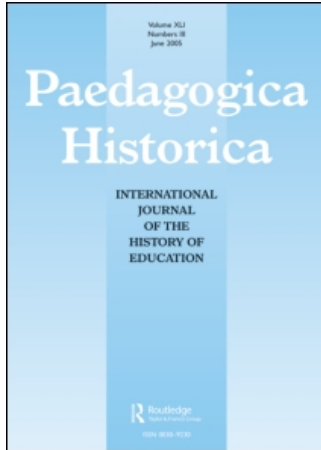


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### The Monitorial System of Education and Civic Culture in Early Independent Mexico

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## **The Monitorial System of Education and Civic Culture in Early Independent Mexico**

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*The discourse about education in early independent Mexico was characterised by its concern with the creation of a civic culture suitable for the new, autonomous and republican order. In this article I examine the political significance of the pedagogical techniques and methods most highly praised and used in this period for the attainment of such aim - namely those of the monitorial system of education. The first section consists of a brief review of the introduction of the monitorial system in Mexico. In the second section I examine the ways in which that system was perceived and adopted, and the civic and republican attributes conferred on it. I contrast the discourse of the manuals produced in Mexico with that of those published in Britain, its country of origin. The last section is devoted to the specific way in which the teaching of civics within the monitorial system was prescribed; this includes an analysis of the textbooks of civic education, known as 'civic catechisms', in particular of the manner in which their rhetorical strategies were deployed to control the experience of learning.*

### **Introduction**

Education was a major focus of political debate and reform in Spanish America after its independence in the first third of the nineteenth century. "Enlightening" the people was considered the keystone to progress in those nations newly constituted as liberal and representative systems. Dozens of initiatives about education reform emerged both from the national government and from a variety of institutions and individuals, although the political instability and the constant economic crisis of the period made it difficult to put them into practice or sustain them for long.

In Mexico, as in most Spanish American countries, the educational policies of the first thirty years of independence were oriented by the strong belief in the power of education, and especially elementary education, for the construction of a civil order that was in accordance with the new republican institutions. Two main purposes figured in the projects of school reform in

this period: the extension of elementary education to a vast majority of the population, and the introduction of civic principles in the basic curriculum of elementary schools.<sup>1</sup> Everybody should learn to read, write and count, and at the same time be instructed in the principles of morality which was not only religious but also civic.

The concept of citizenship had been introduced in the Hispanic world by the Spanish liberal constitutionalism of the 1810s, and became a central notion in the Latin American countries after their independence with the adoption of republican regimes. In the new systems, the sovereignty of the nation was no longer held by the king but by the citizens, who should exert it through the election of their representatives to the local and national government. The Mexican Constitution of 1824 gave political rights to all men who had an honest way of living regardless of their ethnicity or social rank, in an effort to put an end to the Colonial judicial division into "states" of Indians, Spanish, *mestizos* and castes. To be effective, this legal reform required a massive transformation of society itself, and over most of the nineteenth century the debate whether the law or the society should be reformed first dominated the political sphere. In the early years after independence (1821), all the expectations for change were based on the new notion of citizenship, and accordingly the whole of the population had to be educated in the meaning of citizenship.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike the subjects of an absolutist monarchy, citizens had to be instructed in their political rights and duties because of their new role in the election of their legislators and governors. Indeed, the very existence of the republican State, its power and authority, depended upon the existence of a well-informed society of law-abiding citizens; hence the importance of an education in accordance with the republican institutions. As Tadeo Ortiz de Ayala wrote in his political treatise in 1832: "The vices and abandonment of education in Mexico being so palpable, the least reflective man can easily notice the urgent necessity and right duty ... [of] a rational, compact and liberal system of education, which should be general and ought to be in harmony with the political regime adopted by the nation; without the development and intelligence of such a system, the liberal institutions in constant struggle with the decrepit habits of the population will be nothing more than beautiful theories; and the nation will not be able to love them, nor to support them with dignity, nor to represent and exert its supreme rights, nor, in a word,

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<sup>1</sup>By "elementary schools" I refer to what was known at the time as *escuelas de primeras letras*.

<sup>2</sup>See Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo, *Ciudadanos imaginarios* (México, El Colegio de México, 1993); François Xavier Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias; ensayos sobre las revoluciones hispánicas* (Madrid, MAPFRE, 1992); Alicia Hernández Chávez, *La tradición republicana del buen gobierno* (México, El Colegio de México - Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993).

make itself respected and stand at the same level as the rest of the cultured societies which compose the civilised world.”<sup>3</sup>

Although education was conceived as a subject of primary importance for the state, the actual control of the government over elementary and secondary schooling was restricted, due rather to lack of material resources than to lack of political will. From the 1820s to the 1850s, elementary schools were run either by voluntary organisations, parishes and religious orders (the majority), or by the local councils. Nevertheless, there was a tendency for the local authorities to gradually increase their supervision and financial assistance to non-government schools.<sup>4</sup>

In this article I will examine some of the civic concerns embedded in the discourse about elementary education in Mexico in the first decades of independence. A number of studies have already identified the government educational policies and the evolution of the subject of civics in school curricula.<sup>5</sup> However, few of them have explored the civic dimensions of education through the study of actual practices of teaching. This is undoubtedly a field very difficult to investigate, due to the scarcity of sources that account for what actually happened in school classrooms. Yet it may still be approached through materials indicative of methods of teaching and learning. The analysis of pedagogical manuals and school textbooks may enable

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<sup>3</sup>“Fácilmente se puede reconocer por el hombre menos reflexivo, siendo palpables los vicios y el abandono de la educación en México, la urgente necesidad y el justo deber ... [de] un sistema de instrucción razonado, compacto y liberal, que al paso que se generalice, esté en armonía con el régimen político adoptado por la nación; sin cuyo desarrollo e inteligencia, las instituciones liberales en pugna constante con los hábitos decrépitos no pasarán de bellas teorías: y ni la nación podrá amarlas, ni sostenerlas dignamente, ni representar y ejercer sus derechos de supremacía, y en una palabra, mucho menos hacerse respetar y ponerse a nivel con el resto de las asociaciones cultas de que se compone el mundo civilizado.” Tadeo Ortiz de Ayala, *México considerado como nación independiente y libre* (Burdeos, 1832), p. 112.

<sup>4</sup>The Federal organisation of the country was certainly an obstacle for a unified system of education, but in fact the legislation of the different states regarding education tended to copy that of the Federal District. During the period of central republic (1836-1847), there were more consistent efforts to create a unified education system, also with little success. Only in the 1860s were the social and political conditions favourable for the establishment of a national system of education, which in turn was linked to a strong nationalist program. For a discussion of the link between a nationalistic program and the formation of a unified system of public education in other countries, see Andy Green, *Education and State Formation: The Rise of Education Systems in England, France and the USA* (London, Macmillan, 1990).

<sup>5</sup>For a critical revision of the recent historiography of elementary education in nineteenth-century Mexico, see Mary Kay Vaughan, “Primary education and literacy in nineteenth-century Mexico: research trends, 1968-1988”, *Latin American Research Review*, XXIV (April 1989), pp. 31-66.

us to understand the processes that were to conduct the communication and acquisition of a certain knowledge in the classroom - although one must be aware of the important gap between normative texts and everyday school practice. Here I will use these sources to discuss the political significance of the pedagogical method most highly promoted for the reform of elementary schooling in Mexico in this period, the monitorial system of education, and the teaching of the subject of civics within it. Starting from the premise that schools were - and were perceived as - symbolic representations of society which regulated the ways in which students established social relationships within the classroom, I shall argue that the way in which the monitorial system was advocated and put into practice was related to the view of citizenship underlying the general political discourse.

### Monitorial schools in Mexico

If the main challenge in elementary education was to extend it to a wider population, nothing could be more attractive than an inexpensive system of mass-education like the one developed originally in Britain by Joseph Lancaster and Andrew Bell. The monitorial system had many advocates throughout Spanish America, especially amongst the members of the ruling elites who had heard about it in Europe when they were representing their countries in the Spanish *Cortes* or while in exile during the wars of independence. It was also known thanks to the agents sent by the British and Foreign School Society (BFSS) - the organisation founded by Lancaster for the spread and control of his method - to this region in the 1820s. The main attraction of this system - also called "mutual" in Spanish America - was its low cost and its efficiency, for it allowed large numbers of students to be instructed under the supervision of very few school masters, and in less than the time usually required by the traditional method.

