Struggles for Citizenship? Peasant Negotiation of Schooling in the Sierra Norte de Puebla, Mexico, 1921–1933

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This article identifies four different responses to educational policy in peasant villages. Acceptance, appropriation, resistance and opposition to schools are considered as forms of negotiating the educational contract. Peasants contributed to education through legal and customary practices. In return, they sought to influence the terms of schooling. However limited, such influence was possible because the Mexican state had scarce resources and depended on villagers’ support. Taking into account the difficulties of peasants’ subordinate position, their struggle over schooling is defined as a defence of autonomy rather than an exercise of citizenship.

Keywords: autonomy, citizenship, educational policy, Mexican Revolution, peasants, resistance.

Liberty has its base on the civic and scientific instruction of the people and a liberal Republic will not be understood nor conserved by the ignorant. [The Executive] is convinced that Republican men are formed in the school, through the mediation of books, rather than through Codes they do not understand because they do not read them, and they do not read them because they cannot read. (Juan Crisóstomo Bonilla, Governor of the State of Puebla, address to local Congress, 16 September 1880; Fabre, 1990: 25).

Teaching reading, writing and arithmetic to people who have nothing to read, no reason to write and whose possessions can be counted on the fingers of one hand, is a foolish task. For many years, we have to acknowledge, these countryside schools did nothing but this foolish task. (Moisés

1 A very preliminary version of this article, before fieldwork in state and municipal archives was carried out, appeared as (2001) The Cultivated Peasant and the Rustic Teacher: Schooling Cultures in Rural Mexico, 1920–1930. History of Education Society Bulletin 68: 90–103.
These quotations represent two views on the uses of an elementary education based on reading, writing and arithmetic. The first was inspired by nineteenth-century liberal patriotism and the second emerged after the 1910 social revolution. Liberal-patriotic education was mainly concerned with spreading literacy as a means of turning peasants into citizens aware of their constitutional rights and duties. This objective translated into a curriculum focused on learning reading, writing and arithmetic, together with the practice of oratory and music in civic festivals. In contrast, revolutionary education emphasised the social and economic aspects of inclusion, rather than the political and ceremonial. It translated into a curriculum that gave preference to teaching modern techniques of farming over learning the three Rs.

This article is concerned with the implementation of revolutionary educational policy, and notion of citizenship on which it was based, as lived by villagers who had experienced liberal-patriotic education in the Sierra Norte de Puebla. Citizenship is understood here as a set of practices, especially the exercise of rights and duties, which link the population with the various political communities to which they belong, from the village and municipality, through the district and state, to the nation-state. Two practices of citizenship can be put forward as pertinent to the relationship between peasants and schools in the Sierra Norte. First, peasants appeared to act as citizens when contributing to the school effort by paying taxes and providing labour for building and repairing schools. Secondly, from peasant responses to and negotiation of the terms of schooling, one can learn about villagers’ attitudes towards their own and the state’s idea of citizenship as embedded in the schooling programme. But is one really justified in seeing these practices as indicating the exercise of citizenship on the part of the peasantry?

Peasant response to schools will not be considered as mere reactions to policy but as a negotiation of its implementation. Historians have already addressed the question of why peasants welcomed or opposed the schools of the revolution. Pre-revolutionary schooling cultures, national, regional and local structures of power, material resources, the ability and adaptability of teachers and inspectors, have all been considered as factors contributing to the success or failure of the revolutionary schools (Alfonseca, 1997; Quintanilla and Vaughan, 1997; Rockwell, 1994; Vaughan, 1997). This article will explore these questions not only for federal schools, which have received careful attention by researchers cited above, but also for state and community-funded (formerly municipal) schools on which there has been much less research. The result of peasants’ negotiation over education has been assessed by Florencia Mallon (1995) for the mid-nineteenth century and Mary K. Vaughan (1997) for the 1930s. They argue that the counter-hegemonic demands of peasants with regard to education as well as other key policies were partly incorporated into the process of building the hegemonic nation-state. This article broadly shares this view but will focus on how the negotiations were conducted rather than on an assessment of their results. In considering the struggles to shape schooling conditions, we learn about the constraints under which peasants exercised a degree of political agency. In order to identify such everyday negotiations, it is essential to look at the local level.
The state of Puebla possessed a relatively large number of schools before the 1910 revolution. In the Sierra Norte de Puebla, radical liberals had developed a wide network of schools during the second half of the nineteenth century (Thomson with LaFrance, 1999). Relying on municipal rather than state funding, the number of schools in the smaller villages increased towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. By contrast, in states such as Tlaxcala and Estado de México, school numbers diminished during the Porfiriato (1876–1911) because the state government shifted funds from villages to municipal seats (cabeceras municipales) and the state capital (Rockwell, 1994: 176; Bazant, 2002). For Puebla, it was the revolution and its abolition of head taxes (including that on education), and not the Porfiriato, that harmed schooling in the smaller localities. Given the revolutionary rhetoric in favour of rural education, and its accusation that schooling in the countryside had been neglected during the Porfiriato, the case of Puebla was a bitter irony.

