Education System in Mexico

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Preface

In 2013, the Mexican Secretary for Public Education, Emilio Chuayffet, visited the Institute of Education, University of London, to discuss his reforms to the education system in Mexico. He was at this time responsible for all matters concerning education in his country, supported by the Mexican Secretariat of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP). In particular, he wanted to talk about the recent introduction of a national standard for reading ability that was subsequently rolled out across the system. This was that all children within the state system were to be assessed on the number of words they could read aloud in the classroom in one minute. The number of words was to be increased from one grade to the next. This was devised as a measure to raise standards in the system. In response, we quietly suggested that reading skills could not be measured in this way, that this would lead to a distortion of the reading process and that almost certainly more children would develop a lifelong aversion to reading. Unfortunately, our protestations had little effect and the scheme was introduced in Mexican schools with the results that we had anticipated and warned about. This is an example of a standards and accountability approach that now holds sway in most parts of the world, and in particular in Mexico and is enthusiastically endorsed by international bodies, such as the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

This book is a result of a long immersion in the country by three of the four authors. More formally, it has emerged from our work, funded by the Mexican Government, to identify a set of standards in Literacy, Numeracy and Science/Technology, to develop systems and procedures for ensuring the implementation and sustainability of these standards mechanisms, and to contribute to more effective schooling and a better trained and educated workforce in Mexico. The project attempted to provide answers to the following questions: What are appropriate standards in Literacy, Numeracy and Science/Technology at different age and ability levels for Mexico? What are appropriate contents, progressions,
skills/dispositions and formative and summative assessment arrangements in the domains of Literacy, Numeracy and Science/Technology, for the Mexican education system? Which external and internal school arrangements are best suited for their implementation? What is the most appropriate way to sustain these reforms (new curriculum standards in Literacy, Numeracy and Science/Technology and the arrangements for their implementation and use)? (See also Scott et al., 2012)

During this process, we encountered all the familiar difficulties of conducting any research project in any part of the world, and in addition, we encountered two particularly Mexican issues. The first we can briefly describe here as the repeated failures of the Mexican government to implement meaningful and sustainable system-wide reforms of educational institutions. (We examine this issue in much greater detail in the book.) The second issue is the way all discussions in Mexico about education are politicized and, as a result and more so than in many other countries round the world, emptied of significance. This is the background to our writing this book, which we hope makes a contribution to a better understanding of educational institutions in Mexico and consequently better practices within the system.

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