Abstract:
In line with the philosophy of policies geared towards quality, from the 1990s onwards a series of education system assessment programmes have been implemented. The educational authorities and experts believe that these assessment initiatives will improve the system as a whole and will create the conditions to educate the citizens and professionals needed for the 21st century. As such, today practically everything that happens in school is assessed: the educational institution and its projects; the curricular plans and study programmes, in an accreditation process; the academics (exercising their role of teachers, and sometimes their role of researchers), the students, as regards their learning for enrolment or departure from the education system.

Mexico has undertaken this task by means of the education authorities putting into practice an enormous quantity of programmes which, at the end of the day, are extremely expensive and do not necessarily improve the work carried out in the classroom. The education authorities created a lot of student assessment programmes, to such an extent that pupils have to sit 5 large-scale exams per year. All of them have their shortcomings and we believe that it is not by increasing the number of exams that things will improve. As regards the academics (teachers and researchers), three programmes were established, which are applied based on different criteria. And, in turn, the institutions are assessed and the result of this assessment determines access to public funds. This situation led to a multiplication of bureaucratic procedures and a spontaneous generation of assessors who carry out this activity in an amateurish manner.

Keywords:
Educational assessment, Assessment programmes, Assessment of academics (teachers and researchers), Assessment in Mexico.

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Assessment in Mexican education. An excess of programmes and absence of the pedagogical dimension

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INTRODUCTION

This article analyses the set of assessment programmes put into practice in Mexico, within the framework of the education reform programmes implemented since the start of the 1990s. These programmes are geared towards a productivist perspective, based on the concept of providing a high-quality education.

A common trait of the assessment established in Mexico is the absence of a conceptual debate analysing the different schools of thought, apart from the institutions that organise exams on a large-scale. In Mexico we find an empirical generation of assessors: those who have been assessed in school, or who have assessed their pupils, consider themselves assessment experts.

Another facet that characterises the Mexican assessment is an excessive amount of programmes. From the 1990s onwards several programmes have been created, with different guidelines to assess identical objects (students, teachers, programmes). We can state that the spirit that guides the assessment does seek improvement (in an educational sense), but instead seeks to expose a series of shortcomings to society, from an accountability point of view.

A final trait of the Mexican assessment is the creation of the “carrot effect”. Many of the programmes, especially those applied to the academics and institutions, tie in the results of the programmes to the granting of extra money.

In Table I we list the assessment programmes, one of which began in the 1970s, although for state reasons the results were not disseminated. We are talking about the tests developed by the Directorate-general of Assessment, under the aegis of the Public Secretary of Education (SEP). This provided the basis to create the National Assessment Institute in 2002¹, which led to the setting up of two bodies to carry out the same task and which today fight for their place in the same field. In the last 20 years, other programmes have been developed, such as the National System of Researchers (SNI), created in 1984 and the higher education assessment programmes (Estímulos al Desempeño, in 1990; Evaluación de Programas, also in 1990; and the programme established for the institutions — Fomento a la Modernización de la Educación Superior — FOMES, 1990; as well as the Carrera Magisterial programme, established in 1994).

Meanwhile, the current physiognomy of the assessment programmes was adapted within the scope of the government work plan called the National Education Programme 2001-2006, with a series of initiatives carried out under the philosophy of promoting an assessment culture to achieve high quality in education. For a better understanding we group these initiatives in line with the object being assessed.
**THE ASSESSMENT PROGRAMMES IN MEXICO: A SYSTEM OR A GROUP WITH DIFFERENT PHILOSOPHIES?**