The Sierra Norte de Puebla

The Sierra Norte is a region of dense mountains and deep canyons that forms part of Mexico’s Sierra Madre Oriental. Situated between Mexico City and the port of Veracruz, this was a region of strategic significance during Mexico’s civil and patriotic wars between 1847 and 1867. The Sierra population, led by the liberals, Juan Nepomuceno Méndez, Juan Crisóstomo Bonilla and the Nahua Indian Juan Francisco Lucas, were active participants in the national struggles that came to an end with the liberal triumph in 1867. Throughout these turbulent years, Nahua and Totonac Indian communities selectively embraced and appropriated liberal reforms. They also reached accommodation with the non-Indian minority that had settled in the Sierra from the eighteenth century. In contrast to the concentrated land ownership seen in plateau regions, Indian villagers in the Sierra Norte controlled the disentailment of corporate land in order to retain, as private property, small plots to continue a life of subsistence agriculture. They also kept a considerable degree of cultural and political autonomy, while creoles and mestizos took control of commerce and administration. Notably, the creole and mestizo hold on trade, credit and taxation was challenged by Indians and mestizos of modest background, who constituted the Liberal party of the Sierra, known as La Montaña (Thomson, 1989a).

Together with taxes, secular schooling furthered the Liberals’ battle against Church control of villagers’ minds and resources. Montaña leaders believed in mass literacy as a key to citizenship. However, Sierra municipalities chose selective rather than universal literacy; they found that a few literate villagers were sufficient for the needs of a community (Vaughan, 1997: 110; Rockwell, 1996). As a result, the impact of liberal schooling, and its benefits for the expansion of La Montaña, came through the training of future village teachers and secretaries, rather than through mass literacy. At best, secretaries and teachers played the role of local intellectuals, persuading villagers to petition and enlist for liberal causes and helping them to respond to local grievances.
by writing letters of complaint. At worst, they became village caciques who abused their position by extorting villagers.\textsuperscript{2}

From 1884 the Sierra experienced a rapid loss of autonomy due to the federal executive’s moves towards centralisation. When President Porfirio Díaz dissolved the voluntarily recruited National Guards, which served locally, the limits of La Montaña and its popular liberalism surfaced. The bargaining power of Indian communities decreased dramatically because it had relied too much on the military might of the National Guards, as well as personal leadership, and failed to become institutionalised in peacetime (Thomson with LaFrance, 1999: Chapter 14).

When the revolution broke out, the Sierra, true to its liberal traditions and with no strong agrarian movement, joined the moderate Constitucionalistas. When Juan Francisco Lucas died in 1917, the Nahua General Gabriel Barrios was heir to the Sierra cacicazgo until federal government removed him from the region in 1929. Barrios was a somewhat less benevolent cacique but he nevertheless benefited the region with a vast and effective programme of road construction based on unremunerated labour (involving a degree of coercion which earned him a bad reputation) and frequent, if not systematic, support for schools (Brewster, 1996 and 1998).

Liberal-Patriotic Schooling (1867–1911)

During the second half of the nineteenth century, no national educational system with a professional administrative body and qualified teachers yet existed. The Ministry of Instruction had jurisdiction only over schools in the Federal District and federal territories. Yet their educational laws were presented as model arrangements for the rest of the country; in the case of the state of Puebla, laws and regulations were indeed very similar.

Puebla’s liberal governments set up a legal and administrative framework for the running of schools but left funding to the municipalities. Despite the opening of two teacher-training colleges for men and women in Puebla City, most serving teachers remained unqualified and the state government’s control over the enforcement of regulations was limited to a small network of inspectors.\textsuperscript{3} This relative weakness did not translate into a dearth of schools in the countryside. Schools were administered by district and municipal authorities constituted in educational committees.\textsuperscript{4} During the Porfiriato, the strength of district rule allowed for regular tax collection. The population’s most important contribution to education was through payment of the Chicontepec tax, compulsory for all men aged 16–60 and devised by the liberal state to replace

\textsuperscript{4} Reglamento de la Ley de Instrucción Primaria (Puebla, 1883).
the Church’s Dominica dedicated to catechising (Cruz, 1995: Vol. 1, 206–215). A further contribution of adult male villagers to education came through the customary faenas. These were a form of unremunerated labour that all adult males in the community were traditionally obliged to provide. They laboured mainly for public works, especially in repairing roads and constructing and repairing school buildings. Faenas were legally abolished by the 1857 Constitution and subsequently by the 1917 Constitution, which decreed that such work should be voluntary and paid. However, given the lack of financial resources and the perceived obligation of members of the community to contribute to public works, faenas survived. (Thomson with La France, 1999: 10–14; Brewster, 1995: 170–204, 243–273). Taken together, the enforcement of these legal and customary practices (Chicontepec tax and faenas) ensured the running of boys’ and girls’ schools in cabeceras municipales and at least one boys’ school in all pueblos (towns) and some barrios (villages).

