

Maria Amelia Palacios Vallejo:

# The task of designing and implementing a comprehensive policy for teachers

The Ministry of Education decided to adjust its structure and created the General Direction of Teacher Development, appointing Maria Amelia Palacios, renowned educator who, in the following interview, reveals the details and the possibility of a comprehensive policy for teachers in Peru, a task that arouses great expectation and implies high demands.



LILIAM HIDALGO

**Tarea:** *The first question relates to this new General Direction of Teacher Development (DIGEDD in Spanish). In recent years there were only teacher promotion units or others with similar names, but they have been 'nooks' within teacher education directions. What does this change in the structure of the Ministry mean in relation to the importance of the teachers' issue? What made this new direction possible?*

**Maria Amelia Palacios Vallejo (MAPV):** This is an initiative of the Minister of Education, concerned with giving teachers particular attention as a public policy. Not that in the past there were no policies for teachers but there were scattered in many offices of the Ministry of Education (MINEDU) and there was not this idea of one office in charge of all policies that affect teachers' lives, career development, working conditions, wages, training and assessment: a Direction in charge of this set of

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INTERVIEW BY SEVERO CUBA AND LILIAM HIDALGO  
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policies that were under the responsibility of a number of offices which did not coordinate with each other. So the reason of this office is to implement a comprehensive policy that includes all the necessary dimensions for the professional development of teachers.

Some examples: Everything related to the administration of the payroll, returns and assignments is in MINEDU under the Personnel Unit; training depends on the Direction of Higher Education; the evaluation was, in the previous administration, the task of Strategic Planning; there was indeed a Unit in charge of teacher promotion or professional development, but it had very little funding and little strength to define policies concerning teacher incentive and career development.

At the end of last March, it was decided, then, to create the DIGEDD, which became operational in April. The Law of Budget had defined, in one of its articles, the need to establish a Direction of Teacher Evaluation. This article made it possible to create a direction with greater ambition, which sees teacher performance evaluation but also the development of teachers.

So, on March 31, the first adjustment to the Rules of Organization and Functions of the Ministry of Education was approved. I say "first adjustment" because the Law on Organization and Functions is not yet approved, so that the second and final adjustment will be made later this year, and we can take a real institutional reform of the Ministry in 2013. In short, this "first adjustment" has allowed the creation of the DIGEDD to design a comprehensive policy for teacher development, but the Direction of Higher Education, specifically, the Direction of Teacher Higher Education, still has some functions concerning teacher education and on service training.

The DIGEDD has taken three functions that are very important - other than training, because there is no development without teacher training, which is still under the Direction of Teacher Higher Education. The first of these additional functions is to design and implement the assessment processes to enter the public education service - by contract or appointment - not just classroom teachers but also of those in leadership positions, such as directors or deputy directors of schools or educational coordinators (the so called "senior positions"), and

even recruitment for the selection of directors for Local Education Management Units (UGEL), the highest position in the education management career line. All this will be done by the Direction of Teacher Evaluation.

Both teachers and those in leadership positions must be evaluated every three years, additionally to the evaluation for promotion. Those who approve their performance evaluation are entitled to apply for an assessment for promotion to level up in the career. Thus, these four types of assessment - entrance, residence, promotion and access to leadership positions - are part of the responsibility of the Direction of Teacher Evaluation. And this is a very important task and of great responsibility.

A second Direction of Teaching Career and Welfare will be responsible for ensuring the improvement of working conditions of teachers, including physical and occupational health, work environment and an institutional environment conducive to good human relations in schools.

***Tarea: Would the Rules of the new Law be in charge of this Direction, for example?***

**MAPV:** Exactly. Public Career, the law that is going to be discussed in Congress, is a proposal that has come from this Direction because the Career precisely defines working conditions, including pay scale for teachers. In short, its reason to exist is to define and implement policy guidelines that allow progressively improving teachers' social and working health conditions.

This Direction is also responsible for the stimuli and incentives for good teaching performance. In this direction we have developed a program with the Ministry of Health in Lima and Callao, of improvement of school climate and teacher stress, a major occupational health problem in the sector which is now in pilot phase.

