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INTERIM REPORT ON SURVEY OF TEACHING PRACTICES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

[*Informe Preliminar Sobre la Encuesta de Prácticas Docentes en Países en Vía de Desarrollo*]

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Abstract

This paper illustrates a research method appropriate for researchers examining teaching practices and teacher training in poor countries. The method of research described here does not compare with large scale studies in terms of sample size, scientific rigor, and sophisticated statistical analysis. We believe, however, that it can, provide valid information sufficient in accuracy for policy making. Most importantly, we believe, this method offers a feasible way for national researchers to explore why teachers teach as they do in their country. A fundamental assumption is that once in the classroom most teachers learn little more about teaching. In the absence of any systematic feedback or self-reflection on their experiences, they persist in using practices learned in their initial training. On that basis we invited colleagues in a number of countries to share observations on how teachers teach. The compiled results provide an explanation for low levels of learning in many developing country schools. We then propose a second-stage research that collects information on teacher training practices.

Keywords

Teaching practices; Teacher training; Developing countries; Frontal teaching; Whole class method; In-service learning; Discussion method.

Resumen

Este artículo propone un método efectivo para investigar prácticas docentes en países pobres donde es difícil conseguir buena información sobre lo que sucede en el aula. La metodología de esta investigación se distingue de investigaciones convencionales en el tamaño de la muestra, rigor científico y uso de técnicas estadísticas sofisticadas. Creemos sin embargo que puede ofrecer una información válida y suficiente para la toma de decisiones sobre políticas educativas. Es muy importante señalar que este método permitiría que investigadores nacionales, que cuenten con pocos recursos, puedan explorar la práctica docente que se emplea en su país. Un supuesto fundamental de la investigación es que una vez que el maestro empieza a enseñar en una escuela deja de aprender prácticas nuevas o más efectivas ya que carece de supervisión, capacitación y apoyo para mejorar. Por lo tanto, tienen que persistir en aplicar las técnicas aprendidas en su formación inicial. Confiando en ese supuesto invitamos a colegas de varios países en desarrollo a compartir con nosotros sus observaciones de la práctica docente en su país. Los resultados sugieren algunas causas de los bajos niveles de aprendizaje de los alumnos. Por eso, proponemos una segunda investigación para recopilar información sobre la formación profesional de los docentes.

Descriptores

Prácticas docentes; Formación profesional; Países en vía de desarrollo; Instrucción frontal; Método clase global; Formación en servicio; Método activo.

Although there is an increased supply of information about teachers and teacher training in developing countries, there are few descriptions of actual teaching practices, and fewer linking those practices to training or other antecedents. Most research has been on determinants of outcomes (Bossiere, 2004). Teacher quality is sometimes mentioned as important, but is measured solely in terms of years of training; little or no data is available describing actual teaching. Almost no research has been done to explain why teachers teach as they do.

From experience we know that what has "worked" in one culture or economy often fails when applied under different conditions. Innovations work best, if at all, when the human and physical resources necessary for their success exist in the context in which they are carried out. For that reason we should not expect that a list of training practices tested in developed countries would be effective in developing countries. On the other hand, not much is known about teacher training programs in developing countries.[1]

Some teachers in developing countries are highly effective even given limited resources. If we knew how it is that some teachers learn to teach well and others not, we could design more effective methods of training. The strategy of this research, therefore, is to work backward from descriptions of actual teaching practices in the reality of developing country schools, to an understanding of how teachers learn to teach the way they do, and how to help them to learn to teach effectively.

The method of research described here does not compare with large scale studies in terms of sample size, scientific rigor, and sophisticated statistical analysis. We believe, however, that it can, provide valid information sufficient in accuracy for education policy making. Most importantly, we believe, this method offers a feasible way for national researchers to explore why teachers teach as they do in poor countries. We argue that once in the classroom, conditions in most schools do not permit teachers to learn new and more effective instructional practices. Schools fail to enable students to learn because they fail to provide teachers with opportunities to continuously improve their ability to respond appropriately to individual students (Faubert, 2012). In other words, a study of current teaching practices can tell us a great deal about how teachers have been trained.

