

# EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN LOS ANGELES AND ITS EFFECT UPON THE MEXICAN COMMUNITY, 1900-1930

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The theme of equal educational opportunity was a major concern of the urban Chicano Movement in the late sixties. Chicanos accused the entire school system of racism and insensitivity towards the Chicano community. Schools, declared the activists, used institutionalized techniques such as intelligence tests and a tracking system to insure that disproportional numbers of Chicano children would be placed in vocational education courses or in classes for the mentally retarded.

Chicano activists pointed to low reading scores, high dropout rates (up to 50 percent of Chicano high school freshmen dropped out before graduation), high enrollment of Chicanos in courses for the educationally mentally retarded, and the exclusive use of English in the classroom as evidence that the educational needs of Chicano children were not being met. They demanded an end to IQ testing, tracking, emphasis on vocational work, and the disregard for Mexican customs and traditions and the Spanish language. Essentially, the demands recognized the viability of community control of schools. The proposed reforms were intended to serve the immediate interests of the Chicano community. The activists demanded that schools be a means for achieving economic and political equality and overall community development.

What are the roots of the antagonisms between school and community? It is only through an historical approach that the nature of the present relationship between the Chicano people and institutions of the dominant society can be made clear. The study of the role of mass public education in the Los Angeles Chicano community during the period 1900-1930 can provide insights into the present conflict between the Chicano community and the schools.

This study attempts to illuminate the historical development of inequality in the educational process. That inequality exists cannot be disputed, although there is argument as to whether or not it is justified. It is assumed that there is no justification for an unequal educational system.

It is very important to recognize the impact which monopoly capitalism has played in the twentieth century. It has served as the force behind the massive ideological and political reform in the United States known as the Progressive Movement. The schooling process has been part of this reform and has been designed accordingly.

The primary characteristic of monopoly capitalism is the extreme concentration of production and finance in the hands of a few giant corporations. Such corporations as Standard Oil, Chase Manhattan Bank, U.S. Steel, Morgan Trust, etc., control large portions of existing capital. At the turn of the present century, it was estimated that the Rockefeller and Morgan banks controlled one-third of the total wealth in the United States. There are many more examples, but the point is that concentration of ownership and production is characteristic of monopoly capitalism. Huge production processes are controlled by a small minority of the population.

The social and political aspects of monopoly capitalism can be summarized as follows:

1. Labor is highly socialized and concentrated in large units of production.
2. The socialization of labor makes it possible for workers to disrupt production nationally or in a specific branch of production for the first time in the history of capitalism.
3. Socialist ideology became popular among the masses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and violent confrontations between capital and labor occur frequently and with increasing intensity.

Internally, monopolization creates conditions which result in extreme social instability. Simultaneously, monopoly capitalism is in competition with other nations for control of resources and markets abroad. Class harmony at home is a necessary social condition for foreign and domestic expansion. Reforms, then, are needed to preserve existing social relations of production which are constantly threatening to break down. These considerations provided the impetus for the Progressive educational reforms which occurred in the early twentieth century. The aim of these reforms was to create an ideological unity and social stability between capital and labor and simultaneously to reinforce the division of labor in society through tracking, testing, and vocational training.

Within this general need to preserve the relations of production, racism played a leading role. In a nation which had historically relied upon foreign labor, the poorest were often those who were physically and culturally different. Thus, the ideological reflection of the class struggle was often expressed in racist and in anti-foreigner terminology. In the educational process, the existing social relations were strengthened by teaching the poor, and especially the non-whites, to see themselves as naturally inferior and to look upon the capitalist system as neutral, and even as a protector of their interests. The purpose of racism has not been to oppress non-whites by whites but to preserve capitalist relations of production. As such, it serves to separate working people on the basis of racial characteristics and, in so doing, prevents the development of class unity--a dangerous

condition which would undermine interclass harmony. The purpose, then, of racism during the domination of society by monopoly capitalism is to preserve and legitimize existing ideology and social relations through: 1) placing the burden of guilt for poverty upon the poor, the non-white, or the foreigner; 2) preventing the development of unity within the working class by stressing the primacy of "racial" characteristics as the basis for social organization; and 3) reinforcing the relations of production in all areas of the economy by attempting to neutralize class consciousness and to limit political action by working people.

Most historians of Progressivism contend that the Progressive Movement was a democratic movement--that is, one which functioned to protect the interests of the common person. This study disputes that commonly held opinion. The evidence assembled in this article argues that Progressivism promoted neither democracy nor equality in education. On the contrary, the evidence shows that educational reform originating during the period marking the rise of monopoly capitalism was anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian and, further, that educational policy in the United States has not been substantially altered since that time.

This study examines the curricular program of the Los Angeles City Schools during the 1920's and 1930's with special reference to the effect of this program upon Mexican children and, ultimately, upon the Mexican community. Education for the Mexican community in Los Angeles did not provide opportunities for social mobility. In fact, schools limited opportunities for upward mobility through an educational program that consciously reinforced the existing social relations, especially the critical relations between capitalist and worker that threatened to burst apart under the weight of monopoly capitalism.<sup>1</sup>

#### BACKGROUND FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM

The evolution of the organization of public schools in Los Angeles paralleled the industrial, demographic, and bureaucratic changes in the city. Using 1880 as a point of departure, we find that in the following fifty-year period Los Angeles underwent a radical transition. In 1880, Los Angeles contained 11,000 citizens; by 1930, the population stood at 1,250,000 inhabitants. In that fifty-year span, Los Angeles had grown one hundred times. By the early 1920's, Los Angeles was increasing its population at the rate of 100,000 per year.

