INDIAN EDUCATION IN MEXICO: PAST AND PRESENT

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ABSTRACT

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By

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This paper examines the complex issue of Indian education in Mexico from the time of the Revolution (1910) to the present. An historical overview of the effects of the Revolution provides an understanding for the educational programs and philosophies currently affecting Mexico's Indian population. It is demonstrated that Indian education does not exist in a vacuum, but is inextricably connected with national economic, political, and social forces.

Efforts to "educate" the Indians have been, in many respects, unsuccessful, despite consensus that Indian literacy is desired by Indians and non-Indians alike. By examining the largely neglected Indian perspectives toward education, it is shown that the attitudes of the Indians and the non-Indians are conflicting and paradoxical. These paradoxes, and their implications, are explained, and are incorporated in a concluding tentative research problem.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the major goals of the Mexican Revolution was to incorporate the Indian population into the national economic, political, and cultural spheres. More than six decades have since passed, and this goal remains largely unrealized in many regions. According to the 1960 census, nearly half of Mexico's population continues to live in "isolated rural communities" (Wilkie 1970:255). Many of the monolingual non-Spanish speaking Indians (the segment of the Indian population with which this paper is most concerned) live in relatively remote mountainous areas, in villages with less than 1000 inhabitants. Mexico has over 90,000 such villages (Sanders 1975:7).

The 1970 census revealed that 42% of Mexico's 48.2 million people continue to live in rural communities of less than 2500 people. This same census classified over one million people (over 2% of the total Mexican population) as monolingual non-Spanish speaking Indians, and an

additional 2.7 million as bilingual Indians. Thus, these two groups comprised roughly 7.5% of the entire population in 1970. Another reflection of the current conditions in Mexico (as of 1970) is that "despite massive literacy campaigns, 23.8% of the population is officially illiterate; the figure is probably higher" (Perissinotto 1974:226). Compounding the situation is Mexico's population growth rate, which, at 3.4% annually, is one of the highest in the world (Sanders 1974:1).

This paper focuses on Mexico's Indians, and the nation's long-standing attempts at "educating" them. Beginning with the Revolution, an historical overview of the federal government's efforts will reflect the national philosophies and priorities regarding the Indian population. This historical perspective will also establish a framework from which the contemporary rural Indian community will be considered, including a perspective of how the Indians view education. Following this, the current programs and philosophies regarding education for Mexico's Indians will be discussed. These programs continue to have shortcomings, and the problems which they face will be analyzed. Many of the difficulties will not be surprising once the paradoxical and conflicting perspectives on education (Indian vs. non-Indian) are understood. Finally, a short list of recommendations, and a tentative research problem aimed at further ascertaining the Indian attitude toward education, will conclude the paper.

Two contiguous states in southern Mexico (Oaxaca and Chiapas) contain by far the greatest concentrations of monolingual non-Spanish speakers. These two states, while comprising only 7% of the national population, have approximately 40% of Mexico's monolingual indigenous-language speakers. "Indian" is commonly defined by social and cultural characteristics, rather than physical or biological attributes, and one of the more "Indian" characteristics is speaking an indigenous language. For this reason, and because the literature on Indian education in Mexico centers on these two states, this paper will make more than occasional reference to them. In many respects, these two states lag far behind the rest of the nation. For example, while the national illiteracy rate is about 24%, the 1970 census suggests than illiteracy in Oaxaca is 40%, and in Chiapas is 45%.

Before turning to the topics outlined above, one critical piece of information should be noted and born in mind by the reader. While many Mexicans believe the Indians constitute a major national problem, it should be made clear that the Indians "do not consider themselves to be a problem" (Beals 1974:204). They do see themselves as having problems, but much as the non-Indians consider the Indians to be a problem, the Indians see the non-Indians as one of their problems. The implications of this paradox will be a central theme in the latter part of this paper.

CHAPTER II

INDIAN EDUCATION AFTER THE REVOLUTION

The Revolutionary period: 1910-1917

The Mexican Revolution was fostered in part by the regional imbalances of educational facilities which were not ameliorated during the Diaz presidency (1900-1911). While Diaz brought political stability and economic expansion to Mexico, his regime perpetuated an archaic social structure (especially in the rural areas), and did little toward the improvement of rural primary education. Between 1900 and 1910, fewer than 25% of the primary age children were ever enrolled in schools, and the figure was undoubtedly much lower in the rural areas of the poorer states (such as Oaxaca and Chiapas) where the Indian population continues to reside (Myers 1965:34). (Primary age children refers to those between the ages of six and fourteen, for whom attendance at primary schools is compulsory (Whetten 1948: 410)). Mexico's illiteracy in 1910 has been estimated at 85 per cent, a figure which would be much higher in rural areas,

and higher still when including those functionally illiterate. Ruiz (1963:8) adds that during this time hundreds of villages had no one able to read and write.

It was during this revolutionary decade that it became popular to call for bringing the Mexican Indian into the nation. "In 1916 Manuel Gamio, one of Mexico's most famous anthropologists, suggested that Mexico's national well-being depended upon integration of the huge mass of poverty-stricken, isolated, illiterate, and non-Spanish-speaking population into Mexican society" (Wilkie 1970: xxii). As will be seen throughout this paper, the philosophy of incorporating the Indian into the national scene has continued to be seriously pursued to the present day.

Following the Revolution, the Constitution of 1917 stated Mexico's official policy regarding education. It "granted to all Mexicans free, obligatory, fundamental education" and called for schools to be founded "for the economic, social, and cultural growth of the communities as well as the nation, free of all religious teaching" (Modiano 1973:88). From the time of the Revolution until the end of the Cárdenas presidency (1940), considerable efforts were made to reform education throughout Mexico, but with unprecedented emphasis on rural areas.

The 1920's: Cultural missions and rural schools

The Revolutionary ideology of the 1917 Constitution, which called for the masses to benefit from the reforms,

was gradually deemphasized during the 1920's. A negative view was taken toward governmental involvement, a posture which persisted until 1930.

> The goals of social redemption through government action, proposed by the Constitution of 1917, were forgotten in the rush of Mexico's return to normalcy in the 1920's after a decade of civil war. There was no need for an expanded budget, for the government was not responsible for the development of the Mexican nation (Wilkie 1970:278).

Nevertheless, some attempts at Indian education were undertaken during this decade. One of the earliest attempts at helping to incorporate the rural inhabitants into the national spheres was the Cultural missions, the first of which was operating in 1926. While the primary objective of these missions was to improve the quality of the teachers working in rural areas, the purpose behind the existence of the rural teachers was to encourage the incorporation of the "old" Mexico into the ways of "modern" Mexico (Sanchez 1936:95).

A listing of some of the objectives of the Cultural missions, in their attempt to "shorten the distance which separates the rural inhabitants culturally from the national life" (Whetten 1948:433) suggests the value-laden orientation and philosophy of the policy makers at the national level. The missions should attempt to: 1-improve the economic, health, and sanitation conditions in the communities; 2-"awaken a desire on the part of the inhabitants to live in better homes with at least a minimum of desirable

household equipment for the enjoyment of a satisfactory domestic life;" 3-encourage improvement in diet, dress, social and recreational activities; 4-general cultural improvement; and 5-"to encourage the love of country and to combat all foreign influences which tend to undermine patriotism" (Whetten 1948:434). A more succinct statement of how the Cultural missions were viewed in relation to their "targets" comes from Sanchez (1936:69), who wrote that the missioners were "social opportunists building the temple of culture on the site of ignorance and misery."

Other efforts were being made toward improving rural education in the 1920's and 1930's as well. At the time of the Revolution, rural schools were very rare, but by the mid-1920's there were more than 1000 federal rural schools in operation, with 65,000 pupils attending, and there were 6000 state-supported rural schools, and perhaps 1800 private rural schools (Sanchez 1936:67-68). By 1931, the federal rural schools had increased to nearly 7000, with nearly 600,000 pupils. These figures reflect the fact that between 1921 and 1931 national expenditures on education went from 4% to 13% of the budget, of which nearly one-third was used on the rural schools (Ruiz 1963:40).

However promising these figures may appear, they do not tell the whole story. While these new schools were being established, they were having difficulties enrolling and retaining pupils. "From 1920 to 1930, all but 2% of the students left school before completing their course of

studies, usually during the first two years" (Ruiz 1963: 41). These problems continue to plague the schools, especially in the states with high percentages of Indians. In Oaxaca and Chiapas, only two-tenths of one per cent (.002) of the population has received 12 years of education, and the average education per person is one year (Myers 1965: 58, citing the 1960 national census). This is not to suggest, however, that school-age children choose not to attend schools, but rather that this is the inevitable outcome in areas where educational facilities are largely nonexistent. For example, according to government figures, "81 per cent of the 72,164 communities of less than 4,000 population had no schools (Simpson 1937:283). During the 1920's, completing secondary school was not a common practice in any part of Mexico. Even the Federal District (the most educationally advanced area in Mexico) had only 4.2% of its population with 12 or more years of education (Myers 1965:24).

As will be stressed later in this paper, it is not surprising that these early attempts at incorporating the rural Indian into the national consciousness were largely unsuccessful, because their programs had little relationship to life in the Indian communities. The Mexican rural school of the 1920's, designed to be a center for community development as well as a center for academic undertakings, had little effect on the country. The 1930 census revealed that illiteracy among those older than age 10 was 59%, down

somewhat from 66% in 1921 (Sanchez 1936:30). The 1930 census also showed that there remained over 2½ million speakers of an Indian language, half of whom spoke no Spanish (Ruiz 1963:142-3).

The 1930's: The Cárdenas presidency

Beginning in 1933, the Cultural missions became the object of considerable criticism. The critics, noting that the "target" people's life styles were not changing significantly, claimed that the training period for a missioner was too brief, and that the missions did not remain in any one region long enough to have a meaningful impact (Whetten 1948:406). The Cultural missions were suspended during Cárdenas' presidency, and never really reinstituted with their former vigor, although over one hundred missions continue to function today, pursuing objectives similar to those the program was founded on (Gill 1969:81).

The prevailing philosophy regarding rural education in Mexico in the early 1930's is encapsulated in the following statement (published in 1936) which helps explain why the Cárdenas position which followed was considered to be more appreciative of the value of being Indian.

> The complete acceptance of indoctrination is the most striking note in present-day educational thought in Mexico. The schools are not merely educational plants where children and adults learn the fundamentals of literature and mathematics. The schools are organs of propaganda. They are active agents in a plan to change the social and economic order. They do not care to wait for the slow and doubtful reforms which educational

> evolution might provide. They plunge into the very process of change, modifying and accelerating it in the light of current national ideals and policies. The Mexican schools are schools with a preconceived purpose. They seek to speed up the tempo of community life to the rhythm desired by a central government whose hopes are for a harmonious and progressive national movement (Sanchez 1936:93).

The ethnocentrism and insensitivity of the so-called "educated" sector are undisguised in the following statement by the same writer.

> The prevailing ignorance and cultural poverty among the Mexican masses today is difficult to understand. It appears incredible that a people, subject to Western influences for more than four centuries, should be so backward, so largely uneducated (Sanchez 1936:32).

Lázaro Cárdenas was president of Mexico from 1934 to 1939. While he, too, was convinced that the best course of action regarding Mexico's Indian population was their integration into the national economic and social life, he was considerably more respectful of them than those who preceded him. "Cárdenas's goal was not to change the Indian way of life completely, but to introduce him to the methods and goals of twentieth century civilization while encouraging him to maintain the best of his own life and values" (Wilkie 1970:157).

Cárdenas undertook several actions in order to pursue his interests in bettering the Indians' situation. He felt it was essential to their well-being that they be able to understand their rights according to the law, and

he therefore increased the education budget to its highest point ever, and was responsible for an increasing percentage of it going to rural schools. He built 12,000 new rural schools, nearly tripling the number which existed when he assumed office (Ruiz 1963:48).