The monitorial system was first introduced in Mexico without the direct intervention of the BFSS. Nor was it introduced by a government initiative; rather it was the result of the efforts of individuals and philanthropic associations.<sup>6</sup> Already in the last years of the Colonial regime a handful of

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<sup>6</sup>For a history of the Lancasterian Company and the development of Lancasterian schools in Mexico, see the following works: Francisco R. Almada, "La reforma educativa a partir de 1812", *Historia Mexicana*, XVII (México, 1967), pp. 103-125; William Fowler, "The élite and the Compañía Lancasteriana in Independent Mexico, 1822-1845", *Tesseræ: Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, II, 2 (1996); José María Lafragua and Wenceslao Reyes, *Breve noticia de la erección, progresos y estado actual de la Compañía Lancasteriana de México* (México, Tip. de Rafael, 1853); Eugenia Roldán Vera, "Catálogo del volumen 'Compañía Lancasteriana' del Archivo de la Ciudad de México", 2 v., 1985 (ms.); Anne Staples, "Panorama educativo al comienzo de la vida

establishments in Mexico City, Jalapa and Puebla were already advertising the use of the “mutual” method.<sup>7</sup> Less than a year after independence, the first Lancasterian school of this new period was founded in the capital by the editors of the newspaper *El Sol*, who formally constituted the Lancasterian Company at the beginning of 1823.<sup>8</sup> The main founder of the Company, Manuel Codorniu, was a Spaniard who had arrived with the last representative of the Spanish Empire, Juan O’Donoju (who signed the independence agreement with the Mexican leaders). He had learned the system in Spain, where it had been adopted in 1821. Only in 1827 did the BFSS send one of its agents, James Thomson, to Mexico, but he did very little for the promotion of the monitorial system and mostly devoted himself to his work for the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS).<sup>9</sup> Two years before, in 1825, Elizabeth and Richard Jones, daughter and son-in-law of Joseph Lancaster, had settled in Mexico with the aim of promoting the monitorial system. However, in spite of Richard Jones’ appointment as General Director of the Lancasterian Schools of the State of Jalisco from 1827-1834, they did not manage to have a real

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independiente”, in *Ensayos sobre historia de la educación en México* (México, El Colegio de México, 1985, pp. 101-144); Dorothy Tanck de Estrada, “Las escuelas lancasterianas en la ciudad de México”, *Historia Mexicana*, XXII, 4 (México, 1973), pp. 494-513, and *La educación ilustrada, 1786-1836* (México, El Colegio de México, 1984); María Isabel Vega Muytoy, “La Compañía Lancasteriana en su gestión como Dirección General de Instrucción Primaria, 1842-1845” (unpublished Master thesis, Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, México, November 1995).

<sup>7</sup>These were the schools of professors Andrés González Millán and Luis Octavio Chousal (Mexico City), Ignacio Paz (Jalapa, Puebla and Mexico City), and that of the Convent of Bethlem (Mexico City). The school of Andrés González Millán was already described in 1819 as “Lancasterian”, although it is not clear if the others were inspired by the method of the British educator. See Almada, pp. 116-118; Tanck, *La educación ilustrada*, p. 150; Tanck, “Las escuelas lancasterianas en la ciudad de México”, p. 495.

<sup>8</sup>The syllabus of the first Lancasterian school was issued on June 1822 and approved by the emperor Agustín de Iturbide two months later. The syllabus stated that the school was called “El Sol” as a reference to the title of the newspaper and also because the name symbolised the enlightenment that derived from education. See *Reglamento de la Escuela del Sol* (México, Imprenta Imperial, 28 June 1822).

<sup>9</sup>James Thomson arrived in Mexico as the representative of both the BFSS and the BFBS. He was going to represent the former at the second Pan-American Conference to be held that year in Mexico, but after the conference was cancelled his activities were fundamentally concerned with the Bible Society. See Jaime E. Rodríguez, *The emergence of Spanish America: Vicente Rocafuerte and Spanish Americanism* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1975); W.E. Browning, “Joseph Lancaster, James Thomson, and the Lancasterian System of Mutual Instruction, with Special Reference to Hispanic America”, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, IV (1921), pp. 49-98; and Abraham Téllez, “James Thompson, un viajero británico en México”, *Secuencia: revista de historia y ciencias sociales*, XXVII (Sept.-Dec. 1993), pp. 71-84.

influence in the institutional articulation of the Lancasterian school system in Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

The Lancasterian Company of Mexico City was a philanthropic organisation, created to support a handful of primary schools and a school for training teachers in the capital of the country. Although these establishments initially charged fees, later the Company managed to give free education with the rather unsteady assistance and supervision of the city council and the contributions of its members. Other Lancasterian societies and schools were formed in different states in the 1820s and 1830s (most of them in the centre of the country), with some support from local authorities.<sup>11</sup> Until the 1850s monitorial schools co-existed with a majority of traditional ones, though there were attempts in 1833 and in 1842-1845 by the national government to extend the system to all primary education.<sup>12</sup>

The principles of the monitorial system were widely spread during the 1820s. The system was first described in a series of articles written by Lucas Alamán - an important statesman of the first four decades of independence, and later leader of the conservative party - in the weekly *La Sabatina Universal*, between September and October 1822.<sup>13</sup> Two years later, the Lancasterian

<sup>10</sup>The couple arrived in Mexico in the middle of 1825, after a one-year residence in Colombia. Although Richard Jones had some recommendations from the Mexican diplomats in Bogota and from Lancaster himself (who was living in Caracas at that time), the Lancasterian Company of Mexico City could not give him a job for lack of funds. When he eventually became General Director of the Lancasterian Schools of the State of Jalisco, he continually complained that he did not have all the facilities necessary for the establishments of schools according to the original Lancasterian plan, and eventually he lost his job in 1834 with the change of governor of the state. He spent the rest of his life in Mexico teaching private lessons, deeply disappointed about the educational systems in this country and resentful to the Mexican society in general for its conservatism and fanaticism. See correspondence between Richard and Elizabeth Jones (in Mexico) and Joseph Lancaster, American Antiquarian Society (Worcester, Mass.), Joseph Lancaster Papers, box 2, folder 4. Also Edgar Vaughan, *Joseph Lancaster en Caracas (1824-1827)*, 2 v. (Caracas, Ministerio de Educación, 1987, 1989).

<sup>11</sup>For an indication of the regional differences in the spread of Lancasterian schools, see Staples, "Panorama educativo", pp. 104-105.

<sup>12</sup>In 1833 the federal government ordered that the Lancasterian method was to be adopted by all elementary schools in Mexico City, yet this was part of a set of liberal reforms which were abolished a few months later. And in 1842-1845 the Lancasterian Company of Mexico City was put in charge of all primary education throughout the country, as an attempt of the central government to unify the system of education.

<sup>13</sup>Lucas Alamán, "Instrucción para el establecimiento de escuelas, según los principios de la enseñanza mutua, presentada a la Excma. Diputación Provincial de México", in *La Sabatina Universal. Periódico político y literario*, (Mexico), nums 16, 17 and

Company of Mexico City issued its own manual, which went through several editions in the following decades.<sup>14</sup> And in 1826 *El Sol* published another series of articles about the principles of the monitorial system, including suggestions for the ways to extend and organise the regulation of the system at the national level.<sup>15</sup>

These texts drew their information from a variety of sources. Lancaster and Bell were always recognised as the founders of the system but, in fact, Alamán's series of articles and the manual of the Lancasterian Company were based largely upon French and Spanish works.<sup>16</sup> Only the series appeared in *El Sol* was extracted directly from a text written by Joseph Lancaster, although with several alterations.<sup>17</sup> In fact, in the process of selection and translation of the original texts for the elaboration of new manuals, the principles of the monitorial system suffered transformations in order to be adapted to the Mexican context. Although the core of Bell and Lancaster's works remained, such transformations reveal important differences in the way the system was perceived in Mexico, which I will discuss in the following section.

18, 28 September, 5 and 12 October 1822. Alamán had presented this text to the *Diputación Provincial* of Mexico City to promote its adoption by the public elementary schools, an initiative which did not immediately prosper.

<sup>14</sup>Compañía Lancasteriana, *Sistema de enseñanza mutua para las escuelas de primeras letras de la república mexicana* (México, 1824). It was reprinted at least twice in 1833 (Mexico, printed by Agustín Guiol) and once in 1854 (printed by Ignacio Cumplido), and apparently it went through more editions in several states.

<sup>15</sup>*El Sol* (24-27 June 1826). The articles are signed by "S.C." (I have been unable to identify the author).

<sup>16</sup>Alamán acknowledged as his main source a text written by Aulico Hammel, adviser of the Russian emperor who had studied the schools of Bell and Lancaster in England; this text had been published in Russian and German, and a later translation of it into French was the one Alamán read. He said that he followed this text as a guide, but adapted its contents for Mexican use. (Alamán, "Instrucción...", *La Sabatina Universal*, 16 (28 Sept. 1822), pp. 271-274). On the other hand, the anonymous authors of the text published by the Lancasterian Company stated that their book was based upon the following sources: "the latest French guide", the notes written by Manuel Codomiú, the projects of Francisco Ballester y German Nicolas Prissette (members of the Lancasterian Company), "a manual published in Madrid" - probably *Método de enseñanza mutua, según los sistemas combinados del Dr. Bell y de Mr. Lancaster* (Madrid, Imprenta Real, 1820) -, a manual published in Cádiz in 1818, the system of Joseph Lancaster, the extract of M. Laborde (printed in La Habana and reprinted in Puebla), and "the new plan of Villá y Domenech". (Most of these sources have not been located). (Compañía Lancasteriana, *Sistema...*, p. [iv]).

<sup>17</sup>Presumably *The Lancasterian System of Education, with Improvements* (Baltimore, Ogden Niles, 1821).



