

NICARAGUA, A LABORATORY OF POPULAR EDUCATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this article we intend to outline some of the revolutionary changes in the national educational system of Nicaragua, particularly the crucial role of 'popular education'. We shall begin with a short description of the historical background and organizational structure of education in Nicaragua. Then we shall focus on the new methodological principles of popular education in adult education programs.

Popular education co-exists with the formal educational system. In some ways this system has been influenced by popular methodology, in other ways the two systems collide completely. To reveal both the influences and the contrasts between the two systems, we shall describe three formal education programs: study and work, infant education and bilingual education. In a last paragraph we shall weigh the balance of eight years of education in revolutionary Nicaragua, and outline the perspectives for popular education in the coming years.

1.1. Exploiting the people

Under the dictatorship of the Somoza's the educational system of Nicaragua was characterized by contempt for the workers and peasants.*) This was clearly revealed by Somoza, who once stated in an interview: "I don't want educated people, I want oxes."**) The entire educational system supported the control, power and wealth of the Somoza family and their allies.***)

An astonishing proof of the effects of the educational system under Somoza is an experience of the Literacy Crusade in 1980: In lesson 2 a photograph of Sandino's face was shown to generate an active discussion on the meaning of this image for Nicaraguan history. In reality the discussion was limited because many people were not able to recognize the shown

*. Miller, V., *Between struggle and hope, the Nicaraguan literacy crusade*, Colorado, USA, 1985, pp 19

**. Lernoux, P., *Cry of the people*, Harmondsworth, England, 1982, pp 85

***. The Somoza family and their allies appropriated most of the wealth and production of the country. The assets of the Somoza family ascended in 1975 up to 400 to 500 million dollars. In that time about 1/6 of the country fertile grounds and up to 26 of the biggest nicaraguan enterprises were in hands of this family.

figure or identify with it. Somoza's educational system had relegated the man to the category of bandit and terrorist.*)"

For the production of coffee and cotton Somoza didn't need universities and secondary schools. In fact only a small minority of the population received a traditional humanistic education in mostly private schools. For their university studies these students preferred to go abroad. Besides this, there existed state-financed schools where technicians were trained. Education was severely neglected in the marginalized suburbs and townships all over the country. Opportunities for study were limited to giving a rudimentary basic education to the future workers and peasants, most of whom remained illiterate **)

Tünnermann, the first Minister of education under the Sandinista government, summarized the state of education at the time of the revolution:***)

In many of the rural areas, primary education usually did not exceed the third grade. Many schools did not have any educational program and contents learned at school were of little use to peasants and workers.

Besides that, almost 90% of the schools in the rural areas had only one teacher, mostly with only a primary education themselves, 81% of the schools had only one classroom and there was a continuous lack of educational means.

From approximately 70% of the children, who were of elementary school age, and whom actually entered the primary grades in 1976, more than a half dropped out within a year. Although approximately 50% of the population lived in the rural areas, two-thirds of the students enrolled were from the urban centres. Official statistics reveal that during the 1970's, only 5% of the students entering primary school in the countryside completed their studies; this figure was 44% in the urban areas.

Content of educational programs praised the city-oriented 'American way of life' and supported the prevailing social-economic structures.

The few literacy programs that existed prior to the revolution also reinforced the status quo. They disdained the daily reality of the majority of Nicaraguans who were poor peasants.****)

*. See: Miller, *ibid.*, pp. 84

**. Arrien, J.B., Kaufmann, R., *Nicaragua en la educacion*, UCA, Managua, Nicaragua, 1977

***. Tunnermann-Bernheim, C., *Hacia una nueva educacion en Nicaragua*, MED, Managua, Nicaragua, 1982, pp 29

****. Peresson, M.T., et all, *Educación popular y alfabetización*, Bogota, Colombia, 1983

PHOTO 1

PHOTO 2

Two drawings taken from two different literacy booklets. Both are directed towards peasants and working-class people and has the family dinner-table as a subject. The right one is taken from a Nicaraguan literacy booklet, the difference is clear.

Before 1979 education served to reinforce the underdeveloped condition of the country. Illiteracy was, therefore, not only the product of the situation, but also a necessary precondition.*)

1.2. Consulting the people

One of the first actions of the new Government of National Reconstruction in 1979 was the appointment of a Minister of Education. He, and his staff, faced the giant task of planning and implementing a new educational system.

The strategy for educational planning aimed at two goals:

1) to improve and extend educational facilities and expand the accessibility to these facilities. 2) to transform both the structure and functions of the entire educational system.**)

Sergio Ramirez, previous junta member and since 1984 the Vice-President of Nicaragua, stated the aims of the new education:***)

We are trying to find our own conception of education, a conception which is developed in the light of our own history and our own revolutionary situation. (...) Our revolution is anti-imperialistic, so is our conception of teaching. The aim is a radical change of the social structure in the country. This implies a radical rupture with history and social - and economic relations in the country. The conception of educa-

*. Castilla Urbina, M. de, La educación en Nicaragua - un caso de educación para el desarrollo del subdesarrollo, Managua, Nicaragua, 1977

** . MED, El proceso de transformación educativa en Nicaragua 1979-1981, Managua, Nicaragua, 1981

***. Zimmermann, J. (red.), Padagogik der Befreiung-lernen in Nicaragua, München, West-Germany, 1983, pp 44

tion that is derived herefrom, is directed promoting a similar change in the individual consciousness.