**Table I — Assessment Programmes of the Mexican Education System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Programmes</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Higher Medium</th>
<th>Normal Education</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional</strong></td>
<td>Escuelas de Calidad</td>
<td>Programa Integral de Fortalecimiento de la Enseñanza Media Superior (PIFIEMS)</td>
<td>Programa Estatal de Fortalecimiento a la Educación Normal (PEFEN)</td>
<td>Programa Integral de Fortalecimiento Institucional para la educación superior (PIFI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programmes</strong></td>
<td>Plan de estudios nacional</td>
<td>The PIFIEMS programme assesses the changes made in the curricular projects</td>
<td>Accreditation of programmes (Mentioned in the PEFEN, although the study plan has national coverage)</td>
<td>Assessment of programmes (CIEES) Accreditation of programmes (COPAES) Padrón Nacional del Posgrado (PNP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academics</strong></td>
<td>Carrera Magisterial</td>
<td>Programas de Estímulo al Desempeño Académico</td>
<td>Carrera Magisterial</td>
<td>Sistema Nacional de Investigadores (SNI) Programas de Estímulo al Desempeño Académico Programa de Mejoramiento del Personal Académico (PROMEP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Carrera Magisterial* — Teaching career for primary and secondary school teachers; *Normal Education* — higher education establishments for teacher training; *Bachillerato* — Generally corresponds to the last three years of secondary school.

**Institutional Assessment**

The different institutional assessment programmes are voluntary and are characterised by giving access to financial resources.

**In primary education**

The Programa Escuelas de Calidad (PEC) was drawn up based on different international experience. A quality school is one where the educational community takes responsibility for the school work².

Schools that decide to go down this road should draw up a *Strategic School Transformation Plan* (PETE) and an *Annual Work Programme* (PAT).

This programme has been the object of multiple assessments, over 25 times during the 2001-2006 government mandate³, some carried out annually by the Centro de Investigación y docencia Económica (CIDE — Centre for Economic Research and Teaching, Mexico) and others by the Harvard Graduate School of Education. It is very difficult to
calculate the cost of all these assessments or to undertake a cost-benefit analysis.

In the opinion of the assessors, PEC has, among other attributes, the benefit of empowering the management positions in the schools, the teachers and the parents in the construction of a school project and the resource management (when a school receives funding it has to open an account with the issue of cheques that, in order to be valid, have to be signed by the head and one of the parents of the pupils) (Reimers, 2006). The idea is to encourage the “bottom-up” work model, which ends up on a collision course with the control that the Federation has over all the aspects of the education system, such as: content of study plans, definition of test items, etc.

The assessment mechanism of these projects is not very clear, as it is a very complex process: the project is delivered to the State Secretaries of Education, who form a technical committee that analyses and issues a statement and which can give the go-ahead to bonus funding. The Harvard report (Murnane et al., 2006) established that this Technical Committee would be formed by civil servants, academics and a representative of the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE). The statement, with the attribution of points, is returned to a social participation committee by representatives of the parent associations, community leaders, civil servants and a SNTE representative. It is here that the decision is made as to which schools will take part in the programme, taking into account the opinion of the Technical Committee and which analyses, among other factors, the poverty levels. In any event, the final assessment decision is a black box.

It is impossible to say whether or not PEC has contributed to the improvement of the pupils’ learning. First, because there are a lot of social, cultural and pedagogical factors whose influence cannot be clearly identified in the learning results. Measuring the school drop-out rates, academic failure or non-correspondence between age group and school level, as has been done, cannot be directly correlated to the school work carried out after a certain school has joined the PEC programme.

In Higher Education

On the other hand, in Higher Education the Programa Integral de Fortalecimiento Institucional (PIFI)⁴ was put into practice, which started in 2001. This programme followed in the footsteps of its predecessor (FOMES), but incorporated the Strategic Planning perspective, built from the bottom upwards.

The programme models the institutions, regardless of the formal organisation each one has established in its statutes (faculties and schools, departments and university centres), given that each one should be organised into DES (dependencias de educación superior). The academics are grouped into a new unit of organisation, called Academic Bodies. It is supposed that each academic body establishes its own knowledge generation lines. In this background, the Federation induces a governance, organisation and academic model that tends to homogenise the functioning of the institutions and which overrules the institutional regulations.

Naturally, the bonus funding has a big impact on the daily spending of the institutions. This can be seen in the transformations of the infrastructures, laboratories and libraries. This is a model that brings about participation of the academic community and the involvement of the management of the institutions, given that the rector has to defend his PIFI project to a nominated panel (a group of three assessors).