It should be said that, for all its popularity, the Lancasterian system in Mexico was more acclaimed in theory than it was successful in practice. Monitorial schools soon faced lack of funding from the local government for training teachers, paying salaries and buying the necessary equipment. In many cases, even if the school was called “Lancasterian” or its system “mutual”, the teaching was conducted in the traditional way (groups under a single teacher, no monitors and no simultaneous learning).<sup>18</sup> The study of the principles of the system is nonetheless important because it reveals the cultural significance attributed to it by its promoters, even if in practice it did not fully live up to its expectations.

### **Learning to behave: the monitorial system and the republican order**

The particular significance that the monitorial system acquired in Mexico was related to the ideals of a recently independent, republican nation with an intelligentsia that had set itself the task of developing the uses and habits of citizenship in the general population. Such concerns can be better appreciated through a comparison between the Mexican and the English manuals of this system. I use this comparison mainly as a technique of textual analysis to identify the meanings of the different educational discourses; it may also serve to illustrate the way in which a particular corpus of normative principles were translated - that is, exported and adapted - into a dissimilar context.

The monitorial system of education relied upon the principle of more advanced students teaching less advanced ones.<sup>19</sup> Though there were important

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<sup>18</sup>There are no statistics about the number of schools conducted according to the monitorial system in independent Mexico, but there are several references to its popularity, both at the central and local level. There are also testimonies of the lack of knowledge of the principles of the method by the teachers who were supposed to organise a Lancasterian school (See bibliography cited in note 6). The so-called “traditional” method of teaching was based on the division of students in two classes: “reading” - where religious doctrine was also taught - and “writing”, for advanced pupils, which included lessons on arithmetic, sacred history and civil doctrine. One teacher was in charge of a medium-sized group, and most of the students attended only the “reading” class, as it took too long to master the skills taught in that class to enable them to ascend to the “writing” class. The method of learning consisted primarily of memorisation, as in the Lancasterian system itself. See Dorothy Tanck de Estrada, “La enseñanza de la lectura y de la escritura en la Nueva España, 1700-1821”, in Seminario de historia de la educación en México de El Colegio de México, *Historia de la lectura en México* (México, El Colegio de México, 1988), pp. 49-93

<sup>19</sup>Or, as Bell put it, “the simple principle of tuition by the scholars themselves”. Andrew Bell, *Instructions for Conducting a School, Through the Agency of the Scholars Themselves...* (London, Free-School, 1808), p. 3.

variations between Bell's and Lancaster's pedagogical plans - which were not acknowledged in Mexico<sup>20</sup> - the central principles of their system can be summarised as follows.

The school (a single, large classroom) was divided into small groups or classes of children according to the progress they achieved in each subject: reading, writing, arithmetic and religion - as well as sewing for girls, and civic instruction in Mexico. Each class was conducted by a monitor or instructor, who was a student with greater expertise in that particular subject; in Bell's system there were several categories of students performing teaching or supervising tasks, but in Mexico only one rank of monitors was used, following Lancaster's plan.<sup>21</sup> These monitors were instructed by the teacher in advance about what and how they had to teach their groups. Lessons were short, lasting from fifteen to thirty minutes,<sup>22</sup> and students moved constantly from one place in the classroom to another: writing was taught while the students were sitting in rows, with the use of sand boxes and sticks, whereas reading and arithmetic were learned by standing in semicircles around teaching posts on which cards with the lessons were hung (Fig. 1). Both the short duration of the lessons and the physical movement were meant to capture and maintain the children's attention. There were rules meticulously designed for every act that took place in the classroom. Everything was done at a command uttered by the monitors, in an almost military manner. Orders like "in!" (to enter the classroom), "hands out!", "clean slates!", "show slates!", "slates down!", "write!", etc., regulated the course of the learning experience<sup>23</sup> (Fig. 2). Order and discipline were maintained through a system of surveillance exercised from virtually every corner of the classroom. The room was an inclined plane which allowed the teacher to oversee all that happened; detailed registers of attendance,

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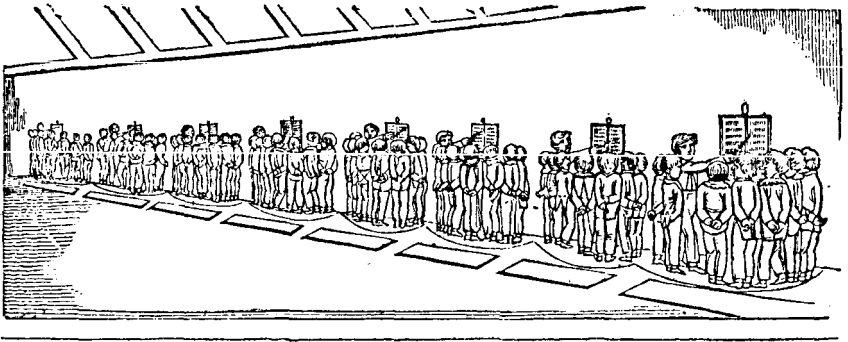
<sup>20</sup>Lucas Alamán was the only one who recognised the differences between the two plans, which he accurately identified in terms of the religious orientation of the two educators and the supporters of their systems (Alamán, "Instrucción...", *La Sabatina Universal*, 16 (28 Sept. 1822). But the struggle between dissenters and members of the Church of England - advocates of Lancaster and Bell respectively - had no importance for the promoters of the method in Mexico, who usually gave the credit of the invention of it to both educators as if they had designed the plan together.

<sup>21</sup>The terms "monitor" and "instructor" were used indistinctly in the Mexican manuals.

<sup>22</sup>At least this is what Bell stated: "...never prescribe a lesson or task which can require more than a quarter, or at most half an hour to be completely master of it: never quit a letter, a word, a line, or a verse, or a sentence, or a page, or a chapter, or a book, or a task of any kind, till it is familiar to the scholar. Let your progress be sure and perfect, and it must be accelerated and rapid". Bell, *Instructions for Conducting a School*, p. 14.

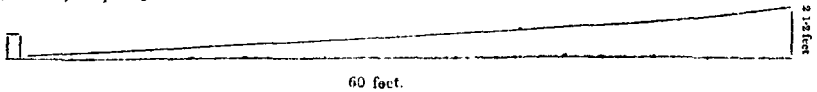
<sup>23</sup>Joseph Lancaster, *The Lancasterian System of Education, with Improvements* (Baltimore, W.M. Ogden Niles, 1821), pp. 27-29.

**Figure 1.** Arrangement for the teaching of reading in a monitorial school. From Joseph Lancaster's *The Lancasterian System of Education, with Improvements* (Baltimore, 1821), p. 32. (By permission of the British Library; shelfmark: 8305.f.16).



ELEVATION OF THE SCHOOL FLOOR.

*Entrance, and place for teacher's desk.*



**Figure 2.** The command ‘show slates!’ as an example of the synchronisation in which pupils responded to the monitors’ orders. From Joseph Lancaster’s *The Lancasterian System of Education, with Improvements* (Baltimore, 1821), p. 28. (By permission of the British Library; shelfmark: 8305.f.16).

LANCASTERIAN SYSTEM OF EDUCATION.

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“SHOW SLATES.”

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improvement and behaviour were taken every day by the monitors and the teacher; examinations were conducted regularly at the end of each lesson; and a scrupulous system of rewards and punishments regulated the performance of the students. In addition, the principle of emulation, set out to make the children wish to ascend within their classes, move to a higher one, or become a monitor, reinforced the control of their behaviour.<sup>24</sup>

When the system was propagated in Mexico, low cost was obviously praised as its main advantage; that was the fundamental reason for its adoption. However, some of the characteristics of the system were perceived in a different way, one that seemed well adapted to the new political institutions of the country. In the process of translation of the manuals, some practices were slightly modified and others remained the same but were endowed with different attributes.

One of the main alterations was that, whereas for Bell, Lancaster and their followers in England the chief virtues of the monitorial system were order, discipline, vigilance, and efficiency in the use of time, in Mexico it was rather the principle of *emulation* what was considered central.

The concern with discipline was essential both for Lancaster and Bell: "It is in a school as in an army, discipline is the first, second, and third essential; system and method follow far behind in the rear".<sup>25</sup> Discipline was supposed to be inculcated through the system of registering and vigilance exercised by the teacher, the monitors and the rest of the students. The spatial arrangement of the classroom as an inclined plane, with the rows of desks fixed to the floor facing the teacher's desk on an elevated platform, was intended not only to maintain order, but to convince each child that he was "under the master's eye". So, as Lancaster put it, the child would avoid "doing any thing in which he would not wish to be seen": "the certainty of detection

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<sup>24</sup>Michel Foucault defined this notion of surveillance in which power is exerted from a variety of sources within the classroom as a "network of gazes". In his study of education and prisons in France in the eighteenth century, he asserted that this transformation from a single to a multiplicity of sources of authority was a symptom of the epistemological shift from the classical age to the modern one. This kind of educational system is ruled by "...a multiple, automatic and anonymous power; for although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network 'holds' the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisions, perpetually supervised. The power in the hierarchized surveillance of the disciplines is not possessed as a thing, or transferred as a property: it functions like a piece of machinery." (Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London, Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 176-177).

