge and skills, by developing teacher profiles, viewing teacher development as a continuum, making teacher education more flexible and responsive, improving practical field experiences, and integrating professional development throughout the career; 3) Recruiting, selecting, and employing teachers, by using more flexible forms of employment, giving schools more responsibility for teacher personnel management, meeting short term staffing needs, and improving information flows and monitoring of the teaching labour market; 4) Retaining effective teachers in schools, by evaluating and rewarding effective teaching, providing more opportunities for career variety and diversification, improving leadership and school climate, and improving working conditions; 5) Developing and implementing teacher policy by engaging teachers in policy development and implementation, developing professional learning communities, and improving the knowledge base to support teacher policy (OECD 2005). The OECD's most recent document on teaching policies (OECD, 2011) reaffirms the need to improve recruitment mechanisms and teacher training; to offer opportunities for professional support and development in the profession, as well as suitable working conditions and an attractive career in teaching; and to strengthen the assessment of teachers and performance related pay. The document also emphasises the need to obtain the commitment of teachers in education system reform processes.

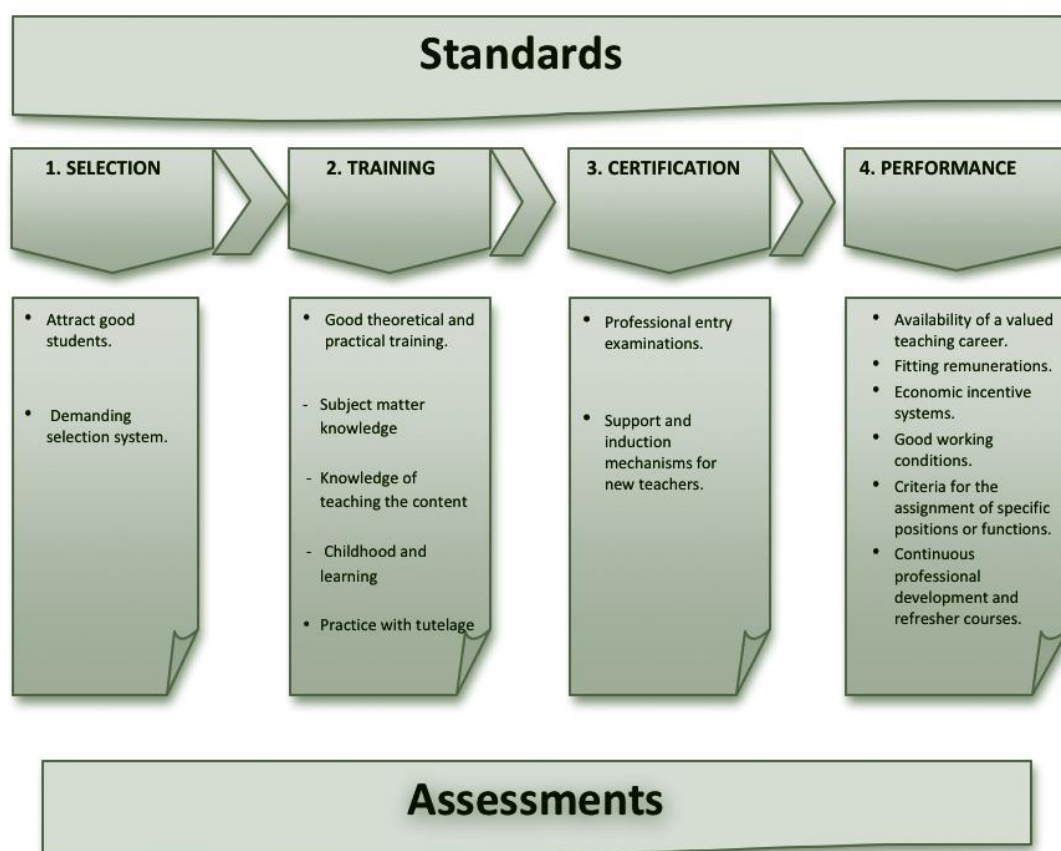
In terms of the system for entry into teacher training, there is agreement on the need to generate selection mechanisms to attract students who are better placed to achieve a high

level of professional performance. Different organizations share the view that there is a need to increase the quality of teacher training, giving future teachers preparation with a solid and useful background in subject matter and teaching skills, with practical field experiences. Some call for the creation of an accreditation system for all teacher training provision. The strengthening of continual training throughout the teaching career is considered relevant by most of the institutions. They set the need to develop solid programmes for professional development that should be related to everyday work in schools, while also designing models for on-the-job training of teachers. Alongside concern regarding teachers' professional development, there is agreement on the need to implement performance assessment systems based on basic standards, agreed upon with teaching unions and social organizations, and focused on improvement of teaching. Others also call for specific standards, in order to achieve teaching with excellence and a clear commitment on the part of teachers.

PHASES IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION: STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

Teaching policies require that attention be paid to the different phases in the career of a teacher, from the start of training through to retirement. The following section shows a model containing the components of a quality assurance system for teaching. It is presented for use in the analysis of the institutional framework present in each country, or which could be achieved by policy implementation in the short or medium term, in order to ensure the quality of teaching. The model is based on an integrated view of the complete career path of a teaching professional, divided into four stages or phases ¹.

Model of the institutional components for quality assurance in teaching



¹ The career phase model is based on OECD reports on teaching (2005 and 2010)

The **first phase** relates to entry into teacher training programmes, where there is a need to attract students who meet the necessary requirements to attain a high professional level. Without doubt, this requires a rigorous selection system and a stimulus package to make entry into the teaching profession more attractive for talented and motivated individuals.

The **second phase** is that of teacher training processes, conducted at universities or in normal schools. Here, it is necessary that training ensure acquisition of subject matter knowledge, pedagogic knowledge of the content, knowledge related to childhood and learning, and solid practice programmes. Therefore, teacher training institutions should have academic solidity and consistency, as well as a high degree of connectivity with the school system that they serve. Furthermore, a system for the assessment and accreditation of such institutions is necessary in order to ensure the quality of training provided, and this system should be based on standards that give value to the certifications or professional degrees that they issue.

In the **third phase**, which relates to the transition from the completion of training to entry into the profession of teaching, labelled ‘certification’, teaching induction mechanisms are considered. This phase should be backed by a system that ensures that all new teachers possess the basic competencies required under shared national standards, and have access to support or induction mechanisms during the start of their professional career, for at least 1 or 2 years.