Without ignoring the multiple benefits (Kent Serna, 2006) that this practice has brought to the institutions (of which we highlight the formulation of Institutional Development Plans, the participation of the academics in this activity, the improvement of the institutional information systems, the attention given to the quantitative indicators established for each programme), the following substantive questions have to be answered: have these programmes really improved the quality of these institutions? Has there been an improvement in compliance with the substantive functions of the public institutions? Is the level of teaching better today and are learning processes and knowledge construction encouraged more intensely? Were the study plans reformulated taking into account the philosophy of the kind of professionals required to solve the national problems and for the necessary insertion of the gradu-
ates into the increasingly competitive and global job market? This set of questions can be enlarged if we take into account the research and teaching tasks.

Something which draws attention is that, while in Europe the movement for quality in higher education has been implemented alongside greater institutional autonomy, in Mexico these improvement projects are closely linked to greater state intervention in the dynamics of the institutions.

**Assessment of the Educational Programmes or Study Plans Aimed at Accreditation**

In *Primary Education* no assessment programmes of the study plans are in place, given that these are of a national scope.

**Assessment in higher education aimed at accreditation**

The clearest assessment model for higher education aimed at accreditation is in place both for the public universities and for the private higher education institutions. This is so in the former, owing to their autonomy, and in the latter, due to the need to have their study plans recognised by REVOE (*Reconocimiento de Validez Oficial de los Estudios*). As such, these institutions have been given the freedom to draw up their own study plans, albeit in line with a set of general rules.

On the other hand, there are other higher education sectors that work with national plans defined by the Federation, such as the case of *Regional Technological Institutes* and the *Normal Schools*. Whether the policies are of the PIFI (for the technological education) or the PEFEN (for the normal schools), they demand that “accreditation is undertaken of their academic programmes”.

At the start of the 1990s peer assessment programmes were set up, but without an accreditation facet. Their initial goal was to supply an assessment that would allow retrospective data to be generated for the functioning of each of the programmes. However, from 2001 onwards the classification of each of the programmes was required (Level 1, 2 and 3), which led to the abandonment of the training perspective.

The task has been monumental. Since the Peers Committees began functioning, in 1991, and up to March 2007, a total of 4,807 programmes have been assessed and drawn up. In this same period 80,347 statements have been issued, with the participation of 3,543 assessors (academic peers). The assessment is put into practice upon request from the institution to the respective committee, which, taking into account the volume of work, can be scheduled inside a maximum deadline of one year.

The assessment of peers was turned into a simple task, and in most cases consists of filling in checklist forms. Taking this into account, the assessment bodies have published a series of guidelines and assessment criteria which, essentially, have been transformed into tools that establish how the curricular project should be constructed, what the content is and the weight that each subject should have in the study plan. The peers subsequently carry out a visit to the institution.

The assessors are trained in their original subjects, but not necessarily in the assessment area. Interviews are carried out, but in general there is a lack of training that would allow the application of different kinds of interviews that are used in the social sciences. Each individual conducts the interview according to their own common sense. And, upon completing it, the assessment report is written up. In general, one of the committee members accepts responsibility for writing the report, although s/he has to achieve a consensus within the committee. One of the essential parts of the reports is the recommendations that, in general, follow a scheme or pattern. Some of the recommendations exceed the powers of the faculties or schools to put them into practice: “improve the salaries of the academic staff”, “modify the university legislation with regard to the enrolment system or with regard to the exam system.” The recommendations usually include the suggestion that the study plans be revised, that names are changed, or that a given percentage of teachers are contracted full time. Also the libraries, laboratories and IT departments come in for recommendations. Finally a classification is attributed to the programme. The management of the institutions only informs the respective academic community of the assessment results, and do not deliver the detailed report.

The accreditation bodies only began to work in 2002, although not for all professions and they did
not necessarily abide by the criteria of the Peer Committees. While the latter involve only indirect costs, the former charge fees for rendering of services. The accreditation bodies charge between 7 and 15 thousand dollars for each job, plus indirect costs such as expenses, self-assessment workshops, which could elevate the accreditation cost to 50 000 dollars\(^7\). The total cost of the accreditation process is borne by public funds. In some cases, and in the words of some accreditation bodies, people talk about a potential market of 300 000 dollars. Accreditation has turned into a protected market.