All the efforts were meant to express and benefit the interests of the workers and farmers, and to contribute to the creation of what Nicaraguans defined as "the New Education". To collect the ideas and suggestions of the population regarding the orientation and basic principles of the new educational system, the government organized a National Consultation in 1981.

This event is unique in the history of Latin America. In its aims, content, and execution. In fact, it represented a rich experience in self-education for the more than 30 participating organizations. Not only the Sandinista mass-organizations, but political parties, parental organizations, and non-Sandinista trade-unions participated. All together more than 50,000 persons, divided in small groups, discussed the possible new forms education would take.*)

An important part of the response had to do with the involvement of the mass-organizations in the educational process. Of course, there was a clamour for more schools, more infant and more adult education. But at the same time the participants stressed the importance of restructurating educational curricula so that the content would be related to the daily reality of the popular classes, revolutionary tasks and popular cultural values. Also teaching methods should reflect the input of teachers, pupils, parents and mass-organizations, the relation between theory and practice, and study and work, into account. They should encourage the creative and research capacities of the students and a scientific vision of the world. As stated in a preliminary report from the Ministry of Education:**)

In conclusion, it should be an education that accompanies and stimulates the revolutionary process. An education that eliminates egoism, individualism and opportunism, and contributes to establish the New Man and the New Society.

The Ministry of Education analyzed and interpreted the results of the discussions. And in 1983 the department published the results under the title: "Aims, objectives and principles of the new education in Nicaragua".***)

*. CIERA, La democracia participativa en Nicaragua, Managua, Nicaragua, 1984, pp 77-78

** Vilas, C., M., La revolución sandinista, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1984, pp 310

***. MED, Fines, objetivos y principios de la nueva educación, Managua, Nicaragua, 1983

1.3. Education for all

After the National Consultation there was a National Council established to advise the Ministry of Education on issues such as how defining the organizational structures for the formal education system. Participants in this National Council are juvenile organizations, teacher unions, and other organizations related to education. This National Council has branches at a local and a national level.

In its first years, after a thorough analysis, the new administration started a process of changing the entire educational system. New programs were introduced, such as pre-school education, special education for handicapped children, popular adult education, and programs specially directed towards the rural population. Curriculae, methods and contents of existing programs (primary, secondary and university education) were largely changed.

For example in university education, some careers like commercial education, international commerce, medical technology were liquidated and others were newly created such as: nutrition, engineering, agronomy, veterinarian sciences. The enrollment of students in economy and law were decreased, while the enrollment of students of pedagogy, medicine, agricultural sciences were increased.

New teaching texts were developed, based on the daily reality, the local history and context, the prevailing methods of production and the authentic culture. More emphasis was laid on the value of practical activities and manual work, associated with the daily life of most of the pupils.

To replace authoritarian methods and rote learning techniques there were experiments with non-traditional teaching methods and non traditional teaching forms such as group discussions, socio-dramas, theatre, puzzles, riddles, and drawings.

Other newly introduced educational instruments are the monthly Training Workshops (TEPCE) for teachers in primary and secondary schools. In these workshops the teachers discuss the new educational material and evaluate the materials they recently applied in their classes.*)

Probably one of the most spectacular actions within the scope of adult education was the National Literacy Campaign which took place in 1980.**)

Thousands of students of all ages, classes and

*. MED, Cinco anos de educacion en la revolucion, 1979-1984, Managua, Nicaragua, 1985, pp 110

**. For an extensive description of this Campaign, see F. Cardenal and V. Miller in: Nicaragua 1980: The battle of the ABC's, in Harvard Educational Review I, 1981, pp 1-26, also: DEI/MED, Nicaragua triunfa en la alfabetización. Documentos y testimonios de la Cruzada Nacional de Alfabetización, San Jose, Costa Rica, 1981

grades swarmed off to the most remote corners of the country. The results were stunning; the percentage of illiterates was reduced from an estimated 52 percent to 13 percent.

By the end of the National Literacy Campaign collectives of adult education, the so-called "Collectives of Popular Education", emerged all over the country. These collectives were to turn the methodological, and theoretical principles of the so-called Popular Education into reality.

Those pupils that had passed with satisfactory results, i.e. those who had mastered the literacy booklet "The New Sunrise", could integrate themselves into a Collective. Each Collective was assigned a volunteer coordinator and promoter, both volunteers. The coordinator, the popular teacher, gives the study materials to the members of the him or her assigned Collective. He or she prepares the themes of the classes and stimulates cooperation and dialogue in the group. The promotor's task was to coordinate and supervise several Collectives of Popular Education and this was done by organizing weekly preparatory workshops for coordinators.*)

By these, and yet unmentioned means, the Nicaraguan government succeeded in organizing and guaranteeing that more than 25 percent of the population participated in some form of education. The challenge that the Nicaraguan government imposed on itself is the objective that by the year 2000 all the Nicaraguans of school age have full access to the educational system.

