

# Reforming Education in Chile: A Survey of New Teachers

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## 1. Introduction

Education reform in Chile has been a principal national objective since 1990, with a major concern being the improvement of the quality of public education, especially of poor children (Carlson, 2000). Teacher quality and teaching practice are central factors that greatly influence educational outcomes and the Chilean reform effort has included a programme to improve the quality of initial teacher education in Chilean universities (Avalos, 2002). This study was designed to provide data on the experiences of young teachers when they begin to teach and it captures the experiences of the teacher cohorts that immediately precede the graduates of the reform who will begin to teach in 2003. An exploratory study with a limited budget, it also aimed at the evaluation of the study methodology so as to improve the design of future studies (Fondecyt, 2002).

## 2. The survey

In September 2002, young teachers from two contrasting regions of the country, Metropolitan Region (RM) and 8<sup>th</sup> Region, were asked to complete a detailed questionnaire about their teaching conditions, performance and concerns. In addition, 15 of these teachers participated in in-depth qualitative interviews and classroom observations of their teaching practices. The final result was a sample of 242 kindergarten, primary and secondary teachers teaching in 150 municipal (public schools), private subvention (private schools receiving public funds) and private paid schools. About a third of Chile's population resides in the RM. Teachers were stratified by school location into low, medium and high socio-economic groups in the RM and by urban and rural in the 8<sup>th</sup>.

## 3. Teaching conditions

The teachers were asked a number of questions about their teaching conditions including the overall climate of their school; the quality of the teachers' room; the frequency of meetings of teachers; the adequacy of the various facilities and equipment; and the availability of adequate time to do their job. School climate. Nearly 70% of the teachers found the overall climate of their school quite good and only 3% found it unsatisfactory. Teachers' room. There was a teachers' room in all but 5% of the schools. While some 60% of the teachers found the teachers' room pleasant and quiet, less than a quarter of the teachers reported that the school provided consulting material like books, journals etc in the room. This problem was widespread but particularly severe for the teachers in the RM schools located in poor districts. Meetings of teachers. The teachers were asked about the

frequency of meetings of teachers. One third of the teachers taught in schools that did not have a teachers' meetings (at least once a year). On the other hand, one quarter of the teachers were teaching in schools that had a teachers' meeting at least once a week. This is a very troubling divide which needs to be addressed as it has serious implications for the ability of teachers to improve their performance by learning from their peers. Availability of time. The teachers were asked about the availability of adequate time for them to perform their different tasks. Two thirds of the teachers felt that there was not sufficient time available to do their jobs properly. What is very serious is that more than 70% of all the teachers felt there was not sufficient time to help the pupils who most needed help. Sufficient time for such help is essential if new teachers are to be able to improve significantly the quality of educational results.

#### **4. Teaching concerns**

Teachers were asked about a number of their teaching concerns and activities including their initial teaching concerns; the actions they took to overcome problems; their level of confidence; their assessment of their pupils; their classroom priorities; their choice of teaching strategies; their management of current difficulties; and the importance they give to different elements of their training. Initial concerns. A list of 12 teaching concerns was drawn up and the teachers were asked to indicate the importance to them of each concern when they began teaching. Teachers in the private elite schools, small schools and schools in the 8<sup>th</sup> region were most positive. Teachers in the private state supported schools, large schools and the older teachers were most negative. The most positive assessments of possible problems concerned intimidation by students and an overall fear that the various problems would damage teaching performance. The most negative assessment of possible problems concerned exhaustion and worry about the opinions of others, presumably bosses and other teachers. Assessment of pupils. A list of 10 characteristics of pupils was drawn up and teachers were asked to assess on a five-point scale the importance they give to each characteristic as a factor in the ability of pupils to learn, or a barrier to pupils' learning, irrespective of the quality of teaching. The answers were scaled and the average ratings were calculated and summed. The overall score was 3.87, suggesting that teachers believed these characteristics to be very important factors in the ability of pupils to learn. The most important characteristics were thought to be family support; motivation; and basic reading and writing skills. The least important characteristics were thought to be a questioning nature; timidity; and the cultural level of the family. The lowest average score was the lack of importance that men teachers gave to students having a questioning nature. This astonishing finding needs to be studied further since it is exactly what we are trying to create.

#### **REFERENCES**

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#### **RESUMÉ**

*La comunicacion fait un rapport sur une étude en cours sur les jeunes maitres en deux regions contrastantes en Chile qui etaient examinés sur les conditions, execution y soucis de leur enseignement dans le contexte du la grande programme de la reforme de l'education en Chile.*