

## La concepción del indígena en el sistema educativo posrevolucionario

*The conception of the Indian education system in the postrevolutionary*

**Uriel Margarito Gaspar**

Universidad de Guadalajara

[urielgdl@yahoo.com](mailto:urielgdl@yahoo.com)

### Resumen

Los discursos educativos que aparecieron en las primeras publicaciones de la Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) hablan de dos poblaciones susceptibles de ser educadas: la rural —en la que se incluía a los indígenas y a los campesinos— y la urbana. En esta dicotomía, se presentaba al México rural, como una forma subalterna, frente a la hegemonía del creciente México urbano. El tema de esta investigación consiste en analizar la creación de una conceptualización sobre el indígena, a través de los discursos que se presentaron en la génesis de un modelo incorporativista educativo, cuyos efectos todavía tienen vigencia en la imagen actual de los indígenas. Con esta finalidad, he revisado los Boletines oficiales que la SEP publicó entre 1921 y 1930; la investigación se centra en ese lapso debido a que la educación fue tema de copiosos debates y escenario de diversos proyectos con los cuales se buscaba transformar la vida de los mexicanos. Debates y proyectos que se inscriben en un clima de intensa participación social, en el que políticos, intelectuales y diversos agentes educativos trataban de redimir al pueblo mediante la educación, buscando con ello hacer realidad algunas de las demandas sociales emanadas de la Revolución.

**Palabras clave:** Discursos, indígena, educación.

## Abstract

Educational discourses that appeared in the first publications of the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) speak of two populations likely to be educated: the rural-in which included the indigenous and peasant and urban. In this dichotomy, appeared to rural Mexico, as a subaltern form, facing the growing hegemony of urban Mexico. The theme of this research is to analyze the creation of a conceptualization about the indigenous, through the speeches that were presented in the genesis of a model educational incorporativista whose effects still apply to the current image of the Indians. For this purpose, I have revised the SEP Official Bulletins published between 1921 and 1930, the research focuses on this period because education was the subject of copious debates and scene of several projects which sought to transform the lives of the Mexicans. Debates and projects that are part of a climate of intense social participation, in which politicians, intellectuals and various educational agents tried to redeem the people through education, seeking to realize some of the social demands emanating from the Revolution.

**Key words:** Speeches, indigenous education.

**Reception Date:** January 2012

**Acceptance Date:** May 2012

---

## Introduction

Link (Jäger, 2003: 63) from a political perspective and asserts that the discourse allows the consolidation of power through institutional intervention. Jäger (2003) adds that the speech as an exercise of power that is given through individual and collective interaction, through which reality is socially accepted by an elite unfolds. This perspective helps to locate a critical stance on the discursive hegemony of indigenous policies. This would mean that from the official discourse, education for indigenous involves the exercise of a power that seeks to subdue ethnic groups to cultural homogenization, regardless truly its peculiarities.

Also contain the official discourse, beyond some minor differences, institutionalized what is education for indigenous image. This process of institutionalization would be done through the impact of the producers of a-intellectual discourse agents and officials of the

era, in contrast to the operational work of the agents-teachers and missionaries. Both positions will be integrated into a conception of the role of indigenous nation in the desired uniform at the time.

Through this work I intend to develop a thick description, to expose and to flesh out the meaning of official speeches to the gestation of a incorporativista model in formal education. Thick description involves stratification explained by the significant structures and through observing their value and role in the historical context (Geertz, 1992). Thus, I analyze the newsletters published by the SEP between 1921 and 1930 to explain ideas and concepts that have been proposed official discourses on the incorporation of indigenous peoples in a national cultural determined.

## **Content**

The conceptualization of the indigenous in the post-revolutionary period is analyzed from two perspectives. The first is the process of infantilization product of that feeling of giving the "Indian" qualities unique to children; that is, they were seen as primitive and helpless requiring protection paternalistic state to become "civilized Mexican citizens." The second refers to a defense of the indigenous, supported by a glorious pre-Columbian past, which had been truncated by the oppression from the Colony by the Spanish and then by the Creoles and mestizos.

