Please cite the source as:

Ruano, C. R. (2002). Educational Reform in Administrative Systems with Pre-modern Characteristics: the Case of Guatemala. *Revista Electrónica de Investigación Educativa, 4* (1). Retrieved month day, year, from: http://redie.ens.uabc.mx/vol4no1/contents-ruano.html

ISSN: 1607-4041

Revista Electrónica de Investigación Educativa

Vol. 4, No. 1, 2002

Educational Reform in Administrative Systems with Pre-modern Characteristics: the Case of Guatemala[1]

Reforma educativa en sistemas administrativos con características premodernas: el caso de Guatemala

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(Received: June 14, 2001; accepted for publishing: January 30, 2002)

Abstract

This article contains an analysis of specific instances of educational-reform failure in contemporary Guatemala. The purpose is to throw into relief those aspects which should be confronted in designing and implementing processes of educational reform in the context of weak nations with pre-modern features. One of these fundamental aspects is the need to study carefully the administrative and power structures within the government, with the aim of locating the channels of real and nominal decision-making. It is also argued that the principle of parallel liberty allows an understanding of the formation and reinforcement of parallel power structures, and that these are found outside the official bureaucratic channels. It is further argued that the administration and formulation of educational policies cannot be summed up in simple modernization schemes that do not take into account the particular sociohistorical conditions in which the educational systems originated.

Key words: Educational planning, educational reform, educational policies.

Resumen

En este artículo se hace un análisis de ejemplos de reforma educativa que fracasaron en Guatemala. El propósito es poner de relieve los aspectos que deben confrontarse al diseñar e implantar procesos de reforma educativa en el contexto de naciones débiles y con rasgos premodernos. Uno de estos aspectos fundamentales es la necesidad de estudiar cuidadosamente las estructuras administrativas y de poder al interior del gobierno con el fin de ubicar los canales de decisión reales y los nominales. También se argumenta que el principio de la lealtad paralela permite comprender la formación y consolidación de estructuras de poder paralelas y que se encuentran fuera de los canales burocráticos oficiales. Finalmente, se plantea que la administración y la formulación de políticas educativas no pueden resumirse a simples esquemas modernizantes que no tomen en cuenta las condiciones sociohistóricas particulares en las que los sistemas educativos se han originado.

Palabras clave: Planeación educativa, reforma educativa, política educativa.

Introduction

In the last decades of the twentieth century, Guatemala, like many other Western Hemisphere countries, has focused its efforts on educational reform, under different socio-political moments—for example, on reducing deficits in coverage; quality and skilled labor; and some isolated attempts at national literacy.[2] However, for previous observers, the Guatemalan case illustrates a real catalog of continual failures in educational reform without a glimpse of short- or medium-term improvement (Galvez Borrel, 1996; Artiles, 1995; Creative Associates International, Inc., 1992).

In fact, the public debate about educational reform processes in Guatemala itself is usually centered on accusations of government corruption at different levels; the lack of capacity of those who are responsible for the implementation of such reforms; and the lack of human and material resources to complete them, among other charges (Fernandez Garcia, 1998). Without denying the existence of such factors as severe limits to educational change, in the following lines I take the liberty of proposing another element for explaining more comprehensively the forces that ultimately determine the achievements and structural conditioning of the educational reform process in the Guatemalan social configuration.

From an organizational perspective, this paper attempts to outline some salient features of the administrative operations of the Guatemalan Ministry of Education, and the way in which the pre-modern characteristics of the decision-making process is imposed, ultimately, on the official, modernizing discourse of the Guatemalan state.

