THE MAJOR PROJECT OF EDUCATION in Latin America and the Caribbean

Summary

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OREALC Publications
Presentation

UNESCO’s involvement in population education dates back to its beginnings when its first Director General proposed making those efforts intended to analyze and understand the causes and consequences of population dynamics and their relationship to education, a part of UNESCO’s field of activities.

Since the sixties, and in keeping with the broad and generous spirit that has characterized the Organization’s initiatives, population education has been a priority in terms of institutional concern, a preoccupation ratified by the mandate issued by the various member states across the globe.

From its onset, population education became actively involved in the debates over the various approaches to population issues. Opinions were highly polarized, ranging from those who held that demographic growth represented the major obstacle to the developmental goals of the various countries, being thus necessary to manipulate the fertility variable so as to restrict growth, to those who claimed that the solution to demographic problems was to be found at the very heart of the development programmes, in addition to a host of intermediate positions.

Debates among the different sectors continue; however, today they are spurred by the knowledge that the permanent exchange and discussion of all the actors involved in population education, sex education, environmental education and other issues, will lead to a meeting of the minds and to a stronger position to address these problems from the perspective of education.

UNESCO is enormously gratified to observe that its actions intended to open a space of confluence and dialogue for all the sectors involved, have contributed to the materialization of important regional achievements.

Along these lines, and prompted by the desire to disseminate transcendental aspects of this issue, we have dedicated part of our Bulletin to population education, sex education and to those referents that having been developed within the framework of joint action initiatives by UNESCO and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), are deemed essential to any informed discussion.

Thus, Martha Falconier de Moyano presents a broad view of Latin America’s current development and scope of population education and its relationship with sex education. Having indicated the contributions to a better quality of life made by population education, with particular emphasis on its pedagogic and social relevance and its interdisciplinary approach, the authoress closes with a submission of innovative proposals characterized by an unwavering adherence to the comprehensive approach that must accompany this type of educational development.

Theologian Waldo Romo, Universidad Católica de Chile, offers his insight into population education from the perspective of the Catholic Church. Following a brief historical account of the Church’s permanent concern for population education issues, the author goes on to discuss the biological, sociological, psychological, and demographic dimensions of this problem area, not just from a vision of man and his vocation as earth-bound and natural, but from one that regards man as a spiritual and supernatural entity. Romo’s contributions underscore existing operational similitudes with other sectors concerned with this issue, a fact that reinforces the
conviction many of us have held in the sense that the practical solutions to regional problems, lie in the dialogue between the various actors.

A more detailed definition and analysis of sex education and of the progress evidenced in the so-called “quality sex education”, is offered by Alfredo Rojas and Katrin Boege. Alessandra Casanova reports on the progress made by Brazil’s intersectoral action on sex education and adolescent reproductive health through two case studies, while Raúl Rosenberg, Juan A. Cifuentes and Erwin García, expound on Guatemala’s new population education strategy, an experience that enlists the participation of secular and ecclesiastical authorities and of representatives of civil society as a whole.

Graciela Messina, presents a pre-view of a more extensive forthcoming work, through the article “How are teachers trained in Latin America”. In this paper the authoress outlines the regional analysis and recommendations set forth in a research study on initial training for primary or basic teachers in our region, commissioned by UNESCO’s Regional Office for Education.

As is customary, the latest publications by the Regional Office for Education are included in this issue.
POPULATION EDUCATION AND SEX EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA

Martha Falconier de Moyano*

Population education—an initiative which spearheaded numerous sex education actions in the region—came into being in the late 60’s, as an educational approach devised to make people aware of the impact demographic variables have on developmental processes. Its presence in the field of education, was related to a historic preoccupation with the unprecedented levels of population growth exhibited by developing countries in marked contrast to the substantial drop in fertility rates—and concomitant ageing of the population—observed in developed countries.

A few years after its foundation, UNESCO was made a part of this crusade when its first Director General, Julián Huxley, underscoring the consequences rapid population growth could have on the environment, proposed the introduction of educational activities which would contribute to a deeper understanding of the causes and repercussions of population dynamics. His proposal was adopted at the General Conference of 1968.

Population education participated actively in the debates on population that characterized the period. At the time, the field was split between two extreme positions; those who held that demographic growth represented the major obstacle to the developmental goals of the various countries, being thus necessary to manipulate the fertility variable so as to restrict growth, and those who claimed that the solution to demographic problems was to be found at the very heart of the development programmes.

The United Nations through its various organizations, contributed to soften ideological extremism and propagate the need to engage in research, training, and communication activities aimed at elucidating the interrelationships between population, resources, the environment and development.

The World Action Plan on Population adopted in 1974 by the 134 participating countries, became the launching pad for population education. The Plan contends that population and development are interrelated: demographic variables have an effect on development variables which, in turn, are affected by them. Therefore, population policies are an integral part of social and economic development policies but can never take their place, while they must be consistent with human rights as regards freedom and justice for individuals, as well as the survival of national, regional and minority groups. Within this context, every individual and every couple has a fundamental right to decide freely and responsibly, how many children to have and when to have them, and to be supplied the information, education

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and means required to act according to their wishes.

Thus, it is recommended that the various governments consider incorporating information regarding the consequences reproductive behaviour may have on family stability, children’s education, psychological development and social well-being, so that marriage and procreation are entered into knowingly and responsibly.

Thus, population education was conceived as part of the integral learning process, devoted to the definition and solution of population issues, and geared towards enhancing the quality of present and future life. The growing conviction that population education has contributed to a heightened awareness of the impact demographic indices may have on the quality of individual, family and social life—regardless of the demographic policies pursued by a country’s government—has amply justified its existence and fostered its dissemination and implementation in better than a hundred nations throughout the world. Although initially population education focused mainly on social and demographic issues—by contrast to other regions such as the Arab States, Asia and Africa—in Latin America and the Caribbean, emphasis was placed on the sex education component which encompassed four major areas: social demography, human ecology, family and sexual education.

Toward a universal conceptualization

This priority was not seldom met with controversy, a fact that moved some countries to come to a concerted definition of population education with representative social sectors. One such definition: “An integral educational approach intended to provide students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to understand and evaluate their demographic, social, and environmental circumstances, and their interrelations with the production and distribution of goods, human rights, and the quality of family and social life, and contribute to a responsible decision-making for the benefit of their families and social group”. Thus, its contents were subsumed under three main study areas: social demography (or population and development), population and environment, and family and sexuality.1

In the 80’s, progress was made in terms of understanding the relationships between population education and other disciplines such as sex education, education for family life, and environmental education. Likewise, the objectives associated with the effects of variables such as fertility, mortality and migration on development processes were more accurately defined, while new topics such as responsible parenthood, fertility in adolescents, and the analysis of sex stereotyping that reinforces gender discrimination, were incorporated into the contents. Hence, population education “aims at helping to understand nature, the causes and consequences of population processes to the extent that these processes impinge upon individuals and social groups and are, in turn, influenced by them. It focuses both on family and personal decisions that have a bearing on the transformations that affect populations, and on overall demographic change”2.

In the early nineties, the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, 1991), contributed the concept of “meeting basic learning needs” defined as the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values required by individuals to survive, fully develop their potential, improve their

quality of life, work and live with dignity, participate actively in the development process, make informed decisions and continue to learn. At Jomtien, the contents of population education were acknowledged as essential to the satisfaction of these basic needs.

Population education has contributed to enhance the quality of life and education through its following attributes;

– its pedagogical and social relevance, in terms of contents and objectives, which provide the learners with the tools to analyze everyday events, gain insight into the causes and effects of demographic swings, understand their own behaviour as it relates to the environment, their families and to themselves, and formulate affirmative action proposals to address them. For instance, when analyzing the causes of child mortality associated with poor socioeconomic and environmental living conditions, reproductive behaviour, self-care, nutrition, hygiene, and mother and child health attention, concrete action recommendations will be made in order to prevent the occurrence of further deaths brought about by these conditions. Thus, its objectives and contents are consistent with the interests of students, teachers and parents;

– its interdisciplinary approach, in terms of methodology, may well represent a communication and knowledge-building scheme, not fragmented into disciplines or subject matters. Because it deals with challenging learning situations, population education facilitates and requires interrelating disciplines. It also encourages teachers to engage in team work, in an attempt to overcome circumscription into specialty areas, and link school work to extracurricular activities (activities learned at school such as, for instance, appropriate waste disposal in order to improve environmental and health conditions, can be incorporated into community-based practical activities).

Methodologically, population education makes use of participative and active techniques which encourage the learner to enquire, ponder and analyze, and the teacher to perform as a learning guide and counsellor. These techniques include field surveys (gathering information, data recording and analysis, and submission of findings); open debate sessions where opposing views are thrashed out; case studies; educational workshops; instructional dialogues; role playing; working in small groups and, in general, group dynamics techniques; didactic games on population issues; theater arts, songs, folklore and literature.

The importance of respect

As stated by O.J. Sikes, the 90’s incorporates into population education emergent issues such as the relationship between population dynamics and environment, VHI/AIDS prevention, gender issues, and the ageing of the population. The values and skills population education propounds, have to do with key concepts such as the importance of having respect for others, particularly members of the opposite sex, the importance of building self-esteem in girls and boys, the possibility and usefulness of planning, the importance of postponing the first pregnancy, being accountable for one’s acts, and the ability to recognize and stave off social pressure.

In short, the implementation of population education through the mid 90’s, shows that although its conceptual definition has remained unchanged in time, in actual practice, priority has been placed on environmental and social and demographic contents, or those linked to family and sex, depending on the country’s situation. Nevertheless, its contents—enriched by the emergent issues—have invariably aimed at the shaping of a critical mind capable of making informed action-oriented decisions con-

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nected to demographic variables and their impact on the quality of life. Hence, its objectives have been averred as a set of cognitive, affective, value-related competencies and practices to be achieved.

Some of the problems encountered when implementing sex education/population education programmes at the formal education level are the following:

- Contents were introduced through the various subject matters contained in the curriculum. For example, human reproduction topics became part of the natural sciences, while sex stereotypes and value topics fell under the category of social sciences. Consequently, achieving a sense of comprehensive education seems a rather distant goal, particularly at the secondary level where different instructors teach the different disciplines.
- An overloaded curriculum, made more critical by an insufficient number of classroom hours, discourage teachers from covering these topics at length. Field work, however, reveals that very often teachers use these arguments as an excuse to conceal their own fear of teaching sex education to students—particularly, adolescent students.

**Today’s population education and sex education**

Having surmounted the difficulties posed by the ideological extremism that initially characterized the debate on population education—thanks be to, on the one hand, increased social sensitivity and awareness of the importance of introducing demographic variables into the social and economic policies underlying development processes and, on the other, the pressure exerted by numerous NGO’s which, on behalf of civil society, revindicated women’s rights and gender equality—the second half of the 90’s shows important gains in terms of the treatment currently given to population education and sex education.

Thus, in the education decennial plans formulated by countries like Ecuador and the Dominican Republic, in the Colombia’s Education General Law and in the Bolivia’s Educational Reform Law principles such as the participation of all the social actors without restrictions, the necessity of meeting basic learning needs for the improvement of life quality, the promotion of attitudes and values for a responsible sexuality and for gender equality are announced, Colombia is developing it starting from the agreements reached in a National Consultation on sex education in order to implement a program in this field. Other nations like Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Peru, Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, Haiti, Mexico and the most of English-speaking Caribbean countries, have incorporated topics of population education and sex education to the curriculums of primary and secondary education through different pedagogical strategies.

Population education, in turn, has been enriched by national and international contributions such as those adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development and set forth in its Action Plan, Cairo, 1994, and the Beijing Conference, 1995, among them:

- The concept of sustainable growth to be used in reference to population efforts, in the understanding that population issues are also Human Development issues intent on reducing poverty, empowering women, and fostering a style of economic development that will eradicate depredatory production and consumption practices.
- The concepts of reproductive health and reproductive rights, including sexual health and family planning, which encompass some of the Human Rights set out in the Letter of the United Nations and the Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

Cairo’s Action Plan, notes the existing interdependence between education and social and

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4 Law No. 115 of February 8, 1994.
demographic change: an increased level of education among girls and women contributes to their empowerment, pushes back their marrying age, reduces their pregnancies and raises their children’s survival rate. This is why, the benefits derived from investing in education translate into increased economic productivity and, because of a reduction in mortality rates, higher life expectancies for both mother and child.\(^6\)

Said Action Plan, was particularly emphatic about the need to formulate integrated Information, Education and Communication (IEC) strategies, to serve as rallying point for addressing top priority population issues such as reproductive health and reproductive rights, gender-oriented initiatives, the education of girls, adolescent counselling, sexually transmitted diseases (STD’s) and AIDS, and the environment and sustainable growth. Educational efforts associated with population issues, must have targeted audiences; among these, political leaders, members of parliament, professionals involved in economic and social planning, teachers, promoters and women in their child-bearing years and, specially, adolescents in rural and marginal-urban areas. In order to ensure their relevance, the messages conveyed should be based on respect for social and cultural values, and on the identification of the needs inherent to each group. A further objective has to do with reinforcing and consolidating the gains materialized by formal education, strengthening non formal education programmes, stressing the incorporation of population education into teacher training, in-service training, the design of methodologies to evaluate population education activities, and the updating its conceptual basis.

In order to accomplish this the criteria used were the following:

– Integration, articulation and coordination of population actions with development dynamics. This implies the execution of projects in collaboration with other development agencies; its insertion in regional, national and local networks, as well as interagency and intersectoral coordination between countries, regions, departments and municipalities.
– Support of State decentralization and modernization processes, restoring population issues to these processes.
– Focusing contributions, based on the priority accorded to the various audiences, chiefly on demonstrative experiences at the local level.
– Audience segmentation, adapting the supply to specific needs that facilitate learning processes while adopting a demand approach.

The present conceptual proposal resulting from the new approaches and contributions, envisions population education as unfolding along two major axes:

– **Population and sustainable development**: wherein, based on the analysis of fertility, mortality and migration patterns, relationships are identified between the environmental problems they give rise to and result from in their respective dynamics, bearing in mind their contribution to sustainable development processes. (For example: population-health, urbanization-urban pollution, migration-water resource deterioration, soil; poverty-growth and population distribution; production and consumption-urbanization-development schemes, and so forth).

– **Family and sexuality**: which, revolving about reproductive health and reproductive rights, promotes the empowerment of women, the elimination of stereotypes based on sex, gender equality within the family and the social group, women’s health and safe maternity, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) including VHI/AIDS, and family planning.

Both areas, are crisscrossed by gender issues and social, cultural, geographical and age group variables.

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**Pedagogical strategies**

From the perspective of pedagogical strategies, current population education and sex education efforts are focused on meeting basic learning needs\(^7\) and the interdisciplinary treatment of their contents and objectives.

The approach directed towards meeting basic learning needs, thrusts human beings into the very centre of the educational process, while acknowledging that it is the individual himself who builds his/her knowledge based on specific needs stemming from daily activities, society’s demands, and on the individual’s personal, social and cultural trajectory. A need is basic in the sense that it gives rise to a second need; however, learning needs are infinite. The satisfaction of one of them, paves the way for formulating a new and more complex need, that is, for learning to learn. The Delor’s Commission\(^8\) has recently enriched this concept underscoring the four objectives of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together.

The satisfaction of needs is reflected in the development of life skills associated with cognitive, attitudinal and value-related aspects. The arena where basic learning needs are met extends far beyond formal schooling boundaries. This is why society as a whole —and within it, numerous actors— become de facto educational agents. This is particularly true of population education and sex education contents, topics which are not the exclusive domain of the traditional teacher. Hence, the importance of visualizing the education process—in its twofold meaning of teaching and learning— as an exchange of knowledge originating in the identification of learning needs. The range of methodologies employed by the process may be diverse: from adult workshops held in Bolivia to information gathering surveys in participatory work sessions with eucadorian children and adults.

This is, however, the starting point for elaborating the learning objectives and most suitable work strategies that will provide the individual with the needed skills.

The interdisciplinary approach, represents an innovative strategy intended to address the educational effort from a humanizing perspective which systematically builds up the ethical aspects of the learner’s formation. This ethical formation—which results from a need to incorporate into the curriculum a number of emergent issues which call for taking a stand—is not just one more discipline to be learned, but, it represents a dimension that pervades and reshapes every curricular component. These issues include the environment, privileged consumption, violence, health related problems (drug dependency, STD’s including VHI/AIDS, teen-age pregnancy), discrimination, and so forth. Therefore, interdisciplinary subjects represent curricular contents which deal with current problems and are closely linked to attitudes and values. The interdisciplinary nature of contents may be variously understood:

- curricular, which relates to the conceptual and attitudinal contents present in diverse areas or disciplines
- institutional, which means that the responsibility for implementing it lies not only in the classroom teacher but must be shared by the school community at large.
- social, which touches on everyday learning

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\(^7\) “Every person—child, youth or adult—should be in a position to profit from the educational opportunities designed to meet their learning needs. These needs encompass both the basic learning tools (reading-writing, oral expression, arithmetic, problem solving) and basic learning contents (theoretical and practical knowledge, values and attitudes) required by human beings in order to survive, fully develop their potential, improve their quality of life, work and live with dignity, participate actively in the development process, make informed decisions and continue to learn”. *World Conference on Education for All, Jomtien, Thailand, 1990*, World Declaration, Objectives, Article 1º.

experiences not necessarily restricted to the school grounds.
The implementation of interdisciplinary curricular contents, requires the creation of educational and curricular projects in schools and education centres. The work carried out in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Honduras, are examples of innovative reforms within a context marked by decentralization processes. The challenge posed, relates to these decentralization processes, in the sense that they may lead to deconcentration and the transfer of authority from the central and State levels to the local and school community levels, thus reinstating the latter to a decision-making position. This mechanism would offer school centres the opportunity to adopt a more aggressive role in the elaboration of educational and curricular projects aimed at enhancing the quality of education and community life, linking school activities to community projects, coping with social problems from an educational perspective, making educational contents relevant, and trying out solidary solution alternatives.

Population education and sex education represent relevant and highly motivating areas that could easily become breeding ground for a host of school-based projects.

**Incorporation into formal education**

The incorporation of population education and sex education elements into present formal education structures implies:

- Its insertion into regular Ministry of Education structures, and into the formulation and implementation of Ten-Year plans intended to reform and improve education, based on the acknowledgment that the satisfaction of learning demands includes the population education/sex education component, as a contribution to the enhancement of the quality of life.
- That the educational reform projects funded by the World Bank, IDB, and bilateral cooperation agencies, be combined with local efforts, in an attempt to make this educational approach an effective component of the basic curricular lineaments elaborated by the Ministries of Education.
- The presence of education decentralization processes—including demonstrative experiences at the regional, departmental and municipal levels— as a device to cater to the specific needs of heterogeneous audiences, while enlisting the cooperation of all actors involved (teachers, students, parents and community) in efforts to render the curriculum more flexible.
- The articulation of formal and non formal educational actions with those associated with information and communication on population, in terms of focusing on and covering the various social segments, unifying the discourse and optimizing results. This requires placing priority—in keeping with each country’s needs—on the target groups that will receive population education and sex education.
- The incorporation of gender, geographical, ethnic and age group variables, to facilitate reaching out to underprivileged sectors of the population with messages which, in addition to being relevant to their needs and interests, portray a global vision of the world with regard to reproductive health, family planning and other educational components which represent vastly untapped human rights.
- The creation of national technical teams staffed with officials from the Ministries of Education, reinforced by personnel from universities, NGO’s, and other institutions, with the mission of facilitating the development and strengthening of local competencies.
- Fostering among national teams a positive attitude towards research as a way of expanding the existing knowledge pool and securing the necessary data that will be required to design programmes which take into account age groups, geographical, gender, social and cultural differences of the target populations.
This positive attitude towards research, also includes the honing of those abilities needed to detect the basic learning needs that will comprise the foundation on which the educational edifice will be built.

- Fostering permanent updating procedures in curricular design. Although this task requires specialized knowledge and practices, the concept of curricular decentralization demands the central level’s willingness to ease its regulatory hold, promote consultation and participation among those who will be guided (learners), those who will guide (educators) and those who are interested in the value-related landmarks that point the way (parents and community representatives). This involves perfecting a decentralized curricular planning scheme so that, eventually, every educational centre will be capable of creating its very own educational project. At every school, the joint participation of parents, teachers, community representatives and students, will result in the creation of an educational project which, keeping nationally established minimum contents in mind, will harmonize with locally formulated demands and community-inspired values.

- The production of didactic materials such as flash cards, work notebooks, modules and others, and the promotion of teacher training initiatives to facilitate the production of materials adapted to a specific population.

- The inclusion of interpersonal communication activities for teachers, which make use of mass media facilities, networks, written material and audiovisual aids.

- The concept of permanent teacher training becoming a part of the retraining scheme of each country, that is, incorporating population education into the training and professionalization systems. The search for alternative employment opportunities among teachers’ professional organizations, employers’ associations, and trade unions, interested in the professionalization of their roles. In terms of strategy, the materialization of experiences that combine distance education with classroom education modalities.

- A preferential treatment to evaluation. The positive attitude that must prevail towards research, should be extended to include this component, and not just owing to their methodological similarities, but to the need to assess the progress being made. The systematization of experiences will have to be reinforced through strict follow-up programmes, and specific evaluation models consistent with the objectives set out at the beginning of each project, will become a must.

- Emphasis on intersectoral, inter-institutional and interagency coordination aspects, with a view to sensitizing members of national societies and strengthening joint collaboration efforts, in addition to optimizing energy and resources, unifying educational messages and an improved utilization and dissemination of data gathered through surveys and demographic research.

- The expansion of population education at the higher and university educational levels. It is here, where the research, reflection and analysis of educational problems keyed to population issues, will consolidate its academic presence, its conceptual scope, its didactic and evaluation methodologies, and its institutionalization.

**Top priority audience: the adolescents**

Teen-age pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease, including VHI/AIDS, comprise some of the emergent issues in today’s society. Both the research conducted in this area and Cairo’s Action Plan, underscore the need to promote educational activities aimed at this sector of the population; adolescents. Furthermore, it appears painfully evident that sex education programmes relying on information dissemination mechanisms have been unable to reduce unwanted pregnancies or prevent STD’s
and VHI/AIDS. Therefore, it behooves us to understand this developmental phase of human beings before setting out to design efficient educational proposals.