The above-mentioned emphasis by the Cultural missions of instilling a sense of national patriotism in the Indians was also ascribed to by the Cárdenas regime. "The idea of education as socio-political indoctrination reached its climax during the Lázaro Cárdenas administration. National goals and the educational process were made inseparable" (Perissinotto 1974:208).

Cárdenas, in 1935, said that "the task of national education demands the diffusion of learning into the rural areas as one of its principal obligations" (Sanchez 1936: 111). To assist in this effort, and to encourage the integration of the Indian into the Mexican mainstream, Cárdenas established the Department of Indian Affairs (which was later replaced by the National Indian Institute). He also founded the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) in 1939. The effects which INAH has had in Mexico are paradoxical, as reflected in an analysis made 35 years after its inception.

> INAH has played a major role in making both Mexico and the world aware of the greatness of past Indian civilizations. It has been less successful in developing respect for the contemporary Indian. Many mestizos have come feel pride in their Indian ancestry, but they still do not care much for their contemporary Indian cousins (Beals 1974:206).

Despite the increasing emphasis on education in Mexico's rural areas, the effectiveness of the program was limited by several factors (many of which are even today considered problems in Mexico): inadequate financial resources, "diseconomies of small-scale institutions, a completely inadequate supply of qualified teachers, and low rates of retention and graduations" (Myers 1965:140). The statistics pertaining to the end of the Cárdenas administration reflect its accomplishments. In 1940, more than half of those older than nine years of age could neither read nor write, and in the states of Oaxaca and Chiapas, illiteracy was reported to be 75%, and was surely even higher in the rural Indian communities of these states (Whetten 1948:417). In 1941, a survey of 3011 rural schools revealed that 28% of them offered only two grades, and 64% only three grades. Also, nearly two-thirds of the enrollment was in the first grade (Myers 1965:41-42). This clustering in the early grades, which continues to prevail today, is largely due to the irrelevance of the education offered, pressing needs requiring the children's economic potential outside of the schools, and parental influences. These factors will be discussed in greater detail in a later section.

Federal expenditures and social change since the Revolution have been carefully analyzed by Wilkie (1970). He evaluates the Revolution by testing the Mexican federal budget against actual expenditures "in order to determine

to what extent the official party of the Revolution has carried out its projections to raise the standard of living for the poverty-stricken masses" (Wilkie 1970:xxi). He notes that while Cárdenas did indeed raise the education budget to unprecedented levels, he was unable to realize his goals. For example, his 1937 education budget called for 18.1% of the total budget, but only 13.6% of the budget was ultimately spent on education (Wilkie 1970:163).

According to Wilkie's analysis, despite the higher levels of federal expenditure on education during the Cárdenas presidency, its primary impact took another form.

> Cárdenas did not ruin the Mexican economy and he did not materially help the masses to any great extent, as his enemies and friends have continued to claim.... Cárdenas's legacy to the masses was not so much in material improvement, but in the psychological position of importance which he gave them. Cárdenas revivified the social ideals of the Constitution of 1917, and he brought the masses into politics in organized groups which could no longer be ignored (Wilkie 1970:282).

In comparison with the other Mexican presidents since the Revolution, Cárdenas appears to most nearly approach the ideology of the Revolution. Those presidents preceding him were more concerned with political revolution than social revolution, and those following him have been largely involved in an economic revolution, although since the 1960's,a more balanced program of economic, political, and social goals seems to have been pursued. The emergence of the economic revolution began in the early 1940's, and its impact continues to be felt throughout Mexico.

The 1940's: Emphasis on industry

Unquestionably, the Mexican Revolution marked a key point in the history of the formal education of the Indian population. Many scholars of the history of education in Mexico regard the end of Cárdenas's presidential term, which was closely followed by the outbreak of World War II, as another benchmark in Mexico's rural educational policies. Some view his term as the final period of serious consideration of the social reform ideology. "The Revolution, it is claimed, came to an end after 1940" (Wilkie 1970:xxiii).

Early in the 1940's, great emphasis was placed on rapid industrialization, with a concomitant deemphasis on rural areas. Prior to 1940, rural schools differed from urban schools both in objectives and content. There was an "implicit belief" that the differences between rural and urban areas were not intolerable, but could be accepted, and that "improvements in village life could best be promoted by working within the existing pattern rather than seeking to replace it" (Myers 1965:46).

After 1940, the new presidential regime abandoned the previous focus on the cultural and social conditions in the rural communities, and proclaimed the urban primary school to be the national model. "What was Spanish and modern was to replace what was indigenous and traditional" (Myers 1965:46). The results of attempting to place an urban-oriented school in an Indian community were largely unsuccessful.

> After 1940, the priority assigned to these regions declined, and the poorer states have had to depend to a greater degree on their own resources. Ironically, primary schools in the rural areas adopted the urban curriculum, a step not accompanied by the increased effort or the fundamental economic and social investments necessary to make it work.... The educational attainment of the population is still far below the national average, and high-level manpower necessary to expand education, carry out programs of investment, and increase economic growth is in short supply. Under these circumstances, the launching of the literacy campaign and the adoption of the urban curriculum could have produced only limited results (Myers 1965:78).

Another comment on rural education in the mid-1940's helps provide an understanding of existing conditions.

> Rather than a school attuned to the daily necessities of the rural population, two-thirds of Mexico, the school had become a poor imitation of the urban classroom, out of touch with reality, divorced from the land, race, and economic character of the rural community. Unless the school was prepared to aid the peasant to raise his level of life, however, it would find little support or sympathy in the village. The peasant had scant respect for the school of the three R's, for his life in the village demanded technical skills rather than book culture (Ruiz 1963:203).

The difficulties of initiating literacy programs in rural schools are touched upon in both of the above quotations. As will be seen later, there is an increasing desire on the part of the Indians to be able to read and write Spanish. Literacy has come to be the strongest common bond in contemporary Indian Mexico between those offering educational programs, and those for whom the programs are designed. Since the time of the Revolution, both schools of national thought (i.e. the pluralists and the assimilationists) agreed that "the illiteracy of the masses and the

inability of many Indians to speak Spanish" were serious obstacles to Mexico's development (Beals 1974:205). But the fact that these two factions disagreed on their ultimate goals, and how to achieve them, has probably contributed in part to the persistence of large numbers of illiterate Indians in rural Mexico. Even more importantly, in my opinion, the continued high levels of illiteracy in Indian Mexico are due to the fact that the Indians for whom educational programs are designed have rarely been consulted for their perspectives on education and literacy. This issue of literacy is complex and multi-faceted, and will be analyzed in detail later.

The 1940's: América Indígena

Another perspective on the differing attitudes toward the education of Mexico's Indians in the period following Cárdenas's term can be gained from the pages of América Indígena, the quarterly publication of the Inter-American Indian Institute, based in Mexico City. For this paper, the issues for the first post-Cárdenas decade (1941-1950) were perused for articles pertaining to the topic at hand. The findings are instructive.

The philosophies and attitudes regarding education for Mexico's Indians, as found in América Indígena during the 1940's, illustrate the complexity of the issue. At one extreme there are the assimilationists who urge rapid and forced integration of the Indians. The polar opposite of

this position would be to leave the Indians alone. However, no one in the literature took this position. Rather, it was felt to be unrealistic, and those opposing assimilation of the Indians most often spoke in favor of peaceful coexistence, or a pluralist philosophy. Steward (1943:328) states that the Indians cannot be isolated; they are going to be affected by non-Indians, so they will need "wise and sympathetic control of the impacts which helps the Indian to reintegrate at each shock."

In addition to these two positions, there were (and still are) intermediate stances, many of which call for the educators to allow the Indians to retain their "desirable" qualities, while concentrating on eliminating the "undesirable" aspects of Indian life. The problem with this philosophy, of course, is determining what is "desirable," and it is interesting, and perhaps not surprising, that the literature of the 1940's has almost no mention of the Indian's perspective on education and what is "good" or "bad." The lone exception I encountered, Berlin, a Mexican, writes that Mexico must always respect the free will of the Indians, and their right to remain free human beings must be protected from those who would forceably alter their lives (1944:275).

The concept of "protection" for Mexico's Indians was a debated one. Alfonso Caso, a long-time Indian-rights activist, writing in reference to the Indians' popular arts, said that they should be protected at all costs from outside influences "which would in the long run provoke the

decadence of the work" (Caso 1942:25).

Others, however, viewed a pure "protectionist" posture as unwise. Villa Rojas, for example, noted that "civilization" could, in many respects, improve the Indians' standard of living (1945:72). But he cautions against any reckless transplanting of outside influences into Indian communities. "It is advisable--indeed indispensable--to take culture modes into account: they must be influenced, not by coercive methods, [but instead] by means of the social controls indicated by sociology and the related sciences" (Villa Rojas 1945:67).

Rather extreme attitudes towards the assimilation of Mexico's Indian population can be found in the América Indígena's of the 1940's. For example, in 1944 Nuñez wrote of the inadequacies of all the attitudes ever held regarding the Indians, including "extermination, segregation, exploitation, paternalistic protection, and indifference" (Nuñez 1944:113). His "solution" calls for acculturation of the Indians, rapid and wholesale, to be backed by the public forces if necessary. He writes that post-revolutionary policies of protection have not produced the expected results, because such policies lacked force. He adds:

> [Mexico] ought to abandon all such empirical Indian policies of foolish protection and help, and substitute a new policy ... rigorously enforced so that it will demand of the Indian the fulfillment of those obligations which in each case be assigned him ... incorporating him rapidly into modern culture, into the life of the Mexican nation (Nuñez 1944:113).

Others were not so blatantly blind to the attributes of the Indian cultures. Two examples from the 1940's serve to illustrate the (at least token) appreciation of qualities to be found in Indian communities. However, as mentioned earlier, depending on how one defines "desirable," the following statement could be used to support either an assimilationist posture or a pluralist stance.

> The prevailing policy of Indian educators is that the school program should encourage the arts, skills, and family and community institutions of the Indian that are desirable, change those that are harmful or that obstruct their social and economic improvement, and introduce new elements of occidental culture that might be beneficial to them (Sady 1942:25, emphasis added).

Obviously the words underlined above are value-laden, and subject to various interpretations. More importantly, however, it seems, is the difficulty involved in determining who should decide what is desirable, harmful, improvement, and beneficial.

The second example is also generally complimentary in tone, except for a curious evaluation of the Indian ability to think, and seems to call for a rather gentle process of integration for the Indians. Gamio writes:

> In order to introduce new means to create new needs, ... native tradition, custom, and personality must be taken into account, since to implant upon these an entirely new and strange way of life would be unjudicious, not to say impossible .... To be beneficial, the substitution of modern effective means for deficient means should be preceded by a well-guided transformation of the anachronistic mental processes which gave rise to the former, employing methods and reasonings suited to the mentality peculiar to the individuals under consideration (1949:105).

The most complimentary statement encountered in the América Indígena during the 1940's regarding Indian populations came not from a Mexican, but from a Peruvian. "The Indian should not only be viewed as a person to be educated, but also as an educator, for the Indian has important contributions to make with his rich tradition, his songs, dances, and folklore" (Barrantes 1944:49). This dual orientation expected of the Indian (looking inward and looking outward) was mentioned four years later by a Mexican author who called for the preservation and encouragement of "regional cultures." He also stated that schoolbooks should be specially prepared for each district "emphasizing the local geography, folklore, archaeology, ethnography, history, and languages, to inculcate in the students an appreciation of their double cultural heritage--Iberic and Indian (Moreno 1948:313). Friedlander's recent study of a Mexican village, Being Indian in Hueyapan, notes the difficulties inherent in encouraging such a double identity for the Indians, and her observations will be noted in the later discussion on education in contemporary Indian villages in Mexico.

One final perspective found in América Indígena is most interesting. Monzón, a Mexican, notes that the Western, modern sphere of Mexico which is proposing to incorporate the Indians into it is far from perfect, and that the integration of the Indian population into the dominant sphere will not necessarily improve the conditions of living for the Indian.

