

Teachers' Conceptions about the Evaluation and the Information Bulletin in the Initial Education

Concepciones docentes acerca de la evaluación y el boletín informativo en educación inicial

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Abstract

A qualitative study and open-ended questions survey design, conducted during the years 2014-2016, is presented for the analysis of how teachers conceive and manage the Information Bulletin (IB) in Preschool. The sample included 60 preschool teachers from Libertador county in Mérida, Venezuela. Findings reveal that these teachers' knowledge about evaluation consists of observing the children's knowledge and learning; the evaluation is always carried out through objective record instruments. Knowledge about IB: a descriptive and objective record tool, which serves to inform and report to parents and stakeholders; teachers manage well the IB structure; the way in which they learned to develop IB was through work experience, advise and help from their peers; and the difficulties in the making of IB are the expression of negative aspects of the child and her/his behavior, as well as the redaction and writing in itself. The results coincide in part with the previous studies, although there are particularities of the sample.

Keywords: evaluation, information bulletin, initial education, preschool, writing

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Resumen

Se presenta un estudio de enfoque cualitativo y diseño de encuesta de preguntas abiertas, ejecutada durante los años 2014-2016, para el examen del modo como las docentes conciben y manejan la evaluación mediante el Boletín Informativo (BI) en Preescolar. La muestra fue de 60 profesoras de Educación inicial, municipio Libertador, Mérida, Venezuela. Se encontró que los conocimientos sobre evaluación son: ésta consiste en observar el conocimiento y aprendizaje de los niños; la evaluación se lleva a cabo siempre y mediante instrumentos de registro objetivo de los datos. Y los conocimientos sobre el BI son: es un instrumento de registro descriptivo y objetivo, que sirve para informar y reportar a los padres e interesados; las docentes manejan la estructura del BI; la manera como aprendieron a elaborar el BI fue mediante experiencia laboral, consulta y la ayuda de sus pares; y las dificultades de las docentes para la elaboración del BI son la expresión de los aspectos negativos del niño y su comportamiento, así como la redacción. Los resultados coinciden en parte con los estudios previos, aunque existen particularidades propias de la muestra.

Palabras clave: boletín informativo, educación inicial, evaluación, preescolar, redacción

Educational assessment is a continuous and recursive task that must respond to the requirements of various actors, allowing the teacher to establish consistency in the structure comprised of student-objectives-contents-strategies, and which must answer the basic questions of what, how, when, where, why, and for what reason to conduct assessment (Barberà, 2002; Escudero, 2003; Martínez & Rochera, 2010; Pimienta, 2008).

Assessment thus plays a critical role in the commitment of being an educator and it is for these reasons that professionals in the field spend years refining competencies in this regard (Martínez & Rochera, 2010). The same is true of the teacher in early childhood education, trained based on the premise that assessment for this first level of the system is a continuous process of qualitative evaluation of potentials, of acquired learning, and of the conditions that affect it, as stated by the Venezuelan Early Childhood Education Curriculum, or CEI. (Ministerio de Educación y Deportes, MED, 2005a: p.6).

Assessment of early childhood education in Venezuela is primarily embodied in the document entitled Information Bulletin (Boletín Informativo, BI). This document contains the findings on the general difficulties and problems encountered by teachers in assessment and in preparation of the IB through the study of responses to a survey conducted using open-ended questions, which allows graphic representation of teachers' perception of assessment and the IB.

Proposal

The experience of the authors has shown that, in Venezuela, teachers have knowledge that could be acceptable from the theoretical standpoint and therefore they verbalize how to assess based on contemporary theories on the subject, but when faced with the pedagogical task they usually apply traditional methods; rapid solutions that undermine the quality of the assessment. Thus, although various theoretical advances in education and assessment have been developed over the years (Pimienta, 2008), in Venezuelan school contexts it seems that the theoretical corpus and the practice are at odds with one another.

This situation could be the consequence of weak academic-practical training, the influence of inherited models, the teacher's lack of research activity, or the acquisition of mechanical practices that allow almost automatic and standardized assessment, among other factors: This that makes it clear that there is a need to study assessment processes¹.

¹ Hidalgo and Murillo state that one aspect that determines the perceptions of teachers about the assessment is their past experiences as students, and in many cases they reproduce what they have experienced in the past (2017, p.122).

After several meetings with professionals involved in early childhood education (belonging to different public and private preschools in Libertador municipality, Mérida state, Venezuela) in different knowledge exchange environments (workshops), something that attracts the attention of any observer or researcher is the difficulty that teachers in early childhood education (preschool) usually have when writing the Information Bulletin or Descriptive Report.

Given that there are clear professional difficulties for the elaboration of the IB, and that these problems directly affect something crucial, as is the assessment of the child conducted in early childhood education, this paper is aimed at understanding what happens in this area in Venezuela through the analysis of the conceptions of a sample of teachers from Mérida, Venezuela, both about the assessment in general, and about the IB in particular. The central issue is: Are teachers preparing the IB correctly? What is their perception of the IB and its preparation within the framework of assessment in early childhood education?

Review of Specialized Literature

Conception and belief are closely related but they are different, since belief is an epistemic state, while conception (of a belief) is the way in which such an epistemic state is represented. Therefore, since belief consists of the attribution of existence to something, it can be conceived by a subject in very different ways, namely as a sentence, as a figure, an image, or a network of ideas, etc. A belief system thus implies the existence of conceptions about what one believes in and these conceptions may or may not be presented verbally (Ziff, 1984).

