

## Contrasting Education Vision. The Viewpoint of Laura Méndez de Cuenca, 1870-1910

MÍLADA BAZANT\*

### Abstract:

This paper addresses the educational experience of Laura Méndez de Cuenca in St. Louis, Missouri. The administration of Porfirio Díaz sent her to St. Louis to study the school system and form an opinion about what should be implemented in Mexico. The study is a comparative analysis of education at a time when the United States and Mexico were transforming from rural and agricultural, into urban and industrial nations. The nation to the north adapted more quickly to the needs of the era and established a more practical type of education; in contrast, Mexico, influenced by the French educational ideal, was determined to offer a more theoretical and scientific education.

**Key words:** kindergarten, elementary school, teachers, positivism, modernization.

During the administration of Porfirio Díaz, Mexico made use of the educational ideas originating in France, and at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of ideas from the United States. It was a common practice for the Mexican government to send teachers and pedagogues abroad to study teaching methods and systems and make suggestions about actions they considered useful for implementing in Mexico. This article addresses the experience obtained on one of these research trips. The protagonist is Laura Méndez de Cuenca, one of the most well-known and outstanding teachers of the times.<sup>1</sup> The guiding line of this essay is a series of reports of a comparative nature that Méndez sent from Saint Louis, Missouri, in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, regarding public elementary school, and especially kindergarten. Her opinions demonstrate a radical posture, her style is caustic and impassioned, her judgments are the product of a long teaching career, and in comparison with other teachers' writings, her critical spirit is exceptional.<sup>2</sup>

In the first section of the paper, I present some similarities and differences in the systems of government and educational administration in the United States and Mexico; then I attempt to describe the era of urban growth and technological transformation—substantial changes that provided the basis for the emergence of new educational concepts and practices.

### The System of Government and Educational Administration

---

\* Researcher at the Centro de Estudios Históricos de El Colegio Mexiquense, AC. Ex hacienda Santa Cruz de los Patos, Zinacantepec, Estado de México, E-MAIL: mbazant@cmq.edu

The federal system of government functioned differently in the United States than in Mexico. The Constitution of the northern nation put education in the hands of the states, which in turn made the local communities responsible for exercising control over their schools with the authorization of state legislatures.<sup>3</sup> This posture strengthened political institutions in the communities; however, the poorest regions remained on the margin of the sustained educational progress that was occurring in the wealthy regions. This fact has made the United States have “the best and the worst schools in the world”, with reference to the “paradoxical United States” (Good, 1966:402). Controversy to date regards the efficiency of local control, since each state in the nation handles its own public education system. While some observers affirm that the greatest obstacle to the United States’ educational development is local power, others sustain that local power is the best assurance that education will remain adequate for community needs (Cremin, 1962:7).

In Mexico, on the other hand, the political and economic autonomy of the municipality began to erode during the first Federal Republic. The diverse state powers felt inclined to limit municipal autonomy to ensure that local governments would follow new legal guidelines. The tendency towards centralization—sustained by the federalist, centralist, monarchical and dictatorial governments—prevailed during the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century. The administration of Porfirio Díaz supported the weak municipal structure, which agreed with its policy of economic progress and modernization. It was more useful for municipalities to remain within the sphere of state power than to allow them to participate in government structure.<sup>4</sup>

Until the administration of Porfirio Díaz, local governments had participated in both an active and inactive manner in their educational systems. Since education was of a preferential nature, the state governments allowed the municipalities to develop, to the degree of their possibilities, their school systems. Although the local levels did not have the freedom to determine their educational programs, they had the authority to suggest, for example, the reading of certain textbooks or the hiring or termination of certain teachers; they invited members of the community to help build school facilities, etc.. On some occasions, upstanding citizens were named to school boards, which met with the mayor to promote all aspects of education. More than once these boards functioned as a wailing wall for educational issues: absenteeism and dropout rates, parental apathy or negligence in sending their children to school, and the carelessness of the local authorities in promoting education as established by legislation, etc..

During the administration of Porfirio Díaz, education was a priority. Because of the educational congresses held in 1889, 1890 and 1891<sup>5</sup> (the watershed for the direction of national education), the federal and state governments adopted the same educational program and adapted it to regional specifics. Uniting the population and integrating ethnic groups into the mainstream through a common educational program was the final goal; as a result, the centralization of education under the iron hand of federal and state administration was indispensable. The municipal corporations, with or without school boards, were considered obstacles to educational management: “nationalization”<sup>6</sup> was presented as the most viable solution for the efficient functioning of education.

From my point of view, given the poverty of most local governments and the generalized lack of preparation of municipal officials, centralization was a necessary evil and as a result, brought uneven results in the states. In the Estado de México, for example, some wealthy municipalities that administered their resources properly, opposed this confiscatory measure.

Therefore, the government founded schools “in concession”: the corporations continued to handle their schools *economically*, but were supervised *pedagogically* by the state authorities. The formula proved to be an astute state measure that perhaps prevented haranguing and most certainly, future conflict (see Bazant, 2002). However, in general, the municipalities lost the limited political and economic autonomy that had remained, but in exchange (as a result of the healthy public finances characteristic of the Díaz administration) obtained greater resources thanks to contributions to education and the efficient tax system.<sup>7</sup>

### **Urban Growth, Technological Change and Educational Reform**

Beginning in the 1870s, both the United States and Mexico faced educational problems derived from a predominantly agricultural, rural society that was becoming urban and industrial. In spite of the difference in proportions and the more accented growth of cities in the United States,<sup>8</sup> the fact is that the cities changed the nations’ physiognomy and altered their political, economic, social and cultural life.

The end of the civil war in the United States provoked substantial modifications in national institutions and society. The North became rapidly industrialized, the West received an influx of settlers, and the South took several years to recover from the devastation of the war (Noble, 1938:265). The consequence of the technological revolution was the population’s tendency to concentrate in the cities, under a new social order (Richey, 1947:452). The new patterns of conduct, values and urban lifestyles of the existing population, along with the cultural pluralism resulting from the waves of immigration—one million immigrants per year by 1900 (Richey, 1947:444)—would engender a new United States society.

The railroad system played a revolutionary role in both nations: by articulating geography and replacing the mule trains as a means of transportation, it stimulated trade, industry and mining in large dimensions. It also favored communication among the population, and provided knowledge of national territory. In the field of education, for the first time, textbooks, classroom furniture and teaching materials reached many communities.

After fifty years of war and internal strife, Mexico at last was beginning to savor the good fortune of peace and the feasibility of reaching for highly desired progress. The nation at that time was a land of enormous contrasts: the northern region, with its sparse indigenous population, seemed to be a fertile location for implementing the government’s modernizing project, while the central and southern regions, with high indexes of ethnic groups, cultures and languages, were viewed by the government and elite as the principal obstacle to progress. In the cities, the developing middle class prospered in various commercial activities, industry, services, in public service, etc., and its concerns, likes and needs marked the guidelines for urban conduct.

In this context of urban prosperity, education flourished. The emerging intellectual group believed that education would be the ideal means to change old-fashioned patterns of conduct and train minds in agreement with progress and modernization.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the western world, a triad of European philosophers—Pestalozzi, Herbart and Froebel—radically changed the focus of education. They borrowed

from Rousseau the main idea of educational innovation, which consisted basically of centering attention on life and on the child's experience in order to convert him into a man, rather than a scholar. Rousseau rejected, as a fundamental premise, the encyclopedic instruction of previous times, based on memorization; he believed that man in his essence was good and happy, and that society made him bad and miserable. In *Émile ou de l'Éducation*, Rousseau developed a utopian treatise in which a boy, Émile, was separated from his parents and educated by a tutor who introduced him to nature, taught him to develop his abilities and directed him towards balanced learning with physical, intellectual, manual and moral content (Rousseau, 1938). At the time, *Émile* was confiscated and condemned, but the work revolutionized educational thinking.

In the 1870s, the United States and Mexico were searching for new formulas to reform their educational systems. The ideas of the three previously mentioned thinkers guided the criteria of educators, who began to reshape the focuses and practices of the moment. In both countries, an innovative pedagogical movement emerged, full of optimism, that radically modified teaching methods. Over four decades, education in both countries had been modernized, largely in theory, especially in Mexico. What did modern education comprise? On the following pages, I shall analyze some of its most important aspects, and shall then attempt to establish some of the theoretical precepts in circulation in both countries.

Under the name of modern education in Mexico, and progressive education in the United States, both countries established a system that hoped to develop children's intellectual abilities, in the manner of Johann Pestalozzi, through the observation, manipulation and analysis of objects in the world around them. The factors of importance were to promote the use of reason and encourage in children the love of learning. According to this perspective, book learning was reduced and the realm of nature acquired a new dimension in understanding the world: objective teaching, object lessons and school outings became the guiding light for educational trends among most theorists.