> Indian problems exist where Indian and non-Indian live together. To settle these problems, we have considered what could theoretically be done for the Indian; but we have not taken into account the limitations of our own Occidental culture .... Anthropologists, administrators, indianists, etc., can convert Indians to Occidents, but they'll just have Occidental problems then. Thus, Occidental problems must be resolved (Monzón 1947:323).

The 1940's: Indianism and indigenismo

The decade of the 1940's was also important in the history of educational philosophies and policies regarding Mexico's Indians because it marked the decline of two long-standing Indian-related orientations, *indianismo* and *indigenismo*. *Indianismo*, basically a belief in the simple agrarian peasant economy, came into its own during the Mexican Revolution. The indianists sought to encourage national appreciation of the Indian languages and cultures. The indianists actively sought to alter the status quo to favor Indians at the expense of non-Indians. The imbalance of power between the Indians and non-Indians remained enormous, however, and those threatened by a disruption of the status quo reacted with "conservative hostility" toward indianist efforts (Ruiz 1963:132).

The indianists had among them both radical and moderate factions. While both wings were concerned with the "nationality" of the Indian, the moderate group (including Gamio, cited above on page 19) gradually adopted a new philosophy, that of *indigenismo*. Leaving the city and working in Indian villages, they soon saw that "the nationality

issue was meaningless unless there were tangible benefits for the Indian" (Ruiz 1963:134). Indigenismo was mainly interested in improving the socioeconomic status of the Indian, and in making him a part of the nation by blending his characteristics with the non-Indian society.

Indianismo and indigenismo began to decline in importance during the post-Cardenas swing to conservatism in the 1940's. World War II, and its accompanying fostering of an emphasis on industrialization in Mexico, created new problems for both groups.

> With industrialization there was no time to worry about the Indian and his special characteristics; the Republic of the future needed technicians and mechanics, not artisans or small farmers .... The reforms of the post-war years aimed to create a country able to support industry. All else was secondary (Ruiz 1963:140).

Not only had indianismo and indigenismo lost their momentum, but also the indigenista rural school was caught between the earlier national emphasis on rural Indian life and the post-war industrial emphasis.

> As designed for life in the village, it was accused of preparing the children of the peasant for the life of the peasant; if its program sought to avoid this charge, it was said to have no practical meaning for the people of the village (Ruiz 1963:140).

While neither indianismo nor indigenismo were able to successfully address the complex Indian "problem," both had significant impact on the Indian villages as well as on the national consciousness. And regarding education efforts

in these rural communities, despite its shortcomings, "the school the indigenistas built was closer to reality than any that had ever been designed in Mexico" (Ruiz 1963:141).

As noted earlier, the Cárdenas administration created a Department of Indian Affairs "for developing programs for the welfare of the more backward Indian groups throughout the nation" (Whetten 1948:426). This was abolished in 1946, and in its wake, the National Indian Institute (INI) was established in 1948. The philosophy espoused by INI was partially pluralistic, intended "to allow the Indian to live with the best values of his past and to retain his arts and crafts while enjoying a higher standard of living" (Wilkie 1970:172). In contrast to most aspects of Mexican politics and education, INI is a decentralized agency of the Federal Government, in an uncharacteristic attempt at employing regional conceptualizations of problems and solutions. The present director of INI, Aguirre Beltrán, has commented on its orientation:

> [INI] decided not to be directly responsible for economic development but instead to invest in infrastructures that would permit more specialized national agencies to work. To this end they pushed roads, credit, health measures, and education, all of which were designed to help Indians learn to operate in a modern world (cited in Hunt 1969:551).

INI has always considered the modernization and industrialization of Mexico as its prime concern, and has viewed the integration of the Indian as an important aspect of these processes. According to one author who studied

Indian education in the highlands of Chiapas, INI views their schools as the most influential agencies of Indian acculturation (Modiano 1973:88-89).

INI's position regarding literacy in the Spanish language, which many view as the single most important aspect of Indian education, reflects their pluralist philosophy. While INI considers Spanish to be an essential skill for the Indians, they need not abandon their native language (Beals 1974:206), although Modiano (1973:87-139) notes that the INI schools in the Chiapas highlands often depart from this policy, with unproductive results which will be elaborated on in the upcoming section on contemporary Indian Mexico.

The importance that INI places on acculturating the monolingual Indian is also noted by Myers, who states that INI "is concerned solely with educating that part of the Indian population ... that is still unable to speak Spanish and thus remains outside the national life" (1965:55, emphasis added). The issue of Spanish literacy, and how to go about achieving it, remains perhaps the most vital concern of the Mexican government as regards their interest in the Indian population. This issue will be evaluated following a final section on the historical development of Indian "education" -- what was happening in the 1960's.

The 1960's: Emphasis on literacy

Fifty years after the beginning of Mexico's Revolution, considerable changes had taken place in terms of the educational facilities in most rural communities. In 1960, more than twenty million students were attending over 20,000 federal rural schools, and state and municipal rural schools claimed still more pupils (Ruiz 1963:215-216). However, these figures do not reflect that in 1960 more than half of the rural children were not involved in any educational system, and the minority that were enrolled were concentrated in the earliest grades; 55% were in the first grade, and 91% in the first three grades (Myers 1965:46,51).

Not only was there concentration in the earliest grades (and rapid attrition in the higher grades, if higher grades were even available), but there was also concentration in the urban areas. For example, in 1970 it was estimated that while 54% of the urban elementary population complete primary school, only 9% of the rural population do (Perissinotto 1974:209). Modiano also notes the disparity between educational enrollment in the nation compared to Indian regions. In 1967, "nationally, 8% of the primary-school enrollees were sixth-graders, but in the rural schools of Chiapas sixth-graders formed only 1.5% of the primary school population" (Modiano 1973:91). One final statistic reflects the teachers qualifications in the rural schools. While undoubtedly there were uncertified teachers in some urban schools, in 1960 more than three quarters of

all rural primary school teachers had no certificates (Myers 1965:55). Because of the inferior quality of instruction in the rural schools, "some parents with progressive attitudes and sufficient resources often bypass the local schools entirely and send their children to the cities" (Myers 1965: 56). However, the vast majority of the rural villagers are unable to exercise this option. The end result of having uncertified teachers in the rural schools is that those rural children who do ultimately pursue secondary education in urban schools find themselves at a disadvantage when competing with the urban children who have had years of superior instruction.

As the 1960's began, the educational efforts in Mexico's rural Indian areas were far from satisfactory in many people's eyes.

> It was clear by 1958 that the last cycle of education, which found the gospel of industry king in a land where two out of three Mexicans lived in villages, had not overcome the educational difficulties of the past. There was, as a matter of fact, reason to believe that the rural school was worse off than before (Ruiz 1963: 87).

Ruiz felt this pessimism for a number of reasons. Mexico's emphasis on industrialization caused a scarcity of federal funds for rural education (Ruiz 1963:85). Also, the five Ministers of Education following the Cárdenas regime were not very concerned about rural education (Ruiz 1963:72-74). Population increases also obstructed educational efforts; gains in literacy were offset by this (Myers 1963:84).

These factors combined to create the following statistical situation. "Of the approximately 5 million children in the primary-school age bracket, 4 million lived in rural Mexico. Of the 3 million children without schools in 1958, three out of four lived in villages" (Ruiz 1963:86).

With the above-stated conditions and opinions existing, the Mexican government, in 1959, inaugurated an Eleven-Year Plan (1959-1970), officially known as the National Plan to Improve and Expand Elementary Education in Mexico. While the plan has been faulted for stressing expansion of elementary education at the expense of the improvement of existing schools, it nevertheless marked a major reform in Mexican education (Perissinotto 1974:209). Among the most important reforms of the Eleven-Year Plan were:

> the primacy of national over individual goals; the need for curriculum to be based on children's experiences and society's needs; and, in light of the reality of wholesale school desertions, the necessity for fundamental education to form the curricular core of the first four grades (Modiano 1973:88).

One additional reason why these reforms were felt to be necessary is reflected in the statistics on illiteracy, an indicator which is often believed to be fundamental in Mexico's educational "problem." It has been said that "there are probably no statistics which are so incomplete, so imprecise and difficult to analyze as those relating to illiteracy" (Rycroft and Clemmer 1965:1). The fact that the Mexican census data are based on unverified responses to the

question "Do you know how to read and write" (1970 census) does not add to the accuracy of the information. Nevertheless, the figures showing Mexico's changes in illiteracy rates reflect a trend. The steadily (if slowly) declining illiteracy rates since the Revolution are reported in the 1970 census as follows: 72% in 1910, 66% in 1921, 61% in 1930, 57% in 1940, 43% in 1950, 33% in 1960, and 24% in 1970. However encouraging this trend might be, it must be recalled that functional illiteracy and rapid population increases make these figures somewhat deceiving. And in spite of the massive literacy campaigns, in 1960 it was reported that of the Mexican population older than 14 years, nearly 70% of those old enough to have completed their primary education were "unable to handle their language adequately in written form" (Balán, et al. 1973:87). Also, Whetten (1948:420) notes that illiteracy is almost always found to be inversely related to the size of the municipality, which means that the small villages where Indians generally live contain a disproportionate percentage of the nation's illiterates.

Retention of literacy skills is a contemporary "problem" that is reflected in a 1959 admission by the Department of Education that at least one-third of those who became literate were no longer able to read or write (Myers 1965:57). Within the rural schools, which were often poorly equipped, understaffed, and neglected, Gill says "the average number of years of school attendance was two,

hardly sufficient to prevent frequent lapses into functional illiteracy among those whose basic learning has not been reinforced through further schooling or active use" (Gill 1969:12). Hines (1969:38) also comments on the difficulties involved in maintaining functional literacy with only one or two years of schooling. Indeed, it is probable that loss of literacy skills was even greater than the national figure cited by Gill above. Functional literacy is generally agreed to require four or more years of schooling (UNESCO 1957:37, Sanders 1975:7).

The problems associated with census data and functional illiteracy are clearly illustrated in the following quotation from Redfield's study of a Mexican Indian village in 1934.

> Most of the people whom the schools have taught to read and write seldom or never do so. In many cases the literacy [reported in the census] means an ability to pronounce Spanish words without much understanding of their meaning. Indeed 16 of the [35] persons reported in the census as literate are also described as not knowing how to speak Spanish. As no instruction is given in reading or writing Maya, this means either that these persons do in fact have some knowledge of Spanish or that--and this is the larger share of the truth--their reading knowledge of Spanish is a superficial ability, an accomplishment, not an instrument of communication (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934:17).

CHAPTER III

CURRENT PROGRAMS AND PHILOSOPHIES

The preceding discussion of the development of Mexico's post-Revolutionary efforts regarding education for the nation's Indian population was presented at length not only to provide an historical documentation for what has been undertaken and achieved, but also to allow for a greater understanding of how and why the programs and philosophies currently under debate or in use have come about. This chapter evaluates the present position of education in Indian communities in terms of statistical accomplishments, and in terms of the effects which the schoolteacher and the school itself have on the Indians.

Statistical evaluation of the contemporary situation

Much of what has been presented regarding Mexico's Indians during the six decades following the Revolution (which "was fought on the assumption that the Indian would be provided with tierra y libros ('land and books')"

(Whetten 1948:404)) remains essentially the same, and the Indians' social, political, and economic status continues to be far below that of non-Indians.

Despite the gains cited in literacy rates, in most Indian areas of Mexico the absolute numbers of illiterate monolingual Indians have increased due to general population increases. Thus, ironically, while there are more Mexicans today who can read and write, there are also more than ever who cannot. Rycroft and Clemmer (1965:12,13) cite a 1964 Population Bulletin which reports that between 1950 and 1960, 6 million Mexicans became "literate," and enrollment in the primary grades increased by 2.6 million pupils. But it also states that these apparent gains were more than offset by population increases, and that actually by 1960 Mexico had more illiterates and more primary age children out of school than it did in 1950.