The different stages of practice as a teacher are covered by the **final phase**, professional performance. Here, there is a need for a teaching career that promotes commitment by teachers, with effective and responsible practice, as well as social recognition and valuing of the profession. Additionally, working conditions compatible with effective performance must be provided, in terms of physical and human environments, and availability of time to conduct professional activities beyond classroom work. Teaching policies should take into account not only opportunities to update teachers’ knowledge and offer continuous professional development in keeping with the different stages of experience and with different functions, but also a standards-based teacher assessment system.

Criteria should exist for the assignment of teachers to specific roles or functions, taking into account their qualifications and allowing students with greater educational needs to be matched with more competent teachers. This certainly requires commensurate remunerations, with a minimum floor and increments based on experience, responsibility, quality of performance, continuing training, and the specific function itself, as well as an economic incentive package that rewards excellence in teaching performance, oriented towards the promotion of high levels of competence among teachers working in rural or geographically isolated areas, or urban regions with high levels of poverty.

Conversely, for exit from the teaching profession, a regulatory framework is needed that allows for the departure of teachers who fail to comply with essential obligations or who show repeatedly unsatisfactory performance in terms of assessments and objective standards. Furthermore, appropriate retirement conditions must be generated for those reaching retirement ages stipulated in each country.

The diagram also shows two components that cut across this system for quality assurance in teaching: a system of standards, and an assessment system. The system of standards is present throughout all phases of the career path from standards to entry and graduation from training institutions, standards for the accreditation of these institutions, and both general and specific competency standards that a teacher should meet in order to be able to conduct high quality teaching-learning processes.

The assessment of teachers also appears across all phases of the model: assessment of applicants to training institutions, assessment of teacher training to ensure that newly graduated teachers possess the basic necessary competencies, and assessment of professional performance, including direct observation of the teacher during his or her classroom activities and/or assessment of documentary evidence with which teachers may demonstrate their teaching capacities. This suite of assessments presupposes the existence of standards on which each one is based. It is worth making clear that when teaching policies are addressed, they should be designed, implemented, and assessed, using the integrated model as a reference, consistently relating to the phases or components of the ‘system’ of which they should be a part.

Box 1: Standards

The concept of the standard, in the context of education, is understood as the definition of knowledge items and skills in a specific field that should be held in order to be considered competent. In the practice of teaching, standards may take the role of representing a “true north”, defining what is valued as best practice. They can also be used as tools in professional decision making, and indicating just how far a person is from attaining the minimum necessary to be considered competent – that is, they can be used as a measuring stick. According to Kleinhenz & Ingvarson (2007), in order for standards to be usable in this way, a complete definition of teaching standards implies three stages of development and three components:

1. content standards: knowledge and skills that a teacher must possess
 2. how to assess them, that is, rules for gathering evidence on the achievement of standards (the types of tasks and assessments that will be considered valid in judging their achievement), and
 3. performance standards, indicating how well a teacher should perform in the assessment.
- These components each serve to answer a different question. The content standards answer the question of what should teachers know and be able to do? The rules for evidence gathering regarding the standards answer the question how do we evaluate what they know and can do? Finally, the performance standards answer the question of how well should a teacher perform (in the evaluation) for such performance to be considered acceptable or sufficiently good?

Source: C. Cox, L. Meckes (2011) Definiciones sobre desarrollo de estándares para evaluar el desempeño docente en México, Working document, OECD. Centro de Estudios de Políticas y Prácticas en Educación (CEPPE), Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

NOTE: Etymologically, the root of the word ‘standard’ is the Old French *estandard*, a flag on a fixed pole used to mitigate the confusion of battle, and thus figuratively a symbol of identity and coming together. It is in these terms that Ingvarson conceptualizes professional standards as playing an important role in the public definition of the identity of the teaching profession: “a good standard for teachers is one that helps to change the perception of the general public regarding the teaching profession, by providing convincing evidence of the complexity of what a good teacher knows and is able to do at different levels of teaching and in different areas of the curriculum” (Ingvarson, 2009).

INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

Trends in teacher training systems around the world during the first decade of the twenty first century can be broken down into two directions of reform: upwards, as the bar has been raised in concepts of the knowledge and skills required for school teaching, and towards the school system that the training systems serve, since everywhere, attempts are being made to reduce the gap between the activities of teacher training institutions and the practical requirements of teaching. The raising of standards is referred to as professionalization on the one hand, and increases in the relevance of teacher training, on the other. The latter aspect is criticised from both sides, by both education units and ministries of education, as theoretical and distanced from the real need of teaching. Both movements have placed pressures on policy, which in certain instances, can be controlled by two different institutional cultures: that of primary school teacher training, and training of teachers at universities. In the first case, the key problem addressed by policies is quality and the raising of standards: adapting certain institutions and curricula established in an environment of seeking to raise coverage, turning them into institutions and contents congruent to the new agenda, based on quality and equity. In the case of universities, the problem involves issues of both quality and relevance: increasing learning results, relevant to the new agenda, while also making a stronger and more effective connection with the school system.

TEACHER TRAINING POLICIES: SELECTION, TRAINING, AND INDUCTION OF NEW TEACHERS.

Teacher training is the fundamental area for guaranteeing the quality and equity of the school system in the long term. Effective ways to make changes to teacher training are fundamental in the future quality of the school system, which will depend on the capacities of its teachers. The critical aspects to consider are the selection of entrants seeking to join the teaching profession, and the *training* that they receive.

