

**TEACHERS IN LATIN AMERICA:
NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR DEVELOPMENT AND PERFORMANCE**

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*Report on the Proceedings of the Conference**

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INTRODUCTION

The conference 'Teachers in Latin America' was an important gathering of international education experts, with the agenda of taking forward the debate on key issues and strategies for improving the performance of teachers in Latin America today. It came just over a year after the Second Summit of the Americas, held in Santiago de Chile in April 1998, at which the heads of government of the region made a commitment to devote more attention and resources to teacher development than have been available in recent years. As such a milestone, the conference aroused considerable interest and was very well attended by representatives of the academic and policy making community from throughout the region, as well as invited experts from North America and Europe and staff of the sponsoring institutions.

The conference consisted of four main sessions, the second and third of which had a plenary and then two parallel panels. (See accompanying programme.) The themes of those sessions were as follows:

- Session One: 'What makes an effective teacher?'
- Session Two: 'Initial and in-service teacher training: innovations and effective practices.'
- Session Three: 'The quality of teachers: incentives and recent innovations.'
- Session Four: 'Teachers' organisations and the professional development of teachers in Latin America.'

Some 25 background papers were prepared for the conference, most of which were presented in the sessions as the basis for subsequent discussion. Taken as a whole, these papers combine quantitative, statistical analysis of general trends in key areas such as teachers' pay, with a series of case studies which attempted to distil emerging trends in more qualitative issues of teacher training and innovations in creating performance incentives.

This report on the conference's proceedings is organised as follows. First there is a brief overview of the background to the concerns that lay behind its organisation, as these were presented in the inaugural addresses. There follows a report on each of the four sessions in turn, with particular attention to the key points of consensus – and debate – as these emerged in the discussions following speakers' presentations. Brief syntheses of key points made by speakers is included as a frame of reference, where needed, for each session, although the reader is also recommended to refer to the background papers. This is followed by a summary of the principal issues raised during the closing session of the conference. The thematic organisation of this section also attempts to reflect the hierarchy of attention given to each major theme in the course of the session. As a supplement, the concluding section offers final reflections by the author on issues raised during the event which were not further developed in the closing session.

THE CONCERNS OF THE CONFERENCE: WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

It is well known that the teaching profession has suffered a considerable decline over the last decades, to the extent that many countries feel that a systemic crisis has been reached. The massification of public education, combined with resource constraints, have stretched national systems to breaking point, creating vicious circles of falling standards, poor remuneration and loss of prestige. The urgency with which this situation needs to be reversed is made especially acute by the immense acceleration in the growth of information and information technology in the world today, and the further challenges this implies for the content and form of modern education. As education has once more become a strategic priority for governments, and renewed reform efforts have focused on quality as well as coverage, so the inadequacies of teaching standards have been ever more sharply highlighted. Not only that, these developments have come at the same time as equally far-reaching changes in the structure of society and social relations have put further pressures on teachers and parents and children alike.¹ One particular cause for concern, for example, is the decline in the social prestige of teachers, which reflects not only problems in the incentive structures of the profession, but also long-run changes in the labour market.

Failure to give due attention to the needs and concerns of teachers themselves has also meant a generalised failure to date to conduct systematic evaluation of reform measures undertaken in recent years, as these have impinged on teachers. These include the decentralisation of the management of education in a number of countries, as well as teacher training programmes and efforts to modify their career structures. There is an urgent need to conduct such evaluation within countries, as well as to build on the available data base of international experience. Recognition of the need for 'better' teacher training needs to be tied to such evaluation, as does recognition of the need to attract better teachers to the profession.

Clearer understanding of the role played by teachers' organisations, and their potential contribution to improving teachers' working conditions and incentives, represents another issue often ignored (or regarded as too politically charged) in reform efforts undertaken to date. Again, this must change in approaches to educational reform which aim to put teachers at their heart.

These were the key concerns which the conference sought to address. Its aim was to contribute towards clarifying the current terms of debate and existing knowledge on these crucial issues for the teaching profession and necessary directions of its future development.

¹ A useful overview of some of the new challenges facing teachers is given in the paper prepared for the conference by María Lucrecia Tulic, 'La Evaluación docente; Antecedentes y propuesta.'

Session One: What Makes an Effective Teacher?

During much of the discussion of the question ‘what makes an effective teacher’, there was a certain degree of tension on the issue of whether or not it is possible or even desirable to define the qualities of a good teacher. Another theme was whether it is possible to correlate social background or educational levels and training of teachers (or the social environments of schools themselves) to educational outcomes. The thorniest issue was whether or not teacher performance can be related to actual classroom techniques and practices and, again, how the issues of training and incentive structures can be applied effectively to improve educational outcomes.

There was clearest agreement on the fact that there is no discernible correlation between the educational levels of teachers and the performance of students. The United States' experience to that effect appeared to be borne out by the evidence from Chile, Argentina and Colombia.² The same applies for the social milieu of the school in which teachers work. There is a wide variation in the performance of teachers both within and across schools and no clear explanation of the factors accounting for such differences. This is particularly worrying since existing research from the United States also clearly points to the fact that the critical factor determining student performance is the quality of the teaching they receive.