## **PRIMITIVE INDIAN**

The State sees Indians as helpless requiring its protection to survive. The Indians were perceived as inferior individuals within the Mexican social scale. In the first step the president and the last was located ethnicities. Also homogenized all ethnicities into one, was irrelevant to know the origin of the different students, it was important to "mexicanizarlos" since despite being inhabitants of the territory seemed to be foreigners or strangers to the ways of the "Mexican".

Calles was considered movement leader "claim" of ethnic groups, as required the aid of the mestizos to remove them from their begging. The state paternalism reflected through government support programs. For example, in 1926 corn was given to the Tarahumara of Chihuahua to bring down the bad season; however, the Indians were conditioned to receive

"Ten liters of corn" extra day if they cooperated in the construction of a road; This measure sought to eradicate "the habit of begging" of indigenous groups. Even the fact that, despite the provision of corn was finished, the Tarahumara continued working and even lengthened the work was praised.

The main lines of action of the Indian government in question is the establishment of rural schools to civilize ethnicities, a project that the SEP monitored through the Department of Rural Schools. Vasconcelos was against them "special" educational treatment because, according to him, would take that stance exclude, rather than include them civilization. In fact, considered as a starting point the teaching of Spanish language so that they could learn to communicate with others and then enter the mestizo education system; with this, they could even aspire to higher education, as long as they met the same requirements as others. This thought stems from the firm belief that Vasconcelos ignorance of the Indians was not a socioeconomic and racial question, that is, its delay was the result of a lack of attention to their instruction. Therefore, Vasconcelos was convinced that education would open new doors within society.

I can not imagine that there is any difference between the ignorant and the ignorant Indian or English French peasant farmer ignorant: as soon as both are educated, auxiliaries become civilized life of their countries, and contribute, each in its measure , improving the world (Vasconcelos, 1923: 10).

The instruction of indigenous concerned not only academic issues but especially practical aspects. It was considered that lacked indigenous agricultural knowledge, so the Houses had lots to teach farming. This action meant that ethnic groups change their farming methods using new technologies, for once give fruit crops, the Indians would see how the implemented techniques were better.

Moisés Sáenz (1927: 496-519) on a visit to the Sierra de Puebla described the way of life of indigenous peoples as 'primitive'. This mote covered both their clothing, traditions, customs, agriculture. He attributed a lower standard of living for the region due to the methods of "Neolithic" high degree of alcoholism and crops. To Sáenz social organization of the indigenous was a simulation. There were chiefs, elders, clerks of courts, as well as

municipal presidents and council in headers, or representatives of the mayor in the villages. All were native except the chief and the secretaries who used to be teachers in schools, so they served as a means of communication between the indigenous and the chief. The chiefs of the Sierra used to be general of the militia, and were those who ruled the region.

The simulation Saenz spoke is that despite all indigenous governing bodies, who was the real authority was the chief. This simulation say Saenz was beneficial because the military had done an admirable job in supporting ethnic groups by building schools. However, it had all fallen to the side by the mismanagement of the government of the State of Puebla after the 1910 Revolution.

Puig (1926-2: 7), among many other characters of the time, highlighted the Indian detachment from material goods and social cohesion; elements that had facilitated their exploitation for long. Therefore, it was necessary to carry out a process of incorporation into civilization to eradicate marginalization suffered for centuries. Because of this abuse state action was deemed necessary to "educate" the Indians and keep them from being abused by other people and it was easy prey to be deceived.

Incorporating ethnicity was welcomed by foreign intellectuals like John Dewey, who praised the government's effort to make such an arduous task. He pointed out that the most important part of educational change was observed in Mexico rural education, which focused on indigenous found. This transformation in education was "the most important social experiments undertaken anywhere in the world" (Dewey 1926, 7). Dewey believed that a revolution in education beyond the incorporation of some groups sought as an end integration of a country. In contrast, the critical role played by the Church as he had secreted a large part of the population. About the creative capacity of indigenous highlighted his artistic virtue, insomuch that they thought they should stay away from today's standards, because I realized in rural areas had a fascinating peculiarity compared to the prototypes found in urban schools. However, applauded the government's education revolution, because they would have an essential element of which lacked the Mexicans, that is, the integration of a nation. Thus, indigenous is presented as an element of Mexico.