The conception of teachers of various educational levels about assessment is usually addressed mainly from the perspective of their beliefs about assessment and the relation of those beliefs to their assessment activities (Barnes, Fives, & Dacey, 2015; Brown, 2004; Chen, 2014; Dayal & Lingam, 2015; Flores & García-García, 2017; Kutálková, 2017; Opre, 2015), but this area still requires appropriate explicative theoretical models (Ashton, 2015; Hidalgo & Murillo, 2017)².

More specifically, the conception (and beliefs) of preschool teachers about assessment is a subject that is still underexplored (something previously reported by Baum, 2000). In fact, during the documentation for this study, the specialized literature only contained six previous studies on how preschool and early childhood education teachers conceive and execute assessment. Studies were conducted in six countries: one in the Netherlands, one in Greece, two in Mexico, one in Sweden and Denmark, and the oldest in the United States³.

Firstly, the study by Frans, Post, Oenema-Mostert, and Minnaert (2017) was carried out in the Netherlands with 96 preschool and kindergarten teachers, with a qualitative approach, using the Conceptions of Assessment Abridged questionnaire (CoA-III Abridged). The data were analyzed using the ATLAS.ti software and the questionnaire was applied in four semi-structured interviews: the first about the teachers' conceptions about standardized assessment in the classroom; in the second, the answers to the first interview were explored in detail and the teachers were asked for a reasoned prediction about the performance of each child under their responsibility; in the third, the results of the assessment, its actions and consequences, and its motivations and

2 There are two basic models: in Skott, 2015, the model of Beliefs of the teacher is compared to that of Patterns of participation as conceptual frameworks for the study. There is a broad review of theoretical perspectives in Ashton, 2015, who reports models of personality, philosophical analysis, constructivist and sociocultural theories, beliefs as emotional and motivational constructs, teaching as persuasion, conceptual change and modification of beliefs, and analysis of beliefs from the ecological perspective.

3 In the work by Moreno, Sandoval, and Morales (2012) a proposal of activities for study and reflection among preschool teachers was developed for the 2012-2013 school year, when what in Mexico is called the "Basic Education Record" (Cartilla de Educación Básica) began to be used in all of the country's schools. This is analogous to the Boletín Informativo in Venezuela. It is not an investigation, but a proposal for the training of preschool teachers. This is not a study, but a proposal for the training of preschool teachers.

expectations were discussed; and in the fourth interview teachers were asked to respond to the opinions of their colleagues, evaluate their perception and assessment of each child, and their expectations of the performance of the group of children.

The teachers discussed the influence that the standardized tests that are usually applied in their country have on the content and form of the materials they use in the classroom, and they considered how these tests influence educational goals.

Meanwhile, the work of Sañudo and Sañudo (2014), which referred to the explicit conceptions of assessment in preschool, used a sample of 745 teachers from Jalisco state, Mexico. The authors sought to find out about the conceptions of preschool teachers regarding assessment, with the intention of subsequently designing a model about the topic and a proposal for assessment for the level in question, using a mixed methodological approach (qualitative and quantitative), and they used descriptive analysis of responses to a brief questionnaire.

Their results showed that the conceptions of the teachers regarding assessment are the following: 1) the teachers are familiar with the main features of assessment in preschool, but they do not have conceptual mastery of its essential purpose, which is to contribute to learning through observation, reflection, identification, and systematization of their forms of intervention in the classroom; 2) teachers use more recording instruments in the assessment than information search projects, identification of problems, and formulation of alternatives; 3) teachers associate assessment more with the information obtained at the beginning of the school year than with continuous or final assessment, and 4) teachers perceive assessment as a kind of one-way process, with no feedback for participants.

In turn, the study by Manolitsis and Oikonomidis, 2013, was carried out in Crete, with a sample of 107 kindergarten teachers. They examined teachers' attitudes to the importance of three dimensions of educational assessment: a) assessment of the kindergarten teacher, b) assessment of the teaching processes in kindergarten, and c) assessment of the child. The results showed that kindergarten teachers consider the assessment of the teaching process to be the most important dimension of educational assessment; that they do not feel sufficiently confident and therefore do not feel ready to self-assess, and that the evaluation of their work can be achieved by reviewing the fulfillment of learning objectives rather than by using objective assessment tools. These attitudes did not vary according to their educational background or their teaching experience.

Meanwhile, the research by Broström, Johansson, Sandberg, and Frøkjær (2012), consisted of a comparative analysis of the view of preschool teachers in Sweden and Denmark about learning at their level. Their study sought to investigate how teachers of early childhood education in Sweden and Denmark conceive the learning of children at that level.

The key results were the following: 1) children's learning is associated with social interaction and development, and the initiative of the children is crucial; 2) learning is basically the result of active involvement of children; and 3) they found many similarities in the conception of learning and participation between Danish and Swedish teachers. According to the authors, their results support the traditional Scandinavian perspective of the coherence of linking education and care in childhood.

In turn, the Master's thesis by Barajas (2003), referring to assessment in preschool and its recording, analysis, and interpretation, was conducted with 23 preschool teachers from Colima state, Mexico. Their results showed that: 1) various teachers lack adequate elements of theoretical training regarding the characteristics of the preschool student and their relationship with the characteristics of assessment; 2) teachers emphasize summative assessment, neglecting formative assessment, focusing only on the final results (comparison between what has

been achieved and what is desired), leaving aside the crucial element of the processes involved in learning, which implies that teachers obviate the need for strategies to solve problems in children's learning; 3) various checklists and records are used indiscriminately that neglect the qualitative and retain only the decontextualized quantitative element.

