

# Mexico's difficult double transition

CHARLES POSNER<sup>1</sup>

Institute of Education University of London

## Resumen

El autor expone que la sociedad mexicana ha cambiado hacia un orden relativamente mayor de democratización interna y hacia una economía muy ligada a su vecino del norte. Se propone en este artículo describir los efectos que esta doble y difícil transición pueda estar teniendo sobre las prácticas e instituciones educativas en México. Este trabajo no podría ser entendido plenamente sin conocer las categorías de análisis desarrolladas por Basil Bernstein, quien propone que el alcance de la educación depende del tipo de códigos de enseñanza-aprendizaje que se utilizan. Estos pueden ser integrados (*integrated code*) o restringidos (*restricted code*).

1. Códigos integrados. Se caracterizan por promover la participación del educando, la búsqueda de soluciones a problemas y un marco contextual abierto. Este tipo de educación promueve la formación creativa, emprendedora y fortalece las habilidades intelectuales. El objetivo se centra en la formación de personas que puedan transformar las prácticas y situaciones existentes con el fin de proponer alternativas y resolver problemas. El motor de este tipo de códigos es la aportación creativa de los sujetos a prácticas y a problemas específicos.
2. Códigos restringidos. Este tipo de educación fomenta la formación técnica, operativa y adapta la acción de la persona a procedimientos previamente establecidos con marcos contextuales estrechos. El motor en este tipo de códigos es cumplir eficientemente con objetivos, expectativas y evaluaciones diseñadas por entidades externas al sujeto.

El autor indica que hasta hace poco tiempo, en México, toda la educación se había construido sobre la base de la noción de un desarrollo nacional autónomo. En tiempos muy recientes, cambios ideológicos parecen estar empujando en la dirección opuesta. Para ilustrar esta idea expone dos ejemplos, uno en relación con la educación superior y otro en relación con la educación básica.

## ■ Cambios en la educación

- a) La educación superior se ha movido hacia formas tradicionales de apropiación del conocimiento en momentos en que a nivel internacional hay un llamado a la educación superior para ser más flexible y creativa. Ha retrocedido el discurso que pregona la solución de problemas (código integrado) hacia uno que se enfoca a la formación y capacitación estrecha de profesionales (código restringido).
- b) Por otro lado, algunas prácticas en la educación básica ( primaria, secundaria y educación de adultos) se mueven hacia formas mas flexibles y parecen estar promoviendo contextos abiertos ( código integrado).

Ante esto expone dos ejemplos: el modelo de la Unidad Xochimilco de la Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana y el proyecto de investigación-acción en educación primaria de Coahuila.

<sup>1</sup> Supervisor General y Coordinador Académico del Programa de Doctorado en Educación de la Universidad de Londres-UAM.  
E-MAIL: pcmspsn@ioe.ac.uk



Ejemplo 1. La UAM Xochimilco, en la Ciudad de México, desarrolla sus programas educativos bajo códigos integrados y contextos abiertos con buenos resultados. Uno de los problemas que enfrenta este modelo es que, bajo algunas condiciones para el forastero, puede aparecer como caótico y no sistemático y por tanto inferior a un sistema tradicional con mayores límites contextuales. Algunas investigaciones sugieren que empresarios y gobernantes están preocupados por la *independencia de pensamiento* de los egresados. Esto es un problema particularmente serio en México, no sólo por sus consecuencias para el sistema de gobierno, si no también por los cambios en el mercado de trabajo.

Presiones dentro y fuera de la esfera de la educación han jugado un papel preponderante para legitimar las críticas internas al modelo y a sus prácticas. Una de las mayores críticas es que los conocimientos adquiridos no coinciden con las oportunidades de trabajo, otra es que el sistema no es reconocido ni valorado por los criterios oficiales externos de evaluación docente. El CENEVAL (Centro Nacional de Evaluación) no le ha dado importancia a la educación basada en la solución de problemas como una manera de formar profesionales y parece que asume que el único papel de las universidades es insertar a sus graduados en el mercado de trabajo.

El clima social, también ha fomentado la regresión hacia lo tradicional tanto en el *currículum*, la pedagogía y la evaluación, definidos por marcos conceptuales específicos y por la evocación del *mercado como la manera inevitable de justificar el cambio de pensamiento*.

Ejemplo 2. En Coahuila, Estado situado en el norte de la República Mexicana, se desarrolla un proyecto a gran escala que seleccionó al azar a un grupo de escuelas con mal desempeño. El objetivo ha sido mejorar la educación a través de la participación de padres, maestros, investigadores y alumnos, con

la premisa de que esto también ayudaría al desarrollo económico y social de las localidades participantes.

En muchos aspectos los principios son muy similares a aquellos practicados en la UAM-Xochimilco. Los resultados han sido que los alumnos han tenido mejor desempeño en sus exámenes y han llevado su conocimiento a la comunidad. Para los investigadores se ha abierto una amplia oportunidad de estudio.

A diferencia de las críticas hacia el experimento de la UAM, no ha habido referencias hacia el mercado para justificar el experimento de Coahuila. Al contrario, el proyecto fue justificado por sus posibilidades de proveer una calidad mayor en la educación que permitiría a los estudiantes tener éxito académico y a sus comunidades progresar.