Although the intellectuals of the time supported the incorporation process through education, villagers were not always the same optimistic view of institutions. In many cases newsletters, such as the Otomi of Tetapango mentioned. In the report by the Director of the State of Hidalgo (S / A, 1927-3) resistance to the teachings received by the school stated. The Indians, despite speaking Spanish, retained their idiosyncrasies so they were "dirty, lazy and claims of educated people." There was also a problem of absence of students who preferred to go to work in the fields. Because of this, teachers work of interest to infants on school work requested and the "next generation" eradicate absenteeism in the classroom.

Gonzalo Mota (1927: 80) was reviewing the failure of rural schools in indigenous populations, were also caused by the bad image that gave the clergy. By the influence of the Church, schools were closed in Milpilllas, El Nayar and El Durazno; in that area, only the center of Providence remained in Mezquital thanks to the work of the principal intermediary between the military and those who took up arms. However, the hope of opening more schools in the area to counter the state of "ignorance" and "want" in which they lived and Cora Tepehuans be had.

Saenz (1927, p. 496-519) also detected that despite the efforts made mountains of Puebla, indigenous communities were not as tame as would, but noted "passive resistance" to the rural school. To prevent rejection of institutionalized education, took out several action plans. One of the most important was the education of indigenous children who later served as cultural brokers in your region, through the Indigenous Student House. Here students from their natural environment is isolating to learn to be civilized and the ideal was that they carried out this process at their home when they graduated. However, the aim of the center tend to like failure years later it was found that by instilling the love of a different civilization to the birth, students act like men "cults" and ceased to be Indians.

The first appearance of the students of the House of the Indian student at a public event took place during the celebrations made in commemoration of the Battle of May 5, 1862 During the ceremony, President Calles presumed "these are my Indians" (S / A, 1926-1: 97). In that event flags fifty primary schools were given, including the Casa del Estudiante Indígena. The following year two hundred students also participated in the celebration of the House on May 5, but this time only made a number of "human pyramids" requiring

physical skill (S / A, 1927-1: 100). An important aspect to note was the fact that the Indians had a strong stereotype that doing physical things were good; but also that "virtue" had to conform to the expected levels of "civilization."

In February 1928 a course was opened to train students in the Casa del Estudiante Indígena rural teachers in their communities of origin (S / A, 1928: 116-127). Managers teach the classes also made reports on the mental, physical, ethical capacities of students. Most agreed that they were "strong" with "character", but this made them easy to be exploited persons, also had the same intellectual capacity than others. About rural teachers training as the need was stressed to encourage them to continue with this profession and work in their home communities to transform socially and economically.

Puig questions about the suitability of the process of assimilation was done by "and civilized Indians", or, let people outside the community will be held. Argued that the failure to leave that task to the already indigenous, was that they were ashamed of their roots. For this reason, the mestizos were right to merge and integrate members of ethnic groups to the country, since they were proud of indigenous folklore and modern civilization people and could unite and form a "national soul." Significantly, despite their reflections on what happened to the Indians "civilized", considered the process that took place in the House of Indigenous student success.

Print media also exerted an important role in the design of the Indian. An example is given in the report by an inspector to visit a Chihuahua mixed rural school where both mestizos and Indians came; to make an examination of language and arithmetic, the latter answered better than the first. Can also see this same characterization in the headlines of the press: the newspaper "El Universal" published an article entitled "Progress of Small Tarahumara in Schools", the "Excelsior" newspaper titled "The Tarahumara Indians are equivalent and intelligent, "adding that" few months have learned to read and write, while mestizos do so with great difficulty and indecision "(S / a, 1924-2: 612-613). The above quote shows how indigenous thought was a backward and even seemed to be surprising to be "smart". Assimilation into society of these children through the acquisition of language is emphasized.

## **INDIGENOUS UNDERDOG**

In the far reaches of the Sierra Madre, near the town of Pueblo Nuevo mummified remains, adorned with well-crafted ornaments, were found so it was not attributable "to the degree of civilization of the local tribes" (S / A, 1926-4: 59), but resembled a technique Asian tribes. They could not belong to the present inhabitants of the region, because they were "primitive" people who lived in caves and with a changing and violent nature. With this fact, the trend was to glorify the ethnic past and belittle this is observed.