In this paper we report data on instructional practices collected at relatively low cost in a set of countries. In a paper to follow, we propose a similar means to explain why teachers teach as they do.

We argue that most interventions in schools to date have failed to change the overall quality, and the inequitable distribution of quality of instruction, that students receive. The impact of improved textbooks and facilities on learning is constrained by how teachers employ those materials and facilities. More or improved teacher training has not significantly changed instructional practices. Until instructional practices are changed, student learning outcomes will continue to be unsatisfactory.[2]

Research Questions

The project in which we are engaged involves three related questions. The first is: What teaching results in what and how much students learn in schools? We know a great deal about the difference between effective and ineffective instructional practices (Appalachia Educational Laboratory, 2006). This understanding comes from reflection on practice but also from research. Almost all of that research has been carried out in early-industrialized countries, in schools and with students much different from those in poor countries. Efforts to transfer ¨good practices¨ from developed to poor countries have generally not contributed to significant changes in learning outcomes. The first question we ask is, what do we know about what works in developing countries?

The second question is: What teacher learning results in what teaching? This is a two part question: First, what do teachers in classrooms in poor countries have to know and to be able to do to teach effectively? Second, how do (some) teachers acquire knowledge and effective skills? Although there has been some research on teacher knowledge and practice in poor countries, there has been very little research explaining how teachers acquire what they know (Kennedy, 1991).

The third question asks: In developing countries, what kind of teacher training results in teachers being able to teach well? With this question we distinguish between formal teacher training, and teacher learning that occurs once in the classroom. Formal training in principle can provide both specific knowledge and skills and also the means to acquire further knowledge and skills to match actual conditions in the classroom (Musset, 2010).

Methodology

We began by seeking a group of colleagues familiar with classrooms and teaching in poor countries. For this purpose we used the membership files of NORRAG (Network for Policy Research, Review and Advice on Education and Training, www.norrag.org). NORRAG, which has 4000 members in 100 countries, provides a forum for discussion of international assistance and policy development in education and training. We identified 257 members who reported experience or research in primary school teaching in poor countries.

Via electronic communication we invited these persons to join us in a collaborative research project that would collect, share and analyze the knowledge each of us had accumulated by virtue of our experience in classrooms in poor countries. We proposed using a variation on the Delphi technique to collect information relevant to the three questions listed above. Prior experience had proved the effectiveness of this technique (Schiefelbein, Wolff, & Schiefelbein, 1998; Schiefelbein & Wolff, 2007). As the first step in the Delphi process we prepared a questionnaire asking about instructional practices in classrooms with which the respondent is familiar.

Logic of the Survey

We based the survey on concepts laid out in John Carroll's Model of School Learning (Carroll, 1963, 1989). We included questions about school and classroom management, and five dimensions of the teaching-learning process for which there is little information in developing countries.

The five dimensions were: time available for learning; quality of the teaching-learning process; materials used; expectations for learning; and the focus of assessment (or evaluation). The first two are primary factors. **Time available for learning** is a critical factor in all instruction. As research has amply demonstrated, other factors being equal, the more time a student spends engaged with the learning material, the more learning will occur. **Quality of the teaching-learning process** is the other key element. Learning is an interactive process, influenced simultaneously by how teachers present material to be learned, and by how students react to that presentation (e.g., by listening and active reasoning based on prior knowledge)**.**

Students vary widely in their ability to learn, as a function of the kind and amount of intellectual stimulation received prior to school. Those who begin school with limited language skills, reasoning ability and knowledge, can be disadvantaged when the teacher treats all students the same, using a "frontal" or "whole class" method of instruction to teach to the average student. Material conditions, such as availability of instructional materials and text, have some importance, but the most critical factor is the quality of instruction. The availability and use of **materials** was assessed with respect to language and math. Prior research has shown that students generally work to satisfy teacher **expectations**; the higher the expectation, the more students actually learn. We think that expectations are revealed by display-

ing students' work and, to a lesser degree, by the teacher's estimation of repeating in the future. Learning is facilitated by opportunities to test new knowledge, high quality **evaluation** is therefore an important part of the learning process, for both students and teacher.