The extreme growth rate necessitated a public bureaucracy to care for the sprawling population and expanding economy. Between

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<sup>1</sup>This author explains in more detail the relationship between monopoly capitalism and Progressive education in "The Relationship Between Monopoly Capitalism and Progressive Theory of Education," *The Insurgent Sociologist* (Fall, 1977).

1910 and 1920, numerous municipal agencies were created. A Housing Commission and a Municipal Charities Commission were established, and the bureaucracy of the public education system was developed.

The social and economic changes naturally affected the educational system. The school population was nineteen times larger in 1930 than it was in 1900, although the population had grown but twelve times during that same period. The school population rose from 20,497 in 1900 to 404,351 in 1930 (Eales, 1955:104). The massive increase in the pupil population pressured the city into devising means to cope with the situation.

The Los Angeles City Schools were faced with enormous problems in their socialization function. Financial, physical, administrative, and educational matters could not be resolved with the old methods. Therefore, a process of school reorganization and reorientation became inevitable.

Between 1900 and 1930, the increasing enrollment could only be accommodated through a steadily enlarging organization. As an example, in 1900 only one high school served the secondary educational needs of the city; by 1930, there were thirty-one.

Special schools, curriculum, and course work were founded between 1900 and 1930 for those unable to read and for foreign students unable to speak English (Eales, 1955:125). At the same time, the Department of Vocational Education began to administer a regular program. In 1917 and 1918, the Division of Educational Research and the Department of Psychology were founded. In 1920, both were merged into the Department of Psychology and Educational Research. It was this department which exerted the greatest influence in curriculum and administrative reform affecting the Mexican community. It was also this department which was the nerve center of oppressive bureaucratic techniques in education.

The school district's educational system was directly affected by the general educational ideas being promulgated throughout the country. The district's associations of elementary and secondary teachers, counselors, and principals, as well as the central administration, lobbied for the most up-to-date approach to education. District publications (prepared by the Department of Psychology and Educational Research), such as the biweekly *Educational Research Bulletin*, for example, usually carried a book review section which informed counselors and teachers of recent, as well as past, publications in psychology and guidance. There were, in addition, frequent excerpts from books and lectures of well-known educators, including Dewey, Bobbit, Thorndike, and Terman; politicians such as Teddy Roosevelt and Wilson; and the lesser-known superintendents of schools of various cities who repeated the messages of the "experts."

Not merely through indirect means were the "experts" instrumental in developing the educational program. In 1924,

Dr. Franklin Bobbit of the University of Chicago was hired to direct the complete reorganization of the high school courses of study. Bobbit, who had previously participated in the commission which reorganized the educational system of the Phillipine Islands (to conform to U.S. imperialist ambitions), performed a similar task for Los Angeles while working out of the Department of Psychology and Educational Research (*School Journal*, 1921a:15). Those teachers who participated in the reorganization of social studies courses were asked to use all pertinent materials "emanating from Teacher's College, Columbia University, University of Chicago, The National Council, The Historical Outlook, etc., for study" (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1924a:5).

In the process of developing an educational system to conform to social reality, the social sciences became a central element in the creation of a cooperative citizen. This reorganization of the curriculum resulted in a social studies program whose principal objective was to promote the

Ability to think, feel, act, and react as an efficient, intelligent, sympathetic and loyal member of the entire social group--that group that is prior to and above differentiation and within which social differentiation occurs. Large-group or citizen consciousness. Sense of membership in the total social group, rather than in some special class. (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1924:3)

That objective was in close correspondence with the expressed wishes of the businessmen and industrialists. In an article appearing in the *Los Angeles School Journal*, the Assistant Director of the Department of Psychology and Educational Research quoted a report of the American Management Association as an example of the broad purpose of education. That quote urged schools to

. . . prepare the new workers for a better understanding of mutual dependence that employers and employees have upon each other . . . give the new worker those economic, historical and sociological facts which will enable him to judge the truth and soundness of the various doctrines, theories, nostrums, panaceas, etc., with which he may come in contact. (*School Journal*, 1925:28)

As an example of a local school program designed for the interests of local capitalists, the December 10, 1923, issue of the *Los Angeles School Journal* is noteworthy. In an article discussing the forthcoming Teacher's Institute, the topics and speakers were presented. The following composed the vocational education section of that Institute:

"Co-operation of Industry with the Schools"

Sylvester Weaver, Los Angeles Builder's Exchange

"Training for the Building Trades"

Godfrey Edwards, Los Angeles Builder's Exchange

"The King of Mechanics Wanted in Industry"

John E. Van Zant, Paul S. Hoffman Company, Inc.

"Trade Extension"

J. C. Greenburg, in charge of Trade Extension Work for  
the [Los Angeles] Sanitation Department

Local reform had designed a curriculum that sought to insure social stability and continued capitalist growth. In its most fundamental aspects, Los Angeles schools applied an educational theory that corresponded to the expressed wishes of employers of wage labor.