Broadly speaking, adolescence is the period covering the transition from infancy to adulthood, stretching approximately from ages 10 to 19. It begins with puberty, encompassing the sexual development and psychological independence stages, in addition to a phase characterized by a sort of economic autonomy. The exact age that marks the end of adolescence has not been clearly defined, with some authors extending it to age 21, although this varies markedly depending on the social and cultural features of each social group. Expanded schooling has set a trend in developed countries which favours postponing expressions of maturity and economic independence. Developing countries exhibit wide differentiations the result of economic, social, and cultural pressures, which range from a swift transition between childhood and adulthood, with a rather short intervening adolescence, to a “late-blooming” adolescence. However, modernization processes, growing rates of access to the educational system and increased exposure to the mass media, contribute to propagate urban behaviour models among adolescents of rural areas and indigenous communities. In time, traditional values become gradually replaced. It should be noted that the labour market crisis, which delays young people’s insertion into the occupational world, has had an important effect in terms of drawing out adolescence.

Those who specialize in the subject, characterize adolescence as a period marked by both an augmented capacity to formulate ideals and plans, and a lack of synchrony between biological and psycho-social development. This being the case, it is not surprising that adolescents experience difficulties making emotional and social adjustments, at a time they feel compelled to assert their sexual identity by accepting physical changes, and giving wings to their psychological independence through the adoption of adult life-styles while building their own identity. Consequently, the swift physical changes undergone tend to draw their attention to anatomical and physiological features which may or may not be successfully interpreted as part of the normal sexual development process. From a psycho-social standpoint, their relationships with adults begin to be questioned and, for some time, the latter cease to be considered valid referents. Adolescents progressively turn away from their elders, whose values and concepts they now challenge, and are drawn closer to their peer groups among whom they seek answers to their tribulations. Conflicts with the “establishment”, the result of a felt need for independence and first-hand experiences may, on occasions, lead to a brush with authorities or to risk behaviours.

If adolescents find it hard to communicate with their parents, the opposite is also true. One of the reasons being parents’ refusal to accept sexual encounters among young people. Hence, both parent-son dialogue and student-teacher relationships rather than taking the form of an exchange of concrete information with the adolescent at the recipient end, become bogged down in moral connotations of what “should be”. A vast amount of research points to the fact that parents would rather have teachers address sex-related issues at school, both owing to a lack of information and rapport with their children.

While menarche seems to have been fast-forwarded and adolescents are currently engaging in sexual relations earlier in life, the number of teen-age pregnancies—with all the attending repercussions for women, social and family rejection, banning from schools (in some countries pregnant students are not allowed to stay in school, and where they are, social pressure and/or emotional problems related to this condition soon cause the students to drop out) and a host of biological and toxicological problems that must be confronted whether abortion
or delivery is chosen—has increased considerably. The incidence of STD’s and AIDS, a crucial stage of contagion in adolescence, is also rising steadily.9

Real needs and interests

A great many countries threatened with reproductive health risks have incorporated sex education programmes into their formal education curricula. However, although 33 per cent of the countries in the region that have acknowledged their concern in this matter, have included contraceptive practices as part of their sex education programmes,10 these have failed to yield the desired result. Such programmes are, very likely, not sensitive to youth’s real needs or interests, neither content-wise nor in terms of pedagogical strategies. Furthermore, their needs are not met simply by providing a general description of the biological, psychological and social changes encountered during adolescence. Students’ needs vary not only in terms of age groups, but also with regard to previous knowledge and experiences, socio-economic or ethnic status—which include a host of social and cultural idiosyncracies—and geographical background—urban or rural. In connection with the objectives of a sex education programme, it appears that programmes restricted to providing information on how to reduce the number of teen-age pregnancies and prevent STD’s are not sufficient in and by themselves, unless supplemented with formative objectives—in terms of values and attitudes—regarding a healthy, free, responsible and pleasurable sexual life.

This requires an integral approach to sex education, wherein knowledge acquisition is rein-

9 Based on IIPF Report, Comprender a los adolescentes, 1994, in a research study conducted in peruvian secondary schools, one fourth of the male student population had contracted some form of sexually transmitted disease.

10 IPPF: op. cit, p. 5.
Population education and sex education in Latin America

Importance of communication, solidarity and affection within the family fold. Roles that fall to the various family members keyed to special needs, interests and priorities: democratizing decision-making initiatives, rights and responsibilities. Child-related responsibilities: as regards material goods; food, clothing, a place to live; in terms of affectiveness; love, care, solicitude; education-wise; early stimulation, formation of the individual. Children’s rights. Shared roles and gender equality. Household chores. Care of the elderly. Quality of life concept.


As a result of the tremendous increase in enrolment rates, a substantial percentage of adolescents have been incorporated into the educational system. These students must have their needs met through an adequate approach to population education/sex education, a task made all the more complex given the highly heterogeneous nature of the region’s populations. Despite efforts undertaken at the formal and non formal levels of education research findings reveal that, in terms of knowledge of their own bodies, prevention of risk situations and contraception, the information made available to the students has thus far proven grossly insufficient. On the other hand, we know that possession of this knowledge does not guarantee responsible behaviour, nor is it indicative of their having acquired the necessary tools to practice their sexuality in a healthy, pleasurable and responsible fashion.

Despite the growing concern showed for adolescents in recent years, and for the need to provide a comprehensive and preventive sex education programme, such programmes should be started early in the school life of the child as a strategy intended both to partake of, as well as to reinforce, the work done by parents in the home. If sex education and population education—which are value-based—are incorporated into interdisciplinary curricular contents, perhaps starting at adolescence may prove a little too late.

Some innovative experiences

Colombia

Colombia’s Presidential Programme for Youths, Women and Family was created in 1992, with the sponsorship of the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar, and the Ministries of Education and Health. This State programme, in joint collaboration with the country’s NGO’s, called a National Consultation Meeting on sex education (June, 1993) which brought together the various social sectors to define an implementation mechanism for a national programme on sex education. A new project on population education was launched in 1994, based on information gathered during 3 years (1991-93) of demonstrative experiences. The Project draws inspiration from decentralization and deconcentration schemes and it is aimed at departmental, municipal and local levels. The project’s beneficiaries are coordinators, regional promoters and technical staff, teachers, students and parents who participate in the various programmes sponsored by the Ministry of Education. These programmes were elaborated in ten of the country’s departments and have been defined according to the priorities assigned to them by project directors in coordination with the National Planning Agency.

The project introduces a novel element in the execution of family and sex education strategies which facilitates coordinating efforts between the formal and non formal levels. Two programmes, “Youth promotion and full prevention” and “Family Education for Child De-
velopment”, were selected with this end in mind. Among other things, these programmes are intended to reinforce youth organization efforts within the country’s secondary schools with a view to facilitating the active participation of schools and community in the identification and solution of relevant issues. Both programmes enlist the aid of regional and departmental promoters and/or coordinators who specialize in adolescent education, with particular emphasis on grades 10 and 11 (average age 16 to 17). They, in turn, engage in public welfare internships at the community level. The project trains all the participating coordinators/promoters drawn from the selected departments and a sample of adolescents from the aforementioned grades.11

The demonstrative experiences conducted, revealed the most popular issues among the adolescents, based on which the following modules were produced: Sexuality and family life, friendship and courtship, human reproduction, teen-age pregnancy, fertility control methods, AIDS and other STD’s prevention. The contents of these modules are discussed and analyzed within the youth’s organizations and subsequently used in their work with other community adolescents and parents.

Another innovative feature of the colombian project is that, in keeping with Ministry of Education guidelines, sex education is not part of a specific subject matter nor carries the same degree of compulsoriness than other disciplines do. This decision, adopted following a National Consultation, was made in an attempt to relieve teachers from what could prove to be an additional burden and a daunting challenge. The Ministry of Education proceeded to draft explanatory regulations on sexuality and sex education as well as the guidelines it would abide by. Teachers were then encouraged through training seminars to elaborate educational projects which enlisted the participation of the students, parents and community members who would underpin the development of the sex education programme. The population education project, contributed to the overall initiative through the creation of a Manual designed to elaborate Institutional Educational Projects (IEP), illustrating how population education and sex education may turn into interdisciplinary formative axes capable of giving rise to school and community projects.

Ecuador

Ecuador’s set of strategies is different than that of Colombia’s. The project got under way in 1992 focusing on teacher training and the nine basic grades of formal educational system. Its strategy consisted of identifying basic learning needs, an endeavor brought to an early success by the creation of various learning needs-detecting devices (designed for teachers, students and parents), which have provided the means to gather –through workshops and working meetings with target groups– the information required to elaborate curricular proposals and suitable educational material. Coordination mechanisms with other projects were also improved, which has allowed harnessing the findings of social and cultural research on adolescent sexuality undertaken in the coastal and sierra areas, and planning local demonstrative experiences oriented towards specific audiences. Another feather in the project’s cap has been the initiation of coordination efforts in the area of reproductive health, aimed at proposing sex education activities to the communities serviced by the various Health Centres. Teacher training is accomplished in workshops that rely on teachers’ input both for formulating and solving problems. An on-again off-again issue, concerns teen-age pregnancy, a fact that has fostered the production of support

11 If the total adolescent population in grades 10 and 11 of all ten departments had been considered the statistical universe, systematization and evaluation would have not been possible,
material designed to work both with parents and students.

**Bolivia**

Bolivia holds the distinction of having created the first population education Project (1992) ever to implement learning strategies inspired in Jomtien’s Framework for Action. The project combines social communication, and formal and non formal education components. Its strategy pursues insertion into the country’s Educational Reform, the NGO’s activities at the non formal level, and the training of social communicators (radio and press). Within the Educational Reform, population education/sex education represent an interdisciplinary axis both at the curricular level –basic education– and at the level of teacher training and formation. In all three components, the project operates through workshops which having identified the specific learning needs of a particular audience go on to train, based on knowledge exchange methods, replicators in the priority areas detected (sexual and family violence, teen-age pregnancy, gender inequalities, mother and child mortality rates, responsible parenthood, sexually transmitted diseases, urbanization-pollution, and so forth). This project has made its mark on adult populations at the non formal level of education. The initiatives that envision working at the educational reform and formal education levels, have only recently begun.

**Honduras**

Another of the region’s noteworthy experiences is taking place in Honduras. The Secretariat of Public Education has implemented an educational reform process and simultaneously started a working experience in fifteen schools, geared towards the elaboration of annual operational programmes (AOP) and curricular projects in line with decentralization and curricular flexibilization objectives, based on interdisciplinary axes. The new curriculum is characterized by its transversal, interdisciplinary and integral nature, while its components are curricular areas, interdisciplinary axes and values. The interdisciplinary axes are: population, environmental education and democracy, health (which includes reproductive and sexual health) and national identity.

The population axis includes the following categories:

- **Family structure**: conceptual referents which includes discussing the various family integration modalities.

- **Demographic dynamics**: causes and consequences of population growth and displacement within a demographic transition climate, their impact and economic and social trends from a historic perspective.

- **Labour force**: comparative analysis of the working force characteristics of the various sector of the economy and women’s participation.

- **Population/environment relationship**: population dynamics and its impact on the loading capacity of the medium in terms of the rational use that must be given to natural resources to guarantee survival.

- **Human Development**: analytical treatment of situations that favour broadening the range of options, such as enhancing the quality of life, women’s “empowerment”, economic and political freedom, equitable participation of men and women.

The Environmental Education axis comprises the following major areas; biodiversity, protected areas, pollution, preservation of natural resources and energy. It establishes its links to population dynamics and quality of life, and identifies those forms of production and consumption that threaten sustainability.

The Health axis consists of a sexual and reproductive health category whose purpose it is to build healthy habits towards a pleasurable and responsible sexuality, free from the dangers of STD’s or VHI/AIDS.

The curricular project on basic education, commissioned by the National Council on Education chaired by the president of the republic, and the brainchild of a joint team from
Hondura’s Universidad Nacional Autónoma and the Secretariat of Education, is presently being validated at the selected schools. Managers and technical staff of the Secretariat of Public Education and directors and departmental specialists on education, have been trained in the implementation of this novel initiative. Additionally, a manual for developing AOP’s and curricular projects designed for teachers and principals of educational centres in collaboration with the educational community, is being produced, to help implement these interdisciplinary axes. Its systematization, slated for late 1997, will contribute new elements to further the dissemination of this subject area in the region.

**Potential working lines**

Better suited working lines for today’s sex education and population education schemes may be retrieved from the aforementioned proposals:

– Sex education, viewed from a holistic perspective, begins in the family fold and gradually becomes the mission of the school; however, it must be shared by parents, family and community alike.

– The overall contents of population education and sex education programmes, should be defined by the Ministries of Education in consultation with civil society. Its implementation should be supple to ensure that its specific contents are consistent with the needs of the target groups at each region, department, municipality and community.

– It is advisable to promote work experiences involving adolescents which provide them the opportunity to become trainers of their own peer group. This way, the horizontal nature of the experienced is guaranteed, and the possibilities of engaging in meaningful dialogue, becomes higher.

– Educators must be encouraged to seek human resources support from ministries of health, NGO’s or universities, in implementing population education and sex education programmes in schools.

– The in service teacher training activities required to implement these programmes, should include insights into one’s own sexuality and how to assume it; methodological elements for detecting learning needs; participative techniques that facilitate a horizontal communication with students; and adequate tools for the elaboration of didactic material suited to the social and cultural characteristics of their audiences.

– Population education and sex education must be incorporated into teacher training curricula.

– Demonstrative experiences should be promoted at the local level, in order to systematize, assess and disseminate their findings.

**PROTOCOL ON THE RIGHTS OF YOUTHS**

In Santiago, Chile, at the proposal of the National Institute for Youth, a Protocol on the Rights of Youths was signed on May 13, 1997. Co-signing the protocol were several representatives of the country’s authorities, namely: the Ministry of Planning and Cooperation and of the National Women’s Service; the Director of the National Institute for Youth; the Ministries of Labour and Education and members of the Regional Metropolitan Superintendency; Chile’s Police Department; the South American Peace Commission; International Amnesty; ECLAC, FAO, UNPD and UNESCO.

This protocol was prompted by concerned chilean youths who have increasingly been the subjects of unfair labour contracts, arrests based on mere suspicion, abusive practices during compulsory military service, and discrimination and expulsion by schools prejudiced against pregnant students. In 1996, the National Institute for Youth launched a public campaign on the Rights of Youths and created an Office for the Advancement and Defense of the Rights of Youths. This year, the Institute sponsored the Ceremony at which the Protocol on the Rights of Youths, was officially signed and adopted.
This paper does not reflect the official position of the Catholic Church on demography or on the broader population issue. Furthermore, the author, cannot claim competency in this matter, nor has it been granted to him. However, the extensive knowledge on the matter accumulated through years of teaching to university students and research in this field of the social sciences, allows him to offer an outline of its general principles and tenets.

In this connection, an expectantly awaited document was Pope Paul the VI’s Encyclical Letter “Humanae Vitae” made public on July 25, 1968. At the time, this document was warmly welcomed not only by the Catholic Church, but also by all those involved in demographic issues. The Second Vatican Council (1965) had acknowledged this transcendent matter in the Pastoral Constitution “The Church in Today’s World, also known as “Gaudium et Spes” (GS), stating therein that “the respective governments have rights and obligations towards problems involving their own populations, and within the reaches of their specific competencies” (GS. 87, 2).

The Council itself did not adopt a ruling on birth control methods, it did however condemn—and emphatically so—abortion and infanticide as “heinous crimes”(GS.51, 3). With respect to birth control, the Second Vatican Council reminded christian spouses to “apply the objective criteria inherent to the nature of individuals and their acts... (Ibid), and not be misguided by subjective reasoning and good intentions.

In order to define “objective criteria” the Council, recognizing the need for further study and acting on behalf of the Holy Father, appointed a Commission for the Study of Population, Family and Natality, (cf. GS. 51, note 14).

Almost two and a half years later, the Commission submitted to the Pope a non-unanimous report. A majority proposed the ethical sanction of artificial birth control methods, while a minority upheld the Catholic Church’s doctrine, namely, the ethical sanction of exclusively natural methods of birth control. The Commission was clearly intended merely as a tool of research, advice and information. The final decision rested with the Pope.

Thus, the Encyclical Letter “Humanae Vitae” (HV) represented the “expectantly awaited” decision that would now be passed.

The Encyclical Letter “Humanae Vitae”

We must, therefore, consider the text of the Encyclical Letter to understand—from within—the position adopted by the Catholic Church Magistracy in this matter. A key concept is offered in the following lines: “The problems posed by natality, like all the others humanity must confront, must be visualized—beyond biological, sociological, demographic or psychological aspects— in the light of an integral vision of man and his vocation, not just natural and earthly, but also supernatural and eternal” (HV. 7).

The quoted lines provides us with the hermeneutics of the position permanently adopted by the Catholic Church in this respect: the population problem is complex and any attempt to simplify it translates into a reductionistic approach with its attending adverse repercussions. A simplistic treatment will yield simplistic solutions, and will inevitably lead to a reductive image of man which is totally inconsistent with an integral view of human beings and their transcendent destiny.

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This simplistic attitude may take two different directions: on the one hand, those who postulate that humanity is presently witnessing an accelerated rate of population growth which may culminate in a demographic explosion. This apocalyptic view promotes the utilization of any method available—selected on the basis of efficiency—to curb this tendency. In our opinion, the efforts disseminated through world forums to legalize abortion as a population control strategy, a view denounced by the Catholic Church, stem from this line of thought.

On the other hand, asserting that today’s problems are merely a question of optimizing the exploitation of our natural resources and securing their equitable distribution under the concerted aegis of the world’s nations, strikes one as too naive. This perspective minimizes the demographic problem and places the solution in socio-economic development, as if it were boundless and its resources inexhaustible.

The Church’s acknowledgment of the demographic problems—at least in some countries—lends legitimacy to the policy-making efforts on population matters, evidenced in some countries; (cf. GS. 87, 2 and HV. 2 and 23). Nevertheless, it is only fair to point out that the Church has raised a stronger objection against the first school of thought, perhaps as a natural reaction to restrictive demographic policies that curtail individual freedom and tread on human dignity.

Once the debris of reductionistic and exclusory measures has been cleared away, it would be feasible to formulate a concerted action strategy to address the two relevant variables: first, propound demographic rationalization and responsible parenthood initiatives. Second, promote a reasonably attainable economic and social development legitimized by a fair distribution of goods and services. It may sound simple; however, achieving a concerted action is much, much more difficult. However, it is important to submit the political will to work with both variables simultaneously.

The ethical dimension

A few words on the variables that impinge on the complex population problems are in order. The mere acknowledgment of this complexity, implies the necessity to adopt an interdisciplinary approach and propose multisectoral solutions that lead to the enactment of population policies that take into account national differences which are amenable to autonomous execution. When rating these variables, the Catholic Church highlights the importance of one of them: the ethical dimension, but analyzed from a family and populational level.

This is perfectly understandable since the integral concept of man postulated by the Church, is irremediably bound to human vocation “not just natural and earthly, but also supernatural and eternal” (HV. 7). This inherent-transcendental vocation answers the essential question posed by ethics in terms of man’s raison d’être or fate, while formulating those values that will help him achieve a greater and better personalization. Ethics, as a philosophical discipline, inserts us in the theological perspective of human behaviour and thence questions and criticizes the sciences that have a bearing on it.

This may be better understood if we consider that the questions raised by experimental and technological science usually deal with the mechanism behind “how something happens” or “how something is achieved”. These are pragmatic and utilitarian questions, valid and necessary in a person’s life. However, they flow along a specific level: the plane of means. Ethics strives to go beyond the scientific-technological parameters to elicit answers in the plane of ends, at the level of the sense and meaning of one’s actions. Rather than “how something is achieved”, ethics concerns itself with the nature of that “something”, what drives the individual to behave one way or the other. “How something happens” is construed by ethics to mean what is the sense and the purpose of that “something”. Thus, it reshapes the scientific-technological questions and answers and
challenges them, not prompted by a desire to invalidate them, but in order to place them at the service of man and his integral development.

Seen through this teleological-inquisitive prism, the questions relevant to our discussion take on different shades; so then, how many are we supposed to be? Are we poor because we happen to be too many or are we too many because we happen to be poor? In connection to population problems, is it morally right to use any means within our reach to accomplish a desired outcome? Should respect for the individual be factored in when making decisions pertaining to his/her reproductive life? Is public authority entitled to implement any population policy at all? Is the inherent and transcendental vocation of man implicated in any of this?

The Church is keenly aware that ethics casts a different light on scientific-technological alternatives in the area of population. Ethics makes us conscious that the population issue cannot dead-end with the study of natality, mortality or migration statistics, since we are not dealing with numbers, gears or isolated monads that live, die or choose to move. What is involved here is the core, the raison d’être of demography, economy, medicine or politics, that is, the human being himself. To dispense with this central element may have disastrous consequences: a conscienceless science may prove ruinous to mankind.

Let us briefly outline the different variables that contribute to the complexity of the population issue, allowing –however– that they may be permeated by the ethical dimension:

**The demographic variable per se**

Is the world really facing a demographic problem? If the answer is given in terms of static facts such as population density or the planet’s capacity for harbouring more inhabitants, then the answer is straightforward: we do not have such a problem. But, if conceived as an imbalance between the rate of growth of the population and the rate of production of goods and services, then we certainly are in the presence of a demographic problem.

This imbalance has an undeniable ethical connotation given the quality of life it entails, and the international justice mechanisms it involves when it comes to distributing said goods and services. The expressions quality and justice are not restricted to ecological or legal interpretations, but are also related to the purpose and destiny of a fraternal humanity. If we reflect upon the population issue, from an ethical plane, we will understand the need to work simultaneously with the two variables which actually enter into the definition of our contemporary demographic condition.

**The economic variable per se**

We are witnessing the apogee of the market-based economy. The risk is that, if it is ascribed absolute and God-like attributes, soon it will be perched high above criticism. Worse yet, any negative ethical values associated with it may be regarded as a devious plan to interfere with the sacrosanctity of the laws of supply and demand as the sole regulators of the marketplace. Therefore, the question is how to create a system that combines having more with being more and, at the same time, have its product distributed—qualitatively and quantitatively—so that it reaches everybody.