## ■ Discusión

Nos encontramos ahora con una paradoja absurda que califica una misma práctica educativa como efectiva en un nivel básico de la educación y como ineficiente y caótica en un modelo de educación superior. Siendo que ambos proyectos han generado acciones exitosas. El modelo Xochimilco ha probado que es posible producir graduados profesionales más y posiblemente mejor educados que otras instituciones.

Los ejemplos expuestos aquí hablan de dos experimentos educativos diferentes de lo predominante en el resto de los programas educativos en México. Llama la atención que uno de ellos esta siendo apoyado por las autoridades (educación básica) y otro esta siendo descalificado (educación superior).

## ■ Conclusiones

Cómo se podría explicar este fenómeno:

1. Los dos experimentos aquí expuestos representan modelos distinguibles

- del resto de la educación en México.
2. Ambos están basados en códigos integrados y marcos contextuales amplios a diferencia de la mayoría de los proyectos educativos en el país basados en códigos restringidos y marcos conceptuales estrechos.
  3. Según Basil Bernstein, un código integrado es inherentemente inestable y no puede existir en una sociedad caracterizada por una división social del trabajo no integrada, sino en sociedades estables. Esto explica en parte que proyectos educativos basados en códigos integrados difícilmente son apoyados y promovidos en México.
  4. México está pasando por una serie de cambios muy complejos. En los llamados países desarrollados estos cambios están relativamente controlados. En países como México, caracterizados por una cohesión social interna muy débil y con dimensiones económicas y culturales internamente dispersas, estos cambios son difícilmente controlables. Esto podría explicar la necesidad de un mayor control social incluyendo la educación, por lo que es poco el interés por proyectos basados en códigos integrados. Una de las posibles explicaciones, al menos como lo han expresado los reformadores educativos en México, es por la necesidad de responder a los cambios que han traído las nuevas tecnologías y por una mayor integración regional.
  5. Por otro lado la existencia y promoción de proyectos creativos y participativos, como lo es el de Coahuila, que parece que surge a contra corriente de las políticas dominantes, nos recuerda que en un tiempo determinado existen fuerzas sociales distintas conviviendo en un mismo espacio. Sabemos que cualquier evento en una sociedad muy compleja involucra una gran cantidad de fuerzas sociales y una gran conjunción de fuerzas internas y externas. Por lo que aún en mínima expresión hay cabida para proyectos educativos alternativos.

**Palabras clave:** Códigos-Enseñanza-Aprendizaje, Códigos-Restringidos-





Educación Superior, Códigos-Integrados-Educación Básica.

**Key words:** Integrated-Code, Restricted-Code, Integrated-Code-Hiher Education, Restricted-Code-Basic Education.

Resumen y traducción de:  
Sergio Bojalil Parra.

## ■ Introduction

**M**exican society has been rapidly if peripatetically moving towards a relatively more democratic internal order and an economy more closely integrated with its immediate neighbours to the north. My purpose in this paper is to describe what effect this difficult double transition may be having on educational institutions and practices.

In 1994 after several years of negotiations the Mexican government took an enormous gamble and adhered to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as a means of escaping from a severe and seemingly continuous economic crisis which began as long ago as 1982. Until that time Mexican ideology, identity and institutions have long been wedded to economic and cultural self-determination underlined by a fierce nationalism and a related model of autonomous economic development which went far beyond the fashionable leitmotifs of the international organisations of the day. Such a desperate or audacious decision was bound to have a profound affect upon the deep social, ethnic, and cultural divisions which had been largely controlled

until that time by equally unique political system consisting of a bevy of social, cultural and economic institutions of which its system of education was an important component.

Until recently the entire educational edifice has been erected upon the notion of autonomous national development, that is, reliance upon internal material and human resources to build a much more socially cohesive society. As part of their long-time adherence to self reliance Mexican governments have traditionally placed great store on encouraging the development of élite and/or specialised institutions of higher education whose aim was one of reduce its technological dependence on overseas sources. At the same time and possibly contradictorily, education has also been seen as the prime instrument to produce a relatively more homogeneous society in order to overcome the enormous differences typical of man countries in the process of development where we find not only social divisions of a hierarchical nature characteristic of European societies but the co-existence of distinct socio-economic dimensions. In the case of México social cohesion was even

more strongly accented than elsewhere because it was seen as the only possible means to avoid the type of civil strife that wracked the country between 1910 and the late 1920's when more than five percent of the population died.

From the primary school through to the University and including the myriad of institutions dedicated to literacy programmes and adult education, the educational system was charged with two tasks: (i) an efficient selection of talent taking into account satisfying the voracious needs of a growing middle class such as we find in many other countries (ii) as well as with providing social control through the organisation of primary education for the vast and growing informal sector, that is, small-scale productive units based largely on the labour force of the household and which in its organisation of its social division of labour, accounting system and relations with other similar producers and the official market does not operate in accordance with the economic rulebook. Until recently this latter task has been the most important of the two.

