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ABSTRACT

Mexico and Guatemala are undergoing changes in their educational systems due to a paradigm shift that replaces ethnic assimilation with pluralism. Both countries' governments have legally recognized the linguistic and cultural diversity of their countries via amendments to their constitutions. Both countries face tremendous obstacles in implementing bilingual-bicultural education programs. Many teachers have a weak understanding of indigenous languages because they were taught under an assimilationist model, and many parents see Spanish as a language of social and economic power for their children. In Guatemala, a 36-year civil war has slowed down implementation of major educational reforms. To help implement successful reforms, more active participation of Indian groups is needed, as in Chiapas with the San Andres Agreements. Second, the importance of teaching Indian languages and culture must be valued by all, but especially by parents and the community who are the key stakeholders in education. In addition, partnerships need to be developed between local communities and universities to expand teacher training in bilingual education and develop bilingual-bicultural materials. Finally, the greatest recommendation that can be made to these countries is that more money be allocated toward preprimary and primary education, and especially toward the education of indigenous people, neglected for far too long. (TD)

A COMPARATIVE LOOK AT BILINGUAL-BICULTURAL EDUCATION IN MEXICO AND GUATEMALA

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A Comparative Look at Bilingual-Bicultural Education in Mexico and Guatemala

In this paper I will examine the efforts of various projects that are currently taking place to promote bilingualism/biculturalism amongst the indigenous people in Mexico and Guatemala. I will also examine the history of bilingual education in both countries and discuss the evolution and promise it holds for the future by examining several models that are currently being implemented.

The first efforts of bilingual education in Mexico were during the 16th century when missionaries were sent by Spain to convert the Indians to Christianity. The missionaries had to study pre-Hispanic languages in order to put them into writing, so the Indians could understand the Christian doctrine. As missionaries became more proficient in their knowledge of Indian languages, many began to translate religious works and then they were able to disseminate these translations through the printing press. This period was also known as the spiritual conquest and it inadvertently led to the advent of bilingual education in the 16th century. For many Indian people, the missionaries were the only source of outside contact because many refused to integrate into Spanish society. They chose to flee to the highlands or other isolated areas in order to continue their cultural traditions freely (Schmelkes, 2000).

Although a large amount of the people in Mexico is mestizo (a blending of Indian and Spanish ancestry) a significant number, 6,700,000 people or 7.4% consider themselves culturally Indian, identifiable by a distinct Indian language (Schmelkes, 2000). According to a 1995 census data there are 56 distinct linguistic Indian groups in Mexico. Concentration is largest in 9 of the 32 states: (Oaxaca, Veracruz, Chiapas, Puebla, Yucatan, Hidalgo, the state of Mexico, Guerrero, and San Luis Potosi) These

states represent the following groups: Nahuatl (language of Ancient Aztec), Maya, Mixteco, Zapoteco, Hnahnu, Tseltal, Tsotsil, Totonaco, Mazateco, Chol, and Mazahua. Among them they speak 80 tongues and variant dialects (Ministry of Education, 1999). Also notable is that 38% of the Indian population are children under the age of fifteen (Schmelkes, 2000).

A recent history of education for the Indian population begins with the establishment of primary schools for the Indian population that started to spread to the countryside from 1920-1960. Instruction at this time was in Spanish and generally schools were multigrade. Another feature of these schools was that they often offered only the first three grades of primary education. Repetition and dropout rates were highest for the indigenous population and continue to be today (Schmelkes, 2000).

Bilingual-bicultural education was formerly established in Mexico in 1979. It was created by the General Directorate for Indian Education within the Ministry of Education. This effort was forged by the Association of Indian Teachers and Professionals who, although they had experience in bilingual education, were confined to instruction mostly in Spanish at the onset of this effort. It wasn't until bilingual-bicultural education was officially defined, that instruction in the Indian language during the first two years of primary school was established. Only after third grade would Spanish gradually be introduced, and by the end of sixth, instruction would be mostly in Spanish. Bicultural education was defined to mean teaching the culture of those who speak the native tongue.

The first time Mexico legally recognized itself as a pluralistic nation was in 1992 with Article 4 of the Constitution which adds a paragraph about Indian rights and develops protection of its languages, customs etc. It states the following:

> Article 4 of the Constitution and the General Law of Education recognizes the Multicultural and multi-skill level of the nation and compromise the state towards educational initiatives that promote the betterment of the conditions and quality of life of the indigenous pop., access to the benefits of national development, observing and defending their human rights, especially those of women and children and that it proceeds with respect towards all the cultural and linguistic particularities of each ethnic group.