In terms of whether or not we can define the qualities of an effective teacher, there were certain general and basic characteristics which did emerge as essential. These included the importance of the teacher being sufficiently concerned about generating learning skills in pupils to make that central to classroom practice, rather than merely imparting information according to the curriculum. The precise nature of the classroom practices required is still not clearly established, however, nor is it certain that the same practices would work in all contexts. At root, therefore, the conclusion was more simply that it is only if the teacher herself is genuinely concerned about the results of the class that she is likely to be effective.³ Thus the emerging consensus on this debate was towards the agreement that if we cannot determine in any detail, or usefulness, the precise characteristics that define an effective teacher, we are thrown back on the use of student performance assessment as the key tool for measuring effectiveness.

Nonetheless, that emerging agreement left undecided the question of how to establish effective criteria for measuring performance. There was some tension, for example, as to whether performance assessment should centre on individual teachers or on schools, with the balance inclining in the direction of school-based assessment. With this, some mention was made of the importance of generating effective team work in schools as a pre-requisite for good institutional performance. In this respect, too, the ability of teachers to respond to the

² The US experience was presented by Eric Hanushek (University of Rochester, New York), that of Chile by Beatrice Ävalos (Chilean Education Ministry), and that of Argentina by Lucrecia Tulic (Education Ministry, Argentina). Comments on Colombia came from the floor.

³ Please note: given the predominance of women in the teaching profession, the feminine pronoun will be used in reference to them, in preference to the clumsy ‘him/her’ option.

particular challenges and benefits of working supportively together was another basic characteristic recognised as important to being an effective teacher. The role of school principals, not surprisingly, becomes critical in this regard. There is some evidence from the United States that principals can and do make a critical contribution to the evaluation of their teachers' performance. This is particularly important where good teachers inherit bad students and cannot in the short term at least make any appreciable gains in terms of student performance. It also suggests further grounds for continuing to move in the direction of greater school autonomy in Latin America. However, there was no clear consensus on the desirability of so doing, and a suggestion of continuing misgivings on the part of some Ministry representatives. The wider issue of relating this debate to overall debates on centralised versus decentralised management of education systems was also raised, but not developed.

Another, related, point raised was that of the need to bear in mind that teachers are part of a wider educational system, however fundamental they may be to it. Recognition of their importance should not come at the cost of ignoring issues of, for example, curriculum and teaching text design. Good teachers are also those who know how to make effective use of good tools.

A further key underlying challenge, and one which appears to be shared between developed and less developed countries alike, is the need for greater clarity in what society wants its education systems to achieve. 'We need to work harder on what it is we think we want children to do in order to decide on how to measure outcomes.'⁴

Related to that broad challenge is the need for clearer understanding of the relationship between the form and content of teacher training, and classroom outcomes. Although the US case indicates that the amount of formal education and training received by teachers is not necessarily a good indicator of their quality or performance, it was not clarified if there was any correlation between the type of teacher training received (as opposed to the quantity) and performance in the classroom. Thus, while there was much insistence that the way in which teachers themselves have learnt will very much affect how effective they in turn are as teachers, the further implications of this remained an unresolved issue in terms of the types of teacher training required.

These critical issues were taken up further with regard to the creation of effective systems of teacher testing, in a presentation of the experience of the US Educational Testing Service (ETS) given by its Vice President, Mari Perlman. She emphasised that a key lesson for the Service has been that 'learning must be the central issue in any attempt to evaluate teachers.' She further noted: 'It is only after the content of learning has been aligned with assessment across the educational system, from students through teachers, and after teachers have been offered the opportunity to learn to be competent (or even expert) pedagogues, that we can say that we have created a system that affords opportunities for all to learn.'⁵ Another lesson for the ETS, which also echoed earlier references to the importance of team work in schools as

⁴ Eric Hanushek, (University of Rochester).

⁵ 'Evaluating Teachers' Professional Practice: An invited presentation for the conference Teachers Latin America, San Jose 28-30 June 1999.'

well as challenges for the design of teacher training programmes, was the vital contribution which experienced teachers can make to the development of beginning teachers.

There was some further continuing discussion on progress made to date in the United States on linking teachers' performance to teaching outcomes. While Mari Perlman sustained that all efforts to do so had been made, it was the view of the previous presenter from the United States, Eric Hanushek, that more could and should be done in this area.

Perlman's strong advice to those setting up teacher testing systems in Latin America was to start with simple goals. There had been some implicit tension in the previous debate on the need for complex systems that take on board a wide range of variables in teacher assessment versus the need to set basic, simple standards.⁶ Her parting advice was that testing needs to 'articulate what we want children to learn with how we are going to know if they have learned it. The questions are: what are we measuring; how do we gather evidence for what we're measuring and how will we know when we've measured it? Everything else flows from these basics.'

Before turning to the next session of the conference, it is appropriate to bring forward a later presentation, whose findings do not entirely agree with those referred to at the beginning of this section, regarding the correlation between teachers' educational levels and student performance. This came from Brazil, and was an overview of the key lessons learnt in that country's experience of reforms to improve the quality of primary education.⁷ A far-reaching assessment had found a very strong correlation between the kind of education –rather than the number of years by itself- received by teachers and the performance achieved by students, with teachers who had studied disciplines other than teaching itself exhibiting better outcomes. There was no subsequent discussion of this finding, however.