In very recent times changes in the ideology buttressing higher



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education and basic education (education at the primary, secondary and adult levels) seem to be moving in opposite directions. Higher education is increasingly wed to a traditional form of appropriation the appropriation of knowledge, similar to Bernstein's notion of a collection code at a time when international bodies call for higher education to be both more flexible and creative. On other other hand, the educational codes governing basic educational programmes seem to have been progressive weakened. Why is this the case?

## ■ 2. Examples

In order to try to answer the last question I will present two contrasting examples of recent changes: one in the area of higher education and the other taken from basic education. The first example suggests that the models of education related to a national model of development could well be in the process of being abandoned as a result of the pressures of international labour markets whilst the second example suggests that these models of education are not only being maintained but being expanded.

### 2.1 The Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco

I have taken the Xochimilco branch of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana as an example because its structure and curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation are at variance with not only the mainstream of educational institutions and practices in México but because it maintains one of the highest rates of completion of first degrees by any measure for evaluating the output of universities. Is the logic of such a switch in educational codes based on the educational usefulness of the

model or on a need for standardisation and accountability? To what extent can it be related to adjustments that México must make to participate in the NAFTA or international educational market?

The UAM was founded in 1974 at the apogee of the national development model when education was seen as a crucial element for securing the involvement of communities necessary to underwrite the development of a homogeneous society and a nationally integrated economy. Its Xochimilco campus was important because it was committed to practising an integrated educational code within the university by providing a common basis for all professional training programmes and by integrating teaching and research as a means of encouraging flexibility and allowing independent thought to develop. Most importantly, it was committed to abandoning the model of the University as some kind of "ivory tower" by involving communities of small-scale producers in its teaching and research activities, by contextualising classroom knowledge through students' involvement in projects within communities and by the university staff changing their classroom practices as a result of their research

within the communities to help them develop their productive capacity.

From the outset the principle of the organisation of curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation at Xochimilco was that learning the principles and content of a profession whether medicine, animal husbandry or agronomy required that knowledge to be contextualised by community knowledge (local pedagogies) and testing that knowledge through problem-solving. Such a practice of pedagogy is labour intensive as it involves long hours in workshops, in the field and working with individual students. So long as the national government was willing to provide the extra resources to staff such a mode of learning Xochimilco could overcome internal and external criticism and maintain its innovative mixture of curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation.

**Briefly, we can summarise these principles as follows:**

The university sought to celebrate a different system of relating knowledge to practice by promoting what we can call "context-free knowledge" predicated on a close relationship between concepts and



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application and on concepts being easily modified by the process of application. Learning was seen as being based on problem solving as a group rather than on an individual basis. Learning involved reference to and relating personal experience to knowledge from the field of specialisation and, most importantly, to areas outside one's immediate field of study. Progress was to be measured by the production and not by reproducing ideas. Knowledge was not to be collected in order to be reproduced but to be stored as a corpus which could be accessed and adapted to solve problems. In that sense learning and research were seen as inseparable. The role of the teacher was a facilitator helping students to work with the con-text rather than as a transmitter of the text.

The problem with context-free knowledge is that under certain conditions for the outsider its accumulation can appear to be chaotic and non-systematic and therefore, inferior to a traditional more context-bound system. From the outset, many parents and potential employers were worried that, for example, the Xochimilco trainee doctors were being educated directly in community clinics rather than in a traditional hospital setting, that the social sciences played a large role in their training and that the process of accumulation of medical knowledge was not as rigorous as the traditional memorisation of the principles of medicine. Many teachers felt that the system requirement of devotion to the mixture of teaching-research-problemsolving meant there was less time to devote to their own individual research as each student required more time than in a more traditional system where the principles and process of evaluation are also simpler.

So long as demographic factors meant that there was a growing need



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for the training of professionals students from the Xochimilco campus could usually find employment in their chosen fields of study but when after 1982, for a number of reasons, competition began to be tougher the situation changed. Employers whether private or the state showed a distinct preference for those trained in a traditional system and according to traditional methods. As State universities could not cope with the demand many private universities often sponsored by private firms expanded or were founded to provide these services in the areas of health, engineering and medicine in particular. Whilst no one openly claimed that the doctors and agriculturalists etcetera, produced by the Xochimilco system were inferior to those being educated in more traditional institutions of higher education research suggests that entrepreneurs and government officials were worried about "their independence of thought" —a particularly serious problem in México not only because

of its perceived threat to the system of governance but, as we will see, also because of changes in the labour market.

By the early 1990's we find evidence of a growing reluctance to send young people to the UAM and finally an intervention on the part of governmental bodies to ease the UAM into a more traditional role so that it would conform to what was regarded as a more acceptable pattern.

Pressures from outside the immediate sphere of education began to play an important role in legitimising the internal criticisms of the model and practices inimicable to the model to manifest themselves. Firstly, the model which had served a national, or in the words of Bernstein the "new", middle class well was now criticised as failing to match knowledge to job opportunities in what was a relatively more restricted labour market. University staff subject to new system of evaluation



found that their labour-intensive classroom activities were no longer recognised and rewarded as performance indicators did not take such work into account. The National Association of Universities (ANUIES) originally founded as a pressure group to represent individual university interests and now increasingly serving as a catalyst to reorient university activities to conform to a model in which the throughput of students would be greatly increased tended to be equally impatient if not suspicious of the Xochimilco model. A new national system of professional examinations managed by the National Commission for the Evaluation of Higher Education (CENEVAL) took no account of the importance of problem solving as a way of training professionals and seems to assume that the role of the university is to slot its graduates into its own idiosyncratic concept of a labour market. More recently the Rector of the UAM argued that it was increasingly difficult to justify such a labour-intensive system and perhaps, more importantly, seemed to insist that the purpose of the

university was not as defined by Xochimilco but consisted almost exclusively in training students for the market.