Puig Casauranc (1926-2) notes as a central point of educational problem to find appropriate mechanisms civilize ethnicities; stated that the two positions on which turned the concept of indigenous were wrong, both of whom extolled the greatness of ethnic groups, and those who believed in his isolation or extermination. Puig referred to the Indians in the following terms:

Indian with great virtues [...] with a past civilization amazing [...] garments of self-denial, spirit of renunciation, sacrifice, selflessness, true detachment from material goods detachment that makes him a constantly hero in combats and easy and docile servant of perpetual exploitation; Indian has fatally, as would a conglomerate of archangels who had suffered what he has suffered a thousand ills, some results of their own psychic and social life organization, and other direct consequences of fierce selfishness of foreign oppressors and Creoles and mestizos who have done [...] on them. But we have faith in the Indians nevertheless (Puig, 1926-2: 7).

Puig emphasized artistic skills of indigenous people, their physical and mental skills, and even pointed out that in his medical work had never received a "spiritual poverty" in them. Despite all these "virtues" Puig welcomed the results obtained in the Casa del Estudiante Indígena. Puig exemplified as a "miracle" the progress that had been achieved "Huichol" because with only two months in the House already showed "civilized" in photographs. The civilization that sought, at least for Puig, had as reference the European culture, to discuss progress because of Wixárika noted that "can not be distinguished by its smart appearance, Scandinavian children; as they had in his face and his whole body, expression, vivacity, attention, interest of any European child "(Puig, 1926-2: 13).

In a visit to inspect the Yaqui Sonora area in May 1926 he realized that people were not violent as believed (Puig, 1926-1: 175). Their categorization as aggressive people's justified by the distrust of "Yoris" (beyond their community people), who had tried to seize their lands since ancient times due to the large number of fertile ground for the practice of agriculture in the region. Furthermore, the severity with which the villagers getting drunk was punished, which believe the fact that all Indians are drunks for their "primitive" customs demystifies it was mentioned. Even it was noted that violent feature of ethnicity was not characteristic of them, but did so to defend themselves as they were used to being objects of slavery and marginalization, whereby populations as Yaqui, had taken up arms to protect their land.

Puig emphasized the glorious past of the Indians, while current conditions justified in their emotional and behavioral aspect, as well as centuries of oppression had lived and still living. The dispossession of indigenous lands was a practice that affected most of the ethnic groups.

Carlos Basauri, member of the Department of Anthropology, was the official "specialist" of the government in matters of anthropology, ethnography and linguistics. During the travel he did, noting that the state kept the indigenous regions, was responsible for photographing the places he visited, in addition to writing your impression about the customs and traditions of the people. Carlos Basauri made a series of articles that were published in various newsletters SEP, where he exhibited the same vision of Puig and Terrones around ethnicity. In one of his reports made in a joint expedition with the University of New Orleans Tulante highlighted the folklore and culture of pre-Columbian Indians of Chiapas, as opposed to those living today whom he saw as "impoverished, degenerate and away all cultural evolution. "

One of the works published by Basauri, entitled "some indigenous superstitions should be fought" reveals aspects that influenced later in education policy for indigenous communities. Basauri indicated that the superstitions of the Indians were part of his own psychology, which is derived from its primitive thought. He believed that despite the Spanish conquest, they had kept true to their beliefs, as though they imposed the Catholic religion, knew readapt to their worldview. The rural teacher should intervene to erase all

those fantasies of their minds, especially in small and fill scientific knowledge. Thus, we sought to eliminate its customs and traditions.

While our Aboriginal keep all these superstitious beliefs which make the most of the acts of his life, can not properly be called "Built to civilization," because even if your outer life is equal to that of a civilized individual, beyond the depths of his soul, will always feel distant from us and will last in your brain all the philosophical concepts that maintain an intellectual stagnation (Basauri, 1925: 155).

Indigenous culture to Basauri (1925: 154-155) was nonexistent, his philosophy of life was an "intellectual stagnation", so had to clear the way they live and act. Was not enough to educate them but needed to intervene "in the depths of his soul", just so they could be a "civilized individual." Basauri eradicating superstitions knew it would be very difficult, so it felt appropriate to start with the removal of the myths concerning diseases and their cures through sorcery. Therefore, rural teachers teach the evils of healing methods of the communities and the "goodness" of modern medicine and hygiene.