#### THE MEXICAN PROBLEM

Within the phenomenal economic spiral, the necessity for a sufficient labor force manifested itself, attracting a large movement of Mexican immigrants and descendants of Mexican immigrants into Los Angeles. Mexican settlements developed mainly in the Eastside in an area known as Maravilla. According to the 1920 Census, 30,000 Mexicans resided in Los Angeles, and by 1930, the number stood at nearly 100,000. Various estimates at the time placed the number much higher, from approximately 150,000 to 200,000. It is highly probably that Mexicans were undercounted. More important for this study than the exact number of Mexicans residing in Los Angeles is the number of Mexican pupils in Los Angeles schools. The school officials interpreted their roles in relationship to both Mexican pupils and the Mexican community. It was this relationship that conditioned the reform of school programs that ultimately affected Mexican children.

Throughout the 1920's, the numbers of Mexican children enrolled in Los Angeles schools increased according to their settlement in the area. In 1923, the total enrollment of Mexican children was slightly above 14,000, or 8.8 percent of the total school enrollment (*School Journal*, 1923a:9). In the next several years, the rise in Mexican enrollment and their concentration in the East Los Angeles area would direct the interest of the educational profession to resolve the "Mexican problem."

In 1926, the Los Angeles school system enrolled 218,097 pupils in all areas of elementary and secondary education. The numbers of Mexican children had increased over 11,500 since 1923 so that in 1926 there were 25,825 Mexican children enrolled, or approximately 11.5 percent of the total. Mexicans were the largest minority by far, followed by Blacks (approximately 5,000) and Japanese (approximately 4,000) (*School District Publications*, 1926:4).

Each year brought new arrivals to the labor market, so that by 1928 Mexican enrollment in Los Angeles schools had climbed to well

over 32,000. This figure represented a major portion of the total "foreign" enrollment in the schools. Not only were Mexican immigrants attracted, but many other immigrant groups as well. In 1920, the city's population was 576,673, of which 112,057 were foreign-born white persons. Nearly 20 percent of the latter group (or 21,598) were born in Mexico. In comparison, in 1910 the foreign-born population numbered 60,584, of whom 5,611 were born in Mexico (*School Journal*, 1921a:23). The overcrowded conditions that plagued the schools would surely reflect upon the attitudes of the educators. In 1922, the high schools which were built to accommodate 13,134 pupils had an enrollment of 17,770. In 1924, the elementary schools had 48,000 more pupils than they had seats.

The increasing enrollment due to economic changes was a problem, but the cause was racially interpreted. In 1922, an editorial in the *Los Angeles School Journal* lamented the increase in foreign-born, especially the Mexican-born, population. The article noted that ". . . during the decade, 1910-1920, while the total population increased 81 percent, the foreign population increased 85 percent, and the Mexican population 285 percent" (*School Journal*, 1922:17).

In another article appearing in the same journal, written by the President of the Board of Education entitled "Problems of the Los Angeles School Board," a description of the scope of the foreign-born problem was examined. It reported that ". . . ten percent of the students in the Los Angeles schools are foreign born. The last state census of children in Los Angeles over three years of age and under eighteen revealed that twenty percent of the parents were aliens." Mexicans, by virtue of their number, became the focus of the attention of the school district's administration.

A strong stand in the Mexican enrollment issue was taken by the Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Susan B. Dorsey, in a speech delivered before the Principal's Club in 1923. She said: "The first duty of education is to equalize opportunities for every child . . . ." However, she continued:

. . . it is unfortunate and unfair for Los Angeles, the third largest Mexican city in the world, to bear the burdens of taking care educationally of this enormous group. We do have to bear a spiritual burden quite disproportionate to the return from having this great number of aliens in our midst. This burden comes to us merely because we are near the border. . . . (*School Journal*, 1923:59)

She claimed that Mexicans came and went without establishing roots in the city, although depositing their "burdens." The superintendent further explained that the state and the nation should recognize this unusual problem and help shoulder the responsibility by providing state and federal aid. This sharing of responsibility is important, she continued, because if ". . . we Americanize them we

can live with them, but if we do not, crime will go on at an increasing rate . . ." (*School Journal*, 1923:59).

An assistant supervisor in the Department of Compulsory Education with special work among Mexicans wrote that the "Mexican problem in the Los Angeles School System is principally the product of poverty in the home which, in turn, is largely the appendage of the influx of immigrants from the Republic south of us . . ." (*School Journal*, 1928:154). The administrator traced this poverty to the "original raciality of the Mexicans . . . Mongolian descent." He further explained this racial theory:

The infusion of Spanish blood into Aztec and Maya veins has Latinized later generations since the sixteenth century. The mixture of the two is fundamentally responsible for the care-free, if not indolent, characteristic of the race. . . . The lofty spirit of independence of both races explains the composure of the present day Mexican under circumstances and conditions which would appall the Anglo-Saxon or American subject. (*School Journal*, 1928:154)

The same assistant supervisor stated that such alleged Mexican traits as lack of ambition, early sexual activities, and poverty could be resolved " . . . in the establishment of a labor bureau of preferred applicants under the auspices of the school board" (*School Journal*, 1928:154). His suggestion does not seem to have been implemented; at least there is no evidence of the establishment of such an employment agency in the literature.

#### THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD: THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

The most important procedures put to use under mass compulsory education in Los Angeles were intelligence testing devices. These procedures were a monumental obstacle to educational opportunity for the minorities and the poor in general. Testing did not initially appear in Los Angeles as a fully developed pedagogical technique. As with most reforms, tests were first employed on a small scale experimental basis. Eventually, testing procedures were the core of the educational process.

Testing devices were first used in Los Angeles in 1917 under an experiment carried out by a hastily organized division within the school system that was given the title, Division of Educational Research. Its first task was to administer an "intelligence survey," using as the basis for the study administration of the Binet test to approximately 2,000 pupils.