The apparent causes of this aforementioned situation could be that there is no internalization of the need for continuous assessment carried out systematically, that there are serious gaps in professional training, and that teachers have a heavy administrative workload.

Finally, the study by Baum (2000), which had a qualitative focus (using focus groups and interviews to create grounded theory), was centered on the exploration of the beliefs of early childhood preservice teachers in the United States in three groups based on the courses they had completed, Beginner (sophomore and junior courses) N=36, Intermediate (senior courses) N=17, and Advanced (student teaching) N=18. The author found five main themes in her analysis: 1) Children's learning and development, 2) Working with groups of children, 3) Relationships between peers, 4) Inclusion, and 5) Professional issues in early childhood education. The students showed differences between their beliefs in terms of strategies for facilitating learning, curriculum and planning, relationships with parents, and the topic of school inclusion.

Assessment at the Early Childhood Level

Assessment of the development and learning of children is a process that takes place from the early childhood education level, previously called preschool in Venezuela (from 1980 to 1999), a description that is maintained in various education systems around the world (Brailovsky, n.d.; Breznitz & Yamin, 2008; Mazariegos, n.d.).

Its objective is complex, given that it firstly involves assessing the learning process; secondly, finding out about the environmental conditions; and thirdly, providing significant elements to adults for the full understanding of the child (León, 2012). It should also be said that although there are three different types of evaluation, each one of them complements and is implicit in the other, namely: diagnostic assessment, continuous assessment, and final assessment (Mazariegos, n.d.).

Assessment in early childhood education is firstly characterized by being an individualized process, that is, that each child will be dealt with and assessed according to their own learning processes, as well as the particular characteristics they have as "being unique"; secondly, to provide a base of comparison to critically determine what the child's progress has been in terms of the different areas of their personality, the topics of learning developed, and the influence of the context (the learning environment, the effectiveness of mediation by the teacher and other significant adults, relationships with their peers, among others) in their integral development; and, finally, because it must be an all-encompassing and neutral process, based on values such as respect, tolerance, understanding, responsibility, and honesty, among others that are no less important.

In the Venezuelan educational system, assessment is a process of qualitative evaluation of the potential of children, of acquired learning, and the conditions that affect it (MED, 2005b). The following is assessed: (1) expected learning, (2) child development, (3) learning environment, (4) family environment, (5) parenting patterns, and (6) the child's interactions with their peers, parents, teachers, and adults.

In the Venezuelan model assessment must be carried out at three specific times: at the beginning, during, and at the end, which are the recognized and applicable types of assessments in early childhood education: the diagnostic evaluation reveals the real situation regarding the level of development and the status of the learning process of the child before starting a school period, didactic plan, or project; that is, it is the starting point that will provide the opportunity to organize the teaching activity.

Meanwhile, continuous or formative assessment allows partial and progressive advance to be evaluated, taking into account the elements that could influence learning, in such a way that it requires constant revision and, if necessary, the reformulation of methods, strategies, and activities. The final assessment allows analysis of the results derived from a specific topic or period of teaching work, and records the effectiveness of practices resulting in the recognition of achievements and difficulties in comprehension and the improvement of teaching and learning situations.

The spaces in which the assessment can be carried out are educational centers, classrooms, communities, and the home. The fundamental characteristics of assessment at this level are that it is preventive, it is all-encompassing, it is formative or part of a process, and it is also continuous and systematic. The assessment criteria are: 1) Respect for children as individual and social beings, 2) Assessment as a process and product, 3) It is conducted in a spontaneous natural and informal environment, and 4) It has conditions of objectivity and reliability.

The Information Bulletin

Concept

According to the Venezuelan Early Childhood Education Curriculum (MED, 2005b), the IB is the instrument that provides information to parents and representatives on the development and learning acquired by their children at three points of the school year (at the beginning, the middle of the year, and at the end) (p.11).

The IB is a type of text that describes the child in a comprehensive manner and with development processes that are specific to each one; it reports progress, potential, and weaknesses; and, from the teaching perspective, it suggests measures to improve the necessary areas. What is evaluated (MED, 2005b) is the child's personal and social education, their relationship with the environment, and their capacity for communication and representation.

The model of IB or Descriptive Report that is addressed in this research (on the part of teachers) is the official Venezuelan document (MED, 2005b), that is mandatorily applied for the level considered. The official assessment document in early childhood education states of the BI:

This instrument allows information to be provided to the parents and representatives on the development and learning acquired by their children at three points of the school year (at the beginning, the middle of the year, and at the end); as well as to receive their opinions [of the parents or representatives] regarding the performance of their child/ren in the family environment (MED, 2005b: p. 11).

The wording of the IB.

The IB must provide an evaluative appraisal of the learning observed during the different times of the school year, taking into account the indicators developed by the teachers, to assess the level of development and learning achieved by the child (MED, 2005b), with the aim of providing the relevant adults with elements of judgment for a better understanding of the child, all of which must be easily understood by the relevant adults; therefore, the wording of the IB should not neglect formal aspects such as spelling, punctuation, use of capitals; coherence and cohesion (use of discursive markers); concordance (subject and predicate must agree in both number and person); and should generally display appropriate management of the vocabulary.

