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The Role of Education in Development in an
Indigenous Mexican Community:
Indigenous Perspectives

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the role of formal education in development for indigenous peoples. To shed light on the complex relationship between education and development, it presents an in-depth exploration of the experiences, concerns and aspirations of members of one indigenous Mexican community concerning the issues of identity, development and schooling. It investigates how the people of this location, a Zapoteco village in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, see development for their community, and how formal education could best contribute to the achievement of these aspirations. Education is considered within the context of different social processes taking place in the community.

Attention is focused on the perspectives of indigenous parents and young people, in accordance with a view of development which recognises the expertise of local people in analysing their situation, and respects their opinions and ideas as paramount to achieving appropriate development. Data from interviews with community members is analysed to reveal a number of themes running through respondents' opinions on culture, identity and development, and the interaction of formal education with these. Their ideas concerning education and cultural autonomy are considered in the light of educational and cultural theories sustained by research, and an analysis of the potential of formal education to contribute to the achievement of expressed development goals is presented.

Development for most Tabaeños consisted on the one hand of cultural continuity, in terms of traditional livelihoods, forms of social organisation and language, and on the other of the acquisition of skills, knowledge and institutions that will allow for the economic, social and cultural development of the community and its individuals. Research and the experiences of indigenous communities elsewhere in the world suggest that education has the potential to support community development in both of these aspects. Tabaeños are beginning to take a more active role in formal education, and the existence of a solid and autochthonous foundation for participation and locally controlled development in the community offers grounds for cautious optimism regarding its ability to continue to define and achieve both the education and the development talked of by community members.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANPIBAC	<i>Alianza Nacional de Profesionales Indígenas Bilingües</i> National Alliance of Bilingual Indigenous Professionals
CBTa	<i>Centro de Bachillerato para Técnicas Agropecuarias</i> Agricultural Technical High School
CNPI	<i>Consejo Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas</i> National Council of Indigenous Peoples
DEI	<i>Departamento de Educación Indígena</i> Department of Indigenous Education (in the state of Oaxaca)
DGEI	<i>Dirección General de Educación Indígena</i> General Directorate of Indigenous Education
EZLN	<i>Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional</i> Zapatista National Liberation Army
IEEPO	<i>Instituto Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca</i> Oaxaca State Institute of Public Education
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INI	<i>Instituto Nacional Indigenista</i> National Indigenist Institute
L1	home language or first language
L2	second language
RLS	reversing language shift
SEP	<i>Secretaría de Educación Pública</i> Secretariat of Public Education
SJT	San Juan Tabaá

GLOSSARY

<i>aguardiente</i>	a locally brewed alcoholic spirit, made from sugar cane
<i>alcalde</i>	the person responsible for justice and dispute resolution
<i>bachillerato</i>	a high school, usually one that offers a technical course of studies
<i>barrio</i>	neighbourhood, a group of families in the village who hold land communally
<i>cabecera municipal</i>	municipal capital
<i>cacique</i>	a local despot, a person who holds political power in a community and abuses it to further his own interests, usually a large land-owner who rents plots to peasant farmers (usually historical)
<i>cargo</i>	an office or position of great responsibility in the community, generally elected by popular vote, e.g. president, <i>síndico</i> , <i>alcalde</i> , president of the church
<i>ciudadano</i>	literally "citizen," used in Tabaá to refer to those who take part in the community administrative system of assemblies and services, i.e. men between 17 and 60 who are not students
<i>fiesta</i>	a religious festival
<i>gozona</i>	see <i>guelaguetza</i>
<i>guelaguetza</i>	a loosely reciprocal system of mutual help among households, used when extra labour or resources are needed, e.g. weddings, harvest
<i>indígena</i>	indigenous, an indigenous person
<i>indio</i>	"Indian," term used to describe indigenous Mexicans in previous centuries, now considered derogatory
<i>jarabe</i>	a traditional dance in the Sierra Norte, danced in couples to brass band music
<i>mestizo</i>	of mixed Indian and European blood; the majority of the Mexican population belongs to this group
<i>municipio</i>	municipality, similar to a county
<i>Oaxaqueño/a</i>	a person from the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca

<i>preparatoria</i>	a high school that offers a course preparing students for entry into university
<i>servicio</i>	an unpaid and often obligatory position of responsibility in the community, usually appointed by the municipal authority, e.g. committee member, village security
<i>sierra</i>	mountain range
<i>Sierra Norte</i>	one of the seven regions into which the state of Oaxaca is divided, and the location of the community studied
<i>síndico</i> affairs	the person responsible for attending to internal community affairs
<i>Tabaeño/a</i>	a person from Tabaá; the adjectival form of Tabaá, e.g. Tabaeño culture
<i>tequio</i>	obligatory and unpaid communal work on community projects, performed by <i>ciudadanos</i> and some women whenever required by the village authorities
<i>usos y costumbres</i>	“practices and customs,” traditional forms of political and social organisation, now legally recognised
<i>Zapoteco</i>	one of 62 indigenous ethnic groups in Mexico, and that to which members of the community studied belong; the language family of this ethnic group

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Formal education is increasingly becoming a central issue for indigenous peoples throughout the world. It has long been recognised that education plays a central part in the development of communities and nations, as well as individuals, by increasing the level of human resources, the potential for economic development, and the capacity of individuals to participate in and contribute to the social and political workings of their society. As institutions controlled by the powerful in any given society, schools have traditionally played an important role in maintaining the status quo of power relations between different societal groups. Historically, educational content and methods have tended to be predicated on the values of socially and politically dominant groups and applied universally, with the effect of culturally assimilating children of minority groups into mainstream society and reinforcing the dominance of the more powerful group. At the same time, social reproduction has been such that minority groups, even when culturally assimilated, tend to remain in the lower classes. This assimilationist model of education continues to hold sway in many parts of the world, often forming part of a system of “internal colonialism,” where a minority is systematically exploited and oppressed by a dominant group, usually with the implicit aim of the cultural eradication of this group by means of its absorption into the mainstream. For indigenous people, then, formal education has held out the promise of economic and social progress with one hand, while threatening the survival of their cultures with the other.

This has certainly been the case in Mexico. From the early decades of the twentieth century until the 1970s, education was explicitly considered to be the most effective means of assimilating the indigenous population into “national society.” Although official policy now recognises the importance of indigenous cultures and the rights of their people, including their right to a culturally appropriate education, formal education for most indigenous children in practice continues to emphasise Spanish language acquisition without giving corresponding attention to indigenous languages, and is conducted according to a standard national curriculum. While in many first world countries, such as New Zealand and Canada, indigenous people are

increasingly taking responsibility for and control of their own educational programmes, the number of such cases in Mexico is small, although increasing. This is due partly to the considerable obstacles posed by political factors, such as relatively low funding for education at a national level and a very centralised, bureaucratic and inflexible education system. These factors are complicated at local level by the extremely large range of indigenous languages and dialects and by a lack of consensus among indigenous parents as to which will be of more use to their children: traditional, Spanish-oriented education or alternative programmes that emphasise local cultures and languages. Despite these obstacles, however, there are an increasing number of examples of local groups moving into the educational arena, traditionally the preserve of the State, and organising themselves to contribute to the development of an educational programme that more closely reflects their needs and desires.

This study is an intensive exploration of the experiences, concerns and aspirations of one indigenous Mexican community; it considers identity, development and schooling. It attempts to shed light on the questions of what the indigenous people of this location, a Zapoteco village in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca (see Figure 1.1), view as development for their community, and how formal education can contribute to the achievement of these aspirations.¹ To provide a frame of reference for the discussion of these questions, the issue of the culture and identity of members of the community is also explored in depth. The study privileges the perspectives of indigenous parents and young people, as those with an immediate interest in schooling, rather than those of indigenous teachers, about whom a number of interesting studies have been written,² or those of academics, officials or policy-makers. This accords with a view of development characterised variously as participatory, grass-roots, or people-centred, which declines to propose a single definition of or path to “development” but sees this as dependent on the particular context in question. This perspective tends to characterise development as having to do with increasing the control that people have over the forces shaping their lives. It

¹ The word Zapoteco, originally from the Nahuatl language, is sometimes rendered as “Zapotec” in English. I have retained the original version in this work as this is how my informants referred to themselves.

² See section 2.1.3.



Figure 1.1 Location of Oaxaca State in Mexico

recognises the expertise of local people in analysing their situation, and respects their opinions and ideas as paramount to achieving appropriate development. The study thus considers formal education within the context of different social processes taking place in the community, rather than in isolation. Many studies of indigenous education in Mexico have tended to take the school as their major focus, concentrating, for example, on improving classroom practice so as to increase educational achievement, on teachers' conceptions of what "indigenous education" is or should be or, alternatively, on linguistic issues in education and cultural change. In contrast, this piece of research takes a more global view of the community and examines the place of the primary school and of formal education in relation to the aspirations of community members for their future. For this reason, methods used to obtain data for this qualitative study included participant observation in the community and school during a three and a half month period of residence, semi-structured interviews with community members based around an open-ended schedule, unstructured interviews and informal conversation, and examination of documents and statistics.

Most indigenous communities in southern Mexico are fairly remote from urban centres and, until recent decades, have been largely isolated from wider society due to mountainous terrain and the scarcity of roads. Subsistence agriculture is the main economic activity in these villages, and the economic situation of many families is becoming more difficult in an increasingly monetarised economy, particularly as environmental degradation and crop blights reduce the agricultural yield. Migration to cities in Mexico and the United States in search of wage labour is increasingly common, resulting in drastic social change in many communities. Poverty is most widespread and severe in the rural areas of the three southern Mexican states of Chiapas, Oaxaca and Guerrero (McKinley & Alarcón 1995:1579), all of which include relatively large indigenous populations. These states also trail the rest of the country in literacy and years of education,³ and a correlation is evident

³ According to figures from the 2000 Census, Chiapas displayed the highest index of illiteracy among the population of 15 years or more (23.48%) and the lowest average years of schooling among the population of 15 years or more (5.55 years). Oaxaca followed in both indicators, with an illiteracy rate of 21.69% and an average 5.81 years of schooling, and Guerrero took third place, with illiteracy at 21.12% and an average 6.32 years of schooling. These compare against national averages of 9.57% for illiteracy and 7.56 average years of schooling (source: SEP 2001a).

between those with little or no education and those in extreme poverty (McKinley & Alarcón 1995:1580). Southern Mexican indigenous communities tend to be characterised by their distinctive cultures, languages and forms of social organisation, often including a highly regulated system of unpaid and compulsory service to the community on the part of all adult men, and sometimes women also, known as the *cargo* system.⁴ Gender roles are usually distinct and strictly adhered to, with men taking on public and representative responsibilities in the community as well as the larger share of agricultural work, and women taking responsibility within the domestic and child-raising spheres. A number of indigenous movements and organisations, of which the best known is the Zapatista National Liberation Army, continue to pressure the Mexican government for greater equity, autonomy and recognition of indigenous rights. The right to an appropriate education is often seen as a high priority.

Since the 1950s, one of the main routes to social mobility for indigenous Mexicans has been through becoming a teacher in the “indigenous education” system, for which bilingualism in Spanish and an indigenous language is a prerequisite. Although a diminution in the real value of teacher’s wages has recently made this career path less attractive, schooling continues to offer the real prospect of social “advancement” and greater economic stability to the academically successful. However, formal education in rural indigenous communities presents a number of problems, including school accessibility, a lack of schooling materials and other resources, teachers with low educational levels and often little training, a curriculum more suited to the experiences of non-indigenous urban students, a dearth of indigenous language materials, malnutrition among students, and high rates of non-attendance and drop-out, often due to the need for children’s labour in the family’s economic activities. To this list must be added the legacy of former assimilationist educational policies under which indigenous languages were either excluded from the classroom or used merely as a pedagogical aid to hasten students’ transition from their vernacular tongue to Spanish. This way of thinking is still influential among many indigenous parents and teachers and, in most cases, indigenous languages still receive only limited use in formal education, creating considerable difficulties for

⁴ For an ethnography of systems of cooperation in one Oaxacan community, see Cohen 1999.

children who begin school with little or no knowledge of Spanish. Not surprisingly, achievement statistics in rural and indigenous schools are lower than the national average.

Meanwhile, improvements in communications and technology and increased mobility, along with Spanish-centred education and other factors, are resulting in the rapid displacement of many Mexican indigenous languages by Spanish. In the state of Oaxaca, speakers of indigenous languages have decreased from 54.6% in 1940 to 36.6% in 1990 (INEGI 1999, Pardo 1995:95).⁵ Due to the difficulty of using racial criteria to identify indigenous people in Mexico, the ability to speak an indigenous language is the only identifier of indigenous ethnicity; thus, when younger generations in a community or family grow up monolingual in Spanish, they officially cease to be indigenous. For most participants in this study, their language was of central importance to their indigenous identity, and the continuity of this and other aspects of their traditional culture was of great importance. Diminishing agricultural production was a cause of great concern in the community, and many saw economic diversification as vital to the continuation of the community and its traditional ways of life. Participants saw formal education as making various contributions to development and, for some, these included the affirmation and reinforcement of local language and culture. In order to achieve this aim, some community members had begun a project to have the local Zapoteco dialect included to a greater degree in the primary school curriculum. However, opinions on the relationships between culture, development and education are diverse, and the extent to which alternative educational initiatives will take hold in the community remains to be seen.

THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis begins by situating the study within the context of previous research and theory, and within the historical-political context of ethnic relations in Mexico, including the role of formal education in regulating these relations. This contextualisation is followed by information regarding the specific circumstances of the fieldwork site and the views of community members on the foundation of their

culture and identity, what development would consist of in their particular situation, and the inter-relations of formal education with these issues.

Chapter 2 begins with a statement of the research problem and an overview of previous studies in the field. Methods used in obtaining primary and secondary data and in analysis are presented and discussed, and the study is located in the context of theories on education and development and on indigenous education. A number of indigenous experiences in other countries are reviewed and contrasted with the Mexican situation.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the historical and social context of the study. I begin by summarising the historical progression of ethnic issues in development in Mexico, including state and societal views of indigenous cultures and indigenous responses to external rule from the time of the Spanish conquest of Mexico to the present. The development of Mexico's indigenous education system throughout the twentieth century is outlined, as are problems which have dogged the translation of policy into educational practice. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction to the socio-economic particulars of the state of Oaxaca and the community of San Juan Tabaá.

The next three chapters are based on primary data obtained through fieldwork and privilege the expressed opinions of residents of the community studied. Chapter 4 introduces the elements that research participants considered central to their indigenous culture and identity, and includes a brief discussion of gender relations in the community and a section on the part language plays in local culture. The discussion includes participants' experiences regarding cultural change up to the present, and their ideas about cultural change and continuity in the future. In Chapter 5, I focus on local views of development. These tend to cluster around four themes: socio-cultural continuity, economic development and its benefits, the provision of services, and social change in some aspects of community life. Each of these four is discussed in turn. Chapter 6 concerns the place of school education in the development of the community. Educational practice in Tabaá is described briefly,

⁵ These figures refer to the percentage of the total state population aged 5 years or more that speaks an

followed by a synthesis of opinions regarding the objectives of formal education. I then examine a number of discontinuities between formal education and local cultural norms and values. Different views on the place of local culture in the classroom are presented, and I finish the chapter with a review of the potential for community-initiated change in educational practice.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the potential for formal education to support the kind of development envisaged by participants for their community and its individuals. The kind of education that would best meet the needs of the community according to educational theory is described and compared with opinions expressed by participants on educational practice and an educational project currently being undertaken by some community members. The likelihood of change occurring in educational practice in Tabaá is discussed with reference to both internal and external forces for change and inertia.

Chapter 2

METHODS AND THEORY

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study is concerned with the role of formal education in development for indigenous peoples. The question of what constitutes development is not viewed as susceptible to a single universal answer but, instead, is definable only with reference to a particular context and by those who live within this context. Although different aspects of development, such as the economic and the political, are considered, special attention is paid to socio-cultural aspects, as these are of particular concern in the case of indigenous communities. With this view of development in mind, the study aims to explore issues of concern to indigenous people for the education of their youth and the kind of education most appropriate to the context and the aspirations of those concerned. This question was investigated through an intensive exploration of the situation of one particular indigenous Mexican community. To answer the question of what kind of formal education would be most appropriate in this community in order to best contribute to the expressed development aspirations of community members, the study explores a number of subsidiary questions:

- What have been the community's experiences of formal education and development to date, and how have these interrelated?
- How do community members conceive of their culture?
- How do community members conceive of development for their community?
- What are the perceived successes and failings of current educational practice?
- How is the role of education in the pursuit of development objectives perceived?

Of necessity, the institutional context of schooling is also taken into account. As a public institution, the school is not necessarily responsive to the opinions, needs or desires of the community, and this impacts greatly on perceptions of the potential of the school to contribute to the community's development. The experiences and ideas of members of the focus community are also compared briefly with those of indigenous groups in other places, both within Mexico and in other countries.

Aims, Objectives and Significance

The research aimed to draw out, through close contact with members of the community, endogenous perceptions of what “development” means for the community and its individuals, and of how “culture” interacts with and shapes these perceptions, before exploring the part that community members felt formal education plays, and should or could play in the development of the community and its individuals.

In accordance with the pluri-ethnic orientation of the Mexican Constitution, recent Mexican educational policy recognises that educational programmes should be appropriate to the cultures and needs of different ethnic groups in Mexican society (SEP 2001b:42), a principle that has been upheld in Oaxaca state law since 1996 (SEP 2001c). To date this has rarely been the case, largely for political reasons, but as the devolution of educational programming responsibilities to state level proceeds and indigenous groups continue to assert their rights, this legislation will surely make its way into practice. The elaboration of such programmes will require a great deal of research into the needs of various indigenous communities and cooperation with members of those communities. This study offers preliminary insights into the aspirations of members of one such community for the education of their children.

A primary objective of the study is to provide a space for “ordinary” indigenous parents and students to express their views on the place of education in the development of their communities. Although many studies of education in indigenous communities have been carried out in Mexico,⁶ few have focused on the opinions of those whom education is intended to serve. Instead, most have tended to present the opinions of education professionals such as teachers and administrators. Such studies have often focused on official indigenous education policy and the translation of, or failure to translate, this policy into practice. Although there is certainly indigenous input into educational policies, much of this has come from teachers, and the perspectives of teachers and ordinary community members do not always coincide. Parental opinions are sometimes referred to, but rarely have studies focused on the opinions of these important actors. Exceptions to this generalisation

⁶ See examples in the section on previous studies.

include Guzmán (1991), whose study of indigenous education in Oaxacan communities counted 164 parents of school children among its 363 respondents, and Rippberger (1992), who conducted 25 of her 55 interviews with Mayan parents and 7 with students. It is intended to complement the studies currently available by providing insight into the essential perspective of non-professional members of indigenous communities.

A further objective is to provide a more complete picture of how education is seen to fit into the complex pattern of community life. This study presents a vision of education within the context of the social, cultural, economic and institutional milieu of one community, and is intended to add background to the many studies of indigenous education which focus on the school or the classroom in isolation. Such intensive and micro-level studies provide an important dimension to understanding the processes of education in indigenous communities, but it is also important to recognise that all social processes exist within larger social and institutional contexts which affect them greatly. The more global, situated understanding of education brought by a development perspective offers insights into the reasons behind often-remarked attitudes of indigenous parents toward education, such as the unwillingness to accept the use of indigenous languages in the classroom, as well as contributing to a more profound understanding of the kind of education that would best serve the community, and why.

As an intensive study of a single community, the study is in no way intended to be representative of Mexico's indigenous communities, nor indeed of Zapoteco communities of the Sierra Norte. Instead the intention is to add depth and colour to the picture provided by more extensive studies. It also provides a point of comparison with a number of first world educational studies which concentrate on the cultural uniquenesses and aspirations of indigenous groups and their efforts to have these reflected in formal educational practice.⁷

⁷ See, for example, Pere (1982) and Smith (1992) on Māori education in New Zealand, Lipka (1989 and 1991), Lipka & Ilutsk (1995), and Stairs (1988, 1991 and 1994b) on Native Canadian schooling initiatives, Macias (1987) and Watahomigie and McCarty (1994) for Native American initiatives, Sherwood (1982) and Walton and Egginton (1990) on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives, and Jordan (1998) for Sami and further Canadian and Australian examples.

Previous Studies

Previous studies of education in indigenous Mexican communities have focused on themes such as the contrast between indigenous education policy and practice, teacher opinions and experiences, cultural differences between community and classroom, and school-community relations. Due to the great number of indigenous groups and schools nationwide, studies have tended to focus on the situations of particular states, with Oaxaca and Chiapas being common choices because of their large indigenous populations and diversity of ethnic groups. Modiano's well-known work (1973) provides a description of Indian life and education in Chiapas, contrasting Mayan learning styles with those presupposed in formal education, and considering the optimum language of instruction and the effectiveness of contemporary formal educational programmes. Varese (1983) provides a useful overview of the indigenous education system, detailing policy and different services provided, and presenting case studies of educational quality in three indigenous communities of the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, the location of the present study. These general studies provide a point of reference for comparing the current state of education in indigenous communities; what is most notable is the slow progress of change with regard to problems noted by these authors. A series of studies which investigate changes in educational policy and their translation into practice, including Cisneros (1990), Acunzo (1991), Mena & Ruiz (1993), Freedson & Pérez (1995) and Mena, Muñoz & Ruiz (1999), also tend to report that educational practice has been remarkably resistant to change. The last of these is a wide-ranging study of indigenous education in the state of Oaxaca which incorporates detailed case studies of classroom practice, linguistic abilities and teacher and parent opinions in four indigenous communities.

The work of Mena & Ruiz (1993), based in the state of Oaxaca, explores reasons for this slow rate of change in educational practice by investigating the opinions of teachers on indigenous education. They find that although many teachers see indigenous education as playing an important role in supporting indigenous languages and cultures, few depart in practice from the traditional educational model which privileges the Spanish language and implicitly or explicitly encourages transition from the indigenous language to Spanish. This confirms Guzmán's finding

that a mere 7% of bilingual teachers in Oaxaca use only the indigenous language in the classroom, with the remainder either using it occasionally, as a learning aid, or not at all (1991:63-4). Mena & Ruiz attribute this situation to a lack of social acceptance of the aims of indigenous education, the absence of bilingual and indigenous language materials, and the exclusive use of Spanish in educational plans and programmes. They conclude that “bilingual” primary education is only minimally different from that given in ordinary primary schools. Howell (1997), Densmore (1998), Rippberger (1996, 1998) and Mena, Muñoz & Ruiz (1999) also focus on teachers’ experiences and opinions.

Guzmán (1991), Rippberger (1992) and McGreevy (1984) explore the experiences and opinions of indigenous people not directly involved in the education system. While Guzmán incorporates a large number of indigenous parents in her sample, her questions are necessarily limited by the large sample size. She investigates aspects of indigenous and *mestizo* cultures which Oaxacan parents, teachers and administrators feel should be included or excluded from formal education, and finds that parents are more likely to emphasise the importance of educating children with respect and family values (24%) than educating them in material cultural expressions such as the indigenous language (12%) or literacy in this language (2%). Traditional forms of social organisation were also seen to have a place in formal education (14.5%), as were agricultural customs and techniques (12.5%). Interestingly, only 15.5% of parents chose Spanish as the most important aspect of *mestizo* culture they wished their children to be taught, while almost as many (14%) failed to find anything worth teaching in this culture. Many parents were concerned that their children were educated against such negative traits as alcoholism, violence, exploitation and discrimination (1991:107-116). Rippberger and McGreevy, both of whom conducted their research in the highlands of Chiapas, used more open-ended interviews and participant observation to obtain data. McGreevy’s study focuses on students’ experiences of schooling, and finds that students’ hopes of acquiring Spanish language and literacy skills through formal schooling were, in many cases, not fulfilled, with negative consequences for their self-confidence and self-esteem. Students had great difficulty understanding their textbooks, and McGreevy emphasises the need for alternative materials for Indian

students. The objectives of Rippberger's research are, in many ways, similar to those of the present study, but greater emphasis is placed on the views of indigenous teachers and administrators. Rippberger focuses on the forces for cultural change brought by schooling, and on the responses of indigenous people to these forces. Some respondents saw schooling as a direct cause of cultural loss, but others welcomed the greater awareness of the outside world brought by education, and the opportunity to acquire skills necessary for interacting in wider society. Some believed that education helped people to appreciate their own culture more, and some that their indigenous culture was sufficiently flexible and profound that it could not be lost simply through schooling processes. She concludes that Indian communities are generally very aware of the cultural discontinuities between traditional and formal education, and that bilingual education equips many indigenous students with the cultural skills necessary for easier and more confident interaction in *mestizo* society. Rippberger sees Indians as choosing the extent to which they maintain or adopt aspects of each of the two cultures, and as creating new cultural identities which incorporate elements of both. Her study goes on to focus largely on the role of those indigenous people employed within the bilingual education system, looking at their role as "cultural brokers" between the two cultures and at adaptations to the national curriculum made in teaching practice, themes she goes on to explore further in her more recent studies.

In a study of education and ethnic identity in a Mixe community in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, Acunzo (1991) discusses a wide range of cultural discontinuities noted by Mixe parents and professionals with regard to formal education. These include the very presence of children in the school, rather than performing productive tasks, turning children from the productive members of family and community which they have traditionally been from an early age into an economically inactive "parasite" population. Mixes saw the school as abstracting children from the family atmosphere in which they have the opportunity to learn both practical skills and values such as independence and self-sufficiency which are vital for community life. School learning was seen as abstract and without immediate practical application, reducing the motivation of children to learn, as well as being overly verbal and failing to respect the traditional learning style of observation and imitation. Mixes

also complained that schools promote egoism and individualism rather than the values of solidarity and work for the benefit of all; that they fail to teach either agricultural techniques or the value and dignity of agricultural work, promoting urban drift; and that at the same time, those that move to the cities often have only the prospect of becoming part of the lower urban class (1991:113-121).

A number of studies of indigenous educational initiatives both in Mexico and in other countries offer instructive insights into the difficulties of developing programmes locally, and the potential of such programmes to contribute to the academic achievement of indigenous children and the development of indigenous cultures. Watahomigie and McCarty's study (1994) of Peach Springs, a small Hualapai Indian community in Arizona, is of particular relevance to the present study because of many similarities in circumstances between Peach Springs and San Juan Tabaá. The two communities are of comparable size, and both speak languages that had been unwritten until the inauguration of schooling initiatives. In both instances, the indigenous language is used extensively within the community and bilingualism is common, although the national language is slowly becoming more dominant. Education and economic development are critical in both communities because of a chronic lack of local employment opportunities. A bilingual- bicultural programme, begun in the Peach Springs school in 1975, is now "nationally recognized for its achievements in curriculum development, native language literacy, and ... interactive instructional technology" (Watahomigie and McCarty 1994:27). Community resistance to the concept was encountered during the first years of the project, but lessened as the programme's successes, such as improved student achievement, became more evident. The study is important to the case of San Juan Tabaá as it demonstrates that indigenous curricula can be successfully designed and implemented within even small language communities. Watahomigie and McCarty note that the fact that local people played key roles in the development of orthography, curriculum and pedagogy was crucial to the programme's success, as were community support and involvement, increased through community education about the project. Consistent long-term funding, staff stability, an increasing proportion of local staff, and a supportive administrative environment are also seen as very important. The current state of education in Mexico makes it very difficult to

secure these final requirements, but the fundamental lesson remains that “genuine bilingual/bicultural/biliteracy education requires local initiative and control, and the realization that indigenous communities have the power to transform the school curriculum” (ibid. :41).

Māori education in New Zealand provides an interesting counterpoint to studies of single communities or small groups of communities. Māori-controlled education initiatives began in the late 1970s, mainly in response to the threat of language extinction. Māori language immersion preschool units (Kōhanga Reo), catering for children from six months to six years old, began functioning in 1982 (Smith 1998:27). Their success has been such that in 1995 there were more than 800 Kōhanga Reo, and 50% of all Māori children enrolled in early childhood education attended Kōhanga Reo. The system has since expanded to include Kura Kaupapa Māori, Māori language immersion primary schools with programmes based on Māori philosophies and pedagogies, of which there are now more than 60 nationwide, and a small number of secondary schools and tertiary institutions which also use Māori language, philosophies and values. There are also a large number of immersion and bilingual units in mainstream primary and secondary schools. Many of these programmes started out with community-based funding, but in many cases funding has now been taken over by the State. It is estimated that 76,000 children in New Zealand participate in some form of Māori language based education (Smith 1998:27). Apart from the substantial revitalisation of the Māori language that has taken place through these formal schooling initiatives and community-based Māori language programmes, a number of studies have shown positive academic results for children in Māori immersion and bilingual programmes. Katene (1992) found that children in bilingual and immersion primary school units, particularly graduates of Kōhanga Reo, tend to enjoy school, use remedial reading and support services less than Māori children in mainstream units, and perform very well academically, in many cases out-performing their monolingual peers. Douglas (1993, cited in Keegan 1996:15) reports that the academic performance of high school students in a whānau bilingual unit improved, along with self-confidence and school retention rates, and a study by Aspin (1994, cited in Keegan 1996:16) showed Māori students learning mathematics through a Māori language medium scoring higher than their peers in

English-medium education in a mathematics achievement test, although Māori was a second language for almost all the students. Bilingual and immersion programmes have also helped to revitalise and empower Māori communities, as people come together and work jointly to achieve their aims, and to provide employment in a Māori language industry (Keegan 1996:13-14,17). It must be noted that, linguistically, the situation of Māori people in New Zealand is somewhat less complicated than that of indigenous groups in Mexico because all tribes speak the same language with relatively little dialectal variation, which facilitates the development and provision of resource materials and the allocation of teaching staff. Although it has not always been the case, funding also tends to be easier to access and educational autonomy greater than in the Mexican context.

METHODOLOGY

Research Site

The state of Oaxaca was chosen for the study because of its status as one of the poorest and least economically developed states of Mexico, together with its large indigenous population. The fact that the state of Oaxaca promulgated in 1996 a State Law of Education which supports indigenous forms of formal education was also influential in the choice of a research location. Within Oaxaca, the fieldwork site was selected on the advice of researchers with experience in the field and on the basis of the following criteria: that the community be of medium size, to facilitate understanding of community dynamics, that it have a bilingual primary school administered by the Department of Indigenous Education in which all six grades were taught, and that an indigenous language be that in common use. Moreover, it was imperative that the community members and authorities and the school authorities be receptive to the research and the presence of the researcher. This implied that education and cultural change be issues of concern to the community in question, which was certainly the case in San Juan Tabaá. The support of educational authorities at state, zone and supervisory levels was also sought and received.

The study focuses largely on primary schooling, although kindergarten, lower secondary, high school and university levels all enter into the discussion also. The primary school was chosen as the main focus because it belongs to the “indigenous

education” system, an alternative kindergarten and primary system run by the Secretariat of Public Education for children in indigenous communities and, in contrast to the kindergarten, has a structured programme of studies. In addition, students at the Tabaá primary school are derived almost exclusively from families of the community, whereas the tele-secondary school caters also for young people from a neighbouring community.

Methods

A pilot study was carried out during one week in late June/early July 1999, during which conversations with teachers, authorities and community members, classroom observation and participant observation of community life allowed for a preliminary understanding of community and school organisation and of important issues in community development and education.

Fieldwork was carried out over three and a half months, from August to November 1999, during which I lived in San Juan Tabaá. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 29 people, following a guideline prepared by the researcher but with space to pursue other topics that arose in the course of conversation.⁸ Interview respondents were those with whom I came into contact in the community, and their families. People recognised in the community for their interest in and knowledge of cultural and educational issues were also sought out for interviews. Most of the interviews were individual, but two involved two respondents from the same household. Interview respondents included fifteen men and fourteen women. Nineteen were parents, twelve of whom had children in the Tabaá primary school or kindergarten. Five were students in the local high school, and seven were teachers. Four held positions of authority within the community in 1999 or 2000. Respondents ranged in age from 17 to 68, and came from varied economic backgrounds, including land-owning families and those without their own land, owners of small businesses, and teachers. One single mother and two women who had separated from their husbands were included in the sample.⁹ Some respondents had spent long periods outside the community, while others had lived in Tabaá all their lives. All interviews were carried out in Spanish. These interviews were taped in those cases where the

⁸ Interview guidelines appended.

respondent felt comfortable with this, and later transcribed in Spanish by the researcher; otherwise, transcripts were typed up from notes taken during the interview. Quotes were translated into English at the time of inclusion in the report, and appear in italics in this text. The names of those interviewed were changed to protect their anonymity. In addition to these formal interviews, classroom observation, participant observation in community life, informal conversation and unstructured interviews – spontaneous but purposive conversations – added to and deepened my understanding of research themes. Field notes were recorded daily in a journal and later included in the analysis. Documents relating to the community and/or written by community members were also examined, and socio-demographic data collected from secondary sources. The use of different methods in relation to the same object of study allowed for a measure of verification of data through triangulation.

Analysis of the data collected in these ways followed the process described by Emerson et al. (1995:142-68): close reading of and reflection on field notes, followed by analytic coding, where notes are first categorised into different themes, ideas and issues and subsequently re-examined in relation to a smaller number of central ideas. As these authors point out, the process is not linear but moves constantly between reading and coding and note-taking as ideas develop.