Endogamous factors critical of the model were enfranchised by forces outside the university and in combination both seem to be leading towards the adoption of a system of stronger classification and framing within the system of higher education threatening a successful model which appeared to be training good socially-aware professionals with a strong commitment to dealing with the economic and social problems impeding the development of the country. The social climate encouraged a reversion to a more traditional model of curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation hallmarked by context-bound operations and the evocation of the "market" as the epitome of the unchallengeable hand of inevitability served as sufficient justification for the change in thinking.

This, of course, raises a number of questions: Why was a seemingly successful model challenged both

from within and without? What lies behind the justifications for the change? How can we begin to understand the abrupt change in thinking which led to re-emphasising context-bound thinking? What is the role of the so-called "market"? To what extent were these internal pressures for change encouraged or conditioned by exogamous factors?

## 2.2 The example of the Coahuila Action-Research Project and Primary Education:

My second example is the strikingly original action-research project conducted in primary schools directed by Silvia Schmelkes which is characterised by a close collaboration between a team of researchers, schools, parents and pupils undertaken on a very large scale in order to improve the quality of education within a randomly selected group of badly performing schools in the state of Coahuila. The project was sponsored by the newly decentralised state education authority and by the Under-Secretaryship of State for Basic Education. The purpose of the project was to improve the quality of education by strengthening the autonomy of the school and to do so by contextualising learning through community needs, the involvement of parents, the use of teachers as researchers, using a model close to that developed by John Elliott and Barry MacDonald and based on premise that such would be a contribution to the economic and social development of the participating localities.

The purpose of the Coahuila experiment was to construct a model of education which allowed community knowledge into the school so that the school would cease to be an interruptor in terms of educational time and space and that its "abstract" knowledge would be contextualised



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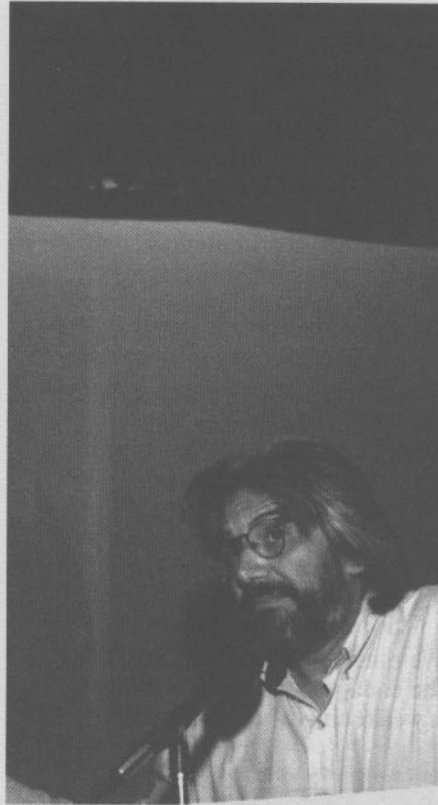




by "local knowledge". This would increase access to what had previously been perceived as "foreign" knowledge systems and their incorporation into the corpus of community knowledge and practice. In many aspects the principles, the encouraging of context-free operations are similar to those practised by the UAM-X.

It was similarly based on view that much of the potential contribution of the informal sector was lost because the school could not provide the time and space so that its knowledge systems could contextualise official knowledge and thereby be translated into relevant actions. Hence, for the project improving the quality of the school meant mobilising these forces by the developing of a contextualising environment, that is, in Bernstein's terms a more integrated code.

The group of teachers, parents and researchers defined the specific problems and issues for research within the framework of a shared productive aim. The role of the researcher or facilitator was to help the group to clarify their productive aims by focussing attention on their practices. The process of the research provided theoretical inputs to the problems and issues as they emerged from groups thinking about their concrete problems. They provided opportunities for the groups to render accounts of their reflections to others, and thereby to discover linkages across individual experience. They provided opportunities for groups to deepen their own understanding of issues through discussion with each other. They provided opportunities for the reporting of common understandings, developed through collaborative reflection to the other groups. Responsibility for the action rested with participants.



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The team found that local needs could contextualise learning and make it more effective and the participation of teachers as creators rather than transmitters of a set curriculum contributed to enthusiasm as did intervention of parents in contextualising abstract concepts through reference to their own productive activities. Pupils performed better in examinations as well as carrying their knowledge to the community.