(a) Selection

The highly influential McKinsey report on the world's best school systems and the factors that set them apart highlights selection of entrants into teacher training as a key factor. This process, along with its characteristics and results, marks the start of a chain of positive consequences that follow on through training, mentoring, and support of active teaching. A decisive aspect that is shared by all the best systems in the world is recruitment to the school teaching profession of the upper third of the respective cohort, in terms of abilities. This shows a stark contrast with the pattern of some regions, where entrants into the teaching profession come from the bottom third or bottom quarter of the ability distribution of the cohort entering tertiary education, with no selection process for teacher training. In most countries, this leads to a situation of excess graduates with degrees in education. The situation is rooted in the logic of socio-educational mobility of new groups with access to higher education and aspiring to the status of professionals, rather than in the needs of the school system – which faces ever greater demands from society to produce higher level learning results, even though it lacks the professional base required to do so. The absence of selection processes to enter teacher training has negative effects on both the quality of future teachers and the capacity of the education system to attract able entrants. The lack of selection systems is synonymous to the low importance and value ascribed to education degrees, giving the field a lower status than others, and preventing the most able from seeing it as a career option. Making teaching degrees more selective makes teaching a more attractive option for the candidates with the highest levels of performance. In the words of

the 2005 report by the OECD: *“Although it is generally better to have an oversupply of teachers than a shortage of qualified applicants, there can be high individual and social costs [...] Several countries report that [...] it is difficult to ensure that able and motivated people find jobs as teachers and are not lost to the profession. [...] [Surveys show that] school principals [...] express concern about teacher morale and enthusiasm, and that such concerns seem to be more evident in countries that have an excess of teachers”.. (OCDE, 2005)*

Selection examination

One way to make advances towards the objective of recruiting the upper third of those entering tertiary education is to establish a selection examination for entry into initial teacher education programmes. This examination should be oriented towards selecting individuals who possess a number of required characteristics necessary for them to become effective teachers: a high general level of abilities in literacy and mathematical thinking, consistent interpersonal and communications skills, a will to learn, and motivation to teach (Barber, Mourshed, 2007). When addressing policies that aim to select students for education degrees, the salary situation of the profession is certainly important, both in absolute terms and by comparison to related professions; furthermore, salaries are relevant both at the beginning of the career and in terms of increase over the years; and finally, there is the issue of whether salaries should affect all teachers or be linked to quality criteria. This is a policy dimension in itself. Here it should be pointed out that selection dynamics cannot be separated from considerations of the status and significance of the professional career in education, which in turn must be addressed alongside the most direct and decisive expression of societal valuation of a profession and its support, in terms of remunerations.

(b) Training

The recent and probably most influential investigation in the United States regarding improvements to teacher training institutions arrived at the following characterization of shared traits:

- A shared vision of good teaching that is consistent in courses and clinical work;
- A common core curriculum grounded in substantial knowledge of development, learning, and subject matter pedagogy, taught in the context of practice;
- Extended clinical experiences (at least thirty weeks) that reflect the program’s vision of good teaching are interwoven with coursework and are carefully mentored;
- Well defined standards of practice and performance that are used to guide the design and assessment of coursework and clinical work;
- Strong relationships, based on common knowledge and beliefs, between universities and reform-minded schools; and
- Extensive use of case study methods, teacher research, performance assessments, and portfolio examinations that relate teachers’ learning to classroom practice. (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, et.al, 2005)

Regardless of national contexts and levels of educational development, the fundamental trends that are common to changes in teacher training, and in harmony with the traits set forth by Darling-Hammond and her colleagues regarding institutions of excellence in their country, and present in the criteria of accreditation agencies for initial teacher education programmes in the developed world (NCATE, OFSTED and other, see Box 2), can be described in terms of four core concepts, that in the logic of public policy for the sector should be other axes of action:

- *Pedagogic subject matter knowledge*, or the union of knowledge of the discipline and didactic knowledge: the what and the how of pedagogical communication, as a mix that defines the core of the specific knowledge of the profession. (Shulman, 1987) A concept that ought to give order to curriculum design in all education programmes and their opportunities for learning in the two dimensions of knowledge, and their crossover areas.
- *Practice or clinical experience*: teaching implies the putting into practice of professional criteria and knowledge regarding teaching and learning, as well as capabilities for the assessment of this process, or practical classroom performance. Learning these skills rests upon supervised work experience, which brings together theory and practice. These experiences and their qualities are the cornerstone or decisive core of quality in a teacher training institution. (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Bransford, 2005)
- *Effectiveness in diversity*: modern teacher training is considered not only of high quality but also relevant, regardless of country and institutional modality, when it is coherent in its efforts to instill in its graduates a professional ethic and certain capacities that empower them to attain equivalent learning results among children with different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds; thus it is vital that initial teacher education provide effective training in combating inequality in the classroom, developing skills in dealing with diversity. (OECD, 2010)
- *Reflection*: the experience of initial teacher education should provide preparation in capacities of description, evaluation, and reflection on the new teacher's own practice and that of his or her colleagues, which can provide a base for growth on a personal and a group level for teams of professionals who work in accordance with the ideals of learning communities; and also a base for managing the problem of the intrinsic complexity of working as a teacher.² This should be seen as conditions of our times, which are radically new and which put forward a radical challenge for education in general, and teacher training in particular: the challenge of creating a suitable response to the learning needs of the next generation, which belongs increasingly to a new world, which views the generation of its parents and grandparents as thinking with a 'different head', as was recently and eloquently expressed by the French philosopher Michel Serres when he characterized the 'apprentices of the 21st century' and their profound differences.

"Without our noticing, a new human has been born, during a brief interval, the time that separates us from the Second World War.

He or she does not have the same body, the same life expectancy, no longer inhabits the same space, does not communicate in the same way, does not perceive the same outside world, nor lives with the same nature: born under epidural anaesthesia with an induced birth, and no longer fears death itself, under palliative care.

² "Teachers typically have to work with many students at once and have to juggle multiple academic and social goals requiring trade-offs from moment to moment and day to day. Although some aspects of teaching can be made somewhat routine, what teachers do will still be influenced by changing student needs and unexpected classroom events. (Therefore, students of education) ... need to develop metacognitive habits of mind that can guide decisions and reflection on practice in support of continual improvement". (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Bransford, 2005: 359)

They inhabit a virtual world. The cognitive sciences show that the use of the internet, reading and messages and texting, checking Wikipedia and Facebook, do not excite the same neurons or the same parts of the cortex as the use of the book, the blackboard, or the notebook. They can handle many types of information at once. They do not know, do not integrate, do not synthesize the way their forbears do.

They no longer have the same head.” Serres, M. (2011)

Accreditation, examinations, and standards.

Two accountability tools provide the backbone of current teacher training improvement policies in the most advanced countries: accreditation of institutions and programmes, and national teaching competency examinations for graduates. Both presuppose the definition of standards, or criteria regarding what corresponds to best practice for initial teacher education (content standards) and *what level* of ability in these standards is considered acceptable (performance standards) (Cox, Meckes, 2011). Accreditation by national or state agencies of teacher training institutions and programmes aims to establish standards regarding the institutions’ teaching staff, curriculums, and alignment with schools, processes for selecting entrants, support systems for student development, material infrastructure, and systems for monitoring and assessing the progress made by students, not only in coursework but also especially in the sequence of progression through work experience projects.

