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## THE TRANSITION TO TEACHING ACCORDING TO THE EXPERIENCES OF NON-TRADITIONAL TEACHERS

**Summary:** This note summarizes, as told from their personal experiences, the transition process of young people, mostly non-teachers, recruited by Enseña Perú to serve as teachers for a period of two years in vulnerable schools in Peru. The results shed light on the difficulties that are faced in the complex transition to teaching and how different mechanisms could facilitate this transition.

### The challenge of low learning levels

Peru has made great advances in education but remains with the challenge of significantly improving educational quality. According to the latest 2011 national student assessment, of the second grade students surveyed, only 30% achieved the reading comprehension levels expected for their grade, while for logic-mathematics just 13% reached expected levels. In addition, the results of international studies such as SERCE 2008 and PISA 2009 indicate that Peruvian students are performing below the regional average.

### Enseña Perú: Striving to change educational opportunities in Peru

Enseña Perú (EPe) is a program that is building a movement of young Peruvian leaders (known as JLs from their name in Spanish) to efficiently contribute to the elimination of high inequality and low educational quality in Peru. EPe is inspired by the Teach for America



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model, but has developed a framework appropriate for the Peruvian educational reality. Since 2009, EPe has been selecting outstanding university graduates from different majors and universities, and after an intensive five-week training in the Instituto de Verano (INVE) (Summer Institute), they work as teachers for two years in educational institutions located in vulnerable areas of Callao, and now also in Arequipa and Cajamarca. The EPe model has two key elements. The first is a set of pedagogical techniques that include a strong emphasis on planning, evaluation and daily monitoring of learning. The second is a set of elements described as "affects," which include techniques designed to motivate students and orient them towards learning. This model is based on the mobilization of "affects" to generate "effects."

## A qualitative look at the transition to teaching

In September 2011, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) partnered with the Peruvian research center GRADE in order to conduct a qualitative study to investigate, among other things, the teaching insertion process of EPe's JLs and the role that tutoring and coaching play in this process. The study was conducted when the first EPe cohort, which entered the program in 2010, was nearing the end of its teaching placement, and when the second cohort, which entered in 2011, was about to finish its first year in the program. The total sample consisted of 20 JLs: 12 from the 2010 cohort and 8 from the 2011 cohort, distributed among seven schools located in the Constitutional Province of Callao. During three months, 53 in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 JLs, 5 tutors, 6 school principals, 12 teachers and 10 parents. In addition, classroom observations and observations of the coaching sessions held by the JLs and their tutors every two weeks were carried out for each JL in the sample.

### "The most difficult experience of my life"

The results suggest that the transition to teaching involves a process that is not easy for any JL. The first year is perceived by the JLs as being not only the most difficult year of the experience, but also as a period of learning. It is a time of experimentation for the JLs, in which they put to the test what they learned during the INVE and establish a balance among the different strategies they have found to be the most or least useful. This first period serves as an extension of the learning experience in the INVE, as the learning eventually achieved by the second year requires the first stage of practical learning, which is necessarily acquired during the first year in the teaching program. It is not until the second year

**Quote from JL 2:** "The first year was like an experiment. You try out different things. They give you a whole model and you bring together a series of guidelines, but in reality, you're not going to change them or verify them until you're on the field. All of last year for me has been a kind of experiment. I realized that this year. Because, this second year, I know what not to do, what I should do and what I need to improve. So, in the beginning, you have a whole set of things you have to do. But then you realize that it's not always how they tell you, you're experimenting, and you change a lot of things in the first year."

**Quote from JL15:** "[...] the first six months are tough, because I didn't have enough time, I didn't know how to solve some problems, I was stuck in one place, going in circles, not moving forward. Yeah, the first six months are the hardest."

that the JLs feel ready to take on a leadership role within teaching. During this period, a greater dedication is evident with regard to motivation and affection; as with more experience and understanding of the job, many JLs focus more on the idea that these elements can have an impact on their students' academic results.