Methodology

This piece of research is based in the interpretive methodological paradigm. The interpretive orientation focuses on the perspectives of local actors, recognising their expertise in local matters and stressing their active role in creating the situations and realities in which they live (see Guba 1990:27). In an educational context, these actors may be people such as teachers, parents and students. Building on critical theory, which concentrates on systemic inequities, an interpretive perspective on indigenous education makes “the minority groups and their local settings central to the inquiry process” (Rippberger 1993: 56-57). In accordance with these theories, the discourse of this thesis stresses the views and ideas of the ordinary people of San Juan Tabaá, rather than those of education professionals, policy-makers or

⁹ For information on individual respondents, please see the appended table of interview respondents.

academics. As Wilson says, "We should like to argue for the primacy of the utterances and practices of third world people themselves. Not that what they say is sacrosanct or less bound up with power relations than what we say, but because we consider it is vitally important to remember that they have the right to define themselves and what they believe" (1990:16, quoted in Mikkelsen 1995:43).

The study is intended to provide a global view of the role of education in the development of an indigenous community, and to reflect emic perspectives to the fullest extent possible. For this purpose, open-ended methods were chosen to allow the perspectives of respondents to come through with minimal imposition of the researcher's preconceptions. Although the general focus of the research was set before fieldwork began, the specific questions and problems were not defined rigidly, allowing space for the priorities of local people and the specific situation to take on greater importance in the research. Mikkelsen notes that, from a participatory development perspective, "the concern for development problems and their solutions based on the incorporation of popular knowledge must be placed in the context of people's own expression of identity, problems and needs" (1995:42), and it is with this intent that both interviews and the thesis deal firstly with the question of identity and culture in the fieldwork site, before going on to explore development priorities and, finally, the place of education within this context.

Research methodology was informed by the participatory approach to research and development. Deriving from development practice, but also applicable in a research context, the participatory philosophy holds that the perspectives and ideas of local people, those whose lives are most affected by development practice or research, are paramount. In common with the interpretive approach, participatory research "regards people as agents rather than objects; capable of analysing their own situations and designing their own solutions" (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995:1670). In participatory research, however, the locus of research control shifts from the researcher to the participants, who share or take control over various stages of the research process, such as identification of the research problem, generating and analysing information, and acting on the results. This last step is another salient characteristic of participatory research: the research goal is immediate action, rather

than simply understanding, and action on the basis of research results is integral to the process (ibid. :1668-9). This piece of research was originally intended to be participatory, with the intention of mitigating the exploitative elements of conventional research by maximising the usefulness of the research to the community. However, time constraints on fieldwork and the lack of a prior relationship with the research participants made development of the trust which is fundamental to a collaborative research effort extremely difficult. As Cornwall and Jewkes (1991:1673) note, “participation is time-consuming” and community members with already busy lifestyles were both unsure what would be expected of them as participants and diffident about committing time to a project they did not view as a major priority. Moreover, many community members saw formal education as a service provided by distant authorities and largely beyond their control, and did not perceive a need for their greater involvement in educational processes. Ultimately, although the orientation of the research was participatory in that it was “about respecting and understanding the people with and for whom researchers work” (ibid:1674), the methodology employed remained conventional in that control over the research questions and process resided with the researcher and it led to no immediate action.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Definitions of Terms

As far as possible, I have tried to reflect emic definitions in usage of terms such as “culture,” “development” and “education” which signify different things for different people. Considerable space is devoted to exploration of local concepts of these terms within the body of the thesis, but my own conceptions of these concepts are noted briefly here in order to make the researcher’s bias explicit.

Although the term “education” may equally be used to refer to learning within a family or community context as to schooling, within the context of this study it will be used to refer to formal school education. Similarly, “indigenous education” will refer not to traditional forms of learning and cultural transmission in indigenous communities, but to schooling administered by the General Directorate of Indigenous Education (DGEI) in Mexico, a nominally separate sub-system of

education offered at preschool and primary level in indigenous communities, distinct from the standard or “federal” system. This usage coincides with that common in Mexico and in the community studied.

Culture is conceived broadly as the set of beliefs, ideas, forms of interaction and ways of understanding, organising and interpreting the world that are shared by a certain group and make it possible for people of that group to communicate with and relate to each other and to understand and deal with their environment. It is seen as a social construct, rather than as something which exists independently of a historically specific situation or of the community of people that creates and defines it, and as such, it is viewed as being constantly in a process of change. Moreover, I view cultural and linguistic diversity as an important social resource, and believe that all communities have the right to maintain and develop their cultures and languages.

Development is also seen as having different meanings and implications in different contexts, following more recent theories of “bottom-up,” “participatory” and “autonomous” development. In contrast to previous theories of development which prescribed a particular and pre-defined route to development, these more recent ideas recognise that different situations and historical experiences call for different approaches to development and, moreover, that development aspirations will vary substantially among cultural, historical, and socio-economic contexts. This way of thinking about development emphasises the sound judgement of local people with regard to their own problems, needs and priorities, and the practice that derives from this theoretical perspective usually aims to strengthen and diversify people’s capabilities to manage and control their own development. People are seen not as “objects” of development, but as actors in, or “subjects” of their own development. As the development process is rarely self-contained within a particular local context but rather dependent on the wider political, institutional and economic environment, this perspective on development is concerned with developing people’s ability to influence the institutions and forces shaping their lives. Without prescribing specific processes or objectives which development must include, then, it is generally seen as having to do with equitable distribution of and access to resources, and the

enhancement of people's capacity to define and achieve development on their own terms.

Education and Development

Under the previously prevalent view of development as "modernisation," education was accorded an important role in both increasing the "human capital" of developing countries; that is, providing knowledge appropriate for the incorporation of graduates into the labour market, and conditioning students to the "social relations necessary for the functioning and expansion of prevailing socio-economic structures" (Carmen 1996:61-2). For indigenous peoples, this entailed a cultural adaptation, and schooling was seen in many instances as the primary means of disseminating "modern," that is to say, Western, cultural values and attributes to indigenous people. However, under more recent perspectives on development, as outlined above, education is seen more as a process of empowerment. Attention is focused on the social benefits of education as well as on the economic, and on benefits for the individual and her community as much as on those that accrue to the nation as a whole. The potential of education to develop the abilities of the individual to make informed choices, to increase control over her own life economically, socially, politically and culturally, and to participate more fully in the social and political workings of her society is seen as central (Carmen 1996:63-71).

New perspectives on development thus imply new educational strategies. Gould (1993:208-211) suggests that third world countries have generally adopted or been forced to adopt an educational model consistent with the pattern of development experienced by Western countries, that is, that the "modernisation" development perspective has been influential in education design. Despite the decline in popularity of this development theory, education systems the world over still tend to be "hierarchical, bureaucratic and centralized" (ibid. :209) and to adhere to nationally planned formulae based on "rational" economic planning. In order to support more recent ideas of development, Gould suggests that education should be more decentralised, flexible and responsive to local circumstances, emphasise the acquisition of locally relevant skills, and involve more local control and responsibility. These suggestions imply a shift in the focus of educational strategies

from the nation-state to the community, recognising the heterogeneity of communities and the need for their participation in educational planning. However, conservative forces which resist such changes include not only the conditionality of aid and external finance and the reluctance of central educational authorities to relinquish control, but also “demand from parents for familiar, traditional forms of schooling” (ibid. :209).

At the instructional level of teacher-student interactions, the theories of Paulo Freire have been fundamental to the development of the concept of education as empowerment. Freire divides educational methods and objectives into two basic types: the first, common to most formal educational programmes, he characterises as “the ‘banking’ concept of education” (1972:53), where the teacher is conceived of as the possessor of knowledge, and her task as to transfer that knowledge to students, who are seen as “‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher” (ibid. :53). This kind of education is characterised by the abstract nature of the knowledge provided, the emphasis on memorisation of this knowledge by students, and the dichotomies constructed between teacher and students (subject/object, active/passive, knows everything/know nothing, etc.). Freire sees “banking” education as oppressive, as it restricts students’ creativity and hinders the development of a critical consciousness. On the other hand, he believes that education can and should be “a humanistic and liberating task ... an act of knowledge” (1985:114), or indeed “the practice of freedom” (1972:62). In this type of education, students and teachers are seen as partners who use their experiences of the world to learn from each other in “acts of cognition” (ibid.:60), and the goal of education is “the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world” (ibid. :60), which “stimulates true reflection and action upon reality” (ibid. :65). Freire thus sees education as a central process in a human-centred, transformative process of development which empowers people to realise their potential as individuals and work together to challenge oppression and devise solutions to the problems they face. Freire’s ideal-types underlie many other more socially situated theories of education, as will be seen below.

Education and Social Relations

A number of important theories focus on the role of education in maintaining the status quo of power relations in society. Bourdieu analyses the processes by which schooling both changes and reproduces social and cultural inequalities. His study is based on research in Algeria and France, but has much relevance to other contexts. In an introduction to Bourdieu's work on education and reproduction, Harker (1990:86-90) explains Bourdieu's principal theories. Bourdieu argues that the culture of the school is usually very close to that of the elite sectors of society, and that schools tend to reward those who possess attitudes and aptitudes ("habitus") typical of this sector. The use of this dominant culture and its habitus as a standard is taken for granted as part of the culture of the school, and this apparently neutral system is thus accepted also by those from non-dominant backgrounds who have a different habitus and therefore tend not to be rewarded in the school system. This lower success rate affects the expectations of under-privileged children and their families, and these lowered expectations in turn become part of their habitus. In order to "succeed," students from non-dominant backgrounds must acquire the habitus of the dominant culture, that is, become assimilated. The fact that some children from non-dominant backgrounds do overcome this disadvantage and achieve scholastic and social success reinforces the perception of the neutrality of the system without affecting its stability.

With reference to cultural differences between non-Western cultures and that of Western-type schools, Ogbu comments that in some cases "people go to school or send their children to school expecting and willing to learn the new culture of the school *because* of expected material and nonmaterial rewards in an emerging Western-type status system" (1982:294, italics in original). Although Bourdieu is referring mainly to class differences and Ogbu to ethnic differences, the acceptance of school culture as natural and its acquisition as desirable is the same in each case.

Van den Berghe (1978:294) comments on the same phenomenon:

The technocratic and bureaucratic ruling class supports a meritocratic education system because the system gives it a head start and legitimates and consolidates its rule. The underprivileged masses support the system because it offers them a tangible avenue of escape, even though the dice are heavily loaded against them. Education for the masses is a kind of national lottery on which

there is a small but real chance of winning. Insofar as an educational system based at least in part on meritocracy detracts the masses from revolutionary solutions to their predicament, legitimates inequality and permits individual movement without threatening the class and ethnic order, formal education, in both capitalist and socialist countries, has been a conservative force.

Because of these vested interests from different sectors of society, education systems are notoriously resistant to change. Van den Berghe, whose study is set in rural Peru, goes on to suggest that while formal education continues to offer a chance, however small, of upward social mobility to individuals, an oppressed minority may be unwilling to risk developing an alternative system, even if this were possible. In any case, he goes on to point out, such a project would firstly require a degree of political and economic liberation that is not easy to come by (1978:295). This provides at least one reason for which parents are often opposed to educational change, as discussed in the previous section. These theorists deal mainly with the reproduction of class relations through formal education. Indigenous peoples tend to be found in the lower socio-economic classes, as a result of historical process of discrimination and subordination, but often face additional difficulties in formal education systems because of their ethnicity.

Kelly and Altbach (1978) consider education and colonialism, distinguishing three types of colonialism: classic, internal and neocolonialism. That which interests us here is internal colonialism, where a particular ethnic group is oppressed by the dominant socio-political group of the nation-state within which it is located. This dominant group attempts to assimilate the subordinate group, resulting in its cultural eradication or ethnocide. Kelly and Altbach suggest that one of the hallmarks of formal education in a situation of internal colonialism is that its aim is the “obliteration of nationhood through assimilation” of the colonised nation into the dominant culture (1988:23). They note that this is often achieved by stressing similarities and minimising differences between the colonised and coloniser, or by attempting to recast the issue as a class rather than a colonial problem (*ibid.* :23,4). Examples of assimilationist educational policies abound; the prohibition of the use of indigenous languages in classrooms in many countries, in some cases as recently as the 1970s, is a prime example. Bodley (1990:102-3) gives examples from missionary-run schools in both North and South America where children were given

haircuts and Western clothing and names, and discouraged from speaking their home languages. Boarding schools were “considered one of the best means of destroying Indian culture because here even very young children could be almost permanently separated from the influences of their parents” (ibid. .:102). The same policy was pursued in missionary and government schools in Canada and Australia (Jordan 1988:191). In Canada, Longboat (1984:1, cited in Jordan 1988:190) asserts that “education has worked with the long-term objective of weakening Indian nations through causing the children to lose sight of their identities, history and spiritual knowledge.” Marainen, a Sami of Swedish nationality, relates from his own experiences that “we were given an inferiority complex in school. Our language was not good enough. We were given a new ‘mother tongue’. Our history was not worth studying” (Marainen 1988:185). Although explicitly assimilationist educational policies have by and large disappeared over the last few decades, policies and practices in many locations still implicitly promote cultural assimilation through, for example, ignoring the previous cultural and linguistic knowledge of indigenous children and rewarding students for the possession and acquisition of knowledge associated with a mainstream perspective. However, Kelly and Altbach point out that the assimilationist project rarely leads to genuine social integration, as members of subordinated ethnic groups are generally assimilated only into the lower social classes (1988:24). Indeed, in many cases, indigenous peoples were considered genetically or intellectually inferior and therefore incapable of being totally assimilated. In Australia in the 1930s and 1940s, schools on Aboriginal reserves did not teach beyond fourth grade of primary school, as Aboriginals were considered incapable of learning (Jordan 1988:193). More recently, the frequent attribution of the lower achievement of minority students to individual learning problems rather than to language difficulties or problems originating in the school system itself still leads to occasional allegations of genetic inferiority (Cummins 1996:52-5,161-3).¹⁰

However, more recent theory has taken issue with the essentialist dichotomies proposed by theories of cultural assimilation, where minority groups are seen faced with a choice between retaining their original cultural identity or having to abandon

¹⁰ Cummins gives the example of Dunn (1987) who, in a monograph on Spanish-speaking children, attributes a supposed lower scholastic ability both to environmental factors and “to genes that influence scholastic aptitude” (Dunn 1987:64, cited in Cummins 1996:52).

this for a new, mainstream cultural identity. Educational researchers such as Stairs, Rippberger and Arratia focus instead on “cultural negotiation” (Stairs 1994a) or on the creation of “new cultural identities” (Rippberger 1993:97) which incorporate elements of both cultures. Indigenous people are seen not as being passively swept along in historical currents, but rather as “active creators who produce their own history through cultural struggles. Actors refusing to accept socially imposed roles create a new definition of themselves” (Rippberger 1993:16). The analysis of social processes focuses on oppositional currents of hegemony and resistance, and on ways in which hegemonic forces are subverted by the less privileged. Studies of indigenous education in Mexico by Rippberger (1996, 1998) and Hamel (1998:121), for example, demonstrate the subtle modifications of standard educational curricula made continuously by indigenous teachers in their classroom practice, while Arratia’s (1997) study of education in Aymara communities in Chile reports the frustrations experienced by indigenous parents and teachers and their ways of responding to this. This perspective sees schools as having their own culture, which reflects neither the dominant nor the colonised culture directly. Schools are viewed as “critical sites for and agents of negotiation among cultures in contact” (Stairs 1994a:155).

Culture and Academic Achievement

It is widely recognised that different ethnic groups have dissimilar schooling experiences, even within the same school, and that members of some ethnic groups tend to experience disproportionately higher rates of school failure and drop-out. Previously, the causes of this situation were often located within the community experiencing difficulty at school (as in the allegations of genetic inferiority referred to above) or attributed to the individual student. More recent theories tend to locate the problem in the pattern that inter-group relations take in wider society, and in the reflection of these patterns in school systems, curricula and classroom interactions.

In exploring the educational experiences of different ethnic groups, Ogbu (1991) makes the useful distinction between “voluntary” minorities – that is, immigrants – and “involuntary” minorities, or “people who were brought into their present society through slavery, conquest or colonization” (1991:9). This framework

attempts to explain the fact that while involuntary minority groups tend to experience disproportionately large school failure and drop-out rates, immigrant groups are often very successful academically, despite apparently facing the same cultural, linguistic and structural barriers. Ogbu holds that the group's "cultural model," that is, "the type of understanding they have of the workings of the larger society and of their place as minorities in that working order" is the most influential factor on their relative school success, and that different historical experiences forge differing cultural models (ibid. :7-8). Factors such as historical experiences of cultural and intellectual derogation, perceived "job ceilings," and a lack of faith in the ability of the school system to educate their youth become incorporated into the group's cultural framework and "shape the attitudes, knowledge, and competencies the children bring to school," in turn influencing their academic performance (ibid. :17).¹¹ This theory bears many similarities to that of Bourdieu.

Cummins' (1996) extensive body of research into the education of culturally diverse students offers useful insights into education for indigenous communities, although much of his data draws on research on immigrant students. His basic position is that academic success or failure is determined largely by micro-interactions between teacher and student in the classroom, in a process he calls "identity negotiation," similar in many ways to Stairs' concept of "cultural negotiation." Cummins contends that where classroom micro-interactions reflect the subordinatory or "coercive relations of power" (1996:14) common in wider society, not only do teachers thereby provide fewer opportunities for academic development,

¹¹ The attitudes and beliefs of the indigenous Mexican community studied, while clearly coinciding with Ogbu's characterisation of involuntary minority groups in some respects, are in others more similar to those traits Ogbu describes as characteristic of voluntary minorities. For example, Tabaeños tend to perceive the fact that their children speak a language other than Spanish on entering school as a barrier to be overcome and, as Ogbu reports for immigrant communities, "they do not go to school expecting to be taught in their own language and culture. Rather, they usually expect and are willing to learn the school culture and language, although they do not necessarily do so without difficulties" (1991:21). It appears that this pattern may be common to some other indigenous Latin American communities (see, for example, Van den Berghe 1978). In Mexico at least, this is possibly due to the fact that the distinction between indigenous groups and the majority *mestizo* group is not as clear-cut as in some other countries, as most *mestizos* also have indigenous "blood" and indigenous identity is officially determined by the sole criteria of speaking an indigenous language, so that indigenous Mexicans cannot necessarily be identified as such in wider society. Deyhle (1995:406-9) details a number of ways in which the Navajo community she studied does not fit Ogbu's theory, some of which coincide with my findings. Further research is called for on this point.

but students internalise the message that academic success is unlikely, and consequently tend to disengage themselves from school learning.

When students' language, culture and experience are ignored or excluded in classroom interactions, students are immediately starting from a disadvantage. Everything they have learned about life and the world up to this point is being dismissed as irrelevant to school learning; there are few points of connection to curriculum materials or instruction and so students are expected to learn in an experiential vacuum. Students' silence and non-participation under these conditions have frequently been interpreted as lack of academic ability or effort, and teachers' interactions with students have reflected a pattern of low expectations which become self-fulfilling. (Cummins 1996:2-3)

Cummins argues instead for "collaborative relations of power," or interactional conditions that promote empowerment, in both society and classroom. In schools, this involves both positive recognition and inclusion of students' cultures and languages, and a sharing of power between teacher and students, as in Freire's model of transformative education.

Students whose schooling experiences reflect collaborative relations of power develop the ability, confidence and motivation to succeed academically. They participate competently in instruction as a result of having developed a secure sense of identity and the knowledge that their voices will be heard and respected within the classroom. They feel a sense of ownership for the learning that goes on in the classroom and a sense that they belong in the classroom learning community. (Cummins 1996:15)

A large number of studies support the theory that emphasis on the inclusion and affirmation of students' cultures, languages and learning styles in the classroom has positive academic repercussions, such as the examples of Māori and Hualapai students given in the previous section (see pp14-16). Vogt, Jordan and Tharp (1987) found that programme elements which were effective for Native Hawaiian children were not effective or culturally compatible for Navajo children and conclude that "cultural compatibility is a credible explanation for school success while, conversely, ...cultural incompatibility is one credible explanation for school failure" (1987:286). Moll and Diaz (1987) give examples from educational experiences with Hispanic American children where the application of different cultural strategies has improved educational outcomes. These examples indicate that there exist multiple learning strategies across different groups, and that the recognition and affirmation of these in

schooling can bring positive academic and social outcomes. However, both Ogbu (1991:4) and Cummins (1996:35) have pointed out that cultural discontinuity alone is not a sufficient explanation of school failure; historical patterns of ethnic relations and the extent to which these are reinforced or challenged in the classroom are probably more important.

With regard to the content of schooling, Ogbu (1982:294) points out that a further consequence of home/school cultural differences is that school learning is rarely reinforced at home. Harker and Nash (1990), taking the position that school failure hinges on “an interaction effect between particular family cultures and a particular structure of schooling,” (1990:26) argue that “minimal levels of involvement with a culture of literacy” (ibid. :38) may be as much of an immediate determinant as school structures and practices in Māori underachievement, while acknowledging that literacy culture patterns may change as a result of contact with Kura Kaupapa Māori.

Meanwhile, the converse is also true: that the wealth of knowledge and experience that indigenous children possess often goes unrecognised and unutilised in their schooling experiences. In many cases, the schooling experiences of these children are constructed on a deficit model, emphasising their *lack* of language skills, breadth of experience and a Western-type learning style, rather than capitalising on their prior knowledge and experience to academic advantage. The increased relevance and therefore interest of a programme which builds and focuses on students’ out-of-school experiences also fosters academic involvement and effort. Hamel (1998:126) points out that the mobilisation and incorporation of indigenous knowledge into school learning has the potential to both affirm the value of the indigenous culture and raise academic achievement. Cummins (1996:146) confirms this, noting that “cognitively-challenging instruction that provides opportunities for students to draw on their background experiences while working collaboratively to explore issues and topics that are relevant to their lives” contributes substantially to academic success. Moreover, a lessening of the home/school gap facilitates parental involvement in schooling, another important component of academic success.

Language of Instruction

For students from a minority language background, research findings indicate that instruction in the home language (L1) for a substantial part of the school day throughout the primary school years is optimum in promoting academic achievement in *both the home and majority languages*, as well as for promoting additive bilingualism (adding a second language at no cost to the development of the first). Cummins (1996:147) notes that “students’ school success appears to reflect both the more solid cognitive/academic foundation developed through intensive L1 instruction and also the reinforcement of their cultural identity.” He suggests that, although it is intuitively appealing to assume that this is so because students’ learning is impeded when instruction is given in a language other than their home language, the evidence does not necessarily support this position, which he calls the “linguistic mismatch” hypothesis; for example, English-background Canadian children in French immersion programmes do not record lowered academic achievement (ibid. :39,103). Instead, he suggests that it is the affirmation of students’ languages, identities and cultures that is the fundamental variable (ibid. :147). However, it should be noted that English-background students in bilingual or immersion schools form a voluntary minority, in Ogbu’s terms, and that this evidence does not disprove the “linguistic mismatch” principle for involuntary minority students. There are certainly various positive reports from programmes where indigenous languages are used in instruction, such as Peach Springs (see p14), although it is impossible to know whether the improvements noted are due to the language of instruction or to cultural affirmation. Hornberger (1998) compared bilingual with Spanish-only educational settings for Indian children in Peru, and found that “...among the pupils in the bilingual instructional setting, not only was there greater frequency of Quechua use, there was a greater use of language *per se* in terms of both quantity and complexity” (1988:110). With reference to a Navajo-English bilingual programme at Rough Rock, McCarty (1993:191, quoted in Cummins 1996:23) reports that “bilingual students who have the benefit of cumulative, uninterrupted initial literacy experiences in Navajo make the greatest gains on local and national measures of achievement.” Mena & Ruiz (1993:185) note the more immediate and animated responses of Oaxacan children to the use of their indigenous language in kindergartens, whereas questions in Spanish tend to be answered in monosyllables or

not at all. This last example demonstrates the validity and importance of Cummins' point that even where first language instruction is not possible, students' cultures and languages can still be incorporated and affirmed in a variety of ways, and that their incorporation into the school programme to the fullest extent possible is likely to promote academic success.

We will turn now to the claim that time spent on instruction in a minority language does not prejudice students' acquisition of the majority language, as long as they are sufficiently exposed to this language. Cummins proposes the principle of "common underlying proficiency," where "at deeper levels of conceptual and academic functioning, there is considerable overlap or interdependence across languages" (ibid. :122), to explain this phenomenon. Skills gained in one language, such as literacy skills, can be transferred to another language with relative ease, provided there is sufficient exposure to and motivation to learn the second language (ibid. :111). Thus "reinforcing children's conceptual base in their L1 throughout elementary school (and beyond) will provide a foundation for long-term growth in [L2] academic skills" (ibid. :104). Evidence for this comes from a variety of sources. Comparative studies of Basque/Spanish (Cummins 1996:118-9) and Catalan/Spanish (Tarrow 1990, cited in Keegan 1996:8) bilingual programmes with different proportions of Spanish language and minority language medium instruction reveal that students' command of oral and written Basque (Catalan) rises significantly with the proportion of Basque (Catalan) used, but that their command of Spanish remains approximately equal in all situations. Similarly, in studies of transitional Turkish literacy instruction programmes in the Netherlands, "it was found that a strong emphasis on instruction in L1 does lead to better literacy results in L1 with no retardation of literacy results in L2. On the contrary, there was a tendency for L2 literacy results in the transitional classes to be better than in the regular submersion classes" (Verhoeven 1991:72, quoted in Cummins 1996:117). Hawaiian immersion students who learned literacy and mathematics skills through a Hawaiian language medium performed as well as Hawaiian children learning through an English language medium in standardised reading, writing and mathematics tests, as well as having a high level of oral fluency in Hawaiian (Slaughter and Lai 1994, cited in Keegan 1996:9). These and a host of other similar conclusions challenge the

alternative hypothesis of “maximum exposure,” which holds that the best way for children to learn a language is to be exposed to it for the maximum amount of time possible, and that time spent on instruction via their first language will hinder the second-language learning process.

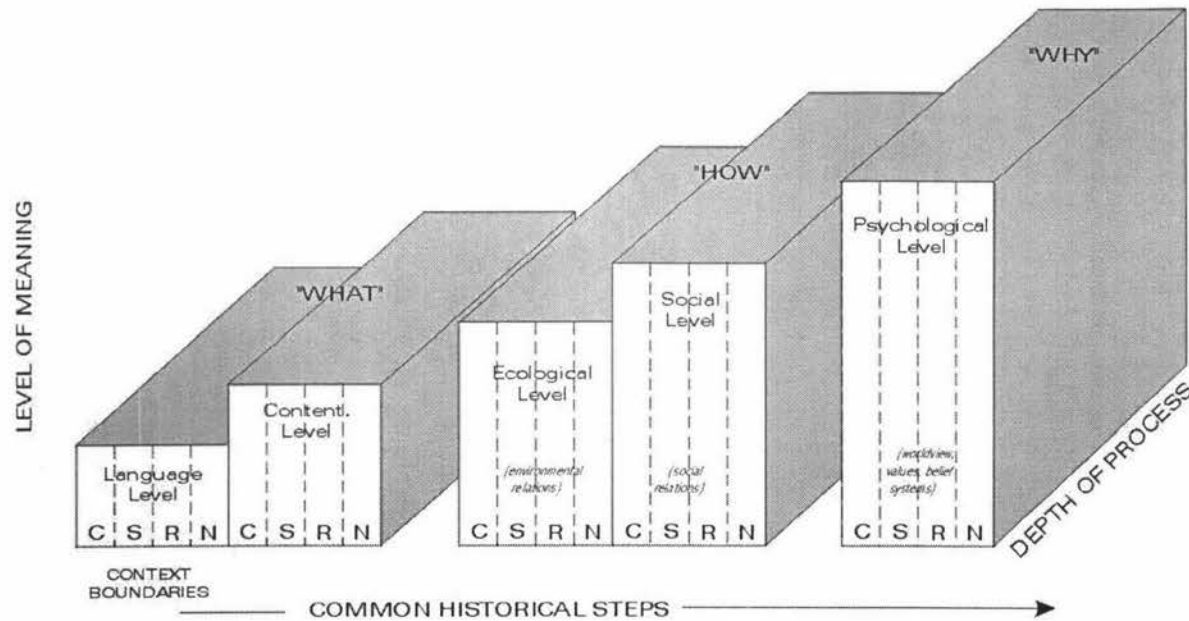
Research evidence also shows that additive bilingualism has no negative consequences for a child’s academic, linguistic or intellectual development, and in fact has several positive impacts. Many studies have shown that bilingual children have greater linguistic sensitivity, and some suggest that they also display greater creative thinking ability (Cummins 1996:104-6). Though evidence is not conclusive, some studies have indicated that bilingualism also enhances cognitive functioning (ibid. :105-8). However, competence in a second language does take time to develop. Cummins makes an important distinction between conversational proficiency, which children often develop within two years of regular use, and academic proficiency, which studies indicate takes at least five or six years to develop (ibid. :61-2). Thus “academic skills in [L2] usually require most of the elementary school years to develop to grade norms, and ... are more dependent on children’s conceptual foundation in L1 than on their [L2] conversational fluency” (ibid. :64). It is therefore recommendable that bilingual programmes continue at least throughout the primary school years.

If children learning a second language do not receive appropriate support for the continued development of their home language, their first language skills are often replaced by the second language in a process known as subtractive bilingualism (Cummins 1996:106). Under some circumstances children can lose their first language within a matter of a few years, and there is some evidence that this has a negative effect on the development of literacy and other skills in the second language, suggesting that the “development of conceptual knowledge in both languages [is] closely related” (ibid. :126-7). Both the benefits of bilingualism and the possible deleterious effects of interrupting the development of the home language suggest that a programme which aims at additive bilingualism is optimal. Traditionally, many bilingual programmes have been “transitional,” that is, designed to bring children “up to speed” in the dominant societal language as quickly as

possible to facilitate learning through the medium of that language. Such programmes focus on *compensating* for the perceived disadvantage inherent in speaking a minority language, and tend to focus on the achievement of conversational proficiency in the majority language. Consequently, children are often expected to begin learning solely in that language within one or two years. In contrast, “enrichment” programmes are those which focus on the advantages of developing two languages, and more often continue the bilingual component of schooling for a greater number of years (Cummins 1996:103-4). However, the primary difference between these two types of programme lies in their attitude toward the minority language: in the first case it is seen to convey a disadvantage, in the second an advantage. Although the language of instruction is clearly a relevant and important issue in the optimisation of education for indigenous students, it is evident that there are other, possibly even more important determinants. Cummins’ (1996:64) claim that “lack of [L2] fluency may be a secondary contributor to children’s academic difficulty but the fundamental causal factors of both success and failure lie in what is communicated to children in their interactions with educators” is echoed by other researchers: Lucas (1981:64, quoted in Cummins 1996:65), who studied Puerto Rican students in Chicago, concluded that “identity, expressed in one’s confidence and acceptance of the native culture, was more a determinant of school stay-in power than the mere acquisition of the coding-decoding skills involved in a different language, English.”

The preceding sections have dealt mainly with the theme of the consequences of educational practice for individual students, in terms of their academic achievement and intellectual and personal development. However, the effects of formal education are felt also at a collective level. The cultural, linguistic, economic and socio-political development of indigenous communities as a whole is deeply affected by the educational experiences of their children and youth, as is evident from the historical experiences of indigenous peoples in Latin America, the U.S.A., Canada, Australia and Scandinavia discussed above. We will turn now to examine some of the different models of educational programmes for indigenous communities from the perspective of their impacts at the collective level.

The Cultural Negotiation of Education (Stairs 1994)



Source: Stairs 1994:166

Fig 2.1 Stairs' model of the cultural negotiation of education

Models of Indigenous Education

Clearly there is an almost infinite number of possible programmes for indigenous education, and different situations call for different programme elements. As mentioned above, Stairs (1991, 1994a) proposes the concept of “cultural negotiation” for understanding the schooling of indigenous students, based on the idea that schools possess their own culture, formed from the meeting and “negotiation” of the indigenous and majority cultures. She proposes a three-dimensional conceptual model-in-progress for understanding cultural negotiation in the context of indigenous education (see Figure 2.1). The first dimension represents breadth of context, and highlights the fact that education is situated within many contexts, ranging from classroom/teacher through school/community and region/educational system to state/national contexts. She notes that the relation of one’s particular area of focus to all other context boundaries is crucial in understanding indigenous education in any given situation. The second dimension is that of level of meaning, or “height of awareness or interpretation of worldview models, belief and value systems” (1994a:169). She notes that historically and in the development of particular programmes, attention has usually been paid first to indigenous languages and their inclusion or use in education. This is often followed by a concern for indigenous educational content; these two aspects form the “what” level of cultural meaning (i.e. what people learn). To this “what” level has been added the “how” level (how people learn), in which the focus is on cultural compatibility and learning styles. This level involves “communication and interaction patterns with people and the environment largely at the behavioural level, but with the growing vision ...that specific cultural meanings are built into social behaviour and into culturally specific interactional styles” (1994a:163). The final step in this dimension is the “why” level, where “the focus shifts from negotiating method to negotiation [*sic*] culture” (1994a:163). At this level, the “culturally whole model of reality,” that is to say, what we know as “values, beliefs, worldview” (1994a:164) is the focus of indigenous schooling. Each step builds on the others in this dimension, such that language, the first step, is not superseded but becomes embedded in all higher steps. The final dimension of Stairs’ model is “depth of process,” that is, “depth of engagement, active participation, and the negotiation of identity...at each level of meaning” (1994a:166). She gives as an example of superficial process the addition of indigenous language classes as a

discrete subject of study, whereas a deep process may involve “elder and community involvement, collective efforts at language renewal, and the strengthening of local indigenous identity around the language, its use, and the cultural values it uniquely conveys” (1994a:165).