It is not unrealistic to assume that Mexico's high population growth rate continues to more than counterbalance any educational gains currently being realized. One confirmation of this assumption is provided by Bravo Ahuja (cited in Ingram 1975:7), who states that despite the existence of 25,000 rural schools, roughly 3 million rural youth remain outside the educational system, which implies an increase in children outside the rural schools since the figures reported in 1958 by Ruiz (cited above on page 27).

Ruiz (1963:xii) reports that "there are still approximately 4 million Mexicans who speak one of 52

languages or dialects," and these figures have changed little since they were written. The 1970 census suggests that nearly 3.7 million Mexicans speak an Indian language (of whom about 72% reportedly also speak Spanish). Modiano reports that 50 Indian languages continue to be spoken in Mexico (1973:89). Also, as recently as 1973, it was noted that 25% of the Mexican school-age population receives no instruction at all (Perissinotto 1973:226) and only 5% ever reach the sixth grade (Magat 1974:1). Magat contributes further unfavorable comments about the current educational system in Mexico:

> The ideal of free popular education has flown high among Mexican revolutionary banners since the days of Benito Juarez. The last two national administrations have doubled enrollment and raised expenditures to $1 billion annually, or 3.1 per cent of the Gross National Product. But despite these efforts Mexico entered the 1970s without advancing more than half its population beyond the second grade, and the teacher-pupil ratio actually deteriorated during the 1960s. Qualitative problems were as severe as quantitative shortfalls (Magat 1974:2).

In addition to these circumstances, others exist which heavily influence and often exacerbate attempts to "improve the well-being" of the Indian population. One factor affecting educational efforts for Indians in Mexico is the fact that "the percentage of the population which speaks only an Indian language has been limited in importance to about half of the political divisions of the republic" (Wilkie 1970:215). Because of the highly centralized nature of Mexican bureaucracy, problems which do not concern

the entire nation are less readily addressed. Another problem to be addressed in this chapter is the inappropriateness of non-Indian teachers in Indian schools. Following the discussion of the problems presently existing in Indian schools, a greater problem (of which the educational problems are only one reflection) must be considered. I refer to the current status and position of the Indian in Mexican society. Many writers feel strongly that efforts to "educate" the Indian population represent calculated or unintentional attempts to maintain the oppressive and exploitative status quo, and that only social reform and/or revolution will meaningfully ameliorate the Indian's life.

In my own mind, the single most important consideration regarding the issue of education for Mexico's Indians involves the goals and expectations of the non-Indians vs. the Indians. Not only are they vastly different; they are also in conflict. Rigid social divisions exist between the program planners and the program "targets." The orientations and desires of these two groups are, in many instances, at variance with one another. The complexities of this issue will be analyzed in depth in the next chapter.

Indian vs. non-Indian teachers

One of the objectives of the new Federal Law of Education (Nov. 26, 1973) is "to attain, through the teaching of the national tongue, a language common to all Mexicans, without jeopardizing the use of indigenous languages"

(cited in Perissinotto 1974:211). The one aspect of education on which the assimilationists, pluralists, and Indians all agree (as we shall see in the following chapter) is that literacy in Spanish is worthwhile pursuing, regardless of the reasons behind such a desire. However, there is far less consensus as to how to undertake this objective.

Despite the benevolent tone of the 1973 law which calls for respect for Indian languages, there remains a strong feeling among the assimilationists that any indigenous language has no place in the classroom. They continue to ignore rather convincing evidence from studies that have shown that "bilingual instruction in the early grades not only speeded up the learning process but in the end produced a more competent use of Spanish, without eliminating the use of the local Indian language" (Beals 1974:205). Whether because of an inherent dislike for Indian languages (which of course the non-Indian cannot understand), or because "most mestizos ... [regard] bilingual programs as absurd or as subversive attempts to prevent the use of Spanish ..., bilingual education is very rare in Mexico" (Beals 1974: 205).

One historical insight into the debate over bilingual education suggests the strong feelings on each side. In 1950, Casas, a Mexican, wrote that to "awaken the mind of the Indian, ... the use of bilingual primers should be prohibited, and the teaching problems attacked without evasion or loss of time" (Casas 1950:63). Another Mexican,

de la Fuente, quickly attacked Casas' statement, noting the difficulties involved in learning a second language without the use of one's native language (de la Fuente 1950:119).

The difficulties inherent in teaching and learning a second language, as experienced in Mexico's rural schools in the 1930's have been aptly described by Ruiz.

> Confronted with a language barrier, the rural school had undertaken three things at one time: to teach the Indian to speak Spanish, to teach him to read and write it, and to give him an elementary education. In the hands of a Spanish-speaking teacher the job was too big: the Indian did not learn Spanish, and education fell by the wayside. Instead of spending his time with the three R's and other basic requirements, the teacher had to emphasize the teaching of Spanish, but he failed even in this task because he did not know the local language (Ruiz 1963:165-166).

The inappropriateness of a non-Indian teacher in Indian schools in the 1970's is noted by Magat. Commenting on the 3000 additional teachers who were dispatched to Mexico's rural areas in 1971 in attempt to improve rural education, Magat cites the opinion of the founder and former director of the Center for Educational Studies, which is concerned with both real and philosophical issues regarding education in Mexico.

> According to Pablo Latapí, a widely respected analyst of Mexican education, the step reflected the poor fit between the country's educational system and the needs of the people. For example, he said the teachers had been trained no differently than if they were to handle city children. Some of those assigned to predominately Indian areas were surprised to discover that Spanish was not the primary language (cited in Magat 1974:1).

Despite the highly centralized nature of the educational system in Mexico, the National Indian Institute (INI) is relatively decentralized, and this flexibility seems to be a contributory factor in the INI schools being viewed as relatively more "successful" than the federal rural schools, as reported by Modiano (1973) below.

In an enlightened attempt to adapt educational theory to the reality of Mexican Indian life, the INI schools have instituted a pre-school preparatory year for Indian children, run by a local bilingual instructor who teaches the children to read in their own language "using material and examples from the local environment" (Myers 1965:55). Unfortunately, however, as noted earlier, Modiano observed that the INI schools she studied in Chiapas began teaching entirely in Spanish during the first or second grade. As a result, "by using Spanish, the teachers tend to put comprehension of the subject matter beyond the children's reach" (Modiano 1973:96). Nash's observations of a first grade classroom restricted to using Spanish reflects some of the difficulties with this approach.

> Inside the schoolroom almost all behavior is initiated and controlled by the teacher. All communication within the school is in Spanish--the teacher ignores responses other than those in Spanish--although most of the children understand no Spanish when they enter school (Nash 1970:307).

Among the Chiapas schools, Modiano conducted tests which "showed the bilingual approach to be significantly

more effective in teaching reading comprehension in Spanish" (Modiano 1973:129). She also reported that in the schools where Spanish was used for instruction:

> Instruction in Spanish as a second language was virtually nonexistent. Rather, it was expected that by using only Spanish the children would somehow acquire a working knowledge of that language. Such an assumption has been invoken time and time again, throughout the world, yet no research has proven its validity (Modiano 1973:132, emphasis added).

In my opinion, illiteracy among Mexico's Indians will not be eradicated by augmenting the number of teachers, or by creating more schools, even if the nation found the finances to consider such proposals. The persistence of high rates of illiteracy (and even higher rates of functional illiteracy) in Indian communities is not due to the quantity of teachers and schools so much as their quality. More than anything else, it appears that being a non-Indian teacher in an Indian community creates not only a linguistic gap which is difficult to span (even if the teacher desires to, which is questionable), but also a cultural chasm which is perhaps far more difficult to bridge, and yet is far more important to the villagers and their children.

It is widely known that cross-cultural change agents often experience difficulties in attempting to introduce innovations in rural communities. The anthropological literature is replete with examples of programs of "assistance" or "improvement" which failed or only partly succeeded because of unexpected obstacles (e.g. Bodley 1975; Foster

1969, 1973; and Paddock 1973). Modiano's study of Indian education in the Chiapas highlands is an excellent documentation of problems encountered in Mexico's efforts to provide "education" to Indians who speak a different language and ascribe to different cultural beliefs and practices. Her comments which follow reflect the innappropriateness of a non-Indian teachers in an Indian community, and illustrate the reasons why locally raised Indians are generally more effective in the schools and in the communities as well.

In addition to the educational duties,

> Teachers are expected to supply leadership to the communities. Most Indian teachers appear to work well with their communities; most mestizo teachers appeared to have difficulties, either because of negative attitudes or because of the language and cultural barriers separating them (Modiano 1973:97).

In the classroom, not surprisingly, the students were more comfortable with an Indian teacher, and the "Indian teachers appeared to be generally more patient and respectful of their students than mestizos" (Modiano 1973:102). The differences in cultural orientations between Indians and non-Indians are also evident in the following observation.

> When a young child fails to obey his parents' orders he is considered too young to understand; a schoolchild who fails to understand his teacher is considered too stupid. The teacher, or a system that offers virtually all instruction in a foreign language is rarely blamed (Modiano 1973:118).

The contrasting systems of "education" which make cross-cultural educational attempts so often ineffective

are forcefully brought home by Modiano's Chiapas study. The Indian style of education is characterized by two factors:

> (1) With sufficient practice at tasks that are an intrinsic part of the family's activities, the child is expected to become accustomed to his work, and (2) children are given considerable leeway, even encouragement, to explore the world around them (Modiano 1973:137).

In sharp contrast to this attitude toward education, the ladino (or non-Indian) practices of child rearing and education (especially for those not considered lower class) is as follows.

> Teachers, as members of the upper-middle stratum of the ladino world, distinguish many childhood activities from adult ones and expect children to learn from intrinsically meaningless tasks and to enjoy their rewards in the vague future of adulthood. Like the Indians, the ladinos tend to include children in many adult activities, at least as passive observers, but, unlike the Indians, a child's first efforts at a difficult task are likely to be discarded as worthless. It is only after he has reached a level of proficiency approximating adult skill that his work will be valued by the family (Modiano 1973:137).

It is hardly surprising, therefore, to see that the Indian children felt far more relaxed, confident, and accepted by Indian teachers, and that "the youngsters are unaminous in their preference for Indian rather than non-Indian teachers" (Modiano 1973:102,134).

These problems involved in placing a non-Indian in an Indian community school where both the language and the customs are foreign are probably the most important reasons

why Indian school children do not stay in school long, but there are others. The enrollment and retention "problem" mentioned earlier (by Myers, cited on page 25) was also noticed by Modiano, who saw a "high dropout rate for students at about second grade. It seems that once they feel they have achieved literacy or when economic pressures bear down they tend to leave school to enter the working world of adults" (Modiano 1973:114). The time children spend in schools is recognized as time which could be used to make an economic contribution to the family, and accordingly, attendance is sporadic in many Indian communities where families are often unable to forego the income that their children could contribute. In effect, the children are not so much dropping out of school as they are being pushed out by economic pressures.

Education and social stratification

Another factor which inhibits the "success" of education among the economically poorer segment of the Mexican population is that the attainment of education can contribute to the process of social stratification, even to the point of causing sharp differences between parents' and sons' socio-economic statuses (Balán et al. 1973:270). "The marginal majority and the schooled minority grow even farther apart" as a result of schooling, writes Illich (1971:98). The more education a child has, the greater the potential fractioning within the family as well as within

the community. "Children who complete the upper grades are more clearly differentiated from their parents, are less willing to accept traditional discipline and procedures, and are often motivated later to leave the village for good" (Myers 1965:52). Given the above-mentioned economic and social considerations, it is perhaps understandable that some Indian parents carefully try to hide their children from the educational authorities, even though "school is not as much feared as it once was" (Modiano 1973:95). Nash has stated that the school, unlike the church, is considered to be an "alien structure" in the Chiapas Indian community she studied. However, she notes that in recent years there has been increasing acceptance of education (Nash 1970:302-303).