Miguel Othon de Mendizabal (1926) regarded as indigenous people similar to any human other and refuted the alleged vices of his race. This stemmed from colonial times when the Indians were exploited, enslaved and so continued for Independence and the Porfiriato. In this way they were treated shamefully and forced to work for foreigners or the Creoles. In its indigenous defense used the definition given by Francisco Bulnes what was a Mexican "a tight man, brawler, dirty and thief" because this was the way in which foreigners and mestizos saw the Indians.

Othon de Mendizabal (1926) notes that ethnic groups were not violent by nature, that everything depended on the social environment, their traditions, in this sense, violence was not a racial order. It noted that alcoholics would be wrong to brand them as taking intoxicating drinks was exclusively for the elderly or certain ceremonial rituals, otherwise it is punishable by death. However recognized that the ritual use of intoxicants was modified from the conquest, as it became lucrative business of alcohol by the Spaniards.

As for hygiene, Mendizabal (1926) asserted that the Indians had ongoing religious rituals involving ablutions and toilets on Temazcalli. The extermination of their customs, coupled

with poverty and marginalization to which they were relegated, poor hygiene caused. About the adjective accused thief indigenous termed as wrong, saying the social cohesion that existed in their communities. Besides calling attention satirised as loose people, and thanks to its workforce were the cities and churches today.

Despite the statement by Mendizabal, was more inclined to consider the Indians as violent and suspicious people. For example, in a report by the inspector of the State of Morelos in visiting Cuentepec (S / A, 1926-1: 152-154) emphasized the remoteness of the place, and the lack of people who speak Spanish, the link between the two teachers was a girl who was interpreter functions. He also noted that one of the people with him knew the language of the community, but was forbidden to speak to the people if they were up to do something. The supervisor Cuentepec stressed that there was no school for sixteen years, so there was no previous work. He distrusted the work of the director of the primary, since he was the highest authority of the people and their interests affected in teaching reading and writing to the Indians.

One aspect that stands out in the report of the inspector is when referring to the language of the people of Cuentepec done. The inspector called Nahuatl as "Mexicano" (S / A, 1926-1: 152-154). This feature is repeated not only in the reports of the inspectors, but there were studies conducted by the Department of Anthropology under the rubric of "Aboriginal Ethnography", which dealt with the socio-cultural aspects of the various indigenous communities and referring them to Nahuatl made it "Mexican" language.

Another report published was the Inspector of the Central Zone of Chihuahua Jarquin Gustavo (1927), who presented a characterization of the Tarahumara similar to the one made by fellow West Zone way. To him the Indians had qualities the "docile, respectful, serious, jealous, sentimental music lovers and outdoor" (Jarquin, 1927: 110) being. However when talking about the opposite of these "benefits", pointing at a pair of sheets Tarahumara were "fanatics" "unkempt", "lazy", "messy", "promiscuous" "drunk," makes a strong critique religious ceremonies and yes to your way of living away from society.

The Tarahumara Indians were considered "superstitious", "suspicious" and appeared to be strong in character, but were fearful, however, were honest and answered by the gravity of

their actions. They had knowledge of medicinal plants, their legends were denounced as "vulgar superstitions" which made them think that these people had always been "backward" compared to others. Despite this it was stated that they were smart enough to join the nation using the "time, patience and money."

This view of the Indians existed not only at national level but also at international events. For example, the Secretary of Education José Manuel Puig on a trip to Havana indicated that all Indians who came to the house of the Indian student were "suspicious" in the beginning, even mentioned that when he saw the "Huichol" I thought were "girls before fashion bob" (Puig, 1927: 17), plus they "gave the impression of strange animals of very bright, very intelligent eyes"; Tarahumara also watched as "rough". At six months, thanks to the "success" of the house the only thing that differed from the "mestizos" was her skin tone.

One feature that stands out from the Indians in the speeches of the time was his artistic ability, even I set out to create a Museum of Indian Culture could appreciate where ethnic handicrafts (Obregon, 1924). The idea flourished and sought to market the products produced by different populations. For this purpose they were sent from embroidery beads to toys wicker; was assumed that there were more than two thousand objects, which were often purchased by foreigners (S / A, 1924-1: 621).