Stairs notes that the model is “intended as a ‘fieldguide’ to cultural negotiation in any educational instance,” (1994a:166) and it is indeed useful for situating examples of indigenous education in action within the process of cultural negotiation. However, the model should not be taken to imply that the aim of every indigenous education project is necessarily an entirely alternative indigenous language-medium programme based around indigenous cultural concepts. Stairs notes that the element of community control and choice is vital to genuine indigenous education, and points out the wide range of existing programmes in diverse contexts, “ranging from integrated bicultural schools, to enclave situations of high compatibility with traditional ways and language, to split two-domain schools, to schools where parents choose limited formal education in dominant language and culture with indigenous ways learned outside the school” (1994a:160). Hernández-Díaz also points out the importance of local choice in the Mexican context, taking issue with the official assumption that bilingual education is the best option for all indigenous communities, when these present a wide variety of socio-linguistic situations: “One of the aspirations and values of indigenous education consists in respecting difference: it is therefore necessary to consider the rights of those who do not want to modify their situation” (1998:49, my translation). Rippberger, in a review of ideological perspectives in bilingual education, notes that the participation of minority ethnic groups in the formulation of educational programmes is essential in order to counteract the historically hierarchical nature of ethnic relations: “Without their dynamic participation, ethnic groups unwittingly perpetuate their subordinated position in society by accepting a system that reinforces an imposed inferiority” (1993:51). Both education itself and the participation of indigenous people in the formulation of educational programmes thus have the potential to contribute to the collective development of indigenous communities.

Stairs (1991:290-91) remarks that indigenous education programmes in Canada that have been successful in terms of continuance and of achieving their aims, including student achievement, have tended to focus not only on native cultural content but also on learning style, as discussed in the second dimension of her model summarised above. She maintains that “the linguistic and curricular content of native education...can be adequately pursued only when embedded in traditional cultural values concerning ways of using language, of interacting, and of knowing” (1991:281). This brings us back to the participation of indigenous people themselves in the design of educational programmes, both for the collective development of the ethnic group through opposition to paternalistic and hierarchical forms of ethnic relations, and with the aim of developing more relevant educational programmes and increasing educational opportunity for individual indigenous students (see Rippberger 1993:51).

Education in the Process of Cultural Consolidation

Indigenous communities are frequently concerned to revitalise or consolidate their cultures and languages and arrest or reverse a process of cultural and linguistic erosion. Fishman (1991) considers this process of “reversing language shift” (where it is understood that the process deals ultimately with “language-in-culture” (Fishman 1991:17)) and offers valuable insights into both the process of successfully reversing language shift and the place of education within this process. Fishman’s view of reversing language shift (RLS) is closely related to the concept of development that forms the basis of this thesis; he characterises RLS at one point as “part of the process of re-establishing local options, local control, local hope and local meaning to life” (ibid. :35). He refers to internal colonialism as social dislocation or “dependency interaction” (ibid. :59), arguing that when communities are socially disadvantaged as a result of their relative powerlessness, and when this disadvantage is widespread within the community, it becomes part of what that culture symbolises, in the eyes of both outsiders and many community members. Opportunities for redressing this advantage, such as education and access to better employment, are largely controlled by mainstream society, and those who seek social mobility therefore become dependent on this outside society and its language. Those who take on attributes of the mainstream culture are rewarded by its power structure,

and members of the colonised group come to perceive that they are faced by a choice between social mobility and ethnic loyalty (ibid. :59-62). However, he points out that linguistic and cultural assimilation into majority society is no guarantee of upward social mobility, nor is the relinquishment of the home culture or language a necessary condition for acquisition of the majority language (ibid. :60-1). Fishman suggests that the pursuit of stable bilingualism and ethnolinguistic syncretism is part of the solution for such communities (ibid. :62).

Fishman suggests that the most effective means of RLS is “strengthening cultural boundaries so as to foster greater intergenerational cultural continuity” (ibid. :28,66). This strengthening of boundaries allows for the “maximally self-regulating fusion of influences from a variety of sources” (ibid. :85), leading eventually to “cultural autonomy” (ibid. :107-9). Fishman’s position is that the processes of intergenerational linguistic and cultural continuity are focused in the home, family and neighbourhood spheres, and that schools are often too far removed from these contexts to effect RLS on their own (ibid. :67,371). However, he does not deny that education occupies an important place in the RLS process. Fishman suggests that communities attempting RLS should concentrate on fostering minority language literacy in the home and community, for example through literacy centres, before attempting to introduce this language to the school curriculum (ibid. :98). He notes that community-based literacy acquisition activities are more amenable to local control and often less costly than school-based activities, foster socialisation in the minority culture for a variety of age groups, and can also promote adult literacy, facilitating intergenerational transfer of this skill (ibid. :97,204). In the case of Navajo, Fishman remarks that “Navajo needs its own societal institutions for fostering the broader and more conscious unity and community that literacy, literacy institutions and widely read Navajo texts can help cultivate” (ibid. :203). Fishman’s study is based on empirical evidence from a range of sources, and is confirmed by evidence from others. Cloher and Hohepa (1995:34, cited in Keegan 1996:13-4) note that Māori families involved in a *kōhanga reo* perceived the centre as “providing a context to help them realise goals and aspirations they had for their children—about strengthening their culture, about creating a wider social context,” and Keegan (1996:vi) believes that “schools and early childhood centres provide a (re-)entry for

the adults of the community into cultural, social, and economic activities which fire the engine of indigenous (re-)development.”

The relation between education and development is clearly many-faceted and extremely complex, particularly in the case of ethnolinguistic minorities and even more so in the case of internally colonised indigenous communities. The following chapters will outline the situation of one indigenous community with regard to education and development in order to shed light on this relationship.

Chapter 3

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

DEVELOPMENT AND ETHNICITY IN MEXICO

As is well known, a number of pre-Hispanic Mexican civilisations achieved great scientific, artistic and architectural feats. The Olmecs, whose culture prospered between 1200 and 400 B.C., were the first to develop the sciences of mathematics, astronomy and architecture to advanced levels (Suchlicki 1996:14-15). The Maya, the Aztecs, and the Zapotecos, civilisations which flourished after the fall of Olmec culture, developed highly structured societies based around complex religions, constructed impressive monuments, and used their detailed and accurate knowledge of astronomical movements for divinations, rituals, and the design of calendars and architectural projects (Cheetham 1974:25-30, Smith 1996:244-273). Five ancient Mesoamerican societies, including these three, developed writing systems, of which the Mayan system had the largest range of expression (Smith 1996:248-9). The Zapotecos constructed one of the earliest cities on the American continent, Monte Albán, the ceremonial centre of which stands just outside the modern city of Oaxaca. Their writing system was one of the earliest of the region (King 1994:29), and they also developed a system of irrigated cropping, and an astronomical calendar which is considered an antecedent of the Mayan calendar (Zoraida 1995:47). Since the time of Mexico's colonisation by Spain, however, relations between the descendants of these cultures and local and national authorities have tended to degrade indigenous peoples and cultures from this earlier position of autonomy to one of poverty, disempowerment and marginalisation.

State and Societal Conceptions of the Indigenous

The relationship between indigenous peoples and the Mexican state has undergone a number of transformations since independence from Spain in 1821. Hamel (1998:107-113) proposes a typology of cultural orientations which guide educational and linguistic policy in Latin American states. It includes three basic orientations: monoculturalism, in which official policy ignores and negates ethnic and cultural diversity; multiculturalism, where diversity is recognised but is considered to constitute a problem, or a barrier to development; and pluriculturalism, where

cultural diversity is viewed as an advantage and as a resource which helps to enrich society. He cautions that these are ideal-types, and that although historical progression generally occurs in the order given, the three coexist in most Latin American states. He asserts that the multiculturalist orientation is that which “still dominates in Mexico ... at least within the dominant population. However, its hegemonic character has been broken” (ibid. :110, my translation).

Mexico’s colonial epoch began with the conquest of the Aztec capital in 1521 by Hernán Cortés, and lasted until independence from Spain was achieved three centuries later, in 1821. Although mixing of the indigenous and European races began early, status in New Spain was generally fixed according to one’s genetic stock and place of birth, with European-born Spaniards at the top and the indigenous population at the bottom, exploited for their labour, their social structures “dismembered and disorganised” (Stavenhagen 1990:47). It should be pointed out, however, that this hierarchy was not absolute, nor were changes in social structures uniform throughout colonial Mexico. Spores (1993:91-92), in a study of the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, points out that the pre-existing class structure was maintained, with modifications, by the Spaniards, and that consequently, some native leaders and nobles equalled or surpassed in rank some Spaniards. In addition, where this suited or at least did not run contrary to Spanish objectives, many more aspects of the Mixtec social system were modified or continued rather than being replaced entirely. However, the Spanish desire to not only exploit but also settle their colonies entailed the incorporation of indigenous people as a source of cheap unskilled labour (Kicza 1993:xv), and the position of the vast majority of indigenous Mexicans continued to be one of subordination and marginalisation. Independence, despite an official discourse of equality for all Mexican citizens, actually worsened Indians’ positions in many ways by reducing the protection that had been offered by the church, and replacing communal with individual land rights, facilitating the expropriation and sale of land to large landowners (King 1994:56). Meanwhile, independence leaders had invoked the memory of the Aztecs’ resistance to Cortés to inspire all those born in Mexico, including Indians, *mestizos* and creoles, in the fight against the colonisers, appropriating indigenous identity for all sectors of society and effectively denying Indians their right to their own identity (ibid. :57). It was probably at this point that

ethnic policy in Mexico most nearly approached Hamel's first ideal type, monoculturalism, with the new State's leaders preferring at times to deny the continued existence of those direct descendants of pre-Hispanic civilisations (ibid. :57).

Spain's American colonies were divided into independent states not on the basis of pre-existing ethnic or geographical divisions, but instead "to satisfy the ambitions of military and political leaders or small ruling cliques" (Stavenhagen 1990:45). Because of the somewhat artificial nature of the resulting states, the creation of a "national culture" where none existed was a primary objective of the new rulers, both to legitimise their new political power and to safeguard their hard-won independence against foreign ambition (ibid. :45). This culture had to be "modern" and "progressive" in order to guarantee the acceptance of the new State among the ranks of "civilised" nations, and the indigenous population, seen as ignorant and "backward" if not outright racially inferior, posed an obstacle to the attainment of this goal (ibid. :44-48). Two strategies presented themselves: the denial of the identity of the Indian as Indian (i.e. monoculturalism), and Indian absorption into a more Europeanised culture (under a multicultural orientation). Both of these strategies have been employed in Mexico at various times. Fortunately, a third option used in some other American countries, that of simply exterminating the indigenous population,¹² was not widespread in Mexico, although exploitation continued and sometimes intensified with the expansion of the capitalist economy and the further concentration of land in the hands of a small minority.

The twentieth century brought revolution (1910-1920), one major outcome of which was the redistribution of land to the largely indigenous peasantry, a process begun by Obregón, the first president after the revolution, and continued by successive presidents until the 1960s. The revolution was thus closely linked with the "indigenous question," as it came to be known, and marked the beginning of an era of rather paternalistic concern for the indigenous population, no longer ignored but now seen as in need of assistance in the task of "modernisation." At the same time, the search for a "national culture" came to rest with the *mestizo* sector of society,

¹² See, for example, Bodley 1999:32-35,48-51, Maybury-Lewis 1997:1-7.

which underwent rapid expansion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while the proportion of indigenous people in the population and the number of those with “pure” European blood shrank accordingly (Stavenhagen 1990:48-9).

Previously considered to be a scant step above the Indians, the *mestizos* were now seen as combining the best features of both the Indian and European races, and were seized upon to form the basis of a modern national identity (ibid. :49). Although Mexico was at this point beginning to discover the glories of its pre-Hispanic past, thanks in part to archaeological investigations of the early 1900s, little connection was drawn between the great ancient cultures and their contemporary descendants, the generally impoverished and marginalised indigenous population. The glories and triumphs of the indigenous past, particularly the Aztec civilisation, and to a lesser extent the Mayan, were once again appropriated, this time as symbols of the national culture and identity that found its focus in the *mestizo* population (Citarella 1990:17, King 1994:59-60); it is still usual for Mexicans to position themselves with the Aztecs when referring to the conquest, saying “We were conquered by the Spanish.” However, the great range of indigenous cultures that existed and continue to exist in addition to the Aztec and Mayan civilisations are largely ignored in the national conception of identity (King 1994:60).

In the early decades of the twentieth century, this diversity of languages and cultures began to be seen as a threat to the national unity and development represented by the *mestizo* hybrid of race and culture. At this point, both of the strategies mentioned above were utilised by State leaders: indigenous people, previously referred to as *indios*, were variously re-classed as “poor labourers” (King 1994:58), casting the problem in class rather than ethnic terms, or as *indígenas*, creating the illusion through this change in terminology that the “Indians” no longer existed (ibid. :59). Insofar as their existence was recognised, indigenous cultures and ways of life were seen as “backward” and as an obstacle to national progress, with their languages and ethnic loyalties hindering the development of a national consciousness. The incorporation of these groups into national society was therefore seen as necessary for the good of all concerned. “Modernisation” thus implied denial or rejection of indigenous cultures on the part of the State, and abandonment of their original cultures on the part of the Indians (Stavenhagen 1980:29).

The post-revolutionary government began a deliberate programme of cultural, economic and linguistic assimilation of the indigenous population into the “mainstream” of Mexican society (Stavenhagen 1990:49). The educational system was selected as the primary instrument of integration (Citarella 1990:15, Stavenhagen 1980:29). Policies on the “indigenous problem” drew directly on the work and thought of anthropologists, sociologists and linguists, and special institutions and administrative departments were set up to deal with indigenous affairs. The early decades of the twentieth century are thus the clearest expression of the “multicultural” orientation in Mexico, although the position persisted in official policy until the 1970s and continues to persist in popular society today.

This modernistic orientation continued along a similar line until the 1960s, when local anthropologists and social scientists such as Stavenhagen, González Casanova and Bonfil Batalla began to challenge the integrationist orientation. They saw in Mexico a case of “internal colonialism,” where the indigenous population was systematically exploited in the interests of the dominant, *mestizo* population (King 1994:65-6). Since World War II, Mexico had undergone substantial economic growth, increased integration into and dependence on the international economic and finance system, and an expansion of the influence of the State and the ruling party into all aspects of society (Citarella 1990:22-23). At the end of the sixties, however, dissatisfaction with the previous models of development and economic growth was rising, due in part to their failure to end poverty and improve conditions of life for the majority of the population (Citarella 1990:29, Stavenhagen 1990:12, 51). Beyond Mexico, the influence of the Cuban Revolution and social movements in other Latin American countries also provided momentum to the search for a new development strategy and national culture (Citarella 1990:29). The government’s brutal repression of the 1968 student protest movement increased the tide of criticism, and through a process of profound questioning of contemporary thought and policy, there emerged a new concept of cultural plurality, and the idea that diversity was not necessarily incompatible with national identity (Citarella 1990:29-30, Heath 1972:161). This point marks the beginning of the “pluricultural” orientation in Mexico, where diversity is seen as a strength rather than a weakness. A change in presidency in 1970

led to greater opportunities for indigenous people themselves to participate in policy formation, and national representative bodies such as the National Council of Indigenous Peoples and the National Alliance of Bilingual Indigenous Professionals were formed.¹³

Later, in the 1990s, Mexico began to give legal status to pluriculturality. In 1990, Mexico ratified Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation, the Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, and in the same year the Mexican Constitution was amended to reflect the importance of indigenous cultures and their rights in the Mexican nation. Article 4 of the Constitution now states that:

The Mexican nation has a pluri-cultural composition sustained originally in its indigenous peoples. The law will protect and promote the development of their languages, cultures, practices and customs, resources, and specific forms of social organization, it will guarantee to their members effective access to the jurisdiction of the state.¹⁴

However, this new policy orientation has done little to alter the material conditions in which the majority of the indigenous population live – in fact, the economic crisis which overwhelmed Mexico from the seventies onward most critically affected the poor, among whom are the vast majority of indigenous people. Since the debt crisis of the early 1980s the extent, depth and severity of extreme poverty have increased, with most of the increase concentrated in rural areas (McKinley and Alarcón 1995:1575). Poverty is especially widespread and severe in the rural south (*ibid.* :1579-80), an area with a large proportion of indigenous people. Demands of political activists from these regions include both greater equity and greater autonomy.

Indigenous Responses to External Rule

Previous to the 1970s, indigenous opposition to colonial and later state and regional authorities had generally taken the form either of passive resistance, a “turning-inward” to protect their languages and cultures from the interference of outsiders, or of armed protest. In the Yucatán peninsula, Maya Indians maintained armed

¹³ These indigenous organisations will be discussed in more depth in the following section.

resistance against government troops for more than fifty years, at one point driving settlers from practically the entire peninsula (Farriss 1993:55-6), and in the north of the country, the Yaqui Rebellion lasted almost a century (King 1994:67). To use the state of Oaxaca as a further example, at least six major armed rebellions took place between the sixteenth century and 1930, two of which resulted in periods of independent rule of the region of Tehuantepec (King 1994:67), and Taylor (1993) reports 51 local rebellions in just two regions of Oaxaca between 1680 and 1811. Interestingly, he notes among the grounds for these rebellions not only economic incursions such as tax increases and questions of political administration, but also affronts to “villagers’ sense of autonomy and community” (1993:125), such as one case where a village priest attempted to stop people from speaking their own language, and another where a priest refused to preach in the local language. Taylor comments that in general, “peasant villages were reacting to what they considered an immediate threat to their way of life” (1993:131). Historians of San Juan Tabaá relate that the people of that village staged a brief rebellion in the year 1700 (Bautista Cruz, n.d.).

In the 1970s a number of indigenous organisations came into being within the mainstream political framework, formed largely by educated Indians who had been employed by the State as teachers or community workers (King 1994:68). These organisations marked the emergence of indigenous peoples as a political force in their own right, without the mediation or representation of their interests by others. Both the National Alliance of Bilingual Indigenous Professionals and the National Council of Indigenous Peoples are national organisations that are semi-official and largely financed by government subsidies, a common strategy of the Mexican ruling party designed to subsume potential opposition into the machinery of the state (ibid. :71). During the 1980s a variety of other, largely regional, organisations came into being, many of which had as their objective the safeguarding of natural resources, on which many local indigenous economies depend, and of cultural resources, particularly indigenous languages (ibid. :71-3). Groups composed of writers, linguists and other interested parties sprang up within many ethnic groups, with the aim of promoting the development or standardisation of alphabets for their languages

¹⁴ Translation by Nicole Thornton, in Nahmad 1998:60.

and the more widespread use of these tongues in the face of the linguistic erosion caused by the ever-increasing dominance of Spanish. The aspect of State-indigenous relations was changed yet again in 1994 by the armed uprising of the mainly indigenous Zapatista National Liberation Army in Chiapas. This militant demand for the recognition of indigenous rights, social justice and democracy has won considerable support both within Mexico and internationally, and brought the “indigenous question” once more to the forefront of the national agenda.

However, countervailing these movements which demand the revaluation of indigenous cultures, the assimilationist ethic which held sway for so long has been internalised by a large sector of the indigenous population, along with its underlying assumption of the inferiority of indigenous cultures. Many indigenous people now see linguistic, cultural and economic incorporation into *mestizo* society as the only hope of “development” for themselves and their children (Pardo 1993:114). The opinions of those in indigenous communities are thus affected by a wide range of different historical and contemporary experiences and currents of thought. We shall see in the following chapters that it is impossible to speak of a unified indigenous response or viewpoint.

History of Indigenous Education in Mexico

In her comprehensive historical review of language policy in Mexico, Heath tells us that despite the wish of the Spanish Crown that Spanish should be promoted along with Catholicism in New Spain, the friars to whom this work was left saw much more urgency in the work of Christianisation than in Castilianisation, so that by the time of Mexico’s independence in 1821, Spanish was spoken only by those of Spanish descent and a few of the Indian elite (1972:179-182). As early as 1857, some political leaders advocated the “rights of the Indian ‘peoples’ to self-determination in matters of language and education” (Hidalgo 1994:191); however, by the time of the Mexican Revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century, the perceived threat of the diversity of Indian languages and cultures to national identity and unity meant that a national education policy was initiated with the explicit aim of converting the indigenous population into Spanish speakers, thereby, it was assumed, inculcating them also with Hispanic cultural norms and ideals (Heath 1972:184-5). The idea that

the primary aim of education for the indigenous population is to assimilate them into a national culture, the hallmark of which is use of the Spanish language, has its origins in this period. It is a concept which has proven to be extremely tenacious, exerting a strong influence on the practice and popular conception of indigenous education in Mexico even to date.

This “assimilationist” education was intended to be carried out entirely in Spanish, using Spanish texts, without recourse to the students’ first languages. The total immersion strategy, known in Mexico as the “direct method” of teaching Spanish, continues to enjoy considerable support among indigenous parents and teachers today, based on the intuitive appeal of the idea that greater exposure to Spanish will result in a better command of that language (what Cummins refers to as the “maximum exposure” principle; see pp32-3). The use of indigenous languages in education began, in isolated instances, in the 1920s, simply as a strategy for effecting a more rapid student “transition” into an Hispanic-based culture, and the usefulness of this technique was recognised in policy by the 1930s (Heath 1972:94-6). “Bilingual” education in Mexico thus dates from this point; however, this name has come to be used somewhat indiscriminately for all education given under the system of indigenous education, even though in many cases this is still given solely in Spanish. In fact, the debate in official circles over the benefits of bilingual education versus those of the direct method continued for decades, and it was not until the 1960s that bilingual education gained the official support of the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP). Popular opinion on the issue remains very much divided even in contemporary times.

Education for the indigenous population in the first part of the twentieth century was thus conceived as a means of modernisation and Hispanicisation. This modernisation was not restricted to the learning of the Spanish language, although that was its major focus; indigenous populations were also expected to modernise economically and become part of the capitalist market system. To this end, they were taught agricultural techniques and crafts, to boost their productiveness (Citarella 1990:17, Heath 1972:87-88), along with sanitation measures and other tenets of modern, that is to say non-indigenous, society.

The later 1930s and early 1940s brought, theoretically at least, a number of new directions to education for the indigenous population. In 1936 the then president, Lázaro Cárdenas, created the Autonomous Department of Indigenous Affairs, the first political body to deal specifically with matters related to the indigenous population. In addition, several teaching and research institutes were created to produce medical professionals, linguists and anthropologists, in order to better understand and assist the indigenous communities (Citarella 1990:19). Impelled by criticism of the integrationist policies on which educational practice had hitherto been based, the concept of the use of indigenous languages in schools began to gain more acceptance, and was endorsed by both the Third Inter-American Conference on Education in 1937 and the First Assembly of Philologists and Linguists in 1939 (Heath 1972:113, Nahmad 1998:59). The study of these languages therefore became necessary and, along with Mexican anthropologists, linguists and social scientists, the Summer Institute of Linguistics was authorised to begin studies of various Indian languages in order to develop alphabets and, subsequently, primers and other educational materials. A pilot project which implemented the recommendations of the 1939 conference was initiated in an indigenous area of Michoacán State and met with considerable success in teaching first language literacy but was discontinued in the early 1940s for political reasons (Heath 1972:118, King 1994:64-5).

Moisés Sáenz, a contemporary social scientist, suggested at this time that education should be a means to the development and improvement of indigenous communities, rather than to their integration into “national society,” and proposed the development of specific educational programmes for indigenous populations toward this purpose (Citarella 1990:19). This was the first time that the needs of indigenous communities had been considered in their own right, rather than in relation to wider society, and as such was something of a watershed in contemporary thought on the issue. It was also an important moment in the debate between those who advocated a universal education, to which indigenous students, like all other Mexicans, would have access, and those who saw merit in the provision of a distinct education for indigenous students. This debate, like that over the advisability of bilingual

education, began around the time of the Mexican revolution (1910-1920) and continues today (see Heath 1972:83-4). The ideas of Sáenz and other critics of the assimilationist school of thought did influence policy to a degree, although they were not translated immediately into practice. This period marked the point where the diversity of Mexico's cultures began to be recognised, and although the assimilation or integration of the indigenous cultures into *mestizo* society generally continued to be considered both inevitable and desirable, it was recognised that this process would take considerably longer than had previously been imagined.

Another important event, the first Inter-American Indigenous Congress in 1940, was attended by representatives of many Latin American nations. Conference delegates resolved, among other things, that education in their countries should consider the cultures, languages, and personalities of students, that America's indigenous languages were indeed capable of expressing a wide range of ideas and thus suitable for use in education, and that teachers assigned to rural schools in indigenous communities should be specially trained (Citarella 1990:20). Although many of the recommendations of the conference were not reified in Mexico's national policy or educational practice, partly due to a change of presidency, one suggestion that was taken up was the creation of a National Indigenist Institute (INI) for each country, which took place in Mexico in 1948. This institution was created as a government body which would provide integrated assistance to the indigenous population in all aspects of life, and was headed by some of the foremost intellectuals in the field (ibid. :21). The INI carried out many projects toward the improvement of economic and social conditions in indigenous communities, including the first widespread system of bilingual schools, later taken over by the Secretariat of Public Education in the 1970s.

The beginning of what was to become this bilingual school system came in 1951, when the INI began to recruit young indigenous people to be "promoters," who would act as intermediaries between the INI's regional centres and the indigenous communities. To these bilingual promoters fell the work of carrying out the INI's programmes and projects, which involved education in diverse areas, from literacy and Spanish to agricultural techniques and sanitation. The number of promoters and

teachers increased rapidly during the 1960s and 1970s, and at the same time the possibilities for social advancement offered by the INI's recruitment of promoters increased demand for and attendance at schools in indigenous communities. The recruitment of these promoters had various repercussions: salaries and greater facility in dealing with wider society meant that they began to form a kind of indigenous elite, and in many cases assumed positions of power within their communities. At the same time, their experiences as promoters distanced them somewhat from community life, causing a degree of ambiguity with regard to their cultural affiliations. Later, from the 1970s onward, these bilingual teachers and promoters were those who formed the nucleus of the organisations which represented the indigenous population in discussions with the Mexican government and bureaucracy (Citarella 1990:25-26).

It is important to note that throughout this period, the use of indigenous languages in schooling continued to be conceived of as a means for the indigenous student to arrive more rapidly at a better command of Spanish through a transition period in the first years of schooling, and not as an instrument for the protection and development of indigenous languages and cultures or for the optimisation of the academic and cognitive development of the student (in Cummins' terms, "compensatory" rather than "enrichment" bilingual education; see pp33-4). Meanwhile, in the general education system, which had far greater coverage than the INI schools, the "direct method" of teaching entirely in Spanish in order to acculturate indigenous children directly into a unified national society continued to hold sway throughout the 40s, 50s and 60s, with little regard for the various changes in anthropological theory or educational policy or for the exhortations of the INI to adopt bilingual methods.

The 1960s saw the beginnings of a current of change which reached full force in the 1970s and brought serious criticism of government actions and policies, including the entire assimilationist thrust of indigenous policy, as discussed in the previous section. The INI's bilingual promoters and teachers formed the core of the new organisations created to represent the indigenous population in discussions with the State, and these organisations proposed the creation of a new bilingual-bicultural

indigenous education, with more space for indigenous groups to contribute to its development (Acunzo 1991:30-1). In proposals that arose out of seminars on bilingual-bicultural education, for example, the use of indigenous languages was considered not as a pedagogical aid but as a necessary condition for students' cognitive development and a fundamental part of bringing their culture into the classroom. In the bicultural component, aspects of indigenous learning systems such as oral transmission of knowledge and the acquisition of skills through observation and practice were emphasised, and it was recommended that students should study first their own language and culture, followed by those of other areas. Education was to be appropriate to each region, implying differentiated programmes, and was to instil an awareness of the value of both the student's own culture and others (Citarella 1990:34-5).

As had been the case in the 1940s with bilingual education, however, these ideas and initiatives remained largely in the realms of theory and policy rather than practice. In the SEP, the decision to separate indigenous education from the general primary system was taken in 1973 (Hernández 1982:117), and new directorates and departments were created to administer indigenous education, culminating with the constitution of the General Directorate of Indigenous Education (DGEI) in 1978. This office continues to control the indigenous education system at a national level to date. Although the INI continued to expand its coverage dramatically throughout the 1970s, its influence in the field of education for the indigenous population gradually declined during this decade, as the SEP took on responsibility for indigenous schools and teachers. The new current of thought was endorsed legally, with the passing of the Federal Law of Education in 1973. This law established as one of the aims of education the teaching of Spanish in order to secure a common language for all Mexicans, without prejudice to the use of autochthonous languages (Hernández & Guzmán 1982:91). In practice, however, education continued along the same old integrationist line in the vast majority of cases, with scant attention paid to indigenous languages or cultures in the classroom, and the bilingual-bicultural model making only slow progress into the field.

The 1980s saw renewed efforts on the part of the DGEI, propelled by the demands of indigenous organisations, to generate a more genuinely indigenous education. The changes recommended by these organisations in the previous decade were incorporated into DGEI policy, now constituted on an ideological foundation of pluriculturalism and equality in inter-ethnic relations. This policy thus presupposed the development of indigenous education within a wider socio-political climate of decolonisation and liberation of indigenous peoples within Mexican society. On this foundation, the development of an educational subsystem was proposed, linked to the national education system but autonomous in content and orientation. Education would be appropriate to each ethnic group and developed with the participation of the community. The student's native language was to be used as the basic medium of instruction, in order to optimise development of cognitive and other skills, and Spanish was to be introduced as a second language later in the primary cycle. Content was to include elements of both national and universal knowledge and culture, and the culture of the particular ethnic group (Citarella 1990:80-86). Pilot programmes were begun in the 1985-6 cycle, but in 1987 a dispute arose with the SEP, particularly with the Sub-Secretariat of Elementary Education, which governs the DGEI, over the legality of the implementation of a separate curriculum for bilingual-bicultural education. The dispute proved impossible to resolve, largely due to the DGEI's relatively weak institutional position within the SEP. In the end a compromise was reached whereby instead of providing a fully developed programme, the DGEI instead limited itself to providing suggestions to teachers on ways in which they could modify and supplement the content and methods of the national programme in order to adapt it to the particular needs of the context in which they taught. It was thus recommended that teachers research the local culture in order to gain a better understanding of how this could be incorporated into the teaching programme. The manuals for indigenous teachers also underlined the importance of using the local language, utilising the prior learning experiences of the child, and taking into account the local socio-economic context in curriculum design (Citarella 1990:87-91). Hamel (1998:123) comments that part of the reason for which the new educational plan proposed by the DGEI encountered problems was because of a failure to achieve consensus with teachers, parents, local authorities and others concerned with indigenous education. He also points to the continued

centralisation of decision-making, with one basic and excessively rigid programme being proposed for all of Mexico's indigenous areas, as a limitation of the proposal. By the end of the 1980s, responsibility for designing and implementing bilingual-bicultural education rested largely with the individual teacher. This continues to be the case today.

In the first half of the 1990s, educational policy returned to an emphasis on productivity, economic participation, and strengthening the national identity, while the general strategy for indigenous education focused on equality of educational opportunity, the strengthening of indigenous cultural values and expression, and ensuring indigenous participation in national development and its benefits (Freedson & Pérez 1995:384-5). In many ways these political aims, and the vision they implied of education as a means to the eradication of social and economic inequalities, were reminiscent of those of earlier decades, as was an emphasis on the teaching of Spanish and the national curriculum (*ibid.* :385-6). However, the devolution of much educational responsibility to state level in 1992 (SEP 2001b:7), and a policy emphasis on the participation of parents and communities in the further development of indigenous education went some distance toward distinguishing these recent policies from those of 40 years ago. The initial and continuing training of teachers was identified by the DGEI as the most serious deficiency in its educational system and indicated, along with curriculum development, as a priority action area (*ibid.* :387). The most recent programme for education, which covers the years from 1995 to 2000, continues these previous policy directions, emphasising human development, educational modernisation, equity, sustainability and productivity (Muñoz 1998:81-2). As in the preceding presidential term, an emphasis on educational equity means that special attention is paid to rural indigenous education. The programme reiterates the principle that education for indigenous groups "will adapt to their needs, demands and situation in terms of culture and language, population, social organisation and forms of production and work" (*ibid.* :82, my translation). In addition, it outlines two new initiatives for indigenous education: combating explicit and implicit forms of racism in the non-indigenous population and working to secure recognition of the contribution of indigenous peoples to the historical construction of the nation; and the recognition of educational inequity for

the ever-increasing number of indigenous students who reside in urban centres (ibid. :81-2). The government and the SEP apparently remain unwilling to concede any real autonomy to indigenous education, continuing to view it as an “add-on” to the national programme. It is thus unsurprising that advances in the practice of indigenous education continue to be few and slow.

Somewhat in contrast to these policy directions, bilingual-bicultural education has continued to receive greater legal recognition and backing during the 1990s. Although the Constitution does not mention education, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention ratified by Mexico in 1990 assures the right of indigenous peoples to an education which addresses their particular situation and needs, and is imparted in accordance with their cultural principles. It also emphasises the importance of the cooperation of indigenous people in the development and implementation of these educational programmes and services, and recognises their rights to take responsibility for the conduct of their own education and to establish educational institutions and facilities of their own, with appropriate resources provided by the government (UN-ILO Convention 169, Article 27). In 1993 the Federal Law of Education of 1973 was replaced by a General Law of Education. This requires that education provided by the state “protect and promote the development of indigenous languages,” “respond to the linguistic and cultural characteristics of each of the diverse indigenous groups of the country,” and include regional content in addition to the national programme for primary education. It further requires educational authorities to take steps to establish greater educational equity, with particular attention to groups and regions which display lower educational achievement or which face disadvantageous social and economic conditions (Freedson & Pérez 1995:392-3, my translation). In accordance with the new policy of decentralisation, the role of the DGEI was redefined by the SEP in 1994 to cover exclusively regulatory and evaluative responsibilities, devolving operational responsibilities to state authorities except in the case of experimental programmes. Moreover, the new SEP documents laid much greater stress on the “bilingual pluri-cultural” orientation of the DGEI, without mentioning explicitly its role in teaching the Spanish language (ibid. :393, my translation). In response to the movement toward decentralisation, some states of the republic have enacted legislation that

defines their educational responsibilities. Oaxaca was the first state to do so, stating in its 1996 State Law of Education that: "It is the state's obligation to impart bilingual and intercultural education to all indigenous peoples, with study plans and programmes which integrate knowledge, technologies and value systems corresponding to the culture of the community. This education should be given in the [community's] first language and in Spanish as a second language" (SEP 2001c, my translation). The law also provides for the establishment of special curricular content and the development of special texts and materials for each indigenous group (Hernández-Díaz 1998:38). Although the impact of national legislation on practice has to date been minimal, it is to be hoped that this decentralisation will provide new opportunities for indigenous people to realise educational initiatives with the support of the state educational authorities.