This line of analysis implicitly involves a classical reference for understanding what are called modern bureaucracies. In this regard, let me repeat here a standard definition of the function of bureaucracy:

> Bureaucracy in the traditional sense refers to those administrative patterns that provide a high degree of specialization, a clear and precise division of tasks to be performed, and hierarchical structures of control and pre-established lines of authority. This organizational system also expresses, among its essential principles, the recruitment of personnel based strictly on the principle of merit or technical knowledge. It also tends to favor impersonal relationships between the different organizational strata and with the clients served by the latter (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 1994, p. 38).[3]

This definition of the operation and structure of bureaucracy will be applied throughout this presentation as a comparative reference to the phenomena observed in the Guatemalan case. These phenomena are discussed only in connection with the operation and decision-making process of the Ministry of Education.

To perform this analysis, the presentation is divided into four parts. First, a brief historical overview of the educational model from the Guatemalan colonial period to the present. The second part describes the salient aspects of educational administration in Guatemala, and discusses the general indicators of the education system, such as investment per student, coverage and other things relevant to this analysis. In the third part, there are discussed two examples related to education reform carried out in recent decades: the Improvement Project for Middle Education or PEMEM, and the Training School for High School Teachers or EFPEM. Finally, in Part Four, there are presented some conclusions and points suggested for further research.

For the purpose of this discussion, the emphasis in this work is presented in the second segment. This is done for two reasons. First, because sufficient time has elapsed since the reforms were implemented to observe the results. Second, the processes of educational reform at the elementary level are quite recent and is still somewhat premature to give an overall evaluation of their results.[4]

This study is based on processes that took place in urban areas. The partial processes of rural educational decentralization initiated after the restoration of civil government in 1985 do not fall within the scope of this analysis. As well, other rural-area initiatives like PRONADE (National Self-Management for Educational Development) are beyond the scope of this synthesis.[5] Nor have we studied the organizational aspects introduced as a result of the 1996 Peace Accords, such as those developed by the Joint Commission on Educational Reform (1998).

I. Sociohistorical synopsis

So as to have a general idea of the socio-historical context in which the educational reform cases we have mentioned took place, and to understand the relationships between different institutional actors inside and outside the educational apparatus, it is necessary to give a brief description of the country, its population, and its socioeconomic conditions.

The Republic of Guatemala has an area of 108,889 square kilometers (42,031.154 sq. miles). Less than 30 percent of the land is suitable for agriculture. Its current population is approximately 12 million. Guatemala has the highest fertility rate in Latin America, and one of the lowest rates of contraceptive use (Elton, 2001). In recent decades, the explosive population growth has aggravated the already catastrophic mortality rates, as well as the malnutrition of mothers and children (Metz, 2001). Estimates reckon that half the population is under 18 years of age.

About 50% of the population is of indigenous origin (Maya, Garifuna, Xinca, Chortí). This population is concentrated in the western, northern and central areas of the country. The other half is mestizo or ladino (Galo de Lara, 1999). In the rural areas, nearly two thirds of the population live below the poverty line. Three quarters of the population has had six years of schooling or less. The net attendance rate at the high-school level is less than 20% (United Nations Program for Development [UNDP], 1999).

The socioeconomic model features a modern agro-export sector superimposed on another sector of subsistence farming with marginal industrial elements. Despite the high indices of growth during the 1950-1980 period, income distribution remained highly imbalanced (Economic Commission for Latin America [ECLA], 1984).

The extreme concentration of land in few hands[6] and archaic tax policies that encourage tax evasion by all social strata, serve to exacerbate the inequities described (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 1995, Clark 2000; Brockett, 1984)

The Guatemalan education system began to take form in the mid-sixteenth century under the Spanish colonial regime. The first elementary and high schools were established around 1550.

These schools were mainly aimed at educating the children of the Spaniards and Creoles (Kurian and Buron, 1988). Colonial educators also occupied themselves, to a lesser extent, with the teaching of the Castilian language among the indigenous peoples, particularly in those areas where the presence of religious orders was most important.

Throughout the colonial period and well into the twentieth century, educational policy focused on the assimilation of indigenous peoples through the learning of Castilian. As the mestizo population grew, a few schools were opened for its use. However, the coverage of these schools was minimal during the colonial period, and did not improve much after that. The number of teacher-training institutions remained unchanged between 1895 and 1944.