Friedlander's fascinating study of a Mexican Indian village emphasizes the psychological disorientation experienced by Indian children who are "forced" to identify with both their Indian heritage and the non-Indian nation. She analyzes the textbooks, the national holiday celebrations, and school-run assemblies, among other things, to illustrate the "double image" which has been forced on the villagers. "There is the noble Indian of the past who has been incorporated into the sacred history of the elite, and then there is the humble Indian of the present who has little to recommend him" (Friedlander 1975:158).

The paucity of Indian teachers is a problem. With the relationship between a teacher's ethnicity and his/her

effectiveness so clear, one might ask why there are not more Indian teachers. The answer lies not only in economic restraints. "There are also historical and social constraints that affect the pool from which potential teachers are drawn. In a land in which only the elite receive formal education there are very few potential teachers for mass education" (Modiano 1973:135).

Developing nations have always had to face up to the shortage of highly trained teachers. Whetten noted that Mexico's Cultural mission schools of the 1920's and 1930's realized that they were not staying in any one place long enough to accomplish their objectives (which would take "an entire generation" to accomplish), "but they are overwhelmed by the needs in other areas" (Whetten 1948:440). The same situation exists today in many respects, and the national strategy continues to be one of spreading the available resources thin in order to reach a larger population, rather than to concentrate their limited resources in a smaller region.

The lack of <u>formally</u> <u>trained</u> teachers, whether Indian or non-Indian, is not necessarily a problem. Modiano's Chiapas study revealed that the training of the teacher is not nearly as important as the fact of being a fully accepted member of the community (i.e. being an Indian). In the 26 Chiapas schools studied by Modiano, "it appeared that the poorly trained teachers who were members of the local tribes were more successful both

academically and in their community development activities than were the more highly trained outsiders" (Modiano 1973: 135-136).

The apparent logical step of providing more "poorly trained" Indian teachers in order to provide the Indian villagers with the literacy they want is not so easily implemented. There are vested interests in preserving the status quo. As Aguirre Beltrán points out, "there can be both internal and external resistance to cultural change" (cited in Hunt 1969:547). As director of INI, he is most certainly aware of the following sentiments. "In most Indian areas, many mestizos [or non-Indians] for generations have exploited the Indians. To the degree INI programs give Indians greater economic independence, these mestizos are often bitterly opposed to INI" (Beals 1974:207).

However, as reflected in the following comments by Illich and Magat, schooling has not generally provided more economic freedom. Rather, it has often solidified the schism that exists between the elite and the masses.

> Some schooling is not necessarily more education than none, especially in a country where every year a few more people can get all the schooling they want while most people never complete the sixth grade. But much less than six years seems to be sufficient to inculcate in the child the acceptance of the ideology which goes with the school grade. The child learns only about the superior status and unquestioned authority of those who have more schooling than he has (Illich 1971:106).

Magat makes a similar observation, explaining that "educational expansion is double-edged. Without informed

planning and evaluation leading to wider opportunity for the base of the pyramid, education could expand along lines that reinforce the status quo and aggravate frustration" (Magat 1974:1). Despite the elitist orientation of school-centered formal education (or because of it), schools do increase the national income. Obviously this increased income is disproportionately enjoyed by the elite, at the expense of the majority. As the elite increase national production, it becomes concomitantly essential that the masses be prepared to participate in consuming the products. Schools are seen as the vehicle for this preparation.

> In an economy on the lower rungs of development toward United States-type industrialization, a school graduate is enormously more productive than a dropout. Schools are part and parcel of a society in which a minority is on the way to becoming so productive that the majority must be schooled into disciplined consumption (Illich 1971:106).

Rather than try to "improve" the existing schools, Illich says that we should "question the assumption on which the school system itself is based. We must not exclude the possibility that the emerging nations cannot be schooled, that schooling is not a viable answer to their need for universal education" (Illich 1971:98). Support for the suggestion of structural educational reform comes from Magat, who cites Lapatí. Referring to recent national attempts to compensate for the disadvantages of the rural schools, Latapí says the efforts did "nothing of the sort." Instead, he calls for a complete review of existing models

of education, allowing for the possibility of "rural education of an entirely new kind" (Latapí cited in Magat 1974:1).

It is widely agreed that the Indian "problem" involves far more than illiteracy. "By 1959, many had come to doubt the efficacy of the literacy panacea" (Ruiz 1963: 84). Support for this notion comes from Beals (1974:206), Modiano (1973:139), and Gill (1969:12). For many, literacy (and education in sum) was seen as only one aspect of needed reforms that were entirely social.

> Literacy was wasted where the activity of life centered on survival. Unless measures were taken simultaneously to correct the conditions that produced illiteracy, being able to read and write was of little value. Illiteracy was not a pedagogical ill but a reflection of deep-seated economic and social conditions (Ruiz 1963:84).

It is to these economic and social conditions that we now turn our attention.

Philosophical and theoretical considerations

Having traced the development of "education" for Indians in post-Revolutionary Mexico, and having examined its current status and problems, it is appropriate to view the issue from philosophical and theoretical perspectives. A number of social commentators have analyzed Mexican social structure and found it to be fraught with inequalities and injustices. Many have addressed the topic of education per se and have found it to be contributing to the problems, rather than aiding in their solutions. This has led some to

call for educational and other social reforms and revolutionary changes in the existing conditions. These philosophical, theoretical, and analytical commentaries which follow speak directly to the issue of Indian education in Mexico, and are intended to point out views on education that are often ignored or denied by those who formulate educational policies and programs for Mexico's Indians.

Commenting on education's function of preserving the status quo, Adams writes:

> Historically, education has not been primarily a tool for changing the societies involved, but, rather, a device for perpetuating their current structure.... Unfortunately, educational institutions tend to reflect the operating order of the society as it stands.... Literacy is being inculcated, but the change is occurring no faster than are changes in other sectors of the culture (Adams 1967:147).

Considering the alternative, as offered by Freire (below), it is easy to understand why those in the favored social, political, and economic positions (the "oppressors," as Freire calls them) prefer to employ education as a means of keeping the "oppressed" in their place.

> There is no such thing as a <u>neutral</u> educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, <u>or</u> it becomes "the practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Freire 1970:15).

Later in his <u>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</u>, Freire

labels the above-quoted function of education as a tool of invasion; he calls it "cultural invasion," and explains what he means.

> In this phenomenon, the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter's potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression (Freire 1970: 150).

The cultural disruptions which accompany disharmonious educational institutions, and the conflicts which were noted in the discussion of the contemporary Indian educational practices, are also noted in Bodley's Victims of Progress.

> In many countries schooling has been the prime coercive instrument of cultural modification and has proven to be a highly effective means of destroying self-esteem, fostering new needs, creating dissatisfactions, and generally disrupting traditional cultures (Bodley 1975: 112).

The notion that schools serve to create new needs has been a concern of Illich as well. He sees schools as having as their primary purposes the double function of fostering new needs and preparing individuals for their roles as consumers, and he notes that schools frequently benefit the producer far more than the consumer, as noted above. Illich also sees another function of the schools. They serve "to teach the schooled the superiority of the better schooled," thereby creating or perpetuating a feeling of weakness and inferiority (Illich 1971:155).

Many authors believe that the economically poorer

segment of the Mexican society (and especially the Indians) has been the victim of social, economic, and political domination, as well as paternalism and colonialism. Stavenhagen (1970:267) states that "internal colonialism is strongest in areas of Indian population, such as Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas." Aguirre Beltrán has called this the "dominical process," by which he means the domination of an Indian community which is peripheral to a more technically and economically developed center, and he sees this domination as a "causal feature in retarding evolution" in the Indian villages (cited in Hunt 1969:547). An analogous explanation of the reasons behind "underdevelopment" in the Indian regions of Mexico is provided by Frank, who employs the concepts of "satellites" and "metropoles" (i.e. peripheries and centers) on world, national, and regional scales to explain how the metropoles tend to develop while the satellites underdevelop (Frank 1972:3-17).

Freire draws attention to a critical distinction between transformation and development, explaining that whereas all development involves transformation, transformation does not automatically imply development. He states that the "oppressors" determine the destiny of the "oppressed" without regard to their development, "for it is their transformation--<u>not</u> their development--that is to the interest of the metropolitan society (Freire 1970:159-160). He continues:

> It is essential not to confuse modernization with development. The former, although it may affect certain groups in the "satellite society," is almost always induced; and it is the metropolitan society which derives the true benefits therefrom. A society which is merely modernized without developing will continue--even if it takes over some minimal delegated powers of decision--to depend on the outside country. This is the fate of any dependent society, as long as it remains dependent (Freire 1970:160).

One final statement will serve to illustrate how many social critics feel about educating the Indians. Feder, in his Rape of the Peasantry, is primarily concerned with Latin America's landholding system, but his conclusions regarding the "education of the peasant masses" are applicable to other areas of potential social reform as well. He writes:

> "Education of the peasant masses," as advocated by some economic developers, might theoretically erode the power of the landed elite in future generations, but as a strategy of development today, it puts the cart before the horse. Education of the peasants ... can be visualized only after radical ... reforms have set the basis for full employment of physical and human resources ... and have provided the assurance that the peasants will benefit from these reforms (Feder 1971:287, emphasis added).

The Revolution is only partly completed

Evaluating the effects of the Mexican Revolution 60 years after it happened is not as easy as it might seem. The goals of the Revolution were numerous, and measurements of how nearly the goals have been accomplished vary. However, as regards the condition of the Mexican Indians, and their educational opportunities, it is clear that the

Revolutionary promises have yet to be realized by many of Mexico's Indians.

> The advanced social provisions of the [1917] Constitution made it a pioneer in its day. It guaranteed free primary education, though the population was predominately illiterate.... Such provisions were assumed to be goals for the future rather than prior guarantees. After nearly 60 years of application, however, most Mexicans, especially those in rural areas, still do not finish primary school.... Thus many critics have been led to question the sincerity and effectiveness of the Mexican system and to talk of a failed or paralyzed Mexican Revolution (Sanders 1975:3).

These sentiments are closely alligned with those of Wilkie, who also makes mention of the differential effects which the Revolution has had on certain regions in Mexico. He notes that southern Mexico has been especially neglected. This section of Mexico is the most heavily populated by Indians, and includes the states of Oaxaca and Chiapas.

> In sum, the Mexican Revolution is not yet complete. Much has been done for the people, but there is still much remaining to do before Mexico is a socially integrated nation. Government policy is of primary importance in directing this work of nation-building, for it has created the climate for over-all development. Prior to 1910 there was very little social improvement. Fifty years later some regions of the country, expecially the South, live in severe poverty. The results of the Revolution have been very mixed when tested regionally (Wilkie 1970:283).

The differential improvements which the Revolution has fostered have been analyzed by Sanders in terms of economic living standards. "The contradictions in Mexican development are reflected in the contrast between the obvious opulence of the [few] ..., and the degrading poverty of

of the rural and urban lower classes. But it is also reflected in the sheer failure of the Revolutionary governments to elevate the overall standard of living of the population" (Sanders 1975:7). Sanders shows that while national per capita income has been rising, the Indian sector of the Mexican population is not appreciably benefitting from the rise (Sanders 1975:7). Instead, income is concentrated largely in the non-Indian sector, and the disparity is increasing (Sanders 1974:8). Also, as of 1970, 62% of the Mexican population was functionally illiterate, and it is certain that the Indians comprise a disproportionately large share of this group (Sanders 1975: 7).

To assess the effects of the Revolution statistically, Wilkie employed data from the six censuses involving the period from 1910 through 1960. He selected seven characteristics from the census data to formulate an "index of poverty." It is interesting to note that the features which Wilkie chose as representative of poverty are largely associated with the cultural characteristics that are generally considered to be the defining characteristics of being Indian. These include people who:

> (1) are illiterate, (2) speak only an Indian language, (3) live in a community with less than 2500 persons, (4) go barefoot, (5) wear sandals, (6) regularly eat tortillas instead of wheat bread and (7) are without sewage disposal (Wilkie 1970:205).