Box 2: Accreditation of teacher training institutions and programmes in different countries worldwide.

In the **UK**, institutions that administer teacher training are supervised by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services, and Skills). All teacher training providers have to implement the standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and the requirements for Initial Teacher Training (ITT) established by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA). Ofsted inspects ITT providers in the following way: it examines a range of documents, including a self assessment form provided by the institution; it observes students’ work experience activities; it observes and assesses training sessions; it interviews personnel involved in the programme; and it observes tutors in the initial training programme as they assess trainees in the classroom. All initial training programme providers are inspected at least once every six years.

In the **United States** each state administers its own assessment system, although most are supervised by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which is a non-governmental organization. The NCATE examines the quality of initial training programmes offered and the standards achieved by trainees, in much the same way as Ofsted does in the UK.

In **New Zealand**, all institutions that offer initial teacher training programmes must submit their programmes to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). Newly developed programmes must be reviewed and assessed by NZQA representatives; if the NZQA recommends their approval, programmes are reviewed every five years.

In **Brazil** all initial teacher training programmes must be accredited by the National Education Council or the Ministry of Education. A similar accreditation system is used in Argentina, where providers are regulated by the Federal Continual Teacher Training Network.

Source: Hobson, A. J. (2009), “On being bottom of the pecking order: beginner teachers’ perceptions and experiences of support”, *Teacher Development: An international journal of teachers’ professional development*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 299., in , OECD, (2010) *Improving Schools. Strategies for Action in Mexico*. Paris.

Graduation examinations

The mechanism that probably brings with it the most consequences in accountability schemes, and which is currently under the early stages of discussion in some countries in the Latin American region, e.g. Mexico and Chile, consists of competency assessment systems or examinations for new teachers on graduation from teacher training. If these set forth minimum standards that are agreed upon in terms of their nature and the level considered acceptable for entry into the teaching profession, they define an effective force encouraging change in the institutional networks that train teachers. However, this force must still go hand in hand with support for institutions and their personnel, such that both are provided with conditions that allow them to acquire the capacities necessary for the design and implementation of opportunities to train teachers up to the newly demanded level. It is vital that an equilibrium be struck between the accountability pressure exerted by examinations, accreditation schemes and new standards on the one hand, and support represented through capacity building and creation of policies, investment in the creation of institutional conditions conducive to change, and sufficient transition time on the other hand. To fail to strike such a balance is to run the risk of demanding that stakeholders achieve what they have not been prepared for, which is a sure fire recipe for creating demoralization and destroying the feasibility of the intended changes. To echo Elmore, here a basic policy action criterion is that for each unit of accountability that is demanded, an equal unit of support and capacity building should be offered (Elmore, 2010).

(c) Induction

Discussion of options to improve teacher training in the region must take into account that in equivalent policies in the most developed countries, institutional models for the establishment of special supervision and support for new teachers on their entry into the profession are becoming increasingly important, alongside the principle that a trial or probationary period should be successfully completed before a teacher is given a permanent position. Although this does require high levels of institutional capacities, as well as capacities among active teaching personnel, the first steps must be taken towards implementing operational teaching induction schemes in the medium term (Marcelo, 2011).

CONTINUAL TRAINING³

If initial teacher education represents a decisive factor in the future quality of education systems, then the continual professional development of active teachers offers the chance to improve current teaching and learning processes. Both dimensions are essential, and they must be integrated in the efforts to create a teaching profession capable of meeting the demands placed on education systems by modern day society.

Public policies show a trend to underestimate the importance of this dimension in view of the high costs associated with the need to provide services for a large number of teachers, or based on the belief that countries can simply wait for the replacement of current teachers with better

³ In the technical literature, the terms “continual teacher training” and “teacher professional development” are often used as synonyms. However, at times the latter term covers a broader meaning than systematic training, relating to the continuous professional progression or advancement that teachers undertake along their career paths as a result of their experience and learning. However, in this document, the terms may be used synonymously.

trained new graduates. This belief fails to take into account the fact that most active teachers are still decades away from retirement, and that they have a powerful effect through the transmission of beliefs and practices to new generations of teachers.

The countries with the best educational results, at a global level, concern themselves with obtaining good levels of attraction, selection, and initial training of education students and teachers, while also offering relevant training opportunities for current teachers and creating favourable conditions for them to take advantage of these opportunities, both within and outside their places of wor. (Barber and Mourshed, 2007).⁴

As a result of these policies, and interest on the part of the teachers themselves, the TALIS Survey (2010) showed that 89% of teachers surveyed in the OECD countries participate in training activities, spending an average of one day per month on them. It should be noted that a current trend in international debate is to overcome a belief that continual training is thought of as remedial or compensation for weaknesses in initial training. Nor can continual training be reduced to cyclic efforts when specific curriculum reforms are implemented, or to certain teachers' needs for refresher courses or courses bringing them up to date with new findings or new roles in the education system that they have been ascribed. On the contrary, the conceptualization is of a permanent need shared by all teachers due to innovation and the raising of societal demands for better learning results for all. This cannot be achieved without improvements in teaching, which in turn are impossible without consistent professional development policies to allow teachers to meet three crucial objectives: knowing their own limits, knowledge of specific best practices, and motivation to make the necessary improvements (Mourshed, Barber, 2007).

Just as in the case of initial training, policy research and deliberation in this field has arrived at certain dimensions of critical impact in the necessary task of addressing this dimension of teaching policies: focus on teaching practices; insertion into the school context; collaborative learning strategies; quality and relevance of continual training; and basic conditions for the functioning of teachers' professional development.

a) Focus on teaching practices

A widely held belief, among both teachers and specialists, holds that traditionally implemented continual training and capacity building activities, consisting basically of courses and workshops that are not linked to the needs of schools and in which teachers play the part of passive learners, do not have a sufficient impact on teaching practices among participants and therefore fail to contribute to improvements in learning outcomes among students. This leads to the concern for innovation in the field, focusing on the connection between training actions and classroom practices. The challenge of ensuring that all students learn, attending to their diversity, is an issue that acquires increasing complexity – and in fact, teachers now make forceful requests for support in successfully completing this task. In the discussion of linking professional development to teaching practices, reference is often made to mechanisms of workshops held in-school or between schools that share a similar context, in which teachers take the lead role in reflecting on practices, including observation, analysis of class planning, assessments, materials, and students' work by teams of teachers.