For the professional researcher the action-research project has highlighted the need for a number of follow up studies which will be useful in determining the reasons for its success and its extension to other areas of México and indeed other countries with similar problems. These consist of studies whose variables are social position

and gender concerned with the transmission of knowledge within the classroom; studies about the relationship between the home and the school; studies on the effects of the organisation of curriculum and pedagogy on the social apprenticeship of children from marginal groups; studies on the forms of the transmission of knowledge within groups of small-scale producers, that is, the forms of social apprenticeship within production and, above all, studies to provide us with a greater understanding of the pedagogic practices of the school (official pedagogy) and its effects on local pedagogy (the knowledge systems of small-scale producers) and finally studies contrasting local pedagogic practices within family and domestic productive units of the informal rural and urban sectors.

In contradistinction to the criticisms of the UAM experiment no reference was to the market or market forces in terms of justifying the Coahuila experiment. On the contrary, the project was justified in terms of providing a higher quality of education which would allow pupils to succeed academically as well as their communities to progress. However, this double use of the term the term "quality" is itself requires more research because on one hand, it seem to refer to educational achievement and on the other to more effective social control. Such questions deserve further attention.

### 2.3 Context-free and context-bound operations and their social bases

We now find ourselves in the absurd situation of trying to account for the fact that a practice of education to improve educational chances and the possibilities to learn based on the greater involvement of community and through creating time and space for local knowledge to contextualise



learning and make it more effective is accepted at the level of basic education but rejected as inefficient and chaotic for higher education. How can we account for this apparent paradox?

How can we adequately explain the recent tendencies in Mexico to move towards educational practices within higher education which restrict the creativity and imagination supposedly necessary, as economists and futurologists remind us, for economic and social development? As recent congresses of agriculturalists and animal husbandry practitioners have pointed out such contextualisation is key to raising production and hence the standard of living as well as providing greater opportunities for research.

On one hand, although the Xochimilco model has proven it is possible to produce more and perhaps better educated professional graduates it is ignored and/or rejected. On the other hand, the Coahuila action-research project operating according to similar principles has been hailed as a major development in and for basic education. On one level the authorities are recommending an integrated code for basic education whilst trying to influence higher education to adopt a more restricted code when writers like Reich argue for the opposite in relation to the United States. If educationalists still argue for the more integrated model then the pressures for the change seem by and large to have been created by forces outside the sphere of education. We must first look at these by exploring the specificity of educational policy and its roots in the Mexican experience. We must also determine to what extent these pressures are also the product of forces exogamous to México—a theme hitherto explored with recourse unfortunately to very deterministic

arguments. For that reason restricting myself to the Mexican context I will now try to explore the reasons for such a dichotomy which in turn will allow me to make some further comments about the causes underlying transitions in more general terms.

### ■ 3. Elements for a possible explanation:

In order to begin to understand our problem we must now look at general trends within the field of education itself in México and those forces from the outside which may have had an influence on its development.

#### 3.1 Endogamous factors:

We must explore the extent to which the endogamous factors which led to a weakening of the integrated model

for the appropriation of knowledge at the University level and to a strengthening of such a model at the level of basic education were related to exogamous factors such as the adjustments which were believed to be made necessary by the NAFTA. However, because of the lack of relevant data we can only speculate.

Firstly, as we have seen the national model of education sought to develop institutions and practices of education which would stimulate the hitherto excluded sectors of society to enter the economy expand the productive base of the country and developing first-class training of professionals through a greatly expanded system of higher education to accomplish such work. Until the 1990's it was felt that higher education had to be based upon a weakening of educational codes, that is, contextualised by national problems and by the need to solve these problems and this required a closer integration between learning and the community.

Secondly, what makes an explanation difficult is the common practice amongst social scientists to attempt to describe, and, if possible, explain changes in educational institutions and practices by reference to a particular phenomenon or concept recently identified by the field. Currently transitions are looked at through the prism of a list of "neos" and "posts". These terms largely developed in the metropolitan countries whilst they might have purchase upon their own internal developments are difficult to apply to the much more complex social structures of countries like Mexico without distorting that reality largely because they select what is convenient and neglect what is not. This is compounded by the fact that in countries like México we still lack reliable data, as Carlos Muñoz



David Villarruel





Ernesto Montes

preached the need for the training of narrow professionals in the light of these well-established needs?

The salient point of about Mexican educational institutions and practices and the often contradictory explanatory discourses which claim to encompass them is that, state education was and still is seen as an unalterable accomplishment of the social and political revolution which led to the formation of a relatively more homogeneous society which arose during the 1920's. The expansion of education was originally a unifying if not rallying factor in the forging of the unusual political alliance between the secular middle classes, the rural producers and the military which led to the founding of the political organisation which was to dominate all aspects of economic, social and political life until the 1980's.

The modern Mexican state was a creation of the settlement which marked the end of the military revolution and the founding of an all but single-party State where the role of the party and State were to associate all competing groups through a single organisation and actively to create a sufficient homogeneity in a multi-dimensional society so that physical conflict would be transformed into negotiations between the élites of these groups. The State created economic, social and political institutions so beautifully satirised by Jorge Ibarguengoita, which were to administer and mediate these conflicts in order to maintain social order which was the first and overriding priority of the new State.

