

Actions and measures from the results

Students National Assessment 2008: Ritual Or Strategy?

The analysis of the results of the Students National Assessment 2008 suggests the authorities of the sector to change the current educational policies and consider the implementation of the National Educational Project and the regional educational projects and, from them, adjust the strategic plans. It points out that the number of boys and girls who do not reach satisfactory results is worth doing it.

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Tarea

Those of us who agree that *the best proof of any given democratic society lies on its children* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer), find serious reasons to be concerned about the results of the Students National Assessment (SNA). It is not a pessimistic vision, nor are we trying to see the glass "half empty". Ours is, simply, a previous reflection on what we think should be done.

We are motivated by the idea that evaluations aim at enhancing educational processes. We also take on account one the objectives of the SNA 2008 pointed in its official presentation: make "decisions that enhance the quality in the learnings of the students" (MINEDU-UMC, 2009).

The report says that between 2007 and 2008 there has been an increase of 1,1% in Reading Comprehension and 2,2% in Math in primary students of second grade who reach the expected result. This could be good news if, from an optimistic perspective, we took it as the beginning of an increasing tendency. Unfortunately for us, as a country, despite of that, only 17 in every 100 students understand what they read, 53 are in process and 30 cannot do it at all. Therefore, it is impossible not to ask: what decisions should be made in such a situation? What should continue and what changes should be done in the current plans?

PRIORITIES OF ATTENTION FROM THE RESULTS

If we consider the results in public schools (the previous refer to private schools), the situation worsens: 12 (11,9%) students in every 100 get satisfactory results in Reading Comprehension, which are the same as the

2007 results, and only 8 in Math, although it has increased 1,6 points comparing to 2007. Even though achievements in education are processes that usually take several years to be visible, the magnitude of the percentages in the students who do not get good results (88% in Reading Comprehension and 92% in Math) make us question for the effects of the current educational policy, specially the ones expressed in national programs such as the National Teacher Training Program (NTTP), "A Laptop for every child", distribution of materials, which were designed to impact in the learnings. The current results have to be revised facing their original objectives and strategies.

For public schools in rural areas, the results in Reading Comprehension are even lower than the 2007 results: only 6 (5,5%) in every 100 obtain the expected results, and although there has been an increase in Math (1,7 comparing to the previous year), we reach a 6% of satisfactory results. In both cases, 94 students did not make it: it is not difficult to conclude where the most needed population is located.

Paying attention to rural schools demand a serious policy of validation of the cultural and pedagogical diversity, and understand it, for example, as the construction or strengthening of models specially designed for these places and budgets – not formats – that take care of the complexity of the rural areas. According to the results in Reading Comprehension, there is a gap in the system between 7,8% of children in multigrade or one-teacher schools that reach the expected level and a 20,7% from the standard schools. Two criteria to produce affirmative actions should focus on multigrade rural schools.

From the results by region, Amazon regions – Loreto, Ucayali and San Martín – would be among the priority attention, both in Reading Comprehension and Math. The traditional scope of interest in the Amazon region can change from the natural resource and its potential income-generator toward the learning necessities of its population, specially boys and girls.

A logic conclusion on the figures of the report is that these regions should be considered priority in the Strategic Program for Learning Achievements – right now they are not -, and have better financial conditions from the Results Budget Program. Similar situation would be found in the Andean regions, Huánuco and Apurímac. Unfortunately, the SNA 2008 results emphasizes the devastating results in these five regions (0,7% in Math and 2.1% in Reading Comprehension) which have been the same since the 2007 evaluation.

INTERCULTURAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION (IBE)

Students of the fourth grade of primary education from schools that are implementing an Intercultural Bilingual Education Program in their mother tongue, Quechua (Cuzco, Collao), Aymara, Awajún and Shipibo-Conibo were also evaluated. In Spanish as a second language, fourth grade instead of second grade was chosen because the Quality Control Unit of the Ministry of Education (UMC in Spanish) has the hypothesis that "since many native speaking boys and girls come from oral languages, discover a writing world for the first time on their first day in class [...] assessing at the end of the fourth cycle – fourth grade of primary - guarantees that students have approached writing during at least four years".

We congratulate the effort of this Unit for recognizing diversity, and its impact in the cultural and equity policies for these populations, because, as we know, evaluation, as well as contents and educational strategies, are cultural products, elaborated by social sectors through a selective process of emphasis and exclusions that can be considered the "monopoly" of knowledge and values in a hegemonic cultural tradition with not much space for other types of knowledge, values and visions (Trapnell, 2008). Until recently, people with a native language different from Spanish, had been invisibilized in the process and subject to a national evaluation only in Spanish.

Giving priority to rural areas demands a serious policy on valuing the cultural and pedagogic diversity, meaning, for example, the construction and strengthening of attention models especially designed for these places.

Despite the advance, the process shows some challenges. One of them comes from the UMC's statement on the non representative character of the results in the IBE schools: "As long as there is no a common definition on those schools. That is to say, the identification of them varies according to each source of information". It is urgent to define when a school is an IBE school, because this will allow us to have specific information in order to make the necessary educational planning, from teacher training and teaching materials to ad-hoc evaluation mechanisms. The necessity of statistics is important because only with precise data there will be institutions that work along a human rights approach. How many teachers are needed? How many books are needed and in which languages? How many boys and girls are there, and in which levels? (Vásquez, 2008). In this way we will be able to know if the policy actions are obtaining the expected results.

The results of the Students National Assessment in Native Languages (SNANL) 2008 are alarming, considering that second grade has not been evaluated but fourth grade:

In every 100 students

63 quechuas (Cuzco, Collao)

76 aimaras

86 awajún

90 shipibos-conibo

... did not obtain the expected results in Reading Comprehension.