⁴ The authors cite the case of the successful reform undertaken in Boston and the explanation of one of the policymakers involved: *"The three pillars of the reform were professional development, professional development, and professional development. We aligned everything – resources, organization, and people – with professional development. Five percent of the district's budget went to professional development, and 80 percent of that went to teachers. The only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction."* Barber, M., Mourshed, M. (2007). *How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top*. McKinsey & Co., pp. 26-27.

This focus is associated with a traditional dilemma of teacher professional development programmes: the tension between the theoretical-academic dimension and the practical dimension. However, in fact this is a false dilemma, as the purpose of improving teaching practices presupposes the construction and full understanding of theoretical knowledge that is based on research into practices, and in turn capable of shedding light on them and providing for their transformation. Each teacher's understanding of his or her own limits – the first step in the process of improving and transforming their methods – often requires the creation of an understanding that the key aspect depends not only on *what to do* but also on *why* to do it, requiring relevant theoretical knowledge. Professional development experiences directly associated with classroom practice do not predominate in some education systems. In fact, they are harder to identify than the centrally administered programmes of courses, and thus, rather than obeying national or regional plans, they come under the umbrella of specific improvement plans that many schools conduct under the leadership of their principals and, in certain cases, with external advisors. All in all, certain examples in the Latin American region are noteworthy: the *Programa de Aceleración in Brazil*, *Aulas Alternativas* in El Salvador; and the *Programa de Mejoramiento de la Calidad de la Educación* in Chile (Calvo, 2009). In some countries and in recent years, a law has been passed that institutionalizes a strategy that emphasizes professional development activities defined by each school and closer to the classroom, and which are put into operation as a requirement for technical assistance tendered to a market of providers – tenders that are financed with public resources (Muñoz and Weinstein, 2009).

b) Improvement of continual training in the school context

One factor that weakens the impact of continual training is its approach based on the individual perspective of each teacher who, reasonably, orients his or her professional development towards the search for better job options. This dimension certainly cannot be postponed or placed behind other issues, but if the aim is to have a positive effect on learning outcomes, then the focus must be placed on the educational unit and on the whole team of teachers to which it applies.

In this regard, the greatest challenge is to turn schools into learning communities where not only the students but all members of the community learn, in particular the teachers. These communities identify their needs and generate relevant training or capacity building actions, allowing them to overcome situations that stand in the way of the students' learning. For example, today most teachers demand training in working in more inclusive schools, especially in secondary education, so as to attend to the socio-cultural diversity and special educational needs of some students, as well as in handling interpersonal relationships in the classroom, and in the use of information and communications technologies. Meeting these demands is vital in teaching policy.

The improvement of the school institution is the area in which professional development becomes a particularly clear priority. Continual training efforts made by schools and agencies may have very little effect in schools if spaces for innovation and application of knowledge and skills learned are not made available. Teachers are often heard to lament that the knowledge and skills that they have learned in training activities are not adopted by school administrators, which leads them to move away from their initial enthusiasm towards despair and inactivity.

The document of the OEI's Education Goals 2021 project clearly states that improvements in the quality of teaching and in the educational actions of teachers are impossible without improvements in the quality and functioning of schools. *“Teachers work within a specific cultural and social, and in specific educational and labour conditions. Public policies for teachers must take into account these contexts and conditions so as to remove potential*

obstacles that could limit the success of particular initiatives specifically oriented towards teachers' professional development" (OEI 2010). This statement is in line with the contributions of researchers who are internationally renowned for the depth with which they address the issue of educational reform, placing a strong emphasis on the development of the capacities of the school and of the teachers as fundamental stakeholders. This leads them to maintain that teachers' professional development cannot be considered outside of the context of the specific needs of each school. Among others, Elmore (2010) sums up his position with the dictum "context matters", while Fullan (2007) states that concern over the individual training of teachers is not sufficient if they are not given opportunities always to be learning in the school.

A concept that draws together this ideas is that of "situated learning", which expresses how professional development, undertaken in the physical space of the school or elsewhere, is always oriented towards solving problems that the teaching staff face in their day to day work, so as to allow all students to obtain the desired learning outcomes.

c) Training Strategies

The disarticulation between continual training and real world teaching practices is expressed strongly in traditional courses for the transmission of knowledge from the academic world to teachers, without regard for their motivations and prior knowledge, as is widely shown in the international literature and in current debate on education.

Therefore, the greatest challenge lies in placing value on centred strategies in peer-based professional learning, mediated by reflection on teaching practices, including the observation of classes held in one school or in a number of different schools. Progress must be made towards a model of "clinical discussion" that promotes professional growth through observation, evaluation, reflection, and teaching actions conducted in groups (Elmore, 2004; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Bransford, 2005; Avalos 2007).

Value is also ascribed to the creation of teaching networks in which teachers of related areas reflect, as a group, on their teaching experiences, in the search for new strategies. *"Successful programmes involve teachers in learning activities that are similar to ones they will use with their students, and encourage the development of teachers' learning communities"* (OECD, 2005).

Strategies based on collaborative learning help to overcome one of the limitations that most severely affects teaching: the isolation that characterises the traditional school culture. "Isolation is the enemy of improvement" (Elmore 2010). A dimension that is underscored in today's international literature on institutions is the research that teachers conduct regarding their practices and the search for innovations to overcome the difficulties that face them (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996).

Conversely, with the aim of increasing the scope of continual training, value is placed on the use of new technologies, the usage of which brings the additional benefit of promoting teachers' usage of these technologies in their work with students. *"In the perspective of teachers' professional development, the possibilities of ICT are barely beginning to be explored. Nonetheless, it would appear that such technologies are not merely another support, but that they rather offer new possibilities for the formation of professional networks, to expand the volume of training proposals available, and to attend both simultaneously and asynchronously to a growing number of teachers"* (Terigi, 2011:37).

d) Quality and relevance of continual training

Although many initiatives that configure relatively broad provision of continual training have been put into practice in many countries⁵, levels of quality and relevance required for learning outcomes under these programmes are often too low. A number of explanations of this problem can be put forward, such as the lack of standards applying to training, the weakness of provider agencies, and the absence of effective regulation. One basic condition to address this weakness is the construction and validation of standards for professional performance that would serve as yardsticks for both continual training and performance assessment. The existence of standards would make a decisive contribution to an enhancement in the definition of the supply of professional continual training for teachers, which would be based not only on the specific visions and capacities of those providing it, but also on a conceptualization that integrates the definitions of best practices as agreed upon and set in standards, with the real situation of the needs of schools and teachers in their specific contexts.