These managers required special training as did also those entering the professions and sciences who earlier during the first attempt to create a modern state during the long rule of

Porfirio Díaz (1873-1910) had been trained in specialised institutions but with the caveat that even these professions were to be certified by the State and not their own organisations in order to avoid a challenge to State institutions. At the apex of the complex system were the specialists in administration who moved between interests groups attempting to maintain a careful balance between groups and engendering a series of linkages which were over and above those of each interest group.

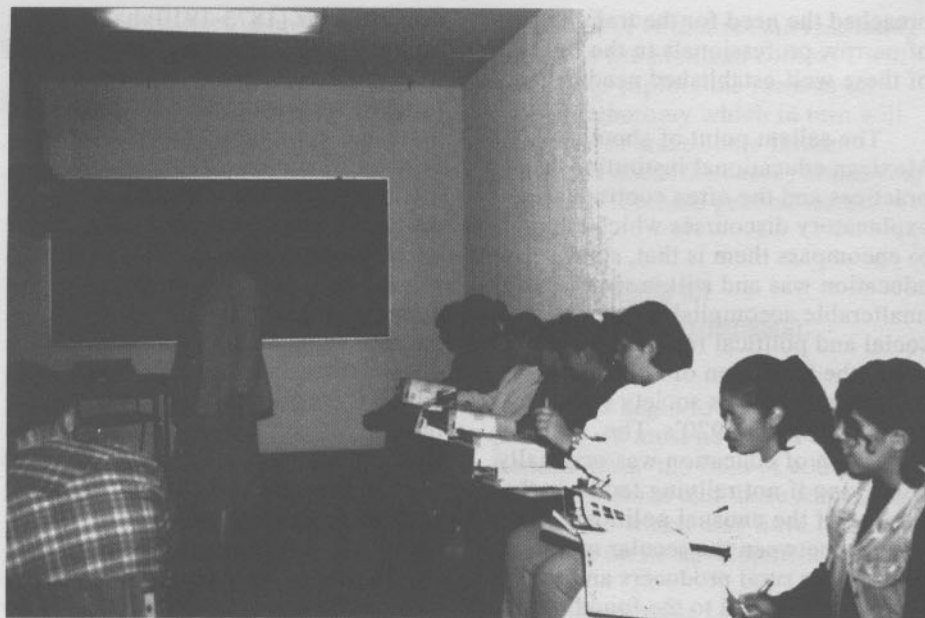
Higher education was concerned with training these specialists through institutions established or re-established by the government such as the refounded National University in 1917 and later regional universities and polytechnics for the training of scientists. The lawyers, doctors and scientists produced by the system were often more concerned with running agencies of social control than their own professions and moved between the practice of their profession, administrative roles and occasional teaching roles in those institutions designed to train their successors.

In the early days the preparation of such an élite meant that the main institution for their training, the University, had to be relatively autonomous of procedures, regulations and organisations depending upon the complex web of contacts and interrelations established within the elite groups. Ideological differences counted for little with self-proclaimed Marxists actively working with Catholic traditionalists in the maintenance of the system. Only the natural scientists were opposed to such a system because, in their view, it deadened creativity, but they were powerless to impose what they regarded as a more coherent model until the

Izquierdo has argued on many occasions and socio-historical accounts of the development of education in México, whilst excellent as in the cases of Axel Didriksson, Hugo Aboites and Patricia de Leonardo amongst others, are still in their infancy. Others try to attribute changes to one single factor. Recently, it has been popular in academic circles to attribute changes to the advent of the NAFTA as if endogamous forces counted for nothing.

Hence, an important second question is what contribution does an examination of recent trends in educational institutions and practices in México make towards the modification of recent theories concerned with the relationship between education and social and economic trends?

How can we explain the retreat from a discourse which preached problem-solving to one which



conjunction of events some seventy years later permitted such a change.

The main aim of the national and at the time highly centralised educational system at all levels was to develop a sufficient level of homogenisation within the society to make civil war impossible and to build a society which was coextensive with the national frontiers and overrode the deep chasms between ethnic and social groups. As it was necessary to impose a single national language it was necessary to impose a single national consciousness through a creative re-invention of Mexican history and through the insistence that basic education have as one of its main goals the teaching of civics through one single textbook.

The problem with such a system is that one pays a high price because it allows little room for creative faculties to be developed. Only those with the cultural capital to surmount the one-dimensionality of the educational system could succeed to the few places available in its institutions of higher education.

However, for the mass of the population even down to the informal sector education was concerned with social incorporation, homogeneity and setting limits to ambition. The absorption of the social codes of control were achieved with stunning efficiency. As Enrique Pieck has demonstrated so eloquently even state-provided courses for rural sewing-circles operated in such a way.

Primary education was seen as an instrument to lead to literacy for the then majority rural sector and as a means of drawing them into the national economy and consensus. Secondary education was to solidify the progress of the urban working class and lower middle class providing them with a vehicle to obtain positions as far removed from the productive sphere as possible. Higher education was seen as a means of satisfying the demands of the middle and upper-middle classes to accumulate cultural capital. So long as funding was available the rhetoric of expansion, similar to that found in the so-called developed countries with their post-war idea of

human capital, could match the reality of providing places at all levels leading to economic betterment. As the space provided for economic expansion in so-called developed countries after the war provided the basis for confusing that expansion with the idea that the growth of education was responsible for it in Mexico the rapid transition from a rural to an urban society and the need to provide a structure which would support that expansion allowed the confusion to continue for an even longer period of time.