In sum, the corporate interests of the church, the landed oligarchy and officials of the crown—civilian and military—as the principal axes of the administrative and political apparatus, maintained a policy of limited access to educational opportunities and to its control, by means of restrictive-access mehanisms, economic limitations and the absence of mass incentives (Dunkerley, 1988). With

the only interlude of reforms carried out during the administration of Mariano Galvez (1831-1836), educational policies—or the lack of them—remained virtually unchanged from the time of independence in 1821 to the period known as the October Revolution between 1944 and 1954 (Gleisejesses, 1991).

II. Highlights of the educational administration in Guatemala

During the colonial era the foundation of Guatemalan government was laid, based largely on the system of royal appointment (Chang-Rodriguez, 1983). That is, appointments to administrative positions were made under the ultimate authority of the Spanish Crown. Thus, individuals so appointed soon learned that their source of authority came not necessarily from the office or from the role, but from the person who had appointed them (McLachlan, 1988).

This tendency to orient the loyalty of colonial officials toward a certain person or higher level outside the internal bureaucratic control, I have called "the principle of parallel loyalty". This principle states that the administrative officials in Guatemala, although in theory they were of the same rank and had similar powers, in practice they had different levels of authority depending on the source of their appointment. This dual loyalty or "parallel loyalty" is a pre-modern trait inherited from the colonial system.

With independence, the Spanish Crown, which served as the ultimate arbiter of disputes among local corporate powers in their struggle for control of local administration, was removed, creating an institutional vacuum that was filled by various schemes of authoritarian or military dictatorship that lasted until the recent past (Lebot 1992; Handy 1992). The limited legitimacy coming from the making of decisions by the Crown disappeared without being replaced by a strong, reformer-type, local management project. From that time on, it would be the military class who would supply the vast majority of government heads or leaders (Barry, 1992; Handy, 1991). Coupled with caudillism,[7] the subordination relationships preexisting under the "principle of parallel loyalty" would be consolidated as essential mechanisms for upward mobility within the framework of the continuous redistributions of power quotas.

The Guatemalan postcolonial elite did not include other social strata in their nation-state project. These elite were also seriously divided over the role the state should play in society. Differences of opinion were sustained throughout the nineteenth century (Williams, 1994; Demyk, 1983). Thus, the weakness of the government institutions was maintained over a long period, at times reaching almost anarchic levels. For example, between 1954 and 1966, there was a series of 18 Ministers of Education under three provisional governments and four different presidents (Monzon Garcia, 1993). The government itself recognized, a decade ago now, the persistence and severity of these shortcomings of the administration and educational policy:

> In parallel, there is a low quality of teaching at all levels of the system [...]. This is due mainly to the following factors: low level of public spending and investment in the field of education [...]. Inefficiency in the educational system, which results in ineffective planning skills, delays in project implementation; red tape and lack of transparency, and a lack of supervision and teacher-training [Presidency of the Republic, 1991, p. 45).

All these limitations of governance and continuity in the formulation of educational policies have translated into a bureaucratic apparatus divided into multiple subunits, with few economic resources and little capacity to put national policies such as those of education into practice (Garcia Lopez, 1989). In the case of the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), this fragmentation can reach extraordinary proportions. Around 1995, the World Bank estimated that within MINEDUC alone, there were no fewer than 127 programs, 290 subprograms, 985 activities in progress, and 11 projects, for a total budget of 1413 units (World Bank 1995, p. 36). These figures are approximate, since it is very difficult to know for certain how many other budgetary units were directly or indirectly related to MINEDUC's budget. Not even the exact number of teachers employed is known. In this study, there were found figures varying from 53,000 to 58,000 teachers, according to an assortment of sources. Such figures, however, could not be confirmed during the field work conducted in the Ministry of Finance, since not even in it could there be found an accurate count of the number of jobs for teachers or the number of schools on the budget.