<sup>25</sup>Andrew Bell, *An Experiment in Education, Made at the Male Asylum at Egmore, near Madras...* (London, Cadell & Davies, 1805), p. 55.

prevents offences, and thereby contributes to the annihilation of punishment".<sup>26</sup>

The Mexican manuals praised the principle of order but they did not pay as much attention as Lancaster and Bell did to the mechanisms of discipline and vigilance. Instead, emulation was taken as "the soul of the system".<sup>27</sup> The mechanism of rewards and the natural inclination of the child to ascend to a higher level in the school constituted the stimulus which created "movement". This notion of "movement" meant more than the physical change of places from one side of the classroom to another (which was itself considered a pedagogical improvement). It was also movement through stages of knowledge and ranks of authority: "the child is in continuous movement, which closes the door to laziness, and at every instant finds stimulus, either in the weekly prizes, or by advancing to the post of instructor, which, at the same time that flatters his pride, obliges him to behave well, in order not to descend from the post".<sup>28</sup>

Emulation was linked to the idea of competition. For Alamán, the "moral impulse" (*resorte moral*) to ascend to a higher place in the structure of the school was the main incentive for self-improvement. The system of prizes and small money rewards would only reinforce that impulse. And the same moral stimulus would help eradicate traditional physical punishments: "the competition for the places..., the chance to improve and the continuous danger of falling behind ... in the distribution of honour and punishments ... [is] enough to substitute for the old system".<sup>29</sup> For Bell, on the contrary, it was mainly the system of vigilance which would reduce the use of punishments, whilst emulation and competition were only a reinforcement of that mechanism of control: "It is the perpetual preference and never-ceasing vigilance of its numerous overseers, which preclude idleness, ensure diligence, prevent ill behaviour of every sort, and almost supersede the necessity of punishment."<sup>30</sup> He stated elsewhere that, amongst the fundamental elements

<sup>26</sup>Lancaster, *The Lancasterian System of Education...*, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup>Alamán, "Instrucción...", *La Sabatina Universal*, 17 (5 Oct. 1822), p. 281.

<sup>28</sup>"...el niño está en continuo movimiento, lo que cierra la puerta a la pereza, y a cada instante encuentra estímulos, ya con los premios semanales, ya con el ascenso a instructor, que al mismo tiempo que lisonjea su orgullo, le obliga a conducirse bien, para no descender del puesto". J.M. Lafragua y W. Reyes, *Breve noticia...*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>29</sup>"El concurso para los lugares, según el cual el niño obtiene el que se le debe; la ocasión de adelantar y el peligro continuo de retrogradar esta actividad en la distribución del honor y de las penas, bastan para reemplazar el sistema de castigos del antiguo." Alamán, "Instrucción...", *La Sabatina Universal*, 18 (12 Oct. 1822), p. 298.

<sup>30</sup>A. Bell, *The Madras School, or Elements of Tuition...* (London, T. Bensley, 1808), p. 3.

of the school, emulation, praise, rewards, vigilance, and short and easy lessons, it was “especially vigilance” which deserved to “stand in the front”.<sup>31</sup>

Lancaster’s texts had a slightly more positive approach to the principle of emulation. His earlier writings had shown more enthusiasm about this mechanism, but in later works he responded to accusations that called it “a dangerous thing”, for its abuse could generate envy or even social resentment.<sup>32</sup> He softened the concept by arguing that his system promoted, above all, “self-emulation”: the child was rewarded for excelling over his own previous achievement. As to “social emulation”, it “may be disarmed of all evil, and directed to much utility and goodness” by the intervention of the teacher: “If two boys are in frequent competition, and one gains the ascendancy, the teacher’s duty is to see that while satisfaction is excited in one, no exaltation or triumph is allowed over the other.”<sup>33</sup>

We find no precaution against the risks of emulation in the Mexican manuals. On the contrary, students who won prizes were to be praised as much as possible: “Once the prizes have been distributed [every Saturday evening], the children who obtain them will walk with them around the school, and the instructor will say loudly: these children have obtained these prizes for their good behaviour and application to their studies”.<sup>34</sup>

Placed in the context of an early republican society, the insistence on the mechanism of emulation in the Mexican manuals may be seen as part of a general concern with promoting individualism and undermining the so-called “corporate spirit” (*espíritu de cuerpo*). The new ruling elites considered religious, military, professional and social corporativism as heavy burdens inherited from colonial times which hindered economic progress. The Bourbon reforms of the late eighteenth century had began a policy to reduce group privileges, especially those of religious communities and guilds of urban artisans and other professionals, in order to allow the central and local government to get a tighter control over their economic activities.<sup>35</sup> This policy gained vigour after independence, strengthened by the ideas of political liberalism which preached

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>32</sup>This difference between Lancaster and Bell regarding the concept of emulation has been discussed by David Hamilton in *Towards a theory of schooling* (London, The Falmer Press, 1989, esp. ch. 4); but he considered only what Lancaster wrote in *Improvements on education*, published in 1808.

<sup>33</sup>Lancaster, *The Lancasterian System of Education...*, p. 25.

<sup>34</sup>“Concluida la distribución de los premios, los niños que los hayan obtenido se pasearán con ellos por la escuela, y el instructor dirá en alta voz: estos niños han obtenido estos premios por su buena conducta y aplicación en sus estudios”. Compañía Lancasteriana, *Sistema...*, p. 62.

<sup>35</sup>The Bourbon reforms concerning special relation to elementary education are discussed in Tanck, *La educación ilustrada...*, *passim*.

equality before the law and rights of individual property.<sup>36</sup> The concern about the “corporate spirit” was also oriented towards eradicating the paternalistic, ethnic-based social differentiation institutionalised under the Spanish rule.<sup>37</sup> From this point of view, the monitorial system was presented as one that tended to individualise students, to a greater extent than a traditional method: students were given the same opportunities and means and they were expected to succeed according to their own abilities and efforts in a mobile, non-corporate environment. The spirit of emulation and individual competition was reinforced by the mechanisms of general and hierarchical surveillance, which intended to make the child feel more responsible for his individual progress.

This promotion of individualism stands in slight tension with other social values promoted in the Mexican texts. Whilst emulation and competition were to be the ruling principles in the classroom, they should be practised in such a way that would make the students be aware of the equality of opportunities prevailing amongst all of them, and of the fact that occupying a position of authority was simply a temporary service in the benefit of the whole group. Accordingly, the Mexican presented some of the practices of the monitorial system as an explicit way to advance *republican* values.

The series of articles in *El Sol* described the Lancasterian system as “the most adequate for the formation of republican customs”.<sup>38</sup> Its author asserted that “the most superficial reading” of the principles of the system would convince anyone of its “analogy with our precious institutions”.<sup>39</sup> This text praised in particular the way the monitorial system promoted the value of equality. Explaining the role and functions of the monitors in the classroom, it stated that the book stands used by them should not exceed in size those of the rest of the students, since that “would be detrimental to the spirit of

<sup>36</sup>The concern about corporativism was central to the political struggles in independent Mexico and it had different characteristics in different periods. According to Charles Hale, in the 1820s the attack was not clearly directed against the old regime of corporate privilege, but against the more abstract notion of an arbitrary government. In the 1830s the corporate privilege of the church and the army was identified as the aspect that needed a radical reform. And in the late 1840s the attitude towards corporations had clearly become the point that distinguished the two political parties being consolidated: liberals and conservatives. Charles Hale, *Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora, 1821-1853* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1968).

<sup>37</sup>Tanck, *La educación ilustrada...*, p. 89.

<sup>38</sup>“... El método de Lancaster... nos parece el más adaptable para formar las costumbres republicanas.” *El Sol* (27 June 1826), p. 1513.

<sup>39</sup>“[De la] analogía [del método de enseñanza mutua] con nuestras preciosas instituciones y fecundos resultados nos puede convencer la más superficial lectura.” *El Sol* (26 June 1826), p. 1508.



equality that must inspire the republican education".<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the mechanism of rotation of monitors (students who were monitors for one lesson then returned to their place as ordinary students for other classes) was viewed in these articles as an "image of the republican system": "...Each monitor dedicates one hour only for the instruction of the class he is in charge of, and then goes back to his own group as simple student. Amazing image of the republican system, where the most meritorious citizen, after devoting a small number of years to the public service in his capacity as first chief of the state, or in any other job, returns to the general mass of his fellow citizens, with no other distinction that what he has deserved because of his services for the good of the community!"<sup>41</sup>

The monitors had to learn that their post was temporary and should be eager to return to their ordinary places in the class once their term of office was over. Their superiority should be understood as a momentary service due only to their application: "...And just like the first magistrates of a republic use, during the performance of their duty, an emblem that makes them known and respected by the rest of the citizens, so will the monitor use some medal or badge when he takes his post in order to be identified by the rest. In this manner the children get used to hand on to others an emblem that they owe only to their merit and application."<sup>42</sup>

The text even suggested that, due to its promotion of equality in the sharing of responsibilities in the classroom, the system was unacceptable for those who supported absolutist regimes: "When [the monitor] retires to his seat to be again a member of the class, another one succeeds him in the post, and another, and another, so that the work and honour of the instruction falls on everyone. Wonderful combination, which, not strangely, has annoyed the

<sup>40</sup>"Los atriles de los monitores...no deben sobresalir de los demás, pues sobre ser superfluos y más costosos perjudicarían al espíritu de igualdad que debe inspirar la educación republicana." *El Sol* (24 June 1826), p. 1501.