Time on task is increased when teachers are effective in **Classroom Management.** Also important is frequent monitoring of teacher performance by school principals (Gillies & Jester-Quijada, 2008; Moore, 2013). Constraints on effective management include high levels of class size and diversity in ability of students. Schools can reduce these constraints somewhat by appropriate assignment of teachers, and by providing continuous professional development.

These assumptions rely heavily on the work of Scheerens (2005) who reviewed more than 200 studies on the effectiveness of different classroom practices. He found that practice variables in general are more highly associated with student achievement than are measures of material inputs, such as expenditure per student. The practices that are most effective are those that engage students actively in the learning process, and those that raise student awareness of how they learn. Almost all the studies included in his meta-analysis were from developed countries.

Data Collection

We circulated draft versions of the questionnaire to be certain that questions made sense in the cultural context of the respondents. Some participants recommended additional questions. The final version of the survey contained 31 questions. Respondents were asked to describe, based on direct experience or observation, the instructional methods used by an average 4th grade primary school teacher, in a developing country of their choice. The questions were descriptive, rather than judgmental. For example:

1. How many times, during the course of the school day, are classes interrupted (by visitors to the classroom, school-wide events, asking students to be quiet)? ____times

17. How many "questions" does the teacher ask in a given class hour? (Don't count rhetorical questions, for example a question like "Do you understand?") ____questions

25. How much emphasis do the mathematics tests given in the 4th grade put on numerical exercises (such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division)? ____A great deal ____Some ____Hardly any ____None

We expected that the survey would take no more than 30 minutes to complete.

The number of responses to our invitation was far fewer than we had expected. About 10 percent of the electronic addresses were not functional. Some respondents expressed interest in the survey but were not able to participate. Although we had no explicit refusals to collaborate in this project, our effort to stimulate participation via electronic communication failed to meet our expectations. After two follow-up messages renewing the invitation, actual responses were obtained from 19 people.

Despite the small number we believe that the responses we did obtain constitute a unique set of data with which to understand issues of education in poor countries. Tables 1 to 3 provide a brief summary of some of the findings. Data describe average 4th grade classrooms in 12 poor countries, all but three on the African continent, but representing widely different cultures and geography. Overall we were impressed by the similarity of descriptions across the countries. Although we understand that there are wide differences in instructional practices across classroom in any country, these data support an argument that most instruction in poor countries is of low quality.

Findings

There is no doubt that teachers in the countries included in this study have a much more difficult task than do those in more developed countries. As the data in Table 1 show, average class sizes are very large (40 to 50 stu-

dents). We also note that there is significant variation in class size from school to school and within schools by grade. Students in 4th grade average 10 years of age, which suggests many entered school when they had already completed 7 years, as compared to an entrance age of 6 years in developed countries. Few of the students had ever attended some form of pre-school education. If we take into account levels of literacy among the adult population in these countries, we may presume that a significant number had at least one illiterate parent. Research in developed countries shows that children's' reading readiness (vocabulary and knowledge of numbers and letters) varies directly with literacy of parents (Hart & Risley, 2003).

The number of official school days is a gross indicator of opportunity to learn. The countries surveyed average about 200 days per year, but a number of days are lost as a result of inclement weather, absence of teachers, use of the school for non-instructional purposes and other events (Gillies & Jester-Quijada, 2008). Our collaborators estimate that schools lose between 10 and 20 days per year, which reduces the actual number students can be in class. Schools are open 5 to 6 hours per day, but between 30 minutes to one hour is spent in recess. We can estimate the students are exposed to less than 700 hours of class per year in Sub-Saharan Africa, a bit more than 1000 hours in the other countries. In principle, then, students in these schools have as much or more opportunity to learn as students in developed countries (NCES, 2013).