This naturally implies a considerable increase in the national budget for education. In 1985 the amount reserved for education consisted of 10 percent of the national budget. In the Ministry of Education there were not only fundamental changes in the budgetary amounts, but also in the amount of money assigned to the different programs. Some dates may illustrate this:**)

*. Lammerink, M., Vos de Waal, L., Rippen, J., *Lápices, herramientas de lucha*, Mexico D.F., Mexico, 1987

** . MED, *Cinco años de educación en la revolución, 1979-1984*, Managua, Nicaragua, 1985, pp 322

	1978	1984
infant education	--	2 %
primary education	57 %	41 %
secondary education	21 %	15 %
adult education	--	11 %
industrial, agricultural and commercial education	9 %	5 %
other programs	3 %	5 %
central activities	5 %	10 %
collective activities	5 %	12 %
	<u>100 %</u> +	<u>100 %</u> + (101%)

In 1978: 282.573.000 C\$: 10 = 28,3 million US\$

In 1984: 1.484.720.200 C\$: 40 = 37,1 million US\$

In the following pages we shall outline the methodological and practical consequences of the new educational policies in Nicaragua after 1979.

2. THE CRADLE OF A NEW METHODOLOGY: POPULAR EDUCATION

2.1. The principles

Much has already been written on the National Literacy Campaign. This Campaign has been of major importance and inestimable value for promoting the structural changes in the educational system. This is due to the methodological principles used, as well as to the massive form of their application. In this Campaign an education that has its roots in the daily reality of the pupils and is directed to its transformation originated.

The contents of the reading and the mathematics booklet evolved from the revolutionary experience of the Nicaraguan people, the revolutionary strategy and the plan for economic re-activation. The lessons reflected the situation and the problems of local communities, production, health, and the more global aims of the revolution: defense and economic reactivation.*)

*. DEI/MED, Nicaragua triunfa en la alfabetización. Documentos y testimonios de la Cruzada Nacional de Alfabetización, San Jose, Costa Rica, 1981

Taking the reality of the revolutionary process as a starting--point for the contents of literacy programs and connecting it with the tasks that emerge during that process, created a fundamental principle: **Flexibility**. As a consequence, a lot of teaching themes emerge during the development and deepening of the process. In other words, as education is based on a changing daily reality, the educational contents have to be continuously modified.

In the program of Popular Basic Education there was a regular revision of booklets. Two factors steered this flexibility: the changing national reality and the themes and critiques that emerged from the popular teachers and staff on local level. In order to respond properly to the changing regional and local interests even the decentralization of the curriculum production was contemplated.

Understanding the changes in daily reality can strengthen the creative participation of the popular masses in order to transform reality.

As the Crusade progressed, we realised the need for people not just to remain at the level of pure awareness or knowledge about what the revolution proposed. Going beyond that was preliminary to become engaged in a process of transformation, actually transforming the world in which they lived by combining what the revolution's development programs offered with the concrete reality and experience of their existence.*)

This points to another fundamental principle: **Action-Reflection--Action**. The roots of this principle can be traced to the work of the renowned Brazilian educator Paolo Freire.**) Since the National Literacy Campaign Action-Reflection-Action is one of the basic principles of the adult education program, although, at the same time, it is cause for many discussions and polemics.

THREE PICTURES (CARTOONS)

This is the way we learn

1. We look at the situation, we observe it.
2. We handle it, we study it, we analyze it, and little by little we come to understand it.
3. Only after all this, we are capable to transform it.

*. Grisby, K., quoted in: Miller, ibid., pp. 87

**.. Through literacy training programs with peasants in Recife, Brazil, in the early sixties he began identifying characteristics of an effective learning methodology. The method implied people working together in community to acquire an understanding of society's economic, political and social forces in order to act upon them and transform them for the common good. See a.o.: Freire, P., *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, New York, USA, 1968

The National Literacy Campaign had more than the sole objective of alfabetizing the people, it also repudiated the 'culture of poverty and silence'*) and tried to recover, resuscitate and develop all the elements of the popular culture. This Cultural Recovery implied, on one hand, purging anti-popular elements which were present in education. Simultaneously, it meant a critical recovery of the autochthonous cultural forms: a recovery of history, folklore, traditions, legends, dances, stories, songs and the poetry of the poor. They tried recover those forms which coincided and expressed the interests of the popular classes.

For example, to stimulate the rediscovering and revalorization of the popular cultural identity, the literacy campaign takes the word "Guengüense" not only to learn vowels, but also to allow a collective discussion on the significance of this term. The "Guengüense" is a very old specimen of comedy with songs and dance created by the Indians and it shows their protest against the Spanish conquerors. Before the revolution this expression of popular history was considered vulgar, and outside the realm of art. Nowadays it is taken as one of the themes in popular education.**)

With the Campaign, adult education was converted in a Collective and Community-oriented event. Education took place in the community to benefit the community. In popular education Dialogue is the basic teaching instrument. Learning does not emerge from listening silently to an educator, nor by rote repetition. On the contrary, learning takes root in discovering, reflecting critically on reality, and together transforming the reality.

During the Crusade the coordinating team came to realize how difficult it was to generate a dialogue as a pure educational method in the isolation of a study session. Effective discussion and analysis were best promoted when dialogue emerged naturally from concrete activities surrounding the organization and implementation of a community project. In such situation dialogue was the result of an immediate problem-solving praxis. People analyzed their environment, planned ways to improve it and learned from their experience.***)

The methodology of Popular Education refers to an alternative educational approach, an approach which is directed at supporting changes in society. To that end educational activities are or-

*. Freire, P., The adult education process as cultural action for freedom, in: Harvard Educational Review, vol. 40, no. 2, 1970

**.. Sprenger, R., Het Nicaraguaanse volkstoneel, in: Wellinga, K., (red.), De bergen, de volgels en Sandino, Utrecht, Holland, 1983, pp 115-129

***. Miller, V., ibid., pp.90

ganized specifically by and for the workers, peasants and small farmers. Popular Education aims at strengthening the **Process of Concientization***) of the oppressed groups and contributes to the transformation of their lives. In this way, Popular Education is considered a pedagogical instrument, used in the liberation process, which tries to stimulate initiatives by and at the local level. In this particular mode, an attempt is made to convert the population into subjects of their own history, organization and development.

