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Title: La evaluación: ¿dispositivo para promover el aprendizaje de todos o para seleccionar?: la formación de profesores en evaluación en Chile
Issue Date: 2017-02-28
Summary

The assessment that teachers carry out daily in school classrooms is crucial and tackle a wide range of practices. In some cases, they involve spontaneous and informal comments on the work students are doing, but they can also be highly ritualised exams that determine whether a student passes a course or training programme. The common element to all these practices is that the teacher judges the knowledge gained, the work done and the progress the student has made. Sometimes, these even involve a judgement about the student themselves and their potential. This evaluative judgement has pedagogical and social implications, since it affects the way in which teaching and learning are carried out. Said judgement also directly affects the students, their motivation, their identity and their school careers. From a sociological perspective, assessment is a device that encapsulate relations of power and knowledge. Assessment classify people regarding the knowledge defined as valid thereby building on a day-to-day basis a social hierarchy, which conditions people’s selection and social distribution.

In the last few years, assessment has become a topic of interest for educational authorities. There is more and more awareness of the impact of assessment practices on improving learning. The subsequent expansion of the assessment focus in the academic field and in educational policy has appeared as a result. In addition, assessment has increased in importance as an educational policy mechanism. This is seen in Chile in particular, where the state’s actions regarding education are more and more often guided by nationwide tests. Although both types of assessment – classroom and national – can be conceived as separate processes, it is currently understood that they form part of an evaluative system whose focus is student learning and their educational career.

In this context, it is particularly important to consider Chilean teachers’ ability to assess students learning. The most systematic Information available is that provided by the national system of teachers appraisal. Said system shows that the weakest area of teaching is in assessment. This leads to questions about how new teachers are being taught to assess. In this respect, the Information available is superficial. In Chile, it is common practice for initial teacher education programmes to involve a course that lasts for a term and tackles general elements of assessment. Said course provides few practical tools and is separate from the teaching of the specific knowledge the teacher will impart. Assessment education has not been the subject of more attention. This is the case with the ‘INICIA Test’, a test carried out by the Ministry of Education that students in the last year of their teaching degree have to take. Assessment is not involved in this test, since the focus is mainly on the specific knowledge of the subjects that the future teacher will teach.

In Chile primary and secondary teachers education is carried out at a tertiary educational level in a wide range of higher education institutions. On one hand, research universities that offer every knowledge area and are highly selective in their admission processes. On the other hand, professional institutes that offer only certain careers and fill their vacancies by only needing students to have finished their secondary education, asking for no additional requirements. In 2015, there were 53 institutions in Chile offering teaching degrees in primary education and 56 offering teaching degrees in secondary education. In the former, there were 10,625 students currently enrolled and in the latter 46,772, considering the different specialisations of secondary education.

The aim of this research is to find out about and interpret the initial training in assessment for teachers. In addition, the opinions expressed about classroom assessment and national tests by teacher education students who are reaching the end of their studies are analysed. The aim is not to evaluate the teacher
education programme by judging its effectiveness or strengths and weaknesses. However, in the analysis carried out, training priorities are discussed on the basis of the conviction that it is necessary for teachers to be experienced spokespersons for national tests. In addition, teachers need to promote classroom evaluations that stimulate student development.

The research carried out is qualitative and takes on an interpretative approach. To begin with, three universities and three teaching degrees at each of them were chosen. Universities were selected based on the institutional heterogeneity that characterises teacher education in Chile. Thus, a state, a traditional private and a private university set up after 1980 were included in the research. The first two institutions belong to the Chilean Universities’ Council of Deans (CRUCH) and admission is via the University Selection Exam (PSU). The third university, on the other hand, has its own admissions system that does not demand a certain score in the PSU as an admissions requirement. In each university, three teaching degrees were studied: primary education, secondary education Spanish language and secondary education mathematics, since the aim was to include programmes at both educational levels and, in the case of secondary education, that deal with different specialisations.