How to deal with the variation of mental abilities became the task of another administrative body, the Department of Psychology, created in 1918 with the specific task of classifying tested pupils. The department estimated that, on the basis of the research, 5,000 elementary school pupils possessed an intelligence



too low to profit by the methods used in regular and ungraded classes (*School Publications*, 1919:3). The Department was given further responsibilities encompassing three main areas. These were: 1) the "testing of children's mentality and school accomplishment, 2) devising materials for individual instruction, and 3) supervising the special schools and classes" (*School Publications*, 1931:7) for advanced and retarded pupils.

The two departments, Educational Research and Psychology, were merged into one department in 1920. Originally a staff of two managed the offices, but by 1924 the staff numbered fifteen, and by 1930 the twenty-six staff members administered perhaps the most influential department in the educational bureaucracy of Los Angeles. With each staff increment, the responsibilities of the division also seemed to grow. In 1930, the department had six major functions. These were:

- (1) High school research and guidance (counseling);
- (2) secondary school curriculum development; (3) elementary research and guidance; (4) special schools and classes (5) psychological clinic; (6) statistics. (*School Publications*, 1931:7)

Each area of responsibility was administered by a section within the department.

However, testing, classification (or homogenous grouping), curriculum development, and counseling were the four specific areas that reflected the basic core of principles of the entire department and, ultimately, of the city school system. Testing had become a monumental administrative procedure by 1929. In the school year 1928-29, a total of 328,000 tests were given to pupils of the elementary schools alone (*School Publications*, 1929:12). Largely on the basis of these tests, school children were placed in normal classes, gifted rooms, slow rooms, and/or classes for the "mentally retarded" (or "development" centers). More importantly, however, was the correspondence between test scores and social class. Significant correlations were drawn from intelligence surveys administered between 1926 and 1928.

One such study, carried out under the direction of the Department of Psychology and Educational Research, compared the intelligence and achievement of Mexicans to white Americans. The study provides insight into the effect of school policy on Chicanos. In 1931, a group of 1,204 Mexican grade school children were compared to a control group of 1,074 white American children. It was found that the median intelligence quotient for the Mexican group was 91.2, a figure approximately nine points below the "normal" quotient of 100 for an unselected population. The median quotient for the white American group was 105, considerably above that of the Mexican children and five points above the normal for an unselected population. However, it should also be mentioned that the Mexican group averaged twelve months above the age of

their white American counterparts. Grade for grade, Mexican children were one full year behind, or overage, compared to their white companions. The supervisor who directed the study concluded that the factors contributing to the low scores by Mexican children were: 1) language handicap, and 2) a "selection of a type of Mexican family who comes to Los Angeles." Furthermore, she added: "Most of the fathers of the children represented in the group belong to the laboring class" (*School Publications*, 1929:90-92). Upon the basis of the test scores, it was found that approximately 48 percent scored below 90. These children would automatically qualify for the slow-learner rooms. Of the entire group, nearly 18 percent qualified for classes for the mentally retarded.

Thus, there was a very high probability that nearly one-half of the Mexican children would find themselves placed in either slow-learner rooms or in classes for the mentally retarded. The remaining 52 percent had poor chances of ever being placed in an educational program other than the manual vocations.

#### THE EDUCATIONAL TECHNICIANS: THE COUNSELORS

Surveys such as the above only reflected the overall social levels of the school district. However, counselors, while they were concerned with homogenous groupings within schools, were consciously focusing primarily on individual pupils. Each elementary school counselor's report furnished "three separate listings of those children who need . . . special attention." First, there were those children with IQ levels above 125 who qualified for "gifted" rooms. These rooms were designed to give an enriched program to children of superior mental endowment (*School Publications*, 1929:12). At the other end of the scale, children whose IQ was 70 or below were candidates for "mentally retarded" rooms. On the basis of IQ alone, the students were considered for the group, or room, corresponding to their mental level. Once selected, the pupil was then given a series of tests designed to diagnose the interests and strengths upon which the teachers would base their approach to instructing the student (*School Publications*, 1929:12).

The segregation of children considered to be of abnormal mentality was founded upon three basic criteria: a) that the more intelligent pupils were to be accelerated; b) that the backward, or retarded, pupil restrained the superior pupils from progressing; and c) that they formed a stagnant pool of constant failures. Criteria were directly related to each other since the consensus was that the brighter pupils were held back by the slower pupils. Therefore, both groups were segregated. Only the "average" pupil was left alone to seek achievement in the world of mediocrity.

The counselors tended to view themselves as objective, scientifically trained professionals whose work was central to the proper functioning of the educational process. Their principal educational goal was the "satisfactory adjustment of the individual," guided by a "scientific attitude" (*Educational Research*

*Bulletin*, 1925a:13). Under the mantel of a science, counselors gave to themselves (and, in fact, were given) near absolute power and responsibility over the pupils with whom they came into contact through the medium of educational testing. When presented with the "scientific" results of the intelligence test, few could muster an opposing argument, and very few did in Los Angeles. All the evidence weighed upon the side of the scientific professionals. Indeed, the arguments appeared logical, well thought out, and progressive.