Meanwhile, other government ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, control the budget of the agricultural schools and agricultural training programs. Furthermore, the budgets of the various military academies, such as the Ecole Polytechnique; the Adolfo V. Hall Institutes; the Center for Military Studies; the Army School of Communication; and officers and others who benefit from scholarships in the national university system, are not publicly available. It is therefore impossible to know by what percentage these educational activities increase the budget of MINEDUC expenditures if properly counted as part of the costs incurred by the Guatemalan education system.[8] This is due to the lack of administrative coordination between different government sectors, for which compensation is made by cutting legalistic mechanisms, with which an attempt is made to codify in legal rules the most insignificant aspects of public conduct.

In this way, Guatemalan education policies retained pre-modern elements in their administration, such as the "principle of parallel loyalty", chronic shortages of qualified personnel and the tendency to leave any decision in the hands of legalistic mechanisms. From minor administrative employees to supervisors and general managers, people respond to requests of various kinds by basing their responses on such applications, building on the apparent hierarchical status of the person making the request long before this individual would occupy such a post within the administration. This phenomenon has been observed by other researchers in previous decades (Brewer-Carias, 1979, Williams 1972). That is, the formal aspects predominate over the specifics of the administration, and the result is a great mass of documentation produced with the elementary objective of

satisfying legal, but not operational, requirements.[9] Officially, every executive has a responsibility, but in reality, no one has the ability to exercise that responsibility because all decisions must be endorsed by the upper level. The consequence of this legal formalism is the inherent slowness to adopt legislative changes not directly promoted by the President (Ruano, in press).

The pre-modern features described here relate to the country's sociopolitical reality. For the dominant corporate groups, the bureaucratic-administrative machinery of government has been, and continues to be, irrelevant to the formation of consensus in decision making.

Within this vision, there is no place for the formation of national instruments of citizen participation such as a coherent and modern system of national education. Lourie (1989) expresses it thus:

> The Guatemalan governments have preserved an institutional facade with parliamentary and presidential elections. These governments are closely linked with the landowning class, which maintains a nearly impenetrable social stratification. The government limits itself to maintaining order and controlling the opposition. The power of the landowners is based on a workforce consisting of cheap labor—underemployed, abundant and illiterate, whose living standard is very poor. Under such social conditions, the effort made by the Guatemalan state in education is directly proportional to its desire to increase popular participation in decision-making processes at a national level: at a lower level of democracy there will be reduced access to education (p. 131).

The Guatemalan education system, the product of a weak and limited institutional capacity, at its heart continues reproducing the pre-modern traits exhibited by the state apparatus as a whole. These features have been observed by several researchers of the administrative apparatus and Guatemalan education from various perspectives (Monzon Garcia, 1983, Verner 1970, Colburn 1986; Demyck 1983, Dignard, 1987; Galo de Lara, 1997; McIntosh, 1978; Ramirez , 1999; Ruano de Flores, 1997).

In this political/administrative environment, the basic conditions for the emergence and consolidation of a modern civil service in the Weberian sense occur only partially. For example, the existence of numerous agencies and executive units without central regulatory mechanisms within MINEDUC produces what are called *partial coupling process* (*loosely coupled systems*). As Churchill Orlikow, Greenfield and Rideout (1979) have argued:

> In those [educational] systems partially coupled, it cannot be assumed that every action necessarily has predictable consequences. [...] The whole system can appear to have an impulse directed toward a global goal, but each subsection will seek to achieve this goal through its own self-satisfying mechanisms (p.84). (See endnote 3).

III. General indicators of the Guatemalan education system

The crucial subtext of all the problems discussed throughout this article is the observation of very low levels of existing funding. Such levels of funding in the educational system reflect the low priority given by the government to education on a national scale. Between 1976 and 1996 the education budget ranged between 1.33% and 1.61% of the gross domestic product (Ruano, 1999, p. 38).[10] Payment of teachers' salaries consumed almost 70% of those resources, and the remainder was used for new infrastructure. Wages are low at all levels, and it is common to find that the government delays for weeks or months in fulfilling their obligations to pay teachers (Teachers of San Juan Ecatepec, 1999).