<sup>41</sup>"Cada monitor consagra una hora nadamás para instrucción de la clase que tiene a su cargo, y después vuelve a la suya como simple alumno. ¡Imagen asombrosa del sistema republicano, donde el ciudadano más benemérito después de haber consagrado un corto número de años al servicio del público, en la calidad de primer jefe de estado, o en otro puesto, vuelve a confundirse con la masa general de sus conciudadanos, sin más distinción que la que le hayan merecido sus esfuerzos en pro del bien de la comunidad...!" *El Sol* (24 June 1826), p. 1501.

<sup>42</sup>"Y así como los primeros magistrados de una república usan, durante sus funciones un distintivo, que le hace conocer y respetar de los demás ciudadanos, así el monitor usará durante su hora de representación alguna medalla o dije que le dé a conocer a los demás. De este modo se acostumbra a los niños a que entreguen a otros y se despojen de un distintivo que se debe únicamente al mérito y aplicación." *El Sol* (24 June 1826), p. 1501.

promoters of absolute power, for it is the prototype of the system of freedom!"<sup>43</sup>

The author of these articles was probably aware that the monitorial system of education had not been adopted only by countries with representative governments (a list of the places where it was practised appeared in the preface of the Lancaster's text upon which this one was based). This rhetorical device, then, indicates the extent to which, in Mexico, general education was identified with political freedom. The concept of freedom, in turn, was linked to the (also inexact) notion, present in all these manuals, that the policy under the Spanish domination was to deny education to the general population and thus maintain it, by ignorance, in submission to an unfair government. The term "system of freedom" was a synonym for an independent republic. The link between education and a system of political freedom is also clear in Alamán's introduction to his manuals, written in a tone which in later decades would seem strange for a leader of the conservative party: "If under the despotic government it has been doubted whether it was convenient to extend enlightenment and culture to the lower classes of society, this issue cannot be questioned under the influence of a regime which must stand upon the solid foundations of general instruction. If there are permanent laws which, establishing exactly the limits of all authority, indicate the subject his duties and rights, it is necessary that he knows what he is entitled to and what are his obligations in the society in which he takes part; and since a liberal government cannot subsist if it is not supported by public opinion, it is necessary that the latter be founded upon sensible principles. How could these principles be acquired if we do not look after the education and primary instruction of youth?"<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>"Cuando [el monitor] se retira a su asiento para ser de nuevo miembro de la clase, otro le sucede en el puesto, y otro, y otro, de manera que recargue sobre todos el trabajo y el honor de la instrucción. ¡Combinación maravillosa, y que no es extraño haya disgustado a los partidarios del poder absoluto, por ser el prototipo del sistema de libertad!" *El Sol* (24 June 1826), p. 1501.

<sup>44</sup>"Si bajo el gobierno despótico ha podido dudarse si era conveniente extender las luces y la cultura a las clases menos acomodadas de la sociedad, no puede suscitarse igual cuestión bajo la influencia de un régimen que debe apoyarse sobre la base sólida de la ilustración general. Cuando se establecen leyes fijas que determinando con exactitud los límites de toda autoridad indican al súbdito sus obligaciones y derechos, es necesario que éste sepa qué se le debe y a qué está obligado en la sociedad de que hace parte, y como un gobierno liberal no puede tener subsistencia si no lo sostiene la opinión pública, es menester que ésta pueda fundarse sobre sanos principios. ¿Cómo podrían adquirirse éstos si no se velase sobre la educación y primera instrucción de la juventud?" (Lucas Alamán, "Instrucción...", *La Sabatina Universal*, 16 (28 Sept. 1822), p. 266.

In this context, the mechanism of rotation of monitors seemed very appropriate to teach the values of that “system of freedom”, by making students conscious of their rights and duties. On the one hand, it would instill the principle of equality (equal opportunities for all to get to the post of monitor, but always returning to the class as an ordinary student); on the other, it would make the students realize the notion of service, and how their individual effort as monitors would result in the general good of the class under their control. The identification between the personal and the general interest was also stressed by a passage in *El Sol* which, elaborating further on Lancaster’s notion of social emulation, suggested that the most efficient way to encourage a student who was not successful in the continuous race for posts and prizes was to “transfer the feeling of individual competition to the competition among entire classes”.<sup>45</sup> Thus the student would feel that he belonged to a group and was contributing to it as a whole, although this measure was secondary to individual competition and served only as a motivation for the less able students.

Another significant difference in the perception of the system in Mexico compared to England was the importance given to “trial by jury”. This was indeed a reproduction of the judicial trial by jury in the classroom, in which the students played an active role. It was to be implemented by the school master when he believed that the nature of a student’s fault deserved to be treated with solemnity. During the trial the “accused” had to stand on a platform while a “prosecutor”, a number of witnesses and a “defence counsel” presented their statements. The jury (formed by monitors) issued a verdict and voted for the appropriate punishment; there was always a possibility for the defence counsel to implore compassion for the accused.<sup>46</sup>

The idea of trial by jury at school was introduced by Bell, and it should be noticed that in Mexico it only appears in the manual of the Lancasterian Company. Bell was criticised for the introduction of this mechanism, and thus tried to lessen its role in a revised edition of his system: “Though fitted to inspire youth with a love of justice, respect for the laws, and deference to the institutions of their country, yet opposite effects have been ascribed to it in theory, and have filled some minds with horror of this hydra monster”. Although he defended the capacity of the children to “discriminate between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, good and bad motives” regarding their classmates, he added: “To relieve my readers from such apprehensions, I

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<sup>45</sup>“Para que un niño por rudo que sea, no se figure que es incapaz de adelantar, convendrá promover otros asuntos de competencia entre otros individuos. Pero de todos los remedios el más eficaz para el desaliento del individuo es transferir el sentimiento de la competencia individual a la de clases enteras, haciendo que éstas se reten al trabajo, y dando la preferencia de lugar a la que haya salido mejor del examen del maestro que ellas mismas hayan provocado.” *El Sol* (26 June 1826), p. 1508.

<sup>46</sup>Compañía Lancasteriana, *Sistema...*, pp. 72-73.

assure them that it [the trial by jury] is no otherwise necessary to the system than as a mild engine of the discipline, which they are at perfect liberty to dispense with, if they retain a predilection for a more summary mode of correction".<sup>47</sup>

As in the case of emulation, there was no objection to the mechanism of trial by jury in any of the editions of the manual issued by the Mexican Lancasterian Company. Presumably it was seen as another way of introducing the principles of a representative system, by training the students in the practice of this judicial process which was being introduced in Mexico at that time.<sup>48</sup>

The differences in the perception and application of the monitorial system in Mexico and England can be explained by the different purposes attributed to it. In England, monitorial schools had been designed primarily for the education of the poor, and many saw them as a reproduction of - and a training for - the system of division of labour of an industrialised society.<sup>49</sup> The division of a large class into small groups that worked simultaneously on short and differentiated lessons was advocated by radicals and utilitarians,<sup>50</sup> following Adam Smith's principles of political economy,<sup>51</sup> as a preparation for the

<sup>47</sup>Bell, *The Madras School...*, pp. 266-267.

<sup>48</sup>The system of trial by jury, of English origin, was widely adopted in Europe in the early nineteenth century and it was through the influence of continental liberals like Benjamin Constant and the Spanish legislators of 1812 that it became very appealing in Mexico after independence. By 1826, jury trial in criminal cases had been adopted by the states of Jalisco, Puebla, Zacatecas and Mexico. Enthusiasm about the system in Mexico was based on the belief that justice would be better attained through the common sense of local people closest to the case being tried, free from traditional judicial corruption. Juries should be made up of property holders only, which would guarantee their independence of judgement. On the whole the system was seen as a means to guarantee individual liberty against the abuse of an arbitrary juridical power. Hale, *Mexican liberalism...*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>49</sup>On the economic and social implications of the use of the space in monitorial schools in England, see Thomas A. Markus, "Early nineteenth century school space and ideology", *Paedagogica Historica*, XXXII, 1 (1996), pp. 9-50.

<sup>50</sup>See esp. James Mill's article on "Education" in the *Supplement* to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (5 ed., 1818) (reprinted in F.A. Cavenagh, *James and John Stuart Mill on Education*, 1931); and Jeremy Bentham, *Chrestomathia* (1816-17). Mill's and Bentham's opinions about the monitorial system and the use they made of their principles also differed from the original works of Bell and Lancaster. For example, Bentham did stress the principle of emulation and individual competition in his educational proposal, but his plan was never put into practice and it was not representative of the general way in which the system was seen and used in England.