Clearly, centralized economic systems have failed to plan successful wealth-generating schemes. However, John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter “Centesimus Annus” cautions us against endorsing a “savage capitalism” (CA. 8). Moreover, certain exclusory economic structures give rise to conditions of under-employment or unemployment, through the adoption of technologies that require high levels of skill or robotize their operations. In time, this causes an unjust distribution of wealth which gradually becomes unfair international economic relations, as exemplified by the case of developing countries which export cheap raw materials only to import them later at a much
higher cost, after the developed country has introduced added value to the very same raw material. The globalization of economy, ruled by transnational corporations, is increasingly widening the gap between the First, Third and Fourth worlds.

The Church’s Social Doctrine, has never failed to endorse the major role played by the State in terms of safeguarding the common good. For some, the mere insinuation of this teaching, is tantamount to suggesting a return to foundered systems of economics. This is not the case. The Church does not propound a specific economic system, although it introduces into existing ones—and will continue to do so undauntingly—an ethical correction factor aimed at the integral well-being of each and every individual.

In keeping with this concept, John Paul II during his visit to Chile in 1987, reminded us dramatically that “the poor cannot wait any longer”, and called upon the good will of men to create an economy built on solidarity. If this is better accomplished through a social market economy (a matter outside the competency of the Church), then so be it, provided the “social” connotation is not forgotten or postponed for the sake of the “market” dimension. Obviously, these considerations greatly affect the population issue, particularly when it comes to juggling a process of demographic rationalization with another one inexorably linked to an economy-oriented solidarity.

The medical variable

Its links to population issues are twofold; induced abortions and contraceptive methods. As mentioned earlier, the attempt by some groups to legitimize induced abortion as a valid population control measure, has been anything but overt. These attempts, albeit still minor, have come to the foreground through proposals formulated at the World Conferences on Population. Civil society has expressed a massive support of artificial methods of contraception while the Catholic Church holds a minority position in this issue.

Pope John Paul II stated in the Encyclical Letter “Evangelium Vitae” (1995) that “from a moral standpoint, contraception and abortion are distinctly different evils:1 the first one negates the sexual act as an expression of conjugal love, while the second one destroys the life of a human being; contraception is opposed to matrimonial chastity, abortion is opposed to justice and violates the commandment “thou shalt not kill”.

Despite their different nature and moral weight, they are often intimately related, like fruits on the same plant. There will be cases where contraception and even abortion may be resorted to under stressful situations which, nevertheless, may never exonerate the individual from striving to obey the Commandments. However, in many more cases these practices are rooted in the minds of hedonistic and sexually irresponsible beings who seeing in procreation an obstacle for their own development, reveal a most selfish concept of freedom. Hence, the life that could have bloomed as the result of a sexual encounter becomes the defenseless enemy to be avoided at all costs. Abortion, is the only answer to a frustrated act of contraception.

Regrettably, the subtle distinction—in terms of mentality—that separates the practices of contraception and abortion is becoming increasingly thinner, as dramatically illustrated by the proliferation of chemical products, intra-uterine devices (IUD’s) and “vaccines” that, sold as freely as contraceptives, are nothing but abortive agents that crush the life of a new human being in its early stages of gestation” (EV. 13, paragraphs 2 through 4).

The text transcribed “in extenso” clearly reflects the position of the pontifical Magistracy in this matter. The theological reflection within

1 Underlined in the original text.
the Church itself stresses that “from a moral standpoint, contraception and abortion are distinctly different evils” and have a different “moral weight” (Ibid).

In 1968, on occasion of the publication of the Encyclical Letter “Humanae Vitae” several episcopates issued declarations on fundamental aspects of it. Perhaps one of the most pertinent was that of the French episcopate made on November 9, 1968 which asserts: “Contraception may never be right. It will always be a disorder, although this disorder is not always sinful. Indeed, it happens that spouses are sometimes torn between duties. The spiritual anguish that accompanies well-meaning spouses particularly when natural rhythm methods fail to provide a safe enough base on which to plan a family, is known to everyone.

On the one hand, they are keenly aware of their obligation to respect the life-giving opportunity conceded in every connubial act; they also feel that, in all conscience, they should delay or prevent a new birth and cannot afford to be left at the mercy of their biological rhythms. On the other hand, renouncing to the physical expression of their love is something they dare not entertain for fear of jeopardizing the emotional stability of their homes (GS. 51,1).

In this connection, we will simply recall the timeless moral precept: if faced with a choice of duties which outcome will be a sin, independent of the alternative chosen, traditional wisdom compels us to seek before God, the lesser of the two evils. The couple, upon reflecting pensively and lovingly as befits the conjugal bond, will then make a decision (French Episcopate Declaration, part V: pastoral guidelines).

Moral theology, regards these particulars and nuances set forth by the Magistracy as vitally important. On a more pragmatic level, a great number of theologians—within the Church itself—condemn induced abortion, but legitimize artificial contraception as precisely what it is; the lesser of the two evils. It should be noted, that the Pontifical Magistracy has anathematized artificial contraception particularly following “Humanae Vitae”. It has reiterated it, time and again, in the Apostolic Exhortation “Familiaris Consortio” (1981), in the Letter to the Families (on occasion of the International Year of the Family) and, recently, in the Encyclical Letter “Evangelium Vitae”. This article, without disavowing the official position of the Magistracy, does not exclude the theological debate—which rages on—on birth control methods, particularly in married couples faced with “conflicting duties”, or—if confronted with abortion—when they are compelled to choose the lesser evil.

The socio-cultural variable

Contemporary population issues unfold amidst a totally new socio-cultural setting. This fact has been acknowledged by the Encyclical Letter Humanae Vitae: “Change is also evident, both in terms of the new personality displayed by women and their place in modern society, as well as in the value of conjugal love within marriage and the significance that must be ascribed to connubial acts as a reflection of this love.

Finally, and above all else, man has accomplished wonders when it comes to mastering nature and managing its resources rationally, so he tends to turn this mastery towards himself; his body, his psychic and social life, and even towards those laws that govern the very transmission of life” (HV. 2, paragraphs 2 and 3).

At the risk of sounding repetitious, our society is changing. It would be safe to assert that society has changed since “homo sapiens” first walked the earth. And this is because the individual, in producing culture, alters “nature” and, inevitably, brings about change in the way he communicates with God, his environment, other individuals. Today, however, this permanent transformation has acquired three distinct characteristics, never before observed: the ubiquitous awareness of change, the rate at which changes occur, and their global nature.
These three characteristics influence the way modern culture is produced, while they contain some elements which are specially important to the way we view and analyze today’s population issues. Let us examine them:

– The human being, conceived as a more dynamic, existential and historical entity, evolving in time, as opposed to a more static, essential and ahistorical conception.

– The human being as a master over the natural forces. Man envisioned as a Lord of nature and, within this realm, as a master of his own fertility.

– Predicated on the above, the potential for separating the sexual act from reproduction. The unchecked dissemination of birth control methods through the mass media, has brought this possibility home, across every social border.

– Woman’s eruption into the labour world, politics, higher education. Her presence in these milieux is gradually introducing irreversible transformations in the perception of contemporary masculine and feminine roles.

– As a result of all this, the family organization is nudged into a progressive transition, going from extensive or patriarchal—typical of rural areas—to nuclear—characteristic of urban areas. The former, typically exhibits a large number of children while the latter shows a marked reduction in birth rates. Other types of families enter the scene—single parents, for instance—which also have an obvious impact on the population. Along this transit, some important traditional values collapse while others are rediscovered; the family becomes the “social locus” par excellence of emotional support, interpersonal relationships, cultivating love, and psychological sustenance of their members, specially before the impersonality and competitiveness of modern society.

An ethical evaluation of this socio-cultural variable reveals lights and shadows in these transformation processes. But, while it is important to be supportive of these processes, we must not yield to the “blind acceptance” of change for the sake of change. Evidently, an assessment of the historical processes amidst which the vicissitudes of human condition unfold renders our assertions rather transitory, and our ethical guidelines more cautious. It directs us to formulate a situational ethics which neither overlooks nor negates moral values and principles, but attempts to “land” them on what may be termed the “hic et nunc” situation of human life. It postulates ethical principles for pilgrims not for perfect individuals, it contemplates not a delivered world, but one in need of deliverance. From the theological contribution, this historical perspective beckons us to live christian morality from the principle of graduation.

Encouraging albeit not naive attitude

Christian ethics does uphold the mastery of natural forces, since finishing and perfecting the work of the Creator is expressly stated in the Book of Genesis (cf. Gn. 1, 28). The “Donum Vitae” (DV) Instruction of 1987 issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, views the efforts at mastery evidenced in assisted fertilization—and in general in the field of experimental science research—with some encouragement, although not naively: “Basic and applied scientific research, represent an important expression of man’s mastery over creation. Science and technology, precious resources when harnessed to serve mankind and promote its integral development for the benefit of all, cannot by themselves shepherd human progress and existence. They, being subservient to man—their source and nourishment—are given by him and by his moral values a sense of direction and purpose, as well as the boundaries that must constrain them.

Thus, any attempt to vindicate the moral neutrality of scientific research and its applications, would constitute an exercise in futility. On the other hand, the guiding principles cannot stem from considerations of technical efficiency nor from the degree of usefulness it might have for some in detriment of others, or worse, from predominant ideologies. Owing
to their intrinsic nature, science and technology demand the unconditional respect of morality’s fundamental criteria: they must be made to serve man, his inalienable rights, and his legitimate and integral well-being, according to God’s plan and in obedience to His will (DV. Introd. 2). Does this undermine the prestige enjoyed by science and technology? Not in the least. Unless we choose to return to animality and exacerbate the deprivations of the poor, we must encourage and step-up the development of the type of science and technology that will provide us with the essential means to achieve our goals.

However, we may have to review the following statement: should man do everything that can be done? If the criterion to measure progress is the possibility of doing something and not the good that will come of it, we may be working against the basic rights of the individual. Neither science nor technology are absolute values. They serve a purpose: the integral development of the individual. Man’s mastery of nature must constitute a humanizing and personalizing element, not one of dehumanization and subjection. The manipulation of human embryos, and the possibility of cloning human beings raise important ethical questions in connection with population issues.

The ability to separate “oneness” from procreation in the intimacy of marriage, could be lived ambiguously: it may contribute to responsible parenthood or reinforce a hedonistic attitude which may lead to an “anti-life” position; that is, regard children as a burden likely to act as a hindrance to the couple’s “happiness”.

Women’s access to the world outside the home is a sign of the times that should be regarded as a positive step towards gender equality. However, this insertion must value the specific contribution made from a condition of femininity. Gender equality is not adverse to cultivating the marvelous difference between men and women in order to build a complementary world. This is particularly significant at the family level.

**Strengthening the family**

The criticism directed at the traditional roles played by men and women—the one at work and the other at home—, albeit valid, should not result in the weakening of the family unit. Appreciation for the working woman, however ethically appropriate, cannot depreciate her role as a mother and a wife. At Beijing’s Conference, the preponderance given to women in business, in the labour world, and in politics compares strikingly with the lackluster references to their roles as housewives. It would seem as female liberation aims exclusively at divesting women from their roles as mothers and wives, and their presence in the home is but a source of frustration and oppression.

In all due fairness, what is asked of the female, namely, that she be a wife, a mother and a worker, should also be asked of the male: that he becomes an active presence in the home as a husband and a father, and not merely as a provider.

A final thought: it is likely the very same changes we value and support are nothing but imperialistic views of the way industrialized occidental civilization casts the roles of men and women. Is it not possible that there are other humanizing structures which are not, necessarily, our own? What must be clearly understood is that regardless of how we decide to structure the family organization, oppression and exploitation—essentially dehumanizing elements—must be avoided at all costs.

Within today’s Church, the need to inculcate the Gospel, that is, to offer the message of salvation that Jesus Christ brings to every human group irrespective of ethnias and, particularly, to the underprivileged, has acquired paramount importance. The history of evangelization has borne countless imperialistic impositions which must be denounced, and regarding which the Church is, currently, much more sensible to. The same is true of the evolution of population policies: is the culture of the planet’s populations—specially the weaker ones—being heeded, when given methods of confronting population...
problems are imposed on them through world forums? This is a serious matter which the Church, from its ethical perspective, wishes to formulate beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Moreover, if we probe further we may unearth astonishing discoveries: the existence of veritable subcultures which regard children as assets, so couples strive to have many of them, irrespective of the economic burden they entail. These subcultures are not ignorant of birth control methods, but, since their children represent means of support and future protection, no attempt is made to use them.

It is the very concept of time which is being challenged. An individual who has the means to provide for tomorrow regards his time as lineal and, consequently, can assign a positive value to birth control since this is part of his contingency plan for the future. There are others, however, for whom time is circular: since there are no means to provide for today the ability to plan for the future is non-existent. The result is to “live from hand to mouth” and “make the best of the moment”. This view of life makes it very hard to accept the concept of forward-moving time and the need to build a nest egg now, in preparation for an invisible future. If this culture is to be respected, the conditions that favour making time lineal for them, will have to be gradually introduced.

It could seem that these reflections distract us from the main issue. However, quite the opposite is true. The Church trusts that they touch on the core of the population issue, since here we are dealing with the individual in its own cultural setting amidst which a person grows and evolves as a human being.

The married couple and society

We approach the closing point of this paper: the Church maintains that the population issue unfolds along two axes we must always bear in mind: the microcosm of the married couple and the macrocosm of society within which the couple is inserted. In turn, both dimensions have their own ethical referents.

Earlier, we expounded on the ethics of the means available to a married couple as seen by the Church’s Magistracy. Let us now look at the ethics of population policies. In order to do so, we will use classical and essential elements of the Church’s social doctrine. However, the articulation of these elements and the conclusions derived thereof, are the sole responsibility of the author of these lines, and do not reflect the official position of the Church in any way whatsoever. Let us refer back to the opening paragraph.

The Church’s doctrine has formulated with crystal clarity the right of the married couple to decide the number of children they would like to have. This is one of the most intimate, personal and unrepressed choices such a couple are in a position to make. This same doctrine also grants the social authority, rights and the responsibilities over the country’s populational bases. As shepherd of the common good, the rise and fall of the demographic tides is contained within this competency.

The enforcement of these two rights and responsibilities may lead to eventual conflicts. The old ethical problem confronted by an authority that must juggle the freedom of individual members of society, and the demands made upon it by the problems this very same society generates. Conflict may irrupt in any of several areas. For instance, in the field of economy between freedom and planning; in the field of social communications between respect for privacy and the right to be informed; in the field of human associations, between the syndical freedom and the collegiate requirement for practicing a profession; etc. The more liberal positions will tend to favour individual freedom; the more socially-oriented views will cast their preference on intervention by a public authority.

In the area that concerns us, conflict has stemmed from certain ethical attitudes that have eliminated one of the vying views. In our case, the chain has broken at its weakest link: negating the competence of the authority on population issues, thus saving the view likely to be more seriously threatened within a highly pri-
private matter, the freedom of the couple to decide. The elimination of the opposing view, however, has brought about a sort of demographic liberalism: the size of the family—large or small—is the absolute, exclusive and full responsibility of the married couple. Any involvement of society through the authority, short of its obligation to provide the resources required to ensure a decent living, will be instantly and summarily dismissed.

Nevertheless, within these considerations which strive to preserve the freedom of the married couple, the State—as manager of the common good—has been burdened with the responsibility of monitoring society’s progress as representatives of the communal well-being. Thus, a contradiction begins to take shape: on the one hand, public authority is given full responsibility for shepherding a politically organized society and, on the other, it is denied competence at the population locus whence society springs, the family.

This contradiction stems from two presumptions adopted aprioristically: one, ascribing every family within a given social group, a private initiative—in the area of fertility—which will always be responsible and, therefore, conducive to the common good; a demographic laissez-faire, as it were. By leaving married couples alone, the common good of society as a whole, is being guaranteed. Second, taking for granted the role of the State, as a miraculous agent capable of multiplying the available resources so that the population at large—dependent and trusting—is supplied with enough goods to make living with dignity possible. This presumption, is at odds with the reality being lived by many in developing countries, since society—and therefore the powers that be—is quite unable of furnishing everybody with enough goods and services to live a dignified life. If it could, we would be living in the midst of a materially developed society.

Privacy and freedom

This contradiction may be resolved by further analyzing the elements previously considered, and adding some other elements borrowed from the doctrine of the Church, thus far not taken into account. Actually, absolutely valid elements have been brought forward: the world of procreation is as private as anything can get and, therefore, demands unrestricted freedom to make decisions. Furthermore, if we wanted to illustrate something really private, we would instantly evoke this particular act, both given the biological-sexual intimacy and the interpersonal affectivity the process implies. This being the case, it is not ethically proper to accept indiscriminate meddling, and if advice in this area is proffered, this should be extremely cautious and judicious.

However, it is also necessary to acknowledge that there is nothing closer to the common good and, therefore, to public authority, than the population ambit, foundation of the human social edifice. In the absence of inhabitants, it is impossible to have nations, politically organized societies or a common good safeguarded by a social public authority. Without followers, there can be no leaders. A territorial expanse is not a nation. A society is the product of a population which, in turn, is the result of the reproductive patterns adopted by married couples.

Hence, we are up against two areas of competence: the privacy that characterizes the world of procreation, and the publicity associated with the populational world. Having granted each the credit they deserve, it behooves us to take new steps in the field of social ethics: on the one hand, to study the intervention mechanisms that should be elaborated to protect that privacy and, on the other, grant the public authority a certain degree of competence over the population. Obviously, intervening in the field of economics or politics is not quite the same as meddling in the affairs of a family. What we have here, are different spheres of competencies and sensibilities. In spite of the popularity currently enjoyed by privative neoliberalism, the Church’s doctrine has not negated to the authorities the
legitimate right to intervene effectively in the field of economy—albeit, not advocating statism—should critical and urgent social needs demand it, say for instance, the closing of Chile’s coal mines. In fact, this doctrine will support a political insurrection provided it is just, all else has failed, and the common good and dignity of the population are being threatened by a drawn-out tyranny.

It goes without saying that direct intervention by the State in family matters is out of the question. Thus, several types of intervention should be identified. Civil marriage, for example, should be regulated in terms of what requirements must the marrying couple meet, who is not permitted to marry, the rights and responsibilities of minors before the law, etc. In the field of procreation, however, the only available options are subsidiary and indirect interventions by the State. Subsidiarity means “every once in a while” or when the need arises, in the event the couple is unable to assume a responsible paternity. Therefore, subsidiarity implies an essential transitoriness under the guise of training towards, empowering, and motivating a responsible behaviour. Given its exceptional nature, this supplemental intervention must end the moment the couple adopts a responsible attitude. Clearly, this approach does not advocate demographic neoliberalistic principles.

Indirect intervention may take diverse forms, none of which, however, justify pressure or coercion. The married couple is thus free to choose whether or not to adopt birth control methods, and if so which method to use. In excluding pressure or coercion, we are obviously condemning any form of direct intervention strategy. Moreover, it would be hard to imagine such an intervention unless it involved a massive and coercive sterilization programme, something clearly unacceptable from a secular standpoint, and downright contemptible from a Christian perspective.

**Strategies**

Let us illustrate some of these indirect strategies: one such strategy takes the form of education, in this specific case, sex education. A responsible procreation behaviour does not spring magically out of nowhere, but it is acquired through a gradual mastery of the individual’s own sexuality which, in turn, may be found at the end of a road called sex education. This educational process does not deal exclusively with biological information, but it also incorporates areas such as genital instruction, love and affectivity, masculine and feminine personalities, socialization of sexuality and, lastly, ethical values of sexual behaviour. Since information is only one aspect of this education, the various actors in the fields of education, health and obviously the family members who become active promoters of their own education, share the responsibility for the success of this intervention strategy.

Social security provides a second indirect strategy. Through various social benefits, the authority can encourage or discourage natality—whichever the circumstances call for. Concretely, if a high rate of birth is desirable, specific benefits could be granted to those who have large families. If the opposite is true, then social benefits would only cover up to a specific number of children.

A third strategy could make use of medical institutions to inform, introduce and, eventually, provide the right birth control element. If the married couple is free to choose whether or not to adopt some form of birth control, and

2 Responsible paternity, means the mutual, rational and unconstrained decision made by the married couple to create life as an expression of conjugal love, with due consideration to the needs and possibilities of the couple itself, present and future children, and the society in which the couple is inserted.

3 In actual fact, the Church ascribes to the parents the role of early educators of their children’s sexuality and, therefore, any school-based sex education programme must be predicated on the active participation of the learners’ parents.
if so which of various options to select, it seems legitimate that competent social agencies—in this case, health institutions—should be permitted to carry out information, introduction and provision campaigns, for the benefit of the latter group. We wish to emphasize that what is being proposed are the medically appropriate means to control birth, not the means a given religious confession deems adequate.\footnote{It must be clear that we are not comparing anticonception with abortion that are specifically different situations.}

We will touch on this controversial point of the teaching of the Church, later on.

Coherent set of decisions

One last indirect strategy is associated with population policies understood as a coherent set of decisions—rather than a health programme—aspiring to regulate the probable size of a country’s population, its age-group composition, the ideal family size, and the rational geographical distribution of its inhabitants, in order to meet developmental objectives. Naturally, there is no “master recipe” for these population education policies. By definition they must be flexible and sector-oriented, since such a policy could not be made by a global authority—perish the thought—but, by the democratic authorities of a particular country. Policy-making initiatives of this sort, call for the active participation of the country’s living population forces through the legitimately established institutional structures.

A specific aspect of this policy—always striving to avoid a reductionistic approach—is the provision of birth control techniques and methods. Here is precisely where some conflicts may arise vis-a-vis the position expressed in Humanae Vitae through the Encyclical Letter directed at rulers (cf. HV. 23). It is legitimate for a State—shepherd of a pluralistic society’s common good—to offer its population each and every medically endorsed birth control means. This does not preclude the Church—active social actor within a nation’s community—from proposing and advancing its teachings on these and other contingent “borderline” issues, using the evangelical modalities which, definitely, exclude pressure and coercion.

In this regard, the Vatican Council II through its “Gaudium et Spes” (GS) Constitution states: “It is a matter of justice that the Church be entitled to preach the faith with total liberty, teach its social doctrine, carry out its mission among men and pass moral judgement whenever and wherever, even in regard to political issues, should the fundamental rights of man or the salvation of his soul demand it, using every means—and only those means—set forth in the Gospel for the good of all, and which are representative of changing times and situations.