Not only was the Department of Psychology and Educational Research in a break with past methods of administration and education, it was also carrying out a crusade to convince the entire school system that the "scientific method" was the correct approach to education. The literature of the department reflected this crusading spirit imbued with a self-righteousness and moral indignation at those who failed to recognize "science." In 1923, the Director of the Division of High School Research of the department wrote that one of the duties of the counselor was to ". . . sell his mission to the teachers and to act as a leader in the faculty in the cooperative study and solution of the modern problems of education" (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1923:1). Merely by being given a wide range of responsibilities, it was inevitable that the scientific professionals would enlarge their image. Their feelings of omnipotence can be understood by their functions, which were (according to their literature) to result in a "more accurate classification of pupils for purposes of instruction" (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1925:1).

The director of the department emphasized the importance of scientific techniques in an article appearing in the department's journal. She wrote:

Every situation investigated, every child tested is, or should be, a research problem, and strictly scientific procedure should be observed. Data scientifically obtained and treated can, if properly recorded and evaluated, be used at any time as the basis of conclusions which may prove a genuine contribution to educational and psychological knowledge. (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1925b:2-3)

A high school principal exclaimed that it was ". . . only with the advent of the counselor that we have had our thinking organized and set upon a scientific foundation." He added that not only was the counselor invaluable in the administration and program, counselors also kept him "fresh in . . . educational philosophy and assisting me in presenting to the faculty those studies which get at the actual facts" (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1926:2).

However, it was not merely in the administration of tests and in the computing of quotients that counselors were involved. Counselors were told that their role was a means to an end, that is, they were to set ". . . up the best possible educational and life

career program for Johnny . . . " (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1925c:3). It was not simply a matter of formulas and data; counselors were using a means through which human beings could be more accurately socialized to the society in which they lived. The scientific method was only a means through which a socialization process could be more accurately and efficiently achieved. Somehow the recognition of individual differences was perceived to be a humanistic breakthrough. The ideological nature of the educational process was mystified in the numerous myths of the educational program--myths that were in essence part of the educational process itself. "The school counselor has developed in recognition of the individual differences existing among children," wrote the assistant director of the department. Furthermore, he added that for normal pupil growth to proceed, the educational procedures must be modified so that the "school may be fitted to the child" (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1925c:5).

The director was most emphatic in exclaiming that the recognition of individual differences " . . . both in innate ability and in personality make-up" had resulted in the need to modify curricula and teaching methods. Guidance, she continued, " . . . based on carefully collected and evaluated data, is our only hope of diminishing the enormous waste in human material which an inflexible school system necessarily produces" (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1926a:1). The proclaimed ideology of the scientists was a mixture of the highly technical and the humanistic, but, in fact, it was a method of intensifying individualism within children in an orderly and efficient manner. The corresponding results were a social stratification of schools within the Los Angeles school system.

#### COUNSELORS: THEIR FUNCTION IN THE SCHOOLS

Only by examining the day-to-day work of counselors as outlined by the department's guidelines and reports can we accurately assess the importance of the counseling program in the school program. These operations involved four main areas: (1) testing, (2) school surveys, (3) classification, and (4) curricula. The Report of the Committee on Analysis of High School Counseling in Los Angeles is an important source because it reveals in detail the function and operation of counselors (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1926a:2-6).

Counselors became involved in their schools through a step process of "gathering . . . facts about the individual children and about the school as a whole." When these facts were tabulated, a "scientific guidance program" became possible. Each child was to have "a complete social case history." Information gathered included:

. . . age, mental and chronological, the intelligence quotient, the nationality, the father's occupation, the amount of retardation or acceleration, the achievement status in the various subjects, the physical defects, the outstanding

character qualities, and the pupil's general attitude toward the school. (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1926a:2)

Once these facts were assembled, a "complete picture of the school as a whole" could be projected. The picture was referred to by counselors as the school survey, an analysis of the factors necessary for the counselor to carry out his assignment. This survey also assessed the schools' efficiency in the

. . . various subjects, the central tendencies of the individual mental abilities, the amount of retardation and acceleration in various grades, the opportunities for social development, the moral status as shown in the number of disciplinary problems occurring, and the physical vitality as manifested in the attendance and health records. (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1926a:3)

Several tasks occupied the major portion of the high school counselor's time; two of these were student and school surveys and curriculum. The counselors had to be thoroughly knowledgeable about the courses offered in order that proper guidance could be given. However, guidance was still dependent upon the occupational opportunities available "in the community." Thus, counselors undertook surveys in cooperation with the Department of Vocational Education and ". . . in cooperation with the occupations teachers of the city." Committees were formed from the cooperative effort which assembled "data concerning the various lines of work." This data included ". . . a description of the job, the preparation required for entrance, the income, the opportunities for learning and advancement, and the number of workers in demand" (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1926a:3).

The occupational surveys were realistic to the point of delineating occupations open to racial and ethnic groups. The report stated that

Some of the specific studies being undertaken by these groups include surveys of the occupations suitable to and firms employing Negro, Mexican, and Jewish help. (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1926a:3)

It was not unusual that Blacks, Mexicans, and Jews were singled out for special guidance consideration. However, it was "chiefly on the basis of test scores that pupils are classified into equal ability groups" (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1926a:4). Nevertheless, teachers' recommendations, achievement test scores, and educational records were also used in the classification procedure. The report made clear that only ". . . when there is strong evidence that a child is of very low potentiality, will the counselor suggest to him a vocation which is apparently within the range of his ability" (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1926a:4). Furthermore, the report added, it was good for the child to keep the curricula at his or her level: "The counselors seek, with the help of

tests, to free children from the possibility of attempting tasks far beyond their ability and to avoid the resulting pain, discouragement, and humiliation" (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1926a:4).