For each degree course, curricular documents were gathered and semi-structured interviews carried out with teachers and students in their last year of study who volunteered to participate in the research. The information collected was analysed qualitatively using a thematic content analysis. As a result of this analysis, deeper meanings were identified, relationships between categories established and tendencies observed depending on the frequency and regularity with which explicit meanings emerged among the groups of people interviewed.

Academics were invited to take part in the research according to their role in the programme. Thus, for each different degree course, the aim was to interview the following people: the head of the degree course in charge of the process as a whole, the person who teaches the evaluation course, the didactics of language teacher and the didactics of mathematics teacher and the coordinator of the practicum, particularly of the final placement. In total, 37 teachers and 30 teacher education students were interviewed. The interviews were carried out by institution from the second half of 2011 to the year 2013.

The thesis itself is divided into an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion. The introduction provides a general overview of the problem the thesis tackles, the context it is framed in and the methodological strategy employed to develop the research that backs it up.

The first chapter develops the conceptual perspective of the study. In the widest sense, the approach to teacher education in assessment adopted in the research has a constructivist paradigm. From this perspective, reality is understood as an objective and subjective social construction. The researcher can get closer to this reality through the interpretation of the subjectivity of social actors. As a result of this approach, teacher education is tackled as a process that constructs a professional identity. Thus, from the institution’s perspective, it is conceived as a process of communication of schemes of thinking, capabilities and values inherent to the profession. Seen from the student’s perspective, it is a process about making sense of teaching and their own identity. Next, assessment is explored as a process that influences the construction of people’s social identities. In this respect, assessment is a teaching tool that define valid knowledge and classify students in relation to this knowledge. These classifications influence the construction of the subjects’ identity and educational careers, most definitely conditioning their position in society. Next, the relationship between teacher education and subjective meaning is analysed, particularly beliefs and conceptions and the
expression of these meanings in verbal discourse. Finally, the lack of specific research on teacher education in assessment is explored.

The second chapter analyses the historical development of assessment and teacher education in assessment in Chile. In this chapter, the role the state assumes in their regulation and the form that teacher education in assessment adopts are organised into four historical periods that are differentiated by the form assessment takes. The first period relates to education in the nineteenth century, a period in which the state educational system was slowly being formed. The second period deals with the first half of the twentieth century, a period that stands out for the installation of a state educational model, whose main aim was the development and socialisation of individuals. The third period concerns the years between 1960-1973, a decade that represents the modernisation of the educational system and its widespread growth, cumulating in the coup in 1973. The fourth period begins in 1973 and lasts up to the present day. This period is characterised by educational expansion at all levels, the creation of an educational market and the weakening of educational institutions.

The third chapter analyses the educational process in assessment in the nine degree courses researched, from the perspective of the prescribed curriculum and from the experience of the students interviewed. As a result of the information gathered, the institutional characteristics, the place that assessment holds in the training programme and the orientation that the specific assessment course adopts are analysed. These aspects allow for universities' teacher education proposals to be accounted for. In the same way, the programme is analysed from the perspective of teacher education students; their opinion on the process, its strengths and sources of tension and the tension between universities and the schools where students do their practicum, a matter to which the students assign particular relevance.

The fourth chapter goes into more depth regarding the significance that academics and students assign to assessment in their interviews, especially concerning classroom assessment. The meaning of assessment as communicated by the students and academics is constructed around three central ideas shared by practically everyone interviewed. These ideas are that assessment is a process, that to assess is not to give marks and that assessment must be fair. This chapter develops these three core ideas in sequence, showing the different positions adopted by these interviewed, which are linked to the following underlying learning theories: behaviourist, constructivist or those without any connection to these approaches.

The fifth chapter tackles the significance academics and students assign national tests in the framework of an educational policy of accountability based on the results of the national tests. In the first place, the development of the SIMCE test is analysed, as well as the function that this has come to adopt in educational policy, to then discuss the emergence of what is referred to as an Evaluatory State in Chile. Next, how the SIMCE is treated during initial teacher education is analysed, then the opinion of academics and students on these test.