The full programme of primary education for the state of Puebla went beyond reading, writing and arithmetic to include geography, civic instruction, constitutional law and natural sciences, as well as more practical subjects such as agriculture and commerce. However, only the best schools in Puebla City offered the full programme. Schools in municipal seats often included civic instruction and music but generally excluded agriculture and commerce. In the smaller villages, teachers burdened with the daunting task of teaching subjects in Spanish to speakers of indigenous languages, were often limited to the three Rs.

One extracurricular school activity flourished during the second half of the nineteenth century, especially in those areas sympathetic to liberalism such as the Sierra Norte: the celebration of civic festivals that provided a form of education and enjoyment to a wider public. Civic ritual turned the often illiterate, monolingual Indians into spectators and potential targets of the liberal state’s educational objectives. Civic festivals typically included literary and musical pieces rendered by teachers, schoolchildren and music bands in the presence of local authorities. A prize-giving ceremony for the best pupils was sometimes part of the programme. Finances permitting, singing the national anthem and hoisting the national flag would be accompanied by military parades and firework displays. In this spirit of celebration, teachers had an opportunity to reinforce principles enunciated in the classroom. They emphasised citizen’s rights and duties and encouraged reverence for scientific inventions and patriotism (Thomson, 1989b).

**Revolutionary Schooling (1911–1933)**

The revolution that broke out on 20 November 1910 put the Mexican countryside on the agenda, especially the demand for agrarian reform and rural education. Educators working for the federal and state governments deemed previous school programmes

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5 This was the case for the municipalities of Tetela, Zacatlán, Hueytlatlan, Huehuetla, Zacapoaxtla and Cuetzalan, as their respective municipal archives attest.
6 Ley de Instrucción Pública para el Estado (Puebla, 1879). Programas de la enseñanza de las Escuelas de Párvulos y Elementales Primarias del Estado (Puebla, 1893).
detached from everyday life and ultimately ineffective. In revolutionary Mexico, elementary schooling would teach modern farming techniques and encourage production and commercialisation of crafts. In Puebla, the educational legislation of 1919 and 1922 introduced the teaching of agriculture, trades and crafts, but only at higher levels of primary school for children aged 12 years and over. More ambitious approaches to teaching these subjects, specifically concerned with rural areas, would emerge in 1923 from the newly formed Ministry of Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública), which now enjoyed federal jurisdiction. The Ministry’s programme introduced farming and trades from the first year of elementary education in an attempt to transform peasants dedicated to subsistence agriculture into small-proprietary farmers dedicated to commercial agriculture. The programme included agriculture and animal husbandry as well as trades such as carpentry, ceramics, weaving, tanning, soap-making, etc. Healthy habits of hygiene and temperance would be promoted through teachers’ moralising talks, home visits and sports (Fuentes, 1986; Loyo, 1985; Vaughan, 1982: Chapters 3 and 5).

Despite a new interest in educational programmes specifically tailored for the countryside, the revolutionary movement had in fact temporarily interrupted the incipient development of an educational system during 1876–1911. Only in the 1930s and 1940s would the building of a stronger state accelerate the emergence of a national educational system. Revolutionary violence in the 1910s inevitably led to school closures. More importantly, the political and fiscal organisation of the 1867–1910 period was shattered. Between 1911 and 1933, Puebla state government changed hands 24 times, failing to provide an effective security force or organise tax collection. The organisation of local administration would undergo important transformations starting with the abolition of districts. Rule exercised at the district level was replaced with violent factionalism and civil disorder to the impotence of municipal authorities (Tecuanhuey, 2001: 28–35; Brewster, 1995: Chapter 4). Moreover, in 1917, all head taxes, including the Chicontepec tax, were abolished. A subsequent rise in property and commerce taxes sought to fund schools, but tax evasion became widespread and curtailed hopes of taking municipal treasures out of bankruptcy. From 1917, the state government aimed to open schools throughout its territory but by the end of the 1920s, it barely managed to pay teachers’ salaries in the 21 ex-district seats. Given the lack of resources and the state authorities’ calls for the opening of schools, local authorities organised the collection of ‘voluntary donations’. These were in effect a continuation of the now illegal Chicontepec tax, since it had become customary to make pecuniary contributions to schools. Under the new circumstances, however, villagers in different parts of the Sierra successfully refused to contribute, demanding they be shown the law or decree that stated their duty to do so. The decreased...
collection of funds, compared to the days of Chicontepec, resulted in greater instability for schools and teachers, whose salaries were at risk. By contrast, *faenas* continued to provide construction and maintenance of school buildings.  