There is still another reason to state that the national literacy campaign is of unique importance. It was the first time that the Ministry of Education coordinated its work with the mass-organizations. This was an indispensable condition to being able to mobilize some 180,000 volunteers all over the country and guaranteeing the distribution of the necessary food, equipment, and teaching material. The distribution and communication network, installed for the national literacy campaign, was maintained for the emerging system of popular education.

Yet another characteristic result of the Literacy Campaign was the **Coordination between governmental institutions and local representations of mass-organizations**. It laid the groundwork for the organization of many of the specific activities directed at changing and transforming community conditions.

Activities or actions that resulted from the discussions in the Collectives of Popular Education often were executed together with the local neighbourhood committees (CDS). At the other hand these neighbourhood committees were actively engaged by the educational authorities to matriculate illiterates in the Collectives.

We should realize here, that in spite of all the imperfections, the Collectives of Popular Education in the local community try to develop and apply the methodological principle of Popular Education: a direct connection between theory and practice.

A Lesson of the Popular Basic Education deals with the mountainous zone and the products that are cultivated there. A certain Collective of Popular Education is located in such an area. In this Collective there is a discussion about the construction of vegetable-gardens in the village, which is stimulated by the Women mass-organization ANMLAE. Juan doubts the feasibility to cultivate vegetables in their particular environment. Augusto is convinced of the usefulness of vegetable gardens, and tries to persuade the others. Pablo and Maria are discussing the sowing of tomatoes in their garden.

*. Freire used the term "concientizacao" to describe the process of moving from personal experience to reflection and analysis of those experiences, to action in the social and political arena. See: Freire, P., *ibid.*, 1968

The Collective decides to visit the responsible of the vegetable gardens of ANMLAE to get more information.*)

As such, the Campaign itself is also a good example of the planning of a massive educational event, in which the problems that emerged during the process were tackled with imagination and creativity. One example of this is the emergence of "the Popular Teacher".

2.2. The people educating each other

By the end of the Campaign, out of pure necessity, the most advanced students were used to collaborate in the literacy classes. In this way, the program developed in new directions. These advanced students were called "popular teachers" and focused initially on those pupils that had more difficulties with the classes. In this, originally unintended, way the popular teachers transmitted the knowledge they acquired previously through their own experiences. This popular teacher later became the resource for the post-literacy program, namely the courses of the "popular basic education" which actually consisted of seven levels one introductory level for illiterates and six successive educational levels.

In spite of its imperfections, the crisis situation and the contradictions, the Collectives of Popular Education continue and represent one of the major sources of structural changes in the educational system. The network of established Collectives of Popular Education can be seen as a new mass-movement, considering that about 143,000 Nicaraguan farmers, workers, women and children, supported by some 20,000 popular teachers gather daily in one of the 17,000 Collectives to dedicate themselves to study, discuss politics and plan direct action in their environment (April 1987).**) As such, the program of popular education serves to mobilize people to establish a national network and to integrate local communities into the national policies.

The National Literacy Campaign and Popular Basic Education have been important arms in the struggle against repression and underdevelopment. Through education there has been an attempt to strengthen the popular culture and the national values which had been oppressed in the past by focusing on the North-American culture. In conclusion, we can state that for the structural changes which are taking place in the Nicaraguan educational system, the National Literacy Campaign has been, and still is, of vital importance.

But at the same time, we have to acknowledge that changes in the formal educational system are still limited, especially in primary, secondary and university education there is a lack of understanding of the principles of popular education, consequent-

*. Taken from a field-diary of a volunteer. In: Lammerink, M., and others, *ibid.*, pp. 78

** . Lammerink, M., Vos de Waal, L., Rippen, J., *Lápices, herramientas de lucha*, Mexico D.F., Mexico, 1987, pp. 112

ly, formal education still seems to be the prolongation of traditional scholastic education. Non-formal adult education, on the other hand, reflects a prolongation of the insurrectional battle.

3. TRANSFORMING FORMAL EDUCATION

Even recognizing that transformations in formal education have been less spectacular, there are still interesting modifications in both quantity and quality. We shall present examples of three different areas of formal education and the difficulties of integrating the previously mentioned concepts in these.

3.1. Mothers and infants

To create possibilities for mothers to participate actively in the reconstruction of the devastated country, and at the same time give a balanced education to their infants, the Ministry of Education established a special program: pre-school education.

Under the Somozist regime there was virtually no attention to infant education. Only 9,000 children (3 percent) between the ages of 3 to 6 were enrolled in an infant school. Almost all of these schools were private because the Somoza administration offered no financial support.*) So when the Sandinista government took power in 1979 they had to start from zero. Since then, enormous advances have been made: in 1983 about 54,000 children in the age from 3 to 6 attended classes in one of the almost 1,000 infant schools, and were attended by some 18,000 infant teachers, a majority of whom are volunteers. Since 1984, there were also "Rural Mobile Infant Services" created so that peasant women, especially during the harvest season, could participate in agricultural activities.**)

The participation of parents and members of the local community in the education of their young children is not only a material necessity (supply of volunteers, construction of facilities, making of toys, etc.), but is also considered indispensable for the realization of the objectives of pre-school education: to offer an integrated attention to the young child and stimulate in habits and conducts that facilitate his or her integration into society.