The Catholic Church’s action, the adhesion to its faith and to its norms, is predicated on freedom of choice and on the various modalities it uses to convince, propose, and invite. Resorting to the temporal power derived from religious confession to impose its precepts, would be tantamount to reediting a type of Christianity long excelled, which utilized the secular arm of said temporal power to dictate to civil society as a whole, the convictions that flowed from religion. The Vatican II theology, expressed through “Gaudium et Spes” and the Declaration “Dignitatis Humanae” on freedom of worship, propounds a legitimate autonomy of the temporal order wherein its enforcers are truly competent which, logically, implies respect for the inalienable rights of the individual, and his freedom to decide and select.

To a large extent, the availability of all the proper medical elements will depend on a ruler who provides objective information, and a wide range of choices. It could not very well favour some goods over others based on efficiency or safety considerations. To do so, would constitute bias, and manipulative treatment of product information. Furthermore, this availability should also encompass sufficient financial and
human resources—physicians, paramedics—to adequately teach natural birth control methods. If a decision was made, for example, in the sense that natural methods were less efficient than artificial techniques and, on that sole basis, only the latter were sold, we would be confronted to a glaring injustice, both because the wrong criterion would have been applied, and because a segment of the population—who chose natural methods for religious or other reasons—would have been excluded.

Just as an improper intervention by the Church can be rejected, discriminatory criteria used by the public authority in representing these methodologies, is equally objectionable. If this were the case, the population’s freedom of choice, would be seriously undermined or severely curtailed.

We are profoundly aware that there is a tenuous balance between procreational privacy and populational publicity which is not always easy to adequately preserve. Responsible parenthood assumed by the married couple and demographic rationalization proposed from population policies, may represent the clues needed to articulate this delicate balance.

QUALITY SEX EDUCATION: A MATTER OF EQUITY

Alfredo Rojas F
Katrin Boege*

What a specific society decides to communicate through the school curriculum to the new generations is “sawed-off knowledge” or “selected knowledge”, if you will. These selection processes are strictly political in nature and although they normally go unnoticed in subject matters like mathematics or science, they tend to show a little more distinctly in disciplines like history and social sciences, to become quite explicit in issues dealing with the beliefs and values of the various social groups. Such is the case of sex education.

In Latin America, sex education has been particularly controversial. In diverse countries and periods, the various sex education initiatives proposed to the formal system, have been met with resistance by hard core conservative groups, thus effectively thwarting its dissemination and consolidation.

The dearth of solid sex education programs has had different effects on children and youths with greater “cultural capital” (who generally correspond to the higher income strata or to children and youths linked to religious institutions), and among children and youths from depressed cultural and material segments who, because of this condition, have few—if any—opportunities to find alternative sources of information on the subject.

In our region, extreme cases where due to migrations or other social processes children and youths live without their progenitors, are not infrequent. A National Survey conducted in the Dominican Republic, for instance, revealed that in 1992, 15.6 per cent of all youths between 15 and 19 lived without either of their progenitors, and 34.6 per cent with only one of them. We may safely assume that lack of information on sexual issues will have a stronger impact on these youths (Elichiry, Nora and Santibañez, Erika, UNESCO 1996).

As we will discuss in further detail in the following pages, one of these effects is the
high rate of adolescent pregnancy. Regional statistics reveal that, here too, a greater proportion of pregnant girls come from lower income segments. These young women are forced to abandon their studies prematurely thus becoming mothers with low schooling levels. One of the groups that stand to benefit the most from the new educational levels achievable by the new generations, is precisely that of adolescent mothers (ECLAC, 1991). What we have then is a vicious cycle:

Teen-age pregnancy among lower income girls ----> poor, badly educated mothers -----> children with low levels of schooling -----> teen-age pregnancy among lower income girls.

A quality sex education, could contribute to break this vicious cycle through a reduction of adolescent pregnancy. But, what is quality sex education?

**Sex education. Research findings**

Various international research efforts have been undertaken in the last ten years. Thus, for example, and regarding “sexual encounters among youths”, the following has been observed:

– In the United States, a review of 23 sex education programmes covering people under 22 years of age, showed that participating youths were less prone to engage in sexual activities, and those who were sexually active, were beginning to slow down (Kirby D., Short L. and Collins J. et al.; 114).

– Furthermore, some of these programmes had a specific impact in terms of postponing their sexual debut and reducing the number of sexual partners (Kirby, op. cit).

– A study of the effects of nineteen sex education programmes implemented in various countries’ schools, showed that sex education did not lower the age of sexual debut nor did it increase its frequency. In fact, six studies showed that sex education raised the age of initiation and lowered the number of sex encounters, while ten showed that the most sexually active youths adopted secure sex practices more often (AIDS Global Programme, WHO s/f; in Exchange 96 No 3).


As regards the use of preservatives and contraceptives, research studies reveal that:

– A stratified sample of 2 411 Norwegian students participating in a prevention enhancement programme intended to reduce STD’s and the occurrence of adolescent pregnancies, showed a positive correlation between the programme and the anticipated results. The correlation was closer among students with fewer sexual partners (Kvalem I; Sundet J; et al, 1996).

– In order to evaluate the impact of programmes designed not only to prevent unwanted pregnancies but also to reduce the risks of contracting HIV/AIDS and other STD’s in U.S.A., 383 African American youths between the ages of 9 and 15 participated in a follow-up activity, at 6, 12 and 18 months, following attendance to an educational programme on prevention methods. Research showed that before this programme two-thirds of the participating youths used some kind of preservative or contraceptive, or both. This proportion increased markedly after the programme was completed. (Stanton, BF.; Li X; et al, 1996).

As regards the “educational modalities” that yielded the best results, research shows that:

– In the United States, traditional sex education classes restricted to offering information on reproductive and contraceptive functions are seldom effective. Recent studies detect an extremely tenuous relationship between students’ knowledge of birth control methods and their consistent utilization. (Citizen for Missouri ..., 1994).

– In the United States, successful postponement of sexual activity has been achieved by programmes beginning in pre–adolescence and grades 6 and 7. These are interactive
experiences which in addition to providing young men with information, help to develop decision-making skills, be assertive, and resist pressure to engage in sexual activities (Citizen for Missouri..., 1994).

– In the Netherlands a new VHI/AIDS and STD prevention programme was compared to a previous one on the same subject, both designed for 9th. and 10th. graders. In its design phase the new programme enlisted the participation of researchers, students, teachers and other school staff, something the old programme did not do. Results indicated that the new curriculum increased the consistent use of preservatives markedly (Schaalma, HP; Kok, G. et al, 1996).

– Although some claim that programmes which foster sexual abstinence among youths might be more effective (Khouzam HR; 1995), so far, there is no empirical evidence to support such a claim. However, it has been clearly demonstrated that abstinence programmes have strong effects on postponing sexual activity, although no positive impact has been detected in connection with sex formation. Very few empirical research efforts on the effect of sex education programmes have been undertaken in Latin America. Thus, out of 7 000 abstracts contained in the REDUC’s Network Data Base (first semester, 1997), scarcely 56 bore the label “sex education” and none of them referred to this particular area of research. The three references to empirical research conducted on the level of knowledge exhibited by male and female higher education students of two Central American countries, reveal their almost total ignorance on sexual matters.

In Chile, an evaluation of school workshops on sex education carried out in 1996, corroborates some of these findings. In particular, the fact that sex education does lead to a postponement of first sexual encounters and a reduced number of sexual partners (CEMERA, 1997). Said evaluation also showed that factual information per se does not result in behavioural changes which are closer linked to culturally assigned social roles.

Be that as it may, the scant number of research studies on sex education evidenced in Latin America, seem to indicate that this area of education has yet to fully mature. This is aggravated by the fact that—in addition to the dearth of information, ethical values and expression mechanisms in sexual matters that characterize Latin American society—predominant attitudes, such as male chauvinism, tend to add to the problem. These attitudes are illustrated by beliefs such as these:

– Extramarital affairs tend to be acceptable, for men.

– Early sexual experiences are praiseworthy among young men and at least tolerated by adults.

– In sexual matters, the initiative is to be taken by men only. Women must either deny their sexuality or express it passively, otherwise they risk being called “fast”, “loose” or worse by the males of the species. This precludes girls from “negotiating” the use of birth control devices, or at least restricts their participation in decision-making.

– Prevention and care is the exclusive domain of the woman. Therefore, pregnancy will always be her responsibility. Men can detach themselves from any responsibility associated with prevention and pregnancy (Elichiry and Santibañez, op. cit.).

Under these circumstances, a quality sex education for Latin America will be one that in addition to delivering factual/physiological information, builds on communication skills that facilitate conversation and negotiation at the individual level or between couples. A quality sex education will also take into account the socio-cultural and political situation of the learners, both in order to create a technically relevant and politically viable curriculum, and to tackle and transform male chauvinist behaviour.

Adolescent pregnancy and poverty in Latin America

In Latin America, adolescent pregnancy has
become a critical issue given its high rate of occurrence and its attending individual and social repercussions. Regarding it quantification, research studies reveal that:

– In the 80’s, fertility rates among the younger groups (19 and younger) had shown to increase in some countries while in others it had decreased, but at a slower rate than it had a decade earlier, for older women (see Table 1). Consequently, the proportion of pregnant women in the younger groups tended to be greater (United Nations).

– In the 90’s, the data available for fourteen countries showed that fertility rates among the younger groups tended to decrease at a slower pace than for other age groups (CELADE; 1996). Table 2 shows the percentages of teenage pregnancy, according to several studies. As may be seen from the data, adolescent pregnancy has reached alarming proportions. Even more dramatically, data from various studies reveal that it tends to concentrate in the lower socio-economic strata.

A case in point. A study conducted in Brazil, showed that 26 per cent of adolescent girls with family incomes under the minimum wage line had had a child, compared to only 2 per cent of those whose family incomes exceeded five minimum wages (Alan Guttmacher Inst., 1988). In Chile, a study involving Santiago’s greater metropolitan area revealed that 77.5 per cent of adolescent mothers came from the four lower income deciles; while in Peru, only 7 per cent of upper socio-economic strata mothers had their first son while an adolescent. This figure increases to 31 and 52 per cent, among the medium-low and low socio-economic strata, respectively (Soto and Guevara, 1988).

From an individual standpoint, qualitative research and life histories indicate that adoles-

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage of Teenage Pregnancy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

cent pregnancy is almost always a traumatic event that deeply scars the life of the young woman, particularly when—due to male chauvinistic tendencies—she must face the social repercussions of pregnancy, the actual delivery, and the care of the child, all by herself (Elichiry and Santibañez; 1996).

Finally, the interrelations of phenomena associated with adolescent pregnancy, namely, male chauvinism, insensitiveness on the part of boys and poverty conditions, tend to translate into a situation where numerous households end up being female-headed. This is not the product of a freely made decision, but the consequence of all the factors mentioned earlier.

**Households headed by females**

In the region, poverty and the existence of female-headed households are closely linked.

Not surprisingly, unemployment is highest among these women. They cannot work as many hours, command lower salaries and face greater difficulties in accessing the labour world (ECLAC, Social Panorama 1995, p. 73). Additionally, they seem to possess fewer resources such as land, capital or technology (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 1988). The level of education is the factor that weighs most heavily on the lack of economic resources evidenced among female-headed households; generally, this gap is the equivalent of two years of formal education less than their male counterparts, a fact that accounts for a 20 to 40 per cent reduction in earning power. Obviously, this augments the likelihood that women who are heads of household will live in poverty (ECLAC Social Panorama 1994, Chapter VI, Tienda and Salazar, 1980). Within this context, a noteworthy fact is that the income differences detected between female-headed households and male-headed households, is greater than the differences observed between males and females in the rest of the population (Arriagada, 1990).

Women who are heads of households normally have two jobs: one in the labour market and a second one at home, caring for their children. Since they cannot count on their families to help care for their children, this double shift necessarily means working fewer hours. A Census of Latin American homes, revealed that in every country surveyed, females who are in this position work anywhere from 5 to 10 hours less than male-headed households. This gap is wider among the poor, where women are even harder pressed to live up to their role of working mothers.

To complicate things even further, females who are heads of households in the working
world are usually poorly remunerated. A study conducted in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, revealed that 53 per cent of women heads of households had low paying occupations in the informal sector, as opposed to 30 per cent of the males (Merrick and Schmink, 1983). In turn, female-headed households have comparatively more dependents since they have fewer wage-earning members.

Based on the above, it may be concluded that the inefficiencies detected in the prevalent knowledge, values and attitudes system, tend to exacerbate social inequalities in Latin America. The questions that needs to be asked is whether the region’s educational systems are capable of offsetting this shortfall and, if so, under what conditions.

Quality sex education. A matter of equity

If, as shown by educational research, a quality sex education can in fact postpone the sexual debut among youths; if additionally, it is successful in terms of curtailing the frequency of sexual encounters or, where couples are already sexually involved, makes possible the introduction of contraceptive methods, a quality sex education could definitely become a pregnancy-preventing strategy, among adolescents of poverty-stricken areas. Consequently, in time it could emerge as factor that, in and by itself, will contribute to enhance the living conditions of the new generations.

The expression “quality” sex education is used to allay a fear, which although never empirically proven, it is claimed to exist –at least in the opinion of some detractors– in theory. The fear is that young learners, as a result of sex education programmes, could feel entitled to engage in sexual behaviour prematurely and irresponsibly. As pointed out earlier, a quality sex education is supposed to do exactly the opposite.

What are the conditions a quality sex education programme requires? In theory, the same any other discipline would: a cultural, social and politically relevant curriculum, suitable didactic material and teachers with a mastery of the specific topic involved.

However, its teaching is more complex than that of any other subject matter, since it implies formation not only in terms of cognitive aspects but also the building on ethical attitudes and communication skills, which require an “interdisciplinary” approach, alternating with specific workshops in key periods in the life and development of the learner. This means that every teacher should know something about sex education in order to ensure the proper functioning of the interdisciplinary approach.

In turn, given the age group distribution of students by grades –in particular students from
the poorer areas— as a result of repetition, the methodology employed should be directed at specific groups at critical ages and in difficult situations.

In other words, the idea is to produce general curricula that may be applied homogeneously at a certain educational level, say 6th grade, as well as targeted curricula, for more specific groups, for example, older students and/or those living in critical conditions: fourth grades aged 12 or 13 living in areas where the risk of contracting VHI/AIDS or sexually transmitted diseases is high. This, in turn, calls for developing work methodologies involving small groups within the classrooms.

Lastly, the social and political context within which sex education is being imparted, should also be taken into account. Thus, for instance, catholic and christian churches, international organizations and NGO’s demand family participation in sex education programmes which, in turn, requires developing specific active and participative methodologies.

Despite this apparent complexity, Latin America exhibits a fair amount of growth in this area. During the last five years for example, the work methodologies involving small classroom groups, inspired in Colombia’s Escuela Nueva, have been developed and disseminated by UNESCO’s Regional Office for Education; various NGO’s initiatives have developed active and participative work methodologies on sex education which, in turn, requires developing specific active and participative methodologies.

From the financial standpoint, the application costs of effective sex education programmes is not high, when compared to the cost of any other massive social policy intended to curb or abate poverty. From a purely technical perspective, both the region’s governments and international organizations, UNESCO in particular, are in a position to initiate, foster and/or develop quality sex education policies, programmes and projects which have an impact on social equity. The next step is strictly political and financial. What is needed is a stronger and more clearly defined political will along with the national and international resources to sustain it.

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THE INTERDISCIPLINARY NATURE OF SEX EDUCATION AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN ADOLESCENCE. BRAZIL’S CASE

Alessandra Casanova Guedes*

Adolescence, the period that marks the transition between infancy and adulthood, is characterized by profound physical, psychological, cognitive and social transformations. It stretches, in the definition of the World Health Organization (WHO), from ages 10 to 19 and evolves in line with modernization and urbanization processes, becoming more of a problem in poverty stricken areas. Actually, the progress and innovations that accompany these processes are felt differently by young people, since “socially, adolescence is a function of social status: the better the living conditions, the longer the adolescent stage; the direst the circumstances, the shorter its duration and the greater the social stigmata associated with it”.

HOWEVER, the changes evidenced at this stage

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of development are common to all adolescents, and will be confronted with little or much difficulty, as determined by the individual’s means.

Biologically, an increased production of testosterone and progesterone give rise to distinct body changes; voice, body hair, breasts, pubic hair, and menarche in girls.

Psychologically, adolescence is riddled with permanent conflict, whether due to a lack of understanding of their own physical transformations, the onset of sexuality, the demands placed upon them by an establishment that dictates obedience to pre-set values or the need to come to grips with their professional destinies.

Socially, this stage in life is marked by a desire to gain independence from the family and, simultaneously, connect with various peer groups, at school, in the neighborhood, etc. Through them, adolescents attempt to find and develop their own identities, relying for security on the discussion and analysis of solutions to their problems, which are chiefly sexual in nature.

During his quest for the self and an independent existence and torn between the desire to break away and the obligation to acquiesce, the adolescent challenges the pre-established paradigms and tests their limits, while engaging in situations that could pose a serious threat to his/her physical and moral integrity. This bleak panorama is made more critical by a lack of relevant information and, in the more extreme cases, of support and counselling.

**Contextualization**

The adolescent population of Brazil, estimated at some 35 million, is particularly vulnerable. Drug abuse has become endemic and violence and child delinquency have reached alarming proportions. Furthermore, this age group is particularly susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases (STD’s) and to the growing incidence of AIDS/VHI.

Teen-age pregnancy, with its attending economic and social repercussions, has risen at an alarming rate affecting directly the lives of young women. Pregnancy, is one of the leading causes of truancy among female students. Conversely, access to secondary education is directly associated with late marriages and delayed pregnancies, since women are exposed to new values and ideas.

Teen-age pregnancies are related to high rates of mortality among first-time mothers. The rates of mortality and morbidity among children of young mothers, may be five times greater than those for other groups. The fact that only in one year, 1995, 27 316 babies were born in Brazil’s public hospitals to girls between the ages of 10 and 14, harbingers serious challenges to the country’s public health institutions.

Within the Federal District (FD), and following a nationwide trend, fertility rates among women of every age group seem to be declining, except in the 10 to 19 year old bracket. The number of live births among the latter rose from 15.5% in 1988 to 20.15% in 1995.

In the settlements of Paranoá and Samambaia, area covered by the present report, these percentages reached 22.2 and 22.4 %, respectively, in 1995.

In terms of the total number of AIDS cases reported, in 1996 Brasilia ranked sixth in the nation.

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4 Population Reference Bureau, Inc. La juventud del mundo 1996.
5 Source: Federal District Health Secretariat.
6 Source: Federal District Health Secretariat.
Confronted with this gloomy scenario, the Federal District Government is promoting a series of health and education measures, and holds the distinction of having been the first brazilian entity to make family planning services compulsory. In schools sex education, drug prevention and violence abatement, were made part of the interdisciplinary curricular contents.

However, and despite all efforts, the education and health sectors seemed insufficiently prepared to implement the proposed policies. Family planning services rarely took into account the specific needs of adolescents, and at schools the lack of training exhibited by professional educators made sex education issues difficult to broach. Science teachers reported feeling ill-at-ease when introducing human reproduction to their students and fearful of their reaction.

A pilot project on information, education and communications in the areas of sexual and reproductive health known as “Multisectoral Integrated Project on Education on Population, Sexuality and Reproductive Health in Adolescence”, (Project sponsored by the Federal District Government, with UNFPA funds and UNESCO’s technical support) was launched in August 1994, with the purpose of working out future action plans.

Paranoá and Samambaia, urban centres which concentrate a lower income population and where basic services are still inadequate, were the selected project locations. Nearly 36 per cent of the families residing in Paranoá and 32 per cent of those residing in Samambaia, have family incomes equivalent to up two minimum wages, whereas in the Federal District, only 13 per cent of the general population has this low an income. Originally, Paranoá was a camp facility built in 1957 to accommodate the construction workers who erected the dam that gave rise to the Paranoá Lake. Forty years later, Paranoá located some 20 kilometers distant from Brasilia, has a population of 48 450 inhabitants. Currently, Samambaia’s population stands at 162 000 inhabitants.

**Strategies**

The Project, recognizing that sexuality is an important aspect of human development and that adolescents will continue to explore it regardless of social restrictions, aims at institutionalizing actions that promote the adoption of responsible, healthy and risk-free behaviour. Thus, the creation and implementation of a methodology designed to form human resources in the areas of sex education and reproductive health in adolescence, became one of the project’s immediate goals. A further objective, had to do with fostering conditions among adolescents conducive to the adoption of attitudes and behaviours that facilitate the development of sexuality as part of their personal and social evolution, instilling in the 10 to 19 age group the notion that sexual experiences should strive to defer conception until adulthood, and achieving a reduction of unwanted pregnancies and STD’s and AIDS cases among young people.

Also in the project’s agenda, was the appointment of a permanent multisectoral team to guide the development of health and education programmes oriented towards the younger population, and the provision of the proper conditions for specialized medical attention through the health and educational systems of Paranoá and Samambaia.

**Operational structuring**

Within the domain of the Federal District Government, intersectoral initiatives may be regarded as both challenging and innovative. Historically, the various sectors have operated in isolation, frequently “reinventing the wheel” and not always making the best of the already scant resources available. On numerous occasions, entities working on similar fields and
even within similar systems, had no idea who
their peers or potential partners were. This frag-
mentation was also visible at the community
level, where several actions were known to be
implemented independent of and parallel to one
another and in total ignorance of each others’
existence. Individuals and entities thoroughly
unaware of the resources that could be found
inside their own communities invoked exter-
nal assistance, rather than electing to promote
autonomy through their available resources.

Considering the need to make the health and
education sectors part of any efficient initia-
tives undertaken in these areas, responsibility
for the Project was granted to the respective
Secretariats, while its general coordination fell
to the Government Office, entity directly linked
to the Governor’s Cabinet.

In order to iron out any wrinkles of a politi-
cal or managerial nature encountered in
intersectoral actions, an operational structure
which incorporated the various institutions in-
volved at the different decision-making and
operating levels, namely, collegiate, adminis-
trative, and technical, was soon brought into
play.

Research

Methodology

In an effort to provide depth and direction to
government actions, the research efforts slated
for Brazil were aimed at producing a thorough
and complete profile of the adolescent.

The information used was gleaned from re-
search previously conducted in this field of
education. During the preparatory assistance
stages these findings were discussed in work-
shops which enlisted the participation of rep-
resentatives from the various institutions in-
volved in the areas of adolescent sexuality and
reproductive health.