## Training and the Transition to Teaching

Among the JLs, the perception was that training given in the Summer Institute is important and gives them tools to initially face the teaching experience, but that this is not always enough since training content sometimes differs from the real situation in the classroom. This may have to do with the fact that, according to some JLs, the training is perhaps too theoretical and does not have enough focus on practical aspects. Added to this is the fact that JLs have to learn new content, since they do not necessarily have specific training in the areas that they teach. This perception is different in the case of JLs who are teachers. These JLs indicate that what they learned during the Summer Institute has been very important for them. In this case there is no element of surprise with respect to classroom work, and for this reason they place a higher value on learning pedagogical approaches that may have been unfamiliar to them.

**Quote from JL17:** "...I think that the INVE is meant to prepare you, and it actually does prepare you, through having a practical element as well as theoretical. But it's different as in the INVE you work, I had 10 students [...] Here I have 150 [...] Very violent children [...]."

**Quote from JL12:** "They prepared us motivationally and methodologically; but not pedagogically. I could say that I was prepared to give a lesson, with an effective methodology. But I was not prepared in how to make the content of my lesson relevant. In other words, they trained me to be able to teach subject and predicate of sentences well. But they didn't teach me what subject and predicate is. That is an area in which those of us who are not education professionals have suffered a lot."

## Managing the classroom environment and the transition to teaching

**Quote from JL1:** "So there was already a point system, with a certain amount of points for each group. They love stickers, on certain occasions, so that was the beginning. Stickers for those who were completing their work well or for those who were doing a good job, a way of congratulating them [...]. It worked for me, but I stopped doing it, because there comes a time when the student thinks that that's what it's all about [...]. But not now, I have come a long way developing values [...]."

The main source of difficulties that the JLs face in their transition to teaching is managing the classroom environment. There is a series of specific issues with which the JLs have to work: managing classroom discipline and managing student motivation, which can be related to their academic achievement. This study found a learning trajectory that starts with the initial difficulties, which are usually resolved with external incentives, and moves (usually in the second year) toward work more concentrated on motivation to learn as an internal incentive. This

evolution leads to forms of self-control on the part of the students and a reduction in the JLs' exercise of direct control. The JLs who are in their first year use more external control

mechanisms, while those who are in their second year combine these mechanisms with other internal control mechanisms, or base their work in the classroom only on the students' self-control and motivation to learn.

## Shared peer learning and transition to teaching

**Membership to Enseña Perú, and the relationships established among the JLS during their time in the program provide fundamental support for facilitating the transition to teaching.** There is an important sharing of learning among peers, particularly between JLS from different cohorts, with those from the second year learning from those from the first. This exchange of learning revolves around issues of general experience, pedagogical issues, teaching issues, classroom management and the experience of working in a specific school and the particular challenges that this entails.

**Quote from JL 1:** "It has been really (useful) because if the rest of the JLS hadn't been there, believe me, if I had been alone in a school, everything would have been a lot harder. Harder because the tutor... isn't with you every day, doesn't experience all the problems that you experience daily and all the situations." [...] "I think it's been as important as Enseña Perú, and even a little more. Why? Because I learned from the rest and they've helped me."

**Quote from JL 13:** "[...] there was a time when I felt I wasn't going anywhere. So I said to them, "Look, I'm going through this, this, this." And they said, "That happened to me too." So it was, it is, in some way like a relief, because you say, "Oh, so I'm not doing it wrong, it's just a part of the process."

## Conclusions and outlooks

Enseña Perú's young leaders' transition into teaching is a complex and very demanding process, with very steep learning curves. However, this process is somewhat facilitated by the learning that is shared among peers and by the tutoring and coaching offered by the program (the subject of a future note). These forms of learning enable the JLS, during the teaching period, to acquire skills that allow them to creatively deal with difficult situations, reflect on their teaching practices, remain committed to the program and achieve greater transformations in their students.

## About the authors

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