<sup>51</sup>Adam Smith had suggested that by providing basic education with a mechanical sense, labourers would not suffer the boredom and, consequently, the "stupidity" caused by monotonous and repetitive tasks in the factories. See A. Smith,

mechanical tasks of work in factories.<sup>52</sup> The utilitarian notion of efficiency at school was also derived from the expanding market and the development of factory production. Bell's analogy of his method with the steam engine was well known: like the latter, the monitorial system could "diminish labour and multiply work".<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the two religious organisations that promoted the monitorial system, the Anglican National Society for promoting the Education of the Poor (following Bell) and the dissenting British and Foreign School Society (following Lancaster), were preoccupied with an education for the working classes that prevented any kind of subversive behaviour - an emphasis characteristic of the wave of social fear in the aftermath of the French revolution. They viewed the monitorial system as a way to promote a culture where social hierarchy would be respected and people would be content with their own allotted station in life.<sup>54</sup> With its devices for order, discipline, and vigilance, the monitorial system was meant to provide a little schooling to the lower classes in order to improve their morals and manners, enable them to read the Bible, guarantee social stability and make them better workers in an age of commerce and industry.<sup>55</sup> As Bell put it, the system was intended to form the habits of "industry, morality, and religion".<sup>56</sup>

In Mexico, by contrast, the system was proposed for application on a larger scale; not only for the poor but as the first step in the creation of a modern, educated society. It was not seen as a method of preparation of the working classes for industry, the society being scarcely industrialised. Moreover, it was not rooted in any religious movement - though religion was of course to be taught in monitorial schools. It was not even a matter of political debate: members of different factions - centralists and federalists, liberals and conservatives - gave their support to it. Nothing in the discourse about the monitorial system in Mexico in the early years of independence

*An Inquiry into the Nature and the Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (bk V, ch. I, art. ii). Quoted in Brian Simon, *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure 1780-1870* (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1974), pp. 138-139.

<sup>52</sup>Sir Thomas Bernard, in his report about different systems of education prepared by the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor, commented that "the grand principle of Dr. Bell is THE DIVISION OF LABOUR, applied to intellectual purposes... The man who first made a practical use of the *division of labour*, gave a new power to the application of corporal strength, and simplified and facilitated the most irksome and laborious operations... But that man, whatever was his merit, did no more essential service to *mechanical*, than Dr. Bell has done to *intellectual* operations." Thomas Barnard, *Of the Education of the Poor* (London, W. Bulmer and Co. Cleveland, 1908), pp. 35-36. (Uppercase and italics in the original).

<sup>53</sup>Bell, *The Madras School...*, p. 37.

<sup>54</sup>Green, *Education and State Formation*, pp. 229-230.

<sup>55</sup>R.D. Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago, 1957), pp. 141-149.

<sup>56</sup>Bell, *An Experiment in Education...*, p. 18.

showed the tone of social conservatism that it had in England.<sup>57</sup> In fact, the attributes conferred on the system indicate that it was believed to form a certain kind of civic culture in the students that involved principles of individual competition and participation, equality and service for the common good.

However, there were some tensions within this liberal, republican discourse. The emphasis on individual competition did not articulate smoothly with the notions of equality and service to the common good. The Mexican manuals displayed an excessive faith in what the spirit of emulation and competition could achieve, but at the same time wanted to instill in the children the notion that the exercise of authority was a disinterested activity and that, eventually, all students were "equal". This tension between individualism and the sense of owing oneself to the society as a whole points towards a more general problem in the political discourse of this period about the role of the individual citizens - deprived of the privilege of belonging to a group or corporation - vis à vis the new state. If the republican discourse wanted to teach notions of social mobility, equality and participation in government tasks, it had to find novel ways to justify obedience to the recently constituted government and its feeble institutions in terms of the principles of individual freedom - and not in terms of the divine right of the king to govern. This was indeed a basic problem of state authority that Mexico, like most former Spanish colonies, faced for several decades in the nineteenth century, and which education continuously attempted to tackle. A similar problem was experienced by another young republican nation, the United States. Andy Green has argued that, even in a country where education was closely linked to democratic ideas, it still had a contradictory function: on the one hand, it seemed to encourage democratic, republican political forms to prevent any return to aristocratic reaction or authoritarian statism; on the other, it taught notions of political conformity to prevent anarchy, which as an essential element in the construction of an individualist, capitalist hegemony.<sup>58</sup> Further dimensions of this problem in the Mexican case can be appreciated by studying the way in which the subject of civic principles itself was actually taught within the monitorial system.

### **Teaching the civic catechism**

Civic instruction was introduced as a subject in elementary schools after independence, though it had been prescribed throughout the Spanish

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<sup>57</sup>And it is interesting that historians of education from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries hardly ever conceived of the monitorial system in Mexico in those terms.

<sup>58</sup>Green, *Education and State Formation*, pp. 35-36.

empire by the liberal and short-lived 1812 Constitution.<sup>59</sup> The lessons about the form of government and the rights and duties of citizens in the new political order were conveyed through small manuals generically called “political” or “civic catechisms”<sup>60</sup> (Fig. 3). These texts, addressed to school and non-academic readers, were characterised by an interrogative style that resembled the structure of the religious catechisms.<sup>61</sup> This is a typical example:

“Q. What is a Constitution?  
 A. An organised collection of the fundamental political laws of a nation.  
 Q. What is understood by fundamental laws?  
 A. Those that establish the form of government, that is, those that explain the conditions under which some will give orders, and others will obey.  
 Q. Who has the power to make these laws?  
 A. The nation by itself, or by means of its Representatives or Deputies.  
 Q. Do we have a Constitution?  
 A. Such a good one, that it can make us happy if we observe it and help it to be observed.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Article 366 stated that in every elementary schools children would be taught reading, writing, arithmetic and “the catechism of the catholic religion, which will also include a brief exposition of the civil duties”. In establishments of secondary education and universities the Constitution itself would have to be explained (art. 368). The 1812 constitution was abolished in May 1814 and then reestablished in 1820-1823, but the influence of this disposition prevailed in independent Mexico (in some states the 1812 Constitution ruled until the new local constitutions were formed, which in a few cases took place as late as 1827).

<sup>60</sup>The denomination most commonly used at the time was *catecismos políticos* (“political catechisms”), but I will rather call them “civic” because this term is closer to the present use of the word as referring to the rights and duties of the citizens. These *catecismos políticos* are the predecessors the civic textbooks of the second half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>61</sup>The Catholic Church had used the interrogative method to teach the doctrine to common people since the end of the fifteenth century, as a recommendation of the Tortosa Council (1492). The Reformation, aided by the improvement of the printing press, motivated the use of these texts more intensely, both for Protestants and Catholics. The *Cartilla de la doctrina cristiana* of the Jesuit Geronimo Ripalda, first published in 1591, became the most important catechism in Spanish-speaking countries until the middle of the twentieth century. See Javier Ocampo López, *Los catecismos políticos en la independencia de Hispano América* (Tunja, Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, 1988), pp. 11-12.

<sup>62</sup>“P. ¿Qué es Constitución? R. Una colección ordenada de las leyes fundamentales o políticas de una nación. P. ¿Qué se entiende por leyes fundamentales? R. Las que establecen la forma de gobierno: es decir, las que fijan las condiciones con que unos han de mandar, y otros obedecer. P. ¿Quién tiene la facultad para hacer estas leyes? R. La nación por sí sola, o por medio de sus Representantes o Diputados. P. ¿Tenemos nosotros Constitución? R. Tan buena que puede hacernos felices si la observamos y contribuimos a que se observe.” D.J.C., *Catecismo político arreglado a la*

Figure 3. Title-page of D.J.C.'s *Catecismo político* (Palma, Miguel Domingo, 1812), the most widespread civic catechism throughout the Spanish empire from 1812 to 1821. (By permission of the British Library; shelfmark: 8042.a.4.(2.)).



*En la Imprenta de Miguel Domingo.*



In this section I will focus on the teaching of the civic catechisms within the monitorial system itself. I shall argue that the civic catechisms acquired a particular meaning when they were read and memorised in the context of the social relations established in the monitorial schools.

The genre of civic catechisms was common to the Western countries that in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century experienced radical changes in democratic political organisation. These manuals were widespread in France after the revolution, with the purpose of instilling the notions of the new regime in the general population.<sup>63</sup> They also proliferated in Spain during the French invasion in 1808 - with a remarkably defensive and nationalistic content - and especially after the promulgation of the 1812 Constitution. After their independence, the Spanish American nations adopted the regulation of the 1812 Constitution in the sense that a "civil catechism" should be taught in primary schools.<sup>64</sup>

Civic catechisms published in independent Mexico followed the structure of their predecessors. They included a definition of society and citizenship, a description of different forms of government and a defence of republicanism, an explanation of the particular form of government of Mexico and of the rights, duties and civic virtues expected from citizens. Unlike the French civic catechisms, which were intended to bring about a substitution of a secular order for a religious one, in the Mexican texts (as in the Spanish ones) religion was almost never absent. In many of them religion was considered as one more of the civic virtues (one of the ways to serve the country was by being a good Christian), and in some cases the political catechism was printed

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*constitución de la monarquía española* (Puebla, San Felipe Neri, 1920; first publ. Cádiz, 1812), p. 1.