During the period 1980-1996, Guatemala has had one of the lowest levels of public spending for education on the continent (Economic Commission for Latin America [ECLA], 1997; Reimers 1995). High rates of illiteracy, school dropouts, shortage of classrooms and teachers are corollaries, almost inevitable, of such levels of the under-financing of the educational system. As highlighted in Part I, nearly three-quarters of the population has had six years of schooling or less. The net attendance rate at high school level is less than 20% (UNDP, 1999).

High school education has not escaped the economic constraints. In the eighties, the number of teachers who worked in public institutions did not increase, despite the steady increase in the number of students (UNESCO, 1991). Earlier this decade, about 40% of all pupils enrolled at high school level were concentrated in private institutions. By the late nineties, this rose to almost 70% ("When education," 1998; "Guatemala in numbers," 1997). Students of higher socioeconomic status achieved six or more years of schooling above that completed by those from poor backgrounds (Thomas, *et al*., 2000).

Although a detailed analysis of private education at the high school level is beyond the theme explored in this study, some basics are presented here. For example, in terms of teaching quality, private institutions vary widely. These differences are due to several factors. Among them are the lack of uniform evaluation systems on a national scale; the low quality of teachers' and administrators' training; the absence of the establishments' mechanisms for rendering accounts; and arbitrary and unjustified fees, among other things (Fernandez Garcia, 1998; Ruano, 1999).

However, I must again point out that the education given in the private sector is a better alternative than the option offered by the Guatemalan government. The latter is summarized in less coverage, lower quality and a steady decline in funds available for education. In this sense, we must remember that one of the first acts of President Portillo in 2000 was to make a global cut of 10% in the state budget. This has meant a real decline in resources available for education, and it can have no positive effect on the short- or medium-term national educational situation.

Afterward, President Portillo had harsh words for local and international organizations who solicited tangible increases in resources available for education, falsely accusing them of opposing an increase in tax revenues:

> Don't think I'm bad or naughty, but I was so happy to see that Ministers Weymann (Finance) and Torres (Education) have not gone to receive the proposal which calls for an increase of a 1,400,000,000 quetzals for education. [....] How nice! There are 52 organizations that are asking for a bigger budget, when it was they who were opposed to the Fiscal Reform (Rodriguez, 2001).

Finally, we must note that State commitments to education, acquired as a result of the Peace Agreements signed between the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG) and the government in 1996 included, among other things, the following goals for the year 2000: an increase of 50% percent on public spending for education, as related with the gross domestic product; an increase in the literacy rate to 70%; profound changes in cultural policies, as well as curriculum content and the pedagogy of school subjects. Furthermore, the government also pledged to expand the coverage and quality to rural areas where Spanish is not spoken, and to increase women's participation in formulating educational policy. None of these goals have been met in full (Inforpress, 2000).

Under such political social and economic conditions, it can be said (not surprisingly) that "the educational system in Guatemala is characterized by inequality, low coverage and low quality" (World Bank 1995, p. 1). Although this picture is in itself quite bleak, in the third part of this presentation there are examples of educational reforms that, rather than failing, continued their course within the pre-modern administrative system in Guatemala.

Next, taking specific examples of educational reforms, I will analyze the apparent failures in implementing these reforms. It will be seen that these mechanisms, although seemingly irrational from the standard bureaucratic point of view, are actually highly-rational actions carried out by those administrators and staff whose capacity for action within the education system is severely limited by the pre-modern constraints and social expectations identified earlier.