Session Two:

Initial and In-Service Teacher Training: Innovations and Effective Practices

2.1. (Plenary) Comparing International and Regional Experiences

A range of international experiences of teacher training programmes (TTPs) (from the USA, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Chile, Mexico, Colombia, Guinea and Malawi) indicate two very general characteristics of successful programmes.⁸ Firstly, they take place in the context of systemic reform efforts which integrate innovations in training into a broader

⁶ An example of a more complex approach is provided in the paper by Lucrecia Tulic, 'Experiencia internacional en el desarrollo y utilización de estándares para el maestro.' Worth noting is the fact the ETS's own system was described by the speaker as a highly complex one.

⁷ Maria Helena Guimaraes de Castro (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais, INEP, Brazil) 'A estratégia para a educação básica no Brasil: Principais Avanços e Desafios.'

⁸ This evidence was presented by Maria Teresa Tatto (Michigan State University). The background paper is: 'Conceptualizing and Studying Teacher Education across World Regions: an Overview.'

strategy. Secondly, they involve child-centred and learning-centred approaches, whereby the role of teachers is emphasised as being one of expert facilitators of learning.

However, the international picture points also to a serious lack of evaluation of TTPs in terms of cost effectiveness and the teacher trainers themselves. There is also a deeper need to face the challenge of thinking in terms of changing concepts of learning processes, rather than simply teaching techniques. Real advance in educational reform requires continuing effort to make a paradigm shift in the ways in which society views the respective roles of students, teachers and teacher trainers and integrate those into a coherent whole.

Recognition of the costliness of teacher training and lack of detailed knowledge of existing and evolving programmes has stimulated further regional research efforts. Six basic emerging trends were discernible from case studies of TTPs in seven Latin American countries.⁹ First, they involve more classroom time for trainee teachers. Second, there is a greater emphasis on continuous in-service training as a necessary boost to initial training. With this, and thirdly, there is greater emphasis on group-based learning, through teacher networks. Fourth, the role of school supervisors is starting to shift from one of policing to one of supporting teacher training. Fifth, there are renewed efforts to integrate TTPs into incentive structures for career development in ways which seek to move away from the previous trend of a culture of gaining new certificates in a 'rubber stamp' fashion. In this respect, too, TTPs are starting to integrate self-evaluation into programme design. Finally, TTPs are starting to be tailored to address specific local or national reform priorities, such as high repetition rates.

Such were the emerging international and regional trends, as presented as the background for discussion. That discussion revealed a certain discomfort in some quarters with the apparent tendency to set new style 'constructivist' approaches to educational reform against old-style 'positivist' ones. These were based on disquiet at the lack of empirical understanding of the actual content of the TTPs. The fears were that over emphasis on teaching forms might lead to some neglect of discipline-based concerns of training content. Also voiced were concerns to monitor more carefully how far incentives for in-service TTPs were having effect. Finally, it was also noted that some of the incentives for in-service training have been in effect for many years in some countries, but have not always produced good results. At issue, then, is not a fresh round of failed incentive models, but new, more effective methods to link incentives to improved results.

2.2. (Panel One) Teacher Training Experiences from Uruguay and Brazil.

Emerging regional trends in TTPs apart, the two case studies presented in Panel One offered examples of highly contrasting approaches.¹⁰ The Uruguayan Regional Teachers' Centres Programme (CERP) is based on a full-time, intensive study programme of three years of 35

⁹ This was the presentation of Juan Carlos Navarro (Inter-American Development Bank), based on the background paper by Juan Carlos Navarro and Aimee Verdisco, 'Teacher Training in Latin America: Innovations and Trends.'

¹⁰ The two presentations were: Denise Vaillant (Administración Nacional de Educación Pública, Uruguay) 'Reforma del sistema de formación inicial de docentes en Uruguay', and Michael Moore (Pennsylvania State University) 'Distance education for Teacher Training.'

weeks of 40-hour per week training (a total of 4,200 hours), which is also residential. 54 per cent of the total cost of the programme (US \$ 15,342 per student), therefore, goes to living and travel grants for trainees and trainers. This a radical departure from the norm of non-residential TTPs in the region. This programme design reflects its key concern to address regional equity issues (the extreme concentration of human resources in Montevideo) by attracting more qualified teacher trainers and trainees to outlying areas. Standards of excellence in the CERPs, aimed also to enhance teachers' sense of dignity, were considered a further key means of achieving that goal.

The Brazilian case was of a distance education programme for teachers aimed at providing a low cost solution to reaching a highly dispersed clientele from the poorest strata of society with a basic training programme. The cost per student for the basic course was \$US 360 per student. The key emphasis in the programme's design was the production of effective distance tools and material, whereby the teacher trainer is an 'interface' between the trainee and the teaching material rather than a traditional tutor.