<sup>63</sup>Although a few examples have been found in Spain in years previous to the French revolution (see Dorothy Tanck de Estrada "Los catecismos políticos: de la revolución francesa al México independiente", in Solange Alberro, Alicia Hernández Chávez, and Elías Trabulse, coords., *La revolución francesa en México* (México, El Colegio de México, 1992), pp. 491-506) and in late seventeenth century England. The earliest civic catechism I have found is the English *A Political Catechism, Serving to Instruct Those That Have Made the Protestation Concerning the Power and Priviledges of Parliament* (1693). It was published during the reign of Charles II and has the tone of an apology of the English political system in the delicate period of restoration of the monarchy after the short period of dictatorial republicanism.

<sup>64</sup>Ocampo, *Los catecismos políticos...*; Anne Staples, "El catecismo como libro de texto durante el siglo XIX", in Roderic A. Camp, et al., *Los intelectuales y el poder en México: Memorias de la VI Conferencia de Historiadores Mexicanos y Estadounidenses* (México, El Colegio de México - University of California, Los Angeles, 1991), pp. 491-506; Tanck "Los catecismos políticos..."; Rafael Sagredo Baeza, "Actores políticos en los catecismos patriotas y republicanos americanos, 1810-1827", *Historia Mexicana*, XLV, 3 (1996), pp. 501-538.

in the same book as the religious one. For the most part, religious catechisms co-existed in schools along with the civic ones at least until the 1860s.

Many civic catechisms followed very closely the structure of their religious counterparts. In the following example, Father Ripalda's catechism serves as the basis for a Spanish civic catechism of 1808:

Ripalda's *Catecismo y exposición breve de la doctrina cristiana*.

“Q. Tell me, child: what is your name?

A. The child will give his name: Pedro, Juan, or Francisco, etc. He should commend his soul to the saint of his name.

Q. Are you Christian?

A. Yes, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Q. What does it mean to be Christian?

A. A man who has the faith of Christ, professed in baptism...

Q. To what is the man obliged?

A. To reach the ultimate aim for which he was created.

Q. What was man created for?

A. To love and serve God in this life, and afterwards see Him and rejoice in Him in the other.

Q. What are the main works in the service of God?

A. Works of faith, hope and charity.”<sup>65</sup>

*Catecismo civil*.

“Q. Tell me, child, what is your name?

A. Spaniard.

Q. What does Spaniard mean?

A. A good man.

Q. How many and which are his obligations?

A. Three: be Christian, apostolic, Roman Catholic, defend his religion, his fatherland and his law, and die before being defeated.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>“P. Decid, niño, ¿cómo os llamáis? R. Responderá con su nombre: Pedro, Juan, o Francisco, etc. Encomiéndese el tener cada uno devoción con el santo de su nombre. P. ¿Sois cristiano? R. Sí, por la gracia de nuestro Señor Jesu Cristo. P. ¿Qué quiere decir ser cristiano? R. Hombre que tiene la fe de Cristo, que profesó en el bautismo... P. ¿A qué está obligado el hombre? R. A buscar el último fin para que fue criado. P. ¿Para qué fin fue criado el hombre? R. Para amar y servir a Dios en esta vida, y después verle y gozarle en la otra. P. ¿Con qué obras se sirve a Dios principalmente? R. Con obras de fe, esperanza y caridad.” Gerónimo de Ripalda, *Catecismo y exposición breve de la doctrina cristiana...* (Puebla de los Ángeles, Pedro de la Rosa, 1808), pp. 39-40.

<sup>66</sup>“P. Decid niño, ¿cómo os llamáis? R. Español. P. ¿Qué quiere decir español? R. Hombre de bien. P. ¿Cuántas y cuáles son sus obligaciones? R. Tres, ser cristiano católico apostólico romano, defender su religión, su patria y su ley, y morir antes de ser vencido.” *Catecismo civil, o breve compendio de las obligaciones del buen español* (Santiago, Ignacio Aguayo, 1808), p. 1.

The resemblance between the civic and the religious catechisms has suggested that both texts had a function which was equally authoritarian. Historians of education have argued that the catechetical structure of the civic pamphlets served to promote the same unquestioned respect for hierarchies, obedience and loyalty to the state that the religious texts aimed to secure for the catholic Church, rather than an active participation in its democratic political organisation.<sup>67</sup> Here I will analyse this argument in the context of the manner in which the civic catechisms were taught, in particular in the monitorial schools.

In the past, the religious catechism had been the only book many people ever had in their hands. It was essential in schools and it was often used as the text with which children learned to read. Its content was learned by heart and it usually helped the process of learning to read because in it children had the visual representations of the prayers they had already memorised.<sup>68</sup> In fact, the interrogative part was only a section of the religious catechism, and it was intended to reaffirm in the memory the series of prayers and precepts presented in the first part of the text. When civic catechisms were introduced, they were taught in the same mnemonic way, but they did not have a narrative section: questions and answers were used as the means to convey information and not only to reinforce it in the mind. Civic catechisms were sometimes used to teach reading, and even the Constitution itself was used for that purpose.<sup>69</sup>

In the monitorial schools in Mexico, "civil doctrine" was ordered to be taught once a week, on Saturday afternoon, for half an hour (by contrast to religious doctrine, to be taught a quarter of an hour every day and half an hour on Saturday). It was to be the last lesson of the day, just before the weekly prizes were awarded.<sup>70</sup> It would certainly be an appropriate introduction to the laudatory ceremony of merit. The manner in which both religion and civics were taught was virtually the same, and the interrogative style of both kinds of texts was essential for this strategy of learning.<sup>71</sup> The school was divided into three large groups. The children would stand in semi-circles as for the lessons of reading and arithmetic. In the first class the instructor would read the principles of the catechism (civil or religious): he would recite the questions and the answers, which the children would repeat several times until they had learned them. In the second class children were expected to have memorised three or four questions to ask one another, mutually correcting their mistakes.

<sup>67</sup>See Anne Staples, "El catecismo como libro de texto...", *passim*.

<sup>68</sup>Tanck, "La enseñanza de la lectura...", p. 220.

<sup>69</sup>Tanck, *La educación ilustrada...*, p. 227.

<sup>70</sup>Compañía Lancasteriana, *Sistema...*, p. 57.

<sup>71</sup>In this the Mexican manuals were closer to Bell than to Lancaster, for in the schools of the latter, claiming to be non-denominational, the Scriptures themselves were used to teach religion.

In the third class the students would do the same thing but using the information of one or two pages of the catechism. As in the reading lessons, the children who gave the correct answers would change their places within the semi-circle, so that at the end of the lesson the reward cards could be granted according to position in the class<sup>72</sup> (Fig. 4).

The fact that both the questions and the answers were pre-ordained, and that no spontaneous or alternative answer from the students was allowed, together with the obvious dogmatic associations between a text of theological truths and a text of political truths, are apt to make catechetical teaching appear to us as a way to encourage an attitude of uncritical submission to the structures of political power rather than of democratic participation in them. This stands in frank contradiction to what the political catechisms themselves taught. Virtually all of them - and especially the text officially adopted by the schools of the Lancasterian Company in the 1830s and 1840s<sup>73</sup> - based their discourse upon the liberal idea that society was a "pact" established freely and willingly by individuals in order to guarantee their peace and security. They described the democratic republican system as a two-way contract between the citizens and their government: the government was elected by the citizens - "the people" -, with the mission of ruling according to the laws that the citizens, through their representatives, had made in order to regulate their social freedom. Laws were a creation of the people itself; they were "imposed by the people to be governed".<sup>74</sup> Should the government not fulfil its commitment to the protection of the individual freedom of the citizens, the citizens themselves had the right to dethrone it.

Such an horizontal concept of political power, a power in which everybody was supposed to participate, contrasted with the verticality of the power relations that the catechetical style seemed to establish.<sup>75</sup> This

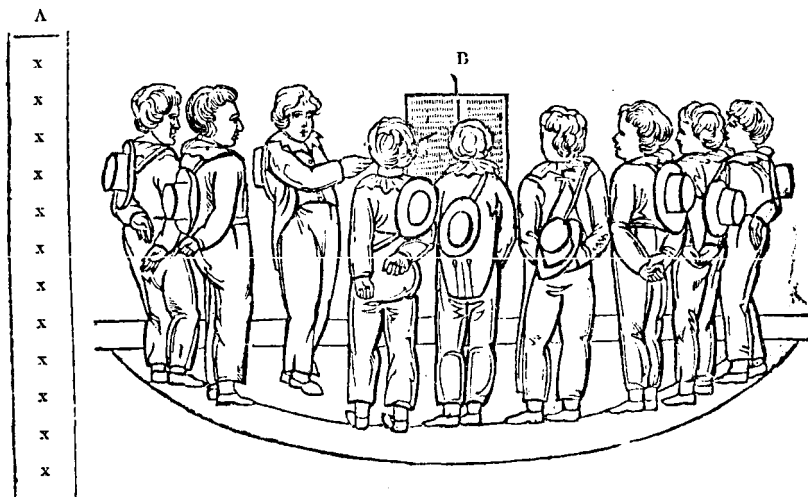
<sup>72</sup>Compañía Lancasteriana, *Sistema...*, pp. 56-58.