However, an important factor in the development of the national model appears to be the rise of a large middle class devoted to administering the system and providing the professional services required by the State. As there is little research in this area I can only speculate on how an element created to administer a system, in the end, played an important role in determining policy. In return for its adherence to the principles of the historical compromise which led to the relative social peace which prevailed for almost seventy years and its forgoing of its professional independence the middle class created by the Revolution secured sinecures, the trapping of political power and was endowed with an education system to allow its offspring to accumulate the cultural capital they required. The system worked until the logic of the market and demographic pressure dictated the need to open the university further. With its pre-eminence threatened the middle class firstly sought to emigrate to private education and when that proved too costly after the series of economic shocks to reform the State education system to restrict entry.

### 3.2 Exogamous factors:

Many Mexican commentators see the NAFTA exerting a determining

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influence on educational institutions and practices. It is an unusual agreement in several aspects. It represents an attempt to integrate two of the most advanced economies in the world with one that often been classified as being part of the third-world. For that reason unlike the treaties produced by European Union countries labour mobility is an area excluded in the first instance from the integrative process. For obvious reasons the United States, in particular, in the initial phases of integration wished to avoid a still more massive influx of poor, unemployed and underemployed workers from México into its territory. For perhaps very different reasons both the Mexican government and American industry wish to maintain potential Mexican workers within México itself through the development of cheap assembly industries (maquiladora) located

along the border between the two countries and concentrate on the development of other types of labour-intensive industries in México where, of course, labour is but a fraction of the cost in the United States and little training is required.

In economic terms the jury is still out but it is possible to identify several trends. The "maquiladora" industry has grown enormously and has provided employment usually for young women with little education. whilst government bodies argue that it can provide the bases for economic development it can also be argued that the industry is more often than not a foreign enclave in México which contributes little to its own growth. Whilst many American and some Canadian companies have located offices in Mexico these are staffed by middle-range administrators and other white-collar workers. The tendency has been for higher level posts of authority to emigrate to the United States. In some cases this has meant that large portions of an entire sector of highly skilled and trained people have either left the country or have been deskilled. Are we to conclude that it is no longer necessary for México to train high-level cadres? Is that why curriculum and pedagogies based on stimulating the creativity and imagination such as found in the elite universities in the United States are now frowned upon?

Finally, in contradistinction to the dominant trend of thought emerging from the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and other international organisations who based their analyses upon a supposedly new international division of labour with its accompanying demands for a new system of education one can argue as follows: México in common with many so-called developing countries

must face the problem of its enormous and growing informal sector. Without the redirection of higher education towards solving the problems associated with that sector it will be difficult for México to achieve the kind of homogeneous socio-economic development which is balanced and which will preserve the culture. To do so, as some parts of the Mexican government, like Sedesol (responsible for, amongst other activities vocational education), recognise requires education based upon the stimulus of context-free operations and drawn from local practices problems and conditions rather than the international educational market.

It does appear that influences external to México effect the direction and development of those parts of its educational institutions and practices relevant to wider markets. I write "influences" because of a tendency of researchers to forget the internal conflicts in society, and, in particular the role of a middle class forced to move from being a middle class dependent on the state to one that must forage for itself and, in some cases, exchanged its dependency on national institutions to a less secure dependency on American and/or multinational corporations. As both the author of the educational system and its main beneficiary it must try to recast education so that it can satisfy its need for the accumulation of exchangeable cultural capital and lifetime security. The national development model provided for such a group but economic, demographic and political factors have now made this an impossibility. Hence, can one argue that the advent of agreements like the NAFTA have provided it with the pretext to push for a more restrictive system of higher education in terms of entry and to redefine the rules of success?



Kaori



## ■ 4. Conclusions: the social bases of educational change

### 4.1 Educational policy and change:

In the course of my presentation I have presented an apparently contradictory picture: on one hand the universities in México have been encouraged to abandon an education code founded on an organic relationship between education and production for one based upon collection whilst the tendency in basic education—that is schooling from primary school through to and including educational programmes for children up to the age of 12 and compensatory adult education—has moved largely in the opposite direction. How can we begin to explain a system which practices openness for those entering the system

and closure for those at its highest levels particularly when corresponding levels in European and other North American countries celebrate the integrated code?

Whilst the integrated code is clearly more efficient in that it increases the possibilities of flexibility and allows space for innovation in practice it has become restricted rather than abandoned because it is recognised both within the field and outside the field that without creative thinking a society and culture can only survive with difficulty. What we are seeing evidence of in contemporary México in concrete terms is the growth of a university to train middle-level management and its increased integration into a new international division of labour which seemingly requires that the educational code which marks elite institutions is increasingly absent.