A closing questionnaire, containing some 97
questions, was divided into six modules.
Through the use of variables such as sex, age,
home state, and insertion in the labour market
–among others– the first module established
the profile of those surveyed.

The second module, searching for a wider
vision of adolescent sexuality and sexual prac-
tices, addressed the topics of sexual practice
and the use of preservatives. The questions
addressed first sexual encounters, description
of the sexual partner and age of occurrence.

The third and fourth modules had to do with
female and male reproduction, respectively.
Some of the topics explored were the practice
and knowledge of contraceptive techniques and
abortion.

The fifth module attempted to elicit opin-
ions from the interviewees, based on values
acquired and experienced, on observations and
information related to sexuality, drugs, and the
role of television, among others.

Before the actual field research got under
way, Paranóa’s community leaders were pre-
sented with the objectives of the project and
the questionnaire. A pilot test of this informa-
tion-gathering device was conducted in sev-
eral homes picked out by the authorities. In
every household, duly trained researchers work-
ing in male-female pairs, surveyed the adoles-
ccent of the matching sex.

Institutional difficulties confronted by the
government agency responsible for carrying out
the survey –Companhia de Desenvolvimento
de Planalto Central (CODEPLAN)– restricted
data compilation to Paranóa, where 895 youths
between the ages of 10 and 19, participated
actively.

Profile of adolescents

Most of the adolescents surveyed (77.77%) at-
tended school, a fact which corroborated the
importance of school participation as support
centre for Project-based activities. However,
in the age group 15 to 19, this proportion
shrunk considerably, since 42 per cent had left
school. Within this sub-group, the main rea-
son for having dropped out was different for
boys and girls; while boys dropped out to go to work (60%), girls (38.82%) pointed to unwanted pregnancies as the chief motive.\(^8\)

Since the family represents an important presence in the life of an adolescent, the need to sensitize parents about the proposed activities was also ratified. Most adolescents live with their parents or, at least, with one of them. According to 32.29 per cent of those interviewed, mothers seem better inclined than anybody else to listen to their teen-agers sorrows; friends and siblings come in second. If a discussion involves doubts of a sexual nature, the natural tendency is to obtain information from friends, brothers or sisters (32.4%), or from parents to a lesser degree (22.12%). This argues for the importance of training adolescents who can replicate this type of information knowledgeable.

It should be noted that a high percentage of adolescents (practically 30%) claimed to rely on nobody to clarify doubts or talk to about sexual matters, making access to this type of information even harder to accomplish.

When analyzing the stance taken by youths before concepts, ideas and facts that determine social behaviour –mainly in terms of masculine and feminine roles, sexuality and drug abuse—the ambiguity that characterizes adolescents, first conservative then quite liberal, could be plainly observed. Thus, when asked to comment on the observation “women must take care of the house chores and children, without help from their husbands”, 73.97 per cent of those surveyed disagreed. Concern about greater gender equality was also made evident when 69.05 per cent of adolescents defended the view that “men should take the initiative when it comes to preventing procreation”.

However, when sexual topics are addressed more directly, youths tend to become more conservative. This was illustrated in reference to the notion that “women must be virgins at the time of marriage”, defended by 52.96 per cent of those interviewed, mainly by girls.

This conservative attitude, reinforced by lack of information, is corroborated by the fact that 62.68 per cent of adolescents—mostly women—agrees that “men need more sex than women”. Furthermore, 50.06 per cent of them accepts that “men know more about sex than women do”.

Having confirmed the ideological stance of these youths, the need to promote discussion on gender roles with every group programmed to participate in educational activities, became crystal clear.

The lack of information on the use of contraceptives, and on the risks befalling those who expose themselves to an active sexual life, is still considerable among youths: 77 per cent of sexually active adolescents indicated having used no form of contraceptive during his/her first sexual experience, and only 44 per cent admitted to using some kind of device on a regular basis.

The consequences are plainly seen when analyzing the low average age of girls who have been pregnant at least once, and of boys who have made girls pregnant. Among sexually active adolescents, 68 per cent had actually gotten pregnant.

In connection with AIDS, prejudices and lack of information were also detected: over one third believed the disease could be caught from mosquitoes, domestic utensils, kissing, or living with AIDS victims; 71 per cent thought they could catch the disease through giving blood.

In light of countless AIDS prevention campaigns sponsored by the Federal Government, and of information gathered by surveyors, the level of efficacy shown by this type of strategy among the adolescent population, was deemed poor.
The data gathered corroborated the need to implement strategies oriented towards adolescent reproductive education and health in Paranoá and similar localities. The significant participation of the younger segment, ages 10 to 14, is worth mentioning. The interest displayed by this age group, would make necessary the implementation of preventive sexual education efforts aimed at reducing the risks entailed by a precocious initiation in sex activities (one of the main objectives of the GDF-UNFPA Project).

The Mobilization Process and a Theater Group called “Metamorfose”

Recognizing that in order for information, education and health efforts to be successful they must include different alternatives ranging from informal communications to the utilization of modern mass media techniques, the Project resorted to different strategies.

Both during the elaboration and developmental phases of the Project, meetings were held with the various segments of the community in schools, community centres, churches and health institutions. At the macro level, the cooperation of T.V. and the press, which made the Project’s efforts the target of several local and national broadcasts and publications –with particular emphasis on the dissemination of data gathered by the survey team at Paranoá—deserves our kudos.

Also vitally important, was the participation of government authorities in mobilization activities within the communities. On several occasions, in what was termed an “itinerant government” strategy, the Governor of the Federal District and other political representatives were present during the Project’s activities in the targeted communities. Subsequently, the authorities became sounding boards at a national level for the proposed actions.

It would be fair to say that the combined strategies used did contribute to the mobilization and sensitization of the selected communities. However, the utilization of the theater as a communication and education medium, allowed a wider dissemination of the Project’s actions, specially among adolescents.

The birth of the group “Metamorfose”, Educational Stage Players, was prompted by the recognition on the part of community leaders of the potential of art as an instrument of communication and education to reach adolescents and other target-groups (teachers, health professionals, community leaders). The Federal District’s Cultural Foundation –government institution devoted to the promotion of cultural activities— engaged two educators to train 13 adolescents residents of the Paranoá community. The group was assembled and the play created during seven months of bi-weekly meetings; the first meeting of every week was intended to train the participants and recycle specific information, such as adolescence, sexuality and VHI/AIDS, while the second dealt strictly with theatrical elements; body language, use of the voice, and interpretation. In a burst of collective creativity, the group put together the play “Facing Adolescence”, a playful and poetic portrayal of the physical, emotional, and social changes that typify adolescence. The play exposes the conflicts lived by young people who lack basic information about their bodies, emphasizes pregnancy and STD/AIDS-related contents, drugs and other issues which are part of the adolescent’s school and family universe.

The school becomes the main –but not exclusive– target of the group’s presentations. It has already performed before some 4 000 public school students, serving as a sensitizing instrument, and a precursor to actions by trained educators. The performance is reinforced by debates following each presentation.

A second play “Balancing on life’s tightrope”, addresses AIDS prevention specifically. It explores the dialectics of desire and risk situations under various contexts, including drug prevention and violence, placing special emphasis on the sexual experience.
**Working with schools**

**Training methodology**

The inclusion of sex education contents in schools’ formal study programmes, paves the way for promoting the overall health of adolescents. However, as shown by the Federal District Government’s earlier experience, the training of teachers on the proper, unbiased and objective presentation of the topics, is essential. In this sense, teachers comprise one of the main targets of the Project proposed training actions.

In order to qualify as a sex instructor, the teacher must have acquired scientifically accurate information on adolescence and sexuality, ranging from data covering the biological, psychological and social development to information related to gender roles. However, the quality of his/her rapport with the students, is equally important since it will determine whether the transfer of this information proceeds haltingly or smoothly... or not at all.

Because historically brazilian teachers, as professionals, have been undervalued and poorly paid, lack of motivation is no stranger to the school setting. Thus, when elaborating a teacher training methodology, the Project placed special emphasis on perfecting interpersonal relations and strengthening their self-esteem.

The idea is that building up self-esteem helps the teacher to establish with his/her students a sort of rapport characterized by dialogue and devoid of the authoritarianism that so often masks insecurities and hampers a legitimate educational endeavor.

The training methodology advanced is based on learning through experiencing. Harnessing concepts first formulated by Will Schultz and Pichon Riviere on affective group development, the system proposes the creation of four pedagogical stages: motivation, exploration, formalization and evaluation. This structuring, by ordering the sequence in which the thematic contents would be inserted into a specific development stage, would facilitate its introjection. The reinforcement of each group’s identity is vitally important, and known to be helpful, once attained. The identity of each participant also experiences a development process that tends to strengthen his/her self-esteem.

The validation of the methodology currently being developed by an external team includes, in addition to confirmation of new knowledge acquisition, an evaluation of the changes evidenced at the control, concept of the self, and sexual values and attitudes loci of the participants.

Initially, the proposed teacher training content envisaged forty classroom hours and addressed, albeit at a basic level, the biological, psychological and social aspects of adolescence, with particular stress on sexuality, pregnancy and contraception. As contact with teachers developed, however, the need for an in-depth study of certain matters, such as gender roles and sexual nuances for example, became all too clear. Moreover, contents not originally contemplated were introduced to the programme. Hence, the approach to teacher training continued to be sex education and reproductive health, but other matters deemed important to their performance such as drug addiction, abuse and sexual violence, were added in short order.

The didactic material used in the training of teachers and other participants, was gleaned from the study and selection of information and communication material produced largely by NGO’s active in the field of sexual and reproductive health. The selected support documents, guides, books, and seriated albums were complemented with original texts, lantern slides, and additional material produced by the technical team.

At each encounter, participants were handed, along with the day’s schedule of activities, texts related to the theoretical contents introduced and the definition of objectives and necessary resources. The purpose of this manual is to
assist teachers in the planning of replicating initiatives. During the replicating activities at the participating schools, the fact that teachers used the planning format proposed by the Project and strategies and texts utilized during the training sessions, was clearly established.

Training involves a total of 105 hours and is divided into four modules which include the following contents: Module I, “Interaction”, comprises the motivational phase and contains topics such as drafting and presenting a project; creative teaching, a responsible methodology; and, interpersonal relationships. Module II, “Sexuality”, which delves into the exploratory phase, includes topics such as sexuality, gender roles, sexual nuances, biological, psychological and social aspects of abuse during childhood and adolescence, and sexual victimization. Module III, “Adolescence”, which deals with the formalization phase, touches on risk behaviour, biological, psychological, socio-cultural, anatomic and physiological aspects of adolescence, human reproduction, pregnancy, contraception and contraceptive techniques. Module IV, which corresponds to the evaluation phase, incorporates topics associated with creativity and action.

Mobilization, selection and execution within the school context

Mobilizing schools – chiefly through their administrative levels – and teacher selection, are basic to the proper implementation of training courses. The meetings held between the Project’s Coordinating Unit and the respective Teaching Departments, are intended to sensitize the school community and facilitate teacher participation in the courses, during working hours and in the absence of pecuniary gains.

The teacher selection process has undergone several modifications since its first training course when participating educators were chosen by their immediate superiors. Due to a lack of appropriate criteria, this mechanism proved damaging in terms of expected results. The second time around, trainees were asked to fill out a questionnaire designed to identify specific and previously acquired knowledge, and, most importantly, evaluate the quality of the relationship they maintained with adolescents. Later, personal interviews following a set script, were incorporated to this process. The dialogue between the teacher and the Project specialist, reveals myriad aspects that expose the presence of desirable traits on the part of the sex instructors, among them, their own sexual adequation, their ease for making contact with adolescents and their predisposition to do so, their intellectual and affective proclivity, and their tolerance.

Course execution strategies were also changed. The original proposal called for two training sessions running consecutive days. However, upon releasing the teachers to attend these sessions, the schools found themselves with classrooms full of students and quite teacher-less. The suggestion was made to schedule training activities during the time allotted to teacher coordination meetings. Hence, training courses were now held once a week for a period of four months, a feature that increased attendance and provided teachers the opportunity to put the acquired knowledge into practice while still training.

Supervision

One of the Project’s characteristics is that supervision is ranked on an equal footing with mobilization and training. Supervision aims at providing technical and moral support, with a view to consolidate training and, thus, make viable the actions proposed by the trained teachers. This is also the juncture at which both teachers and institution define, with the support of a member of the technical staff, which information and communication materials will be used in their replication proposals. These materials are donated to the schools by the Project.

To date, a total of 108 teachers linked to 18
schools in Paranoá and Samambaia have received training through the Project. The idea is to guarantee the presence of a core group of approximately 5 trained instructors per school, to serve as relays in a support network.

The projects developed so far by participating teachers can be subsumed under two categories; formation of educational groups for adolescents in a schedule other than the school’s, and the interdisciplinary introduction of topics related to sexual and reproductive health.

**Working with the health sector**

In order for educational and preventive actions to reap positive results, these must be coordinated with an adequate supply of health services suitable to the needs of adolescents.

At the Federal District Health Centres, as elsewhere, adolescents are often found adrift; they are too “big” for pediatricians and too young for regular physicians.\(^9\) Since morbidity indicators are not noticeably high among this age group, their health has for the most part gone unnoticed or insufficiently attended.\(^10\)

The insecurity of health professionals before adolescents, augmented by the “flash” diagnoses routinely dispensed at public service facilities, has made it extremely difficult to care for young people accurately and integrally.

With the aim of supporting the educational actions undertaken in coordination with schools and community groups, the Project proposed the implementation of a health service tailored to the specific needs of the adolescent population. To this end, the formal training course was reinforced through in-service training initiatives conducted by physicians, technical and professional personnel.

**Working with community leaders**

The successful outcome of information, communication and health strategies, is predicated on the involvement of the various sectors of the community. Accordingly, the Project proposed the participation of community groups not just as sources of support, but as agents of transformation.

Through the existing links to local administrations and relevant entities, community leaders (formal or otherwise) who were in a position to exert some degree of influence over adolescent groups were identified both in Paranoá and Samambaia. Other efforts to single out potential leaders, were displayed in the frequent events, such as fairs, religious commemorations, and various social meetings, where Project specialists took the opportunity to deliver progress reports and increase their knowledge of community dynamics. Religious leaders, sport personalities, owners of health fitness clubs and firemen, were among the influential types identified.

**Evaluation**

The activities promoted by the Project, were individually evaluated through questionnaires designed to measure a spectrum going from changes in the level of knowledge exhibited by trainees, all the way down to the reaction of the public to the Stage Players.

However, given the number and range of its activities, a decision was made to conduct an impact evaluation study that would include an in-depth analysis of every dimension of the Project. To this end, a team from University of Brasilia carried out in situ observations, interviews and quantitative measures with instruments specially designed for this purpose.

The impact of the Stage Players, the quality and adequacy of the service delivered at the Health Centres, the self-sustaining capacity, management, social image, and interaction among institutions, were also taken into account.

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Conclusion: the intersectoral approach

The Project portrays the continuous modifications and adjustments materialized in an attempt to more closely reflect the characteristics of the target-community, and –most importantly– to create whatever mechanisms are required to guarantee the continuity of the actions undertaken.

The self-sustainability of the Project’s actions is underscored at the various levels; from the proposed utilization of human resources from public institutions to the advancement of autonomous groups trained through follow-up procedures.

In less than three years, the Project trained 108 teachers, 30 community leaders, 43 adolescent replicators, and 15 health teachers. Currently, adolescent and parent-oriented educational actions are being developed in 18 schools, one Health Centre and several community centres.

Moreover, the far-reaching impact of the Project’s initiatives elicited a demand, on the part of the community and different institutions, for educational actions with groups not originally considered, such as rural teachers, adolescents at risk, and school health representatives.

Within the Federal District and among other Brazilian states, the Project achieved a “reference” status. Currently, it relies on a vast accumulation of information and communication material in the field of adolescence which is constantly being consulted by various groups, including University of Brasilia professionals and the Ministry of Public Health.

Also highlighted, is the importance of building coalitions with government institutions, civil entities, and various individuals and groups, with a view to structuring an action network that in addition to providing support to on-stream activities, fosters their continuity and widens their scope.

In this context and at the government level, the implementation of actions integrated into the National STD/AIDS Project, the Servicio de Asistencia a la Salud for adolescents sponsored by the Ministry of Public Health and the University of Brasilia, in addition to various other coalitions within the framework of the Federal District Government, are particularly noteworthy. Cooperation has, in fact, extended to the Legislative Chamber of the Federal District, where Project representatives have contributed to policy-making in the field of sexual and reproductive health.

In the area of communications, the Correio Braziliense, widest read local newspaper, conquered an important space among adolescents. The newspaper created a weekly supplement intended exclusively for adolescents, consisting of a column devoted to answering queries on sexuality and reproductive health.

The integration of the different government and civil experiences is essential to the promotion and continuity of the activities already under way. Coupled to the previously discussed mechanisms, these actions comprise a Federal District Government strategy which results will be reflected in the near future.

The fostering of behavioural and ideological change has been known to take some time, and to require not only the acquisition of new knowledge, but also –and mainly– the ability to challenge existing values and introjecting new attitudes. Preliminary data, gathered through impact evaluation initiatives carried out among the different participating sectors, detect a favourable climate to the changes being wrought.

Difficulties do exist, however, considering the breadth of the proposal which envisages working not only at the multisectoral but also at the intersectoral level within the Government sphere, the obstacles encountered should be regarded as challenges that must be met if we are to provide our adolescent population with a safe informed, and properly cared for sexual life.
GUATEMALA’S NEW POPULATION EDUCATION STRATEGY

R. Rosemberg, J.A. Cifuentes, E. García*

In 1992, Guatemala’s Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNESCO and the United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA), sponsored an intersectoral consultation on population education, with a view to defining through a national agreement the appropriate concepts, objectives, contents and methodologies to be used in the implementation of this programme.

The fifteen institutions convoked by the Ministry of Education, acknowledged the need to establish a procedure to identify interests and positions, and nominate institutional delegates who would take responsibility for the follow-up activities as well as engage in an in-depth analysis and critical reflection of the proposal, in order to determine the nature and objectives of the education on population programme. This procedure enabled the discussion of issues heretofore impossible to address openly. The first meetings were characterized by a confrontational atmosphere marked by an ideological extremism that despite hampering progress facilitated an open dialogue.

The Education on Population Project contributed to this procedure by providing technical advice, relevant documentation and information aimed at clarifying any issues that might be considered controversial.

Following five months of debate, the institutional delegates decided unanimously to give the group a permanent status in order to ensure that the efforts undertaken and achievements made, would not be lost, and that society could participate actively in developing education on population regarded as a sine qua non for achieving an enhanced quality of personal, family and social life.

On September 29, 1992, the principals participating in the consultation meetings, reached the following agreement:

“...We welcome the request made by the Ministry of Education with the support of UNFPA and UNESCO, to look into the problem of education on population in Guatemala. Following a lengthy discussion and analysis of its social significance for Guatemala, particularly in its ethnical and cultural area, we acknowledge the need to implement a national education on population programme fully endorsed by the State through the Ministry of Education which must respect life from the moment of conception, the idiosyncracy of guatemalan pluralism, and the right to participate in the Intersectoral Commission on Education on Population within which present and future member institutions must be represented”.

“We recognize that the actions undertaken in this area have been valuable; however, because they have been sporadic, lacked the backing of a National Policy on Population and, in some cases, failed to conform to the real cultural and socio-economic needs encountered within the guatemalan context, have not been fully successful”.

“We regard education on population as an integral education process which will empower human beings to live in a climate of love and, within his own world vision develop dynamic relations with his social, political and economic life, shepherded by ethical principles that will allow him to lead a free, sensitive, responsible and satisfactory family and community life”.

“We deem the following to be features of education on population:

Historical. Unfolding within the search for national identity.

* Paper prepared by Dr. Raúl Rosemberg, National Coordinator of the Population Education Project; Juan Arturo Cifuentes, Assistant Coordinator and Erwin García Arandi, Chairman of Guatemala’s Intersectoral Commission on Education on Population (ICEP).
Moral and ethical. Inspired on human co-existence principles.

Pluralistic. Non excluding and unbiased, towards every sector of the population.

Methodologically active and interdisciplinary. Enabling the guatemalan citizen to become the object of his own formation through the various disciplines offered by the formal and non formal education systems.

Critical. Leading to the development of an objective, conscious and reflective awareness of reality and providing the tools to change it.

On-going. Based on short, medium and long term plans.

Cultured. Conceived and framed within a multi-ethnic and multilingual reality.

Integral and global. Not an isolated event, but comprising every element required for economic, social, cultural and political development.

Congruent. Consistent with our economic, social, cultural and political reality.

Liberizing. Leading to self-discovery and to the development of every man and woman’s full potential.

Open. Making use of every alternative means and modalities contemplated in the national system of education”.

“Population education demands the participation of all sectors which are encouraged to participate critically and with a sense of deliverance. Implementation of the process calls for the creation of a permanent State-endorsed Intersectoral Commission to plan, organize, execute and assess the National Programme of Population Education, and which formulates actions customized to every region and ethnia. Any decision made shall have the consensual approval of all the duly represented institutions. During the process’ planning stages, the needs, interests and expectations of the population will be evaluated. This material will provide the groundwork for a curriculum design that will incorporate all previous experiences into this field of education”.

The Intersectoral Commission established a technical administrative unit for the permanent supervision and evaluation of the National Programme for Population Education, to work in close collaboration with said commission (Intersectoral Agreement on Population Education, Guatemala, 1992).

Active participation

The commitment of institutional representatives to participate actively in this process, signaled an unprecedented event in Guatemala’s educational history, and marked the beginning of a new era for population education.

The Intersectoral Commission for Education on Population (ICEP) was composed of the Guatemala’s Metropolitan Archbishopric, the National Magisterial Assembly, Guatemala’s Evangelical Alliance, the Association of Journalists, the Mayan Language Academy, Guatemala’s Episcopal Conference, FUNDAZUCAR, Guatemala’s Labour Union Federation, the National Workers Federation, the Human Rights Law Office, Universidad San Carlos de Guatemala, Universidad Rafael Landívar and Universidad del Valle.

On January 27, 1993, in response to this intersectoral agreement, the Ministry of Education issued Agreement Nr. 26, whereby the commission was given full responsibility for the coordination, planning, implementation, technical assistance and assessment of the actions and activities undertaken at the national level in matters concerning population education.