IV. Examples of educational reforms

Although in the recent past the Guatemalan state did not hesitate to use the most brutal repression to silence any opposition or alternative vision to its hegemonic political project (Goldman, 1999; Ruano, 1997; Smith, 1995), the case is that in terms of educational reform its own internal dynamics of a pre-modern state were enough to limit severely the scope and depth of any project for educational change.

This section contains an analysis of how an education reform project was dislocated in two separate projects, as a result of the organizational patterns discussed previously: two projects that had been partially abandoned by the early

eighties. I mean the Improvement Project for High School Education/School for Training Middle School Teachers (PEMEM / EFPEM).[11]

4.1. Improvement Project for High School Education (PEMEM)

The Improvement Project for High School Education or PEMEM, which began in 1969, with advice and funding from the World Bank and UNESCO, was framed by the philosophy that favored the development of human capital as an engine of domestic economic development. An essential component of this approach was the training of skilled labor in those sectors identified as keys for internal economic development. This model of educational reform continued with different hues on an international scale. For example, in parts of Africa, it was known under the rubric of technical education (Kelly, 1991), while in North America it is known as vocational education (Pincus, 1989).

In its initial stage, the PEMEM was the creation of a series of twelve high-school level workshops/schools or institutes which would eventually cover the entire national territory. In a second stage of the PEMEM, teacher-training would be added for the technical areas that were going to be offered in the workshops/schools or institutes, such as, for example, chemistry, electromechanics and industrial processes. To deal with the shortage of teachers, as well as to develop curricula for the new schools, there was created a university-level program called the School of Middle-Level Teacher Training (EFPEM).

Although both phases of this reform were integrated in theory, in practice—and for reasons we will consider further on—the two stages were entirely disassociated from the building and equipping of schools. Different ministries with different schedules, policies and philosophies were in charge of infrastructure. Due to the lack of unification of criteria and of centralizing mechanisms for making decisions, for the process of contracting for the infrastructure, for the selection of the location of the institutes and the lack of a centralized administrative apparatus to implement reforms, PEMEM/EFPEM began to lag in its execution. It would have to wait until 1974, or five years after its initial approval, to see the opening of the first schools in the city of Guatemala.

Although the main objective of the PEMEM was the training of a skilled workforce at the high school level in sectors with high technical content, in 1979 it was not clear that such training was taking place. The three institutes in operation were offering a curriculum virtually identical to those of their traditional counterparts.

This situation was analyzed by Menendez (1980) in a study that addressed the prospect of the project's long-term operation. Menendez (pp. 32-44), identified the following factors as causes of the project's failure:

- Increases in the number of students, beyond the levels expected at the beginning of the project .
- Constant changes in MINEDUC priorities and staff.

- Loss of infrastructure because of neglect and other factors.
- Lack of monitoring of students and lack of guidance from competent bodies.
- Lack of coherent policies capable of coordinating the demand for human resources with the national education system.
- Lack of long-term strategies for making curriculum changes or for staff retention.
- Exclusion of MINEDUC from the design and construction of the institutes.
- Chronic deficit of administrative personnel and qualified teachers.

Although, formally, MINEDUC was responsible for the implementation of the PEMEM, in practice, at least two ministries (Communications and Finance) and other executive agencies had as much or more power of decision as the former. Given the "principle of parallel loyalty," the three ministers in charge claimed for themselves the ultimate authority coming from the President of the Republic (Caudillism) even in areas completely outside their jurisdiction or administrative competence. Under such conditions, the administrative paralysis and atomization of the educational reform process are not simple aberrations, but rather, are due to an administrative dynamic which lacked in centralization and control mechanisms.

By 1983, the PEMEM project was declared completed by the government. From the time of its authorization in 1969 until its closing, it took about 14 years, of which only from 1974 to 1982 can it be considered to have been in operation (Ramirez Garcia, 1997).

Today, educational institutions created under PEMEM continue to operate, albeit without any of its objectives or original content.

Today, these dilapidated schools, in terrible condition, are faithful witnesses to reforms that never were able to become a reality.