As a result of Article 4, Strategic and Action components of the Educational Development Program 1995-2000 were created which focused on expanding and strengthening bilingual-bicultural education for the indigenous population in Mexico.

Currently, bilingual-bicultural basic education is offered to 45 Indian groups in 23 states of the country (Schmelkes, 2000). More than a million indigenous children are receiving native language/Spanish bilingual education at the initial, preschool, and elementary levels. The Ministry's statistics vary slightly with an estimate of 49 different languages taught at more than 17,000 schools throughout 24 states of the Mexican Republic (Ministry of Public Education, 1999). There are basically two different institutions that offer Indian education in Mexico. The first is the Intercultural Bilingual Schools, also known as DGEI, which is under the direction of the General Directorate for Indian Education within the Ministry of Education. The second institution is the Program for the Educational Attention of Indian Population at the Preschool and Primary levels, regulated by CONAFE, a federal institution set up to address Indian children living in very small communities.

An important component of bilingual-bicultural education is the role that the Ministry of Public Education plays in devising and distributing different materials both in Spanish and indigenous languages. These textbooks are free and are usually drafted by bilingual teaching staff with the assistance of local community members. According to statistics of the Ministry of Education in 1999, there were more than one million books issued in 33 languages and 52 dialects for the 98-99 school year. In addition, Mexico's bilingual indigenous schools also supply books and tapes, containing stories and legends written both in Spanish and indigenous languages. Usually, children, teachers, and other members of the community create these materials. I heard and saw this first hand when I visited a bilingual school in Yucatan, Mexico during my Fulbright-Hays Seminar Abroad Program in Mexico and Guatemala. The Director of Indigenous Education for Yucatan, Enrique Alonzo, told me that most of the teachers helped design the books translated into the Yucatec Mayan language and Spanish that were used at this school. From there they were sent to the Ministry of Education in Mexico City and then distributed back to the Yucatan bilingual schools. He also said that there were enough books for all students and that students receive their books the first day of school. He also added that the World Bank was helping to fund all lower socio-economic schools in different states of Mexico with needed supplies and resources.

Another interview with the Coordinator of Free Textbooks for the Department of Education in the state of Tobasco on July 13, 2000 also confirmed that bilingual textbooks are usually created locally and then sent to the Coordinacion de libros oficina de Secretaria de Educacion in Mexico City. It is this office that is responsible for distributing free textbooks to all school children by the first day of school. I am not sure

if most school districts in the U.S. can promise that each child will have a book by the first day of school, certainly that has not been my experience in the District of Columbia Public Schools.

The site visit to the bilingual school in Xaya, Yucatan in Mexico during my Fulbright experience gave me the opportunity to hear first hand about some of the challenges they were facing. The staff seemed very committed to their profession and they were selected from the Maya community in which they lived. When I asked the director, Enrique Alonzo, whether the supply of Mayan teachers was adequate he replied that it was and he attributed this to the fact that there were two good schools in the capital of Merida that trained teachers: Universidad de Pedalogico and Academio de Maya. Some problems he pointed out were large class sizes that often resulted in teachers teaching many levels within one grade. He also said that there was no formal method of bilingual education because teachers did it differently. What they had in common was a mostly subtractive method of bilingual education with instruction mostly in Mayan up until the 5th grade and after that instruction is mostly in Spanish with Secondario or Secondary school being entirely taught in Spanish.

However hopeful some of the most recent developments for the improvement of Indian education in Mexico seem, the challenges that lay ahead are enormous. High dropout rates, especially repetition rates, poor educational supply, poor infrastructure in schools, low educational quality as measured by learning outcomes of students, inadequate teacher training and opposition to bilingual education from parents and teachers continue to plague a country with a historical legacy of unequal and inadequate schools for its indigenous population. Mexico is in the process of redefining its

educational system so as to include a more pluralistic vision. The Indian revolt in Chiapas has demanded better education for the Indian population as part of the San Andres Agreements of 1996. It stresses the "recognition of the right of all Mexicans to receive a multicultural education and that national education must foster the knowledge and understanding of Mexican Indian cultures" (cited by Schmelkes, 2000). It is the hope then that Chiapas can be a catalyst for reform for the rest of the country.

Although Guatemala's indigenous population makes up a much larger percentage of the population than Mexico, it shares a similar early colonial history and faces many of the same challenges of Mexico with respect to implementing bilingual education for its indigenous population. Guatemala has a population of approximately 10 million people and approximately 50% are Maya Indians who speak one of at least 20 different Mayan languages (Richards, 1996). The 4 largest language groups are: K'iche, Mam, Kaqchikel, and Q'eqchi. There are close to 1 million speakers of Kiche and the other groups have approximately 360,000 speakers. Together these groups make up over 80% of the Mayan speakers in Guatemala today (Richards, 1996).