Table 1. Time available to learn and other learning resources in 12 developing countries

Average answers to 14 questions asked in the survey	**Total (12 countries)**	**5 Other countries**	**7 Africa Sub-Sahara**
6. Number of students in an average 4th grade class	42,0	49,0	39,1
There are many classes 10 or + students larger than average	81%	80%	82%
There are many classes 10 or + students fewer than average	38%	40%	36%
26. Average age of 4th grade students (number of years)	10	10	10
18. Number of school days (in the official school calendar)	194 d.	210 d	186 d
19. Number of days classes are actually held in average G4	178 d.	199 d.	165 d.
20. Hours of class in the average school day (4th grade)	6 h/d.	6 h./d	5 h./d
Usual daily recess/free time (in minutes).	44 m.	33 m.	49 m.
10. Number of hours of language instruction in a week of classes	6 h/w.	6 h/w	5 h./w
14. Number of hours of math instruction in a week of classes	5 h./w	6 h/w.	5 h/w.
27. Books in the classroom that students take & read (yes %)	50%	50%	50%
8. Percentage of 4th grade students having a language textbook	80%	88%	76%
9. Number of pages of the 4th grade language textbook	105 pp	112 pp	101 pp
11. Number of pages of language text used in the school year	89 pp	104 pp	80 pp
12. Percentage of 4th grade students having a math textbook	85%	88%	76%
13. Number of pages of the 4th grade math textbook	120 pp	123 pp	118 pp
15. Number of pages of the math text used during the school year.	104 pp	114 pp	98 pp

Sub-Saharan countries: Botswana, Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia. Other countries: Ethiopía, India, Jamaica, Pakistan, and Sudan
Source: Answers to questions 6, 8, 9 to 15, 18 to 20, 26 & 27 asked in the first NORRAG survey. June 2011.

Unfortunately, teachers in these schools spend only 5 to 6 hours per week on language, and a similar amount of time on mathematics (altogether, about one-third of the official time). This amount of time dedicated to language and math is less than that given in developed countries, where it is customary to spend at least 2 hours per day on each of the two subjects (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003).

Access to textbooks for language and mathematics is reasonably good (only one in every 4 to 5 students do not have access). We might expect, however, that this distribution favors

urban over rural schools, that is, that urban schools are better equipped with textbooks. Access to other material students can read on their own is less common: only half of the classes provide other forms of reading such as story books.

In effect, students in these schools have fewer opportunities to learn, and therefore spend less time on learning, than do students in more developed countries. This gap seems even larger if we take into account the practices teachers use in their classrooms. Some of these are summarized in Table 2. Time-on-task in the classroom is reduced when teachers are interrupted by visitors, calls to the director's office and other disturbances. Our collaborators report an average of 4 interruptions per day. In almost all cases the teacher stops teaching (and presumably students stop learning the lesson). Interruptions are more serious when teacher talking is the major source of learning for students.

Teachers do most of the talking in class; some of that talking is questioning of students; some is in response to students' questions. The successful experiences of Robert Slavin (2005) and Eric Mazur (Crouch & Mazur, 2001) in the United States, and Vicky Colbert (2012) in Colombia illustrate the importance of using cooperative learning in small groups. Students work in small groups in about half of the observed classes. We can assume, however, that in many of those situations teacher talking continues as instructions to the various groups.