For most of the middle class the need to adapt to a new system and lower one's horizons comes as a severe disappointment if not shock. Their belief in education as a social liberator which would offer responsibility, social promotion and control over the rhythms of labour is shaken. Are we observing how the social pyramid subtly adjusts itself through a process of exclusion in which the victims are as much authors of that exclusion as are outside forces? Given the international division of labour the process of exclusion is most keenly felt in countries like México which have never been able to be part of that élite but have hitherto been able to develop an autonomous system and practice of education. Additionally, international markets have begun to replace the economic functions of the state. Certain socio-economic enclaves in México are clearly more a part of the vaster metropolitan enclaves

of the United States than they are related to their own country. The cultural repercussions of this are enormous. The belief in the Mexican state and culture is of little personal consequence for these groups yet necessary for the maintenance of social and political control. Events in Chiapas have underlined this danger to the social order. It will be surprising if we do not see similar severe reactions to this process sometime in the near future.

On the other hand, perhaps for the reasons cited above the need to incorporate and, so to speak to homogenise excluded social groups continues unabated particularly since all else has failed and models like those proposed by Silvia Schmelkes can be permitted. The vast informal sector and the communities of poor producers continue to be relatively autonomous of world markets and forces largely because, in their terms, this sector is as an irrelevancy. However, in terms of the maintenance of social order which is still largely a concern of the territorial state it is of paramount importance.

In the European setting it is difficult for two such totally different educational codes to co-exist. But in México as Juan Prawda has recently perhaps the very multi-dimensionality of the society requires different codes for different sectors. Whilst in Europe it can be argued that far from the integrated code disappearing at the higher levels of education it has merely become the preserve of a few institutions whilst in México, where important research institutions have been seen as expendable and closed, the ingrained code is in danger of completely disappearing.

It is a widely accepted theoretical proposition that technological innovation and the needs of the market are inevitably responsible



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for changes in education. Such an argument suits both the needs of those proposing such changes as well as those wedded to a simplistic and deterministic model of social change. At least in México educational reformers have couched their discourse in terms of needing to respond to changes brought about by new technologies and the need for greater regional economic integration. They have not spoken about the need to adjust to new social demands. However, one must stress that these innovations and needs are both socially filtered and conditioned. We have found that change takes place as a result of a conjuncture or coincidence of forces—which themselves are sometimes contradictory—and that the changes that take place may not be what was expected or desired by many of those who have seen them as positive.

Hence we can possibly begin to account for the contradiction between offering an integrated code at the beginning of schooling and an increasingly restricted code at the highest levels where we already have a proven model which with more resources would allow even more young people from poor backgrounds to compete more successfully with young people from the middle class as well as providing for the kind of person supposedly required by new technologies etcetra. Normally one would expect the private sector of education to operate codes which still allow one to create the limited number of policy makers etcetra, to manage the system. The private institutions with one exception have little research and are usually staff on a part-time basis from teachers from the state-universities seeking to supplement their salaries. They are parasitic upon the state universities for their staff and for the creation of knowledge.

Hence, are we to conclude that the educational attack upon the UAM in conjunction with the middle-class' attempted desertion of the state sector is in reaction to the the perceived effects of the NAFTA on the economic and social structure of México?

#### 4.2 Theoretical conclusions:

Basil Bernstein suggests that an integrated code is inherently unstable and cannot exist in a society committed to an unintegrated social division of labour. Whilst this can

development of the new assembly-line industries (maquiladora) with their demand for cheap, young female labour has had a different effect upon policy for basic education.

In the case of higher education we find decisions being taken which seem to indicate that there is no longer a need for training creative scientists, managers and thinkers. Hence, the integrated code of Xochimilco is superfluous. In the case of basic education with its need for a pliant labour force the same argument does not hold. But, as we have seen,



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be a partial explanation of what has happened in the case of the Xochimilco campus it does not begin to explain the continued popularity of looser or weaker educational codes for basic education.

It can also be argued with some cogency that: (i) the emigration of higher level managerial and professional posts to the United States and the need for greater number of middle-range managers and administrators are having an influence on planning if not policy for higher education; (ii) the

these elements are mitigated by a host of others as they are mediated through existing and competing social groups and their perceptions of needs.

Our rapid examination of recent changes in educational policy and practices in Mexico suggest that changes in educational institutions and practices are a result of shifting combinations of complex forces internal to education and the social forces from outside which directly and indirectly influence these institutions and practices. In what we call developed countries these shifts



are relatively controlled. In countries characterised by weak internal social cohesion and a myriad of internally unrelated economic and cultural dimensions like México they are not. Are the almost daily variations in educational programmes and the co-existence of two very different educational codes related to these factors? Clearly the evolution of education in Mexico owes as much to the impossibility of achieving a lasting balance between social groups as it does to the sometimes rapid shifts in behaviour of large sections

brief examination of recent changes in educational policy in México demonstrates that it is impossible to identify one cause as the explanation of education change. We have discussed the effects of a double transition on a very complex society which impels us to conclude like Fernand Braudel that any event is a very complex one involving a bevy of social forces and a very complex conjuncture of exogamous and endogamous forces.



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of the indigenous middle class as a result of their chronically unsuccessful attempts to obtain the right kind of cultural capital to compete first in the internal and now in the international educational market. As the middle class is more often than not the author and chief beneficiary of educational institutions and practices such an instability can have profound and lasting effects.

In conclusion the purpose of this short article has to highlight telegraphically that an equally

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