Like Mexico, Guatemala begins its history of bilingual education when the Spanish friars were sent to convert the Indian people. The friars tried to convert the Mayans (the predominant indigenous group represented in Guatemala) by using Spanish as a medium for conversion to Christianity. Although the Spanish crown dictated a policy of Castilianization, the friars found it easier to provide catechism in Mayan. Even after New Spain obtained independence from Spain in 1821, a policy of Castilianization was continued.

From 1965-1978 there was a gradual progression in official policy from Spanish monolingual instruction to a bilingual transitional model with using the Mayan languages as a bridge to Spanish. In the onset of 1965 Guatemala's rewritten Constitution of 1965 declared Spanish as the official language of Guatemala (Article 4) (cited by Richards, 1996). Then later on in 1965 a Castellanizacion Bilingue program was initiated and it was created to ease the transition from native language to Spanish. As part of this new initiative, "bilingual promoters were assigned to preschools to teach in the mother tongue as a transition to Spanish. This program proved to be quite successful at first and by 1982 it had expanded to reach 57,000 students in 13 linguistic areas (as cited by Richards, 1996).

From 1978-1984 Guatemala underwent a dark period as the countryside was being ravaged by a bloody civil war. Speaking Spanish became a survival tactic, so as not to be identified as Mayan during this period. It wasn't until 1985, under the Mejia Victores Military regime, that the Constituent Assembly drafted the 1985 Constitution that reflected a growing change in attitude toward bilingual education. Under (Article 58) previous assimilationist policies were reversed by "recognizing, respecting, and promoting the rights of peoples and communities to their cultural identity in accordance with their values, their language and their customs" (cited by Richards, 1996).

In 1980, the Proyecto Nacional Educacion Bilingue was established and 2/3 of this project was funded by USAID. This bilingual education project expanded upon the previous Bilingue program of 1965 by expanding bilingual education from pre-school until second grade. Academic content from those grade levels was translated from Spanish into the 4 major Mayan languages. This project was intended to be replicated in

various regions of the country, but the civil war claimed not only the many lives of some of the directors, but of the teachers as well. Needless to say the development of bilingual education at this time came to a standstill.

In 1985 as general bloodshed quieted down under the regime of Mejia Victores who was trying to better the atrocious human rights record that Guatemala had at this time, so as to gain possible outside military and economic aid, the governmental institution of PRONEBI (Program Nacional de Educacion Bilingue) was created. It purported the study and preservation of Mayan languages as key to understanding the cultural history of the nation and it advocated bilingual education as a vehicle in which to preserve the rich cultural heritage of Guatemala. Essentially it expanded bilingual programs to include pre-primary and primary. It began with 40 pilot schools and reached 400 schools by 1990. Today it includes 800 additional schools (Richards, 1996) and it is a bilingual education model that promotes parallel or dual development of the Mayan languages and Spanish from pre-primary to 4th grade.

There has been much controversy associated with PRONEBI because of the maintenance model of education it promotes and the fact that it is run by indigenous people for indigenous students. They openly and emphatically endorse a strong bicultural and bilingual educational program as a crucial component to preserving and continuing the cultural traditions of the Mayan people. Of course, they have had to contend with the same kind of opposition that Mexico has had to face when trying to implement a strong bilingual education program for its indigenous population. Opposition amongst community members, especially from teachers who may have a weak understanding of Mayan because they were taught under an assimilationist model,

is common. Also many parents see Spanish as a language of social and economic power for their children and often they prefer for them to be taught in Spanish. These obstacles as well as the legacy of a 36 year civil war which slowed down and continue to affect implementation of major educational reform efforts are what Guatemala faces today.

Challenges aside, there have been some recent positive developments such as the passing of the peace accord in 1996 that established the Mayan Academy of Languages. This has resulted in efforts to codify, standardize, and revitalize the major Mayan languages spoken today. Also, as a result of Article 66 of the Constitution, which promotes "the use of indigenous languages...", bilingual education has been mandated for the major Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala. This effort has not only been undertaken by the government of Guatemala, it has also been led by international donor institutions, non-government organizations, universities and grass root Mayan organizations. Two efforts I would like to examine are the World Learning Access to Intercultural Bilingual Education Project (AIBEP) in El Quiche and the EDUMAYA teacher training program at the University of Raphael Landivar in Guatemala City that I had the opportunity to visit during my Fulbright Summer Seminar Abroad experience.