For Johann Herbart, the principal end of education was more to develop individual sociability through school, than to develop mental abilities. Contrary to the popular subjects of the times, based on promoting science, Herbart believed the study of history and literature was fundamental to achieving his objective. For the same reason, he pronounced his approval of a more balanced school curriculum, without the heavy emphasis normally placed on the sciences. Using the principles of Pestalozzi, Herbart developed an educational method rooted in the notion that all learning was a process, on one hand, for assimilating previously acquired knowledge, and on the other hand, through which new knowledge and existing conditions were related.<sup>9</sup>

The last author of great influence in the United States and Mexico was Friedrich Froebel, who gave the name, *kindergarten*, "garden where the children grow," to the preschool educational level, which he systematized with activities directed at encouraging the child's potentials. His fundamental premise was "to learn by doing," in the form of games, with the objective of achieving the student's unity with his world and with God.

Two more writers delineated educational thought in Mexico: Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte. According to Hale (1991:338), Spencer was the author most widely read in Mexico not only by the intellectual and political elite but also by many teachers who read *De la educación*

*intelectual, moral y física* as an assigned text.<sup>10</sup> This book, translated into Spanish in 1887, refers in detailed form to what education should be, in terms of method and contents in the intellectual, moral and physical areas.

Thus, the cry for the use of reason and observation, the rejection of dogmatism and memorization, and the employment of science as knowledge and as an instrument to organize the mind were the premises behind all levels of education. The law of President Juárez of December 2, 1867, centered its interest during Díaz' administration on the creation of the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria ("National Preparatory School"), the institution that captured the greatest part of the interest—and budget<sup>11</sup>—from the government. The curriculum adopted the positivism of Auguste Comte, a theory in which the scientific method represented man's only access to knowledge: first through observation and experimentation and then through the search for laws that rule phenomena or the relations among phenomena.

The implementation of positivism in the preparatory school created polemics and opposition among contemporaries, and resistance from the students and their parents, but over the long run solidly educated various generations of Mexicans who would compete against the best in the world, at that level and in the scientific professions. As a philosophical theory, positivism went beyond the preparatory classrooms and invaded to a large degree the political sphere of the times of Porfirio Díaz. The "científicos" and other thinkers believed that the methods of positive science could be applied to social phenomena, to the practical ends of economic development and to social regeneration.<sup>12</sup>

Much has been written about the impact of positivism on the preparatory school and its influence on the administration of Porfirio Díaz, but little has been mentioned about its presence in elementary school. What was its legacy? The most important subject at the elementary level was "lessons about things," similar to current subjects in the natural and physical sciences. The objective method or sensory perception was used to teach: children were to observe or touch objects to learn about them. The rejection of memorization and the importance attributed to the objective method and to scientific knowledge, to the detriment of the humanities, showed the application of positivism in elementary school, although not explicitly mentioned.

Spencer and Comte as theorists also influenced, although to a lesser degree, the thinking of educators in the United States.<sup>13</sup> A movement was born in the U.S., however, of educational effervescence that turned into a social uproar, especially after the pedagogically oriented pediatrician, Joseph Rice, toured the entire length and breadth of the United States to denounce public apathy, political corruption and the generalized incompetence that ruined schools. His published reports proved violently disturbing for public opinion (Cremin, 1961:3-8). A spirit of nationalism emerged and began to search for educational formulas, with the deeply rooted idea that education was closely linked to the nation's progress.

Influenced by thinkers from before the Civil War,<sup>14</sup> another group emerged in the 1890s,<sup>15</sup> led by William Harris (commented on below) and of course John Dewey, whose master work, *Democracy and Education* (1916), was compared, because of its contribution to pedagogy, to Rousseau's *Emile* (Cremin, 1961:120). A more modest book, published in 1899, *The School and*

*Society*, attained unprecedented popularity due to its simple condensation of the educational practice carried out in its laboratory school.

Dewey sustained that schools should concentrate on children's interests and the development of all personality aspects on one hand, and that they should adapt to the "circumstances, needs and opportunities of industrial civilization" on the other (Cremin, 1964:154). A believer in active learning, Dewey was able to articulate the three basic components of education—the nature of the student, the values and objectives of society, and the world of knowledge—in an educational theory of "much common sense" (Cremin, 1961:119) that is conceived in very pragmatic terms. Dewey reconciled the eternal dualism of those who made the child the center of action in the educational process, and those who focused their attention on the school curriculum, without forgetting the context in which both operated: the society.<sup>16</sup> In addition to Dewey, other theorists such as Francis Parker, Lester Ward and Jane Addams (see Rippa, 1984; Hlebowitsh, 2001; Gutek 2001b) were able to articulate dynamic theories, appropriate for the moment, that transformed education once they were put into practice.

In Mexico, however, no innovative movement of the same dimensions emerged to adapt education to Mexican reality. The reforms introduced by Laubscher and Rébsamen in Orizaba and Jalapa,<sup>17</sup> respectively—drawn from the thinking of Froebel and Pestalozzi, key for the education of the moment, and joined by Carlos Carrillo, Gregorio Torres Quintero, and Ramón Manterola<sup>18</sup> among others—were unable to structure an educational theory based on Mexican society, of which 70% was indigenous.

Justo Sierra, a pillar of education, carried out untiring efforts to encourage elementary, normal and preparatory teaching. With the absolute support of Porfirio Díaz, who obtained extraordinary powers for him in Congress in order to complete his educational policy,<sup>19</sup> he consolidated very elaborate, modern legislation with high goals of difficult compliance. It is sufficient to consult federal and state legislation's lists of subjects for the school year to understand the impossibility of observance, especially because of the insufficiency of most teachers' training and of course, the lack of resources.

It is worthwhile at this point to emphasize that although educational policy was at the highest point of the *culture of the school*,<sup>20</sup> there was an abyss between policy and everyday classroom life. Such was not the case for the pedagogical theory developed by intellectuals, which was more applicable in the daily school routine. In other words, the teachers in their sphere of influence—the classroom—and the pedagogues through their articles, courses and laboratory schools, like those of Rébsamen and Laubscher, attained another scope of action. At their micro or medium level, they exerted an influence on promoting change in educational processes, although limited by the other sphere: educational policy.

Many teachers and pedagogues participated in establishing educational policy as state representatives at the policy-forming educational congresses, but they failed, paradoxically, to take full account of the target to which policy was directed.<sup>21</sup> I say paradoxically because the teachers, more than any other social actor involved in the educational setting, were familiar with *school culture*. Yes, they wanted to build a modern, progressive society in agreement with the civilized countries of the moment, but they forgot the context of the classroom and especially of the *jacal*, the hut where most Mexican children went to school: the indigenous.

In 1906, at the Consejo Superior de Instrucción Pública (“Higher Board of Public Education”), Laura Méndez proposed considering the possibility of dictating “special means” for the education of ethnic groups because she was “saddened by the miserable state of the Indians, the profound ignorance in which they are totally removed from civilized life, without becoming incorporated into the rest of the nation.” Méndez believed that if urgent steps were not taken, the Indians could become “opposed to it.”

The Board’s president, Ezequiel Chávez,<sup>22</sup> pointed out that dictating special means for Indians would not be possible without repeating the errors of the past, such as the Legislación de Indias (“Indian Legislation”) that isolated Indians and converted them into “perpetual minors incapable of exercising their rights and watching over their own interests.” Pablo Macedo,<sup>23</sup> a member of the commission, commented that special measures would utilize the “most simple and elementary methods and procedures.” The commission finally approved the proposal unanimously<sup>24</sup> but specific formulas for Indians were not established until the end of Díaz’ administration. In practice, Indians generally attended third- or fourth-class schools<sup>25</sup> in which empirical teachers taught a more reduced group of subjects with a simpler methodology. However, to modify enrollment and attendance other changes would have been required, such as adapting the school year to agricultural cycles and condensing the school day.

From my point of view, too much attention was given to discussing, interminably, the methodology and teaching programs, in addition to all the educational topics that constantly led to reforms.

The orthodox positivist, Agustín Aragón, hit the mark when he remarked on the prevailing “reforming mania.”<sup>26</sup> It would have been better to center attention on putting into practice the obligatory and uniform law of public elementary education, with skillful and efficient means (such as those indicated above) and not simply to impose economic sanctions and arrest for heads of households who did not send their children to school. In addition, the allocation of greater federal, state and municipal funding was indispensable for teacher training.

The custom of copying educational models was not always well received in academic and political settings. To reach this end, Díaz’ government frequently sent<sup>27</sup> teachers to the United States and Europe to become familiar with teaching methods and systems, and to make suggestions to the government on aspects that could be imitated; the critics argued that the practice generated superfluous and burdensome expense.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the opposing current warned that little from the outside could be adapted to our country, which had very different origins and traditions.<sup>29</sup> As Professor Abraham Castellanos, a follower of Rébsamen, indicated:

We must flee from the danger of the *invasion of pedagogical proceedings* considered to be a body of doctrine. Many Mexican teachers cross the Rio Grande, visit a few schools; make note of procedures and legislation; copy programs out of much of the bad and good in existence there, and having their suitcase packed with doubtful content, they distribute it on arriving in Mexico. The procedure is not bad. The results are terrible... (Castellanos, 1912:15, italics by author).