The wording of the IB should avoid negative connotations and assessment should be done from a positive perspective, expressing the negative without introducing value judgments and without using words that imply the deterioration of the child, such as "does not share", "does not relate", "does not integrate", "hits", etc.

Finally, the structure of the IB is the following (MED, 2005b): (1) Information on the institution, the child, and the representative, (2) Learning acquired during the period in the areas of learning and components, (3) Assessment by the parents and/or representatives of the information, (4) Recommendations of the teacher, (5) Dates, and (6) Signatures of the manager, teacher, and representative.

Objectives of the Study

General: To specify the conception of early childhood or preschool teachers of preschool assessment and of the wording of the Information Bulletin. And specifically: (1) To find out the knowledge that early childhood teachers have about assessment in preschool; (2) To establish the knowledge that early childhood teachers have about the Information Bulletin, and (3) To prepare a representation of the conception that the teachers have about assessment in early childhood education and about the Information Bulletin.

Research Method

Focus, type, and design of the study

The focus of this research, or its general epistemological conception (Master's in Education, Computer Science, and Instructional Design 2015, p.11 and Appendix B), is qualitative because an analysis of the discourse of the respondent teachers has been carried out in order to create categories that allow their conception of the subject to be understood (Antaki, Billig, et al., 2003; Íñiguez, Martín, & Vera, 2011). The type of research is empirical since a corpus of real data was analyzed, with comprehensive analysis and a basic intention (non-applied research). The design of the research was a survey comprised of open-ended questions.

Population and sample

The population was composed of 112 early childhood education teachers in Libertador Municipality in Mérida state, Venezuela, from 18 institutions at the nursery and preschool levels, and the definitively analyzed sample consisted of the teachers who developed and provided reasons for their responses (N=60), since many of them limited themselves to simply answering "Yes" or a "No", or did not respond, and this did not provide sufficient information for analysis of their discourse. The teachers are holders of graduate degrees in Education, majoring in Preschool; graduate degrees in Early Childhood Education; graduate degrees in Special Education, higher educational diplomas in Preschool; and students of university degree courses related to the early childhood level.

Data collection method

The data were collected during a series of seven workshops conducted in the school years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 by the principal researcher. The method used consisted of a questionnaire applied to the teachers by means of a game called "The Clock" at the beginning of each workshop. The data collected were: (a) basic sociodemographic and labor information on the participants and (b) opinions about assessment at the preschool level, about the BI, and about the difficulties of managing it.

The questions in the document were the following: Q1: What does assessment mean to you? Q2: As a preschool teacher, when and how do you assess? Q3: What is the 'Information Bulletin' to you? Q4: What is the purpose of the 'Information Bulletin'? Q5: What is/are the structure/parts of this type of text? Q6: Who taught you to write the 'Information Bulletin'? Q7: What difficulties do you have in writing the 'Information Bulletin'?

Procedure followed

The analysis consisted of grouping the responses according to their affinity, finding terms (words or phrases)

of interest, analyzing their similarity to group them among primary common concepts, refining the group of common concepts identified until saturation was achieved and the basic categories were thus defined. Then the researchers counted the frequencies, tabulated the relationships, quantified the strength of those relationships, prepared tables and graphs of frequency, and created figures to visualize the relationships between the categories (Velasco, 2014). The details of procedure carried out were as follows:

Transcription of data

Once the primary or raw data were collected (responses to the survey), codes were assigned to the respondents, for example, teacher number four, coded as D4A11LEIE43, which means: Subject number (4), Years of experience (11), Professional title (Degree in Early Education), Age (43).

Subsequently the transcription of the responses was done carried out in tables, with the following transcription conventions: 1) Literally transcribe everything the respondents answered, with any errors it may contain, and 2) Put in brackets and in italics the necessary clarifications to complement what the informant wrote.

Data Analysis

1. The responses to each question were grouped into tables according to the affinity between questions.
2. The terms (words or phrases) of interest for each question were highlighted in each table, with different colors according to the question.
3. The similarity between the highlighted terms was analyzed, in order to group them into the primary common concepts, that is, to synthesize the different terms according to their similarity (synonymy, same reference, etc.). It was kept in mind that a word, term or phrase could have been mentioned several times in the total number of responses.
4. The group of common concepts identified was refined, grouping common concepts into more representative ones. This regrouping produced the first or basic categories. This was repeated as many times as necessary until saturation was achieved for each category, which occurs when: 4.1. Common concepts can no longer be combined (synthesized), or 4.2. New basic categories can no longer be created.
5. The frequencies of the basic categories found were counted.
6. The relationships between the basic categories, between questions, or within the same question were found and tabulated.
7. The strength of these relationships was quantified by verifying how many times the basic category X occurred associated with, together with, or depending on the basic category Y .
8. Frequency tables and graphs were prepared, where appropriate.
9. Graphs were prepared to show the frequency of each basic category, as well as the relationships between them, as follows: 9.1. The basic categories are represented by figures in which their size is proportional to their frequency of appearance (this displays their weight, impact, or importance); 9.2. The relationships between the basic categories are represented by lines, the thickness of which is proportional to their importance (strength, relevance); 9.3. The length of the lines is not treated as a dimension, because the figures are two-dimensional, and that would require a three-dimensional model.
10. Once an adequate graphic representation of the basic categories was prepared, we proceeded to examine their importance in each case according to their size (which must be proportional to their frequency) and the importance of their relationships with the other basic categories.
11. The most frequent categories and which had the strongest relationships with the other categories became the definitive categories, and the definitive subcategories were those subordinate to the former categories, according to the graphic representation prepared.

