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- HOW CAN WE BRING THE BEST TALENT TO THE CLASSROOM?
- PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF ELIGE EDUCAR
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Summary: Elige Educar is a Chilean public-private initiative that seeks to improve the appreciation of teachers and encourage high-performing students to study education by means of media campaigns, talks to secondary school students and scholarships to study education. This bulletin summarizes the preliminary results, which are encouraging and lead us to believe that, through programs like this, it is possible to improve the social value given to teachers and to change the academic profile of future teachers in the region.

How to attract the best talent to become teachers?

One of the factors associated with good teacher performance is high academic achievement during their educational trajectories (Goldhaber, 2008). Singapore, South Korea and Finland, countries who consistently rank among the best on international tests, recruit future teachers from students whose academic performance is in the top third of national rankings.

Furthermore, it is documented that to attract the best candidates to education, the profession must be socially valued and there must be suitable economic reward and professional development opportunities (Bellei and Valenzuela, 2010).

Elige Educar: Striving to attract the best professionals to education

With support from the IDB as one of the first strategic partners, Elige Educar emerged in Chile in 2009 as a public-private initiative seeking to improve the public image of teachers and to encourage academically outstanding students to pursue teaching careers.

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Inspired by the British experience with the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA, accessible at www.tda.gov.uk), Elige Educar's goal is that in five years a degree in education will be located among the top five in terms of public esteem, and that all applicants to education degrees will come from the top 30% of secondary school graduates. To achieve these goals, the program concentrated its activities in two main areas: communication campaigns and scholarship and incentive programs.

The low public esteem of teachers in Chile: a difficult starting point

The program was launched in a challenging context. In Chile, according to surveys, the teaching profession has low social prestige. For example, a study conducted by Elige Educar (with the collaboration of the IDB) of secondary education students in high-performing secondary schools (public, private and subsidized private) shows that around 70% place education as one of the three degree programs with the least prestige and only 22% consider it an honor to be a teacher in Chile (IDB and Elige Educar, 2011). When the program was launched, the average score on the PSU (Prueba de Selección Universitaria – University Selection Test) of students entering education programs at traditional Chilean universities was 30% below the average score for those in medical programs, and they managed to answer only 34% of the test questions correctly (Cabezas and Claro, 2011)

Influencing with communication and incentives

The program uses mass media to reach the public, with commercial spots on television, a radio program, newspapers and graphic media in public spaces and online. It prioritized the creation of a website (www.eligeeducar.cl) and active participation in social networks (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube). Using phrases such as "Change your life and ours. Choose to teach," and "Teachers are the solution, not the problem," the initiative's ideas and messages gained strength in the public agenda and public opinion.

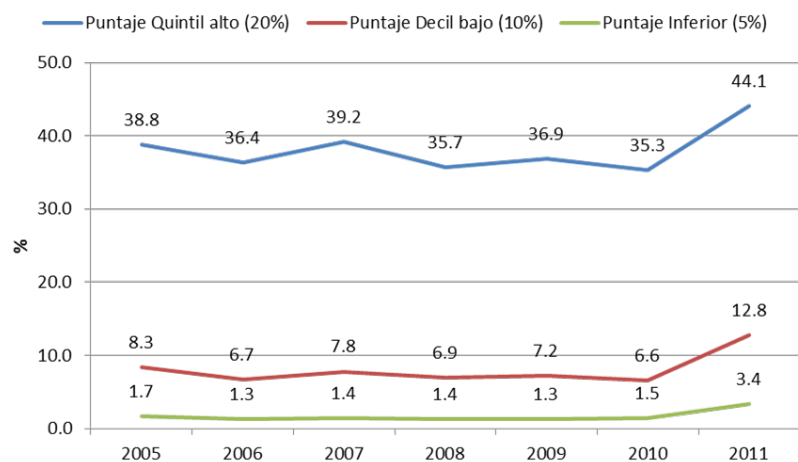
To attract high-performing students to education, the program includes communication activities closer to and more directed at the target group. For almost two years, teams of between three and five education students gave talks in over 300 secondary schools to students in their final years of school, presenting the Elige Educar initiative, telling them about existing opportunities to study education and giving their own testimonies as to why they chose to teach. In addition, the program organized seven student fairs, "Passion for Education Fairs," throughout the country.