4.2. Training School for Secondary School Teachers [EFPEM]

The main objective of the Training School for Secondary School Teachers or EFPEM was the teacher-training program for PEMEM establishments.

Almost from the start of the program, due to lack of coordination among multilateral agencies involved in the project, its implementation was undertaken by UNESCO. This organization continued with its own feasibility studies, and subcontracted local universities (San Carlos, Del Valle and Landivar) for the training of new teachers. Due to confusion about which university would be responsible for developing the EFPEM curriculum, it was not possible to harmonize either the academic content or the requirements of supervised practice teaching, for which reason the plans for a program of unique training were never carried out. This situation endures today, making it virtually impossible for students from various universities in Guatemala to achieve an equivalent level in terms of program content.

Other ministries and government agencies also wanted to take part in designing the EFPEM curriculum. This caused the de facto division of EFPEM into three different programs administered by the universities mentioned.

These conflicts can be attributed partly to the influence of the "principle of parallel loyalty" as a single pattern that shifts impersonal and meritocratic administrative relationships (Lowden, 1996).

Other factors adversely affected the program. Pay incentives for new teachers were lacking. EFPEM graduates did not receive a higher salary than their unskilled counterparts despite the three years of additional university-level study required to obtain this certification (Edwards, 1982). Nor were other teachers given an incentive to hone their skills through the training offered by the EFPEM. The criteria for promotion and seniority remained unchanged for all teachers. Quickly and finally, the number of teachers trained by the EFPEM exceeded the PEMEM staff institutes' original estimates, creating an oversupply of qualified teachers, who could not, and cannot, find work because of the government's low levels of educational investment, which have continued up to the present (Ochoa, Alvarez and Cumatz, 1998).

Currently, the EFPEM continues to operate—with some changes in terms of salary and promotion system, or in the corporate ladder—but with little ability to reduce the high deficit of qualified teachers, especially in the country's rural areas.

Although Guatemala faced a long civil war (1962-1996), the inherent weakness of its administrative and governmental institutions goes back to a long time before. Certainly, the armed conflict worsened, but did not create the mechanisms described here. Caudillism, the weakness of the government apparatus, and the lack of a modern vision of educational administration are consequences of clear expectations regarding the state's role in improving living conditions for the population. These expectations condition and determine, ultimately, the content and limits of educational reforms.

V. Conclusions: the limits of educational reform in the context of weak states with pre-modern traits

None of the reforms discussed here could alter the basic tenets of socio-political backwardness, and cultural marginalization and gender upon which the management of Guatemalan society rests. These assumptions have consolidated inequality and lack of opportunities as mechanisms of social control. The result is a perception, widespread in Guatemala, that no matter what reforms are promoted, there will be large segments of the population who will not benefit from them. Within this context, failure becomes the only possible outcome.

The behavior of government officials and institutions reflects the survival strategy of both. Public officials, permanent targets for power groups who fiercely reject the least government intervention aimed at alleviating the tremendous inequalities now

existing, have fought tooth and nail, using regulations and administrative paralysis as effective defense mechanisms.

Such mechanisms allow them to survive the ongoing political fluctuations, along with changes in leadership and priorities, while there is proclaimed an official modernizing discourse, in which few, if any, deposit their hopes for change.

The Guatemalan social contract, mercilessly imposed by small and extremely powerful groups on the rest of the social conglomerate—the highly-marginalized majority—preserves the foundations of an economic system that requires abundant labor, cheap and with a minimum level of education, for jobs that have little added worth. Nor do they permit these sectors of the population to break the cycle of servitude and ignorance in which they been long entrapped. Thus, to the duality existing within Guatemalan society, including the ethnic and linguistic duality, and the profound economic and social divisions, we must add a new one. That is, globalizing post-modern duality versus educational pre-modernity. While some students in some private establishments prepare to meet a new world through computers and the newest tools of knowledge, others—most—still seek in the eyes of their teachers the reason why they cannot have even a classroom where everyone can be seated, or a chalkboard on which to write their assignments.