In this context of limited capacity of the state and municipalities, federal schools under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education began to open. The Ministry paid teachers and generally provided some school material but community contributions continued to be important, especially since the introduction of farming and trades demanded increased resources. The community had to provide a building for the school and the teacher’s residence as well as sufficient space and land for an orchard, animal husbandry, crafts and trades. Plots, workshops and any other school space dedicated to manual activities were called annexes. Parents were responsible for sending their children regularly and punctually to school and supporting activities organised by the teachers; they were also expected to provide seeds, animals and materials for workshops (Fuentes, 1986).

In state schools obligations were distributed similarly, with the state government playing a role equivalent to that of the Ministry of Education in federal schools. From the early 1920s, Puebla state government put as much emphasis as the Ministry of Education on introducing manual activities. Only in schools sustained by voluntary donations was there less pressure for teaching farming and trades. But it was still present as they were overseen and advised by state inspectors, especially in the municipal seats, but also in some outlying towns and villages.  

**Peasant Negotiation of Schooling: The Ex-districts of Zacatlán and Tetela (1921–1933)**

In 1925, the ex-district of Tetela with a population of 39,000, had eight federal schools, four state-supported schools and 23 schools sustained by villagers’ donations. The municipality of Tetela had state-supported girls’ and boys’ schools in the *cabecera* and co-educational schools funded by voluntary donations in its *barrios*. The ex-district of Zacatlán with a population of 77,000, had thirteen schools sustained by the federal government, two schools by the state (one for boys and one for girls in the Ciudad de Zacatlán) and 47 by voluntary donations. In the northeastern part of the ex-district, the municipality of Hueytlalpan had a girls’ and a boys’ school in the *cabecera* and one boys’ school in each of its three *pueblos*, all sustained by donations.

Taking into account the number of schools sustained by donations, as registered by state inspectors, the ex-districts of Tetela and Zacatlán had roughly as many schools as before the revolution. But the 1925 figure must be qualified: schools, whether federal,
state or community (funded by donations), suffered frequent closures and re-openings due to villagers’ lack of co-operation in providing land and materials, conflicts between teachers, inspectors, local authorities and villagers, as well as sheer lack of resources.12

In 1924, in the ex-districts of Zacatlán and Tetela, federal inspector Malaquías Piña reported that residents of the area were not used to the new school. He found ‘opposition to agriculture and trades in every village’.13 What kind of opposition was this? I shall now look at three different strategies for opposing manual activities in the school (defiance, resistance and appropriation) and one case of successful implementation of the school annexes (a case of acceptance). These case studies illustrate four different forms of peasant negotiation. Because peasants regularly contributed to schools with money, materials and labour, they felt they had the right to influence the terms of schooling, but they did not always claim it openly.

Zacatlán

Defiance: Hueytlalpan

Hueytlalpan was a municipality under the jurisdiction of Zacatlán, extending 56 square kilometres in the tropical lowlands of the northern Sierra and populated by Totonac Indians. By the early twentieth century the non-Indian population had grown to become a significant minority that dominated trade in sugar cane and coffee. The town council’s secretary was a mestizo who abused his position and exercised faculties that corresponded to the Totonac municipal president and aldermen.14

In the early 1920s, the municipality’s population was just above 5000, concentrated in the cabecera of Hueytlalpan and its three subject pueblos. Despite their relative isolation, all these pueblos had boys’ schools in the second half of the nineteenth century, bearing the names of national and regional liberal heroes. When the Chicontepec tax was abolished, they continued collecting money under the name of voluntary donations to sustain one boys’ and one girls’ school for each pueblo, including the cabecera. During the 1920s, like most municipalities of the tropical Sierra, Hueytlalpan did not receive federal government funding. Unlike various municipal seats throughout the Sierra, it did not benefit from state government revenues either.15

Hueytlalpan’s residents were familiar with schools and used to contributing to them through locally controlled taxes or donations and faenas. However, such exactions were not always found to be fair. In fact, evidence of disaffection towards local authorities and secretaries throughout the 1920s included complaints of excessive taxation and faenas.16 Moreover, demand for faenas increased throughout the Sierra