His figures for the first two items especially reflect the

regional disparities between the national population and the heavily Indian states of Oaxaca and Chiapas. For example, illiteracy in these two states is presently nearly twice as prevalent as it is in the national population, whereas at the time of the Revolution (1910) these same two states reported 89% illiteracy, compared with 77% in the national census. The percentage of the population speaking only an Indian language in Oaxaca and Chiapas is roughly 5 and 4 times (respectively) higher than the national figures (Wilkie 1970:208-209, 212-213).

Just what benefits the Indians in Mexico have received or will receive from the formal education which schools are designed to provide is a question not easily answered. The issue of Indian education is a highly complex one, with varying and often conflicting vested interests involved, of which the Indians' interests are widely neglected or ignored. Also, the Indians must compete with the sentiments of some, such as Myers, who have said that it is paradoxical, but that before the Indians can "catch up," they might have to "fall further behind" while Mexico maximizes its present potential for accumulating capital, and only after this is accomplished can the poorer regions be effectively "helped" (Myers 1965:147). It is just such rationalizations as these that have perpetuated the unjust status quo for decades or even longer.

Education is generally regarded to be one of the most important problems in the development of the Mexican

nation. However, Ruiz poignantly illustrates that by itself, it is insufficient to have much impact on the lives of those receiving it.

> If anything may be learned from the Mexican experience, perhaps it is that education alone is of scant use in combating problems of underdevelopment unless major social and economic reforms are undertaken simultaneously. What this implies is that education, the traditional panacea of the conservatives, will fail in countries like Mexico without the radical reforms, and especially the land reform advocated by the extreme left, anathema to the ruling classes (Ruiz 1963:xiv).

It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of respecting the particular outlook of the world held by the Indians for whom educational programs are planned. Despite all the possible good intentions of such programs, it is unrealistic to expect positive results from such one-sided efforts. Yet, for many educational administrators and program planners,

> it seems absurd to consider the necessity of respecting the "view of the world" held by the people. The professionals are the ones with a "world view." They regard as equally absurd the affirmation that one must necessarily consult the people when organizing the program content of educational action. They feel that the ignorance of the people is so complete that they are unfit for anything except to receive the teachings of the professionals (Freire 1970:153-154).

Freire reemphasizes this point at the end of his book, noting that these "professionals"

> commit many errors and miscalculations by not taking into account something so real as the people's view of the world; a view which explicitly and implicitly contains their concerns, their doubts, their hopes, ...

> their perceptions of themselves and of the oppressors, their religious beliefs.... None of these elements can be seen separately, for in interaction all of them compose a totality. The oppressor is interested in knowing this totality only as an aid to his action of invasion in order to dominate or preserve domination (Freire 1970:183-184).

Freire is not so much a champion of the oppressed as he is an advocate of human liberation. He is not so fervent in his anger at the oppressors that he wishes to see them oppressed. He is aware that, historically, the oppressed, upon gaining freedom, often become oppressors in their own right; the actors have changed, but the play remains the same. Freire, by contrast, sees the task of the oppressed as that of liberating not only themselves, but their oppressors as well. This philosophy is evident in his discussion of an antidote for the injurious practice of "cultural invasion."

Freire's solution to the problem of cultural invasion is "cultural synthesis," which involves a blending of, and a mutual respect for, the different orientations of the oppressors and the oppressed.

> In cultural synthesis--and only in cultural synthesis--is it possible to resolve the contradiction between the world view of the leaders and that of the people, to the enrichment of both. Cultural synthesis does not deny the differences between the two views; indeed, it is based on these differences. It <u>does</u> deny the <u>invasion</u> of one <u>by</u> the other, but affirms the undeniable <u>support</u> each gives <u>to</u> the other (Freire 1970:183).

Freire's "cultural synthesis" can only be effectively attained if the Indian attitudes and perspectives on

education are understood and accepted. Freire's comments (above) on the importance of ascertaining and respecting the "world view" of the Indians are extremely well-taken. Analysis of the scarce existing literature regarding the Indian outlook toward education is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

INDIAN PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION

It is a central theme of this paper that in order for Mexico's Indians to truly benefit from education of any sort, their attitudes, goals, and expectations must be well understood. This chapter addresses this largely neglected perspective. Because the educational programs designed for the Indians have largely failed to ascertain what is wanted by the Indians, it will be seen that most of what has been provided in the Indian schools is viewed as irrelevant by them. Further, this chapter examines the objective of literacy for the Indians, which is the only educational goal which both Indians and non-Indians agree is desirable. It will be seen that, because of the Indians' easily exploitable position in the Mexican society, the Indians' reasons for wanting to become literate differ markedly from the non-Indians' purposes. These differences need not necessarily interfere with the common pursuit, but they are illustrative of the complexities involved in a multi-ethnic

nation's process of transformation and/or development.

The bases for these conflicts can best be begun to be understook by amplifying a crucial point made at the outset of this paper.

> Mexico's Indians, it should be made clear, do not consider themselves to be a problem.... Indians see themselves as having problems such as inadequate land; encroachments of mestizo peasants and landholders on Indian land and resources; exploitation by employers, traders, and buyers of Indian products; and efforts by outsiders to destroy local customs and community-based social, ceremonial, and political structures. The government is variously considered oppressive and interfering, or benign and protective. But all the problems are the fault of mestizos. The Indian, in his own terms, is not a problem, but he does have a mestizo problem (Beals 1974:204).

As noted repeatedly throughout the preceding discussion on the development of Indian education in Mexico since the time of the Revolution, the national goals have consistently stressed the integration and incorporation of the Indian into the nation. Regardless of whether the motives behind these stated goals were founded on altruism or expectations of further exploitation, it is curious that consideration and interest in what <u>the Indians</u> felt constituted "improvements" in their lives is conspicuously lacking in the historical literature surveyed for this paper. The occasional references to the importance of the Indian perspective which were encountered are presented in the following pages. No serious scholarly investigation into Indian attitudes toward education was found regarding Mexican Indians. However, one such study for an Indian

community in highland Guatemala was located, and its relevant observations will be considered in the final portion of this chapter.

The neglected Indian perspective

Considering education from the perspective of the Indian for whom it is intended is not a new idea. For at least 30 years, and probably longer, respected scholars have been pointing out its importance. In 1946, Beals commented on the schooling in a Mexican Indian village which he had observed.

> Formal education is still not geared to the needs and problems of Cherán life and is and will remain relatively ineffective until it becomes of obvious utility to the average Cherán resident. In other words, until the educational process is conceived of first of all from the standpoint of Cherán culture instead of from the standpoint of national needs or theories, it will not be effective (Beals 1946:176).

In surveying the issues of América Indígena for the decade of the 1940's, only one reference to the importance of the Indian's perspective was encountered. In 1949, Gamio called for "the needs and ambitions of the Indians to be ascertained, so that practical means of satisfying these needs and ambitions can be established" (Gamio 1949:105). It seems ironic that an organization with the following stated function would have for so long neglected to consider such input.

> It serves as a clearing house for information on Indians and on methods of improving their social and economic

> conditions, and initiates, directs and coordinates studies applicable to the solution of Indian problems or contributing to better knowledge of Indian life (frontispiece of América Indígena, publication of the Inter-American Indian Institute).

Eleven years later, in 1960, another instance of an awareness of the importance of the Indian orientation is found. Buitrón emphasizes that before any teaching is attempted, there must be certainty that the new knowledge will fill a real need felt by the people. However, this enlightened view is darkly clouded by Buitrón's second point: if the people do not feel a need for what the planners want to provide, then the planners must set about to create the need (Buitrón 1960:167).

Freire is also concerned with the Indian position. He writes that any educational programs must begin with the realization that the content of any effort must address the present, existing, concrete situation, and must reflect the aspirations of the people (Freire 1970:85). To further make the point, he quotes Mao-Tse-Tung:

> The cultural workers must serve the people ... and must act in accordance with the needs and wishes of the masses. All work done for the masses must start from their needs and not from the desire of any individual, however well-intentioned (cited in Freire 1970:83).

As logical as this perspective might seem, it nevertheless remains true that "few mestizos have bothered to ask what Indians want, or considered the answer important" (Beals 1974:232). By examining what the Indians do want,

as this chapter does below, it will become more clear why the non-Indians are necessarily disinterested in the Indian outlook on education, due to the basic incompatibility of the two perspectives. In a nutshell, it appears that this disinterest on the part of the non-Indians stems from their strong ethnocentrism and desire to preserve their favored position in the existing social, economic, and political system.

As stated earlier, much of the education offered in the Indian schools is seen as irrelevant by them. For example, Modiano observed inordinate emphasis in the classroom on the "highly abstract notion of nationalism" in areas where Indians perceive of "Mexico" as an unknown area lying somewhere outside of their region (Modiano 1973:96). She also points out, as does Friedlander, that the curriculum and texts are only slightly related to the children's environment and experiences. In 1973, however, new sets of textbooks were issued throughout Mexico, "correcting many of the objectionable features ... especially the urban bias" (Friedlander 1975:147).

Commenting on a community in the Chiapas highlands, Nash has noted that, were it not for the encroachment of non-Indian influences, there might be no need or desire among the villagers for a "formal" educational institution.

> Left on its own, that is, making a mental abstraction and eliminating from the scene all Ladinos, a community like Amatenango would not have any school at all. For the community itself continuity in culture and

> development of the skills needed for the maintenance of the society come through the informal means of ordinary socialization and enculturation (Nash 1971:147).

Education as Indian self-protection

Nash's mental abstraction (above) serves its purpose of illustrating the interconnectedness between non-Indians and the schools in Indian communities. But he also realizes that, in reality, Mexico's Indian communities are becoming more and more exposed to non-Indian forces outside of the community, and that isolation is an impossibility. Thus, Nash writes:

> What is needed to be an Amantenangero is learned in the local social system, while what is needed to deal with outsiders may be learned in the local school. This puts the school and schooling in perspective: it is an extrinsic agency, part of the larger society, transmitter of a different cultural tradition, and by nature an agent of change and a source of new and wider mental horizons (Nash 1971:147).

While the literature has largely neglected the Indian outlook on life, the oppressed position occupied by Mexico's Indians suggests that they desire "improved" and "better" conditions in their lives. As noted earlier, the non-Indians claim to be interested in improving the lot of the Indians. However, the conflicts between these two groups as to what constitutes "better," and the means employed by the non-Indians to pursue their goals, have led the Indians to adopt a defensive posture. Beals, noting that some Indians might possibly rather be left alone, says

that they would constitute a minority.

> Most are interested in being better able to feed, house, and clothe their families; they can be interested in improved health methods, and in some education, although much of what they have available seems irrelevant to them. On the other hand, they resent and resist efforts to change los costumbres, the customs. In short, they may want to produce, live in peace with their neighbors, and even take an interest in being Mexicans, but they want to be Indian Mexicans, not mestizos (Beals 1974:232).

Nearly three decades earlier, Beals, in a comment about the irrelevance of most of what the classroom was offering the Indian, mentioned an advantage of education which the Indian could employ to his advantage when dealing with non-Indians, namely literacy. The use of literacy as a form of protection against exploitation, as will be seen below, is frequently expressed as an important benefit of education, as viewed from the Indian perspective. Beals wrote:

> With all due acknowledgment of the effort and sincerity involved in the school system, the Cherán schools do not train children in any real sense for life in Cherán. The average Cherán resident completing the school training has little advantage over his unschooled fellows in following the farming routines of the community. If he can read and write perhaps he has some less chance of being swindled in business transactions.... The major advantage of school training is to better equip some individuals to cope with the Mestizo world which impinges on Cherán to some extent... (Beals 1946:175).