The subsequent discussion of these contrasting approaches revealed both considerable interest in and lack of knowledge of the mechanics of distance education as a new method of teacher training. Concerns as to its potential drawbacks through the loss of face-to-face trainee-tutor contact, lack of integration of classroom practice into the programme, and others, were met with assurances that the growing body of international experience shows the results from distance education to be equal or slightly superior to those from traditional TTPs. The fact that such concerns are typical, moreover, has led to a great emphasis on building in evaluation as a critical part of distance learning design.

The CERP had not progressed as far with evaluation as it would have liked, in part because of an initial failure to include school principals in such exercises. What the programme has paid particular attention to was the selection of its trainers, setting high entry standards. The programme's heads were particularly proud of the fact that some even had PhDs, given the CERP's emphasis on inspiring a new generation of rural teachers.

Time and energy for discussion ran out at that point. An observation by the author: it would seem that there is a greater need to ensure comparison of goals when assessing distance versus traditional TTPs. The goals of the Brazilian programme would appear to be fairly modest in terms of the teaching standards it hoped to achieve; the Uruguayan case is one where the authorities have been prepared to pay a high price in order to achieve ambitious educational goals - an ambition facilitated by the immense difference of scale in that small country. Moreover, they were also very different programmes in terms of the type of undertaking in question, the Uruguayan case being of initial education and the Brazilian one of in-service training.

Session 2.2. (Panel Two) Experiences from Brazil, Chile, and Europe

The case study from Brazil presented in the second panel was also one of in-service training, however it was not a distance education exercise.¹¹ Its innovative approach lies in linking a particular challenge to improving teaching outcomes at the primary level, high repetition rates, to teacher training itself. It is considered an extremely interesting programme for that reason, as well as one which is well structured and targeted. To participate, teachers are required to undertake two hundred hours of additional training, orientated to the specific activities they will be leading with students. There is a supervisor for every ten teachers, with a highly structured training environment. Teachers focus their efforts on a simplified curriculum, designed to address the daily needs and interests of pupils. By this method, the programme aims to achieve ‘accelerated learning’ in pupils, in order to bring their age levels into line with their school grade. Results have been impressive, with participating students achieving an average of 2,13 grades in one school year.¹² The keys to the programmes success were held to be gaining the political support of local authorities (in turn facilitated by the high visibility of the programme in the mass media), effective programme management, adequate resourcing and the embedding of evaluation into programme design. There is a particular mystique generated by addressing the nagging problem of a culture of failure in children with learning difficulties.

Linking children’s interests with teaching, and teacher training, also lies at the heart of the Chilean innovation of rural ‘Micro Centres’ and Professional Working Groups among teachers.¹³ Teachers are trained and encouraged to develop teaching material in ways which link it to local conditions and issues, as experienced by children in their daily lives. The rural Micro Centres refer to collaboration among teachers in neighbouring rural primary schools, the Working Groups represent the extension of the programme to the secondary level. Thus the process, led by facilitators, is designed as an interactive one both among teachers themselves and among teachers and students, such as to improve motivation and create a learning-centred environment. The Micro Centres programme, now eight years-old, has to date reached 80 per cent of primary schools, and has achieved a substantial gain in learning among students, as evaluated by the programme heads. A key element of the programme’s success is that it is linked to a large scale, national project of educational reform.

The context and concerns of the third presentation and discussion were very different. Case studies came from East-Central and Western Europe and the main focus was on the

¹¹ Presentation given by Joao Batista Araujo e Oliveira (JM Asociados, Brazil), from his background paper ‘Learn as You Teach: The Accelerated Learning Program in Brazil and its Approach to Teacher Education.’ In this section on Panel Two, discussions from the floor are integrated into the presentation of the material by speakers.

¹² The programme was led and first implemented by the education authorities of the State of Maranao: the universe of students referred to in the above results was 3132.

¹³ Presentation by Beatriz Avalos (Chilean Education Ministry) ‘Educación inicial: nuevos modelos en Chile.’ See also her background paper: ‘Desarrollo Docente en el Contexto de la Insitución Escolar. Los Microcentros rurales y los grupos profesionales de trabajo en Chile.’

importance of the values underlying models and systems of education.¹⁴ This is an issue which has been highlighted by the experience of East-Central European countries in their transitions to democracy. Particularly, there is a problem in the gap between the rhetoric and reality of classroom practices, where a culture of participation, democracy and competitiveness is weak, or absent. As a result, the social prestige of teachers tends to be low, offering interesting parallels with Latin America in this regard. The West European experience has many lessons to offer in advances made in effective regulation of the teaching profession and linking of teaching to learning. Moreover, the positive educational records of countries in which teachers enjoy high social prestige, such as Ireland and Scotland, indicate the particular importance of this facet of educational reform.

Session Three: Teacher Quality: Incentives and Innovations

The presentations and discussions during this session, both in plenary and panel phases, moved between the themes of general trends (particularly regarding teachers' pay) and specific case studies of recent attempts to introduce performance incentives. The following treats the two sets of discussions separately.