Results

Sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents

Thirty-five of the teachers have a degree in Preschool Education, an average of 11 years of work experience, and an average age of 35; 11 teachers have a degree in Early Childhood Education, an average of 9 years of experience, and an average age of 40; 8 teachers have higher educational diplomas in Preschool Education, an average of 7 years of experience, and an average age of 43; 2 have a degree in Special Education, an average of 12 years of experience, and an average age of 44; and 4 teachers are students, have an average of 6 years of work experience, and an average age of 35.

By the institution from which they graduated, there are 23 teachers from Universidad de Los Andes, 10 from Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela, 9 from Universidad Nacional Abierta, 8 from Instituto Universitario de Educación Especializada, and 10 from Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador.

Conceptions about assessment at preschool

What does assessment mean to you?

The knowledge that the members of the sample have about assessment are contained in two main categories, namely: (C1) assessment at preschool consists of observing—that is, seeing, observing, recording, describing, representing—mentioned on 24 occasions; and (C2) what is observed is the knowledge and learning of the children, stated on 18 occasions. And both categories appear related seven times in the teachers' discourse.

The relative importance of each category identified and the strength of their discursive relationships can be seen in Figure 1. The asterisk refers to the category Development, and PFD to the category Potential, strengths and weaknesses.

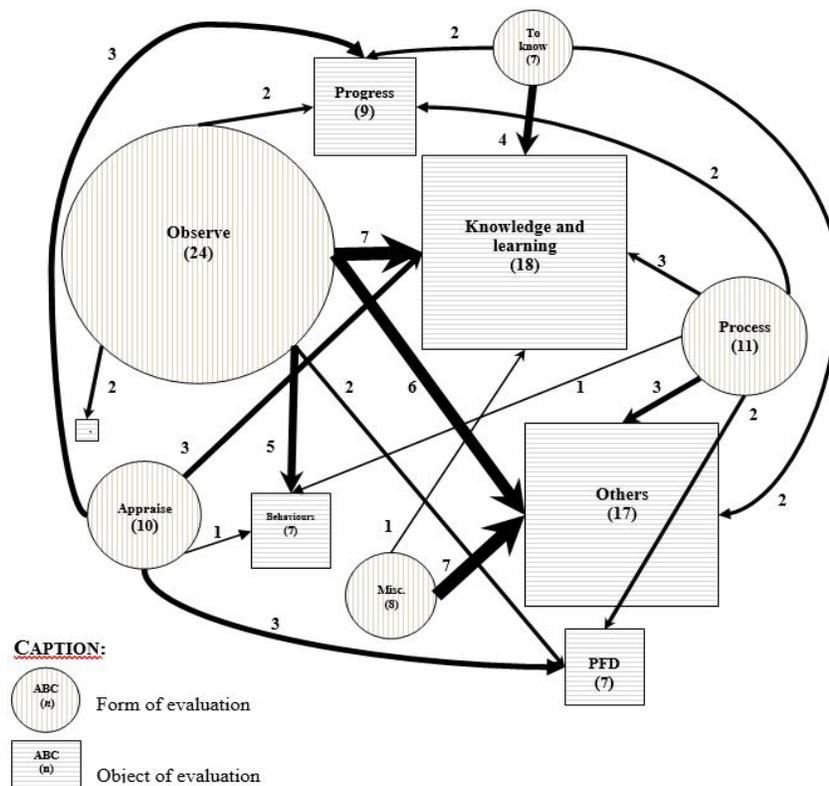


Figure 1. What does it mean to evaluate: discursive relationships between form and object (Question 1).

Time and method of assessment

As regards the time and method of assessment, two basic categories were identified: (C3) assessment is carried out always, stated on 51 occasions, and it is done (C4) using various objective instruments to record the data of the child, mentioned 48 times. These categories are related on 40 occasions.

The importance of each category in the discourse of the respondents and their discursive relationships can be seen in Figure 2 below. It should be noted that, in this figure, ME stands for Through strategies, N is No method stated, Sem means weekly, Mens means Monthly, EVO means On various occasions, and NIC stands for No time indicated.