One of the problems in the area of pre-school education is that most infant educators lack formal training. A quarter of them have experience as a teacher in primary schools, but half of the infant educators, most of them volunteers, just fulfill the minimal requisite: graduation from primary school. To face the problems caused by the insufficient professional background of the infant educators, the Ministry of Education organizes continuous training programs for the infant educators. Besides, the National

*. MED, *Cinco años de educación en la revolución, 1979-1984*, Managua, Nicaragua, 1985, pp 67

** . *ibid.*, pp 67

Autonomous University of Nicaragua established a special course in infant education.*)

3.2. Learning in the fields, working at school

During the national literacy campaign, a lot of students entered, for the first time in their lives, in contact with the living and working conditions of the people who worked in factories and in agriculture. One of the results of the National Consultation was the decision to institutionalize the connection between intellectual and manual work. This concept was synthesized in the program "Study-Work" for students in primary and secondary schools and in the "Production Practices" for university students.**)

The activities in the "Study-Work" program fall into three categories; work in the school (maintenance, repair, preparing of educational materials, construction of gardens, etc.), work in the local community (supporting activities in basic health care, maintenance of some public works, etc.), and work in production (factories and agricultural work during harvest time).

One of the major problems in this field is the fact that there was little effort to link educational knowledge with labour activities in the production centers, nor in integrating the acquired experiences in the educational program. For example: thousands of students go picking coffee every year, as part of the "study-work" program. For the individual student this can be a rich experience. However, on returning to the class-room the teachers turn out to be incapable of structuring these experiences of students and integrating them into the educational process. This lack of understanding of the principles of popular education in the primary and secondary schools and the universities will, later on, force another profound discussion about educational strategies.

There are examples of a successful linkage between practical experiences of students and educational programming. In 1986 a department of the Faculty of Humanities decided to start a community development program with the fishing village of Masachapa. In this project students trained themselves in the methodology of Participatory Research and Popular Education by working with the fishermen and women. At the same time the villagers made, with help of the students, an analysis of their problems and successfully organized themselves to manage the problems. To understand the uniqueness of this example one must realize that two subjects of the Department were transformed in order to carry out the Masachapa project and to give special attention to evaluation and broad theoretical reflection on the developing events.***)

*. ibid., pp 70

**. ibid., pp 112-114

***. See: Lammerink, M., *Pescadores y estudiantes aprenden juntos*, CESO, The Hague, Holland, 1989

As to the "work-study" link, the Ministry of Education tries to incorporate the workers in the production sphere, which previously remained outside of it, into the educational system. To this end, this Ministry established the program "Education Development in the Community" (PRODECO). The main emphasis of this program is found in the rural areas.*)

In these areas the so-called "Regional Schools for Education and Work" (ERET), the "Agrarian Farmers Schools" (EAC) and "Basic Production Circles" (CBP), function up to the ninth grade level, all together with some 4,400 students. At this moment there are about 25 of these experimental centres in which the productive work of the farmers is not only the starting point for a broadening and deepening of their knowledge, but also the central pivot of their educational activities.

3.3. Making room for different cultural identities

The Ministry of Education stated that the principle of cultural recovery could not be limited to the popular history and values of the Spanish-speaking inhabitants. As Nicaraguan territory is shared among different ethnic groups, the application of the concept of Cultural Recovery through education should also take these differences into account.

The Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast differs in many aspects from the Pacific Coast area. On the Atlantic Coast, a Caribbean oriented culture predominates. Besides large groups of English speaking Criollo-negroes, there are also several thousand native Americans with their respective languages, of which the Miskitos, and their language Miskito, is the largest and best known. As a consequence of their isolated position caused by the deficiency or lack of means of communication, there are considerable prejudices and stereotypes on both sides between the Spanish majority and the ethnic minorities.

During the Literacy Campaign there were programs in four different languages (Spanish, English, Miskito and Sumo, another indigenous language), although the same educational material was used in the whole country. Since then various long term bilingual projects have been initiated, in English, Miskito, and since 1985, in Sumo.**)

In spite of an overt political recognition of the autonomy of the Atlantic Coast***), it has been impossible to implement an educational system based on its specific situation and culture. We can

*. *ibid.*, pp 224-229

**.*ibid.*, pp 266 also: Rodriguez, I., *La educación bilingüe en la Costa Atlántica*, in: *El Nuevo Diario*, may 5th, 1987

***. CIERA, *La democracia participativa en Nicaragua*, Managua, Nicaragua, 1984, pp 159-160

point out several reasons: In 1979 the Sandinista government inherited a complete absence of knowledge and experience in the antecedents of the different ethnic groups from the Atlantic coast. The Somozist administration maintained a minimal infrastructure in the region and an educational system that served to guarantee the minimal training necessary for the native workers of the Northamerican multinationals operating in mining and forestry.

Another reason is that the actual educational system on the Atlantic coast suffers a tremendous lack of trained local teachers. As an example we show a page from a booklet of a teacher in Bluefields:

** EXAMPLE OF NAN **

We should mention here that the participation of the Atlantic coast inhabitants in the liberation struggle was minimal with the result that many coastal people view the changes being introduced as more policies of "the Spanish" as they call the people from the Pacific coast. The continuous propaganda of the counter-revolutionaries from Honduras and Costa Rica, in English and the local indigenous languages, also have their influence. This all leads to high absence rates in schools.