The accreditation processes induce the content of a study plan, determine the timing of the curricular reforms and function as an obstacle when one tries to think about professional training in a wider scope. The accreditation leads to the undertaking of a given kind of training, which the accreditation bodies consider to be ideal and which translate into their accreditation documents.

Given the need for the assessment to be objective, the accreditation tasks are carried out based on a checklist, compiled under different topics that comprise this activity.

**Assessment of academics (teachers and researchers)**

The assessment of academics\(^8\), as a mechanism that leads to financial reward, came about owing to two aspects: on the one hand the deterioration of the salaries of academic staff owing to the economic crisis in the 1980s, and on the other hand the assumption that an increase in wages did not contribute to an improvement in the educational work\(^9\). These programmes were designed to bring about better salaries, either through promotions (the case of the *carrera magisterial*) or through a salary bonus (in higher education), and as such they tackled the basic principles (administrative problems in the attribution of financial resources), instead of the academic significance.

The assessment of primary education teachers

Upon signing the *Acuerdo para la Modernización de la Educación* (1992) a general programme for assessment of primary education teachers was established, through an agreement between SEP (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*) and the Union (SNTE)\(^10\). This is a programme that undertakes an array of professional certification activities (the teachers have to carry out an exam of their knowledge to access the programme, and also have to take part in certain ongoing training courses) and which rewards merit — merit pay. The teachers have to show professional output, which is measured through the opinion of their colleagues concerning their work (who are thus instantaneously converted into peer assessors), and by the results their pupils obtain in a school exam.

The *Carrera Magisterial* programme was defined as a horizontal promotion programme, i.e. a teacher with only a teaching post does not need to occupy a supervisory, management or coordination post to get a pay rise. From the moment teachers attain a given position in their career, the pay rise is integrated into their salary.

Meanwhile, from the start and with the changes made in 1998, this programme contains a poor assessment technique, which is very unlikely to have any impact on the work done in the classroom. The research carried out both at national level (Díaz Barriga, 1997, 1999), and international level (Santibáñez *et al.*, 2006; Vegas, 2005), shows that the programme is inefficient, as well as being expensive and somewhat humiliating for the teachers.

The assessment aspects are already defined so in the programmes the following factors are established: professional training and ongoing training of teachers, academic performance, learning results [of the pupils] and academic qualifications. One of the programme’s defects is that attending a course, lasting one week, organised by the Federation, grants more points than, for example, completing a post-graduation.

To assess the academic performance a “peer assessment” method was designed that could not be put into practice from the beginning of the programme. This consists of a group of teachers from a school, presided over by the head, attributing a score to another teacher colleague. This method has led to injustices, vengeance and connivance, and although this is a well documented situation, no modifications were made to the programme to address the problem (Rojas, 1997; Tyler, 1997).

To determine the school performance a test is applied to the pupils of teachers registered for the
programme called “school performance”. The various strategies taken on by each school in the application of this test shows the fragilities it encompasses. In turn, the Rand report [Research and Development] says that big differences were not found between the classifications of the pupils that attended the lessons of the *carrera magisterial* teachers and the other teachers who are not integrated on the career path.

Finally, the academic qualification degree “is measured”, from the start through an annual exam applied to the teachers. The studies carried out in the 1990s about the content of these exams were very limited as, to a large extent, they only focussed on the domain of the content of each teaching level; reference is also made to the humiliation felt by the teachers given that the exams were invigilated by the secondary school pupils and the results were put on display in the school corridors; they also pointed out the corruption that was created through the clandestine sale of the exams. The Rand study shows that the questions of this test do not follow a model, even after 12 years of application, and that the level of difficulty does not increase in line with the scale of the programme.