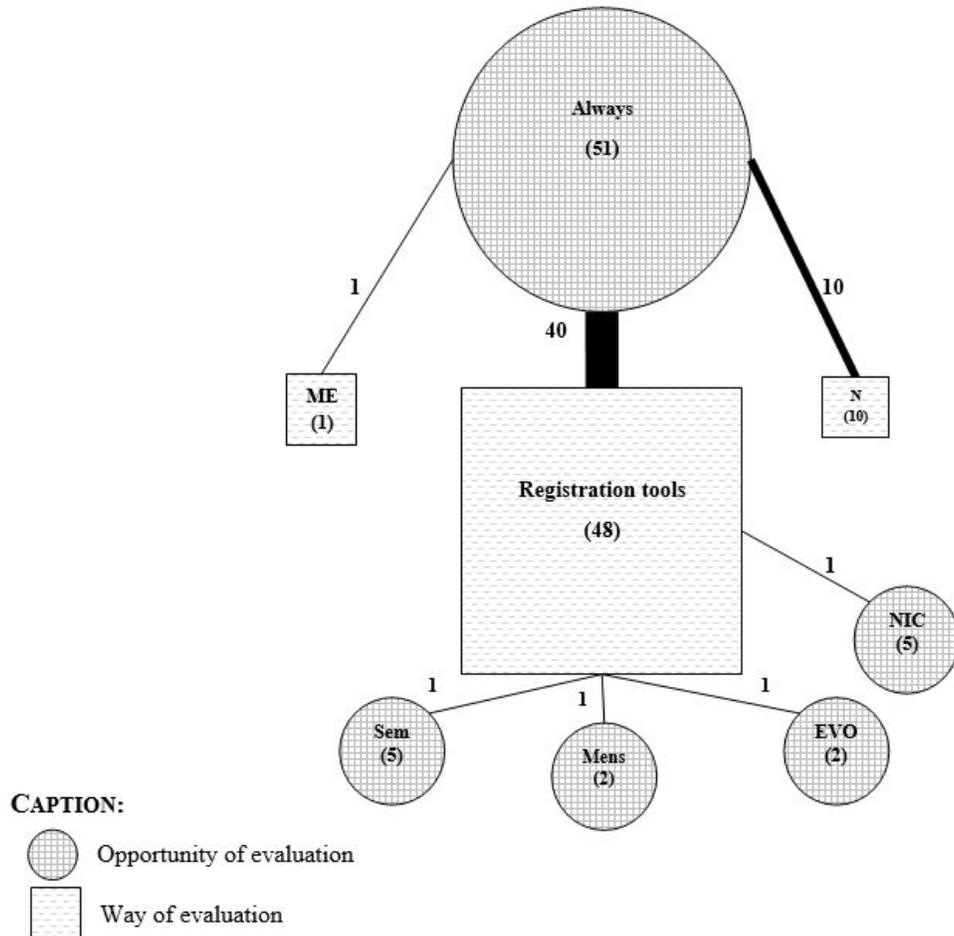


Figure 2. Discursive relationship between opportunity and way of evaluation (Question 2)

Concept and purpose of the Information Bulletin

The knowledge of the group of teachers about the Information Bulletin fell into two main categories, as follows: (C5) The IB is an instrument for descriptive and objective recording of information, which serves to (C6) inform and report to parents and interested parties. These categories appear related 22 times in the teachers' discourse. The importance of these categories in their discourse and the discursive relationships can be seen in Figure 3 below. Note that, in Figure 3, MI stands for Means of informing, the asterisk refers to the category of Means or method of assessment, and O means Others.

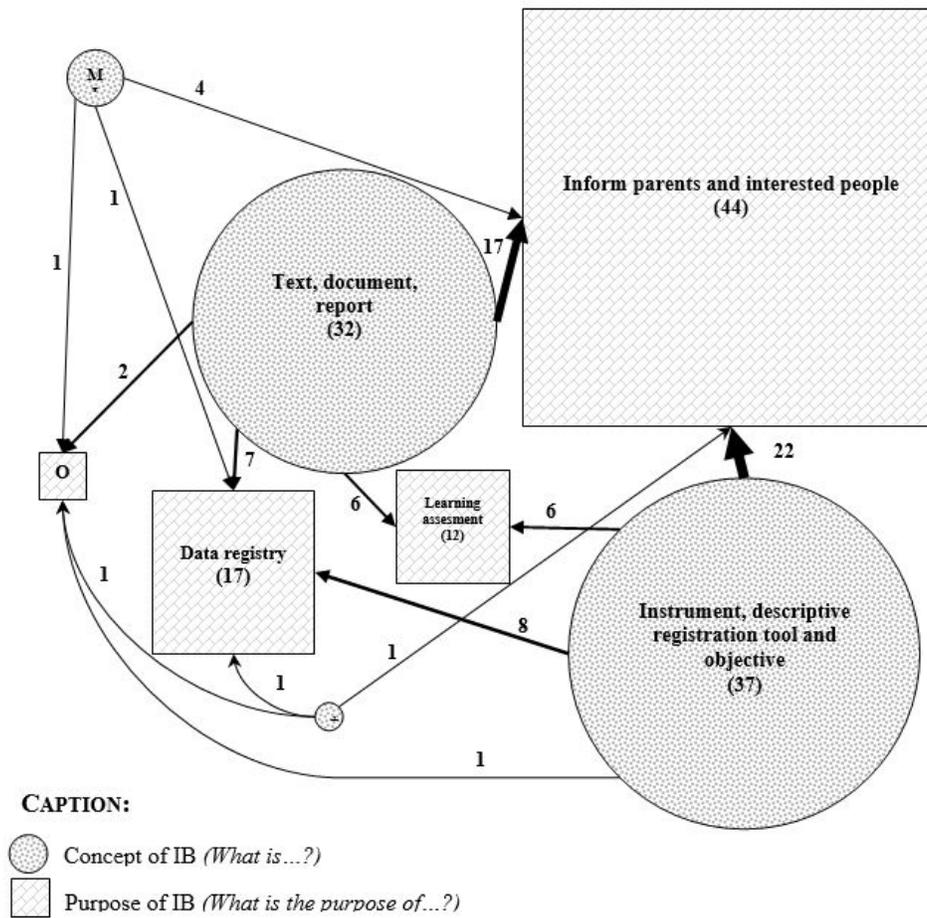


Figure 3. Discursive relations between concept and purpose of the Information Bulletin (IB): Questions 3 & 4.