From a political angle, bilingual education on the Atlantic coast is a sensitive issue. The majority of the cadres in charge of education come from the Pacific coast, don't have much knowledge of the local situation, don't even speak English, not to mention the indigenous languages. Many of them consider the social basis of the Sandistas in this region as weak and therefore conclude that teaching in English or Miskito may stimulate counter-revolutionary separatism, or at least brake the revolutionary process on the Atlantic coast.*)

The most interesting aspect of this process of autonomy is, nevertheless, the methodological discussions that take place regarding indigenous languages and their renovation. These discussions are linked closely with the issue of the legal and practical consequences of the question "What are the consequences of the political acknowledgment of the autonomy of the Atlantic coast?"

On the one hand, there is a concept of bilingual education in which the mother tongue is just a transitory station on the way to dominating of the Spanish language, which is the ultimate aim. The mother tongue of the pupils is the starting point for an easier and more rapid and effective way to learn the dominant language. In this concept the pupils' mother tongue has no an officially acknowledged status, nor perspectives for development.

*. Norwood, S., Evaluacion interna del CIDCA, mimeo D483, Managua, Nicaragua, 1985

In the other concept of bilingual education, the mother language of the pupils is acknowledged as equal to the dominant language, and both languages are taught and treated as equally important for pupils and teachers. This concept of bilingual education would render a sincere acknowledgment of the vernacular languages spoken on the Atlantic coast and also imply a reevaluation of their specific history. We think that the real possibility for effective bilingual education on the Atlantic coast lies in the recent political acknowledgment of the specific historical, economical, social and cultural backgrounds of its inhabitants. This acknowledgement is a key to success or failure for education on this side of Nicaragua, where, for the majority of the people, education is a direct link with what they experience as "the revolution".

4. BALANCE AND PERSPECTIVES

4.1. A difficult process during a situation of war

For those who expected that after seven years of great efforts, the new educational concepts and possibilities would result in a completely new education, these last lines will be disheartening. With the revolutionary victory great changes were introduced, but because of the conditions of the war all changes have not taken place at all levels of society, nor at the same rhythm. In education, for example, perhaps the attitude of pupils changed rapidly, while teachers followed more slowly alter in a different rhythm. The working class passed through a lot of changes which often differed from changes occurring to those youngsters in the apolitical middle-class. Farmers that had organized themselves in cooperatives underwent profound transformations, while bureaucrats clung to their traditions and old habits.

We can find the same kind of differences in the educational system between popular education and formal education. The program of adult education has developed differently than formal education. Although the content has changed in the latter, its structure remains traditional. Even though the social context has changed considerably, changes in the formal educational system take place very slowly and sometimes collide with the changes that originate in adult education.

If we take this into account, it may be considered a success that the activists of the mass-organizations, together with the Ministry of Education, were able to motivate thousands of volunteers to participate in the National Literacy Campaign, various National Health Campaigns and other mass-mobilizations. After eight years of revolution it is striking that there has emerged an adult education that goes far beyond learning to read and write and dominate mathematics, towards a program of permanent adult education. The 20,000 popular teachers, together with a growing number of sensitized professional teachers, are gaining self-confidence as organizers of collective learning.

Nevertheless, the problems and limitations which face the new educational system are innumerable. A great deal of them are related to the economic situation of the country, the economic world crisis, the low prices for Nicaragua's export products and the tremendous amount of money assigned to defense purposes.

These factors have caused huge shortages in the acquisition of essential materials and equipment for the construction of schools, the printing facilities for educational material, the production of furniture and the logistic support to all the programs. (E.g. with a demand for 400,000 writing desks, the Ministry can only produce some 20,000 a year.) Also for economic reasons a lot of teachers leave their jobs. Until 1987 some 2,000 left, this causing the Ministry to rely increasingly on insufficiently trained personnel.*)

The situation of war is another important cause of problems. Since the beginning of the aggression, almost three years after the liberation (1982), until 1985, 15 schools were destroyed, many more damaged and 350 were closed down for security reasons or because the whole community had to be moved to new settlements. The adult education program in particular was attacked. Here some 300 teachers were assassinated, 171 kidnapped and 247 active members of the collectives were murdered. About 840 collectives of adult education ceased to function for the above mentioned reasons.**)

The continuing military mobilization of students, teachers and educational technicians has limited seriously the development and execution of several programs. For example, in the universities the number of male students has been reduced considerably by the introduction of the draft in 1985. Again specifically the Collectives of Popular Education suffered severe setbacks because coordination activities in the countryside had to be reduced, or because the gatherings of the collectives themselves were dangerous due to the fact that the counterrevolutionaries attacked these without mercy.

Together with these problems there are numerous problems which reside in the educational system itself. From 1983 on, the dropout rate of pupils increased year after year, and the study results, above all in secondary and university education, give cause to worry.***) Although part of this can be explained by economics, finds an economical explanation (children have to contribute to the household income), there are also other reasons. The interest of students and their participation are diminished by the sometimes too vertical character of formal educational methods, the broadness of educational content and its poor relationship to reality.