In the section "Aboriginal Ethnography" published in the Bulletins of the SEP are also works that reveal an interest in Indian art. For example, Ruben Campos (1926: 140-143) elaborated a study of popular music, with musical notes transcribed old songs, but he added arrangements to be played in groups of various instruments; we wanted to create a national folklore, through the knowledge of Mexican music. Pablo González Casanova was studying Indian philology, so he pretended to know the affinity between the different languages and dialects spoken by indigenous communities.

The Fine Arts Department, meanwhile, was trying to create a "national culture"; by mixing with modern Indian folklore traditions. It was felt that the Indian descended from a race full of glorious men, although the interest of this department is focused on the most representative cultures such as the Aztec, Toltec and Teotihuacan. In areas like San Juan

Teotihuacan theater sponsored by the Department of Fine Arts were made to feel proud indigenous character of which "descended" (Pérez, 1925: 65-69). One role was Tlahuicole history, a warrior who despite being tlaxcalteca was regarded as "ascending" to the inhabitants of San Juan. This work reveals the way in which it was to homogenize all cultural varieties of ethnicities into one, which ultimately serve as link national culture that arose within educational policies.

## Conclusión

Both positions—the oppressed and indigenous primitivo— resolve conflict through their assimilation into modern Mexico. To eradicate this feeling of inferiority was necessary to make them feel equal to the "civilized" people. Therefore, protectionism was not enough to improve your life, but needed changing their way of acting and thinking, to homogenize the "modern civilization."

You can see how ethnic groups were seen from two perspectives: first, through the evocation of a glorious past marked by the construction of pyramids and building stone figures, ceramic or ornamental; on the other hand, living indigenous communities were synonymous with backwardness, a "primitive" stage of human beings, their way of life was different from those great pre-Columbian civilizations. Their "roots" were only a mythical past, present was the merger into a single national culture through the strategies proposed by the SEP.

Inside the SEP assimilation of indigenous national culture is privileged, although educational policies toward indigenous presented two trends: "the incorporation of indigenous groups through direct castellanización and the imposition of national values and one that supported its integration with language and culture to the national context" (Greaves, 1998: 139), the first position is reflected in the speeches of Vasconcelos, Streets, Puig, Basauri and Moises Saenz; the second was supported mainly by Manuel Gamio and Miguel Othon de Mendizabal. Due to the proposed creation of a national culture, ideas and Othon de Mendizabal Gamio were relegated from the official educational model; in fact, there was contempt for the cultural expressions of ethnicity, except those considered part of the folklore. The assimilation of the ethnic groups is defined as the set of mechanisms and

practices implemented since the SEP, through which the incorporation of indigenous national life was sought. Thus it is observed that the difference between assimilation and incorporation is based on assimilation and incorporation process result.

Finally I consider the educational projects for indigenous had a phase of experimentation reflected in the Houses, the House of Indigenous Student and Cultural Missions. Through these programs the nationalist indoctrination sought to unify the country; in this process, the indigenous have an ambivalent role: on the one hand, national pride is rooted from the glories of the ethnic past and on the other, the importance and diversity of indigenous peoples living in the country despises. Thus, the ancient folklore of certain ethnic groups would be the only redeeming of culture of indigenous groups.

### **Bibliography**

Basauri, Carlos (1925). Some indigenous superstitions must be combated, Bulletin of the SEP.

Geertz, Clifford (1992). Thick Description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. Barcelona: Gedisa.

Greaves Lainé, Cecilia (1998). The debate over an old controversy: the indigenous integration. Centro de Estudios Históricos-El Colegio de México.

Jäger, S. (2003). Discourse and knowledge: theoretical and methodological aspects of a critical discourse and analysis of devices. Barcelona: Gedisa.

Othón de Mendizábal, Miguel (1926, mayo). Vices are a centuries-old indigenous slander. Periódico América.

Vasconcelos, José (1923). Paper read at the Memorial Continental Hall, Washington, the night of December 9 of 1922, Invitation to “Chataucua International Lecture Ass”, en Boletín de la SEP, 1º de enero de 1923.