In fact, local educational initiatives have been taking place with or without state support since the late seventies. Pardo (1993:117-123) describes a number of Oaxacan projects related to the development of writing systems for indigenous languages, including the Zapoteco Cultural Education Centre, which was located in San Juan Tabaá. Other initiatives include radio broadcasts in indigenous languages, writers' groups, and the publication of magazines and books. Molino (1998) describes two Zapoteco writing workshops in communities in the Sierra Norte, where children, young people and elderly people work together to record legends and stories in their native language, and mentions a project, currently underway, to establish a separate teacher training institution for indigenous education.¹⁵ Sánchez (1998) describes the project "Aula Abierta" ("open classroom"), in the Mixe region of the Sierra Norte, which attempts to prepare children for entry into the unfamiliar environment of the school through working with their mothers in the areas of community cooking, health and literacy. Also in the Mixe region, there currently exist both a bilingual high school and a Mixe Community Institute which is awaiting incorporation into the education system at high school level.¹⁶ These examples of

¹⁵ This institution was established in 2000 near the city of Oaxaca.

¹⁶ Education in Mexico follows a 6-3-3 structure, with six years of primary and three years of lower secondary schooling being compulsory, although in many rural areas this is not enforced. Students who choose to continue studying after secondary school go on to either preparatory schools for university study (*preparatorias*) or *bachilleratos*, generally technical high schools. Both of these options are referred to in this thesis as high schools.

educational projects begun and carried through by indigenous people within their own communities are all (with the exception of the indigenous training college) located in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca; obviously, there are many others to be found in other regions and states. If indigenous education is to succeed in a country with the enormous cultural and linguistic diversity of Mexico, decentralisation, devolution of responsibility, and local participation are clearly critical. As is suggested by the case of Kōhanga Reo in New Zealand (see p15), perhaps the road to true bilingual intercultural education in Mexico lies through state support for local projects, rather than local support for state projects, as has been assumed to date.

Contemporary and Continuing Problems in Mexico's Indigenous Education System

Rural villages in Mexico continue to have fewer schools, higher proportions of partially trained and inexperienced teachers, and lower student achievement than urban centres (SEP 2001b:51-2,87). In addition to these problems, the indigenous education system, which functions as a general directorate (the DGEI) within the Sub-Secretariat of Elemental Education of the SEP, faces further obstacles. A number of previous studies of the indigenous education system in Mexico have highlighted problems which still persist today. In her pioneering study of indigenous education in Chiapas, Modiano (1973) draws attention to a fundamental shortage of schools, teachers and materials, an extremely high rate of student drop-out, and frequent use of materials which bear little or no relation to students' experience. Shortly afterwards she criticises studies of the Mexican bilingual education system for failing to take into account constraints on the system "such as very low financing, lack of teacher training, and isolation of the schools" (Modiano 1975: 349). While, as Modiano points out, it may be unreasonable to attribute failures due to these factors to the system itself, the continued existence of these same constraints and their consequences 25 years later is indicative of the priority given to indigenous education by Mexican policy-makers. In another study dating from the seventies, Cisneros (1990:108) looks at schools in indigenous communities in Oaxaca and Tlaxcala, and concludes that formal education in indigenous communities presents severe problems which prevent it from realising its stated aims of greater social integration and equality, and instead results in reinforcement of social differences.

Although some of the shortcomings he notes have been at least partially resolved since that time, others remain unchanged. These include insufficient training of teaching personnel, a scarcity of indigenous language materials and very limited use of indigenous languages in schools, an excessively rigid system based on universally used textbooks and frequent examinations, and an excessive concentration on the memorisation of knowledge in order to continue to advance in the school system, rather than on the acquisition of skills and knowledge which will be of use to students in their daily lives.

In a general baseline study of indigenous education, based on case studies of three municipalities in Oaxaca, Varese (1983:85) identifies as a problem the practice of placing teachers outside their own linguistic areas, restricting communication between teachers and students in their indigenous languages. Freedson and Pérez (1998:42) state that at least 35% of all bilingual indigenous teachers in highland Chiapas speak a different language from that of their students, while in Oaxaca, Hernández-Díaz (1998:41) tells us that in 1996, 15% of bilingual teaching personnel were assigned to communities outside their linguistic areas, and that to this figure must be added those teachers who speak a different dialect of the language spoken by their students. This assignation of teachers to schools in which they are unable to utilise their indigenous language skills occurs partly because appointments are often based on seniority or political reasons rather than linguistic criteria. Novice teachers are usually assigned to remote villages, gradually moving closer to urban centres throughout their careers (see Howell 1997: 263-265). The issue of first language instruction is further complicated by the fact that many of the more than fifty officially recognised indigenous Mexican languages are in fact groups of languages given a single name for historical reasons, and even within each of these languages, regional dialects and variants often hinder understanding between speakers from different villages. According to King (1994:91), what is commonly referred to as Zapoteco and thought of as the indigenous language most widely spoken in the state of Oaxaca is in fact a group of no less than 38 distinct languages. Clearly, this enormous linguistic diversity makes more difficult not only the assignation of appropriate personnel to schools but also the provision of texts and other materials in native languages.

The tailoring of content and teaching style to local contexts, officially encouraged by the DGEI (see Mena & Ruiz 1993: 177-78), is made still more problematic by the highly centralised and standardised nature of the Mexican primary education system. Despite devolving the responsibility for the operation of educational services to state level bodies in 1992, the SEP retains the right “to determine the study plans and programs of elementary, lower secondary and teacher education for the entire Republic,” and the responsibility to “ensure the national nature of basic education” (SEP 2001b:12).¹⁷ Across both indigenous and non-indigenous schools, the same free textbooks are distributed to each student in the nation, and teachers are expected to base their teaching programmes on these texts. In Oaxaca, state-wide exams are given biannually to monitor students’ progress in this curriculum, and these are a major determinant of the student’s progress upwards through the six primary grades. The responsibility for modifying and supplementing the national curriculum in order to offer an education appropriate to the particular context is left to the individual teacher, but teachers are given little training in how to fulfil this directive. As many teachers study in the weekends during the first years of teaching, time is also a limiting factor in their ability to carry out the recommended cultural investigations and programme design. The lack of training which is all too common among indigenous teachers encourages further reliance on the materials provided. In combination with the scarcity of materials specific to indigenous education, this means that in many cases “indigenous education” is limited to a few hours of instruction weekly in first language literacy, if indeed it exists at all. In practical terms, indigenous schools and federal schools are far more similar than they are different.¹⁸

In many villages, sheer availability of educational services also continues to be problematic. Although Mexico’s indigenous education system offers the most complete coverage of any country in Latin America (Muñoz 1998:76), and most villages now have at least a primary school, in smaller locations this may be “incomplete” or “multigrade,” that is, may not offer all six primary grades, or may

¹⁷ “Basic education” includes six years of primary and three years of lower secondary education, and is free and compulsory.

¹⁸ For a discussion of this phenomenon in Oaxaca, see Mena and Ruiz 1993.

have only one or two teachers to attend all grades. Alternatively, children may have to live in a school boarding house in a nearby village. While primary education is generally available in some form to all children, secondary schooling and higher education are often much less accessible. It is common for students to have to leave their villages in order to continue their education, with distances and expenses growing correspondingly larger for higher levels of education. "Basic education," which includes lower secondary education, is guaranteed by the state; education above this level is often costly. Apart from the sometimes prohibitive economic burden of providing both living expenses and tuition fees to a child studying elsewhere, female children are often not given permission to leave the family home because of fears of loss of respectability and unwanted pregnancy. Lack of locally available educational services thus imposes sometimes insuperable barriers to the education of indigenous youth.

Partly connected with these difficulties of accessibility is the issue of teacher training. For aspiring teachers in the indigenous system, there are two routes of entry into the career: to graduate from a normal school programme before beginning to teach full-time, or to study during weekends and holidays over a four-year period while teaching on an annually renewable contract (referred to by the SEP as a "workplace training modality" (SEP 2000b:43). While the first option is the more prestigious (Howell 1997: 259), many teachers in the indigenous system choose the second for economic reasons, with the result that a large number of teachers in indigenous schools, particularly those more remote schools to which beginning teachers are usually assigned, are only partly trained, further prejudicing the quality of indigenous education.

Unsurprisingly, student achievement in indigenous schools is well below the national average. Citarella (1990:77) gives terminal efficiency statistics (the percentage of students entering first grade who successfully complete sixth grade and graduate) for bilingual-bicultural education for the seven years from the 1976-82 cycle to the 1982-88 cycle, which range from a low of 19.75% to a high of 22%. Freedson & Pérez (1995:386) note the same terminal efficiency rate of 22%, and a repetition rate from grade to grade of 17%, drawing these figures from a DGEI study

published in 1990. Meanwhile, the national rate of terminal efficiency for primary schools was 54.7% in the 87-88 school year, an increase of two percentage points over that for the 1982-83 school year, with this increase concentrated in urban areas (Citarella 1990:58). Grade repetition in primary education for the country as a whole was 9.9% in 1985 and 9.5% in 1987, with the figure for urban schools in 1987 being 7.3% and that for rural schools 13.4% (ibid. :59).

Factors such as under-resourcing, inadequate teacher training, and the assignation of teachers to schools outside their linguistic areas all serve to reduce the quality of education available in indigenous schools. Its effectiveness is further curtailed by the fact that the indigenous education system consists almost exclusively of kindergartens and primary schools, after which those children who continue to study must move into the “federal” system of secondary schools, in which, in the vast majority of cases, no provision is made for the inclusion of indigenous languages or cultures or for the differing needs of students from indigenous communities. Although the DGEI has theoretically offered technical secondary education in addition to pre-school and primary education since 1984 (Citarella 1990:53), progress in this area has been minimal, complicated by the dependence of the DGEI on the Sub-Secretariat of Elementary Education. This lack of continuity into secondary education is redolent of the former “transitional” model of indigenous education, which was intended to establish Spanish as a unifying national language, regardless of the effect on the vitality of indigenous languages. The persistence of this assimilationist tendency undermines the credibility of current legislation that states that indigenous education is intended to promote the Spanish language without compromising the development of indigenous languages.

Somewhat surprisingly, this language policy does not always receive the support of indigenous parents, some of whom feel that the primary objective of schooling is that their children master Spanish, and that bilingual schooling can only hinder this process or, alternatively, that the acquisition of their own language and culture is something that should take place in the home or community, rather than in school. Mena and Ruiz (1993:183, my translation), in a study of indigenous education in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, find that “...there is no social acceptance of

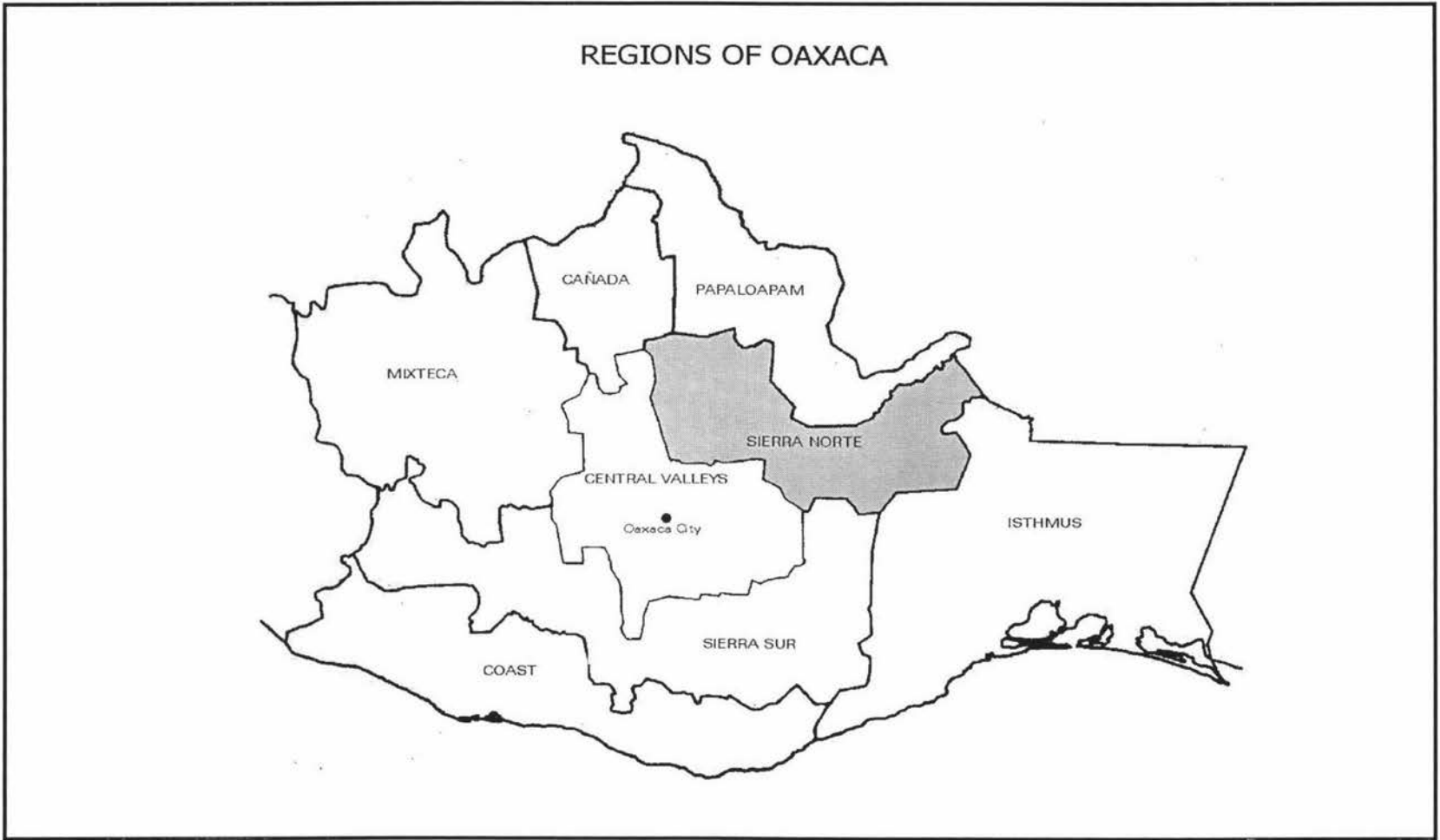


Figure 3.1 Location of the Sierra Norte region in Oaxaca

the proposals of indigenous education, and as long as this does not happen, this process of linguistic displacement will continue to exist.” Chiodi (1992) notes that attitudes of parents in a Mixe community in Oaxaca toward the community school were extremely ambivalent: the function of school was seen as the teaching of Spanish, a desirable commodity, but community members also recognised the cultural implications of this project, and resisted the influence of the school, viewing it as representative of non-Mixe society and a force for cultural change. The Mixe language in particular, as the principal expression of Mixe culture, was jealously guarded from outsiders and from the school. The Mixe, who were never conquered by the Spanish army, are often characterised as exceptionally protective of their culture against outside influences, but this conception of the school as an element of another culture present in the community, as an institution which offers essential skills and yet constitutes a threat to some aspects of community life, is probably present to a degree in most indigenous communities in Mexico. This mistrust of the school dates, in many cases, back to earlier decades, when schools were explicitly directed to assimilate indigenous communities into national *mestizo* culture through educational and community development activities. Acunzo (1991:34, my translation) also comments on the role of the school in “ideological penetration,” concluding that “to prevent a complete rejection of the school as an element foreign to the traditional culture, or a passive and sterile acceptance, it is necessary to convert formal education into a channel for interethnic communication.” Referring to successful community-controlled indigenous initiatives in other Latin American countries, he further comments that “these ... experiences indicate that for the school to be successfully introduced into indigenous communities, it is necessary that it be transformed into a medium for the recovery of the linguistic and cultural identity of the group.” In Mexico, this is something that, with few exceptions, has yet to occur.

THE RESEARCH SETTING

Field research for this project was carried out in the community of San Juan Tabaá, a Zapoteco village located in the Sierra Norte region of Oaxaca (see Figure 3.1). Of the eight regions into which Oaxaca state is divided, the Sierra Norte, with 81.2%, has by far the highest proportion of speakers of indigenous languages (INEGI 1997). The

state of Oaxaca and the community of San Juan Tabaá will in this section be introduced in turn.

Oaxaca

The mountainous state of Oaxaca is located in the south of Mexico, bordering the Pacific Ocean, and the states of Chiapas, Veracruz, Puebla and Guerrero. Oaxaca is about one-third the size of New Zealand, with an area of 93,136 km², and has a population of 3,432,180.¹⁹ Of this number, 36.6% are speakers of indigenous languages,²⁰ of which there are sixteen in the state (Oaxaca State Government 2001a). This number is equal to around one-fifth of the total number of speakers of indigenous languages in the country (Pardo 1993:111); only the state of Yucatán has a higher proportion (39.7%) of speakers of indigenous languages (INEGI 1999). In 1995, 84.4% of Oaxaqueños who spoke an indigenous language were bilingual in Spanish (INEGI 1999). Zapoteco is the most widely spoken indigenous language in the state of Oaxaca, and the second most widely spoken in Mexico (INEGI 1997).

Oaxaca's population is predominantly rural, with 69.6% living in settlements of less than 5000 people, and only 21.8% living in urban centres with more than 15,000 people, the lowest percentage of any Mexican state (INEGI 1997). Accordingly, agriculture plays a major part in the state's economy, with 51.4% of the population employed in primary production (INEGI 1997). Ecological degradation and declining prices for primary produce have, however, led to diversification in the rural economy, with craft production and migration for wage labour to other parts of the state or country and to the United States becoming increasingly important. In the urban areas of Oaxaca, service and administration form the mainstays of the economy, with tourism as another important source of revenue (Howell 1997:256). Those Oaxaqueños who live in rural communities have, for the most part, lived in relative isolation until recent decades, when the road system, along with other services, was expanded; however, many villages still lack basic services. Although Oaxaca's urban areas are *mestizo*-dominated, rural areas are still overwhelmingly

¹⁹ Preliminary results of the 2000 Census.

²⁰ This figure refers to the percentage of the population aged five years or more that speaks an indigenous language, according to the results of a 1995 survey.

indigenous, and the more remote from the cities a community, the more likely it is to have continued its traditional way of life through to the present.

Oaxaca is one of the poorest states in Mexico according to all indicators. Between 1990 and 1997, the proportions of Oaxaqueños unable to read and write (24.6% in 1997) and without instruction beyond the primary school level (71.7% in 1997) surpassed those of the state of Chiapas, awarding Oaxaca the dubious honour of heading the Mexican tables for these indicators (INEGI 1999).²¹ At 71.5 years, Oaxaqueños also have the lowest life expectancy of any Mexican state, compared to the national average of 73.6 years (INEGI 1999); in comparison, New Zealanders have an average life expectancy of 77.1 years (Statistics NZ 2000a). Although unemployment rates are below the national average, incomes in Oaxaca are very low, with 58.9% of the economically active population receiving less than the minimum wage per day in 1995; the minimum daily wage is calculated periodically and was established at 22.5 pesos (equivalent to NZ\$4.50 at 1999 rates) for Oaxaca in 1997 (INEGI 1997). Oaxaca, Chiapas and Guerrero are the three poorest states in Mexico, in terms of expenditure, with 37% of their population in extreme poverty, accounting for 23% of all poor people in Mexico (McKinley & Alarcón 1995:1579).²² Infant mortality in Oaxaca was 14.0 per 1000 live births in 1998 (Oaxaca State Government 2001a); the equivalent figure for New Zealand, in comparison, was 6.5 per 1000 in 1997 (Statistics NZ 2000b).

For historical reasons, the state of Oaxaca is divided into 570 generally small municipalities, approximately one quarter of the total number of municipalities in Mexico. 75% of Oaxaca's municipalities are considered to be highly or very highly marginalised (Oaxaca State Government 2001b). Each municipality has a "head" (*cabecera*), akin to a capital, and many also incorporate smaller villages. The expansion of educational services in recent decades means that all *cabeceras* have primary schools, and most have lower secondary schools also. This is less likely to be the case in small communities, and children sometimes have to walk considerable distances to school or board in a nearby centre during the week. According to

²¹ Both of the figures in this sentence refer only to the population aged fifteen years and over.

²² This statistic is based on income-expenditure surveys from 1989, and defines the extreme poverty line as 1.25 times the monetary value of a standard food basket (McKinley & Alarcón 1995:1575).

statistics for the 1995/96 school year, primary schools in Oaxaca covered 94.0% of demand (INEGI 1997), and kindergartens 66.5%, compared with 70.9% for the whole of Mexico (INEGI 1999). In the 1998/99 school year, 12.4% of Oaxacan primary school students were sent back to repeat a grade, close to doubling the national rate. The terminal efficiency of primary schools in the same year was calculated at 85.8% for all of Mexico, but only 75.3% for the state of Oaxaca. The indigenous education system in Oaxaca is one of the largest in the country, with one third of all people who work in this system nationally concentrated in Oaxaca (Hernández-Díaz 1998:50, n1).

San Juan Tabaá

San Juan Tabaá is a medium-sized village with slightly less than 1500 inhabitants, located 136 kilometres from the state capital, Oaxaca de Juárez,²³ in a region known as the Sierra Norte or Sierra Juárez. Almost all permanent residents of the community are indigenous Zapotecos, and the Zapoteco language is used in the majority of community interactions; however, of the 98.1% of inhabitants who speak Zapoteco, 86.7% also speak Spanish. This figure is higher than that for the Sierra Norte region as a whole, where a total of 22.9% of speakers of indigenous languages are monolingual in their indigenous language, and only 74.2% are considered bilingual in Spanish and their indigenous language.²⁴

Local oral history relates that Tabaá is one of the most ancient communities of the region, founded 200 years before the Spanish conquest by an ancestor named Biladeladao. At the founding of the settlement, a title deed was elaborated in Zapoteco, which details the boundaries of Tabaá with surrounding villages, and a number of genealogies (H. Ayuntamiento SJT 1997:10). The pre-Hispanic Zapotecos were polytheistic, and performed many rites and ceremonies to ask favour of and thank their gods, some of which are still performed today, before the land is sown. The customs of *tequio* (see paragraph below) and *guelaguetza* (a loosely reciprocal

²³ The state capital is officially known as Oaxaca de Juárez, but commonly referred to simply as Oaxaca. To distinguish the city from the state, I will refer to the city either by its full name or as Oaxaca City.

²⁴ All figures are drawn from 1990 Census data. Pardo (1993:Note 3) notes that these statistics probably exaggerate the rate of bilingualism among speakers of indigenous languages as they include

system of mutual help among households, used when extra labour or resources are needed, e.g. weddings, harvest) already existed at this time (Sanches 1998:11). The Spaniards arrived in Tabaá on 24 June 1521, the day of St. John the Baptist, and accordingly redesignated the village San Juan Tabaá (H. Ayuntamiento SJT 1997:10). The system of village authorities and services was established during the colonial era, and new crops, animals and agricultural implements introduced, although maize continued to be the main crop (Sanches 1998:12). In the early years of this century, during the Mexican Revolution, agrarian reform resulted in the recognition of Tabaá's land as communal (ibid. :13).

The village of San Juan Tabaá is both the *cabecera* and the only settlement in the municipality of the same name. This municipal status, along with recent political recognition of the validity of "practices and customs" – traditional forms of political and social organisation – in local elections and political affairs,²⁵ provides for a reasonably high degree of local autonomy. As in many indigenous Mesoamerican villages, the "practices and customs" of Tabaá include a tightly organised and highly regulated web of obligatory and mostly unpaid service to the community which has its roots in pre-Hispanic times. This service, performed by all men between the ages of 17 and 60 who are not students and who reside in the community, takes two forms: the first, known as *tequio*, consists of communal work on community projects, such as the construction of new buildings or the maintenance of roads and paths, and must be performed whenever required by the village authorities, or a fine paid in lieu. This often amounts to 45 or 50 days in a year (Bautista Cruz, n.d.). Women heads of household, i.e. single mothers, spinsters and widowed or divorced women, are also obliged to fulfil certain duties under the *tequio* system, as the contributing representative of the household. These duties include harvesting the coffee grown on land belonging to the municipality, and cooking and serving meals at fiestas.

The second form of service to the community, contributed only by men, involves the fulfilment of elected or appointed positions (*cargos* and *servicios*), from

people who speak only a few words of Spanish. However, their value for comparative purposes is unaffected. The equivalent figure for the state of Oaxaca in that year was 77.7%.

²⁵ In 1995, Oaxacan municipalities were given the choice of conducting their municipal elections according to *usos y costumbres* or, alternatively, with the involvement of political parties. 72% opted for the former option, and 28% for the latter (Velázquez 1999).

president of the community and other positions of authority, through a host of committees responsible for everything from street lighting to the purchasing of goods for the community shop, to the *topiles*, responsible for community security, running messages, and the administration of *tequio*. These positions are each held for a period of one year. At any time, around 100 men hold such unpaid positions of responsibility in the community, and dedicate themselves to community work for anything ranging from a few hours a week to eight or more hours a day. Apart from the time spent on the fulfilment of these duties, which is sometimes so great as to preclude any participation in agricultural work, some positions entail considerable monetary outlay on community celebrations. The successful fulfilment of the more responsible positions, though this may bring the holder to the brink of financial ruin, also brings great prestige within the community.

The highest authority in the village is the General Assembly, a discussion and voting forum called frequently by the village president, at which attendance is expected of all “citizens” – men above school age – and in which issues of importance to the community are debated. This fairly democratic system of decision-making, together with the strong tradition of service to the community, form a solid and autochthonous foundation for bottom-up community development and participation. The community draws funds from fines imposed on its members, remittances from three associations of Tabaeños resident in Mexican and U.S. cities and from other community members living elsewhere, the rental of land belonging to the village, the sale of coffee grown on community land, income from the community store and the maize mills and other such sources, and in addition, receives funds from the federal government for operating costs (Sanches 1998:17).

As is apparent from the structure of these systems, gender roles are very strictly defined in the community. Public roles, such as representing the village and attending meetings, are played almost exclusively by men, while women take responsibility for the domestic sphere and the care of young children. The man is seen as the natural representative of the household, and it is only in woman-headed households that women are expected to take on some of the roles usually played by

men²⁶. However, even these women, who have responsibilities to the community under the *tequio* system, have no voice in community affairs. There are very few spaces where women gather: the kindergarten is one of these, and to a lesser extent the primary school. Those women who do *tequio* meet occasionally, and a few government programmes directed at women, largely to do with domestic and child-rearing issues, also gather women together.

The majority of people in the community are involved in subsistence agriculture, and for most households – of which there are 316 (Sanches 1998:69) – this constitutes their primary means of support. Land is officially held communally by the village, but in practice, it is divided into individually-held plots. Those families which do not own land either belong to one of four *barrios*, groups of families which hold land communally, or cultivate on land rented from the village. Agricultural work is carried out by both men and women, although men tend to dedicate more of their time to farming, and women to household and child-rearing activities. Women are most likely to go out to the fields at harvest time and on other occasions when more hands are required, or to accomplish those tasks traditionally performed by women, such as the sowing of the bean crop. As indicated by the name Sierra Norte, meaning “northern mountains,” the region is characterised by the steepness of its terrain. The 26.79 km² which comprise the municipality of San Juan Tabaá range in altitude from 600 to 1800 metres above sea level, with the community itself situated at 1360 metres. The climatic range afforded by this vertiginous situation enables the production of a range of crops, from tropical fruits to quality coffee, within the confines of the municipality. This situation increases dietary variety and self-sufficiency, but makes erosion an increasing problem. Tabaá’s main crops are maize and beans, supplemented by coffee, often sold as a cash crop, and sugar cane, along with some vegetables, fruits and herbs. Since the advent some twenty years ago of a blight which attacks the rainy season maize crop, the Tabaños have begun to grow maize during the dry season, using a gravity-based irrigation technique developed by a member of the community which is now used in other communities locally, elsewhere in Mexico, and even in some Central American

²⁶ For a fuller discussion of woman-headed households in Mexico, refer to Chant 1997.

locations. Some farmers grow maize in both the rainy and the dry season, but many cultivate only a dry season crop.

The success of Tabaá's irrigation system has had various consequences for the community. Firstly, it has meant that Tabaesños have been able to continue to sustain themselves through agriculture. In contrast, in some other communities in the region, the traditional pattern of life has been interrupted as people have been forced to seek other means of maintaining themselves, such as petty commerce or migration to the cities of Mexico or the United States. Secondly, it has raised Tabaá's profile and fostered closer relations with government departments and non-governmental organisations, strengthening the community's position in dealings with these. Partly because of this higher profile, Tabaá was selected in 1997 as the site of a new educational institution, an extension branch of an agricultural high school located some three hours away which many Tabaá students had previously attended. With the establishment of this school, Tabaá is becoming an educational centre in the region, the only community in the district to host a public high school, and one of only eight, including private institutions, in the Sierra Norte region, which comprises 68 municipalities.

The village provides very limited opportunities for remunerated employment. Monetary incomes are generally very low, as is to be expected in a subsistence economy, and tend to be based on sales of coffee, supplemented with the sale of other crops surplus to family requirements, the sale of labour to other farmers and remittances from family members working in other locations. A recent plunge in the market value of coffee has reduced local incomes considerably. A number of people engage in small enterprises within the village, such building, plumbing or running small shops or restaurants. Migration to cities in Mexico and the United States is an option that is increasingly popular with young Tabaesños, although, as mentioned above, this is less common than in many other communities. Many Tabaesños who reside elsewhere maintain close ties with the village and continue to contribute financially, either directly to the village authorities or through associations of Tabaesños that function in Oaxaca de Juárez, Mexico City and Los Angeles. In 1999, approximately 125 people belonged to these associations. Sanches (1998:69)

calculates that 370 Tabaëños, including students attending schools or universities in other parts of the country, live outside the community. Those who own land within the confines of the municipality must continue to fulfil their financial obligations to the community or risk having their land confiscated.

Physically, the community of Tabaá centres around the *palacio municipal* – the civic hall, a grandiose building constructed through *tequio* – in front of which is the main basketball court, also used for ceremonies, dances and meetings. This area is flanked on one side by the Catholic church and the health centre, and on the other by the kindergarten and the teachers' residence. These spaces, along with the schools, shops and telephone kiosks, are where much village interaction takes place. The majority of Tabaëños are Catholics, but there is also a smaller Protestant church. Most houses in Tabaá are constructed from adobe, with dirt floors and tiled roofs. A small but increasing number of houses are constructed with bricks or concrete blocks, and the number of dwellings with cement floors and iron or concrete roofs is similarly increasing. In 1998, 98% of houses were supplied with electricity, 100% with piped water, the majority with inside taps, and 90% were connected to a wastewater drainage system. Firewood is the main fuel, with only 8.7% of dwellings using gas in 1998 (Zárate & López 1998:11-12). Most homes now have radios, and some televisions (Sanches 1998:33); apart from one radio station which sometimes broadcasts indigenous language programmes, all programming is in Spanish.

Tabaá is connected to the state capital by three buses daily, a journey which under normal road conditions takes approximately six hours. In the wet season, however, landslides and the muddy condition of the partly unsealed road can mean that the buses are unable to reach Tabaá at all, so that those who need to travel to the weekly market in a neighbouring village, or further, must either hitch a ride in a smaller, private vehicle or walk for several hours. State-run facilities in the village consist of a health centre, staffed by a doctor and a nurse and which serves the population free of charge, a kindergarten and a primary school, both administered by the state Department of Indigenous Education, a tele-secondary school, and the new high school. Local organisations include the Organisation of Agricultural Producers of San Juan Tabaá, the Organisation of Coffee Producers of San Juan Tabaá, four

different savings and credit associations which lend to members at low rates of interest, and the Farmer-to-Farmer Agricultural and Cultural Training Centre. The village has two public telephones for making and receiving calls.

Education in Tabaá

School attendance in Tabaá has been increasing with availability, as more educational institutions open their doors within the community. Of the present population of Tabaá, 13.8% have had no schooling, 49.1% attended primary school for a certain period but did not complete the six-year cycle, and 22.4% have graduated from primary school (Sanches 1998:7), while the remainder have continued beyond primary education. These figures compare favourably with those for the Sierra Norte region as a whole, where, in 1990, 22.4% had attended some years of primary schooling but not graduated, but as many as 28.8% had had no schooling (Sanches 1998:6-7). Similarly, while the rate of illiteracy in the region was 33.0% in 1990, in Tabaá this rate was only 18.2% (Sanches 1998:6). Tabaá's strong interest in educating its youth is demonstrated by the strictly enforced community resolution, in force since 1988, that all young people whose families reside in the community shall be obliged to finish both primary and lower secondary school within the community. This resolution, which has been employed by some neighbouring communities also, was originally designed to maximise the number of students in the local schools in order to ensure their permanence and the allocation of more resources. The families of those that miss days of school without a justifiable reason (i.e. sickness), leave school before graduating from lower secondary school, or attend schools outside the community are fined heavily: in September 1999 the community decided, at the General Assembly, to raise the fine for those who do not attend the tele-secondary school in Tabaá from 3500 to 10,000 pesos per grade, totalling 30,000 pesos (\$NZ 6000) for the families of those who choose to study in Oaxaca City or elsewhere or to work rather than gaining a secondary education. This action was taken to curtail an incipient trend of young people choosing to seek work in the United States rather than complete their education; however, the decision is somewhat controversial, as some parents feel that their children may receive a higher quality education elsewhere, and other parents and students do not feel that the

completion of lower secondary school is necessary. As with other fines, non-payment may result in confiscation of property holdings.