What in past decades was a wall impeding access to improved cognitive possibilities is fast becoming an ever-widening gap, where the opportunities lost are irreplaceable. Time will tell whether the Guatemalan public administration is capable of developing new ways of meeting its specific needs, for this does not have to do with rolling back history and forcing the implementation of organizational schemes that have already served out their useful life.

It is rather daring to imagine solutions not cloistered by the feudal fear of a world without social or political armor. Innovative ideas can be found in a future that does not reject its origins.

We will have to wait and see if new generations of Guatemalans can find the way to a new social compact, where educational reform is a catalyst, and not a retardant for the social and cultural transformations that country needs.

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[1] This work was based on field research conducted during 1997-2000 by the author in Guatemala as part of his doctoral thesis entitled *An examination of centralized educational policy processes and their impact in Guatemala City, 1976-1995* (OISE / University of Toronto) . La Salle University in Bogota contributed through the financial support of the vice-rectory for research. I thank the honorable Lorraine Dignard, First Secretary and Deputy Chief of the federal government of Canada to the Government of Guatemala (1997-2000) for her valuable suggestions and comments.

[2] Defined in these lines, literacy campaigns in Spanish. Although there are some isolated programs directed toward specific regions of the country, efforts on a global or national scale have never been made to teach reading and writing in all the Mayan languages of Guatemala.

[3] In the original Spanish version of this article, all translations are the responsibility of the author unless otherwise indicated. In the preparation of this English version, some of the original texts were unavailable, so that it has sometimes been necessary to use back-translation. For this, the translator most humbly apologizes.

[4] The vast majority of the school population is found in elementary and high schools serving populations between 7 and 17 years of age.

[5] PRONADE was initiated in the previous decade for the purpose of facilitating teacher recruitment and fundraising for community elementary schools.

[6] Less than one percent of all farms occupy 21.6% of all arable land, and more than 70% of the remaining farms cannot even provide subsistence for the families who work them (Guerra-Borges, 1984; Bilsborrow and Stupp , 1997).

[7] Caudillismo is a cultural phenomenon that first appeared during the early 19th century in revolutionary South America…[by a] militia leader with a charismatic personality and enough of a populist program of generic future reforms to gain broad sympathy, at least at the outset, among the common people. Effective caudillismo depends on a personality cult.

The root of caudillismo lies in Spanish colonial policy of supplementing small cadres of professional, full-time soldiers with large militia forces recruited from local populations to maintain public order. Militiamen held civilian occupations but assembled at regular times for drill and inspection. Their salary from the Crown was a token; their recompense was in prestige, primarily because of the *fuero militar* ("military privilege"), that exempted them from certain taxes and obligatory community work assignments (compare the feudal corvée), and more significantly, exempted them from criminal or civil prosecution. Away from colonial capitals, the militias were at the service of the criollo landowners.(Downloaded Dec. 5, 2009 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caudillo).

[8] The national university, San Carlos University, receives 20% of the total annual budget of MINEDUC. This obligatory outlay, the product of a constitutional mandate, is a serious limitation to the work of MINEDUC at the level of pre-elementary, elementary and high school. Other resources MINEDUC does not receive because they are directly under the control of the Ministry of Defense are certainly considerable. Up till now, however, the exact amounts of these budget allocations diverted to other ministries or simply lying outside the control of MINEDUC are not known, even though they have to do with activities are clearly within its jurisdiction.

[9] The latest estimates indicate that over thirty thousand laws and governmental agreements are without proper registration within the agencies responsible for implementing these laws and agreements (Larra, 1998).

[10] These data exclude the funds granted to the University of San Carlos.

[11] In this discussion, reference is made to these reforms only, since enough time has already passed between the events and their protagonists discussed here. Although larger and more complex reforms were investigated, these processes are not discussed here for lack of space.