In the early years of the Díaz administration, French influence in education dominated over the influence of the United States. Justo Sierra often remarked that the “Mexican [educational] formula” was a “copy of the French,”<sup>30</sup> and several years later affirmed, when imminent U.S. “invasion” was foreseen, that “schools in Mexico are an American France.”<sup>31</sup> France was the

ideal prototype for emulation, not only because of its educational principles, but also because of its republican institutions, character, customs, food, clothing and art. In contrast, U.S. influence was of a different nature; Mexico admired only the pragmatism of its northern neighbor. Justo Sierra expressed that the ideal in education was “to imitate the practical spirit and continual energy from the North, but without forgetting the tradition of Latin idealism” (Dumas, 1982, t. II, p. 430).

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, U.S. influence became more evident; educators perceived that the excess of theoretical courses led to nothing more than a saturation of the mind; in contrast, the United States included a good dose of practical applications in its curriculum (specifically drawing and industrial arts, although all teaching had a practical purpose), which was reflected in the nation’s vertiginous progress in agriculture, mining and industry. U.S. companies influenced the Americanization of Mexico, such as the flaunting of business signs in English and the speaking of English in various public offices.<sup>32</sup> Under the heading, *El inglés será idioma universal*, the newspaper, *El Imparcial*, lamented the retrocession of French, which had played the role of universal language since the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Dumas, 1982, t. I, p. 562).

The writer and ambassador, Federico Gamboa, indicated with deception: “With what placid, and for me, exasperating conformity does Mexico tolerate the slow Yankee invasion! Business signs, habits, etc. continue infiltrating our national body!” (Gamboa, 1995:131).

According to Laura Méndez de Cuenca “the gallicization of yesterday and the Americanization of today” began at school:

School textbooks tell us there was a Napoleon, a Bolivar, a Washington; they teach us what there is in Switzerland, in France, in the Alps and at Niagara Falls; they give us biographies of artists and poets and soldiers from around the world; but very little or nothing of our own. From the teacher first, and from the newspaper later, and from our parents on all occasions, we learn that we Mexicans are lazy, drunken, apathetic, gamblers and shameless, today just as yesterday, and that we have no cure other than national absorption. In many cases, our dear professor is a good example of what he preaches, and for this reason we believe him a priori. Filled with contempt for what is Mexican, and with admiration for what is exotic, we hurry to forget our language, to transform our customs, and to assimilate those of others, even those that may be bad and may cost us immense effort to assimilate. School affects our patriotic feelings and demoralizes us with tenacity, although without evil intent.<sup>33</sup>

Méndez pleaded for not copying what was foreign:

I have the firm belief that our pernicious habit of imitating everything foreign has led us to having nothing of our own; to be fair, having not had anything of our own, I am beginning to notice a certain impulsive movement towards the ideal of HOMELAND, very promising, and very worthy, and of which all of us who love Mexico feel proud. This is the base on which to build the education of the generation that is in our hands; nothing exotic, no false concept of life.

It is important to notice that the imitation of educational methods and curriculums from abroad was one matter, while another, very different matter was the failure of schools during the times of Porfirio Díaz to inspire children with a love for their native country and its

institutions—values that are especially exalted through the teaching of history. The “impulsive movement towards the ideal of HOMELAND” alluded to by Méndez de Cuenca, emerged in the first few years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, without much clarity or set direction, along with the introduction of “anglicism.” This nationalist movement would take several years to acquire roots and lucidity.

### **Education in St. Louis, Missouri, according to the Viewpoint of Laura Méndez de Cuenca**

From 1902 to 1904, Laura Méndez lived in Missouri because of the educational activity carried out there by William T. Harris, one of the most important U.S. thinkers. His schools were known throughout the country, and thanks to him, Missouri became the “birthplace of the philosophical movement of St. Louis” (Rippa, 1984:158; also see Hlebowitsh, 2001:253, 261-262, 277-278).

Present in St. Louis at the time were all the elements that were transforming urban zones: high demographic growth, ethnic and religious diversity, and accelerated commercial and industrial growth, in addition to a high percentage of German population willing to accept with enthusiasm the institution created by the German educator, Friedrich Froebel (Gutek, 2001a:244). Harris served as an administrator and teacher at various schools, where he applied his educational ideology, and was also the superintendent of the St. Louis school system; he was later the United States’ commissioner of education.

Thanks to the economic bonanza of Mexico’s neighbor to the north, which permitted the allotment of resources for universities, a new class of intellectuals appeared, influenced by German philosophy, not linked to any religious creed, and christened with the name of *educators*.

Within this pioneer group, Harris held a preeminent place (Beard and Beard, 1936, t. II, pp. 418-419). Under the influence of the thinking of Hegel, Harris was able to reconcile a theory based on the United States tradition of individualism but subordinate to existing social institutions. Schools represented only the means for conserving the values from the past and adjusting the individual within society; the main role in the educational process was played by the family, the church, the community and the state. His point of view is considered to have bordered on conservatism, since it preferred organization over freedom, work over play, and effort over interest—all required to conserve and safeguard civil order.<sup>34</sup>

Thanks to Harris, St. Louis was the first city in the United States to incorporate kindergarten into the public school system. When Méndez arrived in St. Louis, kindergarten had been successfully in place for more than twenty years; many teachers had trained at city schools and had spread their knowledge throughout the country (Hlebowitsh, 2001: 277-278).

Méndez’ *Informes* are not simply a compilation of data: they are profound analyses of the preschool and elementary school systems and of the environment in which they developed. In the particular case of the kindergartens of St. Louis, Laura Méndez did a comparative study of the spirit of kindergartens in Germany “as presented in the books I have available” (and which

she would visit in 1907), the status of kindergartens in Mexico, and the U.S. adaptation of Froebel's systems for its schools:

In my opinion, the German kindergarten is more ideal than delicate, more affectionate: appropriate for producing thinkers, artists, poets, mothers and wives; the American kindergarten is not concerned with the home or with the fine arts; the kindergarten in Mexico up to now has been routine, false, poorly adapted to our needs, a cornerstone of that romanticism that undermines our youth and that noxious sentimentalism that devours us.

In both the United States and Mexico, children's kindergarten learning was based on the ideas of Froebel, whose fundamental premise was "to learn by doing". Méndez de Cuenca observed that the classrooms in the St. Louis schools were decorated with teachers' drawings, constantly replaced in order to attract the children's attention. The drawings depicted animals, objects and people's activities, with the purpose of instructing through description, but always with the children as participants. By playing and more playing (because in this nation, children were not afraid of being caught playing like in Mexico, as Méndez pointed out) the children learned what was appropriate for their age; on the contrary, three-year-olds in Mexico were required to use the blackboard, read and write, add and subtract, which according to Méndez, represented a pedagogical anomaly that she recommended correcting.

### **Education, Order and Efficiency**

The first difference, warned Méndez, between the schools of Missouri and Mexico was related to the physical conditions of the schoolhouse, used exclusively for school in the U.S. but often designated as living quarters in Mexico, for directors who generally served as teachers in parallel form.<sup>35</sup>

The cleanliness and organization of the classrooms in St. Louis, Missouri, attracted her attention. Each teacher taught groups of 35 to 50 students, while in Mexico, the teachers of small children could have up to 100 students.<sup>36</sup> The teachers take their work very seriously (instead of reading, studying or knitting in the classroom, like in Mexico) and the classes:

... never remain acephalous; since the persons in charge have great personal dignity and cannot request leaves or send excuses at the last minute, or be absent from work with the pretext of headaches, urgent activities, birthdays or family care.

In both countries, more women than men worked as teachers, and to judge from Méndez' observations, were more responsible in the United States. After school hours, teachers were required to attend pedagogical conferences; from 2 to 3 PM, for example, a class in physiology; from 3 to 4, psychology; and from 4 to 5, methodology. The conferences, sponsored by the municipality, "represented the principal means of popular education in the United States and perhaps the most costly."

The conferences, free and open to the public, presented multiple topics: technical, industrial, literary, scientific, travel-related, musical, universal or national. If a prominent traveler were in the city, he would be invited to describe the countries he had visited, almost always with the aid of maps.

St. Louis had a pedagogical society, founded in 1903, whose objective was to study education in the United States as well as in other nations. It raised funds through voluntary quotas from teachers and others interested in promoting education. One of its functions was to present and cover the cost of the above-mentioned conferences. The society consisted of various sections: art, arithmetic, English, French and Spanish, which was supervised by Laura Méndez “with wide experience and teaching skill.”<sup>37</sup>

In Missouri, continued Méndez in her *Informes*, the absence of assistants, prefects, overseers,<sup>38</sup> etc., meant that authority was undivided and that only directors and teachers were responsible for the good functioning of schools. Since the United States was the country of “ORDER par excellence”, everyone knew what they had to do and the time they had to do it, making assistants unnecessary. Besides, affirmed Méndez, “anemic and romantic teachers are discarded as useless and harmful” since the position required “responsibility, energy and strength.”

Mexico, on the other hand, encouraged “romanticism and weakness,” the qualities traditionally considered virtuously feminine. Politicians and educators thought that the condition of motherhood, and women’s sweet and pure nature, made women more suitable for teaching than men (Galván, 2001).