A third Direction - the Teaching Innovation - will handle building the capacities of teachers for innovation, and has a double task. First, strengthening all the capabilities necessary for teachers to systematize and theorize their own practices and to inform them to society and their peers. We are committed to developing programs that we hope can be replicated and then assumed by the regions. We have to design the program, pilot it in a



first experiment, but then we will leave to the interested regions to implement it. It is a program that seeks to develop the skills of those teachers who want to tell their experience and contribute to pedagogical knowledge theorizing on their own practice and to disseminate it among their peers and society.

The second task is to show society what the pedagogical knowledge of teachers implies - teachers who develop their work in a series of tacit knowledge based on their teaching practice. Part of this knowledge is supported by theories but also by the teacher responses to new situations: it is never possible to find all the answers to the teaching or learning in books.

It is said that science is not based on the particular, but in education, in fact, every child is different and presents different challenges to teachers, so they have to find answers in their practice. We should give teachers the opportunity to show all the answers they find to educational problems and communicate them to society, so that we understand the complexity of the profession and the challenges it faces daily.

A British researcher has made a study of the number of decisions to be taken by a teacher in a school day: the teacher has to decide whether to explain Juanita's or Pedrito's questions; must know if the student broke a rule of coexistence and, if so, immediately correct it. Added to this, there are daily decisions on what to teach and how to teach a particular group of students, they are not all equal.

The Ministry wants the teachers knowledge to be known by society. For that we have a number of initiatives, such as a television program that we hope to launch in September this year and to be called *Teachers who inspire*, to show these good practices of teachers who have managed, somehow, to change the lives of their students.

**Tarea:** *From your comments, it seems that there is a lonely teacher: he responds, he writes ... But where does he or she process these things? Do you anticipate that there will also be a pedagogical, institutional or social space in which the teacher can do this "science" of everyday teaching?*

**MAPV:** Yes indeed: education and teaching are collective jobs. I believe that no teacher can claim everything a student learns as his only job: each student benefits from other colleagues' skills. To learn history, for example, if no communication colleagues develop reading comprehension in students, those who teach history can hardly ask students to consult sources on a specific topic of this subject. At school, the teaching has to be collaborative, all teachers influence the child, and we all develop the skills a child requires to grow as a person and to participate in the different dimensions of social life.

Then, the knowledge related to pedagogy has to be collective and is usually done in communities of reflection and practice, which does not mean that there is also individual knowledge. For example, if I teach history, I have the responsibility to make teaching more attractive to students; I have to know the best procedure to drive the child to really learn history. That's my responsibility, but I also need to talk with colleagues who teach the same discipline to share common problems and methodologies.

Teaching cannot be solitary; its complexity requires reflection and awareness of others, not just the teachers. Teachers often have to ask for help, reflections and advice from other professionals in other disciplines or the discipline that we teach. One specializes in the teaching of the discipline, and is not necessarily a historian or researcher in History.

**Tarea: The Direction of Teacher Development has completed and begun the spreading of the Good Teaching Performance Framework for discussion. We know we are in a process of consultation, but we want to talk about what is expected of this instrument, how to make it an effective tool for the development of the teaching profession in the country.**

**MAPV:** In addition to the Law of Public Career submitted to Congress, the other major product of this Direction in its first three months has been the *Good Teaching Performance Framework*. However, I must say that this is not a creation of DIGEDD: we received an important work developed for nearly three years by the National Board of Education, and what we did was to review and discuss the proposal with specialists and experts, after which adjustments were made to the *Framework*.

This *Framework* is important because we need to build a common understanding of what good teaching means. And this must be a shared understanding not only among teachers, but also with the State and society. Parents, teachers and the State have to agree on what a good teacher is, because it helps the State to formulate policies that help to realize that good teaching. It also helps the teacher to worry about developing skills implicit in that good teaching, and in the case of parents, to do their part, i.e., to see that the teacher who teaches their children has these skills.