Another challenge that must be addressed relates to the development of capacities within the agencies that are responsible for imparting continuing training. The weaknesses of initial training institutions are often passed on to continual training, with the aggravating factor that this function is generally a secondary priority within such institutions. Initiatives addressing this problem have been attempted, and exploration of such possibilities should continue to be explored; such programmes range from the creation of agreements with higher education institutions that stipulate precise requirements in terms of the relevance of contents, academic rigor, and articulation with school practices, through to internships in international academic centres.

Furthermore, an additional issue that requires special attention is that of the demands of continual training. The tendency to consider attendance as the only requirement for certification must be overcome, incorporating the evaluation of the effective level of learning achievement and capacity to translate content learned into improvement in teaching practices. Certifications should reflect professional learning achieved, rather than mere participation in training activities.

The needs of public policy, the demands of schools, or the dynamics of the market often exert pressure towards a generalization of supply that renders difficult regulation to ensure the required quality. This increases the complexity of the challenge of quality, but does not provide an exemption from the need to face this challenge.

One path that could make continual training actions much more relevant is the consideration of the results of performance evaluations, be they national and standardised or conducted by school principals.

e) Teachers' professional development: policy requirements

Facing the challenges discussed above presupposes at the very least consideration of the following requirements for policies supporting the professional development of teachers.

⁵ A review of actions implemented in the Latin American region permits the identification of the following classes: refresher or update courses in subject matter and/or teaching skills; scholarships for postgraduate qualifications in specialized fields, or master's programmes; distance learning programmes using ICT, using e-learning or b-learning mechanisms; pedagogy reflection workshops within or between schools; tutelage or mentoring with renowned teachers; expert advice in the classroom; domestic and international internships

The **first** requirement relates to the need to articulate three different perspectives and interests: those of the teachers themselves, seeking better opportunities in their professional careers (access to more prestigious schools with more favourable conditions, securing economic stimulus packages, etc.); those of the schools, that require that their teachers overcome certain significant weaknesses detected in institutional assessments; and those of the State itself, which requires that teachers be in a suitable condition to implement curriculum changes or to cover certain shortfalls apparent in assessments of learning outcomes or teacher performance. Achievement of this articulation is a complex matter, but indispensable, as the impact of policies in this area depends on their contextualisation in the school environment and on the commitment of teachers involved, both individually and collectively.

A **second** requirement relates to the need to set priorities in terms of the coverage that must be attained by continual training programmes in order to attend, at different times to significant segments of the teaching community. In order to bring about real improvements in teaching capacities, a sufficient investment of resources must be made. Nonetheless, faced with the scarcity of human and financial resources needed to offer opportunities to all teachers at the same time, the question is how to decide which teachers will be given preference. If places are assigned according to the motivation of the teachers, the programme runs the risk of favouring a select group that shows greater interest and is always willing to make large sacrifices in order to improve. It therefore behoves the political authorities to define priorities based on the emphasis of the national curriculum and its reforms, and/or on the results of assessments of learning of teacher performance. The usage of a combination of these factors permits the identification of teachers with greater weaknesses, and of general areas that require more support.

A **third** requirement relates to the means of establishing stimulus packages and conditions that promote teacher participation in training activities. These stimulus packages, which could take the form of postgraduate scholarships or resources for activities in the school, should be devised such as to ensure that they are destined and used in relevant and pertinent programmes. According to international experiences and the perception of teachers and school principals, one of the most critical conditions in achieving this is the assignment of periods during the working day during which teachers may reflect on their practices, work in teams, conduct research, review professional literature, and take part in activities relevant for their training or acquisition of new innovations. This assignment of time periods is a decisive factor, especially in articulating training with the school context.

Significant debate exists regarding the usage of economic incentives to promote participation in continual training activities. In fact, many teaching careers include incentives for teachers who participate in training activities. This is certainly valuable as it stimulates participation and provides recognition for the efforts made by teachers, often during time outside of the working day. However, these stimulus programmes, due to the way in which they have been defined, have also led to significant distortions, as they encourage mere attendance and a certificate-based outlook, regardless of learning outcomes achieved and their translation into improved teaching practices. Nonetheless, if the incentive is not associated to requirements in terms of real effort directed towards learning, it lacks strength. *“If teachers have a high probability of being rewarded without any change in their behaviour, the mechanism no longer provides any incentive to improve teaching and learning”* (Vegas, Petrow, 2008). Conversely, and in terms of the supply of training, this effect tends to lead to inflation without the necessary measures to ensure quality. Furthermore, it becomes difficult to provide recognition for non-formal training practices that occur on an everyday basis in schools, and which are increasingly highly valued for their high impact.

The **fourth** significant requirement to be addressed is the need to build career paths of professional development, distinguishing stages in the working life. Here the challenge is to give due consideration to each stage in the career path, from supporting new teachers through to the assignment of roles as tutors or advisors to more experienced teachers who have shown exemplary performance. Although only a small number of attempts have been made in this regard, they must be analysed and used to define differentiated courses of action. During the initial phase, teachers need strong support that aids their insertion into the workplace in specific school contexts, where they take on responsibilities for which they often feel unprepared. Experiences of induction programmes in developed countries – and some emerging countries deserve to be analysed and emulated where possible. Recognising that new teachers need special support stems from the observation that they are the group most likely to leave the profession. (Vegas, Urquiola and Cerdán Infantes, 2006 cited in Vegas and Petrow, 2008). During later stages, it is important that teachers be able to advance, depending on their performance, through levels of medium and higher development, and that some may become experts. (Berliner, 1994; Berliner, 2001; Danielson, 2011)

The **final** requirement considered here is to answer to the question of how public institutional frameworks may regulate and assess the supply of continual training offered by academic institutions and private training bodies, in order to guarantee their quality and relevance. To fail in this regard is to run the risk of distracting teachers from their core activities with actions that are largely insignificant.

In summary, the greatest challenge related to teachers' professional development lies in providing an effective response to the need to guarantee the support necessary for teachers to build their competencies, their motivation, and their commitment to the learning achievements that society expects all students to attain, thus achieving a suitable equilibrium with the growing responsibilities and accountability requirements that define the context of performance to an ever greater extent.