The feminization of teaching was based on these attributes but women stayed in teaching because they accepted lower and irregular wages; their earning were conceived as supplementary and not the sole family income (López Pérez, 2001).

The rural schoolteachers of Missouri walked up to three kilometers to work, but if they fulfilled their duties they were later rewarded with good jobs and better salaries in the city. In Mexico, on the other hand, teachers traveled farther, and the government did not usually pay their wages on the established date; as a result, the teachers would quit work and the school would be temporarily closed, to the detriment of the students who remained without a teacher several times a year.<sup>39</sup>

The vertiginous expansion of the U.S. educational system that began in 1860 would result in the urgent creation of normal schools. That year, there were twelve schools of this type; by 1895, they had increased to 350 (Richey 1947:419-777).

Until 1874, only six states in Mexico had “something similar to a normal school”; by 1900, there were 45 establishments to educate teachers, insufficient since only two thousand of the eight thousand teachers working in Mexico had a degree (Díaz Covarrubias, 1875:CVI; Bazant, 1993:143).

A comparison between the two nations in this regard would be tedious because of the huge difference in human and economic resources, but it is important to emphasize that the massive education of the U.S. population was a crusade undertaken by the government as well as the private sector. To a lesser degree, the Mexican government attempted by all possible means also to expand education through private enterprise. The idea, however, generally did not advance beyond discourse. The authorities encouraged the opening of a church school (most private schools were church schools) but later intervened constantly, supervising the official

curriculum the school was obligated to follow. This situation, in addition to receiving open criticism from the clergy in some states, prevented the opening of more schools.<sup>40</sup>

### **Pride in the Native Country**

The prevailing school system that Laura Méndez encountered on reaching Missouri had been implemented by Harris and his predecessor, Ira Divoll. When Harris arrived in St. Louis in 1868, a school system based on grades had already replaced Lancaster's system.

The eight-year elementary school was a completely U.S. institution, the product of a long process begun in 1750, and which consistently offered a broader curriculum.<sup>41</sup>

In spite of the educational fame of St. Louis, the dropout rate was very high; children attended school only four or five years, three months each year, until they were old enough to work. The obligatory attendance law arrived late, in 1905, and strangely, Missouri was one of the last states to put it into effect.<sup>42</sup>

The “promotions” system consisted of dividing the school year into ten-week quarters. At the end of each quarter, promotions were carried out and groups formed, according to Laura Méndez, “with careful, able children and a class of fools”:

The children are completely unaware of the test to which they are subjected, and equally unaware of the difference between the two classes: because one of the many good things seen in American schools is that children are never humiliated for their deficiencies. Helping to correct imperfections and develop abilities is the task of all teachers; and American teachers know they must fulfill it.

After dividing the class in two, the teacher “in a clever manner” taught the usual course, as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. According to Juana Palacios, a teacher who visited various schools in the United States, this system of “sections” encouraged personal effort and permitted “adapting school work to the abilities of undeveloped students, without hindering the progress of the more talented” (*Boletín de Instrucción Pública*, 1908, t. X, p. 541).

A major difference between the two educational systems, wrote Méndez, was the form of examination. In Mexico, examinations were held publicly “with the intervention of strangers” and the awarding of prizes, resulting in “taunts, abuse, favoritism, vanity and envy.” Even worse, such examinations did not correctly evaluate student progress.

Although possibly true, public examinations also had the objective of evaluating teacher performance and symbolically represented the state's need to legitimate lay education. On the other hand, oral examinations flattered school authorities and especially the government, which boasted of providing modern teaching that agreed with the pedagogical currents then in vogue.

In the United States, reported Méndez, tests were given individually and the teachers decided if each student was to pass to the following grade. Once a month the teachers sent the parents a

report card with the grades (from 1 to 10) of the subjects taken and classroom conduct. In the United States, schools “are appropriate for the emptiness they have to fill”:

The East produces American democrats, men of energy and enterprise, but cultured, generous, humanitarian; in the South, education is somewhat aristocratic with pro-slavery tendencies; the people of that region are restless, turbulent and have a latent hatred of races and the senseless ambition of conquering territory; at other points, tendencies vary in detail although as a whole no one disagrees or serves as a hindrance to general progress, nor to the desire for universal power, domain and monopoly.

[The United States], the most powerful, influential, wealthy and human nation on the globe, establishes schools on the basis of individual progress as a premise of collective progress, on the foundation of individual responsibility as the antecedent of common responsibility.

Children in the United States, continued Laura Méndez, were inculcated with ideas of solidarity and independence, and of love for their country. U.S. citizens felt proud of their native land because their teachers repeated insistently that abundance reigned in their nation, with the best rivers, parks, mines; industry, production and trade had no parallel in the world, and teachers at times made comparisons as follows:

The Cubans are barefoot, the Philippines unclothed, the Italians dirty; the Mexicans conform to a miserable daily wage and neither spend on carpets for their houses nor cook on stoves, nor have gas lights; the Central and South Americans fight among themselves without rest; but in the United States people wear shoes and clothes; the clothes and the body are clean, the houses are carpeted and they have gas or electric lights and they live in peace and teach other peoples to live in the same manner.

Because of the pro-foreign spirit that characterized Mexicans, exactly the opposite occurred in our country. Those who appreciated the bounty and beauty of our land were generally foreigners. However, Méndez de Cuenca affirmed that both countries could learn from each other:

It seems to me that we have much to learn and imitate from the organizational system of schools in this country; but judging without mercy, I sincerely believe that the United States should learn more than a little from us; and they most certainly would learn it if they were not such an arrogant and conceited people.

One of the things the United States could copy from Mexican school organization was the morning and afternoon schedule, which was extremely useful for the children of workers unable to care for them. In the United States, schools closed at 3 PM (some elementary and secondary grades), but three or four sections of elementary and kindergarten released their students at 11, 12 or 2 PM, causing the children to “loaf in the streets all afternoon, exposed to a thousand dangers.” In Mexico, schools “collaborated with the home; although deficient, parents provided more education at home, especially the mothers.” In the United States:

Factory and business life has undermined the home and completely dismembered the family: rather than collaborating with the home, schools are a substitute for it. It is in the classroom where the child enjoys the delights of social life, since home serves him as a place for eating and sleeping.

Although the academic level of Mexican schools, in Méndez' opinion, was superior because subjects were taught in greater depth and extension, teaching was characterized as being more instructional than educational. In other words, greater importance was attached to acquiring knowledge than to the student's integral development in moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic aspects, the priority that had been set at Mexico's the First Educational Congress. In the United States:

Teaching molds character, forms individuals; there [in Mexico] it twists them, unbalances them entirely, and primarily damages girls. Because school here is a place appropriate for studying, for learning. These people know how to appreciate the superiority of education and enjoy acquired knowledge.

### **Educating and Moralizing**

If I had one dollar, I would buy a 50-cent hat for my father, 48 cents' worth of handkerchiefs for my mother, and put the two remaining cents in a savings box.

In the schools of St. Louis, Missouri, subjects were taught with practical examples and a moralizing background. In the arithmetic problem above, each child in the class wrote what he would do if he had a dollar: "some were generous, others selfish, some careful and economical and all were sincere." By means of a simple arithmetical operation, a moral sense was inculcated in each student, and the teacher took advantage of the occasion to talk about human virtues and defects, praising the good and censuring the bad, but always avoiding the use of humiliating comparisons. From a young age, children were taught to observe, calculate and reason, with an eye on their intellectual abilities and skills in abstraction: no amounts like "quintillions or septillions" were handled, as they were in Mexico. Solving problems of a local nature had the purpose of encouraging pride in the native region.

At the beginning of the school year, every child in Missouri was equipped with a slate and slate pencil, and a one-foot ruler. The school kept all the dry and liquid measuring utensils, scales and weights that were constantly used, since the study of arithmetic outlawed calculations with abstract numbers. The most important objective of learning numbers was their practical application to the diverse needs of business, industrial and home life, to "encourage in children the desire to prosper: a notable contrast with our doctrinaire conformance with luck. We preach it to each other, we imbue it in the spirit of our children, killing in them all seeds of enthusiasm and emulation."

In 1900, uncommon topics were excluded from arithmetic textbooks, such as fractions, greatest common denominator, etc.—topics that did not contribute to greater "social utility."<sup>43</sup>

As inferred from Méndez' *Informes*, classes in St. Louis, Missouri, employed the objective or Pestalozzi method, which consisted of observing objects to become familiar with them.<sup>44</sup> Arithmetic was taught, for example, with the abacus, beans, etc.; geography with outings to observe rivers, the size of mountains, etc..

Reading and writing were learned at the same time, according to Méndez, just as in Mexico. In the second grade, child received their first reading book, and notable differences between the two countries became evident. In Missouri, the books had hard covers, thick, coated paper and very attractive illustrations, generally of U.S. landscapes and places known by the students.