In the following paragraphs we shall indicate these problematic tendencies, their influence on education and possible solutions under consideration by the Ministry of Education. We shall take their own discussions, from 1985 on, as an example. We consider

*. Morales, A., *Calidad de la educación depende del esfuerzo de todos*, in: *Barricada*, april 20th, 1987

**.. Lammerink, M., Vos de Waal, L., Rippen, J., *Lápices, herramientas de lucha*, Mexico D.F., Mexico, 1987

***. Editorial, *Serios problemas en la Universidad de Ingeniería*, in: *Barricada*, march 26th, 1987

the strategy used by the Ministry to discover and analyze the problems as a good demonstration of how autocriticism, openness, change and popular educational principles are still a goal of Nicaraguan educational policy-makers on all levels.

4.2. 1985; the year of autocriticism in education

The preoccupying situation was a sufficient reason for the Ministry of Education to organize a general evaluation at the highest level, in which the directors and methodologists of the Ministry of Education analyzed the methodological principles of the different programs, in April 1985. The methodology of the Popular Education, developed in the Campaign, was used as guide.

The study showed that in the past years there had been a focus in formal education on changing the contents of the programs, leaving the teaching methodology almost unchanged. Conscious of this gap, the participants in this evaluation proposed the methodology of popular education as the leading principle of further development of Nicaraguan schools at all levels. On the fundamental causes of the problems the Minister of Education, Fernando Cardenal, remarks:*)

The Popular Basic Education, that should have had a great influence on the formal education, was, on the contrary, strongly formalized and professionalised as a consequence of the influence of the formal education. That caused Popular Education to lose its capacity for renovation of the formal education and even of Popular Basic Education itself. The number of adults participating in this program has diminished considerably. The problem is not that people do not wish to study, the problem is that educational programs give little answer to the necessities felt by the farmers and workers. On one side this is our fault, on the other side the military situation can be blamed.

According to Cardenal, primary education is:**)

...Too much directed at knowledge and memorization and results therefore in a non-critical attitude; above that, the relationship with production and daily life has not been emphasized enough. Teachers give classes with little room for participation by students. The intentions of previously undertaken transformations were clear enough, but the results didn't always correspond with these intentions. We have to renovate the renovations, the programs were very broad, we pointed out too few priorities. The body of teachers of formal education have a mouldy concept of education, they reluctantly accept renovations.

*. from an interview of M. Lammerink with F. Cardenal, Ministry of Education, Managua, Nicaragua, July 6th, 1985

** . ibid.

The director of the Program of Popular Basic Education, Adolfo Lopez, analyzes the cause of the strong influence of formal education on Popular Education, instead of the intended reverse, as follows:*)

Probably the most important cause is that we did not make room for sufficient time to analyze and theorize in a more profound way on the experiences of the National Campaign. This would have permitted us to identify those elements from the methodology that we had to strengthen in the future in a better way. (...) During the past years the conception and methodology of Popular Education has been polluted by academism concerning the curriculum and formalism concerning the educational process in the classes. We thought that we could improve the educational process to the extent that we regulated it according to standardized norms. We wanted to develop a motivating-, flexible- and creative methodology that could impinge on, and potencialize the transformation of the inherited social structure. But, to the contrary, we used an uniform curricular design which was unable to adapt itself to the specific characteristics of the different social sectors with its political- cultural- and productive peculiarities.

After the evaluative workshop in April 1985, the responsables of education analyzed in different national and regional workshops the results of six years of education. We shall indicate some of their conclusions on the structure:**)

We made a structure that did not fit sufficiently on the reality of the workers. The scholastic nature and formal requirements of this structure were alienating a process of Popular Education. It even was taking some aspects of an elitist education that generated processes of expulsion and made the educational system less accessible to the conditions of the working class.

As to the contents of the education the "responsibles" commented in the evaluations: ***)

*. Lopez, A., Participación en la Asamblea Mundial de educación de adultos, Buenos Aires, Argentine, 1985

** . MED, Memoria del taller sobre educación popular de adultos ante el reto de la transformación educativa en Nicaragua, Managua, Nicaragua, 1985, pp. 75

***. ibid.

The developing and editing of permanent educational texts at a national level does not reflect the felt necessities that vary from place to place and from year to year. A lot of educational content is reduced to simple information that is disconnected from the changing reality. This fact isolates education from production-related transformations that occur in the environment of the participants.

Nowadays, even the popular teachers are considered both one of the major problems as well as one of the richest sources of change and democracy in the program. The problem lies, mainly, in the low qualifications of the popular teachers. Frequently they are only a little superior to the level of the students they are teaching, for example a coordinator that only recently learned to read and write has to educate illiterates.

This is cause for many of the difficulties in the effort to apply flexibly the methodological principles of popular education. The problems become even more complex when the teachers have to deal with a Collective characterized by different levels, where the teacher gives different classes in the same group, as is frequently the situation in rural areas. This demands a great ability from the popular teacher, not only in adaptation to these differences, but also in the capacity to work in one group with different classes. Often the popular teacher lacks the necessary preparation.

We should realize again that the popular teachers are volunteers. Besides their activities in the Collectives of Popular Education, they also have their daily jobs and activities. Above this, a lot of the popular teachers are active members of the several mass-organizations. (E.g. Trade Unions, Neighbourhood Committees, Women's Organizations, etc.) The training and further preparation of these people is difficult under these circumstances. It is also obvious that an entire system that rests heavily on the participation and motivation of volunteers cannot pose very strict demands. This causes considerable inconstancy and instability in number and motivation of the popular teachers.