After four years in school

19,2% de quechuas

14,1% de aimaras

3,1% de shipibos

2,2% de awajún

... made it in Spanish as a second language.

These percentages are not only numbers: they represent people, girls and boys to whom we as a country have denied their *right to education*, which means, as we know, not only to go to school but fundamentally to learn.

It is needed a vision that goes beyond national averages and which sees clearly the places and people in great vulnerability. Although we have been warned that it is not possible to generalize, it is evident that people with a native language different from Spanish are in the most critic situation. Who is responsible for these results? What is it needed to declare this population a priority? What does this priority mean?

STUMBLING BLOCKS

The UMC report also includes a number of factors that would be associated with the low results in the learnings of the students of fourth grade of IBE primary, among those: "Teachers who have serious difficulties in managing the native language; 41% of the teachers who do not read and write in the native language do classes in Spanish, 76% of teachers who teach reading and writing in the native language claimed not having received training on IBE".

We agreed on the report's perspective that there are several factors associated with low results in learning and also shared the focus on the teacher. In fact, teachers have an important role in the process – although not only one -. Having identified this actor, it is expected to have measures with an immediate impact, from a long term perspective. Currently there are three processes regarding teachers that deserve revision and decisions due to their direct impact in the learnings.

One of them is the recruiting process, regarding which managing native languages and IBE specialization should be respected and taken into account in all the country as a priority criterion in order to contract new teachers for the indigenous areas. The "strict merit order" criterion used at present has to consider it. A similar situation is presented in the national evaluations for teachers, which are still the same for all kinds of teachers. The consequences of both measures are in front of us: teachers who do not master the native language and students who do not learn. Immediate significant changes would

allow a decrease in 76% of the teachers who teach reading and writing in the native language without having received training in IBE for the SNA 2010, with the impact that supposes in the teaching – learning processes for these populations.

But maybe the most concerning situation is the one produced as a consequence of the Decree 006-2007-ED and the Ministerial Resolution 0017-2007-ED, in which 14¹ is set as a requirement mark to enter to pedagogical institutions. This measure is thought to reduce the oversupply of teachers in the country, as well as to attract better applicants. Its main objective – it claims – is to improve quality in education. We agreed on that, however, there are some considerations that have not taken into account in this “standard for all the country” measure, due to which we are facing the opposite effect.

For populations with a native language, coverage with IBE programs is limited. The number of teachers trained in an IBE proposal does not cover the necessity of attention in these populations, which is why there is no oversupply as in other contexts. However, and as consequence of the norm mentioned, there has not been a single IBE student in a public pedagogic school for the last three years in all the country. If this situation continues, initial teacher training in IBE will finish in two years. Who will teach indigenous boys and girls? How will bad results be reverted? What is the concept of quality we are using?

Inequity problems appear when trying to achieve equality using standard measures in a diverse reality. The situations described are violating the rights of indigenous populations (Peruvian Constitution, General Law of Education, ILO Convention 169).

FINDING LIGHTS AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Paradoxically, the recommendations on what to do come from the same sector: the UMC recommends – among others – “ensure, according to the established procedures, that teachers who work in IBE schools know local culture and speak and write in the native language. Likewise, identify and offer pedagogical sustainable and permanent support that enables the development and consolidation of the IBE schools”. Consultancies made by the Ministry say the same (García Laguna, 2009): “Blend the threshold of 14 as a minimum condition of access through regulations that define clear rules for regional institutions and for the Ministry itself, which is feasible and efficient: politically possible”. Measure to which the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Jungle agrees. (Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana - AIDSESP, 2009).

We greet the action and effort of elaborating and handing: a Report of Results for each school, directed to the principals of the schools; a Guide for the Analysis of the SNA 2008 for teachers; an Individual Report per student, destined for fathers

and mothers considering the four languages evaluated, apart from Spanish. These documents also present recommendations (actions) to improve the results obtained by the students, for example at school level: “Call all teachers of second and third grade of primary and analyze with them the results. Establish goals and activities to improve reading and number skills and include them in their Annual Plan”. Indeed, it is expected that the results in the performance of the students activate some measures in the families, schools, local educational management units, regions and the country.

We know that regional educational directors and social development managers were given information on the results of the schools of their districts. We, as members of the Participatory Regional Educational Committees (Consejos Participativos Regionales de Educación - CO-PARE), networks or other organizations, should learn

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1 T.Note: Passing grades in Peru are 0 to 20. Schools usually use 11 as the minimum passing grade.



what have been the effects regarding the focalization of the intervention projects and programs that will be implemented from the results and seeking better learnings in the students of each region; if not, promote their design and implementation.

Under the decentralization framework, it is useful to question for the necessity of changes in how “the nation” is understood and built; the definition of the specific functions in the competences shared (what the Ministry of Education and the regional governments should do); the efficiency of short teacher training programs; the increase in the budget in education by 0,25% of the GDP (according to the National Agreement), assigning the Achievements in Learning Strategic Program a budget that allows it to go beyond regular expenses and to invest effectively in the improvement in the educational results.

Valuable reports such as the SNA 2008 should allow us to affirm the consensus (National Educational Project, regional educational projects) and from them, adjust strategic plans (if exist), identify good practices and changes (learn from our own experience, specially the failures) and establish priorities using and equity criterion (most vulnerable populations) expressed in concrete decisions with impact in the short and medium term. Without results, evaluating is no longer a strategic measure to improve quality but a ritual without any sense. **t**

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