Table 2. Teaching activities and processes carried out in schools in 12 developing countries

Average answers to 14 questions asked in the survey	**Total (12 countries)**	**5 Other countries**	**7 Africa Sub-Sahara**
1. How many times (in a school day) are classes interrupted?	4,1	3	5
2. Learning stops during interruptions (Yes %)	82%	86%	80%
3. Does the teacher do most of the talking?	Mostly	Mostly	Mostly
16.Number of "questions" students ask in an average class hour	6	7	6
Questions students ask in an average language class	5	6	5
Questions students ask in an average math class	8	9	7
17."Questions" an average teacher asks in a class hour	11	8	12
28.% of 4th grade classes where students work in small groups	52%	49%	53%
5.% of classrooms with students' work samples on their walls	50%	50%	less than 50%
4.Pages of their own composition students write in a year	20,7 pp	39 pp	13 pp
7.On average, the % of students that will repeat 4th grade	8%	6%	8%
22. 4th grade teachers measure reading fluency (Yes %)	35%	50%	27%
23.Fluency (reading speed) of 4th grade students (word/minute)	51 w/m	35 w/m	62 w/m
21.Language tests put great emphasis on grammar & spelling	53%	33%	64%
24.Language teachers score the test and also write some notes	Some/Most	Some	Some/Most
25.Math tests put emphasis on numerical exercises (Yes %)	81%	80%	82%

Source: Answers to questions 1 to 5, 7, 16, 17, 21 to 25 & 28 asked in the first NORRAG survey.

We included a question about display of students' work samples because these are an indirect measure of student participation in the teaching-learning process, and of teacher effort to motivate students. Another indication of participation is the number of pages of free writing or composition (not dictation) that students do during the year. Writing contributes to learning through reasoning. On average students in the observed schools write about one page for every 10 days of class; in other words they spend very little time writing.

One way to interpret the relatively low rate of repetition reported for 4th grade is that students in the schools observed are learning up to the standards of the curriculum. If that is so, then low scores on international tests indicate low curriculum standards in developing countries. An alternative and more credible explanation is that teachers are promoting children who have not yet reached the level of reading

ability required in the next grade. Significantly, most teachers in the schools observed are reported to not know how well their students read. The observers estimate that at best they read at a rate of 50 to 60 words per minute. In developed countries, research suggests that a rate of 100 or more words per minute is necessary to master the material presented in 4th grade (Rasinski, Homans & Biggs, 2008). Note that in half of the classrooms observed teachers emphasize grammar and spelling over writing and reasoning. Research on the importance of grammar in upper elementary grades is ambivalent (probably because of differences across languages) but spelling is important. Numerical exercises are good but by 4th grade teachers should be using word problems to encourage abstract thinking.

The practices described in Table 2 are difficult to change primarily because (most) teachers are not reflexive about their teaching. Table 3 indicates that most teachers have little or no opportunity to examine their own practices, nor to observe how other teachers carry out their lessons. Although video recordings of lessons are beyond the capacity of most schools in developing countries, audio recordings are possible, as is observation by other colleagues. Ideally, school directors should on a regular basis observe their teachers in the classroom: the most effective directors spend most of their time on helping teachers improve their instruction (Protheroe, 2009).

Table 3. Reflecting on Teaching Practice and teacher allocation in schools

Average answers to 4 questions asked in the survey	**Total (12 countries)**	**5 Other countries**	**7 Africa Sub-Sahara**
30.Teacher recorded (audio or video) classes in the last year	No	No	No
31. School director knows who is the "best teacher of reading"	65%	83%	55%
32. Grade this "best teacher of reading" does actually teach	4	4	5
29. Local research has been done on the 28 initial questions	64%	33%	73%

Conclusion

Schools in poor countries operate under very difficult circumstances. These include large classes of students with diverse abilities and interests, limited access to resources, and unstable environments.

In addition, however, the schools observed are not using their resources as well as they could. For example, the best teachers are not assigned to the grades in which their instruction would make the most difference, specifically in 1st grade where students are just learning to read and write. Instead, the best teachers are assigned upper grades (usually with much smaller class sizes). Directors have the authority to reduce interruptions of class: 4 interruptions per day (Table 2) suggest a time-on-task loss of at least 10 percent. (The actual time lost is even greater if we take into account the time teachers take to restore order after interruptions.)