THE TEACHING CAREER

The challenges of initial and continual teacher training, addressed herein, can only be faced successfully if at the same time efforts are also made regarding the challenge of reformulating teachers' professional career. In many parts of the world, such efforts must start from a situation in which teaching is not a profession that is sufficiently valued by society, in a clear contradiction of predominant political and economic discourse, wherein education is granted a decisive role in achieving social equality and growth. For this reason, a fundamental step must be to make progress towards the valuation of teaching, without which strong candidates can never be attracted and those who show excellence in their performance cannot be retained. In this regard, particular relevance must be ascribed to efforts to construct a professional teaching career, offering broad and meaningful possibilities for development and opening up opportunities for those who show an effort to make full use of their abilities in the service of high quality and equitable education. The fundamental change demanded by the new agenda in this area is to move away from a teaching profession based on the recognition of a career path that associates salary progression with years of experience, and towards teaching careers that base progression on performance and which are oriented towards professional development from a perspective of quality and equity in education. With regard to this fundamental change, the following key dimensions will be addressed in subsequent sections: focalization of the career on teaching activities in the classroom; teaching performance as the means of making progress in the career; recognition through commensurate remunerations, incentives, and favourable working conditions; and the articulation of the teaching career with entry into the workplace and school management.

a) A career centred on teaching activities in the classroom

The existence of a career is valued by some teachers as the mechanism that allows them to gain access to educational tasks outside of the classroom, be it in management, technical-pedagogical work, or research. This is not always based on genuine interest, but rather as a response to the lack of opportunities for promotion or recognition for those whose sense of vocation leads them to stay in school teaching. The result is a constant migration of the best teachers away from the classroom, to the evident detriment of students' learning – a phenomenon that sadly has a stronger effect on teachers who work in the most difficult environments due to the socioeconomic conditions of the pupils. Furthermore, young, talented, innovative teachers, faced with the devaluation of their efforts, tend to abandon the profession. Action must be taken to overcome this serious effect, establishing a design for the teaching career in the service of high quality education, which implies giving a favoured position to classroom teaching work. In various countries, few career structures distinguish teachers into novices, competent practitioners, and experts (Berliner 1994; Danielson 2011); and there is no doubt that this is a serious failing, given the 'flight from the classroom' of the best, in order to advance in their careers. The central innovation to establish in this context is that there must be a differentiation of teachers in the classroom, depending on their level of advance in the competencies intrinsic in experience and training. Those who choose to stay in the classroom must receive bonuses, recognition, and incentives necessary to promote their decision to carry on teaching. Additionally, the new career structures should open the doors for new knowledge, for continuous improvement and innovation, and to support young teachers or those who show shortcomings in their performance. Of course the way out towards management and technical roles must remain open, considering the importance of these functions in education quality, but they should not be situated as the only means of promotion in the career.

b) Performance at the heart of the teaching career

In most countries, teaching careers take into account years of service and participation, often passive, in training activities, as the key factors in promotion or salary increases. This situation does not incentivise or encourage teachers to go to the trouble of innovating and seeking new ways of teaching. When they do make such efforts, they see many colleagues achieving the same or greater increases in their salaries, simply through the effects of time elapsed or through undertaking training activities that place few demands on them. This situation presents a challenge to explore professional career designs that are centred on quality in teaching performance. This is not a matter of ignoring experience or relevant training that is translated into learning achievements by teachers, but rather a way to assess and then reward effective performance as the means of advancement in the career. Organising the career around performance implies paying attention to mechanisms for the assessment of teaching work, an issue that is undeniably complex but which must be addressed. Without an objective and transparent assessment system that is based on validated standards, there is no way of gauging comparable levels of quality in teachers' performance, particularly considering the context in which they work. It is important that these systems consider a wide range of means of observing and analysing real practices as a function of their effects on students' learning, as well as gathering the opinions of relevant parties. (Schulmeyer, 2004; Terigi, 2010; Isoré, 2010).

c) Recognition of teaching work through fitting pay and bonuses

The devaluation of the teaching profession has a serious effect on attracting new teaching with high career expectations, as well as the retention of teachers with promising prospects in other fields. This devaluation of the professional status is closely linked to low wages, inadequate working conditions, and incentive packages that do not reward excellence in performance.

Without doubt remuneration levels and the working conditions under which teaching is conducted are deciding factors in the attraction and retention of good teachers. A lengthy debate continues regarding the salary issue, in terms of both what other professions should be used for comparison and which stages of the career should be provided with the largest economic stimulus packages. In Latin America, some studies suggest that teachers' salaries are higher in relative terms than is generally thought, taking into account income per hour; however, the situation changes on taking into account that most teachers only have a small number of paid hours of work per day. (Morduchowsky 2002, and de Moura Castro & Ioschpe 2007). This discussion must be seen as part of the project, in the medium and long term, bearing in mind the aspiration to a system endowed with highly competent professionals; therefore, average remunerations ought to rise progressively until they attain levels in keeping with this purpose. Furthermore, on visualizing and giving thought to different pay scales and differentiation systems in salary progressions, one may consider, for instance, that a teacher with seven to ten years of experience is likely to be at a time in his or her life with increasing personal and family commitments, so the system should be able to offer significant pay increases during that stage in the career, subject of course to the general principal of good performance.

However, every bit as important as wages are the working conditions and work environment in which teaching takes place, which can prove to be factors determining levels of satisfaction or malaise that are decisive in professional life. This is not simply a matter of material conditions, but also takes into account the climate of interpersonal relationships and the existence of recognition, support, and stimulus for professional development. Certain professional achievements are highly significant to teachers: the first, of course, is the achievement of learning outcomes by their students, but others include the management of innovative projects for their schools, taking on roles as tutors or mentors of new teachers, directing extracurricular programmes with students or activities with parents, and gaining access to scholarships for postgraduate diplomas and degrees, among others. The lack of these opportunities plays a decisive role in the early abandonment of the profession by talented young teachers.

An attractive professional career requires that teachers be able to make progress, in accordance with duly assessed performance, increasing their income and gaining new opportunities for professional development. At the same time, their professional experience and capacities are recognised through duties of technical support and orientation of new teachers. (Rama and Navarro, 2004; Morduchowicz and Carreras, 2002)

d) Teaching career, entry into the profession, and school institution

A key dilemma involved in teaching careers, when they are centrally managed, is their articulation with the management of school institutions – an issue that is particularly important in the context of decentralization of education systems, as is the case in a significant number of countries. (di Gropello, 2004). In many cases competitive systems exist for the assignment of teaching positions, which fail to ensure that schools have access to competent personnel in accordance with their specific characteristics.