13 AHSEP-DECI, box 784, file 60, 1 April 1924.
14 Ramón Márquez, Noticia Estadística, Zacatlán 22 April 1848. Archivo Municipal de Zacatlán (AMZ), Hueytlalpan files, years 1896, 1900 and 1920. AGEP-SEP-MPE, box 117, file 52, 1929.
15 Departamento de Fomento, Noticia con motivo del Cuarto Censo General de habitantes (Puebla, 1922). AHSEP-DECI, box 13, file 17, 1922. AGEP-SEP-MPE, 1925, box 48. AMZ, Public Instruction files, years 1896, 1900, 1905 and 1931.
16 AMZ, files 30, 40 and 53, 1920.
to provide for General Barrios’ road building project. In April 1928, a protest occurred
in the town of Hueytlalpan. The secretary and the schoolteacher were assaulted; then
the secretary, judges and other public employees were imprisoned. Protest leaders,
followed by 150 men, complained of excessive faenas and increased water charges
imposed by the secretary. Like many other schools in municipal seats, Hueytlalpan’s
school had embraced the teaching of agriculture due to the insistence of the state’s
educational authorities.\textsuperscript{17} The schoolteacher, whose salary was paid by Hueytlalpan
residents’ donations, was accused of trying to force children to work in an orchard
despite their parents’ opposition. Indeed already in 1924, federal inspector Piña had
found that Indians in the district were ‘horrified by the work in school annexes’ (i.e., in
the school plot and workshops).\textsuperscript{18} For parents whose resources were already stretched
to the limit (faenas plus increased water charges), the new school’s requirement for
children to work on the land was an unwarranted exaction. But their protest failed.
The Sierra cacique, General Barrios, who had initially supported the secretary and local
authorities, sent an officer and troops to investigate the problem. Not surprisingly, they
concluded that the charges were unfounded (Brewster, 1995: 101–102).

\textit{Tetela}

The following cases occurred in three barrios of the municipality of Tetela in the
temperate highlands. Federal schools became widespread in this region, unlike the
tropical lowlands. According to the 1921 census, San Nicolás had 986 inhabitants
and Capuluaque 787, both surpassing the impoverished cabecera of Tetela, a town no
longer of strategic importance, with a population of only 727. La Cañada was smaller
with a population of 448.\textsuperscript{19} Like most Sierra villagers, the inhabitants of these barrios
possessed sufficient land to grow maize and beans to cover family needs. Lacking
commercial crops such as sugar cane and coffee, they migrated to the lowlands in
search of work outside the highland’s agricultural season.

\textit{Resistance: San Nicolás}

In contrast to the neighbouring barrios of La Cañada and Capuluaque, which were
described as mestizo with Spanish language clearly dominant, San Nicolás was con-
sidered largely Indian.\textsuperscript{20} Like many Sierra villages, San Nicolás had a long experience
of schooling. In 1867, shortly after the liberal triumph over European intervention in
which the Sierra participated actively, the village of San Nicolás raised money through
a communal agriculture system to open a school. They had high hopes for peacetime
and trusted that a school would provide ‘prosperity and enlightened progress’. They

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] AGEP-SEP-MPE, box 60, file 63, Zacatlán 4 March 1925.
\item[18] AHSEP-DECI, box 784, file 60, 1 April 1924.
\item[19] \textit{Cuarto Censo de la República}. México, 1921. Thomson with LaFrance (1999:
305–312).
\item[20] AHSEP-DECI, box 57, file 1, 1923. AHSEP-DECI, box 787, file 16, 24 December
1923. Sáenz (1927: 55, 63, 102, 103).
\end{footnotes}
informed the Tetela municipality of their plans and demanded financial support (Mallon, 1995: 104–105, 287–288). During the Porfiriato the municipal treasury sustained the school. By 1908 there was a girls’ as well as a boys’ school.\(^{21}\)

After the revolution San Nicolás experienced the same financial problems as the region as a whole. At least from 1922 villagers gave voluntary donations to pay the teacher, Señorita Ana María Rodríguez. However, contributions were increasingly difficult to collect. In March 1923 federal inspector Efraín Bonilla proposed to make San Nicolás a federal school because of the irregularities in the teacher’s payment and the risk that the school might be closed. Ministry officials did not accept Bonilla’s proposal on the grounds that the school had so far remained open despite difficulties. However, in July 1923 the school finally became federal after the insistence of local authorities and a request sent to the Secretary of Education by General Tranquilino Quintero (he had been commander of Tetela on the side of the Constitucionalistas in 1914). Villagers would no longer need to contribute to the teacher’s salary but they were now expected to provide a plot and help develop annexes.\(^{22}\)

In February 1924, teacher Alejandría Bonilla explained to inspector Piña that all previous teachers and inspectors had failed to introduce agricultural activities and workshops. On hearing this Piña decided to gather parents in a meeting with the help of Tetela’s municipal president. According to the inspector’s report, the 80 people who attended were persuaded of the benefits of manual activities and decided to provide the school with a plot. They also agreed to give faenas to build a chicken coop, a dovecote and a house for the teacher. After Piña’s talk registration rose significantly from 45 to 116 pupils, with attendance reaching 109 in September. By then they had begun cultivating 2232 square metres of land and the annexes for animal husbandry had been improved. The revolutionary school had been introduced.\(^{23}\) Could San Nicolás be considered at this point a case of acceptance of the new curriculum? And how deep was the change?