San Juan Tabaá's primary school has taught all six grades since 1970, and has been a part of the indigenous education system since 1971. In the 1999-2000 school year, the primary school had 265 students, attended by eleven teachers and one school director. The kindergarten had three teachers, one of whom was also the school director.

In the early 1980s Tabaá was the site of a secondary schooling educational initiative, known as the Zapoteco Cultural Education Centre, which originated with the General Directorate of Popular Cultures, part of the National Commission for Art and Culture. A group of "cultural promoters" employed by this Directorate and native to the area attempted to design and teach a lower secondary curriculum which would more closely reflect the culture and the needs of local young indigenous people, using the Zapoteco language as the medium of instruction and drawing on indigenous knowledge, traditions and concepts.²⁷ The promoters felt that existing educational programmes were in many instances irrelevant to local conditions and as often as not alienated educated youth from their communities. They therefore aimed to create an educational programme which would reinforce students' awareness of themselves as both Zapotecos and Mexicans, through utilising the language, culture and knowledge of their communities, and relating academic learning to their daily lives. Social and natural sciences programmes were to begin from local concepts and examples, subsequently expanding to national and international themes. The Zapoteco language was another subject of study, within which students were to carry out linguistic analysis of the language and help to formulate a Zapoteco grammar. A subject called autochthonous technologies was to consider local technologies and their inter-relations with the natural and social sciences, with the aim of further developing these technologies. The other subjects were mathematics, Spanish (to be taught by a native speaker), and cultural activities (DGCP 1984). Unfortunately this ambitious task proved more difficult than anticipated, due to a complete lack of curricular materials, or indeed any materials written in Zapoteco, a lack of human

and material resources, and insufficient commitment from those organisations and individuals supporting the project. The Centre consequently closed its doors after one or two years.

Tabaá is now the home of a tele-secondary school, established in 1980, the fiftieth of approximately 1500 now functioning in the state of Oaxaca. In this system, each lesson begins with a fifteen minute television broadcast from the state capital, followed by a half hour interval in which the class teacher follows up the broadcast lesson. This system reduces the need for schools to have specialist teachers in each subject. At the time that this study was carried out, the tele-secondary school had four teachers, a school director and a secretary, catering to 107 students. The high school, known as the CBTa (*Centro de Bachillerato para Técnicas Agropecuarias – Agricultural Technical High School*) had 61 students, taught by three teachers, one of whom also attended to administrative matters.

²⁷ The lower secondary level was not at that time compulsory, nor subject to such strict central control.

Chapter 4

CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN SAN JUAN TABAÁ

CULTURE

When asked to characterise the culture of Tabaá, many people talked firstly of tangible cultural expressions which have been part of the community for many generations, such as the local Zapoteco language, and traditional dances, music, and forms of dress.

For me, the culture is what our ancestors, grandfathers, left us. The good things that the ancestors left us. The question of music, dance, and other activities that we do in the countryside, our language, our maternal language which is also something very valuable that they left us. (Rodolfo, 30, 9/11/99)

For Angelina (20), culture consisted of “*the language, the dances, the religion, the style of dress, the food, the way of life.*” For Pablo (30), the traditional dances were most evocative of the local culture: “*Well, as I was born here, my custom is also that I like how the dances are, because we live it,*” while Rodolfo (30) commented on the importance of the traditional music played by the village band: “*The people like that music ... they are values, they're cultures, it's what we have, because a community without a band is a dead community, there's no life, if there's no band, there's no joy.*” The profound interrelation of cultural expression with identity expressed in these comments is echoed by Miguel:

The culture of the music, the dance, the traditions that are lived, the fiestas of the barrios, fiestas of the village ... all that is the tradition, it's the culture that is lived ... and that's what they don't want to lose, the culture. The dance, the traditions, the language, more than anything. (12/9/99)

Miguel was a member of the community brass band, and commented that the traditional music was what people preferred to dance to: “*It's what they like best, the jarabes more than anything. Traditions, that's what they understand, the traditions, the culture that our ancestors left us*” (12/9/99). The Community Statute, a document which sets out the community's traditions, history and internal regulations (see p77-8 below), states that “*cultural experience is through music, dance, acrobatics, rodeo, dance-drama, pastorelas [religious pantomime], community theatre, traditional dress, crafts, gastronomy (traditional food) and conservation of the mother tongue*” (H. Ayuntamiento SJT 1997:29, my translation). Tabaëños were generally in favour of

preserving these forms of cultural expression, with the occasional exceptions of the traditional dress, now rarely worn by young women – *“I’m in favour of the traditional dress changing ... because to tell the truth, I don’t like it, because the old women, sometimes they put on nice clothes, but usually most of them are quite dirty”* (Angelina, 20, 25/9/99) – and the language, discussed in the following section.

Moisés, a Tabaëño employed by the General Directorate of Popular Cultures who has devoted considerable effort to the preservation and development of local culture, saw these cultural expressions as the superficiality of something more profound: *“Many people think that culture is in the dances, the music. That’s the culture that many people think of, in general terms, when they talk about culture. That’s part of it, but the foundation is in the way of life, the way of thinking, the way of understanding the world”* (7/11/99). Moisés defined “culture” in this way:

The culture is everything. All the experience of a community like this. The culture is in the way of life, the way of being. It’s a cosmology that goes beyond, how you understand the land, the animals, the interpretation of dreams, that’s very important ... the concept of valuing the water, valuing the earth, what is death, what is friendship... (7/11/99)

In Moisés’ eyes, the central aspect was the local cosmology, the way of viewing and interpreting the world. Culture revolved *“around the cosmology, that’s the centre, everything begins from there. If I want to do a dance, I have to take into account the cosmology, so that the dance comes out well”* (7/11/99).

Respect is an important value in the culture of Tabaá. This involves respect for the environment, for the ancestors of the village and also for those with whom one lives in the community. *“In the community there’s a lot of respect, but in other places it’s different ... according to age, the respect which has been, first the old people, then those that have done cargos, and then the citizens, who demand many things [from the authorities] and determine many things”* (David, 48, 14/11/99). David and others perceived that this culture of respect was, to an extent, being lost from Tabaá, due to the influence of city culture: *“The young people have changed, it didn’t used to be like that, people were more respectful.... People get used to city life.”* He believed that this change posed a threat to the social organisation of the village: *“There are people now that don’t cooperate in the organisations, they’re lost, they do what they want.”* For some young people, however, respect continued to

be an important value: “*Respect is the first thing a person should have*” (Jorge, 20, 6/11/99).

Isaac characterised the culture of the community with reference to the things which bring people together, including the different forms of cultural expression:

The culture is the vitality [of the community], let's say, as well as the traditions, the dances. It's the culture of the dance that we still preserve ... the music, the way of celebrating the fiestas, the barrios ... and then, it would have to be a devotion to certain images in the months, the twelve months of the year. Every barrio holds a fiesta for the saint venerated in that barrio. They have to spend money, it's a form of conviviality, dances and everything ... and in other aspects such as the guelaguetza, gozona, we practise that. (17/9/99)

Indeed, as suggested by David's comment above, communality is a fundamental part of the local culture. The system of social organisation, with its many and often financially demanding *servicios* and the system of *tequio*, depends on the subordination of the needs of the individual to the needs of the community. Fiestas, dances and religious ceremonies which bring the people of the community together are therefore important in reinforcing the unity of the community. A number of people saw the Tabaeños' unity in work, adversity and celebration as one of the community's most outstanding and admirable qualities:

When the people get together, the fiestas are the ... joys, the enjoyment, music, and also here we have a custom that we work together, together when the commun-, when the authorities send us to do a job, we work together. We're united. We're united, that's how we get on together, there's unity.... We share. When there's a fiesta, when there's a wedding, when there's something like that, they invite us. (Saúl, 68, 5/9/99)

Rodolfo saw this unity as a bequest of the community's forebears:

It's the most important thing for us, the unity, and because of our practices and customs, that's something else that we have, the practices and customs that we have, that our ancestors left us. Here we still don't have political parties, we continue with our practices and customs, and all this has maintained unity in this community.... because in the city, the people don't know each other, and you always feel scared in the city, but here in the country we all know each other, thanks to the unity we have, because of the customs we keep up, the general assemblies, the village gets together and there the young men start to get to know the citizens and so we all know each other. (9/11/99)

Angelina also remarked that the community's practices and customs were an important aspect of Tabaá's culture: "*The jobs that are done in the organisations, that's also a culture ... they organise themselves in different services, like the committees for water, electricity, the school. It's a culture which has always been carried on*" (25/9/99).

The exercise of "practices and customs" in the community also provides it with a high degree of autonomy and self-sufficiency from wider government. Only serious crimes such as murder or rape are referred to external authorities; all others are dealt with by the *alcalde* under customary law (H. Ayuntamiento SJT 1997:25). Juan, an 18-year-old student, referred to the control of local authorities over visitors and internal justice when he described appropriate behaviour in indigenous communities: "*Among villages, we talk politely, calmly. Because if you behave like you're angry, they can put you in jail, and that's why you have to behave calmly, and first, you have go to the authorities*" (12/11/99). The colonial era obviously impinged drastically on the autonomy to which Tabaéños were accustomed, and having regained the right to control their own internal affairs after land reforms which abolished the landlord-peasant relations of colonialism, Tabaéños take much pride in this autonomy and are determined to retain it. One important expression of this pride and determination is Tabaá's Community Statute, a document which sets out the practices and customs of Tabaá along with internal regulations regarding land tenure, natural resources, education, health, and the associations of Tabaéños in Oaxaca, Mexico City and Los Angeles. The document begins with the legal foundation for the rule of customary law, including extracts from the Mexican Constitution and Convention 169 of the ILO, and continues with a brief history of the community and description of its physical boundaries. The general objectives of the Statute are stated to be as follows:

- Social, political, economic, religious and cultural preservation
- Defence of heritage and traditions
- Improvement of economic conditions
- Participation in the process of national development and access to a judicial regime

- Conservation of the maternal language and promotion of its written expression in the community variant, respecting the practical alphabet of the Sierra Juárez
- Customary regulations will be applied in all cases where they are not incompatible with the principles of the public order of the community (H. Ayuntamiento SJT 1997:16, my translation)

The Statute was designed by a group of coordinators and ratified at the general assembly, and is awaiting official recognition by the Mexican government, along with the statutes of other municipalities which chose to continue to administer internal politics according to practices and customs rather than with the involvement of political parties. For a number of people the Community Statute is valuable primarily as a record of the community's customs: "*The most important thing is that we have it for ourselves, because if we didn't, the young people would forget how things were, the traditions, and now we at least have a document that tells them everything*" (Paulino, 44, 6/7/99). Some people in the community, though, find themselves in disagreement with certain regulations contained in the statute, particularly those that impose substantial fines for converting from Catholicism to Protestantism and for failing to attend Tabaá's tele-secondary school. Despite certain disagreements over the content of the regulations contained in the Statute, it remains true that Tabaños are proud of their community's self-sufficiency and jealous of their right to govern internal affairs with autonomy.

Although agricultural work was also once carried out communally, this is no longer the case in Tabaá. Individual farmers are now responsible for their plots and crops, although the reciprocal form of assistance known as *guelaguetza* or *gozona* does continue to function in agricultural tasks. Respect for the land and for nature, and the importance of the land and its cultivation to the Tabaño sense of identity, however, are values which date back to the distant past. "*To cultivate their lands, that's also culture,*" said Patricia, a student of 17 (14/9/99), while Rodolfo commented that "*these products, maize, beans, are the thing the Tabaños, we of the community, attribute a lot of value to, because for us that's our life*" (9/11/99). Francisco, a father of four, said that he had returned to live in Tabaá from near Mexico City because "*I had to produce, because there I didn't produce, I didn't*

cultivate, I didn't ... I worked, but I had to buy everything, and here no, here I'm producing" (15/9/99). For Francisco and others, this individual self-sufficiency is another source of pride in their way of life. Irene (18) said that what she liked about life in Tabaá was that *"if you want something, you have it. Maize, beans, coffee... we don't lack for anything. Sometimes we don't have money. In the city, you have money, but you don't have ... it's different, you have to buy everything, it's different. Because ... money isn't worth anything. And people who grow squash, chilli, have that also – it's good. Money is what we don't have, sometimes, but it's not such a big thing"* (14/10/99). For Lorena (42), Tabaá's system of irrigation was also part of its culture: *"We work in the village, we sow beans and other things, and we have the irrigated land, as well as the rainy season land"* (13/10/99). Moisés saw the ecological balance afforded by the traditional methods of cultivation as a basic part of the local culture. Diminution of respect for the earth leads to the upsetting of this balance, which in turn causes further cultural change:

If we respect the earth, we can harvest, we can have food. If we respect nature, the water and the animals, we can breathe pure air, there's life. And when they change, these concepts that are so important for me, you break the ecological balance, and you go for money. They say, the earth doesn't produce for me any more, it doesn't feed me, I'd be better to leave, go to the United States.
(7/11/99)

Clearly the land is of great importance to Tabaeños, both economically and culturally. This is further evidenced by the fact that the community has entered into conflict several times with neighbouring communities over the question of boundaries; on at least one occasion, the conflict has only been resolved with bloodshed. On the other hand, the respect that Tabaeños feel for the land is reflected in the continuance of pre-Hispanic agricultural rites in which *aguardiente* and other items are offered to the land to request a bountiful harvest: *"There are some rites that are practised also, we cultivate, we prepare, so we take aguardiente and other things for the land, for nature"* (Francisco, 15/9/99).

Women also mentioned traditional rites as part of the culture of Tabaá. Hilaria, the 21 year old mother of a young daughter, mentioned birth rites – *"the births. The birth of a baby. There are many rites"* – and traditional medicine as important cultural aspects: *"And the midwife – they don't go to the doctor. They're scared of the doctor"* (2/9/99). Many pre-Hispanic rites and beliefs were subsumed

into Catholicism in colonial times, and the ceremonies, festivals and images of the Catholic church are now deeply intertwined with the culture of the community. *“Well, here we have a custom of belief, a custom of belief, and of work. The culture, the belief ... that’s where it begins”* (Saúl, 68, 5/9/99). Patricia, 17, included *“to go to mass, the sects”* in her description of Tabaá’s culture, and, as mentioned above, many people mentioned the traditional fiestas, each dedicated to a saint, as culturally important. However, since the establishment of the evangelical congregation in the 1940s, and particularly since a period of heated religious debate in the 1980s, these fiestas have come to be a point of dissension as well as of unification for the community of Tabaá. The amalgamation of pre-Hispanic beliefs with those brought to Mexico by the Spaniards to form a new religious culture is an example of syncretism. Syncretism continues to be an important way of dealing with the influence of outside cultural influences today.

For Jorge, a 20-year-old high school student, the local culture involved not only the traditions and relics of the past but also the preservation of these:

To keep conserving the customs from the past, like holding the fiestas, of which there are two big ones a year; look after the images, the saints, because in other villages, they’ve got rid of them, it’s changed. But the church that we have here, it’s from the year 1700, and here they still want to keep it up like new, they don’t want to let it get run down.... The other culture is conserving Zapoteco, although there are just some old people who speak pure Zapoteco now. And also their way of dressing, in sandals, and the white trousers and poncho. (6/11/99)

Cristina, a woman in her early fifties, shared this point of view: *“To maintain the church which is very old, because it’s really very old, the church, we don’t know who built it”* (12/8/99). For Cristina, this sense of responsibility to keep up a historical continuity in the community demonstrates a respect for the past and for the forebears of the present-day Tabaáños: *“So that our customs aren’t lost, because it’s something from our ancestors, it’s a culture for us, that our ancestors left us”* (12/8/99).

Rodolfo felt that this responsibility required an active commitment: *“It’s our job, for this generation, to keep on preserving our cultures, and also the customs that we have inherited. It’s our job, for all of us, not to lose our roots”* (9/11/99).

It is evident that Cristina sees culture as closely linked to the village's history when she comments that the old people of the community "*know more about the customs that existed before,*" and that, of the young people, "*there are some who like to study, who like to know, and who ask the old people ... but the rest don't attribute much importance to the culture*" (12/8/99). Her remark also demonstrates a certain amount of concern that these links to the past are becoming weaker. Miguel shared this concern: "*People say to me, we have to preserve the culture, and I say to them, So do your children speak the dialect?—No, just Spanish.—Do you live in an adobe house?—No, concrete. And I say to them, You're wrong, that's not the culture*" (12/9/99). Isaac, a teacher in his forties, also believed that respecting the culture of Tabaá meant following in his ancestor's footsteps, and lamented the oppositional influence of modern youth culture:

People come here from other places, and they copy them, the young people, they don't like to walk around in sandals and a hat, they like to have their hairstyles ... and they go off to study, and when they come back they don't want to work on the farm. They don't want to do anything, just hang around. The people here think that having money, having a car and a big house and all that is the good life, but it's not. The good life is to live the past, to live like our ancestors. (14/8/99)

A few days later, he emphasised the dignity and importance of following local traditions:

Somehow they [our ancestors] struggled, they bore the injustices and everything, and we should preserve what's theirs, because we're going to lose it. We're proud to speak Zapoteco, to dress in the traditional style of the region, with sandals, hats and all. This expression is something we're proud of, and secondarily, that which comes from Western culture, it's secondary, because what's ours is ours and we have to know how to value that. (17/8/99)

Isaac saw improved communications and greater mobility on the part of Tabaéños as the main causes of this negative cultural change:

Through the communication, the system of communication, modern communications, when vehicles began to come, telephone lines, means of transportation, things have changed a lot. Because of all this, the culture, the tradition, the way of dressing, it's really changing. (17/8/99)

David (48) was also very concerned about the negative consequences of increased mobility:

There used to be only a little migration, but recently there are many young people that want to experience this change, and they have to leave. And then they come back with another way of thinking, they don't feel like Tabaeños any more. They're embarrassed to speak our language, it's another culture. They change the way they are. (14/11/99)

On the other hand, Miguel, who had returned to live in Tabaá from Mexico City, was of the opinion that migrants from Tabaá and other communities were taking their culture with them and spreading it as far away as Los Angeles: *"Now in Mexico City they [the Tabaeños] have musicians too, and they have jarabes there too, from different communities, even as far as Los Angeles. And that's great, they have the culture there, so far away, in Mexico City, Los Angeles"* (12/9/99).

In contrast to these concerns over cultural erosion, a few people saw cultural change as a necessary and positive thing. Juan, a student of 18, who defined culture as *"what's inherited. What comes from the roots, in those days,"* did not look favourably on this inheritance. *"Since before, since our ancestors, it's always been the same culture, it goes on the same, it doesn't change, and if we don't have education, it's never going to change"* (12/11/99). The desirability of cultural continuity and, alternatively, change, will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

Definitions of culture offered by Tabaeños have many similarities with those found by Rippberger in a study of Mayan communities in Chiapas. Rippberger found that *"Indian parents ... use concepts like 'tradition,' 'customs' and 'respect' to define their culture. The concept of respect is central to their value system.... Other qualities highly valued are hard work, community solidarity, and pride in an Indian way of living"* (1992:81). Other characteristics mentioned included religion, language, dress, values, knowledge base, music, family and community activities like religious festivals, faith in traditional healers, and belief in the power of dreams for spiritual guidance (ibid. :81-85). Another of her respondents saw culture as something more profound: *"It is the spirit that is within each individual"* (ibid. :82).

GENDER RELATIONS

Rippberger noted the important role that women have played in preserving the Mayan way of life. Women are more likely to remain in their villages and continue traditional activities while men often go elsewhere for wage labour (1992:81). In Tabaá also, gender is an important axis of social differentiation in the community. The gendered division of labour is fairly strict, as previously mentioned, and despite the generally democratic decision-making mechanisms in the village, women are in most cases excluded from public decision-making (see pp66,68-9). Women and men had a range of opinions on this matter. Some felt that this was because women were less capable than men of shouldering this kind of responsibility: "*Women don't have the moral courage to attend assemblies,*" said Manuel, a high school graduate of 22 (13/9/99). "*Many women [don't participate] because they're scared to speak, they're scared to participate. And others because they don't know how to express themselves, others because they don't know Spanish very well*" (Angelina, 20, 25/9/99). Others felt that the fulfilment of the community services required of all "citizens" would be too difficult for women to accomplish, either because of the question of physical strength or because the community would not accept a woman in a leadership role: "*I think it's a good custom, because the men are strong, and can take everything, put up with everything. But the women are weaker, and also, if they have services to do, they have the responsibility of their children and the home as well*" (Angelina, 25/9/99). "*Men do their services and women don't, because the men do a service every year, and women are just housewives.... I think that's OK, as a woman, don't you?*" said Emelia, intimating that women didn't need any more responsibility.

Jorge: I would like to see a woman as community secretary, because a woman could do that also

[Researcher:] And as president?

No. Only a man, because it's the man who ... according to the custom here, there's never been a woman as president.

But not as secretary either, and yet you say that a woman could do that.

Yes, but the president is the one that runs things. (6/11/99)

Like Jorge, some others also felt that certain positions could be fulfilled by women, or that if there were different *servicios* for women, it would be reasonable to expect them to contribute: "*Unless there were services that weren't like the ones they [the men] do, the water, the electricity – if there were other tasks ... that a woman could*

do" (Angelina, 25/9/99). Constantino, visiting from Mexico City, said that although the association of Tabaefios there had attempted to elect women to the position of secretary, those elected had refused, in his view because they lacked the necessary self-confidence (14/1/00). Many people in Tabaá also subscribe to the point of view that women don't take part in public forums because they choose not to because of timidity, tradition, or lack of interest. *"It's a custom, it's the tradition. Even if you tell the women to go to a meeting they won't go"* (Cristina, 51, 6/7/99).

If a woman wants to go an assembly, nobody's going to reject her, but if the community calls them [together], not many go. And that's why it's not really seen as important that the women go to meetings. Only the men go to the meetings. And that's also why they only elect men to run the community or to be president, it's just men that do the services, women don't do them.... They get angry when you say, "Have a meeting." ... When [government] programmes come here, like Progresá,²⁸ the women should participate in those programmes, and they, the thing is that they don't want to participate.... It's good if they participate, but they don't have the strength of character to take part in meetings.
(Manuel, 13/9/99)

Some young women felt that although they might like to take on more public or leadership roles, the male-only tradition would be difficult to break. Angelina, with reference to the community's general assemblies, said:

Well, yes, I'd like to participate, but the problem is that the people, if they have an assembly, there are always men there, men; there are no women. I still know what it is to get embarrassed, and unless I was something in this village, to be honest I wouldn't participate. (25/9/99)

If there were positions for women, she thought it more likely that she would take part: *"If they named me in something like that, well yes, I would like to help out. But as I say, there would have to be other women who supported it, because one woman can't do it."* Angelina's sister Hilaria had a similar point of view, that it is difficult to be the first to break with tradition:

But for example, I took a course in agriculture, but as I was the only woman, that's why I didn't have the courage [to work in that field here]. It's difficult, here, for a woman.... I didn't like it. Whereas if you're a man, it's not so difficult, but for a woman, it is difficult. And that's why they [women with more education] leave, to go somewhere where there are more opportunities. (Hilaria, 21, 2/9/99)

Hilaria had instead chosen to take sales work in Oaxaca City, and was considering going to Los Angeles to look for work there. A single mother, she had strong opinions on gender relations in Tabaá, and complained about the double standards applied to men and women:

There's a lot of machismo. That's why I left. (Laughs) There's a lot of ... they judge women a lot. There's more punishment. The bad thing about this place is that when a young woman just comes along and talks to a guy, they say bad things about her, and not about a young man. He's not judged for doing that, whereas a woman is. For example, as a solo mother, I think it's very difficult ... they judge solo mothers harshly, whereas men, as if nothing had happened ... that's the bad part. (2/9/99)

A number of other women were also unhappy with the exclusion of women from decision-making processes. Guadalupe, a teacher and mother of four, said that it was the thing she most objected to about life in Tabaá: “*That they don't let women have a voice or a vote*” (10/10/99). She remarked that in other villages, at least those women who are obliged to do *tequio* (i.e. single mothers and widows) do participate in the assemblies. She also pointed out that some men object to women attending parents' meetings at the primary school, even though women are those who look after the children and thus often have more interest in schooling (10/10/99). This rejection of women's participation by men was confirmed by Hilaria, whose father had attempted to create a women's association to promote projects for women:

Hilaria: They met, but nobody wanted to, or probably their husbands didn't want them to, because he suggested it and they didn't want to, right, Mum? What did they say?

Delfina: That they [the women] didn't have the right to ...

H: They have them [the women] under their thumbs. The man is in charge. And the women hardly participate. (2/9/99)

The male-only tradition seems to be perpetuated both by some women who prefer not to participate, and by some men who prefer that women do not participate. On the other hand, there are both women and men who would like to see this situation change. Hilaria was one of these: “*Usually it's the men who make the decisions.... It would be OK for a woman to lead them also. Aha, because they could speak through her. Like in some other communities, there are women who participate. And here no. I think that here, the women are very backwards*” (2/9/99). “*I think that women should participate too, so that they can give their opinions on what's being talked*

²⁸ The Education, Health and Nutrition Program instituted by the Mexican government in 1997.

about,” said Patricia, 17, and, “*I think that you have to give the women an opportunity to do their services also. Because women can do it too*” (14/9/99). Irene also thought women should have a chance to air their views, although she felt that perhaps a separate assembly would be appropriate for this: “*It would be good if the women had their assembly also, to see what the women say. Because it’s different from the men, what the women think*” (Irene, 18, 14/10/99). Irene was the manager of the community shop, itself a kind of *servicio* she had been asked to fulfil, and was in favour of women’s participation in services: “*It’s not good ... that only men do services, because there are a lot of services*” (14/10/99), asserting that she herself would be happy to represent the community, and “*would like to be a secretary ... I like to show what I know.*” However, she had little expectation that this would come about, because “*they don’t let ... nobody says that the women should come,*” and because women also have child-care responsibilities (14/10/99).

Some men also felt that women should have more opportunity to participate in the public side of village life. Rodolfo recognised that “*our practices and customs often limit women ... for me, personally, it would be good to create more recreational spaces, or something, so that women can collaborate also, so that the women don’t shut themselves up, so that they also start doing the things that men do.... Women can do it too. Or find projects, work ...*” He pointed out that women already participate relatively more in the religious side of things, and concluded “*I think that in the case of San Juan Tabaá, it would be good if the women also took, if they also participated in the general assemblies. It would be positive*” (9/11/99). Some men, though, tended to talk of the community as though it consisted solely of men. The use of the word “citizens” to denote only men was a common example of this. On one occasion, on the day before a general assembly, a man remarked to me that “*all the village will be there*” (Eric, 25/9/99), as if women were not part of the village, and the same assumption can be seen in Saúl’s statement that “*they [the men] talk in the assembly, and make the decisions. If there’s a problem, the village resolves it*” (5/9/99). Moisés pointed out that women did effectively participate in decision-making in a covert manner, that within the household “*the men don’t decide, the women make the decisions,*” and that women influence their husbands’ points of view. “*It’s just that they don’t make public decisions*” (7/11/99). He went on to note that women also contribute to community work, taking on the charge of the meals at fiestas and other

duties. It should be noted, however, that these duties are mostly carried out by single mothers, divorcees, spinsters and widows, whereas those women whose husbands do services are obliged only to contribute tortillas at fiestas. Nonetheless, Moisés' point about the indirect participation of women is important, and there is no doubt that women have devised various ways of subverting the nominally male power base of the village to further their own interests. Moisés also felt that women's more direct participation in village activities and decisions was "*only a question of time,*" and that it depended in part on "*the wisdom of the authorities*" (7/11/99). With both Rodolfo and Moisés holding important *cargos* in the year 2000, it remains to be seen how much this gendered system will change. It is undeniable, though, that gender relations within the community have changed substantially in recent decades, partly in response to the presence of more educated women. In the past, for example:

Here a woman couldn't go dancing, couldn't go to ... didn't even know how to dance, or what the world was like, and why? Because her husband might hit her, or a girl, if she went dancing then she wouldn't be able to get married, and all that. But now, the young people, the ones that are studying, organise their dances, they have some fun and then they go home, and in the morning they go out to the farm peacefully. (Isaac, 17/8/99)

Jorge, 20, commented that women also have more control over their lives now: "*Twenty years ago still, to get married the couple didn't have to be boyfriend and girlfriend. The parents of the boy went to ask her parents for her, even if she didn't want to.... Now it's different, they don't make a girl marry someone she doesn't want to*" (6/11/99). The women of today have thus gained more freedom, more choice and more opportunities than those of the previous generation.

LANGUAGE

Language is at once a repository of culture and a medium for its transmission from generation to generation. As Stavenhagen (1990:108) says, "through its language, a given group expresses its own culture, its own societal identity; languages are related to thought processes and to the way the members of a certain linguistic group perceive nature, the universe, and society.... languages express cultural patterns and social relations and in turn help shape these patterns and relations." Largely for this reason, language has been the overwhelming focus of both general ethnic policy and indigenous education policy in Mexico throughout the twentieth century, almost to the exclusion of consideration of other aspects of indigenous cultures. In the case of

Tabaá, their Zapoteco language is not only a primary aspect and expression of their culture, but also the aspect which differentiates them most readily from other sectors of Mexican society and indeed even from other indigenous communities, where other languages or different dialects or variants of Zapoteco are spoken. Language was thus generally among the first aspects of their culture mentioned by Tabaeños, and many of their opinions and feelings about Tabaá's culture found focus in comments on its language. In addition, given the considerable barriers and, often, discrimination faced by non-Spanish-speaking Mexicans, the indigenous language is also a subject that provokes great intensity of feeling. It was common for Tabaeños to refer to their language as "the dialect," "the indigenous language," or "the mother tongue" rather than as "Zapoteco." This is possibly due to an awareness that the language spoken in Tabaá is one of a large number of dialects and variants all referred to as "Zapoteco." Alternatively, it may reflect that the term "Zapoteco" actually comes from the Nahuatl language; in the language of Tabaá, their own language is referred to as *dizra farazre*. The use of the term "dialect" also reflects a previously commonly-held conception that Mexico's indigenous tongues are something less than fully-fledged languages, inferior to Spanish and unsuited for some functions, such as education. This idea dates back to the days of "modernisation" when indigenous cultures were considered backward, and linguistic and cultural assimilation was considered necessary. Some people continue to subscribe to this now discredited idea but many more continue to use the term "dialect" simply as a matter of habit.

Many people, both older and younger, ascribed great value to the local language. Saúl, a 68 year old man, called Zapoteco "*a treasure for us.... The dialect shouldn't be lost*" (5/9/99). Rodolfo, part of a group of local men that meets regularly to devise an alphabet for and thereby promote the use of Tabaá's variant in the primary school and in the community, wrote the following piece in Zapoteco:

Our language reminds us about the indigenous people that we are, as were our ancestors when they arrived and founded our village, in which we were born. We shouldn't be ashamed of the place in which we came to be born, wherever we may be – we are from here, and here we will die. Our language is a legacy that was left to us by our ancestors, and for this reason it is an important task for us to be able to write it just as it is spoken in our village, and to teach the current generations so that they can write and speak it

*correctly, so that we don't let our language, which our ancestors left us, fall into oblivion.*²⁹

Rodolfo's piece brings out a number of important ideas: the close connection of the language with Zapoteco identity, the sense of historical continuity engendered by continuing to live in the same place and speak the same language as his ancestors, the complex mixture of pride and diffidence experienced with regard to his indigenous identity and language as the marker of that identity, the respect felt by Tabaños toward their ancestors and the importance of not forgetting their ways, and finally, the strong foundation of identity in the community of Tabaá, rather than a regional or ethnically based sense of identity. These ideas all cluster around the theme of identity. The sense of identity as something deeply rooted in the past and of the language as the hallmark of this cultural continuity is echoed by Isaac, a teacher and father of eight, born in a nearby village:

[The language] is the pride of the village, that we speak our language, our variant of the dialect; since the Spanish arrived, how many years is that ... and we've resisted, we still speak Zapoteco.
(17/8/99)

Francisco, also a member of the group to which Rodolfo belonged, when asked to characterise the culture of Tabaá, said, "We're ... legitimate, because we still speak our original language, of San Juan Tabaá. Because we speak Spanish now, but that's only since the conquest" (15/9/99). A number of young people also commented on the importance of the language to their sense of identity. "To talk to people in Spanish, for me, it doesn't feel right, because seeing as we are indigenous communities, if we meet someone who speaks their dialect, and we can't talk to him, even though we're indigenous ..." said Manuel, a high school graduate of 22 (13/9/99), and continued, "If one doesn't know the indigenous language, we feel like we're not worth as much." Irene (18) was proud that her language distinguished her as indigenous: "We should keep speaking it, so it doesn't die out. Because if the language dies out, then we're no different from people from the cities" (14/10/99). Jorge (20) also remarked on the loss of indigenous identity that he feels a change in language would entail, contrasting Tabaá with a neighbouring village, the district capital:

²⁹ This piece, and a later one by Fernando, were translated from Zapoteco into Spanish by the group. The translation into English is my own.