Thus, high school students were placed at an "individualized" learning level corresponding to an occupational position waiting to be filled. The tests invariably selected the poorest students for occupations that were of the manual variety, and since these were not of high social value, counselors exerted "a great effort" to raise their importance in the consciousness of the students. The report stated it as follows:

A great effort is made to overcome the traditional feeling that it is unworthy and ignoble to enter anything but the professions . . . he need not feel disgrace that he is not preparing for one of the professions. (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1926a:4)

Through a bit of mental engineering, the real difference in pay and social status between manual occupations and professional occupations was to be overcome. All one had to do was to "think" he was equal to another, and equality resulted. However, students were not given the opportunity to fully exercise their capabilities and desires. A number of techniques were used to distinguish mental levels of students. Some schools gave colored cards to each student admitting "them to the proper classes." These cards stated whether their work was "Honor College Recommended," "College Recommended," or "High School Graduation." "In other high schools the teachers were given lists by the counselor indicating each child's group." In another school, the counselor prepared a directory with pertinent information on each student, such as IQ, "previous number of failures, and a group . . . in which he should be enrolled" (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1926a:5).

The director of the High School Research Division of the department was much more blunt in his frank assessment of the role of counselors. He wrote that the job of the counselor was ". . . that of the placement of the misfit" (*Educational Research Bulletin*, 1923:1).

Teachers were urged by the department to "be conversant with the economic and social conditions in which they teach, so that they may the easier guide pupils towards selecting activities which the parents will consider worthy and will support" (*School Publications*, 1929:46). Thus, prior to the benefit of an IQ test, students were already categorized into educational areas corresponding to their socioeconomic level. In the counseling and guidance that followed, the categorization was reinforced until the schools became a microcosm of the society which they served. Children were placed into general occupational preparations through various pedagogical devices. That which concerns us here is vocational, or manual, training.

The first means of placing children into manual training was the development rooms and centers for the alleged "mentally retarded" of the higher elementary grades. In 1928-29, a total of 2,554 children, representing only one-fourth of the referrals, were enrolled in this program, which was designed as an educational program for the mentally defective. Each child was "programmed" with due consideration to a great variety of factors, such as ". . . the child's health and nutrition, his emotional stability, his social development, his chronological age, his mental age, his particular grade placement in the vocational or fine arts, and his particular industrial adaptability" (*School Publications*, 1929:71). Once enrolled, there was no means of returning these children to normal classes. Their problems, their social level, became permanently fixed within the normal operation of the institution. The philosophy of the development centers was rigid: each child "must become a part" of the "industrial world." No alternatives were possible. The average IQ of the students was approximately 63 (*School Publications*, 1929:80).

The limits of a "successful accomplishment," or achievement, were external, or social, and impinged upon the classroom. The development centers and classes were ". . . located in the sections of the city where there was greatest need for them." Thus in 1930, of the eleven centers, ten were located in areas characterized as "laboring class" communities. Enrollment figures clearly describe the social level of the students, since attendance varied with the agricultural work seasons:

The children enter in Fall, due to the seasonal employment in the country, where the children and their parents are employed picking fruits and nuts. The enrollment reaches the peak in the Spring when many centers and rooms have to maintain waiting lists. The month of June usually brings an appreciable exodus when the children and their parents go out into the fields to harvest the onion crop. (*School Publications*, 1931:116)

Each center's program was based upon some type of manual work. Each center had a "full-time manual education teacher and a full-time crafts teacher. The larger centers had a full-time agricultural teacher and the smaller centers had the service of an agricultural teacher two or three days a week." The centers divided the course work for boys and girls, reinforcing the existing sexual division of labor found in society. Centers were "equipped with a home economics unit" which consisted "of a cooking room, cafeteria, sewing room, and laundry. . . ." A manual education unit served the male students. It consisted of a ". . . main workroom, a lumber room, a paint room, and a tool room; a hand-work unit with provision for loom weaving, clay-work, basketry, and miscellaneous types of craft work" (*School Publications*, 1931:115).

The center's population was largely "from foreign homes" and was handicapped by a language "problem," according to a survey of nearly 1,600 children taken by the Department of Psychology and

Educational Research (*School Publications*, 1931:122). Mexicans, Blacks, Russians, Asians, Jews, and Italians were represented among the children. Blacks were segregated into two centers; Mexican children constituted the entire population of one center, one-third in two others, and one-fourth in two more. In all, Mexican children were highly represented in five of the eleven development centers.

The development rooms produced no skilled labor for the economy, nor was there any appreciable relation between training and later occupation. Of the 325 who graduated from the development centers in 1928-29, 65 were working in agriculture as fruit pickers, 60 sold newspapers, and the remainder were scattered over a wide range of unskilled manual occupations (*School Publications*, 1929:89-90). Even though there seemed to be no relation between the graduates' occupations and the training program, there was, nevertheless, a definite attempt to train the students for particular occupations. Apparently, at times the plans were successful. One administrator found that training girls in laundry work enabled them to hold positions in large laundries when they left school. In fact, he stated, ". . . several employers have told us that a dull girl makes a very much better operator on a mangle than a normal girl." Furthermore, he stated, ". . . fitting the person to the job reduces the turnover in industry, and is, of course, desirable from an economic point of view" (*School Publications*, 1929:87). That "perfect fit" was also a result of the psychological conditioning that the schools so eloquently struggled to inculcate.

#### CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS

As industrialization proceeded, the labor needs of industry were reflected in the district's educational program. By 1930, the larger outlines of educational reform regarding testing, teaching, counseling, and curriculum development had already been institutionalized in Los Angeles. All that needed to be done was to fill in the particulars, especially in curriculum development. It was made clear by the fledgling Division of Educational Research "that the demands of commerce and industry must be met so far as they represent the general need . . ." (*School Publications*, 1918:5).

The purpose of schooling was interwoven with and, ultimately, shaped by capitalism. The preparation of students to enter "the business and industrial world" was more than just an abstract preparation for "life." It was an education molded by the interests of capital. The director of Vocational Education understood the responsibility of schools: "Since Los Angeles is more and more becoming a manufacturing city, the demand for men and women for industry is clearly evident" (*School Journal*, 1920:7). School administrators were quite disturbed, for example, that in a survey of eighth grade boys it was found that "[n]o one had determined to enter an automobile factory" (*School Journal*, 1920:7). Furthermore, the survey found that pupils' vocational aspirations and



labor needs clearly did not correspond. This was found to be an unnecessary and inefficient barrier to the smooth transition from school to work. The solution to the problem was thought to be proper placing of students in school work commensurate with their aptitudes and abilities. "If the change of interest can be brought about during the school career," stated a report of the Los Angeles City Schools, "a large saving in time and energy for the pupils and their future employers may be saved." Moreover, the report continued, it

. . . is not uncommon for the labor turnover in business houses and in factories to exceed 200 percent per year. This is very expensive as each new employee must become accustomed to his new place before he is able to do his best work, and a large part of the labor turnover is due to dissatisfaction and unrest on the part of the employee. (*School Journal*, 1920:7)

By 1920, the Los Angeles School District had organized an efficient approach to balancing curriculum and labor needs. Teachers of vocational education held biweekly conferences " . . . examining minutely the basic occupations listed in the U.S. Census Classification of Gainful Pursuits, to determine just what should be the definite content of class instruction . . . " (*School Journal*, 1920:7).

Vocational courses thus became arranged to suit the needs of the business and industrial world. Simultaneously, pedagogical goals were based upon these needs. Thus a "boy or girl" applying for a position and confronted with the embarrassing question, "What can you do?" was a pedagogical problem. The schools were to prepare students so they might be spared the agony of the employer's question. "The employer," stated the school district's report, "expects immediate service and production . . . " (*School Publications*, 1922:5). Thus the question "What can you do?" became a legitimate pedagogical problem resolved through the public school's program.

The question was not applied universally since it was modified by IQ tests, achievement scores, teachers' assessments, and grades. Students were chosen for vocational courses primarily on the basis of the IQ test and other selected criteria. The results of these methods reflected the class structure of society. Students of low socioeconomic status, as well as those with low IQ's, were given far narrower choices for entering the wide range of education available.

School administrators held on to the belief that the individual "blossomed" within an individualized curriculum. One wrote that "education is merely the manner of training the mind and body that will enable the individual to best adjust himself to his environment, with the incidental advantages of economic independence, self-realization, and . . . happiness" (*School Journal*, 1920:7). However, he continued, as far as vocational education was

concerned, it was the "dull pupil" who was particularly suited for such a self-fulfilling experience. Lack of mental ability was no longer a cause for failure, for somewhere along the line there was an individualized course of study that corresponded to one's IQ. Following Lewis Terman's "discovery" that an IQ score could indicate the general occupational aptitude, courses of study were arranged along the lines indicated by the IQ score.

However, vocational courses were not entirely the result of the school district's initiative. The local Chamber of Commerce, as well as individual businessmen, not only supported the schools but also worked closely with them.

The cooperative efforts of the schools and industry proceeded "upon very practical lines and registered remarkable success," wrote one administrator (*School Journal*, 1921:3). The manager of the Industrial Department of the Chamber of Commerce agreed:

The interest of the businessmen in the schools of Los Angeles is naturally keen, inasmuch as he helps pay the bills of the schools. But his interest does not end there in dollars and cents. Employees of his concern are the products of the public schools and their efficiency depends in large measure upon the methods employed in the schools. (*School Journal*, 1922:16)

The cooperative spirit produced positive results. Vocational education was placed on more equal terms with the regular school subjects, and a committee, formed of representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and the Board of Education, met on a regular basis to resolve pedagogical questions involving vocational work. It is not clear how long this committee operated, but what is clear is that a steadily enlarging scope of educational activities brought both the Chamber and the school district into quite close cooperation.

The Director of Vocational Education wrote in 1924 that "Los Angeles was fortunate in bringing about . . . most wholesome cooperation in the schools . . . from business and industry." He added:

In this city we hold that for the normal child education should be liberal and general in the earlier years of the child and remain so until the senior high school. However, in a city so large we find groups of children, usually of adolescent age, who more readily obtain their general education through actual participation in various shop activities. For those, vocational education often is of great advantage. (*School Journal*, 1924:41)

Not only were the higher administrative levels in close touch with business and industry, counselors also regularly surveyed the employment possibilities in the school's immediate community. One principal urged his colleagues " . . . to be in close touch with the leading businessmen and women in his district, for through them

he can sense the desires and needs of his people, at the same time gaining the confidence of the community as a whole" (*School Journal*, 1926:13). A principal of a high school noted the cooperation and exclaimed, the "Chambers of Commerce and other similar organizations . . . have aligned themselves with the schools in carrying out educational programs and campaigns" (*School Journal*, 1922b:6). A teacher at a high school wrote:

Before sending boys and girls out to accept positions they must be taught that, technically expert though they may be, they must ever keep in mind that their employers carry the responsibility of the business and outline the work, and that the employees must be pliant, obedient, courteous, and willing to help the enterprise. . . . (*School Journal*, 1927:16)

Los Angeles schools were particularly boastful of their relationship to capital. An editorial appearing in the *Los Angeles School Journal* (1927:44) summarized the situation well: "Teachers and business people are alike in building the future. Such cooperation as exists in Los Angeles is a long step toward an amalgamation of education and life."