3.1. Existing Incentives and the issue of teachers' pay

One possible interpretation of recent evidence gathered in an IDB project on the teaching profession seems to suggest that among teachers today the factors most influential in recruitment are the desire for employment and a sense of vocation.¹⁵ This is in large part a reflection of the fact that those becoming teachers are increasingly poor, working class women. Other factors such as the desire for social status, mobility, and even job security are of less importance. This situation would indicate that an extremely high price, both pedagogically and economically, is being paid for the high degree of job security built into existing structures, made the more perverse by the fact that it is not a crucial factor for recruitment. Economic logic would dictate that the costs of job security should be shifted towards, firstly, higher entrance salaries to attract better recruits and, secondly, greater pay differentials in the career structure such as to reward performance.

A World Bank study of teachers' pay levels in 12 Latin American countries shows that in 9/12 cases teachers are paid less than other professions, controlling for education levels, years of experience and gender.¹⁶ However, introducing number of working hours into the

¹⁴ The background paper is slightly different in focus, as indicated by its title. John Coolahan (National University of Ireland), 'Trends and Developments in Pre-Service Teacher Education in Western Europe.'

¹⁵ This section draws on the presentation of Claudio de Moura Castro (Inter-American Development Bank) 'An overview of who are the teachers in Latin America and what they think'. Although this presentation was made in the first, plenary session of the conference, it is placed in this section of the report for reasons of consistency of subject matter.

¹⁶ See background paper by Xiaoyan Liang (World Bank) 'Teacher Pay in 12 Latin American Countries: How does teacher pay compare to other professions, what determines teacher pay, and who are the teachers.'

equation, much of the difference disappears and teachers in some countries are even paid more than their counterparts. Pay differentials at different levels of career structures are extremely low, however. Nonetheless, rural teachers are, on average, paid considerably less than their urban colleagues.

Presentations on this theme from Panel One drew on the cases of Peru and Argentina, and were far from entirely consistent with those findings.¹⁷ Thus, in the case of Peru, research undertaken by GRADE indicates that teachers do rate job security very highly indeed. Findings also show a growing supply of teachers despite declining salaries levels and social status. Research in Argentina had controlled for the size of town/city. It found that teachers were relatively better paid than comparable professions in small provincial centres, a situation which was reversed in medium sized centres. On national average, however, there was no difference between pay for teachers and comparable professions. Recommendations from this study included a geographically differentiated approach to pay rises, to adjust the imbalances found.

Subsequent discussion of these findings revealed considerable discomfort in some quarters both on the reliability of the methodologies, resultant data and the policy recommendations from it. Participants who voiced their opinions felt that findings to the effect that teachers' pay is not low in comparison to comparable professions to be questionable and dangerous as a policy making tool. The feeling from the floor was that salary increases are necessary. However, this included a recognition of the need for incentives both for performance and, too, to attract better teachers to rural areas.

Similarly, in Panel Two, where discussion on this issue focused on the case of Brazil, there was generalised dissatisfaction with existing pay levels.¹⁸ It was agreed that the relationship between salaries and their professional performance was small, however, particularly in terms of children's learning. Moreover, the issue of salary increments needs to address not only individual scales, but also consider the importance of group incentives, with approaches based at the school level. The case of Brazilian municipalities, where by law their contribution to schools has tripled in recent years, and improved results achieved further indicates the importance of establishment centered approaches to incentives.

3.2. Innovations in creating performance incentives

The first case of an innovative incentive programme, presented in plenary session, came from Colombia.¹⁹ An ambitious national programme, it had succeeded in selecting one school from each of the 2,000 educational districts in the country as the recipient of a prize for community recognition of good standards, with one teacher in each selected for special distinction. In terms of implementation, therefore, it was considered a success story, since it

¹⁷ These were: Jaime Saavedra (GRADE, Peru) 'Incentivos en los sistemas de educación pública y privada en Perú' and Emiliana Vegas (Harvard University, USA), 'Remuneración de los maestros en Argentina.'

¹⁸ The Brazilian presentation was Guilherme Sedlacek (World Bank) and Kaizo Beltrao (Instituto de Pesquisa Economia Aplicada, IPEA, Brazil), 'Incentives, Pay and Teaching Career Structures in Brazil.'

¹⁹ Claudia Uribe (Harvard University, USA), 'Incentives adoptados para los maestros en Colombia.'

had been carefully negotiated with the national teachers' union, and had succeeded in a campaign of national consciousness raising on teacher quality. Factors accounting for success included an effective communications strategy, based on children's testimonies of their relationship with their teachers. The programme had also succeeded in its aim of attracting more teachers into the first primary grades, since these were the levels singled out as potential recipients for individual awards. No more systematic evaluation of the programme was carried out, however, and it was ended after a year for reasons which were thought to be political: government concessions to continuing discomfort on the part of the teachers' union on the introduction of incentive schemes.

Another, less successful experience, presented in Panel One, came from Mexico.²⁰ On the admission of the programme's head, a key drawback of the experience had been to base it on self-assessment by schools and teachers themselves - that is, without the strong community component of the Colombian case. This meant that, when teachers perceived that more pay meant more work, they simply refused to co-operate with the programme. Schools awarded themselves full marks for performance in a cursory fashion, school heads being particularly negligent in this respect. As a result, there were also (it would seem) distortions in the data drawn from the programme, whereby the least trained teachers appeared to get the best results.