For the second key pillar of its strategy, the creation of incentives, Elige Educar and Fundación Futuro (Future Foundation) created a scholarship program for graduates of different degree programs who are in the top 50% of their class to participate in short Secondary Education Teacher Training programs. To date, 179 scholarships have been awarded in different areas. In turn, and due in part to the influence of the program, in 2011 the Chilean Minister of Education (also a strategic partner of Elige Educar) implemented the "Teaching Vocation" scholarship program, a program with larger scope for secondary school graduates who obtain high scores (at least 600 points) on the PSU. Currently, this program offers full tuition for accredited education programs of at least four years for more than 6,000 students.

Preliminary results for students admitted to education programs

Although a rigorous assessment of the program's impact has not yet been implemented, Elige Educar has conducted follow-up studies that suggest that there has been an important change in favor of the initiative's goals. One of the results has to do with the marked increase in high-performing students enrolled in education programs. According to 2011 data, the percentage of education students who scored within the top 5-10% in the PSU doubled, and the percentage within the top 20% increased by nearly 10 percentage points. Furthermore, by 2011, the "Teaching Vocation" scholarships offered by the Ministry of Education has resulted in an increase of 68% of students with scores of more than 600 points on the PSU enrolled in education programs in the Universities of the Rectors' Council, increasing from 1824 students in the 2010 admissions process to 3066 students (Secretary General Ministry of the Presidency, 2011).

Percentage of education students among young people with high scores on the PSU



Preliminary results on the public perception of teaching

Since the beginning of the program, Elige Educar, along with Adimark, a well-known market research and public opinion company that is a strategic partner in the initiative, has been conducting a survey of more than 1100 Chileans over 18 years old on the public perception of teachers in the country. Results from December 2011 indicate that, after two years, the number of people who would support their child if he or she wanted to study education increased by 8% (from 68% to 76%), and those who would be interested in studying or having their children study education increased by 10% (from 48% to 58%). The increased interest in studying education is even more significant among those between 18 and 24 years old (from 38% to 59%). Also, for the first time, interest in education is close to that seen in other highly esteemed professions. Among young people aged between 18 and 24, interest in studying education exceeds interest in studying business, equals interest in studying civil engineering and comes near interest in medicine.

However, the survey also indicates that the main obstacles for enrolling in an education program are the working conditions of teachers as perceived by the respondents. The percentage who believes that teachers earn good wages fell between 2009 and 2011 from 28% to 20%, and those who think that teachers can develop professionally fell from 52% to 46%.

From this data, it is clear that to attract and retain good teachers, there must be not only a high social value given to the profession but also the working conditions of teachers must be on the same level as those of other highly valued professions. For this reason, Elige Educar decided to expand its field of action and also began to approach the issue of improving the working prospects of teachers. With this goal in mind, a working group was created to reach a consensus on a proposal for a teaching career. This proposal is reflected in the document "Proposals for a Teaching Career."

Conclusions and lessons learned for the region

What Elige Educar has learned in its first years of operation can be useful for other similar teacher quality improvement initiatives that might arise in the region. In particular, it has been seen that there are good teachers in the education systems in the region and that their experiences and testimonies can help draw attention to the importance of teaching in our societies. A second lesson learned is that society quickly assimilates the message of the significance of a good or bad teacher in a person's life; personal experience makes this a message that carries meaning and is enthusiastically supported by society. Finally, a third lesson is the importance of civil society in providing continuity for initiatives like this one, that aim to become public policy in order to have the best possible teachers and to change the public esteem of teachers in the region, both in the short- and long-term.

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