Furthermore, teachers persist in the use of instructional practices that are ineffective in precisely these conditions. Teacher-centered instruction works best in small, homogeneous classrooms. In large, diverse classrooms it insures that many students will receive little or no teacher attention. Teachers persist in these practices blaming physical conditions or the students themselves. School directors generally fail to provide supervision that helps teachers to reflect on the effectiveness of specific practices.

In the absence of in-service training, or prior training that encourages reflection on practice, teachers continue to teach as they were taught to do in their pre-service formation or as they learned in earlier schooling. Interventions, such as improved textbooks, smaller classes,

and in-service training that increases teachers' subject knowledge, will have little or no impact on actual practices.

In effect, we hypothesize that teachers teach as they do because that is how they were taught. We hypothesize that the instructional practices of teacher training institutions are the model that teachers carry into their classrooms. Classes on student-centered methods (including constructivism) leave little or no effect because future teachers learn to imitate their professors.

An assessment of this hypothesis requires understanding how teachers are trained, and what they learn from that training. The following section of this paper describes the approach to be used in the second part of this project.

A Proposal for Next Steps to Identify How Teachers are Trained

This topic has several components or issues. One issue concerns the relationship between what teachers learn in their pre-service training and the instructional practices they use in the classroom as teachers. To what extent do practices reflect content of training? A second issue is the process by which teachers learn in their pre-service training, that is, the instructional practices employed in their training. A third issue concerns those who provide the training: how do the trainers of teachers acquire their knowledge and instructional skills?

We propose in the next stage of our research to explore the learning that takes place as a result of what is called "teacher training." If we consider training as a process, we can distinguish between "inputs" and "outputs". The inputs would include academic subject matter content (e.g., math, language), but also teaching of pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical skills. This could be inferred from the formal curriculum, observed directly, or inferred from what teacher candidates report.

An "output" approach could assess graduates' actual practices against standards of practice. This approach assumes that, in any given country, there is a set of best practices that all teachers should use. A high quality graduate would be one skilled in using the "best" practices. In a country with poor quality instruction, emphasizing new teacher conformity to a fixed set of proven practices may be appropriate for moving the system from "Poor" to "Fair" on a scale such as that proposed by McKinsey (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010).

The requirements for moving from "Fair" to "Good", however, require a more sophisticated approach. Levels of student learning can be carried to a higher level by matching teaching practices to student prior knowledge and learning styles. This requires that the teacher not only be skilled in using a variety of practices, but also capable of assessing individual students and choosing the practice most appropriate for a given situation. The first approach—training teachers to use a fixed list of "best practices" --emphasizes training in "skills". More is required. An effective surgeon, for example, must not only be skillful with the scalpel, but must know when surgery is to be preferred over other methods for improving health.

We use the term "competence" to refer to the combination of skills with good judgment about their application. Students learn more when teachers are competent in applying different methods according to the needs of their students. There appears to have been no research done in developing countries assessing teacher competencies.[3]

In order to learn how teachers learn to teach competently we might ask these general questions:

1. What are the competencies of effective teachers?
2. What competencies did they have when they finished their teacher training?

3. What is the source of any difference between present competencies and those held on finishing training?
4. What methods and content of their training are most highly associated with their level of competence?

The set of questions for the second stage of the study should focus on the skills and diagnostic judgment teachers have when they leave teacher training institutions. Some information about subject matter knowledge of teachers is available through international studies such as the SACMEQ in Africa (www.sacmeq.org). Were ours a heavily-financed study, we would administer well-constructed tests of pedagogical knowledge to a multinational sample of teachers. We would send teams of observers to assess levels of teaching skills. As this is not possible, we instead will rely on expert judgments as to level and kinds of competencies of the average teacher.