A similar story emerged from the presentation of the Venezuelan experience, given in Panel Two.²¹ There is a growing problem of governability in Venezuelan schools, whose origins may be traced to a system intended to enshrine job security for teachers. The situation is made worse by the lack of incentives to apply for principal positions at schools. Teachers feel unappreciated in the public sector, and tend to gravitate to the private, despite the fact that pay levels there tend to be lower. This has led to a series of distortions in the system, whereby there are an increasing number of temporary, substitute staff, teaching posts are 'rented out' and there is a generalised decline in professionalism and standards.

Discussions from these cases revealed the following concerns. It is extremely difficult to create a culture of self-assessment in schools. Teachers may become temporarily enthusiastic about incentive programmes and make short-lived efforts at improvements, but long-term changes in working practices are another matter. Moreover, there is a potential danger in awarding success since schools with the worst problems may become further discouraged - when what they most need are injections of support. Not only that, there is also a danger in relying too heavily on prizes based on pupil and community satisfaction on the lines of 'I really like my Teacher', if this is done at the expense of paying attention to what children have actually learned.

Another issue was that of improving working conditions and other non-financial incentives for performance gains. There was a strong feeling from many quarters that the improvement of working conditions was a matter of considerable concern to teachers and, moreover, negotiation with teaching unions that delivers on this front can help in creating a climate for

²⁰ Victor Velásquez (Education Ministry, Mexico) 'Carrera magisterial en México.'

²¹ Josefina Bruni Celli (Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Administración, IESA, Venezuela), 'Incentivos oficiales y no oficiales en Venezuela.'

performance improvements. Furthermore, the issue of recognition for professional achievement needs to be combined with national strategies for raising the status of teachers; issues underlined, for example, by the Venezuelan case.

A different but not unrelated theme was of the need for realistic recognition of the weight of political factors in the implementation of any reforms attempting to create incentive structures. This already emerged in the Colombian national innovations programme as a factor accounting for its short duration; there was a general recognition of the endemic problem of such short-termism in the region. Another presentation from Colombia had also introduced the issue of outright clientelism and corruption in the management of teachers as another issue which cannot be ignored.²² Once more there was a general consensus as to the need to be aware of the political context of reform and design and implement reform strategies accordingly.

The case of the National Board of Teaching Standards of the United States, presented just afterwards, offered a very different approach to these issues.²³ It is based on an entirely optional approach to performance incentives, and one which relies on criteria for awarding excellence drawn from the heart of the teaching profession itself. Thus the National Board Test is one 'by and for teachers', and is considered the most prestigious teaching award in the country. Those teachers who pass the exacting National Board Test are awarded \$US 1,000 from State authorities in recognition of their achievement, and as an additional incentive (beyond prestige) for taking the test. However, the fee required to take the National Board Test is twice that sum, \$2,000 per teacher. Interestingly, fee costs are increasingly being met by the (State-based) teachers' unions, who are eager to attract and retain the best teachers within their jurisdictions. Teacher motivation for participation is overwhelmingly driven by professional satisfaction, not financial incentives.

Session Four: Teachers' Organisations and Professional Development

As there is growing recognition of the need to integrate teachers' organisations into educational reform efforts, so there is a need for better understanding of the organisations themselves. There is great heterogeneity among teachers' unions in the region, since their structure and ethos reflects the history of their respective States. Certain very general trends are discernible, however.²⁴

Growing confrontation between governments and unions arose from the 1970s in conjunction with the increased 'proletarianisation' of the teaching profession and worsening conditions of work and remuneration. This was exacerbated to the extent that subsequent reform efforts were in opposition to union interests, particularly in the case of decentralisation and increased community monitoring of performance. Confrontation was lessened to the degree that

²² Jesús Duarte (Inter-American Development Bank), 'La carrera docente en Colombia.'

²³ The presentation, 'Paying Teachers by Merit: the US experience', was given by John Guardia of the National Council of Teaching Standards.

²⁴ This introductory section is based on the presentation given by Daniel Filmus (FLACSO, Argentina), 'Visión general de las organizaciones del magisterio.'

governments gave concessions on these issues, given that there have been insufficient resources to grant pay rises, a process dating back in some cases to previous reform efforts of the 1970s and 1980s.

Nonetheless, there appears to be the beginning of a sea-change in the unions, at least in some cases. They are taking greater interest in teaching standards and are both leading and demanding training programmes. A factor explaining this shift would appear to be the changing class base of the profession. Whereas in past a predominantly middle class profession took for granted its social prestige, the new corps of working class teachers recognise the need to earn that standing and are motivated to do so.

These general observations were given concrete backing by the three cases presented, from Argentina, the Dominican Republic and Mexico. The Argentinean example was of the union of teachers of the State of Córdoba, whose membership is 27,000 of the 40,000 teachers in the State.²⁵ The union has progressively taken on responsibility for improving education quality and has instigated an ambitious programme of teacher training to that effect, including outreach courses and concerted efforts to work closely with both the national and international educational community in raising standards. The motivation has been to improve self-esteem among teachers, in which the ratification of their fundamental social responsibility is recognised as a critical element. Demands for improvements in working conditions also include the recognition that performance incentives represent an integral aspect of overall systemic gains.