It is difficult to believe that Piña’s eloquence changed the school panorama so definitively and rapidly. It is more likely that he established a good relationship with the municipal president who had enough influence to change villagers’ immediate conduct. Compliance, however, was not lasting. When Sub-Secretary of Education Moisés Saénz visited San Nicolás in 1927, he found a good building and enough equipment but a bad school. Average attendance had dropped to 65, and only 36 pupils were present the day of the visit. The orchard was virtually non-existent, and although there was a good arable plot, the corn plantation was in a sorry state. According to the Sub-Secretary, the community did not co-operate and he gave the school 1 month to radically change or be closed. The school remained open under federal jurisdiction but not without difficulties. Unfortunately, there is no record of the state of annexes after Saénz’s visit. But even leaving aside the unpopular manual activities, the school still faced important obstacles. In 1928 the teacher found it difficult to re-enrol all children of school age whereas later in the year, villagers

\(^{21}\) AMT, box 161 bis, 11 August 1894, and unnumbered box for the 1900s, file 3, 1908.
\(^{23}\) AHSEP-DECI, box 787, file 16, 1924.
complained of the teacher’s inefficiency. Thus, on both sides of the educational contract, each part felt the other was not living up to expectations.\textsuperscript{24}

**Appropriation: Capuluaque**

Capuluaque was described by contemporaries as a mestizo village of Spanish speakers.\textsuperscript{25} In the mid 1890s Capuluaque had a boys’ school under the name of local Nahua patriarch and liberal-patriotic hero, Juan Francisco Lucas, sustained by the municipal treasury through the Chicontepec tax. By 1908 the school was co-educational with 35 boys and girls attending. In early 1922, Capuluaque’s school was sustained by villagers’ donations but later that year it became federal. Despite the change of jurisdiction, it kept the name of Juan Francisco Lucas.\textsuperscript{26} Continuity in the name, however, did not assure its smooth running, and community support for the school fluctuated throughout the 1920s. Ana María Rodríguez was the federal teacher in 1923. Formerly a municipal teacher who had taught in the neighbouring village of San Nicolás, she was sent to a promising new school in Xochiapulco because Capuluaque’s villagers were reported not to be cooperating with the school in mid-1923.\textsuperscript{27} Yet 3 years later, in June 1926, inspector Lino García found the school’s animals and cultivation plots were very well looked after. Three years later still, in 1929, parents expressed the view that they were not interested in their children growing crops or rearing animals in school and refused to cooperate. The Director of Federal Education in Puebla decided to close the school. Parents in Capuluaque hired a teacher of their choice to impart the type of instruction they found appropriate.

In February 1932, probably due to financial difficulties, Capuluaque’s authorities and residents requested the re-opening of the federal school offering all their support. It opened as a co-educational school with a programme of 3 years of elementary education. Throughout 1932, teacher María Arroyo ran sports and hygiene campaigns enthusiastically, but with limited support from the village despite being described as a persuasive negotiator. In July 1933, during a school festival, inspector Fausto Molina encouraged residents ‘to eradicate the prejudice against children working in the cultivation plot and annexes’.\textsuperscript{28} However, in November he still reported the community’s unwillingness to support the school’s manual activities, while the organisation of patriotic festivals enjoyed widespread co-operation with very satisfactory results. Peasant parents clearly preferred the activities of the old liberal-patriotic school.\textsuperscript{29} When
they called upon the Ministry of Education to re-open the school, they wanted to share 
the cost of schooling but they would not comply with work in annexes or intrusive 
moralising campaigns.

**Acceptance: La Cañada**

In the eighteenth century, silver mining had attracted non-Indians to settle in La 
Cañada. Mining contributed significantly to sustain the mid-nineteenth-century liberal 
campaigns but declined subsequently. By the early 1920s most male adults were farm-
ers and often had to migrate in search of work.\(^{30}\)

La Cañada had enjoyed secular education from early on. By the end of the nine-
teenth century it had a girls’ as well as a boys’ school. But the development of schooling 
was not unproblematic. Nineteenth-century teachers complained of low enrolment, 
absenteeism and tardiness as well as lack of co-operation from parents and the justice 
of the peace. Like Capuluaque in the 1920s, when parents disagreed with the way the 
school was run or the manners of a particular teacher, they tried to organise their own 
school (Mallon, 1995: 287–290). After the revolution, financial difficulties ensued and 
private funding became crucial. Thus in 1923 the boys’ school received support from 
the local deputy, Arnulfo Pérez, and the girls’ school became private, with fees paid by 
parents.\(^{31}\) In July 1924, the boys’ school became federal and co-educational. Property 
of La Cañada, the school building was large, well-lit and ventilated. Villagers did repair 
work, collected contributions to buy new desks and provided for the teacher’s house 
which included rooms for girls’ cooking and other workshops. The teacher, Jovita 
Cortés, was hard-working and the community liked her. Through the mediation of 
General Gabriel Barrios, the school obtained a 5000 square metre plot with a good 
water supply where they grew corn and vegetables.