Structure of the Information Bulletin

This is where the seventh category emerged: (C7) the structure of the IB is formed by: institutional data, information on the child, development of assessment in terms of the areas of learning, teacher recommendations, signatures and stamp of the staff, and it generally considers the aspects outlined in the CEI (MED, 2005b).

There is a group of four teachers who, in addition to the previous elements, include the description of the plans and projects worked upon and child absences, as well as a special section for “Achievements” and another one for “Weaknesses” of the children, aspects that are not suggested in the curriculum, but, from the perspective of these teachers, they are important to highlight.

One problematic issue for the teachers is that they show discrepancies and confusion between the knowledge they have about the curricular guidelines, the learning areas, and the components. On the other hand, some teachers (3 Ss) include in the structure of the IB the use of instruments and interpretation, and it is necessary to review how this aspect develops, what characteristics it has, and why teachers differentiate between these two phases of the assessment process.

Mode of learning from the Information Bulletin on the part of the teacher

Depending on the way in which the teacher learned how to prepare the BI, four groups were identified, namely: one group of teachers who state that experience is a fundamental element of their learning, made up of 26 teachers; another group of those who learned with their colleagues (peers or superiors), comprised of 11 teachers; a third group who learned by means of only one of the methods indicated, which consists of 20 subjects; and another group of two teachers, who do not meet the above criteria.

The way in which the teachers learned to prepare the IB produced two basic categories: (C8) through their working experience (N=39) and (C9) by means of asking and receiving help from their peers (N=19). These categories were related on six occasions in the teachers' discourse.

Difficulties with the preparation of the Information Bulletin

The difficulties with the preparation of the IB according to the respondents produced various categories, with the main ones being: (C10) Method of expressing negative aspects (N=32) and (C11) Wording problems (N=28), which were directly related in the teachers' discourse on six occasions.

In terms of difficulties with the preparation of the BI, three groups were identified, namely: one group of teachers who stated they had difficulties in expressing negative aspects, comprised of 12 teachers; another group of those who said they had problems with wording, including eight teachers, and a third group of respondents who stated that both issues were a problem, composed of 11 teachers.

The importance of each of the categories of difficulty in the teachers' discourse and their discursive relationships can be seen in Figure 4 below.

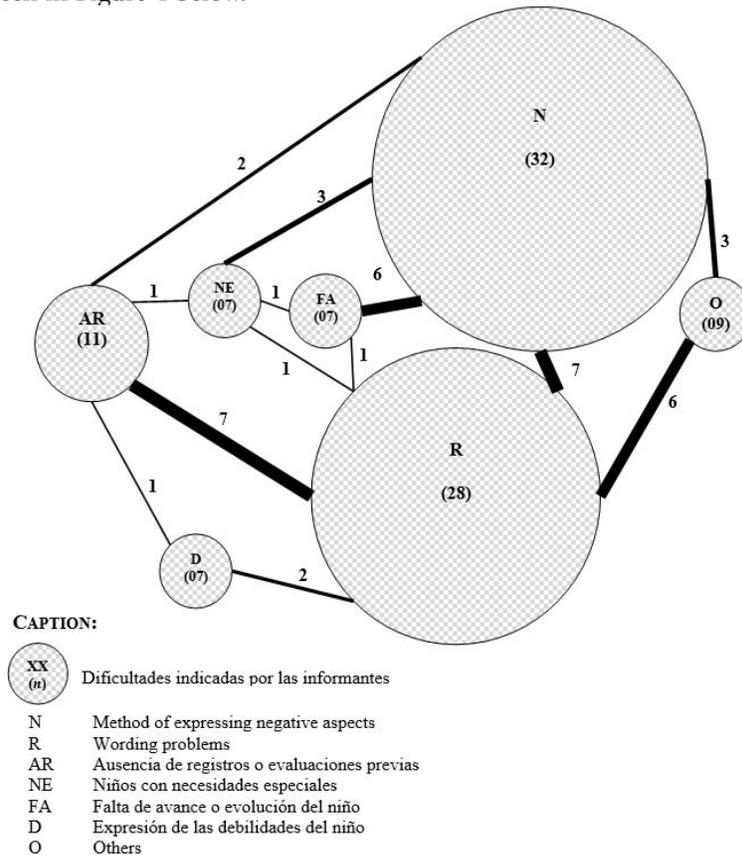


Figure 4. Difficulties to elaborate the Information Bulletin: discursive associations between the difficulties referred by the participants (Question 7)

Analysis of Results

Results in the context of the specialized literature

The teachers carry out the assessment predominantly reaching objectives focused on memory capacity, which is consistent with Barberà, 2002: “prioritizing the learning of algorithms, rather than understanding the tasks themselves as complex problem situations” (Barberà, 2002, p. 257). The teachers see the assessment as a data collection process, the analysis of which is based on comparing the data with certain aspects stated in the curriculum for the level, which agrees with the results of Sañudo and Sañudo (2014). They also take it as a fact that it is free from influence, which takes place solely in the classroom, and focuses on the most obviously observable aspects, through instruments of objective recording, to the detriment of information research projects, identification of problems, and formulation of alternative solutions, which is also consistent with the findings of Sañudo and Sañudo (2014).