Each of the regular junior and senior high schools offered vocational courses for males and females, although the distribution of these courses was not equal. Some senior and junior high schools had extraordinary numbers of vocational courses, while others had only one or two. Not surprisingly, in the east side where the bulk of the foreign born resided, a concentration of vocational courses was evident. The two east side schools, Lincoln and Roosevelt, had unusually high numbers of vocational courses. Of the thirty-one high schools operating in 1932, only eight offered "class A" all-day vocational courses for males. Class A schools set aside "three clock hours for trade instruction . . . one and one-half for trade instruction, and one and one-half clock hours for academic instruction" (*School Journal*, 1927a:9). There were a total of thirty-one class A courses available at these eight schools. Lincoln and Roosevelt offered seventeen of these; Fremont, located in another predominantly working class section of the city, offered nine class A courses. Thus, three high schools offered twenty-six of the thirty-one class A vocational courses. They were all in working class sections of the city.

The number of non-class A vocational courses for males clustered again around the working class neighborhood schools. Lincoln had seventeen of these courses, Roosevelt offered eighteen, and Jefferson had eleven. University High School, on the west side, offered only one vocational course and one of the class A variety. The emphasis is more significant when it is recognized that only eighteen vocational subjects were made available.

The evidence strongly points to the heavy emphasis upon vocational work in certain sections of the city, particularly the east side where the bulk of the Mexican community resided.

Virtually no vocational work was being done in at least half of the high schools in 1929; yet in that same year, Lincoln, Roosevelt (on the east side), and Jefferson (in the Mexican-Black central section) combined made available for their students forty-six of the seventy regular vocational courses taught in the entire city. Roosevelt and Lincoln alone offered thirty-five vocational courses (*School Journal*, 1927a:9).

Vocational courses for girls, aided by state and federal funds, followed similar distribution patterns. For instance, homemaking was offered at only four schools: Lafayette Junior High (with an enrollment of 36 percent Black, 14 percent Mexican, and 30 percent Jewish) (*School Journal*, 1927b:23), Belvedere Junior High (51 percent Mexican), Hollenbeck (Mexican and Jewish), and Jefferson (mixed working class). Lincoln offered dressmaking, millinery, and power sewing. Roosevelt offered dressmaking, sewing, power sewing, and personal hygiene. What this in fact meant was that of six vocational subjects for females, Lincoln offered three, Roosevelt four, and Fremont two. Only seven schools taught vocational courses for women. All of them were located in immigrant and poor neighborhoods (*School Journal*, 1927a:10).

A very special example of the vocational emphasis for Mexican children was the case of the San Fernando Elementary School. The school principal requested that the school, "attended entirely by Mexicans" totalling 600 students, be officially changed "to become a Mexican Industrial School" (*School Journal*, 1923b:23). The superintendent of schools and the Board of Education were favorably disposed to such a change in school purpose, which was to "better fit the boys and girls to meet their problems of life in the future years." The regular school work was thought to be appropriate for the lower grades, "but the older children will have a longer time to finish their academic work, and will have more vocational training." The latter was to consist of a pragmatic program:

The girls will have more extensive sewing, knitting, crocheting, drawn work, rug weaving and pottery. They will be taught personal hygiene, home-making, care of the sick. With the aid of a nursery they will learn the care of little children. The boys will be given more advanced agriculture and shop work of various kinds. (*School Journal*, 1923b:23)

It is not clear whether the school actually operated as a Mexican Industrial School since there is no further mention in any of the school's publications. What was significant was the continual emphasis upon vocational education for Mexican children, even to the point of creating a Mexican Industrial School.

In conclusion, the Los Angeles educational program in the 1920's and early 1930's was characterized by an adherence to general Progressive techniques and philosophy. Los Angeles had reached a stage in its development during the 1920's during which educational reform became necessary. These reforms insured that the Mexican

community would be subjected to a narrow, one-dimensional educational program that stressed non-academic vocational course work. Channelled into these courses by the counseling program, Mexican children became a major portion of the students in vocational course work and in slow learner classrooms.

For those thousands of Mexican children in public schools, education was not an opportunity for social mobility. Instead, their education was designed to benefit the interests of capital. Simultaneously, Mexican pupils were being trained in numbers far out of proportion to their percentage of the school population for pre-determined occupations in the economy, usually in the lowest paying categories, which most of their fathers and mothers had entered upon immigrating.

Los Angeles was not alone in implementing such an educational program. A 1933 study by the U.S. Office of Education reported identical schooling programs in the Los Angeles, Denver, San Antonio, and El Paso school districts. Their common approach placed Mexican pupils ". . . into a course of study suited to their needs," which was a non-academic curriculum emphasizing manual training (U.S. Department of the Interior, 1933).

Thus, the normal operation of free, mass, and compulsory education was one means by which the Mexican community supplied the capitalist economy with an "educated" labor force. The schools, agents of social stability, served the public, but only after that service had been molded to the specifications and the interests of monopoly capitalism.

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