So, based on this social agreement, in this common vision of what good teaching is, we can walk in the same direction: the State, teachers and society. It is supporting and doing everything necessary together to have teachers with the skills implicit in this *Framework*.

The *Framework* defines 9 skills developed in 40 tasks. This is what we are now spreading and reflecting with such important actors as the teacher trainers in achieving this *Framework*. We have just finished the stage of reflection sessions with an important set of public pedagogic institutes. We have not done it with the private ones yet. We also want to do it with universities, other very important teacher training centers, and then, with the protagonists, i.e. the Basic Education teachers. We wish to have wide reflection and gather input to adjust it. We do not intend to change it entirely, because it comes

from a long consultation process, but we are collecting suggestions for improvement.

As I said, the *Framework* includes Basic Education - Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary -, and defines generic skills, not specialized. So you will not find in it the skills for a teacher of special education or intercultural bilingual education, but the skills that every teacher should have in relation to the IBE or in connection with special needs children have.

First, our goal is for this *Framework* to help steer policies for initial and in-service training. Second, we need it to guide the evaluation. As already indicated, it has 9 general competencies and 40 specific tasks, but these tasks cannot be evaluated. For evaluation, two tasks have to be done: first, to define levels of achievement, levels of performance by each career stage of each of the skills; and the second, to work on indicators that are measurable. Then with these indicators, items or evaluation criteria for observation of classroom practice are elaborated.

This involves quite a task to be done from this *Framework* to make it a specific assessment instrument. That is the task we have in the Direction of Teacher Evaluation. And that means that for each evaluation, teachers will be informed of what competencies will be evaluated according to the level of the career in which they are. That is, a teacher who is in the last third of his career and has risen to the sixth level, for example, he will be evaluated differently in a particular skill comparing to the evaluation of a teacher who has just begun and is on his first level. Obviously, the first will have to be more demanding than the second, because it has to do with years of experience, classroom practice and training opportunities. The teacher who is on the sixth level will surely have a master's or maybe even a doctorate, while the teacher at the first level probably has his degree but no master yet, and no post-graduate studies. I think it's very important that teachers know this, so they do not fear the evaluation.

**Tarea: Will it also be disaggregated by level and specialty?**

**MAPV:** Exactly. The evaluation has, say, a generic part, as general pedagogical knowledge that every teacher





should have, and will have specific segments concerning the assessment on knowledge of the discipline.

**Tarea: According to the Framework.**

**MAPV:** Sure. We will not assess skills that are not defined in the *Framework*.

**Tarea: What is expected from the spreading and reflection process? Are we in a time of consolidation of Framework?**

**MAPV:** After setting the text, it will be uploaded on the Ministry's website, in the PerúEduca section, and those who wish to will be able to send their proposals up to a certain period. It will then be a new opportunity to get input from civil society. But with teachers, we are going to contact directly through seminars.

**Tarea: Can you tell us what goals for this year is a Direction that was created just three months ago intending to achieve? How do you expect to end the year in December?**

**MAPV:** Well, first we would expect to close December with a Teacher Reform Law and its Regulations approved and, therefore, having increased the salaries of all teachers of the career. That would be a great way to celebrate the end of the year. Second: a *Good Teaching Performance Framework* and the complete design of the model of teacher evaluation approved, not yet implemented, but with the whole strategy for 2013. I mean, with the models, processes and finished instruments.

It may also happen that the year ends with the first assessment of relocation of teachers who come from the Law of Teachers (Ley del Profesorado) to the Teacher Reform Law. If approved by Congress, the latter provides that teachers who make this move and that will be located in the first and second level will have two opportunities

to be placed in a level of the career, from the second to the sixth. If the Law was passed in October, the first assessment will be made before the end of the year, so some of the teachers would be placed under the new scale by the end of the year. If it does not happen, this evaluation will be early next year. It all depends on when the Law and its Regulations pass.