Manual activities were combined with liberal-patriotic ritual. La Cañada celebrated 
civic festivals attended by nearby schools and in one occasion even by the municipal 
authorities. Inspector Piña found social life in the village had ‘improved considerably 
since the opening of the school’.\(^{32}\) Evening classes included music lessons by Delfino 
Cruz who also headed the school committee and whose presence underscored the 
continuity of liberal ceremonies. In 1917, Cruz had composed two melodies and a 
funeral march for the memorial service of Juan Francisco Lucas; one of the pieces was 
sung by the school choir. It is possible that liberals such as Cruz and the teacher and 
former Methodist minister, Angel Zambrano, looked to La Cañada as a redoubt of the 
old liberalism, rather than to the cabeecera of Tetela. The latter was the former strong-
hold of patriotic liberalism, where the Church was reported to have gained ground 
after the revolution and where parents were resisting co-education.\(^{33}\)

In 1925, the Director of Federal Education in the state of Puebla congratulated the 
justice of the peace and the people of La Cañada for the support given to the school.

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31 AMT, box 31, file 8 and file 2, 1923. AHSEP-DECI, box 57, file 1, 1923.
32 AHSEP-DECI, box 786, file 42, 1924.
33 Thomson with LaFrance (1999: 310–311). On Methodists’ support for patriotic 
liberalism, Thomson (1989b) and Bastian (1989).
When Moisés Saéz visited in 1927, he found the plot and water supply were very good and he praised the teacher, Angel Zambrano, for his interest in the manual activities of the school. Judging by the Ministry of Education’s reports, La Cañada’s pre-revolutionary schooling culture did not prevent it from giving unqualified support to the 1920s federal school, participating in patriotic rituals as well as farming and workshops.34

Discussion

Causes for Negotiation

The villagers of Hueytlatlan, San Nicolás and Capuluaque found the new educational contract to be unbalanced, with schools still demanding considerable contributions from villagers, while becoming more intrusive by threatening the autonomy of the peasant family through the teaching of farming, and frequently failing to provide significant results.

Sierra villages were used to schools based on a Republican conception of citizenship that encouraged patriotic virtue and the knowledge and practice of constitutional rights. During the nineteenth century, they accommodated to these schools and paid for them regularly through the Chicontepec tax. Even if enrolment had been far from universal and attendance irregular, some chose to send their children to school. The old school took up precious time parents needed to teach their sons and daughters to become peasants, introducing them to the family’s division of labour. But at least it provided skills that few peasant parents were in a position to teach, such as reading, writing and arithmetic. In contrast, the new school attempted to teach precisely those skills that were the core of peasant life and identity and were traditionally transmitted by parents. Further intrusion of the school came with the hygiene, temperance and other moralising campaigns that sought to transform domestic life.

Except in villages where the revolutionary school was introduced at the same time as agrarian reform (which was not the case for the communities studied here), schools were exacting in their demand for land, seeds, animals, etc. When land was scarce the obligation to provide the school with a cultivation plot became a burden. In places where there was a strong agrarian movement, the situation was different. The issue of land was then associated with the exercise of rights rather than the duty to be productive. Land grants facilitated cultivation plots for schools. Successful school annexes identified by Vaughan (1997: Chapter 5) in the municipalities of Zacapoaxtla and Xochiapulco were in towns or villages supporting the agrarian movement. In most of the Sierra, by contrast, the agrarian movement was practically non-existent (Brewster, 1998). In any case, the presence of an agrarian movement was neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for the success of the revolutionary school. In Tecamachalco (southern Puebla) the existence of a strong agrarian movement did not

34 AHSEP-DECI, box 786, file 42, 1924 and box 784, file 60, 30 September 1924. Sáenz (1927: 54–55).
impede the failure of school cultivation plots due to lack of water (Vaughan, 1997: Chapter 4). By contrast, the school at La Cañada succeeded without an agrarian movement but with the benefit of a well irrigated plot. These cases suggest it was adequate land available for the school, regardless of the means through which it was obtained, that made a difference. With favourable land conditions, the school could offer good products and thus persuade parents of the advantages of the new school. La Cañada additionally enjoyed support from prominent local figures. Finally, throughout the 1920s the barrio was reported to have assertive teachers who learned to listen to villagers’ demands and preserved popular civic festivals. By contrast, in San Nicolás, Capuluaque and Hueytalpan, scarce resources for annexes, lack of support from the authorities, intra-community factionalism, or teachers insensitive to villagers’ needs, halted the development and persuasive power of the new schools.