The style was moderate and clear, quite the opposite of textbooks in Mexico, where “even the most modern are crammed with useless wordiness, literary rubbish that, while not understood, bores the children...”; they were “bluish or yellowish, with blurred printing, poorly bound” and contained:

... their little points of healthy literature, a lot of sermon, much more scolding and such an abundance of romantic stories and sickly literature that when the child is stupid, to his good fortune, he looks at it with disdain; but if he is somewhat clever, he is annoyed by the sweet vocabulary of stale lyricism that the Honorable Municipal Government gives him, with the unhappy ending that of instead of becoming an educated man, useful for his fellow citizens, he becomes a pedant, fool and stray lady-killer, and the situation is not as bad in the case of the boys; for when a girl is instigated through her candescent tropical imagination, she assimilates all of that dull and often malicious wordiness of certain anecdotes and poetry from the textbooks, and begins to prepare herself, due to her romantic tendencies, to throw herself off the bridge, when she finishes normal school, highly congratulated, highly applauded and with her diploma under her arm. I am not talking about this because of what I have been told, but because of having witnessed it on innumerable occasions, when I was a student, when I was a teacher and when I was a director at the normal school.

Méndez de Cuenca’s description of Mexican textbooks coincides with contemporary and subsequent criticism. However, it should be pointed out that beautiful and useful textbooks also existed, such as *Lecturas mexicanas* by Amado Nervo, *Frasquito*, which contained pleasant, short accounts of people and scientific discoveries, not to forget the national history book written by Justo Sierra and the geography books of Daniel Delgadillo. Although each subject had its textbook, I agree with the decision to establish the *Libro de lectura* 1, 2, 3 and 4 for each year of elementary school. The sole annual textbook contained broad information on hygiene, history, geography, etc., explained in a brief and interesting manner, and its illustrations attempted to attract the student’s curiosity, complement the text and facilitate comprehension.<sup>45</sup>

Méndez herself learned to read with the “abominable San Miguelito” that received its name from the image on its cover of the archangel overcoming sin, depicted as a devil. In spite of Méndez’ criticism of the primer, she affirmed that this method was better than the “neat signs of the Lancaster system”—signs hung on the walls to illustrate letters, syllables or numbers to facilitate the learning of reading and arithmetic.

All children during the times of Porfirio Díaz learned to read and write with small books known as primers, or with reading methods that carried the names of their authors, such as the Rébsamen or Torres Quintero methods. Other books for the children to practice reading contained short stories, true or fictitious, with a moral or civic setting, as mentioned by Méndez. The interest in textbooks waned as teachers gained importance as educating agents. Many pedagogues believed that textbook use reduced children’s intellectual work to memory exercises, and displaced the teaching function; this criteria was magnified to such a degree that by the end of the Díaz administration, the use of textbooks was declared voluntary.

### **Integration into the Environment**

Before 1865, children in U.S. schools learned basically to read, write and count, and to have good behavior. Little weight was given to subjects such as history, geography and object lessons. However, after 1865, thanks to the spread of Pestalozzi’s thinking in the western

world, such subjects increased in importance. Recognition was given to the influence of the environment on students' integral development.

In Mexico, the physical and natural sciences, known as *lecciones de cosas*, were taught with the objective or intuitive method; on occasions, this subject was called the objective method.

In the United States, especially after 1880, the teaching of science degenerated into the rote learning of a type of elementary science that consisted of making observations and listing facts. By the end of the century, this subject had been replaced by simple nature studies (Richey, 1947:73-725). However, when Méndez de Cuenca visited the Missouri schools, the objective method was still in style for teaching science. Apple trees, for example, were studied as an integral part of nature, along with their relationship with their surroundings. Comments were made on the fruit's great usefulness, and apple dishes were prepared in some schools. Remarks of a moralistic nature were added, such as "George Washington ate a baked apple before retiring for the night because it activated the brain's functions." On school excursions the children came into contact with nature and observed the raw materials that served for the nation's industrialization. Above all, an attempt was made to cultivate children's observational abilities and develop their admiration for the beauty of nature.<sup>46</sup> Their participation in class was encouraged. Many times the children themselves suggested the topic, and the teacher served simply as a guide and supervisor, "limiting herself to directing at times the children's incipient criteria."

In the same manner in Mexico, the subject of geography (occasionally part of object lessons, in agreement with the objective method) was taught by showing sand, clay, dirt and water; explanations were given on the formation of mountains, on natural springs, rivers, etc.. Subsequently, school outings searched for samples in situ of rocks or seeds, in order to stimulate students' intellectual curiosity and powers of observation, and inspire them with a love for nature. The collected samples became part of school museums. As a pedagogical corollary, the children observed watched the process of plant germination, the growing of corn, beans, etc., in small school gardens or in flower pots.<sup>47</sup>

### **"Americanization"**

By 1900, the study of history had become generalized throughout U.S. elementary schools (Richey, 1947:726).<sup>48</sup> In addition to teaching history as such, all subjects were illustrated with historical events in such a way that all children learned U.S. history "by heart," along with the transcendental role played by historical figures such as Lincoln, Grant, Longfellow, and others. However, the students' complete ignorance of Alexander the Great, Homer, Michelangelo, Napoleon, and other famous men "serves to establish the idea among the people that only the United States produces eminent citizens."

Méndez observed that when past events were taught, "truth and sincerity" were the rule, but such was not the case for recent events. When dealing with the Mexican War, for example:

It is stated that the dispossession of which we were victims was planned previously and in cold blood by some Americans and caused primarily by the ambition of the southern states that wanted to own territory to which slavery could be extended.

In the case of current events, “which the press covered daily and about which everyone knew the truth with regard to the tricks one country devised to take control of another, even by force, the children are deceived, perhaps without malice.”

The civic virtues of the North American people were continually discussed in the classroom, and aspects of other nations were denigrated:

In their desire to belittle and denigrate everything that is not North American, the children are presented with hateful descriptions of Muscovite imperialism, Germanic tyranny, French immorality and prostitution, misery and decadence in Italy, the cruelty, ignorance and fanaticism of Spain, the arrogance of England, the degradation of China, and lastly, the savagery, insignificance and ridiculous presumption of all of Latin America, measured with the same ruler as all the uncivilized tribes that populate the world’s islands.

Lessons are concluded by saying that the United States “by chance, by divine right, has the task of civilizing the world.”

The public conferences for adults that Méndez had the opportunity to attend constantly mentioned the fact that America received millions of immigrants “distressed by misery and tyranny” and adopted them by “nationalizing them, educating them and loving them in the struggle for life.” Immigrants, she insisted, “arrived in rags, but American citizens take immense capital to other countries and contribute powerfully to the development and progress of the nations that shelter them.” With such teachings, “what child attending school, either a native citizen or an immigrant, does not desire to be North American and does not feel proud of being so?” Méndez continued her discussion of the “privilege” of belonging to the most powerful and civilized nation in the world:

The falseness and hypocrisy of the lesson resides in exalting disproportionately the Saxon races, English-speaking people to whom the future belongs; the blessed country founded by Protestant Pilgrims, with the destiny of expanding without respite to spread civilization throughout the world.

Thus, immigrant children, mostly Italians, Slavs or Jews, heard this litany intermixed with the daily grammar lesson or arithmetic, geography or civics, and came to believe that the United States was the “only civilized and civilizing people in the world.” Teachers strove with special zeal to uproot immigrant children’s love for their native country, “to convert them into enemies of all countries and all races.”

Although Méndez de Cuenca viewpoint seems exaggerated, the imperialist spirit of the United States was supported by its teachers through the National Education Association. As a result of the Spanish-American War in 1898, the Association resolved that “the cause of freedom and humanity, the solidarity of the North American people with the Anglo-Saxon races increase considerably with said armed conflict.”

Teachers were in agreement with the U.S. imperialist policy and diffused it in their classes. The educational efforts in the recently acquired Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba attempted to Americanize the population after 1898, in the shortest time span possible, with no respect for native culture (Curti, 1935:225-227).

The “Americanization” process was extremely complex because of the need to amalgamate the different customs, races, beliefs, lifestyles and languages of immigrants arriving from many nations. The waves of immigration were diverse. Before 1880, immigrants were from England, Ireland, Germany and Scandinavia; they settled on fertile land in the central and northwest states; after 1880, immigrants were from southern and eastern Europe and settled primarily in the cities. In the urban centers, the new inhabitants faced problems not only of adapting to a new nation, but also to neighborhoods populated by their fellow countrymen already undergoing the same adaptation process. It soon became obvious that “Americanize” was synonymous with “Anglicize”; i.e., inculcate Anglo-Saxon morals, legal concepts, order and democratic institutions. Some affirmed that unity was not simply the perpetration of Anglo-Saxon traditions since a new nationality would slowly emerge from the melting pot (Cremin, 1964:66-75), with different characteristics.

On the other hand, it is important to point out that various immigrant groups wanted to conserve their languages and customs, and occasionally resisted learning English. In Missouri, the foreign population consisted basically of Germans who wanted German spoken in their schools, and opposed the use of textbooks in English. To solve this problem, the authorities implemented the use of German for the immigrants’ children, but the immigrants wanted, in addition, for German to stand as the sole language at school. Harris then issued a reminder that immigrants had been admitted as citizens in a country whose official national language was English. As a result, some removed their children from public schools and enrolled them in private German schools. To complicate the situation even further, many U.S. citizens opposed the teaching of a foreign language at school, and took steps to have it suppressed (Good, 1966:361).