I would like Zapoteco to be retained, so we don't forget where we're from. For me, I'm proud to speak Zapoteco. Because we don't have another language, other than Zapoteco; and Spanish, it's what they speak in the cities. For example, in Villa Alta, they don't speak Zapoteco any more, just Spanish. (6/11/99)

For Patricia (17), the Zapoteco language is very closely connected with the culture and traditions of the community: *"The language is important. To keep on preserving our traditions, so they don't get lost"* (14/9/99).

All of these comments evince the fear held by many members of the community that their indigenous language will be supplanted by Spanish, as has already been the case in many Mexican indigenous communities. There is no doubt that language use patterns in Tabaá are changing rapidly: in one generation the community has gone from being largely monolingual in Zapoteco to a point where 87% of the inhabitants are bilingual³⁰. As schooling in Tabaá has always been in Spanish, but bilingualism has risen dramatically only in the last generation, it seems that the school may not have been the major determinant in changing language use patterns, although it has certainly been influential. Longer attendance at school in recent years has probably contributed to the increase in bilingualism. Other factors such as increased communication and migration have probably been as important as schooling. Most of those monolingual in Zapoteco at this point in time are older women, reflecting the fact that women previously tended to receive less schooling and travel beyond the community less frequently than men. The influence of Spanish in the community is clear even to an outsider, both in frequent lexical borrowing into Zapoteco and in the increased frequency of situations in which Spanish is used in the community. To give a brief example: although most exclusively inter-Tabaeño interactions take place in Zapoteco, when people are called over a public address system to receive telephone calls, these announcements are always made in Spanish, although both the speaker and the intended audience may be Tabaeños with Zapoteco as their first language.

Opinion on the likelihood of Zapoteco being replaced by Spanish in Tabaá varied from inevitability to impossibility, but for members of the group that Rodolfo belonged to (see p88), the possibility was sufficiently real and frightening that they

had decided to take active measures to avoid this eventuality. Their first step has been to set out to develop a writing system suited to the local variant. Another member of the same group, Fernando, wrote in Zapoteco:

We want to write our language so that it isn't lost, because we were born in it, and our elderly people are getting older, and our language is being lost. And on the other hand, the teachers that teach our children say that the children need to learn to write the Zapoteco language, but they are from other villages and can't even speak it as we do. That's why it's important that the native [speaker]s write our language.

This piece highlights Fernando's pride in and protectiveness of the particular dialect of Zapoteco spoken in Tabaá, noticeable also in the comments of Rodolfo and Isaac above. Isaac later commented on this specifically, comparing Tabaá's particular variant with that of Yojovi, the adjoining community: *"Each village is proud to have something which is its own. From here to Yojovi, the tone is different. They understand each other, but it's different"* (14/8/99).

For many indigenous Oaxacan groups, developing an alphabet has been seen as the essential first step in language preservation efforts (see Pardo 1993). In Tabaá, the development of an alphabet specifically designed for their particular variant of Zapoteco is seen by some as indispensable to its continued vitality. In fact, since the early 1980s, a standardised "regional" alphabet has existed for the representation of the different variants of Zapoteco spoken in the area in which Tabaá is located, developed in part by the Zapoteco Cultural Education Centre which functioned briefly in Tabaá at this time (Pardo 1993:121). It is this alphabet that is used in the Zapoteco textbooks provided to primary students in this area and taught by the primary school teachers. However, because of differences in the way certain consonants are pronounced in Tabaá and the neighbouring community, Santo Domingo Yojovi, it is more difficult for people from these communities to write and recognise their words using this alphabet. As Rodolfo points out, *"When you take a good look, it's very difficult to have just one alphabet, because the mother tongue has many variants"* (9/11/99). Moreover, members of the community expressed dissatisfaction with the "regional" alphabet because some of the letters used to represent certain sounds had been drawn from an English orthography, particularly

³⁰ According to 1990 Census data.

the “sh” sound, common in Zapoteco but one which does not occur in Spanish. Referring to the teaching of Zapoteco in the primary school, David (48) said, “*They’re using a regional Zapoteco, using the writing of the Americans, there are letters that are derived from English. We want an alphabet that’s our own, of the community*” (14/11/99). Orthographic concerns about the existing alphabet reflect the very strong identification of Tabaeños with the community of Tabaá, rather than with the region or the Zapoteco ethnic group, and the desire to assert this identity through the creation of a unique alphabet for their variant of Zapoteco.

It’s original to San Juan Tabaá. What we want is to write what’s authentic, what is from San Juan Tabaá, as it’s spoken. Because in other communities it’s spoken a bit differently, and we want it to be our dialect, from here.... We want to write it just as we speak here. And with ... how it’s spoken, and with something, something that’s original. (Francisco, 15/9/99)

Fishman, in his landmark study of reversing language shift, confirms that cultivating first language literacy within the community is an appropriate step for a community where the minority language is commonly used in intra- and inter-family social situations and which wishes to bulwark this language against erosion (1991:95-6). He also remarks that although the existence of a single written standard is desirable both for maximising the currency of a language and in terms of the affordability of producing textbooks and other written materials, it is not a necessary condition for reversing language shift (1991:342-6).

Many Tabaeños expressed concern about the strong influence of Spanish on their language, referring to the number of Zapoteco words that had been replaced by Spanish words, or the “mixing” of Spanish with Zapoteco. For Francisco, this was another reason to take part in the group involved in creating a writing system for the local language:

Yes, it is changing, because there are some things that the young people don’t say, there are things that are disappearing with time, because some people speak more Spanish now, and the original maternal language disappears ... for example, to say “garlic,” garlic has a name in Zapoteco but the kids now don’t know it by that name, because it’s been overtaken by Spanish, and that’s something that worries us ... and that’s why we’re ...[working] to recover all that. All that, those words, which are disappearing, being forgotten ... but we still have time, because we still have the old people who still speak it. (15/9/99)

Young people concurred with this view, commenting that *“It’s already being lost because now they mix up Spanish with Zapoteco a lot. And the old people, the really old people are the ones that speak Zapoteco well, no Spanish. But now, the young people of these years are starting to speak more Spanish than Zapoteco”* (Angelina, 20, 25/9/99), or *“the old people know more Zapoteco, how to pronounce it”* (Irene, 18, 14/10/99). Some even went so far as to say *“I don’t speak it well”* (Marco, 23, 14/8/99), despite the fact that Zapoteco is their first language and one that they may well speak with more fluency than Spanish. A couple of younger people observed that this mixing of languages made for a situation in which people spoke neither language well. Angelina commented that:

Sometimes people want to learn Zapoteco, and if you know Zapoteco you can teach Zapoteco, but on the other hand if you know Spanish and Zapoteco and you don’t know either of them, you can’t teach Zapoteco to anyone else because you yourself don’t know Zapoteco well. And that’s why it’s better to have this language, but well, in this village, that it doesn’t die out. (25/9/99)

Antonio (29), who was back in Tabaá briefly from the United States, was of the opinion that *“it shouldn’t be like that. People should speak pure Spanish or pure Zapoteco or pure English”* (3/9/99).

Some members of the community, however, see a conflict between the conservation of their culture, including the language, and development. Pablo, a father of two primary school aged children, expressed his uneasiness over cultural changes that he saw as inevitable:

The Zapoteco language is changing so much, it’s almost dying out. Many of us speak Spanish now, and then we speak Zapoteco, and they’re getting mixed together. We still have the older people, who speak it better, still the pure Zapoteco.... I wouldn’t like to see all this die out, but then, it’s because many people leave Tabaá [and then come back], that’s why everything is changing. We don’t want our children to live the same kind of lives as we’ve lived; we want things to be better for them, and it’s because of that that Zapoteco is dying out. (20/9/99)

Although the traditional culture is important to Pablo, he sees it as inevitable that this will fade as the community develops. He perceives Spanish, and the access to wider society offered by this language, as the better option in a mutually exclusive choice between cultural continuity and a better life for his children. Talking about how he raises his children, Pablo said, *“I speak to them in Spanish, so that they’ll be open,*

and talk with anyone,” (20/9/99) and *“I don’t really like my kids to speak Zapoteco, because if they go somewhere else, they’re not just going to meet someone and start speaking our Zapoteco. Spanish always comes first”* (20/9/99).

For most people, then, their language is something of which they are proud. They see it as a positive thing for Tabaá that it has thus far preserved its language, and would like to see this continue into the future. A minority of people, however, see the continued use of Zapoteco as a negative thing which marks the community as “backward” and acts as a barrier to its economic and social development, and are thus opposed to its continued use. This perspective reflects the “modernisation” ideology espoused by the Mexican government for many years, still influential in educational practice and in many cases in general Mexican society: that progress requires Hispanicisation and adopting the cultural traits of a more “advanced” societal model. Jorge commented that while he personally was proud to speak Zapoteco,

what happens is that people are learning more, and because Spanish is what’s spoken more in Mexico City, it suits them more to live with Spanish. And Zapoteco, it’s always seen as inferior, some people are ashamed of Zapoteco. In Mexico City, if you ask them if they speak Zapoteco, they’ll tell you “No, just Spanish,” but when people ask me, I say “Yes, I speak Zapoteco, I speak it better than I speak Spanish.” (6/11/99).

Isabel (54) and Jorge’s mother, Lourdes, both of whom had children in their twenties and had spent periods outside Tabaá, were of the opinion that it would be better if Spanish were the only language spoken there, as in some other nearby communities seen as more advanced. *“It’s good [that in these villages they no longer speak Zapoteco], because I like Spanish. Here we need Zapoteco too, for the people that can’t answer in Spanish, but I like Spanish”* (Isabel, 1/9/99). She explained that when she was a child, very few people in the community could speak Spanish, and that this made travel and commerce more difficult: *“My father got around in Oaxaca with only signs ...[when] he went to sell oranges in Oaxaca”* (1/9/99). She herself only learned Spanish after moving to Mexico City, and said, *“We need Spanish when we go to Oaxaca, to buy things”* (1/9/99). Both Isabel and Lourdes saw many advantages in city life, and gave their reasons for living in Tabaá as partly or mainly economic, citing the necessity for school uniforms in urban schools as a disadvantage of life in the cities. Lourdes saw Spanish as vital *“to know how to answer something,*

any question you might be asked. Like yourself, you're asking us questions now, to know how to respond, answer. Because if you don't know Spanish, all you can do is smile" (10/9/99). When asked how she would like the community to be in the future, Lourdes responded, "*I would like the language to change ...but it's difficult to get rid of the language, because there are the old people speaking the dialect*" (10/9/99). As well as recognising the practical value of Zapoteco for communication with those monolingual people of the community, both of these women spoke Zapoteco much of the time in their homes.

A number of other people, mainly women, saw Zapoteco as mainly of practical, rather than cultural value, without viewing it as having a negative impact on the community. Delfina, a 49-year-old mother of five daughters who had spent a considerable period of time in Mexico City, noted the value of Zapoteco in the community for communicating with those older people who do not speak Spanish, but felt that the teaching of Zapoteco in the school confused the children and wasted valuable school time, keeping them "*behind, instead of learning more Spanish.... I don't like that they teach it in the school*" (2/9/99). Lorena, 42, and Emelia, 21, also focused on practical reasons for conserving Zapoteco. Lorena, a mother of three, said, "*It should continue, because there are those old people who don't know [Spanish], and we can't teach them, we can't oblige them to learn*" (13/10/99), while Emelia, a high school student in her final year, felt that it was important that Zapoteco continued to be spoken "*because some people ask us to translate Spanish into Zapoteco*" and because "*apparently in some jobs they ask you about your language*" (21/9/99). Indeed, in order to become a teacher in the indigenous system, an important option for Emelia and other young people, it is necessary to both speak and write an indigenous language.

Many of the same people who felt that the upkeep of the local Zapoteco was important were also in favour of the language being more widely written. Clearly, Rodolfo, Francisco and other members of the group which gathered to develop a Tabaá alphabet saw great importance in the dissemination of first language literacy among the Tabaá population. "*That's our purpose, to write what's our own. That, more than anything, is the goal that we're pursuing, and then translate it, so that we can all write it and speak it just like that, that which belongs to us*" (Francisco,

15/9/99). *“What we want is that San Juan Tabaá has its own alphabet, and when we have an alphabet of our own, to inculcate it in the school so that the kids have their own, in the Tabaá school, have their own alphabet”* (Rodolfo, 9/11/99). A couple of younger people regretted that they had not had the opportunity while in school to learn how to write Zapoteco correctly. Manuel believed that it was important *“that they know how to write it ...because there are occasions when you need to translate it, Zapoteco into Spanish,”* (13/9/99) and Irene, when asked if there were other things she would have liked to have learned at school, answered, *“Yes. The Zapoteco language, because we didn’t learn that; they just started teaching it two years ago”* (14/10/99).

Attitudes toward the importance and value of Zapoteco relative to Spanish thus varied widely among members of the community, but there was general consensus that it was very important that children learn Spanish well. *“[The village] is advancing, and schools too. There are children who already speak Spanish, it’s advancing, it’s advancing”* (Saúl, 5/9/99). *“It’s important. It’s important that a child speak Spanish and at the same time Zapoteco as well”* (Miguel, 12/9/99). Cristina, a 51 year old woman who runs a small restaurant in the village, reflected on her own school days: *“Yes, now they’re born and they start speaking Spanish, they’re born and they just start speaking, and for us Spanish was really difficult, and now it’s not”* (12/8/99). When asked what a Tabaá child should learn at school, Angelina (20) responded:

Firstly Spanish, because books always require Spanish, all of them. They come in Spanish, and the majority know Zapoteco, and they don’t know how to read, they don’t know how to speak Spanish. To answer their teachers when they ask them [questions], well, they don’t know Spanish. That’s why they have to learn Spanish.
(25/9/99)

She went on to state, in a point of view similar to that of Pablo’s, that the language of Tabaá should be preserved, but was against the teaching of Zapoteco in the school, implying that school is for teaching national and not local culture: *“I’m more in favour of them learning Spanish in school, because if they go to study somewhere else, they won’t ask them anything in Zapoteco, nothing, always in Spanish.... Zapoteco will be useful to them in the community, but it’s not going to be any use to them in other villages, Spanish is more use”* (25/9/99).

With good reason, Spanish is seen as indispensable for those who wish to achieve even moderate academic or economic success. Many people see the predominance of Zapoteco in the community as a barrier to the acquisition of a good command of Spanish and for this reason some people, like Delfina (see p95), are opposed to the use of Zapoteco in the community or in the schools. Irene, who was considering entering high school, was more interested in attending a school outside Tabaá, because *“here they don’t speak much in Spanish, more in Zapoteco, whereas in the city it’s just Spanish”* (14/10/99). Jorge, though proud of his first language, felt that he had not acquired an adequate command of Spanish until he left the community: *“I didn’t know how to speak Spanish very well when I finished secondary school. It was only when I went to Mexico City that I learned to speak Spanish”* (6/11/99). However, Manuel (22) did not feel that speaking Zapoteco had any negative effects on one’s ability to master Spanish: *“If it doesn’t affect you when you learn Spanish ...Zapoteco doesn’t hurt the people who live in the cities, and we know that Spanish is very easy to learn”* (13/9/99).

Attitudes toward Zapoteco thus tend generally to cluster around three main ideas: that it has cultural value, that it has practical communicative value, and that it is of no value or acts as a hindrance in the pursuit of development goals, one of which is the mastery of Spanish. Language is among the most deeply-rooted and, consequently, most controversial aspects of culture for the Tabaéños. There is no doubt that Spanish is encroaching on the social space of Zapoteco and playing an ever-expanding role in communication in Tabaá; how the Tabaéños choose to deal with this situation will have considerable impact on the socio-cultural development of the community. Language is a crucial issue in the question of development for indigenous peoples, and its role in development and place in education will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

Tabaeños also view the land and their relationship with the land, the continuity of customs passed down from previous generations, the cohesion of the community and the communal nature of social organisation, respect for the social order and for other people, their worldview, and their relative autonomy as

fundamental in defining their culture and their identity. Most, though not all, community members are in favour of these aspects continuing to form an important part of the pattern of life in Tabaá; opinion is more divided over the issue of gender relations, with a number of women and men believing that traditionally strict gender roles, expectations and standards should be relaxed or modified. The aspirations of Tabaños for the future of their community, with regard both to culture and to the social, economic and political spheres, will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

TABAEÑO VIEWS OF “DEVELOPMENT”

For Tabaeños, ideas of development tend to cluster around four main themes: socio-cultural continuity, economic development and its concomitant advantages, the improvement of public services, and social change in selected aspects of community life. These themes are not distinct, but interwoven with each other and with further issues such as culture, identity, gender and migration. Here, however, they will be dealt with in turn, to provide a structure to the discussion of this complex topic.

As suggested in the previous chapter, many Tabaeños see the continuation of traditional livelihoods, certain forms of social organisation and cultural expression, and other aspects of the local culture as important for the community's future. The desire for continuity and anxiety over factors that threatened this were common themes in responses to my questions about development. Many expressed concern over the threat posed by changes in the conditions for agriculture, an issue that impacts on Tabaá's development both economically and in terms of socio-cultural continuity. The irrigation system developed in Tabaá in the early 1980s has provided the means for Tabaeños to continue living off the land to date, but erosion, crop diseases, and diminishing returns on cash crops are all issues of concern to the community, and many of those young people who go on to university choose to study agronomy or a related speciality. Paulino speaks for many Tabaeños when he says, *“For us, the important thing is to have maize and beans for our family”* (3/7/99). Isaac and others wished to see their children continue the traditional way of life in the village: *“The idea that many of us here have is that our children shouldn't leave, that they stay here and share with nature here, and that they have education here too ... so they don't go to the cities.... That they at least have a means of support here in the community”* (17/8/99).

Some of the fruits of the traditional way of life, such as tranquillity, peace of mind, and a natural environment were things that Tabaeños considered important for their future. Due in large part to the organised and communal character of Tabaá's social relations, the community is generally safe and tranquil, qualities appreciated

by community members: *“It’s very peaceful. Very, very peaceful. We hardly have any problems”* (Cristina, 12/8/99).

Here in our own community, it’s very safe. You don’t live with fear, no-one’s going to assault you, or you run into someone in the street who beats you up; nothing, this is a very peaceful community, and that’s what I like about it. Your family lives peacefully.... In the city you’re always worried but here in the village no, because of the unity we have here. We all know each other. And if something happens, for example if you run into a drunk and he hits you, the authorities are right there to take care of the matter. (Rodolfo, 9/11/99)

Peacefulness and the trustworthiness of local authority, qualities engendered by the small, cohesive nature of the community, were things that Francisco also saw as important and worth continuing: *“People are different here because they work in the country, there are no diversions, the people are calmer.... There’s no corruption here. I think that that’s one of the best values that we have in San Juan Tabaá”* (15/9/99). A number of people mentioned breathing clean air as one of the benefits of life in Tabaá, as well as eating natural food direct from the farm. In a number of ways, then, “development” for Tabaeños involves keeping things the way they are. However, this is not always easy.

In many ways, social continuity is linked with Tabaá’s survival as a vital, self-reliant, proud community. David’s preoccupation with the loss of respect he perceives as taking place in the community, discussed in the previous chapter, is due to concern that the system of social organisation will break down if people cease to act in the interests of the community. The encroachment of an individualist ethic is thus a threat to the community’s ability to manage itself as it has always done. David’s concept of respect is tied in with the social structure – *“first the old people, then those that have done cargos, and then the citizens”* – and his vision of development for Tabaá is also strongly tied to his faith in local practices and customs:

There has to be a nucleus, the authorities. It’s very central that there are new authorities to manage the community in the correct way, not for personal interest; they shouldn’t be interested in the community’s resources, the money, they should be concerned for everything, the families of Tabaá, the problems, the economy.... There has to be a responsibility on the part of the authorities to worry about the community and to request support from the

government – and in that way the community will keep on advancing.... And keeping up the custom of demanding a lot of the authorities. Sometimes the community complains about a lot of things, and that's good, because if they didn't, the authorities could take advantage of the community. They should keep up that way of doing things. (14/11/99)

David related this to his experience of the development of the community to date: “Here we have had, thanks to the efforts of the people, unity. The community has come through many problems, but in other communities there have been divisions, and in this community, until now, we've had unity” (14/11/99). For David, then, the community's development depends on its social cohesion and on the responsibility of its members. Rodolfo also saw the community's progress as due to the hard-working nature of its people and their willingness to work for the good of the community:

Since I was a child ... there have been a lot of changes. Why? Firstly because the people of Tabaá have always sacrificed themselves. They're hard-working people, farmers; from dawn until dusk, they dedicate themselves to their land, their family, they get their work done; and on the other hand, when the authorities call them for a day of tequio for some project, they're there, and why? Because they want the best for their community ... or the best for their family. (9/11/99)

The democratic, participatory and unifying aspects of Tabaá's practices and customs were generally appreciated, and the system seen as effective. “In a community, the work is always done in harmony, I mean everyone works together and that way things get done better” (Angelina, 25/9/99). However, the proliferation of services in recent years, with new committees for the primary school, the secondary school, the maize mills, electricity, water, the community shop and the health centre, has led to a degree of dissatisfaction with the system. Some saw the fulfilment of offices as a necessary sacrifice for the good of the community – “It's hard, but it can't be helped. As a citizen you have to do what the community says” (Rodolfo, 9/11/99); “They're things we need, like electricity, because they're resources, and if we don't sort them out, who's going to sort them out?” (Jorge, 6/11/99) – but some felt that too much was asked: “The services you do, a citizen has to do a lot of services, there are about thirteen services now. It's one year of service, and then for one year they leave you alone, and then, the next year, they can ask you to do another service” (Manuel, 13/9/99).

Rodolfo went on to say that the development the community has seen in the past ten years has been due also to government development projects such as Pronasol – the National Programme of Solidarity. He stressed, however, that a community has to show that it can make good use of resources in order to continue to receive government support:

... government resources began to reach the communities. And the communities that knew how to take advantage of them, that knew how to use the resources, made progress. But some communities refused those resources, they didn't accept them, and they're still the same as they were. Whereas San Juan Tabaá got more resources, thanks to the unity that has always characterised it, and thanks to the authorities, who knew how to secure these resources.... The government has realised that the people of Tabaá know how to use the resources they're given, and every year more resources are given to Tabaá. (9/11/99)

Saúl also commented on the role of the government in recent community development: “*The community has accepted the programme of the government, and so it's advancing little by little.*” The projects he referred to were such things as “*getting materials to build schools, ... to build community buildings like the health clinic, the town hall ... all that was with the help of the government, and the churches too.*” He was appreciative of the resources offered by the government – “*Myself, I think it's good. We don't know about the politics, but we think it's good because it helps.... Good or bad, it's a help. (Laughs) Good or bad, we're receiving it*” – but noted that Tabaëños were unaccustomed to receiving help from outside sources: “*The people think it's strange to receive it, because we're not accustomed to that. They send money to the countryside, to help ... there are people who think it's strange; before that didn't happen, it's a change. Before we didn't used to have this help, we just helped each other*” (5/9/99).

Tabaá is thus willing to accept resources in order to further its social and economic development, but Tabaëños are often very jealous of their right to autonomy in their political and social affairs. Isaac talked explicitly of this:

The way we name our authorities, and all that structure, for example in this community we elect our authorities democratically, according to practices and customs. We elect the municipal authorities, we elect the authorities of the Catholic church, all of the social structure of the community. We elect them according to practices and customs; political groups don't intervene.... The

people have been aware, we don't want to keep on being manipulated, as we were manipulated by the Spanish. Now we want them to leave us to work in peace. We're not rejecting the State, but ... everything that's according to the laws, to the social norms that exist is acceptable, we respect that, but we also need them to respect our way of life. (17/8/99)

Rodolfo's view of progress also implied the importance of the Tabaëños' autonomy to develop their community as they wish: "*It all depends on us, on what we want, and what we do, because if we don't do it, no-one else is going to come along. For example, we get help from the government, and with the resources they give us, we use them as we should, for productive projects, on the farms, or to create employment opportunities*" (9/11/99). Rodolfo's and Saúl's comments reflect the fact that, thanks to its fairly democratic, participatory and organised system of government, Tabaá has the structural base to decide and manage its development. This has been the case in Tabaá since at least the land reforms of the Revolution, and Tabaëños expect to retain this control over changes in their community. "*The communities can do it, everything's possible, all you need is for the people to organise themselves, to work for the good of their community*" (Rodolfo, 9/11/99). Continued community solidarity is obviously crucial both to the retention of local control over development and the community's ability to execute the development strategies it selects.

In return for this self-organisation, some people believe that the government should recognise not only the customary forms of social and political organisation, but also the savings that it incurs by not having to organise that sector of society itself. For example, in a request to the state governor to provide resources for the further development of the zone in which Tabaá is located, the presidents of the fourteen communities of the zone pointed out that their area has "social stability, with zero crime and drug-trafficking," thereby saving the state the expenditure of resources that would otherwise be required to combat these social problems (Sector Zoogocho 1997:4, my translation). The document goes on to request the assistance of the state in the expansion and improvement of public services such as roads, schooling, health and electricity, and its cooperation in the development of income- and employment-generating projects.

Life in Tabaá is becoming more difficult as the community becomes more and more integrated into the national monetary economy, while the local economy remains fundamentally one of subsistence, with only limited remunerated work available. A number of people made the comment that life in Tabaá was adequate, as one could provide for one's basic needs through agriculture, but that the lack of money was increasingly problematic. *"Life in Tabaá isn't that hard ... vegetables, fruit, maize, beans, that's what people's work is ... we have enough to eat. The thing is that there's less, there's not so much money, but we do have crops, because we work"* (5/9/99). For Rodolfo, his ability to be more or less self-sufficient in terms of food, thanks to the community's land base, meant that life in Tabaá was more economically secure than city life:

To be honest, it's good to be in the country, because I've been in the cities too, and in the cities you go hungry more often than here in the country. Because in the city, if you don't have money in your wallet, then you just don't eat ... in the city, you need to earn a lot of money to be able to live, whereas here in the country, even if you don't have money you can live. (9/11/99)

However, he was also concerned about the lack of money in the community: *"We have resources, but often there's no money here.... natural resources. Like the river, there's a lot of wealth there; we're just starting to exploit it ... and there are other resources; to create more job opportunities and have more money"* (9/11/99). Others complained about the restrictions that lack of income placed on them. *"Here in Tabaá it's like that, there's no money. That's how we are ... farmers. We feel that there's no money. Where there are both father and mother, [it may be easier, but where there's just one parent,] it doesn't stretch to pay for the child's schooling; the child doesn't get to go to school,"* said Isabel, a mother who lived alone with her daughter. Emelia also noted that a lack of financial resources often affected the educational chances of young people but pointed out that *"in other cases it affects people more, like food and clothes"* (21/9/99). Manuel (22) felt compelled to leave Tabaá in search of money: *"Yes, I'd like [to live here], but the thing is that it's not easy to make money. And that's what you need every day"* (13/9/99), and Lourdes and her husband had also considered moving to the city *"for the money, aha, for the money that we sometimes don't have, until the harvest comes in"* (10/9/99). However, she also commented that in Mexican cities, it was still difficult to make

ends meet because of low wages and high rents. Alleviating poverty and augmenting incomes is thus a primary development concern in Tabaá.

Economic development is seen as not only desirable in and of itself, but also as a means to achieving the socio-cultural continuity discussed above. Given increasing monetization of the local economy, climatic and environmental changes and environmental degradation, it is possible that economic diversification is indeed the only means whereby the community will be able to continue in its accustomed manner. As mentioned previously, the advent of a disease which attacks the rainy season maize crop has given rise to large-scale migration from many communities in the region, particularly of men, vastly reducing populations and drastically affecting the form of life in these villages. David was anxious that knowledge gained through agricultural education be translated into practice in order to combat these tendencies: “[Before, the people] weren’t educated even to farm, like our ancestors, with no changes. I hope we’re going to see things change – we need to see the results of the techniques that are taught” (14/11/99). Isaac saw the diversification of agricultural techniques and crops as fundamental to the community’s development:

We still need a lot of things here ... yes, we’re united, but there are other questions we haven’t pursued, like work. Here we haven’t stopped sowing maize ... but there are other kinds of things, like vegetables, bees, apiculture ... but because the people don’t know about them, they don’t do anything except what’s necessary, sow maize, coffee, sugar cane.... But we could do that kind of thing, sow other kinds of seeds, another kind of work, to create employment opportunities here in the country. But because of lack of knowledge and so on ... we haven’t been able to advance in that area; we would like our children to advance. (17/8/99)

Rodolfo talked of the necessity of developing non-agricultural sources of income and employment also, mentioning one project the community had undertaken with government support: “We built a brick oven, with the support of the government, with the intention that people wouldn’t go to the city. If they want bricks they have them right here, and it does work. We want a machine for getting gravel from the river too, because it’s very hard work. To exploit the resources we have, to make money” (9/11/99). This project also reduced the community’s dependence on outside resources, improving its economic self-sufficiency.

Moisés had a comprehensive vision of development for Tabaá, which included agricultural and non-agricultural projects led by community members, and an education system within the village which reinforced its cultural values and catered to its particular development necessities:

[We can] create professionals, so that it helps the community, an educational strategy that has to do with agriculture, create a project for consideration by the state or federal government to create employment, opportunities for employment for graduates of universities or institutes of higher education, so that those same teachers are in the communities giving classes ... and teaching skills to farmers. [Teachers that] develop income-generating projects for farmers, find alternatives for the farmers. Create employment opportunities, create income-generating projects for women ... [They will] create projects for the people who didn't get to study, so that they have access to work ... so that it's all a circle, we're all producers, we're all farmers, or in general, everyone has it clear just what they're doing. And it's an appropriate economy, an economy developed in the community. There are projects, different projects. But it's not closed. When new generations are born, who want to leave and go to the cities, [we need to know] how to prepare these people for that. (7/11/99)

The theme of community self-sufficiency is very apparent in Moisés' idea of development also. His central idea is to break the community's dependence on outside institutions, without denying people the chance to leave the village for education or employment. Currently, those who wish to seek higher education or greater vocational opportunity have little option but to leave Tabaá temporarily or permanently, but Moisés wants community members to have the choice of obtaining these within Tabaá, or making the most of their experiences elsewhere.

Access to education and employment within the confines of the village are major preoccupations for these men, all of whom are community leaders, and for others in the village. Pablo stated his concern poignantly in terms of his hopes for his children: *"I would like them to stay and work here, but then their studies wouldn't be any use to them. It depends on them; if they want to go on with their studies, that would be great, wouldn't it? But if they don't study... I'm not against farming, I personally like farming, but if they were to find a better life, well, that would be wonderful"* (20/9/99). Under existing conditions, Pablo believes that his children's best chance in life lies outside the confines of the village. Isaac was content with the progress of the community in these areas to date, but hoped that the next generation

would see a more complete education offered in the community: “*Now we have the high school, I hope that in the future we’ll get a school of higher education, a university ... so our children are here, so they don’t go to the cities.... I repeat that we want this for our children, most likely we won’t see it*” (17/8/99). These are vital questions for the development of the community, as in the absence of employment and educational opportunities people are obliged to leave Tabaá, and a growing number choose not to return.

Migration is a primary contemporary issue for Tabaá and other rural Oaxacan communities. Tabaesños have gone north in search of work since the Second World War, when the absence of young men in the United States obliged the government to contract Mexican workers. In recent years, however, a number of factors have combined to substantially increase the number of Oaxaqueños seeking work in Mexico’s cities and in the U.S.A. Foremost among these is economic necessity, due in part to the environmental degradation and reduced harvests already mentioned. Improved communications are likewise important, as are the relative value of U.S. currency in Mexico, rising levels of education, making it difficult for graduates to find suitable employment in their communities, and the growing network of relatives and acquaintances that most Oaxaqueños can rely on in their cities of destination. Increased migration causes difficulties for rural communities in two ways: firstly, emigrants are no longer available to hold *cargos* or perform *servicios*, placing a heavier burden on those who remain; and secondly, returning migrants bring habits, ideas and diseases that can cause social problems in their communities. In the case of Tabaá, those who leave are more often attracted by the prospect of higher earnings than driven by economic necessity. Others go simply for curiosity, to experience a different way of life. The consequences for the community, however, are the same.

In Isaac’s eyes, life in the United States caused young people to devalue the culture and traditions of Tabaá:

In other countries they have another mentality ... they have another way of life. It influences them [young Tabaesños] when they go and live with other people ... and the kid changes the way he dresses, he speaks English, and so on, and they get back and corrupt the community’s culture. They think differently, they don’t

think about going to work on the farm, but about driving around in a car. (17/8/99)

Moisés' view was similar, that those who leave fail to appreciate what their upbringing in the community has given them: "*They make a comparison, "Here I have to cultivate, here I didn't have the opportunity to get ahead" ... but they never take into account the knowledge, the education of the family, they forget about their community"* (7/11/99). Manuel felt that those who had lived in the United States became arrogant: "*When someone from the village leaves for over there, and then comes back, they show off after they come back"* (13/9/99). His comment hints at the challenge to community egalitarianism brought by those who return from the cities of the north. Although Tabaeños have been migrating in search of wage labour since at least the time of the Second World War,³¹ the sums that some now return with set them at a substantial economic remove from other individuals and households, and the disparity between poor and well-off households is increasing rapidly. Although there is no denying that wealth has long been an important axis of social difference in Tabaá, some customs work to promote a modicum of economic and social equality. For example, the network of social obligations and *cargos* obliges those with more resources to host fiestas and celebrations for the entire community. Earlier this century, social equity in Tabaá was greatly enhanced by land reforms – "*Before, there were people who were caciques. Just a few people controlled the community. But now everyone works on their own land, everyone harvests"* (David, 14/11/99). Egalitarianism is also fostered by the generally democratic nature of local practices and customs. While the concern of community members tends to focus more on the cultural consequences of migration than the economic, it remains to be seen whether and to what extent economic differentiation will engender changes in the socio-cultural sphere also.