In this environment, it is vital that clear policies exist to address entry into the active practice of teaching, requiring that the State establish not only educational degrees and certificates issued by academic institutions, but also minimum requirements based on meeting agreed standards, which must be attained by those who practice as teachers in schools. The instruments available for these purposes may include examinations to gauge knowledge and competencies and/or assessed practical work experience.

Once a person has been approved to work as a teacher, a significant issue is the assignment of teaching positions, observing criteria of objectivity and transparency while distributing teachers into roles that are in line with their personal capacities and motivations. In particular, and considering the inequality that characterises countries, it is important that stimulus packages be constructed to position highly trained educators with real expectations of achieving learning outcomes in schools that attend to students from the poorest households and in areas that are distant from urban centres. These teachers must feel not only attracted to working in highly complex schools but also stimulated to persist in a task that presents indubitable difficulties – requiring commensurate rewards.

With regard to management within school institutions, there are good reasons to favour certain margins of autonomy that it would be unsafe to limit through fixed regulations related to the teaching career. For example, it is important that a school principal be able to assign functions within his or her institution without restrictions stemming from rights guaranteed through a centralized career structure; it is also important that in the entry of new teachers to each school, centralized systems for the management of the teaching career set forth rules that provide space for the freedom of choice, by both establishments and applicants. For instance, a principal may be able to pick from a shortlist provided by the administration; while an applicant for a teaching post may likewise choose between different possible places of work, within a set framework. From the points of view of both the institution and the teacher, this is a necessary condition for the construction of teaching teams capable of generating and maintaining effective schools in terms of both education quality and equity. (OECD, 2010)

In turn, school management requires a high level of participation from all stakeholders in the education community, not least the teachers themselves. Their contribution to the development of the education project is fundamental, as is the involvement of the school community in achieving the continuing improvement of its teaching staff.

For education management in schools, a crucial issue is the administration of the consequences that the career brings to teachers, through performance assessment processes. At the upper extreme of assessed performance, opportunities should be opened for outstanding teachers to orient the work of their peers, as well as to contribute to the strengthening of institutional pedagogy tasks, but without making excessive reductions of the time that they spend teaching. The lower end of the scale brings with it the challenge of providing support for teachers who show severe weaknesses in their performance. However, the goal of ensuring that all students receive a quality education may in some cases justify the separation of certain staff members from their teaching duties, either temporarily or definitively.

In synthesis, the construction of a new teaching career may represent a powerful tool for articulating a policy that provides recognition and valuation of the profession and permits significant increases in the capacities of teachers, a decisive factor in achieving the goal of a quality education for all, as set forth in the education objectives at both the regional and the global level.

INTEGRATED POLICIES AND PRIORITISATION CRITERIA

From the perspective of any education ministry and its actions, the range of problems and courses of action that this document sets out to synthesise is vast and demanding, especially if one refuses to abandon the criterion of aspiring to integrated answers, to ‘making a system’. The question then is how to prioritise. The answer should come from nothing less than the historic and political situation of each country, and its arena of policy deliberation. In conclusion, we present a set of prioritisation criteria for this effort of deliberation and decision making.

a) The requirement of ‘making a system’

In terms of policies for teachers, the documents drawn up by both UNESCO (Dakar, 2000) and UNESCO-OREALC, as well as the agreement reached at Conferences of Ministers of Education, at Havana (2002) and Buenos Aires (2007), make clear the need to possess high quality initial teacher education oriented towards performance in diverse contexts, attracting talented young people by improving working conditions of all active teachers, through effective recognition of the teaching career. Further proposals call for the implementation of a performance assessment system for teachers, based on basic standards agreed upon with teaching unions and social organizations, and for the creation of incentive policies and remunerations that will allow teachers to recover their social and professional valuation. Therefore, it is clear that the emphasis is placed on the need to guarantee integrated policies that articulate initial teacher education, insertion into the profession, and continual training.

b) Teacher policies: ‘state policies’

The design and implementation of integrated policies for teachers sets high demands in terms of policy quality. If there is a real ambition to untangle the thorniest problems and create a synergistic solution to the different decisive factors, then there is no alternative to placing education agendas, and particularly policies related to teachers, in a special category: that of policies that require long term agreements; thus, ‘national’ or ‘state’ policies, in which partisan competitiveness takes a back seat as energies, procedures, and time are invested in the construction of a shared vision regarding the issues at stake and the courses to follow, not only between government and opposition in the political system, but also in the realms of society and of the unions, where both the teaching community and parents should take part in the creation of fundamental agreements, such as the clear case of the national construction of standards.

c) Centrality of the definition of standards

As discussed when the component model for quality assurance in teaching was presented, standards and assessment are mechanisms that cut across the different phases in a strategic way: without them it is impossible to take a consistent line in addressing a ‘quality assurance system’. Worse still, without standards it is hard to undertake a valid and useful assessment in order to improve systems, in the absence of parameters to distinguish achievement levels, in any dimension or environment. In answering the question of setting priorities in this phase, the starting point must therefore be the definition of standards (or “estándarts”) that make clear what knowledge and skills should be possessed by a teacher in secondary, primary, or early childhood education in the 21st century. Such a definition, constructed so as to create support and agreement, is the same as having goals, such as parameters to measure distance from a goal, to promote and give order to the actions of policies and stakeholders in the three major areas that have been identified as strategic issues: initial teacher education, continual training, and the teaching career. The construction of standards, both in competencies on graduation from initial training and for the performance of active teaching professionals, is both a technical and a political challenge.

The first requires reaching the foundations of the best and most widely supported modern ideas on what competencies a teacher must possess in order to undertake his or her delicate and demanding mission under current conditions, and then defining them in terms that permit their assessment, identifying minimum acceptable levels for all teachers who are to be entrusted with public faith in their capacities (moral and intellectual), to take responsibility for the growth of generations of students. The second is even more challenging, as it demands agreements attained through wide ranging participative processes, providing support and authority for the definition thus reached; and beyond even this, it must bring together the

profession under the “estandardart” that gives it identity and pride, and by which the ordering and prioritisation of the means for attaining its achievement are also supported.

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