As a result of the research carried out, it can be concluded that, in regulatory terms, school assessment have historically varied in Chile, both in their approach and organisation. In regulatory terms, assessment has become more flexible, moving from exams whose main aim was the selection of a very reduced elite to more inclusive assessment that accompany the expansion of the system during the sixties. However, although their demanding nature has been reigned in, selective aims remain the norm. Thus, giving marks maintains the aim of promotion and those given in secondary school have recently acquired importance in relative terms as a way of getting into higher education.
For its part, teacher education in assessment began in the first few decades of the twentieth century, as part of the course on methodology. It was in the sixties that a specific course on assessment that was more conceptual than practical was incorporated and which included measurement. This course was maintained, but, in the seventies, it moved away from statistics and measurement and started to concentrate on classroom assessment. It was and it is a general course that is not linked to the specific subjects taught in the future by student teachers, although recently, in some universities, assessment has been incorporated into specific didactics courses, bringing back the interaction of this subject in the teaching process, as occurred at the beginning of the Twentieth century.

Regarding the nine degree courses tackled in this research, the first element that should be highlighted is that the teacher education framework that emerges is different depending on whether it is analysed from the curricular, academic or student perspective. If assessment education is analysed from the curricular perspective, it could be concluded that this basically occurs through the assessment course. However, from a student perspective, assessment education happens as part of diverse curricular activities during the degree course. In the first place, it occurs during the specific assessment course, but students also recognise assessment training opportunities in didactic courses, other compulsory and non-compulsory courses and, fundamentally, in the practicum that they do in schools. Far from being coherent and synchronised, these different activities are organised around the strain or dissonance produced between what university teaches them and what they come into contact with during their work experience in schools.

Teacher education in assessment in the cases studied adopt mainly formative approaches, critical of the selective aims and the practices predominant in educational establishments. This is due to the fact that they are still moored, in regulatory terms, to selective assessment logic, although now this is not very demanding. In addition, teacher education in assessment maintains elements of a traditional assessment approach and of an academic approach to teacher education: the process starts with theory to then advance towards application. Application basically consists of the design of assessment instruments, which do not get so far as to be applied in the classroom. Thus, they are checked and corrected conceptually, but not as a result of their application to real students. This lack is also influential, given the fact that the performance of students informed as a result of using the instrument is not analysed, to such an extent that, during training, the capacities needed to analyse learning are not put into practice, nor are the students’ pupils difficulties or strengths discussed using the collected evidence. As a result, feedback is not used practically and descriptive feedback, which is normally associated with improving learning, is not worked on. This emphasis on instruments can be interpreted as a residue from the positivist way of thinking. From this perspective, instruments are emphasised over the judgement the teacher has to form using the information collected. In this way, the difficulty of constructing said assessment judgement in real situations is overshadowed. The possibility of sharing the criteria and standards to judge student learning are also minimised.

As far as national tests are concerned, these are tackled only partially and critically during degrees programmes. This is mainly due to the fact that they are external to the teaching process and because of the surface and reproductive knowledge that is assessed.

As far as the meanings of assessment as expressed by those interviewed are concerned, the conclusion is that these are ordered according to three central ideas: that assessment is a process, that to assess is not to give marks and that assessment must be fair. When tackling the different aspects these imply, the interviewees have different opinions that may resemble a behaviourist approach, a constructivist approach or have no similarities to either one. These relationships, however, do not appear consistently – in other

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words, the same interviewee, faced with certain aspects, adopts a behaviourist position and faced with others a constructivist one. This is why it is concluded that the interviewees create a hybrid discourse on assessment that involves behaviourist and constructivist elements.

As a result of the analysis carried out, it can also be concluded that the interviewees understand assessment as a process that fully overlaps with the development of the teaching process. Teaching and assessment are two sides of the same coin, but occur in sequence: first, people are taught and then assessed. The basic idea is that what has not been taught cannot be assessed. The process is conceived as something constant rather than as a sequence of events. Linked to this, the ideal assessment is carried out during the process, informally and almost imperceptibly to students. This is understood as ‘taking the class’s pulse’ - in other words, to sensitively capture whether learning is taking place through questions, dialogue and student reactions.