For 15 months, the Intersectoral Commission worked towards the completion of a document that would comprise the formative axis of education on population which, in addition to providing a definition of the topics and contents involved, represents the product of a negotiated agreement supported by a large portion of civil society. The formative axis includes subjects related to socio-demographic elements, family, quality of life, development, human rights, health, human sexuality, women, ethnia, ecology, ethics and communications.

Defining the formative axis required more
Population education and sex education in Latin America

information than that available to the delegates. To this end, 57 heads of member institutions and institutions linked to population activities, embarked on a three-month training course. The Population Education Project in collaboration with FLACSO-Guatemala, proceeded to sensitize the participating leaders to the need for formulating alternative solutions to the socio-demographic dilemma confronted by the country, through the educational process.

The Intersectoral Commission, assisted by national professionals, drafted the first curricular proposal for pre-school and primary education. The need that Guatemala’s education on population should be underpinned by real and concrete objectives based on currently perceived needs, was clearly established. Agreement was also reached on the importance of providing children and youths with an insightful look into the population problem during their formative years, as a strategy to better cope with the challenges embodied in national community development actions. Helped by our democratic life-style, the Commission stated, and by increased access to and availability of educational resources and, particularly, relying on active community participation, it will be possible to develop in the individual, the family and society, a responsible and critical conscience which will facilitate the adoption of a harmonic, solidary and fraternal paradigm to serve as the foundation of a development process endowed with justice, equity and peace.

The approved curriculum focuses on the principles, values and attitudes learners are expected to build up, with special emphasis on equitable gender relationships, and the incorporation of issues dealing with poverty, quality of life, environment, health, education, and human rights keyed to development problems. Additionally, knowledge of and respect for the mayan culture was established as a strong socio-cultural approach.

The formative axis on sexuality and population begins at the pre-school level with an introduction to self-esteem and sexual identification, to continue in primary school with notions of fertility and pregnancy, followed by knowledge of human reproductive anatomy and physiology in the intermediate grades, to culminate with the concept of “parenthood”, responsible motherhood, and family planning, in the final grades.

The technical support material provided to teachers consists of number of suggested activities to carry out with children. These, are participative and stimulate information, relationships among variables, reflection, critical thinking, and problem solving abilities. The concepts of sustainable human development and demographic responsibility are introduced. Basic health information regarding the importance of mother and child health and the prevention of VHI/AIDS and STD’s, is also supplied. Bulletins, brochures and mini radio shows, are also used as diffusion mechanisms.

Their contents touch on mother and child mortality rates, spacing and preventing pregnancy, gender equity, and responsible parenthood. These materials were based on findings produced by an assessment research undertaken by the Metropolitan Archbishopric and the Pastoral University. At every school, parents are asked their consent before introducing education on population topics. The response has always been favourable.

During 1996, the Intersectoral Commission and the Population Education Project, trained some 350 technical people at the central level and a little over 27 000 teachers from 14 out of the 22 departments that comprise the Republic of Guatemala. Additionally, and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, a second population education course sponsored by Guatemala’s del Valle University, got under way. This University implemented a middle level teacher training programme with specialization on population and environmental sciences, a Bachelor level programme on population, environment and development and a Magister programme with a specialization on environmental science.

Population education activities in Guatemala,
have included several demonstration experiences in mayan communities. One such initiative brought together two ethnic populations – cakchiquel and quiché– with the aim of respecting their cultural values. The participative experiences, first implemented in 1995, included research activities, teacher training programmes and sensitization of parents and youths from both communities. This activity included topics related to the family and quality of life, women’s participation in economic life, respect for their condition, boy-girl differences, women and ethnia, ethics, human rights and development, and how they relate to population.

Important conclusions in connection with the main topics of population education were drawn from this experience. These, in turn, allow experiencing a closer and more direct contact with reality and everyday living; enhance the degree of reflection and analysis between teachers and students; reappraise the importance of education in the eyes of parents; develop teachers’ creativity in didactic matters and facilitate the natural approach to topics formerly considered taboo.

Based on the above, a recommendation was made in the sense that population education be included in the agenda of the Commission for Indigenous Affairs, under the section dealing with how to implement educational reform.

It should be noted, that the Population Education Project, has been involved in the creation of side-projects with the Metropolitan Archbishopric and Guatemala’s Evangelic Alliance organization which making use of their extensive information networks carry out training, counseling and information activities promoting population education topics. These activities include the design of printed material, the production of radio commercials and shows on responsible parenthood, prevention of teen-age pregnancy, AIDS and self-esteem. Further activities undertaken with the cooperation of Centro de Estudios Cooperativos (CENDEC), are geared towards the training of leaders and members of the various cooperatives across the country.

In closing

Since 1984 and through 1992-93, the country’s educational initiatives have been beset by both insufficient knowledge of population education topics, and the repressive influence of political actors belonging to hard-core religious groups. As a result, the objectives of education on population were obscured by prejudicial notions both at the level of government authorities and civil society representatives.

Notwithstanding these circumstances, it is worth noting that population education activities, in a country marked by political dissent, armed conflicts and the complexities of a multicultural society, have advanced and flourished within a climate of unprecedented consensus.

The creation of the International Commission opened to important sectors of civil society an official space for dialogue, exchange and sensitization. Thus, from 1994 on, the pace of production and implementation of new activities seemed to gather momentum noticeably. In this connection, mention should be made of the Legislative Agreement whereby the Congress of the Republic establishes that AIDS prevention activities should be routed through the Commission and the Education on Population Project.

Training of human resources on population education –both in specialty courses conducted in conjunction with prestigious institutions such as FLACSO and Universidad del Valle– contributed importantly to the conceptual edification and enlightenment of teachers and civil society leaders, who committed themselves to implementing the project’s actions from within their own institutions as well as from those of the Ministry of Education.

The Project is legitimately inserted in the policies and strategies of the SIMA/Ministry of Education coalition, and enjoys the full recognition of the institutions and organizations that make up the Intersectoral Commission, not least for having taken into account the socio-cultural dimension of the indigenous commu-
nities, both through the inclusion of ethnia and population as a topic, and the successful presentation of demonstration experiences in two mayan speaking communities. Despite hints of ideological resistance to education on population activities on the part of traditional sectors, the prevailing climate as exemplified by official representatives of both the Catholic and Evangelist Churches, labour unions, universities, private industry and other sectors, is fully supportive of the need to implement this theme without further delay. Wide acceptance has been also evidenced at the regional, departmental and school levels.

The decision of the Ministry of Education—with the support of UNFPA and UNESCO—to convoke highly representative institutions to assume responsibility for defining the population education process, has been a landmark in the country’s educational history. This is living proof that coordinated and democratic participation by the community can lead to a concerted policy agreement, an initiative which a few years earlier would have driven a wedge of dissent through the heart of civil society.

The creation and permanence of the Intersectoral Commission, and the participative debates within the conceptual framework of the population education process, eliminated the erstwhile opposition of hard-core groups. The Intersectoral Commission—underpinned by a broad social spectrum—has provided population education activities with credibility, reliability and continuity, while attaining a high percentage of the goals and objectives it had set for itself.

Addresses and Electronic Mail

1. Regional Office for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, UNESCO-Santiago and its REPLAD, REDALF, PICPEMCE, SIRI Networks

   www.education.unesco.org/orealc

   uhst@unesco.org

   Alternative Address: unesco@mailnet.rdc.cl

2. WWW Service (World Wide Web) for access to information distributed by UNESCO-Paris

   http://www.unesco.org/
HOW ARE TEACHERS TRAINED IN LATIN AMERICA

Graciela Messina*

What elements tinge the perception educational communities have of teacher training? Oftentimes, teacher training has been invoked to justify the structural limitations exhibited by Latin American education. Finding fault with teacher training only to later identify the educator as the main culprit of the so called “school failure” syndrome, does not take a leap in logic, and seems to be the preferred option.

Frequently, teacher training has been associated with the “shortfalls” that seem to –typically– curse western civilization educators. Moreover, the training experience has unfolded irrespective of considerations of working conditions, detached from the school trajectory and the country’s history, insensitive to poverty, and blind to cultural disavowal and stilled indigenous tongues. Also, and as an extension of this view, teacher training has been nominated as the potential rescuer of the teaching-learning processes.

When we think of teacher training we are inclined to associate it with the professional and personal development of specific individuals. Although we know full well that this training is imparted in institutions, we tend to ignore its institutional dimension. Thus, any change of approach that involves teacher formation must consider institutional reforms which encompass not just the training centres but the whole of the educational system.

What would happen if we chose to look at teacher training from the critical teaching theories? Not unlike critical pedagogy which extends its task over and above the classroom to encompass cultural policies, teacher training focuses on collective formation with a view to creating a “collective professionalism”. This form of professionalism affords a clearer view from within the educational locus. It reinforces the social power of teachers by giving rise to a new relationship with knowledge, namely, the reflective teaching approach, reflective research or reflection from within the practice. According to Zeichner, this presupposes both a formation and a teaching strategy, an articulation of theory and practice, research and action. Relying on the educator’s knowledge base, reflective teaching proposes an education scheme which generates a dialogue between pedagogical knowledge and the knowledge systematized in the various disciplines. Succintly, if teacher training is to create “reflective” educators, the institutions responsible for their formation must have aprioristically adopted these codes.

From this reference framework –which time has validated– UNESCO’s Regional Office for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean conducted a study on initial teacher training for Latin American primary school teachers.

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The two-year project (1995-96) involved the participation of 17 countries in the region. The present article offers a synthesis of the research questions formulated, the achievements made and the difficulties encountered, along with major findings and recommendations.

The project unfolded within the PICPEMCE Network, operational network for the Major Project of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. The team responsible for teacher training initiatives took on the coordination and elaboration of the comparative regional study with the collaboration of major network institutions; the Ministries of Education’s Teacher Training or Higher Education Departments, and regional teachers and researchers. The latter groups were responsible for carrying out national studies on the basis of secondary data. With regard to the sources, we are aware of the dangers mediation entails and of the distorting consequences of successive mediations between reality and the conclusions presented in this paper.

The plight of the teacher, a situation much addressed in public debate, but yet to be resolved, was the main concern of the study. However, initial teacher training has been conspicuously absent from these debates, opinion has it that teachers are circumscribing this key issue, and its impact on future education and work opportunities.

Within this context, a regional assessment of initial teacher training becomes essential. Confronted with the paucity of regional studies and the focalized nature of the global research conducted in the 90’s (such as Rust and Van Dalin’s, 1994, covering 24 developing countries), the issue has gathered renewed momentum. This information vacuum reinforces the belief in the social feebleness of teacher training advanced by some. Worse yet, information on initial teacher training efforts undertaken in Latin America during the last two decades is simply not available. Thus far, the only referent for the world (and for the region to boot) is the global study on primary and secondary education conducted by Blat and Ibañez in 1980, and disseminated by UNESCO that same year (Blat Gimeno and Marín Ibañez, 1980).

Study alternatives: starting where and to what end

The issue being studied was born out of a specific concern to create a pedagogical link that facilitates encounters among autonomous individuals. In this respect, the issue was formulated as a long-term contribution, namely, promoting a peace culture for the region as a whole, an aspiration long entertained by UNESCO.

Two elements provided the rationale to embark on a regional research on initial teacher training: the deficiencies exhibited by this area of education and the scantiness of relevant regional information available in 1994 (specially the dearth of research initiatives and regional meetings during the last ten years).

Specifically, the study focused on the analysis of initial training for primary school teachers, gathering empirical data to serve as the basis for proposals in this area, creating the conditions conducive to a regional debate on the issue, and, identifying research needs and launching a regional information system.

The research on initial training efforts for primary school teachers, paved the way for the Project on Initial Training for Basic Education Teachers (FIDEB).

The study’s focal point was the initial training opportunities offered to basic school teachers. “Teacher training” refers to processes or functions intended to create conditions conducive to the professional development of those who participate; teacher training implies the objectivization of institutions which represent publicly acknowledged and specifically-oriented spaces. Training involves institutionality, although the guises individual trainees adopt and the development processes they experience, are also aspects of the phenomenon. The study focalized on “the institutional dimension of initial teacher training”.
Initial teacher training

In the present study, “initial teacher training” is defined as the formation that empowers the individual to pursue the teaching profession; initial training includes “regular” programmes designed to form future educators, pre-employment training programmes, as well as professionalization programmes for teachers who work without the benefit of a degree. It also involves programmes at different educational levels: secondary, tertiary university-oriented and non-university-oriented. Although research efforts were centred on the structure of the initial teacher training supply at the basic school level, several areas came under analysis, in an attempt to bring other aspects into context, among them: the fate of various educational reforms; the national education framework; the role of training in educational reforms; teacher training policies; and, the current situation of practicing teachers.

The two questions that structured the study are:

– What is initial training and, specifically, what position does initial training occupy in the region’s educational systems? What structure does initial training adopt, what elements does it contribute to the professionalization of teachers, and to what extent does it create a favourable setting for on-going education? Likewise, to what degree does initial training prepare teachers for the public sector, as part of a strategy to consolidate public education? Lastly, does initial training promote a desire for life-long education?

– How is initial training related to the teachers’ tasks? Specifically, how is the actual structure of initial teacher training related to the legitimate tasks society defines for teachers, and, conversely, what initial training reforms must be implemented before emerging social demands which, in turn, imply new tasks for teachers?

The study revolved around two historical initial teacher training events that are associated with types of institutions (normal schools versus other higher education institutions) that have tended to coexist through some stages and, in some countries, still do.

Clearly, normal schools have left their imprint in the region. The study recounts the historical evolution of initial teacher training starting in the 19 century and up to the present, which originally—and for a prolonged period of time—existed under the aegis of normal schools. The panorama presented by the 90’s, with normal schools no longer cast as the core institution for initial teacher training, is also described in the study.

The global study of Blat Gimeno and Marín Ibañez (1980)–our only regional referent–provided some variables and indicators. This study made possible the comparative evaluation of initial training supply for basic education taking the years 1975 and 1995 as markers. The two pivotal variables were the position of initial training programmes within the educational system as a whole (indicators: educational level and type of institution), and the formal schooling acquired by teachers upon finishing their initial studies, based on programme information. The indicators used for the latter variable were the number of primary and secondary education grades required to access initial teacher training programmes, total previous schooling (primary + secondary), age of access into the training programme, number of years devoted to professional education, and total number of school years upon graduating (that is, all the years elapsed from primary education through initial teacher training). In addition to these variables, others were selected which helped describe the internal structuring of the initial teacher training supply, the working conditions of practicing teachers, and the overall state of education.

The regional study had an exploratory nature and was structured on the basis of national studies conducted in 17 countries. These, in turn, gathered information best characterized as “secondary”, since it was not produced by field studies undertaken at the time of
execution, but was “available”. However, the statistics submitted by a large portion of the PICPEMCE units, required a compilation effort that challenged the “availability” of this so-called secondary data. In this regard, the study gave rise to an information-building process, both at a regional and national levels, that deserves our recognition.

The shortfalls detected during the information seeking process, strongly suggest the need for regional teacher training organizations to create information systems. If said information systems were capable of providing basic indicators (number of students and number of teachers at the training centres), they would be paving the way for designing and implementing more subtle indicators. Furthermore, two lines of research would be needed to feed these information systems: a list of initial training organizations for basic education teachers, and ethnographically-oriented case studies in initial teacher training centres.

**Study findings**

*Tertiarization and heterogeneity: a summarized view*

The study corroborates both the transfer of initial teacher training programmes from middle to higher education (“tertiarization”), and the high heterogeneity of programmes between and within the countries in the region, as well as the formation of “differentiated” circles in almost every country.

These “differentiated” circles represent the decade’s greatest novelty. But, what are they? It is no longer possible to claim emphatically that initial teacher training programmes in the region or in a country, can be found at a specific level of the educational system. As a matter of fact, quite the opposite is true, for heterogeneity reigns supreme. Starting with the co-existence of training programmes inserted at different levels of the educational system, continuing with various types of institutions situated at the same level of the system, and culminating with the differences in quality exhibited by like-institutions sharing the same level in the educational system. All these combinations are present in diverse, subtle and hard to quantify proportions (for example, the following combinations: universities and normal schools with “higher” education status; institutes of higher learning and universities; teacher colleges inserted in secondary or middle education which co-exist with universities; professional institutes, universities and pedagogical universities which co-exist with one another in the same country; others).

In this respect, we wish to venture the following notion: heterogeneity lends legitimacy to negative images associated with initial training, and obscures the tertiarization process. Moreover, the isolation of initial teacher training programmes with respect to those which offer initial training to teachers from other educational levels, discipline-oriented curricula, school-based culture, and the absence of joint regional training initiatives, are features that should be stressed. This scheme seems ill-suited to meet current educational reform efforts, let alone regional and sub-regional integration emprises, all of which require at least common minimums.

**Previous reflections**

The set of conclusions and recommendations on initial training derived from regional seminars sponsored by UNESCO during 1995, were systematized into a reference framework. Furthermore, the various schools of thought on training that co-exist in everyday life and in the educational world, were carefully

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1 This article presents a brief outline of the study’s final report, currently in press; Cfr. Messina, Graciela. Cómo se forman los maestros en América Latina, UNESCO-Santiago, 1996, final report of comparative study.

2 Cfr. in reference section of regional or national consultation meetings.
reviewed. The concept of profession versus teacher professionalization and their relationships with teacher training, was also the subject of research. This synthesis facilitated reflecting on research from current regional knowledge, and enlisting the participation of an important number of workers from the field of education.3

The immediate result was a greater diversification of points of view.

Ten main topics emerged from these meetings:
– teacher training, the role of the State, and teachers as educational subjects;
– initial training as part of a life-long education process;
– the pedagogical model in training: reflection from the perspectives of practice and research;
– creation of a regional space intended for reflection-research-action: cooperation networks;
– initial training programmes for basic education teachers: who the learners are;
– teacher training: an approach from the teacher perspective;
– teacher training and intercultural aspects;
– tertiarization in initial training programmes for basic education teachers, pending tasks and achievements;
– the new role of teachers unions; the ideal teacher.

The exercise confirmed the existence of regional consensus in terms of the importance of vindicating teachers’ working, cultural, economic and educational rights, and defining teacher training as a public responsibility. The concept that teacher training must pertain to organized teacher groups in the schools, make use of participatory methodologies, and involve teachers unions, was unanimously reiterated.

The public debate reflected the social appreciation gained by teacher training programmes in the region while simultaneously stressing that its articulation with other educational strategies is vitally important, if the illusory deliverance potential of training is to be dispelled. In the words of Debesse (quoted in Brault, 1994): “the implicit or explicit belief in the omnipotence of teacher training is a revised image of the old belief in the omnipotence of education”.

The regional debate also reaffirmed, among other equally important ideas, the notion that initial teacher training and on-going in-service training are two sides of the same coin and consequently, one should not be favoured in detriment of the other. Some other proposals which carried considerable agreement were the creation of regional and national work spaces, theory production, practice monitoring and information exchange, and increasing the hierarchy of initial teacher training programmes by conferring on them a higher educational status.

The elucidation of teacher training views that facilitated a revision of opinions challenging the validity of training as a permanent quality enhancement tool for education.

The review of professionalization and professionist as categories, allowed a clearer view of the teaching profession, and the recognition that the dominant concept of teacher professionalization in Latin America is external to the individuals and for educators it represents yet another divergent demand, much like an unpaid debt or an unfulfilled mission. In this respect, various approaches to professionalization were deemed to co-exist, while it was ascertained that no references to “professionalization” could be made without first establishing its variability and dependency on the field wherein the profession unfolds; most approaches recommend promoting the teacher’s autonomy as professionalization axis. Furthermore, they all have a common principle: professionalization is a must; the underlying presumption, explicit or otherwise, is that

3 Some 240 Latin American education workers participated in the regional meetings held in 1995 (see reference section) with countries participating in the The Major Project of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. Because Chile was the host-country for most of the events, the presence of chilean educators was majority.
teaching represents an activity not quite developed into a profession.

The different “professionalization” approaches, also share in comparing and evaluating the teachers’ task from an abstract definition of profession, originating in the sociology of professions and derived from the so-called liberal professions. By contrast, from a critical perspective (Carr and Kemmis, 1988; Marcelo, 1995), professionalization is not something bestowed from within, but a self-made possibility that justifies its new name: “professionist”.

In our estimation, this novel way of practicing the teaching profession presupposes four basic components:

– reference to a teaching collective (“collective professionalism”);
– reappreciation for the work of teachers as a socially required commodity (work for third parties, work as a service), and the adoption of fair wage scales;
– reflection on the role of the teacher (self-role or objective-role) and the construction of a space in freedom;
– a training model that favours building knowledge from a reflection of the teacher’s own practice, and contributes to the production of theory.

Bisaillon (1993), observing that the teaching practice has been gradually secreting its own cocoon by becoming a technical, individual and executional task, rather than one of creation, proposes rescuing the notion of teaching as a collective task, inserted in a life-long education process, and promoted onto others as a social service. This concept of teaching as a social service rests on two pillars: the definition of the work of the teacher as defined by the teachers themselves on the basis of participative research, and the State-designed implementation of labour conditions that promote the professionist concept and fair salary compensations.

Extended scope

The exploration of the educational context corroborated the existence of a generalized reform process in the region, and the central role basic and middle education play in it. Transit from primary to basic education, an on-going process in several countries, implies an adaptation of initial teacher training to the new structure. The institutionalization of basic education in the region⁴ has resulted in the extension of the teacher’s field of endeavor (educators have gone from being primary to basic school teachers); for its part, pedagogical decentralization implies a potential expansion of the teacher’s working space. However, based on study findings we may surmise that the low salaries, laboural deregulations, and the centralizing strategy of reforms, have actually shrunk the educator’s scope of action and social power.

Lastly, if we accept Berstein’s thesis which propounds that reforms, build, impose, and distribute pedagogical identities (Berstein, 1996), what is the nature of the identity being built by the reforms and, specifically, how does it touch on the identity of basic teachers?

The study revealed the function performed by teacher training within reforms. Although these reform initiatives do acknowledge the central role played by the teacher in systematic education, their main strategy has been the professionalization of the educational action (management, in particular) rather than the professionalization of teachers. Consequently, for the teaching staff, teacher training has worked as a socializing mechanism for the implementation of reforms and not so much as a strategy to build “the reform project”.