The World Learning - Intercultural Bilingual Education Project sponsored an elementary school I visited in Chipaca, Chichicastenango in Guatemala. Charles Tesar was the director of this school for World Learning in this region of Chichicastenango. World Learning received a 4-year grant with USAID in April of 1999. The sub-agreement was with Save the Children and approximately US$6.8 M will come from USAID. The area they are targeting the project is in El Quiche, one of the hardest hit areas during the war. During my Seminar, Charles Tesar told us that many students

received no education during the height of the war, as roads were ruined and teachers were killed. He told us it had been a struggle to bring the children back into the educational process.

Dr. Joshua Muskin, Sr. Education Advisor for World Learning, provided an overview of the project at a recent Comparative and International Education Society Conference, in Washington, D.C., March 14-17, 2001. He provided the purpose of the project which was twofold: first to give assistance to Ministry of Education and NGOs with providing a better educated rural population and second to expand access to intercultural bilingual education in Quiche. He cited the aim of the project as "to provide the education aims of the Peace Accords, ensuring bilingual education as a strategy...". To implement this, World Learning has put an Action Plan into place that focuses on several key components:

1) Improving teacher training in Intercultural Bilingual Education
2) Develop IBE materials and guidelines for these teachers
3) Community participation
4) Coordinate the project with policy makers
5) Implement IBE in preschools and initial education

During my site visit to the bilingual school in Chipaca, Tesar stressed the importance of community participation as a key component to the success of the program. He told us that linking ownership of schools to the community was crucial in terms of sustainability of the project. To fulfill this endeavor they are training parents to become teacher's aides and they are also supporting them by encouraging their participation in parent-school committees. For example, at Chipaca there was a parent committee in charge of the materials center and grants were available for community members to produce activities.

Dr. Muskin cited that in order to achieve the project's goal of better preparing teachers, a major partnership had been formed with Universidad Raphael Landivar in Guatemala City and its EDUMAYA program. This university is training students to address the linguistic and cultural needs of the Mayan people of Guatemala. Students are trained in IBE methods and then they help to train others in the communities who serve Mayan children. The university offers Indigenous scholarships to help attract and recruit Mayan people to become educators. As part of this program, educators work hard in indigenous community schools and teach a curriculum that addresses the linguistic and cultural needs of the community. The bilingual model is a transitional one with primary instruction (1-3) mostly in Mayan and then transitioning to Spanish almost entirely by sixth grade. During a lecture by a panel of educators at Universidad Rafael Landivar this summer, we were told that the EDUMAYA project was quite successful and that the dropout rate was minimal (Raphael Landivar, 2000).

Some of the challenges that both EDUMAYA and World Learning face are endemic to the challenges that face Guatemala. Unlike Mexico, over one half of Guatemala's population is indigenous, so the need and undertaking of expanding bilingual-bicultural education, so as to fulfill the provisions of Articles 58 & 66 of the Constitution as well as the Peace Accords, is enormous. Moreover, Guatemala is trying to rebuild its educational system that did not exist for many indigenous people, especially those living in the western part of the countryside, during the civil war. Sustaining any kind of reform after the NGOs, international donor institutions, and foreign government money and support leaves seems to be a daunting task for the government of Guatemala to face alone. Hopefully, USAID, World Bank and IMF can work with the Education of

Ministry in Guatemala to continue with some of the implementation of successful models that are taking place for the indigenous people in Guatemala, like the World Learning Project, and plan to put more money towards the development and expansion of new bilingual education projects.

In summary, both Mexico and Guatemala are undergoing relatively recent changes in their educational system due to a paradigm shift that replaces assimilation with pluralism. Both countries' governments legally recognize the linguistic and cultural diversity of their countries in the form of amendments to their Constitutions.
Of course, putting it on paper is just the first step. Both countries face tremendous obstacles when trying to implement bilingual-bicultural education programs as I have cited earlier. Some recommendations can be made to help implement successful educational reform. First, more active participation of Indian groups is needed like in Chiapas with the San Andres Agreements. Secondly, the importance of teaching Indian languages and culture has to be valued by all, but especially by parents and the community who are the key stakeholders in education. Another recommendation is that more partnerships need to be developed between local communities and universities to expand teacher training in bilingual education and develop materials like the EDUMAYA program at Rafael Landivar University. Finally the greatest recommendation that can be made to these countries is to advocate and demand from their governments that more money be allocated towards pre-primary and primary education, and especially towards the education of its indigenous people which has been neglected for far too long.

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