Following the evaluations, we also hope to have a design an approved clear assessment for directors in late 2012. Remember that these officials are in these positions just temporarily throughout the country and there has not been recruitment processes to select those who can remain in office for three years. We have been leaving this important function of management and deputy management, plus other senior positions, in temporary positions for many years so we're trying to end the year with a complete design of the evaluation of principals, with all its instruments defined, the strategy to evaluate and the schedule, so that they can be effectively evaluated from 2013.

We should also have a *Good Principal Performance Framework* or at least with good practice criteria for principals that serves as a guide for the evaluation. We think this should be given priority because principals will also play an important role in the performance evaluation of teachers. So we need to have principals who have not only been ratified by an order of the regional directions, but also have been evaluated in order to assume the positions, because it is with this cohort of principals that we will be able to make a more accurate assessment.

In a nutshell, at the end of the year we should have a design of the performance evaluation, perhaps implemented an initial assessment of relocation from second to sixth career level for teachers who come from the Law of Teachers, and also the design of the principals' assessment.

We hope to have also approved the incentive plan to begin implementation in 2013 with funding from the budget. That is, we would estimate the cost and we would have these resources included in next year's budget. Hopefully that is accomplished, because the budget is approved in November.

Regarding occupational health or improving the conditions of institutional climate and stress prevention pilot program, at the end of the year, we hope to have completed the pilot and have it ready for widespread.

With respect to innovation, we hope to have the teacher creativity program in place, because that is the program that will train the first group of teachers in the country that has been selected to enter the pilot program that will develop their abilities to systematize innovation or leading practices in their schools, and that will finish in the systematization and publication of these experiences. Furthermore, not only do we want them to narrate their experience, but for this experience to have a theoretical framework, an explanation, a solid pedagogical argument, that supports why and how decisions were made and explain why they had good results with these innovations or these good classroom practices.

We intend to work with a small group of teachers -25 or 30 - who could post their experiences, so we will be "gathering" a library of teaching practices in Peru at any level of Basic Education, although in the future we would like to have also a similar collection of best practices of teacher training in other areas. This is the teacher creativity program that will be launched later this year.

By then, we will also have issued, on Channel 7, no less than six editions of the TV program *Teachers who inspire*. It will show these good practices of teachers, over which various specialists invited to the set will reflect. I also believe that these cases will be an excellent material for the training of future teachers. This is another initiative.

I do not want to promise more, but I'd also like to have the beginning of the digital library of teachers in MINEDU website, i.e., a library at PerúEduca with essential readings for every teacher. We will have to

make a very careful selection and also refereed so it is not only a decision of the Ministry of Education but to have a kind of advisory group to tell us what book to include (for example, "Diario Educar" by Constantino Carvallo) so we do every effort to obtain permission to digitalize the text.

**Tarea: In this abundance of commitments, what would the expected role of the regions be?**

**MAPV:** Well, the role of the regions is strategic: it is not possible to implement a teacher policy without regions. As you know, they are responsible for in-service training and the payment; they also administrate schools and teachers in their jurisdictions, and decide a number of administrative processes with teachers.

Taking into account the three functions of DIGEDD, I can give examples of what role corresponds to the regions. In the Direction of Evaluation, evaluation is, by law, a task shared with the regions. Obviously, the rectorry corresponds to MINEDU, which designs the evaluation and the instruments, but execution and implementation are made with regional governments. The implementation has a national stage and local stage, and it is in the latter that the Regional Government is involved with its decentralized offices and the schools. As you can see, there is a differentiated participation in the evaluation: some functions are exclusive of the Ministry of Education, such as the design, model and instrumental, and others are shared with regional governments and UGEL, Regional Directions and their offices, including schools.

I forgot to say that in the case of the evaluation of new teachers, even the design of the instruments is responsibility of the regions. There we want to establish a relationship of shared work, in the sense that we want to have meetings, such as an annual workshop to assess the quality of the items and tests, because it is necessary to improve the capacity of regions to develop quality items in their teacher assessment tests. We want that in every region there are specialized testing teams. This is a complex task that requires special preparation.

This second semester, we will organize a workshop with experts from the regional management directions