Furthermore, in most countries initial teacher training operates independently of on-going training, while within initial teacher training another schism has become evident among careers that form basic and middle teachers,

⁴ In 1995, for practically all Latin American countries, basic education represents a level within the system (12 countries), is being implemented (5 countries), or is a second order group (one country).
and other pedagogical studies. This trend is moving towards articulation, everywhere in the world.

As regards teachers’ working conditions, the study corroborated some characteristics already detected by previous research: greater poverty among teachers, low salaries, salary raises below cost of living increases, teacher migrations to foreign countries or exodus to better paying professions, increase in number of female personnel, highly heterogeneous degree-status composition (both in terms of degreeed versus non-degree, and types of degree: middle-level graduates from normal schools versus degrees granted by higher education institutions), and a strong presence of normal school graduates among practicing professionals. Qualitatively, some 3 million practicing teachers were identified for 19 Latin American countries.

A twofold relation was identified between initial teacher training enrolments and the conditions under which teachers practice their profession. In countries where teachers had received salary increases enrolments were shown to increase while the converse was also true, the effect having been been directly proportional in countries which have imposed salary cutbacks. On the other hand, in countries with generalized and high rates of unemployment, initial teacher training enrolments rose, since the teaching profession represents a stable and formal occupation.

Finally, based on a review of available data, it may be concluded that a regional study on teachers –and by teachers– working jointly with other sectors, which accounts for the way they think, learn, organize themselves, live, and participate in cultural and political life, is greatly overdue.

**Normal schools: a steadfast paradigm**

As suggested by the study, normal schools represented a steadfast initial training model for aspiring teachers as demonstrated by the fact that they governed the training programmes for over a century. Additionally, consultations revealed that initial teacher training is still associated with normal schools. Some continue to vindicate these schools and the training they impart, advocating their commitment and vocation building capacities.

The liberal state gave birth to normal schools, as part of its public education crusade. Normal schools, which embodied the learning ideals represented the foundations which supported the educational systems which, in turn, were key elements in the emergence and consolidation of Latin America’s national states. The term “normal” deserves further study, since it seems to reverberate with the legitimacy of civilization and jurisprudence; in fact, in some countries for better than a century the teacher’s official designation was that of a “national normal teacher” blending in two important connotations: national state and law. Normal schools, were part of the 19 century liberal movement for the advancement of a public, free, compulsory and secular education; they also vindicated education as a function of the State, and placed the full responsibility and the mission of disseminating it, on the shoulders of public officials.

In this respect, the creation of public schools also implied the emergence of public teachers. In terms of objectivity and probity, the image of this civil servant departs sharply from that of the private tutor. Schools as institutional and differentiated spaces; the emphasis on discipline; the emergence of two distinct roles: teacher-students; the importance of acquiring language in all its linguistic and expressive richness; the professionalization of teachers and the preservation of learning within the educational system (through training programmes) rather than at the hands of individual teachers; teachers as agents in a system guided by the tenets of popular education “educate each one according to his/her capacity”, with all the fragmentation this entails; the tendency to establish a homogeneous educational system propagated by an equally homogenous staff, endowed with a transmitting code: these are
the elements which, in the mind of Sarmiento, comprise the heart of normal schools.

Clearly, normal schools form part of public education initiatives which, in the particular case of the liberal state, consisted mainly of regular primary education intended for the 6-7 and 12-14 year old groups, which were granted priority status when categorized as “school-aged population”. This new institutionality gave rise to specialized personnel, learning resources, funding, and an *ad hoc* instruction site: the school.

The professionalization of teachers became indissolubly linked to the public ambit and particularly to regular primary education; teaching had to be regulated by banning from its midst improvisation, the intervention of individuals who felt entitled to teach just because they happened to know more than the apprentices and, worse, who did so in private places not suitable to educational undertakings. One of the leading motives behind the issuance of public diplomas –State accreditations– was the defense of the institution, the implementation of regulatory measures before the arbitrary and subjective nature of the private supply, the creation of an objective, transparent and recognizable order; in short, its public nature.

At the same time, the creation of a public educational space brought about not only fragmentation but increased opportunities for the population at large. Even if playing with marked cards, public instruction had an undeniable democratizing effect. Teachers, primary schools and normal schools represented the agents and the agencies that made it possible. Within this context, normal schools became associated with ministries of education to a far greater degree than they did with universities, and received the strong influence of the pedagogical theories in vogue in Europe and North America; during the second half of the 19 century, some governments even hired teachers from the United States and Germany.

In this respect, we would like to share one more reflection: what have normal schools contributed to the production of pedagogical knowledge? were normal schools knowledge-elaborating centres from the start? if so, when did they stop and under what conditions?

The assumption made here, is that the Latin American normal school was an implementer of primary education; consequently, from its very beginnings it functioned not only as a teaching institution but, as a teaching institution for teachers, rather than a research centre. This trait prevailed in time, while universities kept a rein on research. Furthermore, it is our contention that the elements which contributed to the emergence of Latin America’s pedagogy, came from the fringes, from non-formal education, from a liberating literacy learning (Freire would be one of the great names associated with this regional pedagogy).

### Normal schools and their historical evolution

While in some countries normal schools proliferated and their supply was subsequently transferred or transformed to accommodate a hierarchic arrangement, in others a few schools held the exclusivity on initial teacher training.

On the other hand, some countries accomplished tertiarization in a stepwise manner and with the aid of transition plans. In other countries, transfer processes to higher education were materialized in one fell swoop. A third group of countries, however, has yet to attempt this transfer, a fact that has given rise to spirited debates.

However, the general trend points to tertiarization and the growing heterogeneity of the supply, as well as the formation of differentiated training circles within the various countries, although in a few the supply has remained monopolistic. History also puts it stamp on these processes: thus, in some countries normal schools make their appearance in the mid 19 century, the early part of the 20 century or perhaps the 60’s, 70’s or 80’s. Still others are at the implementation stages or waiting to introduce the reforms that will make them possible.
Hierarchy or loss

The following tendencies may be inferred through the comparative study of the evolution normal schools underwent in the individual countries: basically urban institutions; institutions segregated by gender during a relatively long period of time, and in some countries by location, i.e. rural-urban (normal schools intended for the training of female teachers versus male teachers; normal schools for rural teachers versus urban teachers); post-primary schools lacking equivalence with the secondary educational level; belated integration of the teaching career to secondary education, along with circumscribing professional training (2 to 3 years) to the second cycle of middle education.

This was construed by some as an attempt to establish a hierarchic arrangement, and by others as a loss of pedagogical training specificity; in general terms, normal schools—after being a handful of prestigious institutions—swiftly increased their numbers, which following sustained growth reached—in some countries—the level of massive supply; although the number of normal schools grew in proportion to the overall development of the educational system, their expansion was more significant in countries governed by federal regimes.

On the other hand several countries, in the name of quality and rationalization, reduced the number of normal schools or simply concentrated them on a single higher education normal school. Others, in addition to changes in study plans, either blended all middle level normal schools into one (a higher education normal school with more than one branch), or incorporated them into universities. Furthermore, tertiarization in some countries has not yet taken place.

It should be noted that tertiarization has stripped normal schools of the monopoly on initial teacher training, with the accompanying fragmentation of the supply and the materialization of new initial training institutions. In some countries, the normal schools that had been transferred to higher education levels added to their career repertoire, technical and post-secondary studies. Furthermore, in the wake of normal school tertiarizations new fragmentations took place within the ambit of higher education.

Based on the information provided by each country, “evolution models” for normal schools were constructed which spanned the 1960 and 1995 period. Focusing on initial and final stages, and disregarding intervening processes, three different evolution models are identified:

– A process that culminated in the final closing of normal schools and the transfer of their competencies to the university; this model was implemented in only one country (Chile), as a result of the military coup that disrupted democratic institutionality in 1973. At present, initial teacher training is imparted in universities and professional institutes (higher education non-university institutes);

– A model that kept normal schools at the middle level of education. In a few countries normal schools continue to operate at this level (six countries: Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama); that is, tertiarization has not taken place. Some sub-groups are evidenced here, the product of the restructuring processes a few of these countries are undergoing. Others are entering the debate stages; in all cases, tertiarization hangs in the air;

– The tertiarization model of normal schools: in the great majority of countries, normal schools were transferred from the middle to the higher level of education (thirteen countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Uruguay); Colombia, where tertiarization is in-progress, is the likely fourteenth member. This last model, which involved most of the countries of the region, entailed at least three different processes:

– The concentration of middle level normal schools on a single Higher Education Normal School, at a non-university level (one country, Dominican Republic).
The transference of normal schools from middle to a higher non-university level gave rise to various types of institutions: higher education normal schools, institutes of higher education (nine countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, El Salvador, Mexico, Uruguay, Paraguay). This process includes four variants ranging from the restructuring of normal schools to create Higher Education Normal School to their transformation into institutes of higher education, and a host of intermediate modalities such as the transfer of normal schools from the middle to the higher level of education. In some instances these processes involved either granting other institutions authorization to participate in teacher training activities, imparting upgrading courses to normal school teachers, or assigning new educational tasks to normal schools. In some countries, the transfer of normal schools corroborated the existence of a monopolistic initial teacher training regime; the differences within this group of countries are marked, comprising variant and sub-variants in a highly heterogeneous matrix.

The incorporation of normal schools to the university level (Costa Rica) or the transformation of normal schools into institutes with university status (Cuba) or into institutes of higher learning which are subsequently united through a University of Pedagogy (Venezuela; UPEL) and share the supply of initial teacher training with other universities and non-university institutes of higher learning. Within this last group (three countries: Costa Rica, Cuba and Venezuela) different combinations can be observed which relate to the presence or absence of a monopolistic training criterion. This last process, which after one or several steps accomplishes the transition from normal schools to the university, is both dynamic and homogenizing, since it leads to full tertiarization through its various modalities leads to a full tertiarization.

Reform models

The incorporation of two variables—the institutional situation of normal schools at the time of change and the presence or absence of other training institutions—gives a more comprehensive perspective of the scenario. Based on the new data four reform models can be identified:

The conservation model (six countries: Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama); normal schools remain at the middle level between 1960 and 1995. However, in two of these countries (Brazil and Panama) normal schools now share teacher training with universities. In Colombia, normal schools are being restructured into higher education normal schools, while the universities have an active participation in the professional training of practicing normal school teachers (mainly those with a bachelor’s degree); in this model, which preserves the institutional arrangement of normal schools, the presence of universities loom in the horizon.

The tertiarization towards non-university higher education models (seven countries: Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela, Uruguay) which involves middle level normal schools moving towards non-university institutes of higher learning. In three of these countries (Cuba, Uruguay, Paraguay) said institutes monopolize teacher training activities. In Cuba, although these institutes have been given university status, they have retained their autonomy and are not a part of a pedagogic university’s faculty or school. In the four remaining countries, universities and institutes either emerge simultaneously (El Salvador, Ecuador, Peru) or the institutes become universities of pedagogy (Venezuela, UPEL). Here too, for most countries universities are part of the horizon; interestingly, the tertiarization process in most of these countries (Peru and Ecuador are the exceptions) got under way later than 1975.

The hierarchic model for normal schools (four countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Mexico,
Dominican Republic) associated with a deeply rooted normal tradition. Here, the idea is to transfer normal schools from a middle level to higher education level, through the granting of new functions or conferring upon them the status of higher education normal schools. In Argentina, reformed normal schools share the initial teacher training activities with universities. However, universities are not the leading teacher training institutions. In Bolivia, Mexico and The Dominican Republic, universities train normal school teachers or non degreed teachers; in Bolivia and Mexico, universities offer upgrading courses to practicing teachers and are authorized to award bachelor’s degrees. In The Dominican Republic they are authorized to form bachelor degree holders, upgrade normal school teachers and confer master’s degree to administrators. Finally, the hierarchic model does not follow a chronological pattern. While in Argentina and Bolivia it was implemented prior to 1975, in Mexico and The Dominican Republic is a much more recent occurrence, namely, 1984 and 1995, respectively.

The university-oriented model (two countries: Costa Rica and Chile) is diametrically different from all others. In the Costa Rica of the 60’s, the University School of Pedagogy (former reformed normal school) coexisted with post-secondary normal schools; in 1973, normal schools are transferred to the domain of universities and, since then, the latter have monopolized initial teacher training. Concurrently, in Chile, middle level normal schools co-exist with universities and together begin training teachers; this co-existence holds until 1974 when normal schools—which had already been transferred to the higher education level in 1967— are finally shut down. The teacher training task is taken up first by the universities and then by the universities plus the non-university institutes of higher learning; however, by law the former are the only institutions competent to do so. Interestingly, both in Chile and Costa Rica long before normal schools died out (were either closed or incorporated), universities were already engaging in initial teacher training activities, a presence that is still felt in the teaching tradition. In these countries, the university-oriented transition begins early, in the 40’s for Costa Rica and in the 60’s for Chile.

How does this new classification contribute to teacher training efforts? Basically in two ways: it highlights the strong ties to tradition that characterized these institutions prior to any reform. Additionally, it harbingers the presence—to a greater or lesser degree— of the university in the immediate horizon of most of the countries in the region.

**Unescapable evidence**

In short, tertiarization constitutes an unescapable evidence: in 1995, most of the countries in the region (thirteen out of nineteen) have undergone the tertiarization of their normal schools. The process is twofold: transfer to the higher education level or disappearance to make room for a different breed of institution. Tertiarization, however, is a far cry from being homogeneous: it took place in different decades and its processes were also differentiated, while it was implemented either stepwise or abruptly.

What type of normal school are we talking about? First, although by 1995 thirteen countries had undergone the tertiarization of their normal schools, in ten of them, these institutions persist albeit structurally reformed. On the one hand, out of ten countries which in 1995 had normal schools six of them have retained middle level normal schools (Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama), while the other four have created higher education normal schools (Argentina, Bolivia, Mexico, The Dominican Republic). Moreover, in two of these countries (Argentina and The Dominican Republic) higher education normal schools have assumed the responsibility for teacher training.

The persistence of normal schools in the region implies—for most of the countries which have adopted this stance— both the preservation
of a secondary level school model, and the decision not to incorporate other types of institutions into initial teacher training programmes. However, in those countries where middle level normal schools persisted, already in 1995, restructuring towards a higher educational level was under way (as in Colombia’s case), or at least tertiarization was a controversial topic, waiting to happen.

In terms of normal schools, “moving towards a university level” would seem to represent the predominant long-term tendency. However, the fragmentations observed in their midst and the crises affecting universities as a whole, support the view that initial teacher training has gained neither social nor academic legitimacy from this alliance. Confronted by the upward displacement of professional credentials, the incorporation of teaching careers into universities could be construed as part of the crisis that surrounds the very concept of “university”, and in particular its capacity to make distinctions. However, the tepid credibility placed by public opinion on teacher training could be more closely aligned to the crisis affecting the teaching profession, than to any discredit brought on university academic credentials.

**Structure of initial teacher training supply**

How are the differentiated initial teacher training circles manifested? In 1995, while nine countries have a training structure consisting of differentiated circles (Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Peru, Venezuela, Panama, Brazil, Nicaragua), the other ten exhibit considerably more homogeneous institutional structures, concentrated in only one level of the educational system and in only one type of institution (Cuba, Colombia, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Mexico, The Dominican Republic, Honduras, Guatemala: out of these, only three –Colombia, Honduras and Guatemala– concentrate the supply at the middle level).

This homogeneity, however, is but apparent: in five out of the ten countries that concentrate initial teacher training at a single educational level and in only one type of institution, there are universities which offer professionalization programmes for non-degreed teachers, upgrading programmes (bachelor’s degree) for normal school teachers or specialization programmes (Mexico, The Dominican Republic, Colombia, Honduras, Bolivia). We are witnessing the establishment of a new hierarchy that also welcomes the new fragmentations. Likewise, in 1995, in more than half of the countries (nine) the universities are participating actively in initial teacher training initiatives.

Participation may take variegated forms; while in some countries where normal schools are highly traditional the university supply is marginal (Argentina, 1%) in others, universities concentrate the lion’s share of the supply (Chile) or all of it (Costa Rica). Additionally, in most countries (fifteen) university and non-university higher education level institutions do participate in initial teacher training activities. This information confirms that despite fragmentation, the tertiarization process has spread widely.

The key evidence set out by the regional study can be summarized in two words: “tertiarization with heterogeneity”. Thus, differentiated training circles were born, while children became the legitimate educational subjects of basic instruction. The transfer of programmes towards higher education levels and the internal fragmentation of the supply (fragmentation evidenced between and within levels, and among institutions) are the unique features of the last decades. However, these transformations are inserted in a scenario which has shown a relatively strong persistence during the century: the training of teachers –within the broadest interpretation of life-long education– who will educate the new generations, while overlooking the importance of training primary or basic education teachers capable of teaching youths and adults who have yet to finish formal schooling.

Although most initial teacher training
programmes remain true to the school tradition, their transfer to higher education levels clearly represents a significant cultural change. However, this change has not aroused the social interest anticipated, and public opinion has turned a blind eye to its repercussions. A relatively well-disseminated notion is that, in the last twenty years, initial training has not only failed to advance but it has remained tethered and, has even backslid—with respect to normal schools—both in terms of coherence and effectiveness.

If use is made of Blat Gimeno and Marín Ibañez’s global research indicators to characterize initial teacher training in 1995 (positioning in the educational system and years of training, UNESCO, 1980), it may be seen that for twenty countries (while available, and at times contradictory, data exists for seventeen others), the beginning age for compulsory education remains at around age six, the number of years to train teachers fluctuates between 2 to 5, while averaging at around 3-4, (with important differences even within countries) and the total number of school years required to graduate falls somewhere in the neighbourhood of 15 years. Normal schools represent a minority while there is a marked predominance of tertiary institutions, which is not the case with universities.

In summary, taking the 1969-1975 period as a landmark, initial training for primary school teachers has risen steadily in terms of years of schooling; and, despite a change of educational referent, from primary to basic, this trend has been characteristic of the region for the last two decades. This change also brings along an increase in compulsory grades, roughly 2 to 3. However, regional fragmentations have become more critical. While in one group of countries normal schools have been preserved, in others initial training for basic education teachers has been the responsibility of higher education since the 70’s.

This fragmentation of institutions and quality standards is also seen within the countries themselves. In a study conducted by Rust and Dalin (1990) involving 24 developing countries, initial teacher training is observed to remain unchanged since the 70’s, hovering at around 3 years of schooling and 13 years of total schooling. This study also points to the profound regional and national differences which caution against making sweeping generalizations.

Another interesting difference uncovered by this piece of research is that only 3 out of the 24 countries involved, exhibit diversified curricula, being uniformity the rule for the rest.

If the trends identified in this study were comparable to those detected in Latin America, the region could stand to gain positive advantages in terms of more curricular flexibility and tertiarization.

**Sustained process**

The upgrading in initial teacher training observed in the 1975-1995 period represents a sustained transfer to higher education accompanied by growing institutional and curricular heterogeneity. In 1975, the programmes of only six countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador and Peru) were inserted in the higher levels of education—university and non-university—, while the remaining 13 countries relied on middle level programmes imparted through normal schools. Twenty years later, however, only 4 countries (Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) had retained this last modality while 2 others exhibit differentiated circles at two educational levels (middle and higher, combining middle level normal schools with universities: Brazil and Panama); most countries (thirteen) offer programmes inserted exclusively in the higher levels of education (Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, The Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela).

Consequently, it may be concluded that in thirteen countries initial teacher training is found strictly at the higher levels of education, in two more, higher education initial training
circles co-exist with middle level programmes, and in the remaining four, institutions are concentrated exclusively at the middle level.\(^5\)

The increase in the number of years of schooling observed in initial teacher training programmes during 1975-1995, represents an indicator which supports the tertiarization hypothesis and demonstrates the extent to which the growth of prior schooling may prove to be a determining factor. In 1975, the region’s average number of school years for accessing initial teacher training programmes was ten; professional studies lasted another three (average for the region) and the total number of school years for the graduating teacher was thirteen (“total number” is defined as the number of years elapsed between primary school and graduating as a full-fledged teacher). Two decades later, the regional average for accessing initial training has risen to eleven, professional studies demand another 3.5 to 4 years –depending on the study plan– and total number of schooling fluctuates between 14 and 15.5 years, also based on the study plans which were used as referents. Likewise, a country by country analysis of this twenty years, taking into consideration the various circles co-existing in their midst, the total number of years devoted to school upon graduation was found to exceed 19, in sixteen countries.

Colombia, Guatemala and Honduras constitute exceptions to this trend; in Nicaragua’s case, although normal schools are still operational, one of the study plans has been increased in 1 year, as compared to 1975; in Brazil, increases are accounted for by the participation of universities that offer 4-year study programmes, as opposed to normal schools which programmes have been kept at 3 years.

A country by country analysis of the duration of teachers’ professional studies, shows that in 12 countries the tendency has been to increase, in 3 to decrease, remaining unchanged in the rest; for its part, previous schooling was seen to rise in 11 countries, holding steady in the remaining countries.

Based on this information, the hypothesis advanced by the present study is the following: professional training, measured in terms of school years, shows a slight alteration between 1975 and 1995 (the longest study programmes may extend their duration 3 or 4 years); however, given their current insertion in the educational system, 3 or 4 years in 1995 are not equivalent to the same number of 1975 years, since most countries have moved up to higher education levels. Along these lines, between 1975-95, previous schooling augments in 1 year, an increment that proves enough to make a difference however, and corroborates that most countries have in fact transferred training to the higher educational levels. Moreover, these changes take place within an educational system where compulsory schooling has risen to eight or nine years, from six.

Consequently, it is our contention that the strength of initial teacher training programmes in the 90’s, lies not only in their professional specificity but also in the fact that they are part of a curricular proposal where compulsory schooling has expanded, and secondary education is an entrance requirement in the great majority of the countries (in thirteen countries where training is inserted in the higher levels of education, and in the circles of higher education from the other three countries that rely on mixed systems).

The nature of tertiarization

One last question that needs answering; what kind of tertiarization are we talking about? What is its nature? Has it brought about qualitative change in training schemes or is it just a formal hierarchical arrangement supported on the principle of schooling as a knowledge measuring-stick?