Irene viewed the social and cultural changes introduced by increasing migration philosophically: "*Things are changing, we're not like our ancestors any more. Some people say it's not good to change, that we should go on in the way of the old people, but how? Things change, whether you like it or not, because people*

³¹ Kicza (1993:xx) points out that, due to population growth, many indigenous communities "had to send out their members, either temporarily or permanently, to be laborers in the Spanish sector of the economy" even in the eighteenth century.

go and live in the cities, and they come back with another way of dressing and everything” (14/10/99). David, however, felt that returning Tabaños could bring much more serious problems:

Another important thing is health. Here you don't see too much of this illness, AIDS, or other illnesses, but when people go to the United States and to Mexico City, sometimes they make mistakes, they don't know how to look after themselves. And then they come back to the community and infect people, and then a year later there are three, four, five people ... in Tabaá that hasn't happened yet, but what has become popular is grass. They come with other ideas, another atmosphere; sometimes the people from here get mixed up with lazy people who don't want to work, it's another way of behaving. Or when they smoke grass, they contaminate, infect, that's the worst thing that can happen in a community. Because when you use drugs, you're not respecting your body. That's happened in other communities. (14/11/99)

David felt that the community could develop ways to reduce the negative impacts of migration to an extent: “*With strategies from the community, we can put the brakes on these things, because the community determines a lot of things*” (14/9/99). One strategy that has been adopted is to restrict membership in the three associations of Tabaños to those who have already completed two *servicios* in Tabaá. Those who choose to leave before this point are obliged to pay fines for missing *tequio*, rather than paying the substantially cheaper annual membership fee to the association. Hefty non-attendance fines for primary and lower secondary schooling discourage the migration of school-aged youth, and all Tabaños are obliged to retain financial ties with the community on pain of land confiscation.

In addition to impacts felt at community level, migration obviously affects family life. It is reasonably common for married men to leave their families for a period of a few years in order to save money working elsewhere, and many parents were concerned at the thought of their children living far from home. Victor, an elderly man, told me that his four children all lived outside Tabaá for study or work reasons, and that while he was proud that they had studied, he was concerned that neither of his sons would return to Tabaá to take over his plot of land and care for him in his old age (13/8/99).

However, migration obviously benefits many of those who migrate, and the community benefits from the stimulus to its economy provided by remittances and returnees. Lourdes (40s), when asked her thoughts on migration, replied “*Well, sometimes I think it’s good, because over there it’s less work and they earn more*” (10/9/99). Manuel pointed out that often even those young people who have studied as far as high school or beyond “*have nowhere to go but to the United States ... they say they earn more money there than they would in Mexico*” (13/9/99). Pablo, who had himself lived in Mexico City for nearly twenty years, saw benefit in another aspect of migration: “*I’m content, personally, that they’re leaving, that they’re getting to know [other places], because I don’t think it’s very good that they’re shut up in one place. It’s good to know [other places]*” (20/9/99). Rodolfo, on the other hand, cautioned that not all those who leave in search of their fortune find it: “*Many of them go to make money, to earn more, to live better, but in many cases these intentions, these dreams don’t work out, there are only a few who come back [with what they want].*” Rodolfo himself had more faith in education: “*Some people think it’s better to go north, to the States to work and make money, but me, I think just the opposite, because if they find a good job and save, that’s fine, but ... [for] someone who’s well-educated, it’s more secure. It may be difficult to find work, but at least what you have in your mind, what you’ve studied, no-one can take that away from you*” (9/11/99). Many young people in Tabaá were tempted by the prospect of life in the United States or in Mexico City where they could earn more money or find the kind of work they wanted – “*I want to live somewhere where there are work opportunities*” (Tomás, 23, 12/8/99); “*The thing is that you earn more there [in Mexico City] than in Oaxaca*” (Angelina, 20, 25/9/99). Some, however, felt that their chances would be better in Tabaá. Juan, who was considering studying to become a mechanic, explained that “*For example, there [in the city], when you finish studying, there are lot of mechanics. And here they need that kind of service too. And they charge a lot for it*” (12/11/99).

Tabaá’s isolation from urban centres does indeed mean that services and goods are often more expensive, and one of the consistent requests the communities of the zone make to the state government is the improvement of the road network. “The lack of roads is a determining factor in the extreme marginalisation of the

Indian villages,” states the letter from the Zoogocho zone to the Oaxaca state governor (1997:4, my translation), and petitions him to upgrade and seal local roads, which are often impassable in the rainy season. The expense of acquiring certain goods came up often when Tabaeños talked of the changes they would like to see in their community. *“It’s easier to buy clothes in the city. It’s cheaper in the city. Here it costs us more.... There are things you can’t get here”* (2/9/99), said Delfina, and Pablo, who offered building services, remarked that *“[in the cities] it’s easier to buy construction materials ... and if you phone them up, they bring you the materials you want quickly, in the city, but here no; here it’s a bit difficult to build, materials cost you almost twice as much”* (20/9/99). Although they felt that further upgrading was necessary, people were grateful for the roads that had been built, and the bus services that meant they no longer had to walk such long distances: *“We had to go to Zoogocho, to the market, by foot, to buy food, to buy everything we needed. And you carried all of your things to sell, and on the way back everything you’d bought.... It was one day, going and coming back.... Before, there were no roads, and when the children got sick, they had to carry them to Oaxaca, and we had to walk there ... it was hard. Now it’s a bit better”* (Isabel, 1/9/99). The provision of other public services was also seen as a substantial improvement. Isabel commented on improved health services and practices: *“Before there was no doctor, nurse, and there was a lot of illness. The children died ... but [now] we’re more used to having everything clean, to boiled water”* (1/9/99). *“It was a bit difficult, because we didn’t have electricity, before, and we didn’t have drinking water ... and now we live better,”* said Pablo (20/9/99). Rodolfo commented that *“Tabaá has progressed a lot, because it has the necessary services, although it still needs more services, but we have drainage, potable water, the health centre, we have preschool education, primary, secondary, and, since two years ago, the CBTa ... we’re improving, looking at other communities”* (9/11/99). David agreed that Tabaá already had access to *“the important services, the indispensable ones, like electricity, education ... and we’ve made advances. Like this town hall, it used to be made of adobe, and when it rained, it was horrible”* (14/11/99). Services have been an important part of development in Tabaá, and although the community now has the basic infrastructure, there is still room for improvement in the quality of services offered. Lourdes, for example, regretted the absence of more specialised health services in the community, as it was

difficult for her to travel to Oaxaca because of family responsibilities: *“To tell the truth I’m a bit sick ... and it’s been like that for years, my womb, and if I was in the city I’d have been to a special doctor or something, but if you have to go from here to the city ... what we need is good doctors, we have them, they come and go from the clinic, but they don’t know what it is that I have”* (10/9/99).

Educational services were clearly important to Tabaeños. Many mentioned the schools first when asked what changes had taken place in the community during their lifetimes. Many people had not had the opportunity to complete primary school because only the first grades were offered. Isabel, who had completed second grade but did not read or write, remembered that *“before, there was a ‘federal teacher,’ who was paid by the community. Every month they came round to see if we had money to pay him. We didn’t have money, and no teachers came.... At that time we bought books, with our own money, and now they just give them the books. And now there are more grades, and more Spanish, and the children learn very well”* (1/9/99). There was general satisfaction that Tabaá now had not only a complete primary school and a lower secondary school, but also a high school, known as the CBTa. Education was seen by many Tabaeños as a key to the development of their community – *“The more educated a human being is, the better ... for the good of this community, and for the good of the people themselves”* (Rodolfo, 9/11/99); *“Education is the most important”* (David, 14/11/99). This important theme will be explored in detail in the following chapter.

The fourth type of development that Tabaeños hope to see in their community is change in certain practices and ways of thinking. As mentioned in the previous chapter, some people wished to see the community’s strict gender roles relaxed and women taking more public roles in community activities, or making more use of their education: *“Because often when a woman gets married, she breaks her educational development. They forget about everything they’ve learned in nine years”* (Moisés, 7/11/99). Isabel and her daughter Florinda commented that gender relations had improved in that domestic violence had diminished:

Florinda: Before there was more violence, they used to beat the women...

Isabel: I don't like that. But it doesn't happen much now.... maybe because of education, people have studied and aren't so often violent, or because of the church, the evangelicals...

Some women and men were of the opinion that, despite improvements, there was still a considerable distance to go in the field of gender equity, and that this constituted an important part of the community's development: "*There's a lot of machismo. That's why I left (she laughs).... I think that here, women are a long way behind.... Here, their destiny was to be born, grow up, get married and have children.... Now, women have started to study, they're giving it their best shot*" (Hilaria, 21, 2/9/99). "*Because women can do it too*" (Patricia, 17, 14/9/99).

As discussed in the previous chapter, some Tabaeños felt that the traditional culture and language of the community were obstacles to its development, and thought that Tabaá would advance more rapidly if it were to give up these markers of indigenous identity. Tabaeños would commonly refer to the nearby district capital as more "modern" or "advanced," citing as proof the fact that this village is now largely monolingual in Spanish, and that many people there hold non-agricultural jobs:

Sebastián: Already in some communities, like Villa Alta, they only speak Spanish.

Lourdes: Have you been to Villa Alta? ...

S: It's more advanced.

L: They're all employees, of the government, they don't work on farms much. (10/9/99)

Fishman's description of the psychology of internal colonialism (1991:59-62, see pp37-8) is very apposite to the situation of Tabaá, and goes far to explain the development of such attitudes.

Other community members saw Tabaeños as closed-in, and felt that a certain narrow-mindedness would possibly be lessened if people were more familiar with different places and ways of life. Many young people commented on Tabaeños' propensity to gossip, complaining that they had only to be seen talking to someone of the opposite sex for rumours to spread; others saw some people of the community as envious and critical of those who had better fortune than themselves. In a number of different ways then, Tabaeños believed that social and cultural change in some respects would be beneficial to the community's development.

As can be seen from the opinions expressed in this chapter, views on the complex question of development are by no means convergent and the issue is necessarily entangled with others such as culture, identity, migration and education. For many people, development hinges on the continuation of traditional forms of life, while others believe that development will be achieved only if Tabaëños give up their indigenous identity and adopt the ways of “modern” society. There is, however, general agreement on the necessity of economic development and diversification, both to make life easier for those who live there and to make it possible for future generations to remain there. Although diversity of opinion makes it impossible to speak of development for Tabaá as a single trajectory in a predetermined direction, the community’s traditions of discussion, debate, democracy, respect and communality provide the best hope for resolution of the question of how Tabaá is to develop and for the achievement of this development. As Isaac said, *“For the most part we’re already constructing what we want the future of our children to be, for tomorrow. We all think of our children more than anything, because here we’ve really suffered a lot, due to the marginalisation that we face. And, thanks to everyone’s support, we’ve been able to advance.... We always have it in sight and we’re always planning, making plans for the good our children; we’re looking at the present and future of our children”* (17/8/99).

Chapter 6

TABAEÑO PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION WITH REGARD TO DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL CHANGE

CURRENT EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Education in the Tabaá primary school, officially known as the Cuauhtemoc Bilingual Primary School, follows the national curriculum and takes place almost exclusively in Spanish. Many children arrive in first grade with some grasp of Spanish, acquired at kindergarten or from their parents, although only a few speak this language with anything approaching fluency. However, within one or two years, most children are capable of conversing happily in either Spanish or Zapoteco, despite receiving no formal instruction in Spanish as a second language. In the first years of primary instruction, a great deal of class-time is devoted to mastery of the Spanish alphabet and of basic reading and writing skills. Once children have acquired these skills, the other subjects are introduced: mathematics, natural sciences, history, geography, civic education and “indigenous language.” This last, in which Tabaño children learn to read and write Zapoteco, is a supplement to the national curriculum taught only in “bilingual” schools administered by the General Directorate of Indigenous Education (DGEI). Spanish language and literacy skills continue to be developed in Spanish classes, although these follow the same texts and syllabus as in monolingual schools.

Classes run from 9am to noon and from 3pm to 5.30pm, Monday through Friday. Each week begins with “honouring the flag,” a half-hour patriotic ceremony in which the entire school assembles to swear allegiance to the Mexican national flag, sing the national anthem, and listen to recitations of patriotic poems by students. The students then march off, military-style, to begin lessons. In the 1999-2000 school year there were eleven classes: three first grade, two each of second, third and fourth grades, one fifth and one sixth grade. Although there must generally be at least twenty students to a class, the three first grade classes each had only seventeen; the school had asked for this dispensation in order to try to combat a disturbingly high rate of first grade repetition. Students move on to second grade when it is considered that they have grasped the basic mechanics of reading and writing in Spanish. From

the 1998-99 school year, 15 of 61 children in first grade (24.6%) failed to move on to second grade. In the previous school year, 17 of 57 children (29.8%) repeated, and in the preceding year, 11 of 53 (20.8%) (Hernández 1999, pers. comm.). Repetition rates across all grades for these three years were 17.5% in 1998-99, 15.4% for the previous year, and 16.0% in 1996-97. These figures are commensurate with national statistics for DGEI schools (see pp60-1) but well above general state and national statistics (see p65).

None of the teachers at the Tabaá primary school in the 1999-2000 school year were native to Tabaá, but two had married into the community. Most of the teachers were Zapoteco, many from nearby communities, but one was from a different ethnic group. More than half of the teachers were studying toward their bachelor's degree in indigenous education and travelled to Oaxaca City every other weekend to attend classes. The teachers meet before the beginning of the school year to elect a principal and decide who will take charge of which classes. In the year in question, all of the higher grades were taught by men, and the lower grades by women, with the exception of one man who taught first grade.

Classroom observation revealed that the general teaching pattern employed by most teachers, particularly in the lower grades, was that of periods of blackboard-based whole-class instruction followed by exercises which students were expected to copy and complete individually (although collaboration among students was neither prohibited nor unusual) before presenting them to the teacher for grading. Students were sometimes called or asked to volunteer to go to the front of the room to complete exercises on the blackboard or, in the higher grades, to present their work orally. The small-group work style was used occasionally in the higher grades. While most teachers assumed sole authority in the classroom, one teacher, in charge of the fifth grade, employed a more democratic style of classroom management, encouraging students to contribute opinions and discuss issues of leadership, discipline, etc. However, the majority of teachers were far from authoritarian. Classrooms were generally fairly noisy, relaxed environments, and no instances of harsh disciplining were observed. Although teacher-student relations were relatively casual, and students felt free to address teachers or move around the classroom at

will, the authority of teachers was respected, and a simple reprimand was generally sufficient to calm an excessively noisy or boisterous student.

Gender relations prevalent in the community were reflected to some extent in the school, most noticeably in the higher grades. Upon reaching fourth or fifth grade, most girls began to dress in skirts and blouses (younger girls commonly wear trousers to school) and became much more shy in their demeanour, often showing obvious reluctance to speak in front of the class, sometimes to the point of inaudibility. Girls in the higher grades volunteered answers, opinions and information much less often than boys, even when they knew the correct answer. Positions of leadership, responsibility or class representation were awarded disproportionately often to male students. To give an example: as the sixth-grade class was rehearsing a play to be performed for the community on the anniversary of a historic event, the teacher, concerned for the quality of the presentation, reassigned all of the female parts to boys, as the girls who had been rehearsing for these parts could not be convinced to raise their voices to an audible level. The community's gender stereotypes were thus reinforced in the school in various ways. On the other hand, the majority of the teachers were female, disrupting stereotypes of male authority and providing successful role models for girls.

As all teachers originated from other communities, none spoke the Tabaá dialect of Zapoteco fluently. Guadalupe, who had married into the community around fifteen years previously, understood the dialect and could speak it, although she was clearly more comfortable in her own dialect. The use of Zapoteco in the classroom by students was universally permitted, and occasionally incorporated into academic activities, even where teachers did not understand what students were saying. For example, in one exercise where fifth grade students were required to practice public speaking skills by pretending to make a public announcement over a microphone, they were asked to do so in both Spanish and Zapoteco. In another case, fourth grade students who had been told a story were asked to re-tell it in their own words, in both Spanish and Zapoteco. One first grade teacher also attempted to enhance students' understanding of and interest in the lesson by asking them to translate the words they were learning to read into Zapoteco. These examples all

communicated a positive message to students about the value of their own language. Moreover, they altered the power relations between teacher and students, moving closer to Cummins' "collaborative relations of power" and Freire's educational ideal, where students and teachers learn from each other. This was especially notable in one third grade indigenous language lesson given by Guadalupe, where she deferred to students' superior knowledge of the local dialect and worked together with them to correct the Zapoteco sentences students had written on the blackboard.

Language acquisition was indubitably an important issue in the school. Students who entered first grade with less Spanish than others or were slower to acquire a conversational command of Spanish appeared to experience considerable difficulty in completing the academic tasks required of them. Most students acquire conversational proficiency within one or two years of entering school, but there are indications that academic proficiency, which requires comprehension of decontextualised language, is not so rapidly acquired. Teachers worried that students did not express themselves well either in written or oral form, and that although they mastered the mechanics of reading, they often failed to grasp the meaning of what they read, even in later grades (Hernández 1999, pers. comm.). This is consistent with Cummins' findings for children from non-English speaking backgrounds in the United States (see p33). The absence of a strong culture of literacy in the community also contributes to this problem, as Harker suggests is the case for Māori children in New Zealand (see p30). The historically oral nature of Zapoteco and the relatively low rate of literacy in the community and region mean that written language plays little part in the home culture of most Tabaeños, its use being generally restricted to the educational and community management spheres. This situation is reflected in the school, where few books other than textbooks are in evidence, and reading and writing activities are restricted almost exclusively to the exercises given in these texts. Some teachers encouraged students to make use of the small town library, which contains a selection of children's books; however, as Celestino, the school principal, commented, "*there are no teachers here who like reading ...unfortunately, we're not used to reading*" (16/11/99).

Finally, it must be noted that although most teachers are from approximately the same ethnolinguistic and social background as students, a number of factors conspire against greater inclusion and affirmation of this culture in the classroom. These include the dialectal variation that limits teacher-student communication in Zapoteco and the fact that the primary school curriculum is designed in Spanish and for Spanish speakers, both mentioned previously. In addition to these, the fact that many teachers have relatively little training or experience induces them to base their teaching heavily on the materials provided, also in Spanish, and on their own schooling experiences, dating from a period when the assimilationist ethic was more influential. Low levels of training also mean that teachers have limited access to up-to-date educational research and to good teaching models and examples. Moreover, like the community members who wished to see the local language and culture supplanted by Spanish, many teachers have to some degree internalised the messages sent by the structure of power relations in Mexican society, where indigenous cultures have for centuries been subordinated and disparaged. Belonging to the same ethnic group as students is thus no guarantee that teachers will not, to a greater or lesser degree, reflect the power relations prevalent in society in their classroom practice.

OPINIONS REGARDING EDUCATION

Tabaeños tend to be very interested in the education of their children and the schools are often the subject of debate in assemblies. As mentioned, the community enforces attendance throughout the six grades of primary schooling and three of lower secondary, on pain of heavy fines, and an increasing number of young Tabaeños are choosing to attend high school since the Tabaá branch of the Agricultural Technical High School (CBTa) opened. Isaac, himself a teacher, commented that “*formal education is received very well here. There aren't many problems with its acceptance*” (17/8/99). Teachers at the primary school and kindergarten observed that Tabaeño parents took more interest in the schools and demanded more of teachers than those in other communities they had worked in:

It's very different in Tabaá. The people take a great interest in education, and in other places where I have been, it's not like that.... You can see it at the meetings, because they ask questions and they're interested, and they at least give the children an exercise book and a pencil; in other villages the kids come to

school without anything.... the town authorities support us, they always have. There, we never received any financial support from the authorities, but here they discuss education in the assemblies ... and also they question the teachers; if they don't like a teacher, they ask for them to be replaced. (Gabriela, kindergarten teacher, 15/11/99)

Celestino, a primary teacher, talked about the resolution of questions at parent-teacher meetings: *"Tabaá is a community where the people participate, a lot, where people state their opinions. And that's good. We debate some issues, but we resolve them, we sort them out. It's good that they bring them up; we don't want to hide the problems. It's better that they say it to our faces"* (7/9/99). Tabaeños see education as an important medium for individual and community development and are clearly very concerned with the quality of education their children receive.

Perceived objectives of education commonly included the personal development of the individual, the attainment of personal economic security and the development of the community. Many people felt that the primary objective of education was to inculcate a child with manners or respect. In Spanish, the words "educated" and "education" are often used to refer to a person who is well-mannered, or to a polite and respectful way of dealing with other people, and Tabaeños often used these words to describe how they expected that someone with studies should be. Jorge felt it important that in school, *"the teachers should teach them about 'education,' to respect older people, in case their parents don't tell them; because respect is the first thing a person should have"* (6/11/99). Cristina believed that someone who had studied *"should be very 'educated,' "* and that this was a primary requisite for achieving one's goals in life: *"Because if you're not, you always have problems. An educated person can go as far as they want, but if not..."* (12/8/99). David was of the same opinion: *"If a child doesn't grow up 'educated,' he can't better himself in his social life in the community, because he picks up bad habits, vices. The important thing is that he respects his teachers, the people, his parents, who decided to educate him"* (14/11/99). This important element of personal development is seen to be partly the responsibility of parents and partly that of teachers. The high priority placed on instruction in this value within the school by Tabaeños concurs with Guzmán's findings regarding the priorities of indigenous Oaxacan parents (1991:112). The emphasis placed on "respect" and "education" is

consonant with maintenance of the network of social relations in Tabaá society. As implied by David's comment, "education" also implies seriousness and a sense of responsibility, important qualities in a social system where all must contribute to the functioning and development of the community.

Tabaeños saw education at higher levels as continuing to contribute to one's employability, economic security and personal development, often using phrases such as "*becoming somebody*," "*becoming something*" and "*getting on*" to describe what they wanted their children to get out of their education. Most parents wanted to see their children continue their education beyond the level which they themselves had reached, often to a "professional" (i.e. university) level, although this was economically difficult or impossible for many families. David captured this aspiration when asked about the goal of education: "*The improvement of the student. A concern to get on. Here we have a saying that goes: 'If I couldn't study, I don't want you to make the same mistake – I want you to be better than me.' Their children should be better than they are – that's how many people are here*" (14/11/99). A university education is seen by many as the purpose and conclusion of previous studies. This can be seen from Lorena's comment on her aspirations for her daughters: "*We'll see if one of them, because I have two daughters, gets a degree, because it's no good if you spend money and don't see the results. It would be good if they kept studying*" (13/10/99). Cristina also thought it important that children "*finish their studies, to become someone*" (12/8/99). Education was seen by many as offering their children the opportunity of an easier life, with less hardship. "*It's important for me, because they can, they have the right to have an easier job, to get a more comfortable job. They can live better,*" said Saúl (5/9/99), and Lourdes commented that education was important "*so that they have a good job, so they don't suffer like I have. Because I don't have any money, but as a teacher, every fortnight you get something, so you can buy what your children need*" (10/9/99). Angelina saw education as a means to a more secure livelihood than farming: "*To improve. I mean, I don't want to be like my parents, growing things on the farm, working on the farm, and sometimes the land doesn't produce*" (25/9/99). For Delfina, the economic security to which education was the key was a means of guaranteeing her children's independence: "*To have an education, to have a future, to work, to look after*

themselves" (2/9/99). David, among others, also suggested that an educated person was more able to fend for themselves and make the most of their life: "*When people don't educate themselves, they're weaker when it comes to getting on, advancing*" (14/11/99). Francisco saw education as offering his children more opportunities than he had had and thus giving them the opportunity to give back to society:

Because the person who studies can explore his life, can have better things, that we haven't achieved. And that's the most important thing, to get to know other cities, even other countries, and be useful to society; and be professionals, but good professionals, with positive ideas, who achieve their goals.
(15/9/99)

The promise of a "better life" with higher social status and greater economic security was thus for many people one of the main goals of education. Tabaá has produced quite a number of professionals, including agronomists, teachers, lawyers, priests and engineers, substantiating the possibility of achieving this aspiration.

Francisco's final comment indicates a further expectation that Tabañes have of education: that the individual who succeeds academically and professionally will in turn give back to the community. Suarez-Orozco (1987:291-99) notes that Central American immigrants in the U.S.A. wanted to "become somebody" not only out of a desire for individual betterment or status, but also as a form of repayment to parents and relatives for the suffering involved in providing them with an education, and in order to relieve the hardships experienced by family members and contribute to the well-being of their ethnic community. Although the situation of Tabañes is by no means as extreme as that of Central Americans fleeing war in their own countries, similar aspirations appear to motivate both parents and students. Lourdes remarked that she was in favour of her children studying so that they could "*be something. I'd like them to say, 'Thanks to my mother, thanks to my parents'*" (10/9/99). Manuel, who had graduated from high school but whose parents had been unable to support him to go on to university while providing for seven younger siblings, said, "*I wanted to better myself some more, or be something, for the community.... So that it moves ahead, because sometimes communities just break down ...there are communities [where] the people don't think of their community. I want this community to move forward, to be an engineer or something, for the community*"

(13/9/99). Guadalupe expressed the desire that her children would use their studies for the good of the community:

[I would like them to] come back and do their servicios. If they [leave to] study. But I'm not talking about servicios like the ones my husband does; I'm not saying I want them to come back to be topiles. I'm talking about other services, that they help the community. I tell them to go and study, [and then] to go to the communities where they grew up, where they studied. In whatever they can. Their father is like that too, he supports his community.
(10/10/99)

While some Tabaños who have gained professional qualifications have elected to remain in the cities, others have returned to the community temporarily or permanently to exercise their knowledge and skills for the good of the community. A number of students studying in the new high school, which specialises in agricultural education, expressed a desire to go on to study agronomy, forestry or veterinary medicine at university and to return to the community after completing their studies. Patricia, who wanted to study agronomy, said, “*I plan to live here in the village, to support the people of my community*” (14/9/99). In Miguel’s view, students had a duty to give something back to the community in view of the dispensations the community gives students in order to allow them to study, such as exemptions from *tequio* and *servicios*. In order to attract as many students as possible to the high school, the community also paid, from municipal funds, the enrolment fees of all students in the 1999-2000 school year, and CBTa students were moreover given a scholarship of 100 pesos each month for living expenses. Miguel saw it in this way:

If you become somebody, you have your community, you have your family. Don't forget.... I'm somebody, thanks to my community, to my family, to my people, who lived through this, who educated me...because before, when we were in the primary, all the children went to do tequio; they didn't let us go to study.... Now the CBTa is up and running here in this community, but they [the community] give them that freedom to study. They give them a scholarship from the community, they help them, and so on. They shouldn't forget that the community is also supporting them, is helping. (12/9/99)

Rodolfo thought it important that his daughters study as far as they were able, both for their own personal development and for the good of the community:

...give them as much education as I can, so that they have a high level of education ...not so much for a job, but so they're educated, so they know what changes there are in the cities, what's going on with economic development, and also the technological advances that are happening in the country and in other countries; and on

the other hand, to be with their people from Tabaá, so that whoever might arrive, they're here with their people, with at least an education, even if it's not that good, but so they know how to look after themselves. That's the idea I have of education, I value it. I like studying very much, but I didn't have the opportunity to study at a higher level; but what I didn't have, that's what I want to give my daughters. (9/11/99)

Education is thus seen by Tabaeños as an important means to social mobility, and one that has the potential to benefit both the individual, enhancing their personal development and expanding their opportunities, and the community, which can benefit from the knowledge and experience they have gained. The strong identification of the individual with the community and the importance of social cohesion are once again very evident here.

Education was seen as important for both boys and girls, although a number of people commented that this had not been so much the case in the previous generation. Some of this sentiment had been due to simple sexism, as Hilaria remarked: *"It's good that [women] are studying now, because before, they just didn't study...they said that women shouldn't study.... Here, their destiny was to be born, grow up, get married and have children"* (2/9/99). Another obstacle to women's education was parental fear of unplanned pregnancy. Delfina remembered that when she was young, children had had to go to boarding schools in order to study beyond fourth grade, but that only boys had been able to attend these (2/9/99). Lourdes remarked that she had enjoyed studying and would have liked to continue on to secondary school. Her brothers had become teachers and lawyers, but her parents had been unable or unwilling to meet her own schooling expenses: *"They made [my brothers] study, and they studied; but me, because I'm a woman, my parents didn't support me. It's the way of parents here, they're scared that people- that their daughter will get pregnant."* She said that in the case of her own daughter, *"I would support her to go and study, it's important, it's good for her"* (10/9/99). The possibility of pregnancy continues to be an issue in the education of young women today. Angelina, whose older sister had come home from university pregnant, was refused parental permission to leave Tabaá to attend high school: *"I wanted to go, but my Dad didn't let me because of what happened with my sister"* (25/9/99). Angelina had thus spent two years at home after finishing lower secondary school, and had been one of the first to enrol in the new high school when it opened in Tabaá. On

graduating, she planned to work for two years in order to finance her own university studies, to which her parents had already agreed. The option of studying within their own community is thus particularly important for women, and the proximity of the new high school represents a major new opportunity for the community's young women. With regard to appropriate learning for boys and girls, most felt that it was good for children of both sexes to study all subjects: *"Now they learn to sew...before, the boys didn't like sewing. Embroidery was for the girls, and now the boys learn to knit too, everything...it's good. Because you should learn all sorts of things. If I'd had a son, I would have told him to go to the class, even if it was women's stuff...it's good"* (Cristina, 12/8/99).

Because of the perceived importance of education in individual and community development, educational quality was a matter of much concern. Many people commented on a perceived decline in the standard of the curriculum and of teaching and educational methods over the last generation. Isaac commented that a decline in the real value of teachers' wages had affected teaching quality: *"If a teacher is well paid, and so on, he's going to perform well, but if a teacher's not paid, he can't perform very well. That's why there are deficiencies in our education, because a lot of teachers are trying to get other jobs [as well]"* (17/8/99). Delfina felt that the stricter methods she had been taught with were more effective: *"If we didn't learn something, we were forced to study, they shut us in; that's how we learned our letters.... Now it's not like that. They pass anyway. If they behave well, they pass, and they don't learn, they just do what they're told"* (2/9/99). Paulino believed that changes to the educational curriculum had led to a continuous decline in educational standards and children's learning:

When I was in primary school I was taught well, but when my son went to primary, on the contrary, it was further behind. It wasn't the same, it was worse.... We talked about this a lot when we wrote the [Community] Statute. With a lot of things you say, 'Why did the government do that?' But in my opinion, education was better before; and they say that before our time it was even better."
(6/7/99)

Many Tabaeños were thus dissatisfied to a degree with the education their children were receiving, and teacher training was a contentious issue. Lourdes, who had a daughter in second grade, felt that the fact that some teachers had not

completed their training affected the quality of their teaching: *“They don’t teach them very clearly.... There are teachers that are trained to teach classes, and there are teachers that aren’t- well, that are still studying”* (10/9/99). Although the Tabaá school is not responsible for the fact that it is assigned many teachers still in training, this is always the subject of debate and rancour at parent-teacher meetings. Francisco felt that both the government and the teachers themselves were to blame for the excessive number of training teachers in rural communities:

The government takes advantage...they send us the teachers who are starting out ...and after they graduate, the teachers go to the cities, and why? Because they’re better trained and they leave, and we’ll always be a village of opportunities; but we never get the reward for that. The teachers get their degrees ...they get their training here, we give them the opportunity. What we want is that they come back, but until now they haven’t done that. (15/9/99)

While Francisco thought it reasonable that the school should have some training teachers, it had been suggested by others that the village request the replacement of all those teachers who had not completed their training. Ironically, Tabaá has gained a reputation among teachers in the zone for being demanding and somewhat difficult, and more experienced teachers, who are given first choice of assignment, often prefer to work in other communities, with the result that Tabaá often receives more training teachers than other schools in the zone.

The impact of language on the education of Tabaeño children is of concern to many community members. Lourdes remarked on the difficulties that children with less exposure to Spanish encounter on entering school:

They have trouble learning Spanish when they go to kindergarten, because the teacher tells them to line up, and they just stand there. They don’t know what she means. And then when they go inside, they put out the colours...and the teacher tells them such-and-such a colour, and they just stand there, poor kids, they don’t know which colour she’s said. There are some kids who don’t know, who don’t pick it up quickly, which colour is ‘black,’ which colour is ‘green.’ Kids that grow up with just Spanish are quick to say, ‘Me, teacher, let me do it,’ because they’ve known it since when they were little...but those that only speak the dialect at home, it’s difficult for them, and they’re shy about speaking. (10/9/99)

Many Tabaeños, including Lourdes, felt that it was better for teachers to speak to children only in Spanish so that the children picked it up more quickly, in accordance with the “maximum exposure” theory. Hilaria remembered that when she had been at

primary school, children were fined for speaking Zapoteco, and spoke approvingly of this extreme technique: *“50 pesos for each word ...and now they’re allowed to talk Zapoteco, but before we weren’t, because the teachers realised that if we talked Zapoteco, we didn’t understand Spanish.... It’s better that they don’t let them. Because they already know it”* (2/9/99). A few community members felt that children would learn Spanish more quickly and perform better academically if teachers could speak in Zapoteco when children didn’t understand what was being said in Spanish, but none suggested that Spanish should be taught as a second language or that classes other than “indigenous language” be taught in the Zapoteco language. As we have seen, serious doubts have been cast on the validity of the “maximum exposure” theory by evidence that shows that children’s acquisition of a more widely-spoken language is not compromised by time spent on instruction in their first language, as long as there is sufficient exposure to the second language (see p32-3). Although the intuitive appeal of the “maximum exposure” theory makes the opinions of Lourdes’ and Hilaria understandable, it is very possible that access to more information would alter the views of community members on the form of education most appropriate for Tabaeño children.