Laura Méndez admired the evolution of “Americanization” and affirmed that it arose from a genuine U.S. educational system that did not copy foreign models.

[It does not give] its citizens exotic ideas or customs, but it transforms in its schools, with admirable tenacity that we must imitate, by the way, foreign children into sons of the nation, without their becoming false sons.

The integration process was so complicated that schools had to broaden their educating function; their doors were opened at night and on the weekends to serve as gathering points where informal education began to play an equally important role in the “Americanization” process. The settlement houses also had an important place in this process. Located in poor urban neighborhoods, they functioned as community centers that offered help to immigrants of all ages, in solving not only educational problems, but also health, entertainment and vocational problems. Their central objective was to teach the population a trade in order to overcome poverty and become integrated into the North American nation.<sup>49</sup> According to the historian, Diana Ravitch, the major success of education was Americanization, the process by which students learned to “love America and be American.”<sup>50</sup>

The disintegration of the family mentioned by Méndez was another product of the “Americanization” process she admired. It has been affirmed that children’s rejection of their parents’ native cultures, a rejection that was learned and stimulated at school, was the detonator for the dismemberment of the home. The opposite occurred, for example, in the

communities of Scandinavians and Germans who settled from Minnesota to Washington, and who were able to conserve their cultural hegemony without disintegration (see Handlin, 1952).

### **The Encouragement of Industrial Arts**

Lastly, I shall mention the learning of industrial arts as an indispensable part of the education of U.S. children. Philadelphia's industrial exposition of 1876 opened a novel area in the field of education. Teachers noticed that the nation's industrial progress was linked to manual training, which was fundamental for a child's integral development. In addition, interest in such training attracted children to school and taught them to love work. Various schools of industrial arts were opened and the subject became obligatory in elementary schools (Cremin, 1961:23-34, and 1964:25-26; Noble, 1938:320-321).

When Laura Méndez de Cuenca visited the schools of St. Louis, Missouri, she observed the importance of industrial arts. The encouragement given to such learning was due to John Runkle, the president of Massachusetts Institute of Technology. When he visited Philadelphia's exhibition, he was impressed by the tools manufactured at the Technical Imperial School of Moscow. On returning to MIT, he founded workshops and a school of mechanical arts to train students interested in industrial research (Cremin, 1964:25). Subsequently, his influence spread throughout the entire nation.

Méndez observed that industrial arts in Massachusetts became famous because of the boys' participation in sewing and knitting, occupations considered appropriate for girls only in other states; and in Chicago, there were schools where girls learned to use shovels, axes, hammers, saws and other tools. In Missouri, the coeducational schools prepared girls to work in various areas of industry and in workshops; they learned to "make cornucopia for candy, small boxes and cases for various uses, objects from paper, wood, clay, cardboard and canvas."

Haute cuisine was taught in girls' schools, to enable students to use their knowledge to work at inns or hotels. In addition to food preparation, the classes taught students to draw and study the components of food, such as legumes and grains, as the teacher would explain the item's nutritional properties, cultivation and growing cycle.

The purpose of industrial arts classes was not to make girls better housewives, but to prepare women for living. In Mexico, such knowledge was transmitted from mother to daughter, and Méndez affirmed that "a Mexican woman knows all about running a house."

The teaching of industrial arts attempted to develop the children's skills, imagination, energy, patience and persistence. Teachers wanted to awaken "individual character, the mark of this great people." Industrial arts began in kindergarten, with drawing classes, alternated with didactic games to promote occupations in carpentry, blacksmithing, labor, etc..

The vocations were promoted in all subjects since the United States wanted "to make useful men to enrich their nation with the work of their hands." The secret of U.S. education was the work/study/play trilogy, the idea of school as an enjoyable task, and the notion instilled in children's minds that work generated wealth and led to God's blessing for the worker.<sup>51</sup>

Contrary to Mexico, where more boys than girls finished the school year, in the United States the opposite occurred:

Whether because of the harshness of the climate or the pressing need for each individual to collect resources for his own support, whether because of the greed for riches that constitutes the nation's endemic illness, the boys leave school at a very early age for the workshop; while the girls stay in school longer.

The girls, said Méndez, were therefore more cultured and looked down on the opposite sex, and when they married, superiority was evident in their treatment of their husbands. Marriage became less common and divorce increased at a rapid pace. The emancipation of women had a very high cost that "had been barely glimpsed by a few: powerless now to reverse the chain of events."

In spite of its advantages, the U.S. school system, according to Méndez, suffered from the serious error of promoting the disintegration of the family:

Just as schools are governed now, they produce excellent workers, skillful artisans, numerous and sometimes good physicians; mechanics of the best quality; clever merchants and businessmen without parallel in the world, but not wives, nor mothers, nor housekeepers, nor even maids because these occupations are now the responsibility of foreign women.

Méndez recognized the importance for Mexican women to study and work, but not at the cost of losing their families:

Instead of Americanizing the Mexican woman, emancipating her entirely, I believe she should be taught liberally, prepared to earn a living for herself or for her own, when single, poorly married or widowed; I do not believe that we should pull the Mexican woman from her home, as done here, because she is neither happy in the midst of so much freedom, nor because of it does she feel gratitude for the man she has been given, but rather the deepest hate, if not contempt.

## Epilogue

Laura Méndez complied with the Mexican government on sending her *Informes pedagógicos* from St. Louis, Missouri. With respect to other teachers' reports, Méndez' writings are outstanding because of their comparative nature; in addition, the author's enthusiasm enriches the usual transmission of cold data or a simple narrative. With the use of a single standard of measurement, Méndez analyzed the school systems of both nations, praised their virtues and condemned their faults. She was particularly bothered by the constant arrogance of the U.S. people, taught at all hours at school. Such indoctrination was undoubtedly a skillful measure adopted by state governments to amalgamate the various races present in their populations, while creating in the children a superiority complex of unknown scope. On the contrary, in Mexico we had a "pernicious habit of imitating everything foreign" and scorning what was Mexican—which was valued, paradoxically, only by foreigners.

The passionate spirit of Méndez moved beyond the classroom: although she believed U.S. education to be pedagogically superior, she perceived the damage of the family's disintegration that was caused by the school schedule as well as the justified air of women's preponderance

over men due to their longer stay in school. If U.S. citizens had not been so pretentious, according to Méndez, they would have done well to copy the warm home atmosphere of Mexican families.

In addition to her interesting impressions, what was the legacy of Laura Méndez de Cuenca's trip for Mexican education? On Méndez' return to Mexico, Justo Sierra invited her to form part of the Consejo Superior de Instrucción Pública ("Higher Board of Public Education"), the highest governing body in Mexican education. As an active member, Méndez most certainly influenced the decisions of the time regarding the importance of integral education and the usefulness of industrial arts, but especially, the practical nature that must be present in education—all topics experienced firsthand by Méndez in the schools of St. Louis, Missouri. Her career in education would last many years more: she traveled to Europe to study school systems and held various government positions in education during the Mexican Revolution. In the early 1920s she enrolled in the university as a regular student to study literature, while beginning to arrange a well-deserved retirement after 42 years of service. Her enjoyment of retirement benefits was cut short—only two years—by her death in 1926.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> A native of Amecameca, Méndez served in various positions during the 42 years of her career in education, as a classroom teacher, an administrator and a school inspector in Toluca as well as Mexico City. She was well-known in education because of her participation on various commissions of public education and the Consejo Superior ("Superior Board")—the highest governing body in education, presided over by Justo Sierra—and represented Mexico at various international congresses of education. She participated in literature by writing poetry, short stories and fiction.
- <sup>2</sup> In general, other reports from teachers sent to the United and States and Europe, while always of interest, lack a critical and comparative spirit; they are narratives that in overall form praise the educational systems of other countries. See, for example, the reports of Rosaura Zapata, Abel Ayala, Estefanía Castañeda and Juana Palacios in *Boletín de Instrucción Pública*, 1908, t. X, pp. 527-533; t. XIV, pp. 271-281.
- <sup>3</sup> States like Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas and some southern states allow the local level to exercise broad powers, while other states, such as New York, Maryland and New Hampshire keep strict control over the local level; Good, 1966: 156-157.
- <sup>4</sup> Salinas, 2001: 14-15. The tendency toward centralization became generalized throughout the entire nation, especially in the states of the central region. The exceptions were Oaxaca, and to a lesser degree, Yucatan, states that left a wider margin for municipal autonomy. I thank Carmen Salinas, a scholar of the history of municipalities, for having provided me with this information.
- <sup>5</sup> The first congress was held from December, 1889, to March, 1890, and the second from December, 1890, to February, 1891. Since the first congress was unable to deal with all matters relevant to education, the second meeting was called.
- <sup>6</sup> By the end of the century, almost all the states had "nationalized" their schools (Bazant, 1993: 32-33). The "nationalization" term was used by the federation, although "centralization" would perhaps be more correct.