It is understood that assessment inform more teaching than learning. What is assessed is made up of fragmented curricular objectives rather than curricul ar aims. With respect to the cognitive demands the interviewees consider that it is a complex topic and what they most know about is the quantitative definition of this as used extensively in educational establishments. A qualitative approach to cognitive demands is hardly present, which means the results hoped for need to be described. All of them recognise the diversity of the students and the need to contextualise education and assessment is very clear to them. In addition, some of them maintain the importance of diversifying the instruments used for assess.

The main transversal difference between the interviewees is seen when comparing students and academics, since students were more critical compared to their teachers: they value informal evaluations first and foremost; they do not value the marks given, which they consider irrelevant; they value assessment contextualisation and differentiation to attend to student diversity and they value the recognition of effort beyond capabilities.

Regarding national tests, the students interviewed were more critical compared to their teachers. Among university academics, the informative value of the SIMCE test is recognised; however, its use as a tool to control and exert pressure is rejected. In the case of students, negative opinion of the SIMCE test predominates, bringing its informative value into question. The SIMCE test is considered so biased that it simple does not reflect reality, meaning that it loses legitimacy from the start.

Thus, the main difference is generational. This can be linked to the different situation the interviewees are in regarding assessment. The students are assessed, while the academics carry out the assessment and, therefore, have decision-making power. Because of their very position, students are inclined to reject assessment. Context may also play a role in these differences. Chilean students have spent several years protesting against the authorities, through ongoing demonstrations involving thousands of people. During this process, a highly critical discourse of everything institutional has been consolidated, so it is not surprising that in the area of assessment students align themselves with more radical discourses, making the generational differences in society evident.

In this context, the differences between the interviewees from different institutions are few, but are also considered relevant. In effect, students from the non-selective institution appear to be more inclined to prefer lenient qualitative practices. However, just like students from selective universities, they appreciate the formative value of assessment but not the value of marks. Students from the new private university appear to be more receptive to pupil diversity, eventually extending recognition to their pupils that they
themselves did not receive. Thus, they are more inclined to consider multiple social factors in their assessments and use a variety of instruments to therefore give all students the opportunity to prove their knowledge. Students from other universities also recognise this, but they suggest that in certain situations a single instrument could be fairer, inasmuch as different treatment could cause discrimination. In the same way, the latter suggest that marks could be used as a way of controlling behaviour and that helping a student with problems with his marks has limits, given the very effort the student makes or the limitations of the time available.

It is worth considering the repercussions on future assessment practices that these interpretations could have among recently graduated teacher students, in particular regarding the duality of the transformation/reproduction of social inequalities implied in assessment practices. In this respect, it is highly probable that the subjectivity that is constructed during the teacher education process is renewed by inserting itself into the professional arena and therefore can be changed. However, the cross-cutting nature with which certain ideas are proposed makes us think that they are also widely dispersed among the teaching body. Thus, it is possible for teachers to work in a system that both outspokenly criticises its own practices and that involves hybrid practices that mix together elements from a selective tradition with behaviourist and constructivist aspects.

Future teachers should try to innovate towards more formative evaluations, although they will face a series of obstacles when trying to do so. Some problems derive from the current regulations that exist, which prioritise marks and student rankings. Other obstacles are linked to the weaknesses in training assessment procedures and skills. In this respect, the diversification of instruments could lead to the enrichment of teaching. However, it is completely insufficient to orientate assessment towards learning for all. For this to occur, descriptive feedback is the main link, but this is something not developed during teacher education. In addition, during their degree courses, students do not have specific opportunities to analyse assessment from the learner perspective. Due to this, they remain trapped among approaches that prioritise the use of assessment as ways of providing information that give feedback for the teacher but not for the student.

Thus, it is expected that graduates will have few opportunities to innovate regarding the practices that currently exist in the system, despite their criticism of these. This could generate important differences between what they think and what they have to do. This will only help make the discrediting of assessment worse, with the risk of trivialising marking practices even more. In the same way, this asymmetry could help strengthen informal evaluation practices, to which a lot of value is assigned but which risk being equally or more discriminating than formal selective practices.