The results also confirm the finding of Sañudo and Sañudo (2014) that their subjects do not conceptually master the purpose of assessment, which is to contribute consistently to learning through observation, reflection, identification, and systematization.

The finding also agree with those of Flores and García-García, 2017, in terms of the contradictions between the teachers' conception of assessment and the design of the national curriculum, as they found low consistency between the conceptions of the teachers and what was established by the education reform in Mexico⁴.

On the other hand, the findings are not consistent with those of Broström, Johansson, Sandberg, and Frøkjær (2012), who found that the teachers studied believe that children's learning is connected to their social interaction and development, and that the initiative of the children is crucial in this regard. The Scandinavian teachers therefore seem to be more involved with the process of assessment, in the sense that they are better trained and handle the conceptual tools and techniques more appropriately, and that the deficiencies indicated here were also indicated in a Mexican sample, in Barajas (2003), including matters such as the emphasis on the summative assessment and that the formative assessment is usually neglected (pp. 135ss).

The conception of the teachers about the topic analyzed

The general representation of the conception that the teachers have about assessment in preschool and about the Newsletter was shown graphically in the previous figures, and is also shown in its final form in Figure 5.

⁴ Although these authors focused on secondary education, they found that while the teachers consider assessment to be a measurement, in the reform it is recommended that assessment be done to improve learning and, therefore, to the teachers the objectives of assessment, according to the reform, are the competencies.

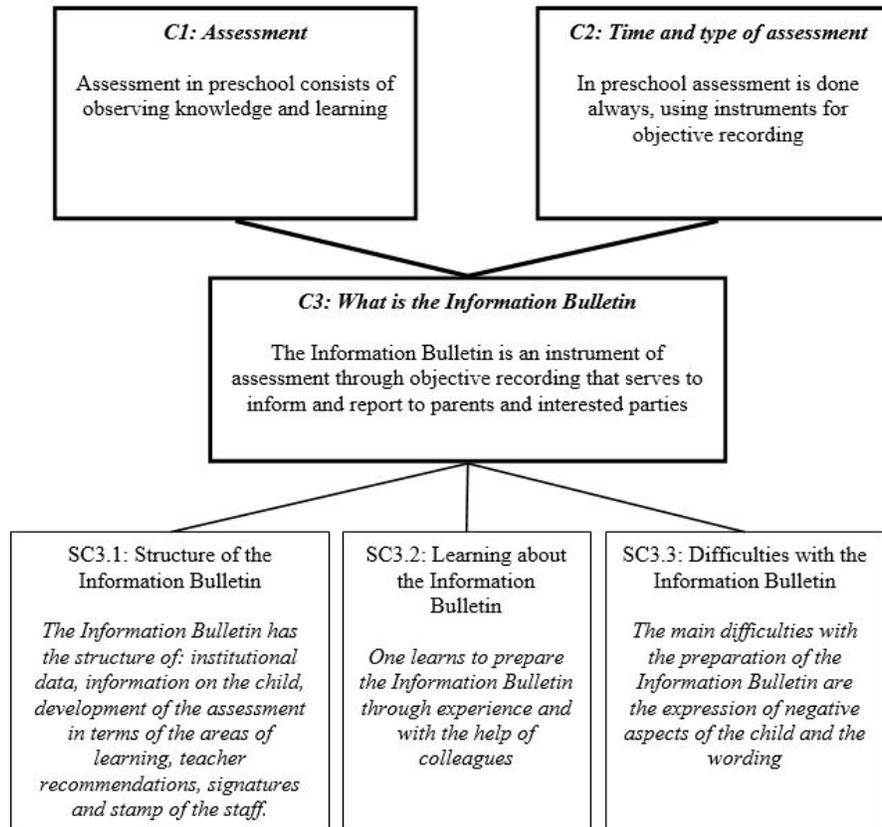


Figure 5. Conception of teachers about assessment in preschool and about the Information Bulletin, showing the categories and subcategories that were identified

Limitations of the interpretation and/or application of the results of the study

It is not possible to make generalizable assertions about the whole state (province) of Mérida or about the rest of the country due to the size of the sample and because it is a qualitative and intentional sample and therefore is not representative. However, as the experience of the researchers has allowed them to see, the conception of the subject that has been found here seems to be general to teachers at the educational level considered. Thus, the cultural particularities of the subjects and of the place and present time suggest that the concepts identified can be extended to teachers in other states of the country.

Conclusions

The knowledge that the members of the sample have about assessment can be divided into four main categories, namely: (C1) assessment in preschool consists of observing–seeing, observing, recording, describing, representing, (C2) what is observed is the knowledge and learning of the children, (C3) assessment is always carried out, and this is done (C4) through different instruments to objectively record the child's information.

Meanwhile, the knowledge that the group of teachers has about the Newsletter revealed three categories, which were as follows: (C5) the IB is a descriptive and objective data recording instrument, which serves to (C6) inform and report to parents and interested parties; likewise, (C7) the structure of the BI, according to the group, includes institutional data, information on the child, development of assessment in terms of the learning areas, teacher recommendations, and the signatures and stamp of the staff.

And, in turn, the way in which the teachers learned how to prepare the IB was basically (C8) through their working experience and (C9) by means of asking and receiving help from their peers. The group experienced two basic difficulties in preparing the BI, namely: (C10) expressing negative aspects of the child and their behavior, and (C11) the wording of the bulletin.

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