Similar attitudes were apparent in the Dominican case, although this differed in being a national union strategy which had evolved in the course of a country-wide process of public-private concertation for educational reform.²⁶ Reform efforts came in the context of national recognition of the crisis in the education system, and have been an ongoing ten-year process initiated in 1990, known as the Plan Decenal. Pay rises across the board have been linked to additional performance increments and it is this, together with the attitudinal changes achieved in the unions, are what union leaders themselves consider to be the key factors accounting for the success of the reform.

The picture offered of the current situation in Mexico was more mixed.²⁷ Some general advances along similar lines have been made, but there is still considerable variation in attitudes from one State to another.

The brief discussion that followed included consideration of the issue of the links between teaching unions and political parties. The key issues emerged as being ones of transparency and clear separation of partisan concerns from matters of the common good. Union leaders

²⁵ Walter Mario Brahovac (Unión de Educadores de la Provincia de Córdoba, Argentina), 'Participación de los sindicatos en el mejoramiento de la calidad de la enseñanza en Argentina.'

²⁶ Melanio Paredes (Education Ministry, Dominican Republic), 'Resultados obtenidos mediante la reforma profunda del sistema educativo en la República Dominicana.'

²⁷ Alberto Arnaut Salgado (Colegio de Mexico, Mexico), 'El papel del Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación en la investigación educativa y en la formación del magisterio en México.'

who have been entirely open about their party affiliations, but who have maintained them separate and apart from concrete reform issues, would seem to have been the most successful in ensuring their continued legitimacy in all sectors of the teaching community. Where this has not happened, as in Venezuela, their legitimacy has been undermined.

There was a recognition from self-styled 'progressive' union leaders themselves that there is still a long way to go in terms of making such changes a region-wide transformation. Nonetheless, they were insistent that their experience of the benefits to be had from government-union co-operation were ones which could be replicated in other countries and contexts. In their opinion, it was not a question of unions capitulating to governments, but rather working constructively with them. A new culture of conflict resolution through negotiation can and should be promoted.

The Closing Session

The initial observation made by the first panelist, Vicky Colbert of Colombia, to the effect that the sessions had revealed more consensus on problems than solutions, set the tone for the closing session. Key points made and reiterated by both panelists and floor will be presented thematically in what follows, in a manner which also attempts to reflect the hierarchy of attention given to them.²⁸

- *Teacher training*

Although there is growing awareness of the vital need to look more closely at how teachers are trained and who trains them and what exactly they are being trained to do, there is still much ground to cover. As things stand, there may well be many contradictions between what we want teachers to do, and how and what they are being taught. It may be, however, that recognition of this situation is the first vital step towards rectifying it.

There is also still much room for improvement in terms of taking advantage of experienced teachers in the design and implementation of training programmes. The same applies for use of classroom time in training.

Equally importantly, closer links need to be made between initial and in-service training, in ways which take the above factors into consideration. Nonetheless there appear to be positive emerging directions of change on these fronts.

At the same time, greater attention to the form and structure of teacher training should not be at the expense of careful consideration of its content. Better understanding and dissemination of how children learn is also vital to the future design of the curricula of teacher training at all levels and stages. Moreover, this also needs to take into consideration the heterogeneity of the learning levels and abilities with which teachers have to contend in the average classroom.

²⁸ The other panelists were: Maria Helena Guimaraes de Castro (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais, INEP, Brazil), Ernesto Schiefelbein (Universidad Santo Tomás, Chile) and Germán Rama (Administración Nacional de Educación Pública, Uruguay). However, although much of the tone of the session was set by them in what was a quite brief closing session, comments from the floor are also, as noted, integrated into this section.

Continued efforts to pay attention to issues of teachers' attitudes and approaches to children and their ability to generate trust, even affection, is also needed.

- *Teaching Standards*

There is greater clarity in setting standards for what children should learn than there is in setting the teaching standards that may lead to those desired learning levels.

Using student learning performance as the key criteria for setting teaching standards is not without its own challenges. Nonetheless, pursuing standard setting efforts in that direction may be a constructive, practical way forward. It should also make a positive contribution to the design of teacher training.

It may well be the case that there is no one model of teaching standards that can be applied to all contexts either within or across countries. Standards cannot be removed from cultural contexts. Moreover, they must also face the challenge of accommodating to differences in learning and teaching styles in students and teachers, respectively.

With this, greater understanding is needed of how schools in unfavourable socio-economic contexts nonetheless achieve good results. This includes better understanding of the contribution of effective team work within schools and how that itself can be achieved. There may well be a danger of confusion in terms of how much the educational and training levels of teachers is or is not a determining factor in student performance.

- *Incentives*

Although the conference may have made some progress in terms of understanding of what effective teachers should do, it has gone much less far in clarifying how to get there. This applies also to the questions of training and standards, but certainly, too, to incentive structures.