4.3. Towards a new revolution in education?

The process of implementation of the methodology of Popular Education is a long and difficult one because it means discussion and acceptance of its basic principles at all levels by those concerned with education. From 1985 on, there was not only a strong process of self-criticism at all levels, but also a process of consultation and diagnosis was initiated at all three levels of the Ministry of Education. This work, initiated at the top of the Ministry, was developed in this way because as Edgar Silva, adviser of the Ministry considered:*)

*. from an interview with E. Silva in: La metodología de la educación popular en la práctica del MED, april 1986, Managua, Nicaragua.

We cannot impose all this by decree, if we did it, it would mean we'd be working by commands, and we wouldn't differ from the traditional methods. The necessary changes in curriculum, content, texts, methodology and so on, imply a radical change in our educational system. This will take place by discussion, dialogue and convincing participants, and taking into account all the contributions of everyone related to education. (...)

We shall not be able to progress if these contributions are not taken into account. We have made it very clear that the solution cannot be found in administrative or technical proposals. Cooperation with all three levels, especially the regional and zonal "responsibles" who have a profound knowledge of their own region or community, has permitted an interchange of ideas, opinions and suggestions. In this way we acted consistent with the principles of the Popular Education: in a participatory, horizontal, and non-imposing manner.

After the year of self-criticism, in which the general policy towards improvement and transformation was beginning to appear, the lines of these policies were materialized in 1986 and 1987 in a whole range of initiatives such as: schooling, research and pilot-projects. As an example of the long and difficult process of implementation of Popular Education we shall focus on schooling.

As to schooling, teachers and local leaders are receiving special emphasis because they have to become into leaders and guides of the educational process. Without doubt, the teachers have to re-educate themselves in the methodology of Popular Education, because they have been trained in the traditional way and worked for years or decades with the traditional pedagogy, which manifests itself in the daily practice of the schools. Even though teachers understand the necessity and wish to work according to the methodology of Popular Education, often they do not know how. As to teacher education, Edgar Silva states:*)

We believe that we had to start with some very modest experiences, that, at first, can be evaluated at a zonal level, where a serious reflection can result in the extraction of some conceptualizations of the Popular Education in the Nicaraguan practice.

In this way it is clear that no attempt has been made to make a specific tendency in Popular Education the official one. Strictly speaking, what has been attempted is to outline the real essential parts of Popular Education regarding its methodology, relations between the different elements of teaching-learning, and the creative processes in order to apply this to the Nicaraguan reality.

At present we can notice that the general principles of Popular Education are reclaiming their place in the Nicaraguan educational

*. ibid.

system. On the Atlantic coast we see that the concepts of bilingual education are questioned in the demand that education express the different cultural identities that co-exist in Nicaragua. We can also mention that there has been a renewed interest in surpassing the still high rates of practical illiteracy.*) And, finally, there is an increasing interest in the universities for the methodological principles of Popular Education and participatory research.**)

At all levels of the educational system, Popular Education, and its methodological consequences for every aspect of education will be in the centre of attention for the years to come. This was affirmed by Fernando Cardenal, when he concluded at the final presentation of the general evaluation in April, 1985:***)

We all leave convinced of the fact that our system of political training, and everything that has to do with communication, has to base itself in the starting points of Popular Education. We cannot return to mere imposition of our ideas without taking into account the reality of the masses, the way people live and act in every day life (...) Sergio Ramirez (the vice-president) said to me: 'I would like Popular Education to be in the centre of attention. (...) Our situation is extremely difficult, and we need this renovation in our communication means. (...) I think we need to declare another revolution in all the levels of education.'

ABSTRACT

In this article the authors focus on developments in Nicaraguan education until 1987. The history of education in Nicaragua reveals that education was an integral part of a system in which the workers and peasants virtually were ignored. Immediately after ending the Somoza dictatorship, the Sandinistas initiated a new educational system which aimed at improving the situation of the masses by using their needs and wishes as the starting point of the new education. The new educational system also leans heavily on the active participation of the peasants and workers. For both reasons it is called Popular Education.

The new educational methodology that is to transform the educational system can be defined as a result of the practical

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- *. Lopez, M., Educación de adultos necesita otro impulso, in: El Nuevo Diario, march 30th, 1987
 - **.. Lammerink, M., Mazariego, A., Educación popular como metodología en la formación de profesionales de educación y ciencias sociales, in: Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios Educativos, numero tematica "Educación en Nicaragua", no.4, Vol. XVII, Mexico, 1987.
 - ***. MED, Memoria del taller sobre la educación popular en el contexto educativo de la revolución en la nueva Nicaragua, Managua, Nicaragua, 1985, pp. 98

experiences of the National Literacy Campaign in 1980, on one hand, and the results of a broad National Consultation in 1981, on the other. In the years that follow the Sandista government intends to develop a general transformation of the educational system it inherited. The basic guiding principles can be defined as: flexibility and a cultural recovery of popular Nicaraguan values. Above all, education is considered as a process of conscientization in which dialogue and the connection between intellectual and manual work result in a chain of action-reflection--action. And finally, looking at the place of education in society, the new education is to be developed as a collective and community-oriented event; therefore, there has to be a close coordination in the educational field between mass-organizations and governmental institutions.

By 1985 the Nicaraguans found that things tended to happen the other way round - formal education was influencing informal popular education. With renewed interest the Nicaraguan government tried to work towards "a new revolution in education." Popular Education is again in the centre of attention.