- <sup>7</sup> The economic administration of education has not been studied in detail by state; however, the considerable increase in state budgets during the Díaz administration permitted improvement in public education.
- <sup>8</sup> True to the norm, the statistics of the time are imprecise. In the United States, one author sustains that in 1900, 40% of the population lived in cities, and that by 1910, this number had increased to 45% (Richey, 1947:453). The key question would regard the number of inhabitants required to define a settlement as a city. Beard and Beard (1936, t. II, p. 206) state that in 1900, one-third of the population lived in cities of more than 8,000 inhabitants, and that 40% lived in rural zones. In order to establish a precise comparison, in 1900, 5.5% of Mexico's population lived in cities having between 5,001 and 10,000 inhabitants (Guerra, 1988, t. I, p. 348). González Navarro (1956) affirms that in 1910, 71% of the population was rural: data are available only for 1910, and a minimum of 4,000 inhabitants defines a settlement as urban.
- <sup>9</sup> Hlebowitsh, 2001:259-261. I thank Dr. Dennis J. Bixler-Márquez for having provided me with this book and the other books listed in the bibliography, as well as the documentary film.
- <sup>10</sup> Some rural teachers used it as their main resource. See, for example, the case of the teachers in Estado de México, in Bazant, 2002.
- <sup>11</sup> For example, the budget for 1902-1903 was 114,791 pesos; it was followed by the medical school with 80,446 pesos. *Ley de Ingresos*, ACS, book 307, page 390, exp. 15.
- <sup>12</sup> To expand on this topic, see Hale, 1991 and Villegas, 1972.
- <sup>13</sup> As reflected by the summarized bibliography in this article. Dewey, for example, was quite familiar with the thinking of these authors (Cremin, 1961:120).
- <sup>14</sup> Like Horace Mann in Massachusetts, Henry Barnard in Connecticut, John Pierce in Michigan and Samuel Lewis in Ohio, who believed that public education, equal for all, was the fundamental ingredient for creating a fair, democratic, republican and progressive society (Cremin, 1961:8-14).
- <sup>15</sup> To mention a few: Barnas Sears of Massachusetts; J.L.M. Curry of New York; John Eaton of Washington and also Lester Ward, William James and Edward Thorndike (Cremin, 1961); this author analyzes the thinking of all theorists and their influence on the nation.
- <sup>16</sup> Hlebowitsh, 2001: 294-297; Ripa, 1984:164-173. The philosophy of active learning was formally introduced in Mexico in 1923.
- <sup>17</sup> A native of Germany, Enrique Laubscher was a student of Froebel and in 1883 founded a model school with a normal academy that put objective education into practice for the first time in the country. Swiss-born Enrique Rébsamen, the "only true pedagogue" (in the words of Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, the founder of Mexico City's Escuela Normal para Profesores) (Meneses, 1983:327) developed a curriculum based on the ideas of Pestalozzi, Froebel and Herbart; according to Castellanos, it was "adapted to the Mexican social setting" (*Pedagogía Rébsamen*, 1912:14) of the schools of Jalapa. The influence of both educators spread throughout the entire nation.
- <sup>18</sup> Carrillo became well-known because of his rejection of a textbook that encouraged memory through a mechanical process. He believed the teacher should be the main educating agent. Gregorio Torres Quintero revolutionized, through his onomatopoeic method, the simultaneous learning of reading and writing. Ramón Manterola founded the *Boletín Bibliográfico y Escolar*, which presented his educational ideas; he attributed to teachers the main power for the good functioning of schools.
- <sup>19</sup> Not only for him but also for other ministers of public education, Joaquín Baranda (1876-1901), Justino Fernández (1901-1905) and then Sierra. Guerra, 1988, t. I, p. 407.

- <sup>20</sup> See the convincing article by Agustín Escolano, which refers to the “culture of school” (set of theories, norms and practices that must be inculcated [...], a term recently coined by historians with a still not completely defined by consensus) in three settings: “practical reason in the empirical area; academic discourse in the scientific area; social control in schools as organizations. Each one of these types of culture has its own sphere of autonomy that partially interacts with the other two. The three also coincide in certain divergent zones.” The author warns that educational reforms over history have failed because of schisms among these three cultures (Escolano, 2000:210).
- <sup>21</sup> The formulation of this reflection is based on the article by Escolano (2000).
- <sup>22</sup> Attorney, under secretary of public education from 1905 to 1911.
- <sup>23</sup> Attorney, collaborator in Díaz administration, especially in business matters.
- <sup>24</sup> AHCESU, Consejo Superior de Educación, caja 3, exp. 45.
- <sup>25</sup> That were located in the towns or on the ranches, haciendas and farms; in contrast, first- and second-class schools were found in the cities, villages and seats of local government. The government assigned the school categories to populations depending on local resources. Those that depended on agriculture had fewer resources and could therefore maintain only third- or fourth-class schools; in contrast, populations with trade or industry generated more resources and had the right to a first- or second-class school.
- <sup>26</sup> In Alvarado, 1994:131. Before the success or failure of a reform could be evaluated, another reform was legislated.
- <sup>27</sup> No statistics exist in this regard, but various sources allude to this constant practice. See for example the reports given by the directors of the normal school on school projects 1897-1910; information on teachers receiving scholarships outside of Mexico (AHSEP, Guía 96, exp. 27-1-6-4, 27-1-6-5, caja 2061, exp. 24-7-37-5, 24-7-37-8). Also the journals, *La Enseñanza Normal*, *La Escuela Mexicana*, *Boletín de Instrucción Pública*; Bazant, 1993: 139; Galván, 1991:208-210).
- <sup>28</sup> The Mexican government paid Laura Méndez, through the Mexican consul in St. Louis, 50 pesos in gold each month, equivalent to 50 dollars. At that time, the exchange rate was 2 pesos per dollar, meaning that Méndez earned 100 pesos per month, the salary of a university professor in Mexico—not a very good salary in Mexico and even less so in the United States. As a teacher in Mexico City, Méndez had previously earned 25 pesos per month; as an inspector in 1905, she earned 150. She was continually dissatisfied with her salary. It was insufficient to cover her living expenses, and she lived in various modest houses in San Pedro de los Pinos (AHSEP. Sección personajes ilustres. Laura Méndez de Cuenca).
- <sup>29</sup> *Diario del bogar*, August 12 and 16, 1908, in Meneses, 1983:579.
- <sup>30</sup> Reference was being made to the basic principles of free, obligatory and lay education that had been proclaimed in France in 1882, thanks to the work of Jules Ferry, the “inventor” of the formula, according to Sierra (Dumas, 1982, t. I, p. 283).
- <sup>31</sup> On the occasion of the conference on “France and Mexico” at the Club Francés, April, 1898 (Dumas, 1982, t. I, p. 435; t. II, p. 224).
- <sup>32</sup> Such as postal employees and police. The last straw was at the ticket booths in the train stations, where English had to be spoken in order to be served (Dumas, t. II, p. 225).
- <sup>33</sup> All quotes from Laura Méndez are from her *Informes*; published by the *Gaceta del Gobierno*, the official newspaper of Estado de México, on July 16 and 20, October 12, 15, 19, 22, 26 and 29, and November 2, 1904.

- <sup>34</sup> Later to be criticized by philosophers and educators (Curti, 1935:310-348; Cremin, 1961:15-20 and 1964:14-22; Good, 1966:359).
- <sup>35</sup> This arrangement occurred in urban zones, while rural schools were practically huts. Mexico City schoolhouses divided into school and living areas have been studied in detail by Chaoul, 2000.
- <sup>36</sup> Such a large group was usually the exception and occurred only in urban areas. In rural areas, the average number of children in a classroom was from 4 to 20.
- <sup>37</sup> AHSEP, Sección Profesores Ilustres, Laura Méndez de Cuenca.
- <sup>38</sup> Assistants generally taught two grades (first and third) and the director the other two (second and fourth) when elementary school lasted four years. The expansion to five and six years varied by state. Assistants earned less than directors. The prefects and overseers supervised the physical condition of the classroom for cleanliness, hygiene, etc.
- <sup>39</sup> In Estado de México, for example, the average number of teacher changes during the school year was three (Bazant, 2002).
- <sup>40</sup> In Estado de México, for example, the government threatened to suspend municipal authorities if a church school had more students than the public school. However, in other states that were traditionally religious, like Tlaxcala, religion was taught at the public schools and the authorities remained on the margin (Bazant, 2002; Toulet, 1998).
- <sup>41</sup> See the development of this process in Noble, 1938:178-185.
- <sup>42</sup> The first state was Massachusetts, in 1852, and the last was Missouri, in 1918 (Good, 1966:160, 359-360, 407).
- <sup>43</sup> In 1900, the first surveys appeared to determine the usefulness of arithmetic in various occupations; the entire decade was dedicated to studying this problem and the conclusion was reached that the simplification of 1900 had been insufficient (Good, 1966:446).
- <sup>44</sup> The most important follower of Pestalozzi in the U.S. was Edward A. Sheldon of the Normal School at Oswego, New York, but his influence spread throughout the country; see, for example, Richey, 1947:723-725 and Noble, 1938:209-211.
- <sup>45</sup> An interesting analysis of texts and forms of reading can be consulted in Moreno Gutiérrez, 1999.
- <sup>46</sup> Another purpose of school outings was for the children to become familiar with the difficult conditions of factory life and the poverty of many sectors of society. These outings were begun by Parker, the father of the progressive school, in accordance with Dewey (Hlebowitsh, 2001:307). According to Méndez de Cuenca, this aspect of outings was apparently not taken into account in St. Louis.
- <sup>47</sup> The teachers also visited farms, factories and museums to observe the nation's flourishing business and industry (Martínez Moctezuma, 2002:282-296).
- <sup>48</sup> In 1897, Dewey began to emphasize the importance of history as an "ethical value that develops observational and analytical powers and makes inferences about the factors that determine and transform a social situation" (Curti, 1935:526).
- <sup>49</sup> The best known settlement house was founded by Jane Addams in Chicago in 1893. Her work was internationally recognized when she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931 (Hlebowitsh, 2001:307-312).