Many existing incentive structures are badly designed and do little or nothing to improve the quality of education. There still immense problems, for example, whereby teachers with the least experience and training are working in those areas where they are most needed. Strategies for introducing incentive structures which are based on effective mass communication and consciousness raising campaigns would appear to be one useful way forward.

Better understanding is still needed, however, both of how to use pay structures and, too, the importance of non-financial incentives. In terms of pay structures, the debate has been inconclusive. One way forward may be in further international comparisons which take into account GDP per capita in determining respective pay and performance levels in both developed and less developed countries.

Improving the social standing of teachers is also essential. This is partially a function of improvement of pay levels, but far from exclusively so. National efforts to recognise and re-

emphasise the intrinsic value of teachers and their contribution to society needs to be pursued on all possible fronts.

Concluding Remarks

Subsequent appraisal of the conference by participants was highly favourable. Inevitably, however, given the breadth and complexity of the issues under consideration, there was a sense that more questions were raised than actually resolved: a necessary and positive step forward of itself. It is perhaps helpful, for the ongoing research and reform agenda, to highlight those areas which appeared to need the greatest further attention, supplementary to points made in the closing session.

Regarding the question of teachers' pay, it was striking that there is considerable resistance in many circles to accepting that pay levels are not necessarily universally low. This appeared to stem both from motives of empirical misgivings and, too, more emotional responses. It may be therefore, on the one hand, that the issue is not settled technically to the degree that analysts might believe. In this respect, it is probably the case that greater disaggregation in the presentation and analysis of data could be helpful, as well as more detail and clarity in comparisons of teachers' pay with that of other professions. On the other hand, it may also be true that more measured, nuanced approaches to framing the issue in terms of policy implications is also needed, given its sensitivity. Greater efforts to enlist the cooperation of teachers' organisations in both research and policy recommendations would probably form a necessary component of such strategies. In this respect, too, deeper understanding and wider dissemination of success stories such as union involvement in the Dominican Republic's Plan Decenal would be helpful. Naturally, all such efforts must, as conference participants stressed at different junctures, pay all due attention to the political context of reform efforts, and at local as well as national levels.

It was also notable that there was some tension in attitudes to individual versus collective performance incentives. These stemmed in part from the technical difficulties of linking individual teachers' classroom practices to the learning abilities of their pupils. However, it also appeared to be based on the experience that team work among teachers and the creation of an esprit de corps in schools is a crucial component of success stories. Individual and collective incentives are not necessarily mutually exclusive and it may be the case that both are desirable, however the essential point is achieving clarity and coherence in reform strategies. The avoidance of schemes which have the effect of further discouraging poor performing schools and teachers, where what they may require is added support, is another consideration.

Once more, however, implementation clearly remains a considerable problem. Cases where effective mass communication strategies encouraged broad community support, as in the national incentive programme in Colombia and the accelerated learning programme in Brazil would seem to be one key dimension. However where teachers – and/or teachers unions – were not made full stakeholders in the process, their weakness was also demonstrated, as in the Colombian case. In this regard, then, it would appear to be vital to pay greater attention to the issue of gaining sustained teacher support in the implementation of incentives schemes, in

which a first step might be gathering further case study material of cases in which this particular dimension has been achieved.

The above observations also need to be seen in the light of another striking finding, which the individual case studies did on the whole appear to bear out, namely that pay is not the key motivating factor for teachers today. There seems to be a further tension between the motivating factor of vocation (considered extremely important), and the issue of social prestige (considered generally low). One of the most encouraging stories to emerge on this question was from Córdoba, Argentina. The teachers' representative was convinced that the low social status of so many entering the teaching profession was creating a desire on the part of a new generation of teachers to enhance their social standing by regaining the prestige of their profession. The recognition that this entailed improving standards, including by accepting incentive structures, was the key and most positive element. Once more, then, improving our understanding of these processes, and how they may be encouraged, would seem a vital step forward.

Another quite general impression left by the conference is that there is greater clarity regarding teacher training than standard setting. Training that focuses on learning, and pays due attention to integrating initial with in-service training is emerging as the norm – although this still begs the question of how far this is being socialised among the wider teaching profession and community. Standard setting is probably an area in which continued analysis of international experience would be particularly helpful, given that it remains a relatively new issue in Latin America itself. Clearly, however, stringent efforts would be needed in understanding the social contexts involved in the different countries as these have impinged on educational outcomes. Here, too, it would no doubt be important to pay close attention to disaggregated school and pupil performance, controlling for their socio-economic milieux.

Finally, an issue which the conference raised at various junctures, but did not develop, was that of the critical role of school heads. It was notable, for example, that school heads emerged as the allies of improving standards and assessing teachers in some cases, such as that of the United States, and their enemy in others, such as Mexico. Better understanding of the factors accounting for such differences would appear to be helpful. In this respect, analysis of the levels of school autonomy and the institutional framework of different education systems, notably their degree of decentralisation within the State would be a key issue. The question of pay incentives would also appear to be important. Indeed, given the fundamental and central importance of school heads in improving (or undermining) teacher performance, it might be desirable to focus further efforts on addressing the specific issues relating to them in particular, as well as the teaching profession as a whole.