Foster has noted that peasant societies usually do not take much interest in learning to read and write until "late" in their "development." "Villagers do not look upon literacy as an abstract thing that is good per se. It is

something that takes time and hard work, and when it is achieved it has no meaning for most people" (Foster 1973: 167). He continues that it is only when the villagers begin to see that the literate people have extra advantages, "or when they feel they are less likely to be cheated by city people if they can read," that literacy becomes important to them (Foster 1973:169). As Mexico's "isolated" rural Indian villages become increasingly less isolated due such influences as roads, schools, and radios, interaction with non-Indians increases accordingly. This exposure to non-Indians places the Indian in a position of potentially being exploited, and fear of such abuse has heightened the Indians desire to gain literacy skills in Spanish.

> The Indian who can not speak Spanish finds it very difficult indeed to defend himself against persons who wish to take his land. He will often find himself abused by agents of Federal, state, and local government, and since he can not speak the language his recourse is limited (Wilkie 1970:214).

Modiano noted a similar perception among the Indians in highland Chiapas. "Many like school because they see a genuine need for ... some knowledge of Spanish and a smattering of 'the three Rs' so as to be better able to defend themselves against potential cheating by the ladinos" (Modiano 1973:116,119). In her concluding section on the effectiveness of the schools, Modiano again notes the conflicting interests of the ladinos and the Indians, and again education is valued for its protective potential.

> For themselves the ladinos see schooling as an essential experience in the process of becoming an adult, an experience that will give the child the necessary tools, such as literacy, arithmetic, and diplomas, for economic and social success. The Indians see the schools in quite a different light. They feel themselves greatly disadvantaged in their dealings with ladinos and see formal education as offering some skills with which they can better defend themselves. Indeed, self-defense is the almost universally given response to questions regarding the value of schooling (Modiano 1973:137-138, emphasis added).

Finally, comments made by Lewis, based on his 1943 study of a Mexican village, demonstrate the long standing nature of the ambivalent feelings which Indians have about education. "Only a minority of the parents give school attendance priority over work. The ability to read and write on a simple level satisfies the standards of most mothers and fathers" (Lewis 1960:75). Also, his statements regarding the distrust of others suggest the exploited condition which Mexico's Indians have long endured, and they support the contention that Indians value literacy as a skill which might possibly reduce further injustices. "Tepoztecans view people ... as potentially hostile and dangerous, and their typical reaction is a defensive one.... In Tepoztlán the motives of everyone are suspect.... It is assumed that anyone who has power will use it to his own advantage" (Lewis 1960:87,90).

Despite the ironic paradox that the non-Indians want to provide education to Mexicanize and acculturate the Indian population, whereas the Indians want to use education

to protect themselves from further exploitative economic, political, and social forces,

> ... there is considerable concurrence between what the Indians and the school authorities want for the children, at least during the earliest grades. Both want the children to learn Spanish, to read and write, and to learn some elementary arithmetic. Little wonder, then, that enrollment and attendance are strongest in the first few grades. Few Indians seem to want anything more of the schools and most children drop out once they have acquired the rudiments of the three R's and Spanish (Modiano 1973:139).

It is clear, then, from the several citations presented above, that the one aspect of education most desired by Mexico's Indians is literacy. It is also clear that they have come to want this skill not because of aspirations to participate in the national economy, but rather because of a perceived need to protect and defend themselves from exploitation and oppression.

It should be noted that Mexican law requires schooling for children between the ages of 6 and 14. However, as Whetten explained (writing in 1948), this is more an ideal than a reality, because many of the communities in the rural districts offered no more than two years of school (Whetten 1948:410-411). While this statement was written nearly 30 years ago, it remains valid in many sections of rural Indian Mexico. But this is not a problem in the Indians' eyes. Even the completion of primary school (6 years), except as it relates to obtaining literacy, is not relevant in contemporary Indian communities where labor-intensive agriculture

occupies the vast majority of the labor force, and few other occupational opportunities exist.

Indian attitudes toward non-Indians

It has already been noted that serious scholarly studies regarding Indian attitudes toward education are woefully lacking. It should also be stated that studies of Indian attitudes toward non-Indians are also extremely difficult to locate in the literature. While numerous comments regarding this question have been presented, it should be made clear that the studies from which they were drawn were not focusing primarily on Indian relations with non-Indians.

However, two articles addressing precisely this question were encountered, and are extremely insightful, as their findings ultimately relate to Indian attitudes toward education, as will be seen below. Van den Berghe and Colby, working among the Zinacantan Indians in Chiapas, found that Indian receptivity of non-Indians was largely dependent upon whether or not their interaction was one of approximate equality or one of subordination and potential exploitation. The Indians, it appears, "are more willing than ladinos to accept outgroup members in situations involving intimacy and equality [e.g. in close friendships] , but less willing than ladinos to enter into outgroup relationships that do not imply equality [e.g. as neighbors] " (Van den Berghe and Colby 1961:69). Supporting the numerous statements which were included in the preceding discussion of the Indians'

desire for literacy as a means of self-protection, these authors felt that the Indians' responses were influenced by fears that a non-Indian might "take over the land, exploit, make impositions on, and otherwise restrict the freedom of behavior of the Indians among whom he lives" (Van den Berghe and Colby 1961:69). The second article, authored by Colby (1961), also addresses the Indian attitudes toward inter-ethnic relations in the Chiapas highlands. It is again expressed that Indians experience tension and anxiety as a result of the abusive and paternalistic treatment they receive from the non-Indian people with whom they come into contact. More importantly, in this article, Colby suggests that Indian receptivity to formal education might be closely correlated with Indian receptivity toward those providing it (i.e. the non-Indians). This possible connection between Indian attitudes toward non-Indians and Indian attitudes toward education has important significance, and will be further examined below.

The relationship between Indian attitudes toward non-Indians and Indian attitudes toward education

At this point it should be reasonably clear that Mexico's Indians are, to a considerable extent, alienated from the majority of the Mexican population. Turner, writing about the Chontal Indians in Oaxaca, succinctly expresses the sentiments which appear to be experienced (to varying degrees) by much of Mexico's Indian population. "The

dissatisfactions that the Chontals experience are for the most part due to their interactions with the Mexican society" (Turner 1972:85). He further states that "Chontal culture is at cross purposes with the Mexican culture. The Chontals are part of a minority culture that functions poorly in terms of preparing them to participate in the majority culture" (Turner 1972:86).

The position of the Indian in the Mexican society, and the Indian attitude toward the rest of the Mexican population, combine to contribute a great deal toward an understanding of the Indians' attitudes toward education. The process of learning a second language has been evaluated from a social-psychological perspective by Lambert (1967), and his conclusions are relevant to other aspects of Indian education as well. Lambert shows that success in learning a second language, as well as motivation for wanting to learn a second language, depend largely on one's attitudes toward the members of the other linguistic-cultural group.

The effects of these social-psychological factors were observed by Colby, who states,

> In general, relations with Ladinos are sometimes charged with feelings of ambivalence and suppressed emotionality. These feelings extend to questions of knowing Spanish and of knowing how to read and write because such attributes are so closely associated with Ladino identity. By further extension, ambivalence and emotionality normally associated with Ladino contact sometimes exist in attitudes about school (Colby 1961:78).

The extent to which anti-ladino feelings permeate the

Indian worldview can be seen in a finding by Luzebtak. Writing about the strong resistence among many Indians to becoming ladinos, he states that, in the Indians' mind, the worst sin an Indian can commit is that of "showing off and acting like a Ladino" (Luzebtak 1966:118).

Colby's Chiapas study of Indian education found a definite correlation between the attitude of the Indians toward non-Indians and toward schooling. Those Indians who had positive feelings about ladinos also felt positively about education (Colby 1961:84). This association was tested in a Guatemalan Indian community approximately 10 years after Colby presented it. This study (by Sexton 1972) constitutes the best available statistical investigation into Indian attitudes about education, and consequently will be included in this discussion of Indian education in Mexico. Sexton's confirmation of Colby's hypothesis, and Sexton's associated observations, add considerable credence to much of what has been suggested in this paper.

It is not at all inappropriate, in many respects, to include Sexton's highland Guatemalan Indian village study in this paper on Mexico's Indians. First, the village of San Juan la Laguna is geographically close to the Mexican state of Chiapas. In fact, the Chiapas communities discussed in this paper are closer to San Juan than they are to most, if not all, of the Oaxaca communities mentioned. Second, they are historically culturally similar, and the similarities persist in several ways, to the present day.

Third, the Guatemalan Indian, like his Mexican counterpart, occupies the lowest rung on the socio-economic ladder, and is subject to the same abuse and exploitation. Fourth, in 1964, Guatemala reportedly had an illiteracy rate of 62.1%, roughly double that which Mexico reported for that year. The state of Sololá, which includes the community of San Juan, reported its population as 85% illiterate, also about double the rates reported for Oaxaca and Chiapas.

The village of San Juan la Laguna, according to Sexton, is 98% Indian. Although there has been a school in San Juan since at least 1938 (and six grades available since 1967), and although school attendance is compulsory, San Juan reported an illiteracy rate of 72.3% in 1968 (Sexton 1972:v,1,3,8).

Sexton's study centers on the impact of education in respect to innovation (which he defines as synonymous with acculturation) in the community (1972:v). Regarding the importance of literacy in the village, he cautions that it is imperative to view it as merely one aspect of a larger framework.

> Although literacy is a crucial variable in modernization, it would be extremely naive not to consider it in relation to other obviously important variables such as occupational opportunities and advantages of formal education, both of which have a heavy bearing on the motivation to become literate (Sexton 1972:1-2).

It is also noted that while motivation to accept formal education depends in part on the curriculum and the teachers,

there must be visible tangible benefits that will stimulate the Indians to incur the costs involved in formal education. One of the most important benefits which the Indians must be able to see is increased occupational opportunity which requires formal schooling (Sexton 1972:11).

Sexton conducted a pre-tested forced-choice survey of thirteen questions regarding Indian attitudes toward education in San Juan, involving a sample size of 133 respondents. He received unanimously favorable responses to several questions. The Indians in San Juan are in complete agreement (100%) that children who attend school are industrious (as opposed to lazy), that most of what is learned in school is useful, and that children should attend school to learn to speak, read, and write Spanish. Substantial agreement (93%-91%) was also reported for several questions. It was largely (93%) agreed that it was more important to attend school than to learn one's parents work. Learning arithmetic was similarly (93%) valued. And fully 91% felt that children should attend school to learn how to obtain better jobs (Sexton 1972:60-61).

Sexton also asked two questions regarding the possibility that formal schooling might alter their cultural orientation. The ambivalence with which the Indians in San Juan view formal education is remarkably clearly illustrated in their responses to these questions. Despite the unanimity and near unanimity of opinion regarding the positive values seen in formal education, there was also very strong

agreement (85%) that "boys and girls should not attend school because they will turn their backs on other Indians" (Sexton 1972:61). And regarding attending high school (which, because there is none within commuting distance from San Juan, involves residing in another community), 65% agreed that "boys and girls should not attend high school because it will make them become like Ladinos" (Sexton 1972: 61).

Sexton's research showed there to be a significant positive correlation between those Indians who have a more favorable attitude toward ladinos and those Indians who have a more favorable attitude toward formal education (1972:28). This finding is supported by research conducted in a nearby Guatemalan community, where it was found that attraction toward formal schooling is heightened by contact with ladinos (Tax and Hinshaw 1970:181). In his summary, Sexton concludes,

> There is some variation in opinion as to the worth of the school in general as reflected in a community attitude scale toward formal education. Some of this variance in opinion may be due to the obvious lack of opportunity to use higher education in San Juan due to its state of underdevelopment (Sexton 1972:45).