A Delphi-type procedure can be designed to assess the competency level of teachers with respect to the various steps in an effective instructional process. We expect that there is no standard canon of the set of competencies required for teaching (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2012). Our first task, therefore, will be working as a collaborative team to come to agreement on important competencies. We can then use the Delphi method to assess what we collectively believe is the average across the countries we are describing. The competencies could include but are not limited to:

1) assessment of students' knowledge of a given subject matter;
2) ability to present learning objectives clearly and in a logical sequence;
3) use of examples and illustrations of the material;
4) use of questions that prompt students to express their learning in their own words;
5) involvement of all students in the learning task;
6) detection of students' difficulties in grasping the new material;
7) introduction of new material in small steps;
8) maintenance of a supportive and friendly atmosphere focused on the learning task; and
9) maintenance of classroom order.

An Invitation

We are now ready to design a questionnaire to be used in a second survey. We are seeking collaborators with experience in poor country primary education systems. Two kinds of collaboration will be involved. The first will be the construction of the questionnaire, the second the provision of expert judgments about teacher competences and the content of teacher training. Inquiries and offers to participate should be sent to our e-mail addresses.

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NOTES

[1] Work is underway, however, on comparative studies of plans and programs of teacher training in more developed countries. See for example Barrow, Boyle, Ginsburg, Leu, Pier, & Price-Rom (2007); Chen & Mu (2010); Ingersoll (2007); Tatto, Lerman, & Novotna (2009); and Zhang, Postlethwaite, & Grisay (2008).

[2] For a more complete argument see McGinn & Schiefelbein (2010).

[3] For an example of a European study of teacher competencies see Baer, Kocher, & Wyss (2009).

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Abstract / Resumen	*This paper illustrates a research method appropriate for researchers examining teaching practices and teacher training in poor countries. The method of research described here does not compare with large scale studies in terms of sample size, scientific rigor, and sophisticated statistical analysis. We believe, however, that it can, provide valid information sufficient in accuracy for policy making. Most importantly, we believe, this method offers a feasible way for national researchers to explore why teachers teach as they do in their country. A fundamental assumption is that once in the classroom most teachers learn little more about teaching. In the absence of any systematic feedback or self-reflection on their experiences, they persist in using practices learned in their initial training. On that basis we invited colleagues in a number of countries to share observations on how teachers teach. The compiled results provide an explanation for low levels of learning in many developing country schools. We then propose a second-stage research that collects information on teacher training practices.* Este artículo propone un método efectivo para investigar prácticas docentes en países pobres donde es difícil conseguir buena información sobre lo que sucede en el aula. La metodología de esta investigación se distingue de investigaciones convencionales en el tamaño de la muestra, rigor científico y uso de técnicas estadísticas sofisticadas. Creemos sin embargo que puede ofrecer una información válida y suficiente para la toma de decisiones sobre políticas educativas. Es muy importante señalar que este método permitiría que investigadores nacionales, que cuenten con pocos recursos, puedan explorar la práctica docente que se emplea en su país. Un supuesto fundamental de la investigación es que una vez que el maestro empieza a enseñar en una escuela deja de aprender prácticas nuevas o más efectivas ya que carece de supervisión, capacitación y apoyo para mejorar. Por lo tanto, tienen que persistir en aplicar las técnicas aprendidas en su formación inicial. Confiando en ese supuesto invitamos a colegas de varios países en desarrollo a compartir con nosotros sus observaciones de la práctica docente en su país. Los resultados sugieren algunas causas de los bajos niveles de aprendizaje de los alumnos. Por eso, proponemos una segunda investigación para recopilar información sobre la formación profesional de los docentes.
Keywords / Descriptores	*Teaching practices; Teacher training; Developing countries; Frontal teaching; Whole class method; In-service learning; Discussion method.* Prácticas docentes; Formación profesional; Países en vía de desarrollo; Instrucción frontal; Método clase global; Formación en servicio; Método activo.
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