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5 Although included in this group are Nicaragua, with differentiated access to initial training, contingent on passing the common cycle of secondary education or completing secondary education, and Colombia where tertiarization is under way.
The “upgrading” of initial teacher training programmes occurs at a time of expansion for Latin America and the Caribbean. This is not a mere coincidence. It is consistent with the idea of providing a territory for an ever-growing school system, before sowing the seeds of learning and watching knowledge bloom. In this upgrading of training, in most countries the universities have not participated as actively as tertiary non-university institutions; furthermore, a fracture line is beginning to form between State-coordinated tertiary institutes and those universities which retain variable degrees of autonomy.

In the region, the upgrading of initial training for basic education teachers may be better explained in terms of previous schooling rather than professional training, although in most countries the latter has increased, and in some, considerably so. According to available data, the average number of years involved in professional training (3 years in 1975 and 3 to 4 years in 1995) has increased to a lesser extent than the total number of school years (13 years in 1975 and 15 years in 1995). This is the result of two phenomena: in most countries, compulsory schooling has increased, while professional training has risen up to 5 years in some countries, but has remained between 2 or 3 years in others. The moderate rise (in regional average) experienced by professional training between 1975 and 1995, not only accounts for national specificities, but it also conceals an important difference: the transfer of programmes to the tertiary level. The current heterogeneity of the initial training supply for basic education teachers, imperils the creation of a national training system, and warrants a more thorough study.

This situation, with its accompanying host of manifestations and loss of common objectives, is shared by most of the countries in the region. This fact has been established by most governments through their own assessments. Heterogeneity is also present within the countries themselves. An evident example of this dual heterogeneity is the educational level of programmes and the duration of study plans. For instance: in Argentina, teacher training programmes are tertiary and study plans fluctuate between 1.5 and 4.5 years, even when 53 per cent of the institutions have average study plans of 2.5 years and 27 per cent has 3-year plans. In other words, in 80 per cent of the cases, study plans average between 2.5 and 3 years.

In Chile, programmes have a tertiary nature and study plans fluctuate between 5 and 3.5 years, albeit in most institutions these only extend 4 or 4.5 years. In Honduras and Nicaragua, plans last 3 years and they are inserted in the middle level. The same holds true for Panama, except that here three universities offer 3 to 4-year teacher training programmes.

In Costa Rica, teacher training programmes last seven years (including bachelor’s degree) and are inserted in the higher educational level (universities). In Cuba, programmes last 5 years and are also inserted in the higher educational level.

Apparent similarities in the educational supply are worth mentioning. A case in point: in Chile the educational supply—at first glance—seems quite homogeneous, since all institutions are higher level entities; furthermore, 62 per cent of the tertiary institutions are universities (18 universities and 11 professional institutes). However, higher education is so fragmented—a trend replicated at the level of initial training for basic education teachers—that the training imparted by the universities is not equivalent.

In Argentina too, what appears to be a homogeneous supply turns out to be fairly heterogeneous: although, not unlike Chile, all teacher training institutions are higher education entities, this apparent homogeneity conceals the co-existence of various types of initial training institutions for basic education teachers, higher education normal schools, non-university institutes of higher learning, universities, higher education institutes which incorporate technical careers, and others. In some cases, Chile’s for instance, the causes of present heterogeneity date
back to the overall reform of the university system in the early eighties. Three sub-systems resulted from this reform (universities, professional institutes and technical training centres), all offering a different quality of supply to an equally divided population on the basis of socio-economic status.

Likewise, higher education was made the object of market regulations which banned “pedagogy in basic education” careers from the universities and dispersed them among mixed-quality tertiary institutions.

**Magnitude of the supply**

Another element intervening in the heterogeneous nature of the supply, is its magnitude. The magnitude of the supply may vary from countries which have as few as 3 universities capable of providing initial teacher training (Costa Rica), finding mid-range values in countries like Honduras with less than 15 normal schools, to countries where more than 500 teacher training institutions make up the supply (Argentina, 834 institutions, out of which 1 per cent are universities; Mexico, 473 higher education normal schools and 74 Units of the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional).

However, the magnitude of the supply is better understood when observing enrolment rates: whereas in some countries that rely on a limited number of institutions, relative enrolment rates are high, in others where the number of institutions is higher, their enrolment is proportionately lower (for example, The Dominican Republic, 3 institutions and 1 350 students; Panama, one normal school with 850 students, in addition to Panama’s National University and other private universities –no enrolment data available; Chile, with 29 institutions and 3 500 students).

Unfortunately, there is insufficient information to estimate the regional rates of enrolment of initial training programmes for basic education teachers; for most countries this datum is inaccurate or non-existent; in countries with a large number of institutions, like Argentina, this information is not available and to obtain it, an *ad hoc* census –in progress– will be needed.

Finally, the administrative dependence and the type of degree granted also add to the heterogeneity of the Latin American supply. While in some countries the supply is strictly public (Cuba), in others the State still leads (Argentina, public institutes represent 70 per cent). Among a third group, private training centres are more numerous (Chile), culminating with El Salvador where all initial teacher training supply is in private hands.

In terms of degrees, there is no single degree used across the Latin American region; degrees may be variegated starting from normal teacher (national normal teacher in some countries) versus general basic education teacher, and integral education teacher. Within most countries, this heterogeneity is also evident. To complicate things further, there are projects under way which contemplate the creation of a Faculty for Infancy-Related Careers (Chile, University of Concepción) which offers a cycle common to three careers (basic education, nursery school and differential teaching) in addition to a modular system that facilitates earning one or more specialty diplomas. One last pertinent observation has to do with the fact that the regional supply of initial teacher training for basic education, seems to be children-oriented or, by default, fails to encompass the population as a whole (children, youths and adults) as legitimate basic education learners. The inclusion of training that prepares for bilingual intercultural teaching in initial teacher training for basic education, is not a recurrent concern (with the possible exceptions of Ecuador and Peru), based on official documents.

However, most initial teacher training programmes for basic education would seem to be shifting towards the presenter style of teaching while placing a strong emphasis on constructivism. Additionally, attempts at integrating “general” and “pedagogical” training have taken the form of successive and permanent reforms to the study programmes.
In terms of professional practice, the prevalent trend points to changing terminal and intensive practices, considered something “severed from the rest”, into a permanent, transversal and gradual component of initial training (beginning with observations and research at the school and culminating in an intensive classroom practice, called “internado” in some countries).

The role of the State covers a wide spectrum of participation. Although the “shadow” of a centralist welfare State, which in the past articulated normal schools, still insinuates itself, currently its presence may range from a centralized system working through a single type of training institutions, to the concept of the subsidiary State. Cuba and Uruguay, where the supply represented by higher education training institutes is relatively homogeneous, illustrate the first group; the other extreme is exemplified by Chile or El Salvador.

Interestingly, where the State regulates initial training activities the overall supply, or at least almost all of it, is public. Conversely, when the State does not regulate initial training, the overall supply is either private (El Salvador) or it is inserted in a State-funded organization which, however, does not ensure gratuitous education to the student (Chile). Mid way between these extremes—a centralized initial training supply versus one weakly regulated by the State— is the case of a Ministry of Education which coordinates fairly autonomous and institutionally diverse tertiary institutes, ensuring gratuitousness for public institutions (such is the case in Argentina, involving institutes which before being transferred to the provinces had a national character).

Likewise, countries where the supply is differentiated according to the various types of institutions, and the responsibility of the Ministries of Education lies with the coordination of non-university higher education training institutes, but excludes the universities (Ecuador, Peru). In these cases the supply is also free.

**Favourable changes**

Although initial training follows an expansion and fragmentation style not unlike that exhibited by the rest of the region’s educational systems, the favourable changes that have taken place in the last decades should be stressed, particularly their re-insertion at the highest educational level—higher education—which accredits the more complex types of instruction and enjoys the highest social prestige.

From the standpoint of the school actors, namely, teachers, students, parents, and others, higher education accreditation—and in numerous countries university accreditation—has a symbolic importance we cannot afford to overlook. It also presupposes a powerful element that could be resorted to during salary or contract negotiations, and throughout the teaching profession.

Within this context, the transfer of initial training towards higher level of education—in those countries where the process has yet to occur—represents a vindication legitimized from the realities portrayed in this paper.

The question is whether the hierarchic arrangement implemented in most of the countries in the region has improved the quality and relevance of initial training or even the social image of the teaching profession, to trigger positive changes in the labour condition of teachers and in the social demand for initial training.

Reality shows that tertiarization has co-existed with both the deterioration of the teaching profession and its social image. Furthermore, within the tertiarization framework, enrolment in initial teacher training careers has exhibited a downtrend—or remained stagnated— in most of the countries in the region. In this respect, the social demand for initial training would be more closely aligned with the teaching profession crisis than with the hierarchic arrangement imposed on initial training programmes.

Due to lack of evidence, we decline to opine with respect to the relationship that would exist
between the new initial training hierarchy and changes in its quality. This question could be best answered from the field of research through participative efforts in training centres, a task we are hoping to embark on in a very near future.

We can, however, make some contributions. On the one hand, higher education in Latin America is fragmented with respect to the quality and types of training offered (general versus professional) and to the social homogeneity exhibited by its members; consequently, insertion in this level constitutes no guarantee of the social relevance or professionalism of general training. On the other hand, the present state of initial teacher training is characterized by a severe heterogeneity in terms of the institutions, educational levels, and programmes that share a systematic educational space, dubbed by observers “initial teacher training”. Diversity stemmed from a common root—normal schools.

It is important to note that the “training system” concept is not applicable to initial training; within the majority of countries differentiated training circles co-exist at the same educational level or through combining programmes from various educational levels. Lastly, the hierarchic arrangement imposed on initial training is a necessary but not sufficient condition vis-a-vis the structural crisis of the teaching profession. Furthermore, this crisis dampens the possible impact this arrangement could have had on the quality of initial training, basic education and the social position of teachers.

We wish to submit the following argument: how socially visible has the hierarchic arrangement been? To what extent has public opinion, even education specialists, perceived this change? Could it be assumed that the teaching profession crisis is to blame for this discrepancy? Once again, initial training is inferred to be part of an action system.

Based on the secondary information gathered, it would seem that training institutions are teaching centres with little or no research and/or extension activities. In this respect, training centres seem to have existed at the fringes of pedagogic knowledge production for an expanded community of educators. On the other hand, the upgrading of initial training has occurred hand in hand with the deterioration of the teaching profession partially brought about by structural adjustment policies—being teachers’ salaries one of the variables to be adjusted—and the weakness of teacher training promotion initiatives.

In this context, the consequences initial training tertiarization may have had on the teaching profession becomes difficult to determine, since the social position teachers have been thrust into works as an intervening factor.

Finally, along with the tertiarization of initial teacher training and a host of small and somewhat sporadic achievements, spaces have been created and projects launched, guided by a new action spirit: programmes are now defined at the very centres, workshops are inspired on practical experiences, training is imparted by education workers, teacher unions participate actively in training centre councils and play an intellectual role in support of the vindication of their profession.

**Recommendations**

Rather than offering a list of recommendations, an overall view of the situation seems indicated. The establishment of a new institutionality for training centres which would now become teaching, research and community development centres integrated to a web of networks, appears highly advisable. Concurrently, the creation of training centres of national scope would facilitate absorbing the diversity that characterizes our population and working with those elements held in common. Within this framework, it is possible to visualize the materialization of interrelations among regional national training centres, in harmony with civil society (particularly with teacher unions and parliaments), and the articulation of regional and subregional...
integration efforts, following in the footsteps of MERCOSUR, Convenio Andrés Bello and PALATINO. Issues of concern for the immediate future which, consequently, need to be addressed now are the adoption of a regional system of professional and academic equivalences for teaching credentials, and the implementation of measures designed to safeguard its social relevance.

Another aspiration along these lines, is to work with a multiplicity of inter-communicating actors: training centres’ teachers and students, practicing teachers, teacher unions, parliaments, and ministries at their various operational levels. A specially important aspect, is the creation of new ways of teaching and learning wherein reflection from practice and authoring assume a pivotal role. Accepting uncertainty as part of the teaching profession, and having a strong inclination towards lifelong learning, constitute two of the features that should be promoted from an institutionality that has made them a part of its structures.

Finally, the proposed recommendations are not restricted to training centres, but are extensive to the very lives of the players: hence, the concept of higher salaries, building and protecting the teaching profession, caring for the health and well-being of educators through improved housing, cultural traveling, exchange agreements, community service activities and individual and collective authoring. A new educational culture and regional pedagogy could be built, supported on these proposals. We coincide with the already systematized proposal of other professional groups in terms of “creating a new formative attitude” in teacher training (Ruz, editor, 1992).

However, this new attitude can not exist in a vacuum but must be underpinned by a reformed institutionality concerned not exclusively with social practices. We propose creating the conditions that will facilitate the implementation of a collaborative and open culture of training and, hence, of teaching and learning. In order to become a reality, this emerging culture requires the presence of civil society in the training effort, and, conversely a training that is responsible for its own social task.

Predicated on this premise, policy recommendations should be unified around the creation of something akin to an “Integrated Programme or System of promotion of the teaching profession”, geared towards teacher trainers, and future and practicing educators, where initial teacher training is freely linked to permanent training; a virtual coordination space, rather than an organization socially established for the promotion of this field of endeavor.

In this respect, a set of actions focalized on the cultural change of training such as the following, is recommended:

– consultation with the various social sectors in order to redefine the work of the teacher;
– undertaking of institutional development and training projects in teacher training institutions and schools;
– design and start-up of interactive teaching and learning interactive models and reflection workshops inserted in the professional practice;
– design and start-up of diversified opportunities for the teaching career and upgrading of the wage scale.

All these actions, should represent components of a unique teacher professionalization process, and one of promotion of their social, economic and cultural status.

If, in the short-run, initial teacher training is inserted in a regional process intended to review the dead end compartments, the mutual prejudices among the peoples, and the history as written by the vanquishers; if, in the short-run, initial training contributes to the launching of curricula that contemplate regional integration, its kinship with a culture of peace, will become evident for everyone. And then, we too would be inching closer to that type of school where learners feel at home, are respected for what they are, and where parents and the community form part of the educational institutionality.
By way of closing

The conclusions derived from this study are flowing currents which during the course of last year, have already been altered by the evolution of the institutions, and our own professional and life histories. Training institutions are undergoing change while new institutions have made their presence felt in some countries, and in others the restructuring process of normal schools is picking up speed.

The legal framework of training processes is also undergoing revision, while their institutionality is still closely linked to tradition. Participation in regional and international seminars on training facilitated the validation of the strategy adopted by the FIDEB project—which falls in line with the principle of triangulating and integrating initial teacher training, on-going education and research. This principle has been advanced in international seminars by specialists from other world regions. Field visits and regional consultations opened up dialogue spaces with those responsible for teacher training, principals and educators in the various training centres.

Through these exchanges, we learnt that the authorities of some countries deem the transfer of training institutions to tertiary levels as something not feasible; observed the climate prevalent on some normal schools where everyday activities were still governed by the bell, and basic, middle and normal schools shared at the same building and educational space. In normal schools and universities we talked to teachers concerned about studying their own practices and working with the community. Through the participation of teacher trainers and educators in training workshops, we also learnt that the eagerness to learn and the fear of implementing change go hand in hand. The power of reflection workshops to spearhead reforms were amply confirmed in the year that went by. Finally, and as a result of this exchange, the study’s findings and fragments of personal and institutional life have become inextricably woven.
Today, the life and accomplishments of Paulo Freire seem inexhaustible. In them, we find genuine portrayals of humanity at its best. Humanity, expressed not only as love for men and women or as a commitment to the underprivileged, but as social and educational proposals and actions, historically purposive.

The sadness that shrouds his death, reaches beyond those of us who were honoured by his friendship and touched by his message, to countless others, teachers and popular promoters who, enlightened by his teachings, summoned the courage to assume a fighting stance on the side of human dignity and engage in respectful dialogue with whom Freire called the oppressed. In a region such as Latin America, where the excluded and the poor abound, the pedagogy of autonomy and hope advanced by Freire throughout his life, has become an essential and undeniable part of the “possible dream” of a society where equal opportunity reigns, and education represents the cornerstone of individual and collective freedom.

His first experiences as an educator (1964) in Recife and Brazil, his native country, cost him expatriation after 75 days of imprisonment. His admonition that students should understand their own inner reality as part of their learning activities prompted the ruling military government to brand him “an ignoramus and a revolutionist”. Naturally, following this episode his awareness-building method and discourse were disseminated and acknowledged by the world at large, first in Chile where for a period of four years he worked among farmers and agricultural specialists, and then at Harvard University’s Study Centre for Development and Social Change, where he taught for one year. As of 1970, he contributed importantly to the work of Geneva’s World Council of Churches. Starting in 1975, his short albeit enriching stint in Africa, brought a universal perspective to his work while providing him with an opportunity to work with the popular segments of Guinea-Bissau, Sao Tomé and Principe, Mozambique and Angola. In 1980 he returns to Brazil where, in an attempt to “relearn” his native country, he adopts a political stance. The year 1989 represents a landmark in Freire’s life: following a period of consultancy to various brazilian state and non-government organizations, he is appointed Secretary of Education for Sao Paulo, the country’s most populated prefecture. These experiences rekindled his skepticism in terms of obliterating the sectarian differences between right and left, and convinced him of the immediacy with which some of his followers regarded the strategies intended to eradicate oppressive economic, political, and cultural structures.

It would not be inaccurate to claim that Paulo Freire is the widest read Latin American educator of this century. His numerous publications have been translated into eighteen
languages. His classical works “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” or “Education an Exercise in Freedom”, were enriched by myriad notes, articles, lectures and books which inspired by a desire to communicate in a renewed and invigorating language, chose to combine profoundly vehement notions with boldness, diaphanousness and humor. His natural humbleness was repeatedly tested by over twenty universities across the world, which bestowed upon him the title of doctor honoris causa, and by organizations like UNESCO which awarded him the Jean Amos Comenius Medal in 1995, after having commissioned him with important tasks such as representing Latin America in the jury responsible for the annual presentations of the International Literacy Awards.

Federico Mayor, UNESCO’s Director General wrote the following memorable lines on the book entitled “Paulo Freire. Uma biobibliografia”, recently published by his closest collaborators:

“To invoke Paulo Freire’s name is to evoke gales of lucidity. To discover just and valorous whirlwinds of dissent soaring in the name of humanity’s trodden dignity. To emphasize the tenacious and serene vigil for the freedom of those oppressed, for education, for the mastery of the self. To reaffirm a heartfelt conviction that we must all partake of the great adventure implied in accessing knowledge and awakening the immense and emblematic potential that dwells in each human being. To invoke Paulo Freire’s name is tantamount to rising against the short-sightedness of economic reductionism and throwing wide open the door that leads to creativity and enterprise”.

Paulo Freire is gone, but not forgotten. His ideas, his example and his coherence will persist like so many bright and distant stars which can neither be bought nor sold in a world where technology and the market represent symbols of the fin-de-siècle. Paulo Freire left an imprint in the lives of many. He demanded an honest dialogue and tenderness towards children and adults as protagonists of a creative educational experience; he elicited respect through smiles and affection for those who were denied an opportunity to become educated; contributed, like few other men, to envisage the educational process as a collective construction wherein all of us are empowered to teach and to contribute to learning. He fought indefatigably for an effectual education that provides everyone, specially “the others”, the tools to become their own masters and critical of their selves and circumstances, as the cornerstone of an equitable society. His name will continue to be linked to the grandest dreams and utopias nurtured by our Latin America.

José Rivero. Regional specialist-UNESCO.
UNESCO’S INTERNATIONAL LITERACY AWARDS

At a meeting held in Paris between 7 and 11 July, the International Jury for Literacy Awards, accorded honours to programmes and personalities from three countries in the region: The International Association Award for Reading was granted to Sociedad Salesiana’s Don Bosco Roga Project, which promotes the re-insertion of Paraguayan street children, adolescents and illiterate and semi-literate adults into the family and society, through occupational training programmes.

Normas’s Award, Honourable Mention, went to Peru’s National Literacy Programme sponsored by this country’s Ministry of Education, in recognition of the efforts undertaken to successfully bring literacy to the very poor and to isolated ethnic groups, through a programme which combines intercultural bilingual education with occupational training and income generating activities.

Special appreciation was extended to Dominican Republic’s Arsenio Ureña, an entrepreneur who in addition to having devoted time and resources to literacy programmes in 52 communities has granted numerous university scholarships and brought to completion important reforestation and livestock programmes, as his way of contributing to community development.

LATIN AMERICAN AND THE CARIBBEAN PRESENT AT HAMBURG’S CONFINTEA V

The presence of our region was felt at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) held in Hamburg between 14 and 18 July, 1997. During the discussions, which enlisted the participation of 60 ministers of education and representatives of 240 NGOs for a total of 1,500 worldwide representatives, the fact was acknowledged that adult education could not leave behind the thousands of youths who never finished school. It should be noted, that a large number of indigenous persons and women were present among the attendees, who participated actively in the definition of the Declaration and the Agenda for the Future, adopted at the closing of the International Conference.

Colombia’s Minister of Education presented to the plenary session the Regional Report sanctioned at Brasilia. Chile’s “Ministra de la Mujer” addressed women’s plight in the region and in Chile at the Plenary and before a Special Panel, while Uruguay’s Minister of Education presented the region’s conclusion on the topics analyzed.

During the Conference, a heartfelt tribute was paid to the memories of the recently departed Paulo Freire (Brazil) and Dame Nita Barrow (Barbados), illustrious adult educators whose work has become known throughout the world.

One of the major agreements adopted, involves the consensual regional view that current institutions must be strengthened as a follow-up to CONFINTEA V, and objective that will be met by enhancing the work being undertaken by CREFAL and the REDALF network.

In terms of adult education, the Hamburg Declaration and the Agenda for the Future assert that “the informed and effective participation of men and women from all walks of life, will be necessary if humanity is to survive and overcome the challenges posed by the future”. As stated in the Declaration, “the challenges of the 21st century cannot be met by governments, institutions or organizations alone; the imagination, energy and ingenuity of everyone, as well as their full, vigorous and free participation in every aspect of life, will also be needed”. “The learning of youths and adults may acquire, will provide the principal means to significantly increase their creativity and productivity, in the widest possible sense of the expression, while becoming an essential condition for solving the perplexing and intertwined problems of a world buffeted by swift changes and growing complexities and risks”.

These two foundation papers, within which future action in this area must be framed, are available in Spanish at Santiago’s UNESCO/OREALC Office.
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