Views on the cultural consequences of the education presently offered in Tabaá generally fell into two categories: that formal education has no effect on the culture of the community, and that schooling has an adverse effect on local culture and undermines cultural values. Rodolfo, who took the latter view, believed that the curriculum taught in the primary school was detrimental to students’ understanding of their environment:

They’re putting things about other countries in the kids’ heads. They teach the kids what there is in other countries, what mountains there are, what resources they have, what each country has, the continents, capitals, and everything like that they teach, and it does affect us...the kids should know their community, their state, their country. It’s not a bad thing, but I think they should start with what they have, to know it better. (9/11/99)

Moisés saw the education that was presently offered as inimical to his culture and the development of his community because of its failure to acknowledge and value indigenous cultures and languages: *“Education talks about progress...in the indigenous villages, in the Sierra...that’s what rural teachers teach, that to be part of national development, you have to stop being indigenous. You have to speak the*

official language, Spanish, to have rights. Your indigenous language doesn't matter, what counts is [Spanish]" (7/11/99). He also used the example of indigenous religions to illustrate this point:

The indigenous communities suffered under the Spanish, and their penetration brought a religion.... And that's part of education. So there was already one religion, their own religion, but with the Spanish it took a knock. But resistance continued and continues today.... This is part of the ideology, part of education.... The Constitution of the United Mexican States says in Article 24...freedom of expression, freedom of religion. But the indigenous sector was never taken into account, what was their own religion...and that's what I mean, that's what's written down, from the teachers, it's not their fault, but there it is. And this concept gets to the students, and they grow up, and become professionals.
(7/11/99)

Moisés saw the higher status accorded to Spanish language in Mexican society and in formal education as affecting both the cultural values and the stability of indigenous communities: "*Another concept is that the [indigenous] language is useless, worthless. What good is the language going to do you? 'If you go to Mexico City, and you can't speak Spanish well, you won't have work, so get an education.'* And what does it do? *It's another cause of migration*" (7/11/99).

For perhaps the majority of Tabaeños, however, the promise of economic development offered by the acquisition of mainstream cultural attributes and skills such as Spanish and literacy outweighed considerations of cultural continuity. Pablo, for example, recognised that "*the modernity*" brought by schools affected the community culturally, but felt that "*that's OK, for me that's fine*" (20/9/99). Others did not believe that education affected the local culture. David believed that the community's culture was strong enough to resist the potentially disruptive influence of education:

Education doesn't affect the culture of the community as long as the young people are the ones who have to adapt their way of thinking to the culture of the community. It would affect it if students didn't respect their culture. Because it could happen that after primary, secondary, high school, university, the student didn't even respect the culture of their community, they could think 'This won't help me, I have another life now.' *The most fundamental thing is that it depends a lot on the person, the student.* (14/11/99)

Guadalupe, for whom "culture" had primarily to do with "*the fiestas, the language, the traditions,*" was of the opinion that education "*doesn't affect [the culture],*

because when there's a fiesta, the students participate" (10/10/99). Most people then, did not see the curriculum taught in the primary school as problematic, with the exception of the somewhat controversial subject of "indigenous language." Generally speaking, how well the curriculum was taught was a topic of greater concern than that of its effect on local culture.

The fact that the effects of education on their culture are not always immediately obvious to Tabaeños does not, however, mean that these effects are negligible. Most of the cultural effects of formal education noted by Acunzo in his study of a nearby Mixe community (see pp13-14) apply equally to the situation of San Juan Tabaá, and many are reflected in the comments of Tabaeños. For example, Tabaeño children would traditionally have been productive rather than dependent members of the family and community from an early age. Children can often be seen looking after younger siblings, running errands and assisting their parents with such tasks as transporting firewood or preparing tortillas outside of school hours, and it is certainly apparent that they are expected to take a share of the family's workload at an earlier age than their city counterparts. Tabaá's exemption of students from the requirements of *tequio* implies acceptance of this trade-off of education for productivity at community level, but at family level there are those who object to the enforced removal of their children from the labour force. Manuel, the fifth of twelve children, felt that it was unfair to oblige all children of large and poor families to attend nine years of schooling:

In some cases, you can oblige them, but in other cases, for example where there are many children, like in our case...they shouldn't be obliged. Because it depends on the father: if he wants his children to study, he's going to make the effort to send his child to school, but if they don't have the means, they shouldn't be obliged.
(13/9/99)

As noted earlier, formal education also takes its toll on indigenous cultures by assuming indigenous children to be at a disadvantage educationally (see p30). Teachers and community members tended to focus on the skills and attributes that children lacked, particularly Spanish language skills, but also others such as wide experience of different environments and people, access to the vicarious experiences brought by television and other media, and a culture of literacy, rather than on the advantages that their culture and experiences conferred, such as the command of an

additional language, a strong social and cultural identity, environmental awareness, and a wide range of practical knowledge and skills. This perspective tends to devalue indigenous knowledge and instead privilege Spanish and non-indigenous knowledge as more important. It also privileges non-indigenous learning styles over indigenous forms of education, positioning formal education as the only way of acquiring “useful” knowledge. Exposure to this orientation, evident in both the school programme and the attitudes of the adults around them, undermines children’s confidence and pride in their indigenous identity and in their own knowledge and experience, which research evidence suggests leads to lowered academic achievement, social dislocation and uncontrolled cultural change (see pp28-30).

A number of suggestions made by Tabaeños regarding ways in which education could better support the local community reflect a concern that education is not currently contributing as well as it could to the community’s cultural and economic development. Saúl was in favour of students being taught, through practice, skills which they could apply in the community: *“In the CBTa they teach them through practice, and they work. They teach them to work, to look after animals, birds, and how to sow seeds...they try it out. In practice.... We want them to learn to embroider, to sew...workshops...carpentry”* (5/9/99). Manuel thought that the present curriculum could be improved by the addition of more English education and *“other kinds of studies...like veterinary, how to inject animals, because sometimes they get diseases...and they all die,”* but that it was unnecessary to teach more agricultural skills: *“Since...a long time ago, the indigenous man has followed the custom of putting manure on the land so it produces, and that’s not really necessary because we already know it. We already know about farming, but the other things we don’t know are what will help us most”* (13/9/99). Rodolfo believed that children should learn first about their local geography and environment before studying those of other places:

I think that from primary school, children should be taught to know their territory, the communities we adjoin...because a lot of the time, because of the education they get, they know more about other countries than about their own state, their own community.... The programmes arrive, they talk about other countries, and that doesn’t help us at all.... They should start with what they have, to know more. (9/11/99)

In contrast to those who believed that local history and cultural values were better learned outside the school, Irene's opinion was that *"It's important that they learn these things, the language, the traditional dress, and it's important that they learn them at school, because some of them don't care, how things used to be in Tabaá. The old people know, but they don't ask them, because they don't care, whereas if it's at school, they have to care"* (14/10/99). Some believed that the teaching of local cultural values such as respect and manners was also a fundamental part of school education, as mentioned previously. All of these comments betray an underlying concern that current educational methods and curricula are working against, undervaluing, or at the least failing to uphold important elements of Tabaá's culture.

The place of local language and culture in the school curriculum was a topic of some disagreement among Tabaños. Some parents felt that the primary objective of school learning was to provide children with access to knowledge and skills that would benefit them in wider society, particularly Spanish, while others thought that the school should place emphasis on reaffirming the value of their own culture, history and language to children, and teaching them skills that would be of use to them within the community. The first of these viewpoints is exemplified in the comments of Delfina (see p95) and Angelina (see p96), who felt that Zapoteco should be kept out of the school because children could better spend their time learning things that would be useful to them outside the community. Lourdes also took the view that it was unnecessary to teach Zapoteco in school because the children already spoke it: *"For me, Spanish is more important. Because when they teach them to speak in the dialect, the children, since they were born, already understand it.... The teachers now teach them to talk Spanish, it's more important. Here they already speak the dialect very well"* (10/9/99). She felt that Spanish, on the other hand, was difficult for children to learn – *"It's difficult for them to pronounce it, and write it"* – and that emphasis should be placed on consolidating students' command of Spanish. Luis, who had spent several years in the United States, thought it more important that children learn English than Zapoteco in school, because the great variation in the dialects of Zapoteco meant that it was of limited use outside the community, whereas with Spanish and English one could communicate wherever one went (12/8/99).

Jorge, a high school student, was not against the teaching of local history and language in the school in principle, but felt that the lack of continuity into secondary schooling made the teaching of Zapoteco redundant: *“The subjects they teach us in the tele-secondary and in high school don’t have anything to do with Zapoteco.”* On the other hand, although he believed it important that children study local history – *“Why Tabaá changed, because in Tabaá they believed in different gods before the Spanish came, and Catholicism came; and why they changed the way houses are built, because they were different before too. All the history of Tabaá, what the Spanish did here in Tabaá, and in the rest of the country,”* he felt that these things should be learned outside school, as *“the teachers aren’t going to be able to talk about what happened in Tabaá, any of that, because they’re not from here”* (6/11/99). Cristina agreed: *“Not in the school, because they don’t know all of the history of [Tabaá]. The old people know it, but by memory, not written down. I think they should learn from those who know”* (12/8/99).

Many people felt that the teaching of Zapoteco in the school posed a similar problem, in that teachers from other communities spoke different variants of the language, making it difficult for them to teach Tabaeño children. *“Because there are differences between communities, the Zapoteco is different...you can’t pronounce it the same; and if a bilingual teacher comes to teach how to write Zapoteco, it’s not easy, because in other communities they don’t speak the same Zapoteco”* (Manuel, 13/9/99). Some, like Angelina, felt that for this reason it would be better to remove Zapoteco from the school curriculum entirely: *“They say that in the first years [the teachers] should talk Zapoteco, but not all the teachers speak our Zapoteco. It’s different, and the children get even more confused”* (25/9/99). Others were of the opinion that the problem could be resolved if Tabaeños could teach this subject. Francisco thought it vital that Tabaá’s variant was that taught in the school, and that for this reason it was important that it was taught by people from the community: *“As for Zapoteco, it should be the real one, our one, and we should teach it to the children, and not them, not the teachers”* (15/9/99). He thought that those teachers from Tabaá should return to the community to teach, or else that *“somebody [should be] trained, or a group, to perform this role.... People from the community”* (15/9/99). Miguel supported the use of Zapoteco in the schools, but felt that teachers from other communities both impeded children’s academic progress – *“They don’t*

speak it the same as we do, and when they give an exam, or an assignment in the indigenous language, it's different. And when they teach the children to write...Zapoteco language, they're going to teach it differently from how we speak it" – and prejudiced the community's cultural continuity: "The government organises [indigenous education] to maintain the culture, but I think that instead of maintaining the culture we're also losing it, because they don't send us teachers who are from our communities." He attributed this problem to the teacher-assignment criteria of the SEP: *"If they knew how to assign teachers...those who are from Tabaá should give classes in Tabaá; the ones that know the Zapoteco of Tabaá and can work with the children"* (12/9/99).

A further reason given for the exclusion of Zapoteco from the primary curriculum was that the writing system used was very difficult and confused the children. While this sentiment can be attributed in part to an unfamiliarity with both the concept and practice of reading and writing Zapoteco, it also has to do with use of the regional alphabet, difficulties with which were discussed above (see pp100-1). Some remarked that the Zapoteco textbooks provided by the SEP were as good as unintelligible to Tabaños. *"Some books came out – I don't remember in which grade they gave them out – that no-one understood, hardly anyone understood them.... I tried to read them, but I didn't understand,"* said Pablo (20/9/99), and Rodolfo, *"The books that arrive at the schools – to be honest, we adults don't understand them, and it's worse for the kids. We don't understand the alphabet at all. It's a bad investment on the part of the government. It hasn't brought results"* (9/11/99). Saúl, who read an alternative Zapoteco alphabet, developed specifically for the Tabaá dialect by a missionary who had lived in the community, commented that *"It's difficult for the teachers to teach it too. It's difficult for the teachers, even they can't write it correctly, as we speak it,"* but that *"it can be done. For those of us who read [Zapoteco], it's always difficult, and writing it too, but it can be done"* (5/9/99). Delfina stated that she was against the teaching of Zapoteco in the primary because *"the children get confused with Zapoteco, and they don't understand the letters, the Zapoteco. You can't read it"* (2/9/99). Her daughter, Hilaria, agreed that *"It's difficult to read it,"* but later commented, regarding the alphabet developed by the missionary, that *"I would have liked that to be what they taught in the school. I think it's very good. As he was a specialist, I think he did it well. You can still*

understand it. Whereas the way the teachers write, it's difficult to understand, to read" (2/9/99).³² It is possible, then, that some objections to the teaching of the Zapoteco language could be resolved if problems regarding the variant spoken by teachers and the alphabet used could be dealt with.

Despite current difficulties, many people were of the opinion that the local culture and language had an important part to play in schooling. David saw it as vital that the Zapoteco taught was that which children spoke in the community, in order to reaffirm their sense of identity: *"I want them to learn to write our own Zapoteco, because it's the most valuable thing for us, it's something very important. It's original to us"* (14/11/99). Rodolfo saw the recognition of the local language in the schools as a form of revalidation of indigenous culture, to awaken a pride in their identity on the part of Tabaëños:

So we don't lose our cultural value, that's the objective ... so that the values that our ancestors left us continue, so that we're not ashamed to say what our roots are. So that an indigenous person is worth the same as someone from the city. That's what I think. We don't have to be ashamed. Perhaps because of our colour, our race, but we don't have to be ashamed. We have everything, everything that the people who live in the city have, that's my idea. In my case, when we go to a meeting in the city, we're not ashamed to say that we come from Tabaá. Why should we go around hiding our roots? We're from Tabaá. (9/11/99)

Francisco saw first language literacy education as *"very important. Otherwise it [the local language] will disappear. Because if not, in a little while, I don't know, but it could be that it falls into oblivion"* (15/9/99). Saúl was of the same opinion: *"It's good [that they teach Zapoteco in the primary]. It's good, because if they don't, the dialect will die out"* (5/9/99), and Cristina thought that teachers should use *"both – Zapoteco and Spanish. So that it's not forgotten"* (12/8/99). For these people education is seen as a means to the safeguarding of local culture for the community. Miguel, on the other hand, saw judicious use of the local language in the kindergarten and primary school as a way of achieving higher educational achievement as well as cultural reinforcement:

³² This alphabet did not come to be widely used in the community, possibly because it was devised by a Protestant missionary to the largely Catholic community. A number of copies of the Bible written in Zapoteco and using this alphabet are held by members of the community's smaller Protestant church, including Hilaria and Saúl.

There are kids in kindergarten who don't know Spanish. And that's where you need a teacher who's from the same community, so she can speak to them in both Zapoteco and Spanish...she can speak to them in Zapoteco, tell them that it's like this, and at the same time translate it into Spanish, so that at that moment, the child learns two things at the same time...and it helps the child to learn faster. (12/9/99)

Indeed, as we have seen, research suggests that the integration of local culture into education can bring about positive outcomes both culturally and educationally.

Isaac and Moisés, both of whom had worked for the Directorate of Popular Cultures, believed that it was possible for education to make a positive contribution to the economic and cultural development of the community, and had clear visions of the kind of education that would do this. Isaac felt that education could contribute directly to the village's economy, at the same time harmonising with its culture:

I think that education should contribute...to progress, on the basis of what we do here, agriculture...how we're going to improve our crops...so we can share with nature...as our ancestors thought, without damaging nature. Help, for example, to reforest, to nourish the land, fertilise the land, but with techniques that aren't harmful to the land; not with chemical products.... Doing experiments to see how we can continue to produce without harming the land.... That's what we want, and that's where the educational institutions can contribute.... That's precisely why we're having this discussion about our schools working as they should, that they help us for the future. (17/8/99)

Moisés' ideas of the kind of education the community should have were similar, in that he believed that education should derive from indigenous concepts of the world and yet incorporate elements of both indigenous and Western knowledge. Like Isaac, he also saw environmental awareness as of primary importance. Moisés believed that this education should begin from primary school and continue through to tertiary level:

Talking about the cosmology...you have to start with that to incorporate it into education. I think that for education for the kids, primary education, you should teach these elements, to give value to our concept of the natural.... I think it has to start from a mystic education, that takes cultural concepts and includes these elements generally. And not just talk about Mother Earth and so on, but give value to concepts of the family.... We already have the CBTa, we would like to have a university where they talk about development in indigenous communities, where they talk about indigenous cultures. Achieve an education that is useful to the community,

that's economically sustainable, that puts autochthonous, traditional knowledge into practice, and puts scientific knowledge into practice. To know about both of those, so that neither one loses out...a well-centred educational strategy.... An education that allows a total development, not an economic development as such, but a form of collectivity. (7/11/99)

These visions of an alternative education go beyond the “what” level of Stairs’ (1994a) conceptual model of indigenous education to the “how” and “why” level, integrating environmental and social relations, values and worldview into the curriculum. For both Isaac and Moisés, the teaching of agricultural techniques is more than simply the transmission of knowledge; it also involves affirmation of a way of conceiving nature, and the relationship between nature and humanity, which is a fundamental part of Tabaéño culture. Moisés, comparing current educational concerns with his own ideas for a truly indigenous education, made this point clearly:

... ‘So that the land produces more, use fertiliser.’ So that’s an area of education, how to apply fertiliser, production, improvement, economic development, the economic development of the indigenous sector, of the land, and ...it’s as if it were an injection. ‘You have a cold...get an injection.’ Three injections, and I don’t have a cold any more, I’m better. But I’m doing myself harm. And if I take another lemon, other natural things, it takes longer, but it’s effective.... [Classroom] education says, ‘To get better development, or higher productivity, use fertiliser.’ And they never touch on the question of the concept of the spiritual, the concept of the mystic. If you want to use that, you should ask permission of Mother Earth. (7/11/99)

Stairs (1991) notes that it is common for indigenous education programmes to move from “cultural inclusion,” for example the appendage of the indigenous language instruction to the standard curriculum, to “cultural base,” where linguistic and curricular content is “embedded in traditional cultural values concerning ways of using language, of interacting, and of knowing” (1991:281). Although education in Tabaá is currently very much at the “inclusion” end of the spectrum, ideas such as those of Isaac and Moisés, which clearly fall into the latter category, intimate that Tabaá has the potential to realise, if it chooses, an educational programme which reflects its culture more profoundly and makes a greater contribution to the development to which it aspires. Meanwhile, it may well be that the initiative of the group of men who are currently developing an alternative Tabaá alphabet is the first step along the road to this alternative education. Rodolfo stated that the group was

finishing off the alphabet, and now we're going to start to write, a story, or a legend, or the history of San Juan Tabaá, when it was founded and so on. It's a question of using the dialect, practising, and once we have the alphabet properly defined, to start to get it into the school, so that the students learn their own language.
(9/11/99)

Members of this group plan eventually to have their alphabet taught in the primary school by Tabaéños, either teachers native to Tabaá assigned to the school or locals employed by the community for this purpose. It is to be hoped that this effort to resolve problems of linguistic variation will reduce opposition to the teaching of Zapoteco literacy and increase community support for the place of local culture in the school. This willingness on the part of Tabaéños to get involved in and take greater responsibility for the education of their youth signifies a change in school-community relations in Tabaá, where, apart from the Zapoteco Cultural Education Centre project, education has generally been the exclusive preserve of the official educational authorities. As Moisés remarked, the legal foundation for the development of such a community-based education now exists in Oaxaca:

I think that the concern we have in the community is to take advantage of what it says in the Constitution, the law, the law passed by the state of Oaxaca, and the universal declarations that talk about indigenous rights, indigenous culture, indigenous languages, and reclaim those. (7/11/99)

Although long-standing prejudices and habits, systemic inflexibility and a slow-moving and unresponsive bureaucracy form formidable obstacles, it has been demonstrated in Oaxaca that indigenous educational initiatives can make a difference to the educational experiences of indigenous children. With the advent of legal support at state level for such projects, the social and organisational foundation for self-development that Tabaá possesses, and the will to develop a more appropriate and autochthonous education for Tabaá, it is to be hoped that this may slowly begin to become a reality.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSIONS

Development for most Tabaëños consists on the one hand of cultural continuity, in terms of traditional livelihoods, forms of social organisation and language, and on the other of the acquisition of skills and knowledge that will allow for the economic, social and cultural development of the community and its individuals. School education is seen as having an important contribution to make to each of these aims, although different people emphasise different aspects. All Tabaëños interviewed saw the acquisition of the Spanish language as important for the children and young people of the community, and there was consensus that formal education was an important site for this learning. Beyond this, some emphasised the reinforcement of traditional cultural values, such as respect, through schooling, while others saw as more critical the acquisition of skills and educational qualifications which offer the chance of greater economic stability and reduced hardship in life.

Cultural change, seen mainly in terms of language shift, was an issue of concern to community members. Most were proud of their indigenous language and identity, although some believed that these posed obstacles to the achievement of economic and social development, which they saw in terms of “catching up” to the living standards and opportunities enjoyed by urban Mexicans. Some saw schooling as having the potential to play a vital role in the preservation of the local language, while others saw the primary purpose of schooling as the teaching of national culture, and therefore believed that the indigenous language had no place in the classroom. These sometimes conflicting viewpoints may be difficult to resolve, but the fact that the community has autochthonous mechanisms for dispute resolution and a history of unity and open debate affords hope that consensus will be achieved on issues of the community’s development, the role of the school in realising this development, and the community’s involvement in the schooling process.

Currently, primary education in Tabaá conforms largely to standard Mexican practice in terms of the curriculum and language of instruction, although a number of teachers make subtle modifications in their teaching practice in order to present the

curriculum in more relevant ways and welcome the children's language and culture into the classroom. Most teachers have received some training in the theory of "bilingual intercultural" education, but few currently incorporate this into their practice to any great degree, relying instead on traditional methods. Teacher-student relations in most classrooms tend more toward Freire's "banking" style and Cummins' "coercive relations of power," again with occasional exceptions. If students are to achieve their potential, academically and personally, it would seem that some changes are indicated in the culture of the school and classroom, in order to enhance students' self-esteem and affirm the value of their identity.

Research and the experiences of indigenous communities elsewhere in the world suggest that an educational programme which responded to the cultural and developmental context of the community would have the potential to support community development in both of the aspects that Tabaeños see as important, that is to say, socio-cultural continuity and the expansion of economic and social opportunities. A truly bilingual intercultural model of education which emphasised the acquisition of skills appropriate to the local environment would both give students a solid grounding in their first language and culture and equip them with the language, academic and technical skills necessary to contribute to the economic and social development of the community. The programme would probably include a reasonably high proportion of Spanish language medium instruction even from early grades, to assure adequate exposure to that language and the development of adequate academic proficiency in Spanish before students began secondary schooling, but would continue to develop students' Zapoteco language skills also in order to ensure both a solid cognitive foundation and the advantages of additive bilingualism. The degree to which further aspects of indigenous culture, learning style and values were incorporated into the programme ("level of meaning," in Stairs' terms) would require further discussion amongst community members, but it should be remembered that generally, the greater the affirmation and inclusion of students' cultures, the more successful they are likely to be in school.

To date, education in Tabaá has been largely the preserve of national and state educational authorities. One generation ago the community did contract teachers independently in order to increase the educational opportunities of its

children, and in the early eighties an attempt was made to establish an alternative lower secondary school with a locally developed and culturally appropriate curriculum, which unfortunately faltered within a couple of years. Since then the community has continued to maintain a strong interest in education, lobbying for and receiving new educational institutions and demanding the highest possible quality of existing institutions. Recently, a new educational project has been initiated, signalling that some Tabaeños are now ready to become more intimately involved in the education process and take on greater responsibility for and control of the formal education their children receive.

This project aims to supplement the primary school curriculum with more effective indigenous language instruction. Objectives are currently conceived in terms of collective development for the community, i.e. language preservation, rather than the advantages likely to accrue to students individually through the incorporation of their own language and culture into the context of formal education, although individual and collective benefits are of course not independent of each other. Collective advantage to the community, in terms of consolidating its cultural base and strengthening its cultural autonomy, is likely to result in benefits such as increased self-confidence to individual community members. On the other hand, benefits to individual students eventually translate into collective benefit for the community, as individuals with a strong foundation and pride in their culture and community are likely to contribute their knowledge, dedication and skills toward the development of the community. Education thus has the potential to contribute simultaneously to both individual and collective development.

Although raising academic achievement is of great concern to most community members, the majority are unaware of educational research which shows that this can often be achieved through maximising the inclusion and affirmation of students' cultures, languages, identities, experiences and knowledge in the classroom. Conversely, many parents believe that instruction in or through the medium of the Zapoteco language is detrimental to students' acquisition of Spanish as a second language, although research evidence from other countries indicates that this is unlikely to be the case. This hypothesis rests on a kind of zero-sum logic,

where more of one language (or culture) is seen to necessarily imply less of the other. However, evidence from both the educational and cultural fields points to syncretism, or bilingualism-biculturalism, as the best option both for developing the capabilities of the individual and for maximising community control over cultural change. Lack of information thus constitutes an obstacle to development, in that Tabaeños are in some ways less able to define the best ways to achieve the development they wish to see in their community. However, as the project currently underway proceeds, it is likely to have positive impacts at both the collective and individual levels, and it is to be hoped that these benefits will become clear to those community members currently opposed to greater affirmation of the local language and culture in the school and community.

With a recent state law which promises political and material support for indigenous educational initiatives, the potential for community involvement in education and for change to long-standing and unhelpful educational practices is increasing, should indigenous people choose to take advantage of it. Although the task of designing and implementing an alternative programme is formidable, particularly in a small community with a reasonably distinct dialect and few resources, experiences in other countries have shown that under certain circumstances it is possible to create successful alternative programmes even in small communities.

The fact that schooling is one of the most important means to achieving social mobility and improved living standards, however, means that the risks of attempting to alter educational practice are perceived as very high, even though Tabaeños currently seem to face a situation which neither promotes scholastic achievement nor supports the conservation of their indigenous culture. Currently, for perhaps the majority of people in Tabaá, the quality of the education their children receive, particularly teaching quality, is of greater concern than either the curriculum or the role of schooling in cultural preservation. While the wishes of indigenous people with regard to the education of their children should certainly be respected, there may be substantial value in a community education programme regarding educational findings and experiences in other parts of the world. It is possible that a more profound understanding of the potential of appropriate educational programmes

to support both higher student achievement and greater community control over social and cultural change could alter community opinion on the question substantially and lead to greater motivation to discuss and seek ways of modifying educational programmes and practices to promote desired outcomes. On the other hand, it is very possible that the community would opt to continue with the current national programme, but would prefer to have fully trained teachers, in which case leaving the "indigenous education" system to become affiliated with the regular, "federal" system of primary schooling may be one option. In either case, continued community debate is certainly necessary to resolve dissatisfactions with the education currently available.

The question of the potential of community-initiated educational change does to an degree beg the question of the extent to which this is possible within the notoriously centralised and inflexible Mexican education system. A number of successful indigenous educational initiatives in Mexico to date have taken place outside the official primary school curriculum, either at pre-school level or outside school hours. Fishman suggests that, in the process of reversing language shift, it is better to concentrate on activities which take place either out of school or outside the school curriculum before attempting to alter those aspects of schooling more subject to the control of outside authorities, in order to consolidate the skills of community members and build up community solidarity and enthusiasm. While this is one option, there is also room for much cultural negotiation in classroom practice, even within the teaching of the national curriculum. Moreover, as noted, the task of decentralisation is being tackled at higher levels, and the progress of educational projects such as a new indigenous teacher training institution in Oaxaca indicate that legal assurances of the rights of indigenous people to appropriate education and to participation in the design of such programmes are slowly but surely becoming a reality.

Ultimately, it could be argued, only change in the structure of ethnic relations in wider society will allow true development in indigenous communities and truly equal educational opportunities for indigenous children. There is certainly truth in this view, but as Fishman points out, it is necessary for indigenous communities which wish to safeguard their cultural autonomy to take steps toward the

achievement of this goal in the meantime in order to arrest processes of cultural erosion. Moreover, these actions must begin with those spaces and processes over which indigenous communities exercise relatively more control. Tabaeños appear to be doing just this, and there are grounds for cautious optimism regarding the likelihood that their efforts on behalf of their community will result in both the kind of education and the kind of development that they dream of.

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Interviews were based loosely around the following questions.

Parents

- What is life like in San Juan Tabaá?
- What are the good things about living here? And the bad things?
- What does the culture of San Juan Tabaá consist of?
- How are Tabaños different from people who come from other places?
- How could someone tell that Tabaá is a Zapoteco village?
- How has the village changed since you were a child? What has caused those changes? And what do you think of those changes?
- How would you like the village to be in the future?
- How have the schools affected life here?
- What do you think of migration from Tabaá?
- Tell me a little about education and the schools.
- Where did you study?
- What was your education like? The same as education today, or different?
- Would you have like to study further?
- To what level would you like (have liked) your children to study?
- Is it important for children and young people to study? Why?
- How would you like your children to be as a result of their education?
- What do you think of the schools that Tabaá has at the moment?
- What do you think about bilingual education?
- What would a primary school that was ideal for Tabaá be like?
- What do you think children should learn in primary school?
- How do the schools affect Tabaá's culture?
- What do you think about the roles played by men and women in Tabaá?

Young people

- To what level do you want to study? Why?
- What do you want to do when you finish studying?
- Do you plan to live here in Tabaá, or somewhere else? Where? Why?
- What is life in Tabaá like?
- What are the good things about living here? And the bad things?
- What do you think of the life women lead in Tabaá?
- How are Tabaños different from people who come from other places?
- What does the culture of Tabaá consist of?
- How could someone tell that Tabaá is a Zapoteco village?
- How is the culture of Tabaá changing?
- Do you think it's important that Tabaá's culture is maintained? Which aspects of the culture? Why or why not?
- What do you think you need to learn in school? Why?
- What do you think of the education you've received?
- What do you think about Zapoteco being taught in the primary school?
- Do you think it's important that children learn about the culture, history, etc. of the community?
- What would a primary school that was ideal for Tabaá be like?

Teachers

- How many years have you been teaching?
- For how many of those have you been in Tabaá?
- Do you like being in Tabaá?
- What are the problems the village faces?
- What difficulties or problems do you experience as an indigenous teacher?
- What difficulties or problems do you see with indigenous education?
- What difficulties or problems do you face in your teaching?
- How could these problems be resolved?
- How is Zapoteco culture different from *mestizo* culture?
- How do you think education affects indigenous communities?
- In concrete terms, how do current educational content and practice affect the Zapoteco culture?
- What do you think of the school textbooks?
- In what ways do you try to incorporate the local culture into your classroom?
- What is the goal of education?
- How would you like a child or young person to be as a result of having studied?
- What is the role of the school in the development of the community?

APPENDIX 2

TABLE OF INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

<i>Name</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Level of education</i>	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Wealth</i>
Angelica	F	20	High school (inc)	Single				Y			OK
Celestino	M	30s	High school	Married	Y				Y		OK
Cristina	F	51	Primary	Married			Y				Well-off
David	M	48	Primary	Married	Y	Y	Y			Y	OK
Delfina	F	49	3 rd grade	Married		Y	Y				OK
Emelia	F	21	High school (inc)	Single				Y			
Eulalia	F	30s	High school	Separated	Y				Y		OK
Francisco	M	40s	Secondary	Married	Y	Y					Well-off
Gabriela	F	20s	University (inc)	Single					Y		OK
Guadalupe	F	30s	University (inc)	Married	Y	Y			Y		Well-off
Hilaria	F	21	University (inc)	Single mother	Y						OK
Irene	F	18	Secondary	Single							OK
Isaac	M	40s	High school	Married	Y	Y			Y		Well-off
Isabel	F	54	2 nd grade	Separated		Y					Poor
Jorge	M	20	High school (inc)	Single				Y			OK
Juan	M	18	High school (inc)	Single				Y			
Lorena	F	42	5 th grade	Separated	Y	Y	Y				Poor
Lourdes	F	40s	Primary	Married	Y	Y					OK
Manuel	M	22	High school	Single							Poor
Miguel	M	30s		Married	Y	Y					Well-off
Moisés	M	40s	University	Married	Y	Y				Y	Well-off
Pablo	M	30s	4 th grade	Married	Y						Poor
Patricia	F	17	High school (inc)	Single				Y			
Paulino	M	44	Primary	Married			Y			Y	OK
Pedro	M	30s	University (inc)	Married					Y		OK
Rodolfo	M	30	High school	Married	Y					Y	OK
Saúl	M	68	4 th grade	Married			Y				Poor
Sebastián	M	40s	5 th grade	Married	Y	Y					OK
Zacarias	M	30s	University (inc)	Married					Y		OK

Notes

- Column 1 indicates whether respondents had children in kindergarten or primary school.
- Column 2 indicates whether respondents had children in secondary, high school or university education.
- Column 3 indicates whether respondents had children who had completed their studies.
- The "S" column indicates respondents who were students.
- The "T" column indicates respondents who were teachers.
- The "A" column indicates respondents who held positions of authority within the community at the time of fieldwork.
- Wealth levels of "poor," "OK" or "well-off," relative the standards of the community, were assigned by the researcher on the basis of the construction of respondents' homes and/or their incomes. Where interviews did not take place in the respondents home and no supplementary information was available, no level is shown.
- In the "level of education" column, "inc" indicates that the respondent's studies at this level were not completed or are still in progress.

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