The assessment of the academics (teachers-researchers) in higher education

With regard to this topic three questions have to be looked at: the first is that most of the programmes that are today labelled assessment were designed only as salary top-up mechanisms — the most extreme case is the *Teaching Career* programme, better known as *Estímulos al Desempeño Académico de Educación Superior*. The academic criteria of this programme were formulated by the Ministry of Finance, which established a quota of academics each institution could receive and also the points that could be attributed to each aspect assessed.

It is probably within the scope of the assessment of the academics that the assessment programmes most clearly show the diversity of criteria, duplicity and a certain perversion. Instead of analysing the salary situation of a professional who must obtain the academic level of PhD, who has to stay up to date, who incorporates herself/himself into the international community and who publishes articles in peer-review journals, they are submitted periodically to assessment processes (on an annual basis in most cases of performance stimulus of PROMEP; and every five years in the National System of Researchers — SNI).

The SNI was created in 1984 and the programmes today known as “Academic Performance Stimulus” in 1990. In 1996 the *Programa de Mejoramiento del Profesorado de la Educación Superior* (PROMEP) was established. All these programmes were geared up towards assessing the performance of the academics. The first two tied in the assessment with a financial reward, a reward that could triple the professional wage level established in the salary tables of the public universities. The PROMEP also granted a scholarship equivalent to one SNI Level, in the period between the graduation and the moment in which a person is invited to take up a university position.

### Table 2 — Comparison between the salaries of the academics and the federal government civil servants 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNAM Salary Table</th>
<th>Gobierno Federal [média]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate C</td>
<td>9,917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category A</td>
<td>11,465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category B</td>
<td>13,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category C</td>
<td>15,908</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Department Head</th>
<th>24,282</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area Sub-director</td>
<td>39,432</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area Director</td>
<td>84,316</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Director-General</td>
<td>126,787</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director-General</td>
<td>171,035</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In analysing what each programme assesses, we can see that each one of them has a different idea about what constitutes academic work. The SNI carries out an analysis of the individual academic output, measured through the number and quality of publications produced in a given period. The researchers should not necessarily restrict themselves to the working avenues of the institution, as it is more important to foster an international component. The stimulus programmes, in turn, assess the individual work, but it is an assessment that is carried out based on a financial ceiling, established by financial criteria¹¹, meaning that the assessment results are subordinated to this financial reward.

None of these assessment formats coincide. The academics have to organise their work in accordance with what each programme defines. The
Mexican academic is over-assessed and the assessment has modified the academic behaviour, and simultaneously sapped the motivation of the teachers as regards their basic responsibility: giving lessons and supporting the students.

Attributing points is the “most objective” activity of the assessment, but it makes the academics “economise their work”, given that publishing three articles can be worth more than publishing a book, giving a conference earns more points than giving lessons. It also induces the teachers to give greater attention to the best pupils, as those who have learning problems generally do not get good grades, or finish their studies inside the stipulated time. In the new academic production model it does not pay to dedicate much time to a pupil, as this robs time from preparing the next conference paper or completing the article the teacher is working on.

The logic behind these programmes has been productivity and differentiation, promoting a series of activities that have not necessarily improved the working conditions of the teachers.

The Mexican teachers have understood the signals given by the system: they have to dedicate more time to the activities that give more points in the programmes, which does not mean, necessarily, making a pedagogical-didactic or educational commitment with their students.

**Assessment of the Pupils’ Learning**

One of the symptoms of the application of productivist thinking in the Mexican education system has been the introduction of exams left, right and centre. If one thing has epitomised this last phase of the government policies it has been the investment, against the didactic thinking, that an improvement in the teachers’ classroom work will automatically derive from applying exams and disseminating the results obtained.

The application and dissemination of primary teaching exams

One of the aspects that characterised the 2001-2006 government was the investment in the universalisation of large-scale exams, as well as the dissemination of their results, leading to a ranking of each student and school.

The Mexican government has refused, systematically, to divulge the results of the assessments, so much so that in 1998, it requested the UNESCO Laboratory for the measurement of Quality in Education not to disclose the results of the Mexican pupils (Casassus, 2000).