Having reviewed the pertinent findings from Sexton's research, a second ironic paradox presents itself. The first, it will be recalled, is that while non-Indian Mexico wants to "educate" its Indians in order to further integrate them into the national economic, political, and social

spheres, the Indians want to become "educated" so that they can better resist these same forces. The second paradox, somewhat related to the first, is that the system that wants to incorporate the Indians into their world is the very same system that is responsible for creating the conditions which make pursuing formal education undesirable. The very same people (non-Indians in general) who have created the conditions of underdevelopment (which includes limited occupational opportunities, and distrust and dislike for non-Indians) are also responsible for the unfavorable attitudes which Indians often hold toward non-Indians, and these attitudes have been found to closely correlate with Indian attitudes toward education. In other words, the abuse and exploitation of the Mexican Indian have created circumstances and attitudes which are now serving to make formal education in Indian communities an unpopular entity in many respects, from the Indians' perspective.

Summary

An historical overview of Indian education in Mexico since the Revolution has provided a background against which the current programs and philosophies of education for Mexico's Indians can be analyzed. It has been shown that the attitudes of the Indians and the non-Indians toward education are conflicting and paradoxical. It has further been shown that (although again for conflicting and paradoxical reasons) both the Indians and non-Indians agree that Indian

literacy is desirable. It has also been shown that there exists a disproportionate amount of knowledge of, and interest in, non-Indian attitudes toward Indian education, when compared to Indian attitudes toward Indian education.

The two-faced sentiments which characterize many of the non-Indians attitudes are thinly veiled in the following statement. Commenting on the high rates of illiteracy around the world, Rene Maheu, then Director-General of UNESCO, remarked that "such a state of affairs is not only a disgrace and a scandal on the grounds of human conscience and justice, but, in terms of economics, it is the height of absurdity and sheer waste of manpower" (Rene Maheu cited in Rycroft and Clemmer 1965:2).

As for the Indian perspective, Colby has stated that "no educational system operates in a vacuum. Inevitably the community in which it operates abounds in a complex of attitudes toward it, attitudes which will militate strongly for or against the goals of the educators" (Colby 1961:77). This paper has demonstrated that unfavorable attitudes towards non-Indians, and the oppression they represent, have reduced Indian receptivity to education. Harris suggests that their behavior might be logical and rational. He notes that "many planned technological innovations may actually be useless or ill-advised when examined within the full context of the adaptive potential of peasant life" (Harris 1975:463). He also explains that notions of peasant conservatism are not an accurate explanation for

Indian resistance to education. "Contrary to popular notions of the causes of underdevelopment and poverty, peasant populations can be readily induced to surrender their traditional ways if substantial improvements in cash income and heightened security seem clearly associated with the innovations" (Harris 1975:471). In other words, structural constraints on Indian mobility (both economic and social), largely imposed by non-Indians who benefit from them, rest at the foundation of Indian resistence to schooling.

It should be clear at this point that the issue of education for Mexico's Indians is not simplistic. By any measurement, it is imperfect. Education has largely failed to meet the goals and expectations of both the non-Indians and the Indians. Given the lack of meaningful dialogue between these two groups, this is not surprising.

It should also be clear that, regarding the conflicting interests of the non-Indians and the Indians, my sympathies lie with the latter. It seems that despite the intrusive presence of the schools in Indian villages, the Indians are trying, with some success, to take from them what they want (literacy), while resisting what they do not want (national integration). It would seem that both the non-Indians and the Indians would benefit from recognizing their differences, and concentrating on the one common objective of literacy.

It is clear that further research is needed regarding Indian perspectives toward education. Until a better

understanding of the Indian viewpoint is presented, truly worthwhile educational programs for Mexico's Indians cannot be realistically formulated and implemented. Accordingly, the final chapter presents a tentative research problem intended to address this shortcoming. In addition, a short list of recommendations for improving Indian education is offered.

CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS AND A TENTATIVE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Recommendations for Indian education

Having reviewed a substantial volume of literature regarding Indian education, certain possibilities for at least slight improvement in the existing educational system occasionally appeared. However, it is important for those concerned with the Indian's position to bear in mind that education and literacy are not sufficient in and of themselves to create the social reforms which might be seen as crucial to the well-being of the Indian. Regardless, every effort should be made to see that educational programs are provided in a manner which is agreeable to those for whom it is intended.

With this in mind, a short list of recommendations is offered below. The suggestions are biased in that they have the interests of the Indians foremost in mind. Convincing those who have the power to implement these recommendations that they are in fact worthwhile is a problem beyond the scope of this paper. The recommendations are:

1. School teachers should, regardless of their lack of formal training, come from the same linguistic and cultural group as those living in the village where they work. It is clear that a "foreign" teacher discourages (even if unintentionally) attendance, motivation, and learning.

2. Indian education should be geared for a 3 or 4 year program--just long enough for Indians to attain rudimentary skills in literacy. A program based on the assumption of continuation through 6 or 12 grades is disadvantageous, and does not account for the reality of the Indians, most of whom want little more than literacy, and most of whom cannot afford more time than that in schools. Studies regarding the best methods of learning to read and write Spanish as a second language should be scrutinized, and relevant findings should be applied to the Indian schools (see Engle 1976).

3. The Indian schools should be decentralized. The INI schools in Chiapas were shown to be more effective, and this is in part because their policies and programs are more flexible than the federal rural schools whose directives come from Mexico City.

4. The school curriculum and texts should be geared to the Indian's life and aspirations. Irrelevant studies and texts foster disinterest, confusion, and desertion.

5. The school calendar in Mexico is inflexible and poorly designed to take advantage of the slack periods in agriculture which are common to Indian villages (Myers 1965:

51), and should be allowed to be adaptable to local conditions, in order to allow greater opportunity for attendance.

6. Given the prevalence of transistor radios in Indian villages, the possibilities of indigenous-language broadcasts for educational purposes of many types (literacy, health, agriculture, for example) should be investigated.

A tentative research problem

Prior to formulating any program for education for Mexico's Indians, it seems critically important to ascertain and understand, as nearly as possible, the Indian viewpoint. The potential benefits of such information are many. First, and foremost in my mind, programs which have been formulated by taking into account an accurate Indian perspective will stand a far better chance of benefitting the Indians for whom they are intended. Second, and unfortunately probably more important to the program planners and implementers, such programs, sensitized to the "worldview" of the Indian, are far more likely to be positively received by the Indian, something which has not occurred, in many respects, in the past. Third, it is quite possible that culturally synthesized educational programs, formulated as a result of meaningful dialogue between Indians and non-Indians, might ultimately reduce the feelings of disrespect, tension, and animosity, and increase mutual appreciation of existing cultural differences.

I believe that the cultural anthropologist is in a

unique position to make important contributions to improve the position of the Indian. By virtue of genuine appreciation of, and concern for, the intricacies of Indian culture, the anthropologist is likely to gain acceptance in an Indian community, and eventually to obtain an insightful understanding of the Indian attitudes and perspectives toward education and its place in the Indian community cultural system. This knowledge, combined with the likelihood of having been trained in a non-Indian cultural milieu, provides the anthropologist the opportunity to act as a sort of interpreter, not only linguistically, but more importantly, culturally, thus facilitating dialogue and understanding between the two disparate sectors of the Mexican population.

Accordingly, this final section suggests two important questions which lamentably have largely been neglected in the literature, and which can best be answered by the anthropological field techniques of community residence and participant observation, supplemented by questionnaires.

Because this proposed research is intended for an Indian community in a predominately Spanish-speaking country, language communication and translation difficulties are a potential source of difficulty. Anthropologists often have relatively little (if any) fluency in the Indian language spoken where they are working. Rather than expend the time and energy required to learn yet another language (since in most instances they have had to learn Spanish as a foreign language), they attempt to circumvent this obstacle by

employing bilingual assistants. While this approach has apparently worked satisfactorily for most anthropologists, it would be my intention to gain reasonable competency in the Indian language spoken in the region where this research occurs. While this will necessitate additional time in preparation for carrying out the research, it is my belief that the time spent in the community will be enhanced by this language competency in at least two ways: (1) potentially more rapid acceptance in the community, and (2) more complete understanding of community dialogue.

It is my opinion that two critical pieces of information need to be systematically and thoroughly studied, in order to more successfully accomplish the widespread goal of Indian literacy. The first regards Indian attitudes toward Indian, as opposed to non-Indian, teachers in their schools. The second regards the effectiveness of the two common methods used in teaching Spanish to Indians.

The literature surveyed in the research for this paper demonstrated the paucity of data regarding Indian attitudes toward the ethnicity of the teacher, and its affect on education. Some statements were presented on this issue for which no empirical evidence could be found. The only statistical attitudinal surveys encountered were those of Colby (1961), Sexton (1972), and Van den Berghe and Colby (1961). While these contribute significantly toward greater understanding of Indian perceptions toward education, the question of teacher preference remains unverified. "Teacher

characteristics, such as background, ethnic identification, training, and relationship with the community have been too infrequently studied" (Engle 1976:258). She later states that "the ethnicity of the teacher probably has an effect, but it has never been adequately tested" (Engle 1976:264, emphasis added). She also notes that a study of the effects of the cultural sensitivity which an Indian teacher possesses is needed (Engle 1976:259). While Colby (1961), Modiano (1973), and Sexton (1972) have all suggested that Indian teachers provide an environment which allows for more successful Indian education, verification of this hypothesis would be most helpful.

That this hypothesis is reasonable may further be supported by several findings presented in this paper. It will be recalled that: (1) Sexton (1972), and Tax and Hinshaw (1970) suggest that Indian attitudes toward education are closely correlated to Indian attitudes toward non-Indians, and (2) Van den Berghe and Colby (1961) state that Indians are more uncomfortable in situations where they perceive of themselves as subordinates, and (3) Beals (1974) writes that Indians resent and resist efforts to change their customs. It is reasonable, then, to assume that Indians would: (1) feel more receptive to education offered by an Indian teacher, and (2) Indians would feel more at ease and more equal with an Indian teacher, and (3) Indian teachers are less likely to change Indian customs. However, systematic testing of these postulates would contribute significantly

to testing the hypothesis that Indian teachers are preferable to non-Indian teachers.

The second important topic of investigation involves attempting to ascertain how Spanish might most effectively be taught to Indians. The largely unresolved debate over whether literacy in a second language can better be achieved through the "direct method" approach (teaching only in the second language) or through the "native language" approach (using the native language to teach the second language) has been addressed by Engle. She decries the lack of research on this issue.

> Searching through many documents and files and personal contacts unearthed 25 relevant studies, carried out in countries ranging from South Africa to the United States. Of these 25 studies 7 are truly experimental in that variables were controlled, a comparison group was selected, and data were gathered systematically. Of these 7, 4 are noteworthy in their thoroughness .... (Engle 1976:254).

One of the 4 "noteworthy" studies is Modiano's research in the Chiapas highlands. However, despite its "noteworthiness," Engle explains that Modiano's results, which suggested that the INI schools using the "native language" approach produced competency in the second language (Spanish) superior to that achieved in the state and federal schools using the "direct method" approach, "do not offer a good comparison" of the two methods, due to incomplete control of variables (Engle 1976:258). According to Engle, Modiano's shortcomings are due to her inability to control

for (1) children in the state and federal schools who were less than fluent in Spanish when reading instruction was initiated, and for (2) the lack of systematic instruction in oral Spanish (Engle 1976:258). The research proposed herein intends to improve on Modiano's efforts by carefully controlling for these variables.

Engle (above) points out the value of selecting a comparison group for this research. This proposed research program will obviously be most effective where comparisons can readily be made between schools employing the two approaches to teaching Spanish (controlling, of course, for other variables). In the Mexican states of Oaxaca and Chiapas, such an opportunity exists, because of the fact that the state and federal schools employ one approach while the INI schools use the other.

In addition to these two topics of investigation proposed above, research involving Indian education could also benefit from efforts toward understanding Indian attitudes toward occupational opportunities. It has been suggested that this factor has significant impact on the importance which Indians place on formal education, and this hypothesis should be carefully analyzed.

Finally, the results of this proposed research should be made available to educational program planners and the Indian community itself, and the academic community in general, in hopes that the findings might serve to increase the well-being of Mexico's Indian population.

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