<sup>50</sup> Documentary film, *The Story of American Public Education*, by Sarah Mondale. According to Mondale, 53 nationalities were “Americanized.” One scholar affirms that the melting pot was a myth because on one hand, it expected immigrants to accept and embrace the Anglo-Saxon ideal, i.e., forget their cultural heritage; and on the other hand, the black minorities were totally discarded in the Americanization process (Pai Young, 2000:62-63).

<sup>51</sup> Documentary film, *The Story of American Public Education*, Sarah Mondale.

## Bibliography

Alvarado, Lourdes (1994). *La polémica en torno a la idea de universidad en el siglo XIX*, México: UNAM.

Bazant Milada (1993). *Historia de la Educación durante el Porfiriato*. México: El Colegio de México.

Bazant Milada (2002). *En busca de la modernidad. Procesos educativos en el Estado de México, 1873-1912*, México: El Colegio de Michoacán/El Colegio Mexiquense, AC.

Beard, Charles and Mary R. Beard (1936). *The Rise of American Civilization*, New York: The Macmillan Company.

Castellanos, Abraham (1912). *Pedagogía Rébsamen. Asuntos de metodología general relacionados con la escuela primaria*, México: Librería de la viuda de Ch. Bouret.

Cremin, Lawrence A. (1961). *The Transformation of the School*, New York: Knopf.

Cremin, Lawrence (1962). “Popular Schooling”, in *Talks on American Education*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Cremin, Lawrence (1964). *The Transformation of the School. Progressivism in American Education 1876-1957*, New York: Vintage Books Edition

Cremin, Lawrence (1977). *Traditions of American Education*, New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers.

Curti, Merle (1935). *The Social Ideas of American Educators*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.

Chaoul, María Eugenia (2000). “Entre la continuidad de la vida y la esperanza de cambio: la educación primaria oficial de la ciudad de México, 1896-1920”, seminar on doctoral thesis, UAM-Azcapotzalco.

Díaz Covarrubias, José (1875). *La instrucción pública en México. Estado que guardan la instrucción primaria, la secundaria y la profesional en la república. Progreso realizado, mejoras que deben introducirse*, México: Imprenta del gobierno.

Dumas, Claude (1986). *Justo Sierra y el México de su tiempo 1848-1912*, 2 vols., México: UNAM.

Escolano, Agustín (2000). “Las culturas escolares del siglo XX. Encuentros y desencuentros”, en *Revista de Educación*, número extraordinario, Madrid: Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, pp. 201-218.

Galván, Luz Elena (1991). *Soledad compartida. Una historia de maestros: 1900-1910*, México, Ediciones de la Casa Chata (núm. 28)

Galván, Luz Elena (2001). “Las maestras de ayer... un estudio de las preceptoras durante el Porfiriato”, en *Primer Congreso Internacional sobre los procesos de feminización del magisterio*, CIESAS/El Colegio de San Luis/Gobierno del estado de San Luis Potosí (multimedia version).

Gamboa, Federico (1995) *Mi diario I (1892-1896)*, México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes.

Guerra, Francois-Xavier (1988). *México: del Antiguo Régimen a la Revolución*, ts. I y II, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

- González Navarro, Moisés (1956). *Estadísticas sociales del Porfiriato. 1877-1910*, México: Secretaría de Economía.
- González Navarro, Moisés (1957). *Historia moderna de México. El Porfiriato. Vida social*, México: Hermes.
- Good, H. G. (1966). *Historia de la educación norteamericana*. México: Unión Tipográfica Editorial Hispano-Americana.
- Gutek, Gerald L.(2001a). “Friedrich Froebel: Founder of the Kindergarten”, in *Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Education*, Chapter 15, New York: Longman.
- Gutek, Gerald L.(2001b). “Jane Addams: Advocate of Socialized Education”, in *Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Education*, Chapter 18, New York: Longman.
- Hale, Charles (1991). *La transformación del liberalismo en México a fines del siglo XIX*, México: Vuelta.
- Handlin, Oscar (1952). *The Uprooted. The Heroic Story of the Great Migrations that made the American People*, Boston. Little, Brown and Company.
- Hlebowitsh, Meter S. (2001). “Progressivism and the Cause of Social Reform,” in *Foundations of American Education, Purpose and Promise*, Canada: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Informes (1911) *Informes presentados al Congreso Nacional de Educación Primaria por las delegaciones de los estados, del Distrito Federal y territorios*, vols. I, II y III, México: Imprenta de A. Carranza e hijos.
- López Pérez, Oresta (2001). “Hilvanando historias: dos estudios de caso de maestras mexicanas”, *Primer Congreso Internacional sobre los procesos de feminización del magisterio*, CIESAS/El Colegio de San Luis/Gobierno del estado de San Luis Potosí (multimedia version).
- Martínez Moctezuma, Lucía (2002). “Educar fuera del aula: los paseos escolares durante el Porfiriato”, en *Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa*, vol. VII, núm. 16, México: Consejo Mexicano de Investigación Educativa.
- Moreno Gutiérrez, Irma Leticia (1999). “Los libros escolares de lectura y las formas de leer”, en *Experiencias educativas en el Estado de México. Un recorrido histórico*, Toluca, El Colegio Mexiquense, AC.
- Meneses, Ernesto (1983). *Tendencias educativas oficiales en México, 1821-1911*, México: Porrúa.
- Noble, Stuart G. (1938). *A History of American Education*, New York: Farrar + Rinehart, Inc.
- Pai Young, Adler Susan A. (2000). “Schooling as Americanization: 1600s-1970s”, *Cultural Foundations of Education*, New York: Longman.
- Ravitch, Diane (1974). *The Great School Wars. New York City 1805-1973*, New York Basic Books, Inc. Publishers.
- Richey Edwards (1947). *The School in the American Social Order*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Rippa, Alexander (1984). *Education in a Free Society. An American History*, New York: McKay.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1938). *Émile ou de l'Éducation*, París: Librairie Larousse.
- Salinas Sandoval, María del Carmen (2001). *Los municipios en la formación del Estado de México 1824-1846*, Toluca: El Colegio Mexiquense, AC.
- Villegas, Abelardo (1972). *Positivismo y porfirismo*, col. SepSetentas, núm. 40, México: SEP.

Toulet Abasolo, Lucina (1998). "La lucha del poder local y de los maestros por alfabetizar a la población. Huamantla, Tlaxcala (1880-1910)", master's thesis in history, México: Universidad Iberoamericana

### **Bulletins and Reports**

*Boletín de Instrucción Pública* (1904-1909).

*Informes pedagógicos* by Laura Méndez de Cuenca, published in *Gaceta de Gobierno, Periódico Oficial del Estado de México*, July, October and November (1904).

*La Escuela Mexicana* (1904-1909).

*La Enseñanza Normal* (1904-1910).

### **Abbreviations**

AHSEP Sección Personajes Ilustres, Laura Méndez de Cuenca ("Famous Persons Section")

AHCESU Archivo Histórico del Centro de Estudios sobre la Universidad ("Historical Archive of University Studies")

ACS Archivo de la Cámara de Senadores ("Senate Archives")

*Article Received:* March 8, 2002

*Accepted:* May 23, 2003

Cuenca is only one of many points of interest in the province. Some 30 kilometres from the city you will find the first hills of the Cuenca Mountains, home to the unique landscape of the Enchanted City, made up of weird and wonderful formations, reminiscent of objects, animals and human forms, that water and wind erosion have carved out of the huge limestone rocks. Although it is easy to see the similarities, there are notices with the names of each of the rocks (the "Boats", the "Toboggan", the "Elephant", "The Sea of Stone", the "Diplodocus"). Further to the north you will find the El Hosquillo Hunting Reserve and the Solán de Cabras Thermal Spa Resort, famous for its medicinal spring waters. Because of the contrasting viewpoints of the different essays, often conclusions are ambiguous. De Cambridge English Corpus. While the material is heterogeneous, the dialogue lively, and the viewpoints various, there is agreement among all contributors on two matters. De Cambridge English Corpus. The historical coverage of the field is outstanding but, at times, some viewpoints lack up-to-date referents. De Cambridge English Corpus. More relevantly, there are many viewpoints to mobile agents. De Cambridge English Corpus. Whatever the independent merit of these arguments, we do not wish to defe