In this background, in 2002 an Institute was set up, adding a new body to those already existing. Instead of integrating the Institute into the General Assessment Department, two new exams were created: the EXCALE (exam applied to a sample of pupils) and the ENLACE (blanket exam applied every year). Later, each federal entity created their own state exam, as the pupils had obtained bad results in the national exams. They believed, wrongly, that “a higher number of exams would lead to better learning.” Therefore, to give an example, pupils in their sixth year of school had to sit 5 national or local exams per year, plus the international ones that were applied.

The Mexican exams applied on a large scale were geared towards measuring the quantity of content of the study plan that could be memorised and which could be applied in the school exercises. This kind of test is in contrast to the international exams, such as PISA, which focus on knowledge and competencies for life.

One of the aspects common to all the institutions that carry out assessment activities is the confusion generated between “informing and assessing.” The reports supply data that is so general it is difficult to see how it can help the educational authorities [in decision making] or provide pointers to the teachers that enable them to improve their pedagogical work. They clearly do not comply with one of the assessment functions: the retrospective supply [returning of results]. As if it was a sports competition, INEE establishes 4 levels of school performance (INEE, 2006, p. 12) — an indication that enables a classification to be attributed, but does not supply guidelines about learning tasks.

Hence, school performance is expressed in the following levels: a) Below basic, b) Basic, c) Medium, d) Advanced. With this information, the mathematics teachers, for example, do not know if their pupils can carry out basic operations (summing, multiplying or dividing), if they can carry out simple operations (summing three numbers or multiplications of
two factors up to the hundreds) or if they can carry out more complex tasks (summing more than four numbers with 6 or 8 constituents). The only clue that the report gives is that the pupils had difficulties in dealing with fractions (in primary education) and the secondary education report said that the pupils were relatively efficient at solving problems with natural numbers. They make no reference to the behaviour of the primary education pupils in relation to the various mathematical topics, or the cross-multiplication rule or the solving of problems of varying degrees of complexity. As for secondary education, they do not indicate whether the students manage to apply the basic algebra operations, or if they manage to solve first-degree equations.

In any event, we have to recognise the effort made by the educational authorities to attempt to individualise the learning results of around 10 million primary education pupils and more than one million, eight hundred thousand secondary education students¹², an almost impossible task when large-scale exams are applied. Likewise, also praiseworthy is the effort in giving pertinent guidelines about what should be learned in each subject, in spite of the fact that the rush to disseminate them led to several mistakes, above all when the pupils’ parents do not have sufficient education to lend support to this activity.

The publicising of the results also leaves a lot to be desired, especially owing to the image used: a scale, in which the best rankings are at the top, and the worst at the bottom, marking the pupil’s position with the words: “your son/daughter is situated here”. Using the so-called traffic light reporting technique, the results are disclosed using three colours: red (bad and insufficient), yellow (sufficient) and green (excellent).

**Assessment of students in higher middle and higher education**

Many of the statements written herein can be applied to the assessment of the higher education students, but with a factor that accentuates the problem: in this case the assessment activities were privatised. When the Centro Nacional de la Evaluación de Educación Superior (CENEVAL) was created, the option was taken for the entity to function as a private institution which, over time, would transform into a profit-making company. In the financial report, published in 2003, revenue of more than 23 million dollars is declared¹³.

CENEVAL supplies its services to the higher middle and higher education institutions through a contract for the end users — in this case the students — who pay a fee to take the exam. Through this agreement, the results are delivered confidentially to the institutions (university, institute, normal school, education centre) that the contract was formally signed with. No pedagogical usage is made of the results, and the retrospective supply of data does not function. In the best-case scenario information is disclosed about the best marks or a report is written indicating which schools (secondary, bachillerato or universities) are attended by the pupils with the highest grades.

The Centro publishes a study guide with the bibliography to study, which turns into a kind of straight-jacket, especially for the areas of knowledge that undergo constant innovations. New topics and cutting edge content are simply not tested in these exams.

A considerable number of questions in the CENEVAL exams merely assess the memorisation of the content and its mechanical application, something that was already studied for the EXANII (Díaz Barriga, 2006).