The defiance and resistance of Totonac Hueytalpan and Nahua San Nicolás, in contrast to the appropriation and acceptance of mestizo Capuluaque and La Cañada, might suggest that mestizo villages were more responsive than Indian villages to educational policies that introduced modern traits and programmes entirely based on the Spanish language. Mestizos, whose mother tongue was Spanish and had greater links with the outside world through trade, were presumably more acculturated, and would therefore adapt better to schooling. However, evidence suggests that the ethnic composition of villages was not decisive in the response to schools. Villagers’ attitudes varied across time. Assertive mestizo Capuluaque was at some point reported not to cooperate and in any case it rejected school annexes. Defiant Totonac Hueytalpan and resistant Nahua San Nicolás provide evidence of more or less strong support for schooling at different times. Successful mestizo La Cañada has a record of facing typical school problems: low enrolment, absenteeism, parents’ disapproval of teacher or curriculum, etc. Additionally, when factionalism and politics affected schooling, it did not necessarily happen along ethnic lines. In Hueytalpan, Totonac villagers opposed not only the secretary and teacher, both mestizo, but also the Totonac municipal authorities. The local balance of power, regardless of ethnic allegiances, could confront the governing and the governed, or different factions within the town. As Vaughan has shown, it was Nahua Xochiapulco, and other Indian villages involved in the agrarian movement, that had the best schools in the region. In these schools and in mestizo La Cañada, the common factors were availability of resources, support of the authorities, lack of serious rivalries and strong interests opposing the school, and the efficiency of teachers. These elements, rather than ethnic traits, were probably the key to successful implementation of the revolutionary educational policy.

Forms of Negotiation

In overtly opposing or quietly resisting children’s work in annexes, villagers in Hueytalpan and Tetela affirmed their right as parents to control children’s labour. As community members funding the school through the so-called ‘voluntary donations’, or contributing in kind to federal schools, their opposition was an affirmation, however indirect, of their right to have a say in the running of the school.
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Villagers developed different forms of negotiation according to their interests and circumstances. Because of their powerlessness, they rarely chose to openly and formally voice their opposition or claim their rights. In the case of Hueytlalpan an official appeal procedure had little or no chance of being heard because the schoolteacher and local authorities were supported by General Barrios’ cacicazgo. For the same reason, the moderately violent form of opposition chosen by Hueytlapan protesters proved fruitless. The failure of protests such as Hueytlapan’s further deterred peasants from overt defiance to school. Additionally, the San Nicolás villagers’ discourse of progress attached to schools from an early date suggests that peasant parents were aware that opposition to the school was not something to express openly in public. Even if they were only rejecting certain aspects of the school programme rather than formal education as a whole, their attitude could be misinterpreted as a rejection of education and progress more generally, and often was (Mallon, 1995: 285–294; Brewster, 1995: 243–253). Under these circumstances, it made sense that the Indian barrio of San Nicolás showed a tactical compliance in the presence of cabecera authorities, while still resisting the manual activities in the last instance.35

The most widespread expressions of disapproval of the school were omissions rather than actions: non-enrolment and low attendance. Similarly, when villagers were interested in some form of schooling for their children, but did not wholly agree with the existing school programme and administration, or when demands were too onerous, rather than complain openly, they chose not to co-operate with material resources and avoided participation in school activities. In a more assertive move, Capuluaque villagers not only withdrew their children from the federal school but hired a teacher of their choice, thus proving their commitment to formal education and increasing their bargaining power. Even if they had to call upon the Ministry of Education when they could no longer pay the teacher, they were not ready to comply with all aspects of the federal programme.

However limited, all these community strategies taught teachers a lesson: the need to negotiate with and adapt to local opinion so that parents would send their children to school. After all, a school without prospective citizens was no school. In the context of a weak, developing state, the government’s inability to fully fund schools meant the communities’ material contribution was essential and thus villagers, however subordinated, could retain some control over the school (Vaughan, 1997; Rockwell, 1994).

Nevertheless, when the school managed to acquire enough material resources (without being too exacting) and had good teachers, as in La Cañada, its penetration was less contested and more successful. If the circumstances were favourable enough, peasants would yield to the new tendencies. This leads us to conclude that peasant defence of liberal-patriotic schooling and the family’s economic and cultural autonomy was not a stubborn, unchangeable position, nor a heroic resistance. It was the attempt to shape educational policies on the basis of rights earned as taxpayers and contributors. However, neither policy-makers nor teachers recognised peasant actions as an

35 Knight (1994: 443) and Mallon (1995: 82–83) have found similar situations where the subordinate ‘obey but do not carry out’ (‘obedezco pero no cumplio’).
exercise of rights and duties. This was partly because such exercise was a mixture of legal and customary practices, resulting from peasants’ sense of justice and previous processes of negotiation, rather than inscribed in any code of citizenship promoted by the state. Blind to peasant logic, educators often interpreted peasant action as backward and misguided.

The indirect and rarely open forms of peasant negotiation identified here, like those described as resistance by Scott (1976), show that while subordinate, peasants nonetheless struggled to defend their interests. Whereas the struggle proves peasants’ full capacity for political agency, the fact that their interlocutors did not formally recognise their right to influence schooling, leads us to conclude that this was more a display of the weaponry of the weak than an exercise of citizenship.

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