**A KIND OF CONCLUSION**

To conclude this article we have to ask ourselves the following questions: “has the assessment that has been applied for more than 15 years been a driving force behind an improvement in the quality of education?”, “Has a culture of assessment been created in Mexico over recent years?”

Unfortunately these questions do not have a positive answer. The assessment has reflected a mentality that negates the pedagogical dimension of the complexity of the acts underpinning education, education of citizens, professionals, a new generation of Mexicans. Far from tackling the topic underlying these problems, it leads to a greater degree of formalism in education. If anything came out of this establishment of assessment systems, it was an increased level of formalism and simulation in the educational acts.

Almost spontaneously, a generation of assessors has been created. In the workshops the participants...
are asked if they have ever been assessed, in order to reach the following wise conclusion: “We have all been assessed, we all know about assessment.” Today, when the exam results are published, for example by ENLACE, it is society, it is the pupils’ parents who try to create the school rankings, and the validity or reliability of the results is not discussed.

Mexican assessment costs a significant amount for the public authorities owing to the number of institutions involved and the exams applied, but also for the parents of higher education students. It is a very expensive activity. In Mexico investment has been made in an assessment process that sanctions rather than supports the teachers’ work. As such, for example, one of the INEE reports clearly states that it was written for the authorities and for society, and not for the teachers.

Faced with the State’s lack of morals in failing to establish a fair professional remuneration level, the assessment of academics has been promoted. This assessment aims to obtain compensation bonuses, and does not analyse the distortions that these programmes create in academic life.

The assessment is not designed to comply with a pedagogical function, to monitor the educational process, or to be a diagnosis tool. The assessors have turned into the new divine caste of contemporary societies. Their mistakes and omissions remain in pectore, given that they cannot be the object of analysis by society.
1. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was defeated in the 2000 elections, meaning that the creation of the National Institute for Educational Assessment and Evaluation (INEE) was a project implemented by the so-called government of change (and the interests of intellectuals from the education field linked to this movement, most of whom had links to the previous PRI governments).

2. See the document: “¿Qué es una escuela de calidad?” At http://basica.sep.gob.mx/dgdgie/escuelasdecalidad/ (June 2007).

3. See the list of assessments carried out on the SEP website: http://basica.sep.gob.mx/dgdgie/cva/programas/escuelasdecalidad/

4. This is a programme that can be considered a model. When it came into force another programme was established for Higher Middle Education (PIFIEMS — Programa Integral de Fortalecimiento Intitucional de la Educación Media Superior Universitaria) and another one for the Normal Schools (PEFEN — Programa Estatal de Fortalecimiento a las Escuelas Normales).

5. The main arguments used in this section were taken from the research carried out on the State Public Universities and whose results are presented in Díaz Barriga et al., 2008.


7. An academic who takes part in these activities pointed out that an accreditation body of a given profession has a potential market in the next 6 years of around 300 million pesos. In other words, the educational authorities granted them a closed market, where they can freely set their own fees.

8. We use the name academics to include the assessment of teachers and the assessment of researchers, as well as the assessment of those who exercise both these functions.

9. This was a theory defended at the start of the 1990s, both by the World Bank (Educación primaria, Documento de política, Washington, 1992), and by CEPAL-UNESCO (Educación y conocimiento. Eje de la transformación productiva con equidad, Santiago de Chile, 1992).

10. This is a powerful union, connected to the old PRI structure, but which since 2000 has increased its power (it is a forceful apparatus). This strength means that the formal education authority has to negotiate with the real education authority — the SNTE. For example, it is the SNTE, and not the education authority, who knows the real number of vacancies for teaching positions (magíster).


12. According to documents from the Directorate-General of Educational Assessment “it is estimated that these exams are applied in 98 485 general education primary schools (public and private), indigenous and community courses; this translates into 9 671 337 pupils. In secondary education they are applied in 31 299 schools (private, general, technical, tele-secondary and for employees) in a total of 1 784 316 pupils examined” See document named “Evaluación Nacional del Logro Académico de los Centros Escolares ENLACE” (s./d.).

13. Data taken for the website of the Centro Nacional de Evaluación de la Educación Superior (CENEVAL).

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