<sup>73</sup>José Justo Gómez de la Cortina, Conde de la Cortina, *Cartilla social, o breve instrucción sobre los derechos y obligaciones del hombre en la sociedad civil*. This text had at least eight editions in Mexico between 1833 and 1849. It was used in the municipal and Lancasterian schools of Mexico City as well as in some states such as Puebla. The author donated his copyright to the Lancasterian Company of Mexico City. The *Cartilla* was basically a slightly modified copy of a Spanish catechism from 1812, the *Instrucción familiar, política y moral* by José Sabau y Blanco (Madrid, Imp. de Ibarra, 1812).

<sup>74</sup>"Las leyes que impone el pueblo para ser gobernado." Gómez de la Cortina, *Cartilla social*, 8th ed. (México, Santiago Pérez, 1849), p. 11.

<sup>75</sup>A similar opinion has been expressed about scientific textbooks written in an interrogative form in nineteenth-century Britain. Greg Myers has argued that, by presenting a closed world of established questions and answers, the dialogue form in texts of popular science in fact contributed to separating the realm of those who made science and that of those who were only to know something about it. However, in this text Myers seems to criticise the method of nineteenth century texts against the

**Figure 4.** Manner of teaching reading and the catechism in a monitorial school. Students changed places within their semi-circle according to the number of right answers they gave. From Joseph Lancaster's *The Lancasterian System of Education, with Improvements* (Baltimore, 1821), p. 31. (By permission of the British Library; shelfmark: 8305.f.16).



When done reading or spelling, the pupils and their monitor return to their class seats, when the monitor of the classes take the same charge of them as before going out to read.

discrepancy may be described in terms of a “performative contradiction” between the democratic content of the texts and the authoritarian practice of teaching through the catechetical style, a contradiction associated with the ideological function of legitimating the new group in power.<sup>76</sup> In fact, a similar tension between democratic and authoritarian principles can be observed within the discourse of the civic catechisms themselves, especially in the way they encouraged obedience to the government as a civic virtue. On the one hand, the texts taught that the people participated in the organisation of the government and that they had a right to demand from it the satisfaction of the people’s needs, for the government was only a representation of the people’s will. Yet, on the other, they tended to promote the notion that obedience to the government was an expression of love for *la patria*, and the nature of this love was described as something unconditional, rather than as something subject to the fulfilment of the “pact” contracted by the citizens and their representatives.<sup>77</sup>

We may be tempted to argue that this “performative contradiction” between democratic and authoritarian values and practices indicates a form of “false consciousness” in service of the legitimation of the dominant group trying to consolidate its authority. It is undeniable that, as Andy Green has shown, in the process of state formation education plays a significant role by contributing to form the ideologies and collective beliefs which legitimate state power; this was of particular urgency in a state so young as the Mexican in the period studied.<sup>78</sup> But to what extent can we describe this contradiction between contents and methods of teaching as an indication of the ideological function of civic education? In this case, the fact that these methods were not invented anew for the teaching of civic principles, but were *adapted* from pre-existing local or external resources partly explains the existence of such discrepancies. The use of the catechetical style seemed appropriate to convey civic principles

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framework of twentieth-century analytical education, rather than against the pedagogical trends of the time. (See Greg Myers, “Science for women and children: the dialogue of popular science in the nineteenth century”, in John Christie & Sally Shuttleworth, eds., *Nature Transfigured: Science and Literature, 1700-1900* (Manchester-New York, Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 171-200.

<sup>76</sup>The notion of “performative contradiction” as a discrepancy between a meaning conveyed explicitly and the meaning that is conveyed by the act itself of conveying has been discussed by Denys Turner in *Marxism and Christianity* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983), ch. 3. Turner uses a pedagogical metaphor to illustrate his concept of ideological practice in terms of such contradiction.

<sup>77</sup>For a closer examination of this point, see Eugenia Roldán Vera, “The making of citizens: an analysis of political catechisms in nineteenth-century Mexico” (unpublished dissertation for the degree in Master in Arts in Historical Discourse and Methods, University of Warwick, U.K., September 1996), pp. 69-80.

<sup>78</sup>Green, *Education and State Formation*, p. 77.

because it was the most efficient method for teaching a body of doctrine in elementary schools that was available. Similarly, the fact that the monitorial system of education was transplanted from abroad accounts for some of the tensions between its original and its newly-acquired purposes and applications regarding civic education.

These factors help to explain why the catechetical style was praised not only as a technique that facilitated progressive understanding according to the principle of short and differentiated lessons characteristic of the monitorial schools, but also as the appropriate style for the promotion of active participation of the students in the classroom. Brief and varied lessons were meant to maintain the attention of the children,<sup>79</sup> whilst breaking down the information into short sentences or groups of sentences introduced by a question facilitated repetition - the way "leave a permanent impression" on the mind<sup>80</sup> -, which was the basic way of learning in both monitorial and traditional schools. In Bell's words: "The same division ... of each lesson into parts, and learning, portion by portion, is observed in committing to memory the catechism, religious exercises, addition, and multiplication tables, and throughout every branch of education. The rule of the school is - short, easy, and frequent lessons - divided into short parts, gotten one by one, and well said."<sup>81</sup>

Yet the way the catechism - religious or civic - was learned in monitorial schools was different to that of traditional schools. In the latter, students were not supposed to ask the questions to one another. In fact, in the printed religious catechisms the voice who asked the questions was that of the priest (which in the classroom was performed by the teacher), acting as the authority who already knew the answers and was only examining the knowledge of the children. As I mentioned before, the fact that children were able to ask questions and correct one another, and that they could ascend in their classes if they knew the right answers - practices that were permitted by the catechetical style - was viewed in some Mexican manuals as a way to

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<sup>79</sup>As Alamán put it: "One of the most adequate ways of not tiring the attention of the children, is to focus it alternatively on various objects, so that by not keeping it too much on any object, they do not get wearied. This is the purpose of the distribution of the several occupations of the children during the time they are at school." ("Uno de los medios más adecuados para no cansar la atención de los niños, es llamarla alternativamente a varios objetos, de manera que no deteniéndose demasiado en ninguno, no puedan llegar a fastidiarse. Con este fin se distribuyen las diversas ocupaciones de los niños durante el tiempo que pasan en la escuela, de suerte que éste se llene enteramente." Alamán, "Instrucción...", *La Sabatina Universal*, 18 (12 Oct. 1822), pp. 296-297.

<sup>80</sup>Bell, *An Experiment in Education...*, p. 57.

<sup>81</sup>Bell, *The Madras School*, p. 44.

promote a republican a sense of mobility and of active participation in tasks of authority.

Moreover, examples of other types of non religious catechisms arriving from England to Mexico in this period contributed to validate the interrogative method as something rational and even modern - England being the prototype of a liberal, progressive country not driven by ignorance and superstition as the former Spanish empire. In the 1820s a series of more than twenty catechisms of "useful knowledge" were published in London for the "enlightening" of the recently independent countries of Latin America. Produced by the house of Rudolph Ackermann (written or translated by Spanish exiles and sponsored by Latin American diplomats and statesmen), these manuals were reprinted several times in those countries and constituted a very important basis for the further local production of textbooks - also in a catechetical style - throughout several decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>82</sup> Their interrogative style followed that of other books for children produced in England since the late eighteenth century for the teaching of all kinds of subjects, from sciences to history.<sup>83</sup> All the textbooks were introduced by a note stating that the word *catecismo* did not mean only a religious book, but it

<sup>82</sup>See María Teresa Berrueto León, *La lucha de Hispanoamérica por su independencia en Inglaterra, 1800-1830* (Madrid, Ediciones de Cultura Hispánica, 1989); John Ford, "Rudolph Ackermann: culture and commerce in Latin America. 1822-1828", in John Lynch (ed.), *Andrés Bello: the London Years* (Surrey, The Richmond Publishing Company, 1982), pp. 137-152; "Rudolph Ackermann: publisher to Latin America", in *Bello y Londres. Segundo Congreso del Bicentenario*, 2 vols. (Caracas, Arte, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 197-254; Vicente Llorens Castillo, *Liberales y románticos. Una emigración española en Inglaterra (1823-1834)*, 2nd ed. (Madrid, Castalia, 1968); Eugenia Roldán Vera, "Useful knowledge for export", in Nicholas Jardine & Marina Frasca-Spada (eds.), *Books and Sciences in History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming); A. Viñao Frago, "Un programa educativo para la América Hispana desde el exilio liberal londinense (1823-1833). Blanco-White y la historia de la educación española", in *Historia de las relaciones educativas entre España y América: V Coloquio Nacional de Historia de la Educación* (Sevilla, Departamento de Teoría e Historia de la Educación, Universidad de Sevilla, 1988), pp. 313-321.

<sup>83</sup>Most of Ackermann's texts were translations of a series of catechisms published by William Pinnock in the 1810s and 1820s, re-printed in Britain dozens of times throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Since the last years of the eighteenth century the dialogue form was commonly used for scientific textbooks addressed to aristocratic families, where they were taught by parents or private tutors. The series *Evenings at Home*, by John Aikin and Ana Letitia Barbauld (1792-1796), and Jeremiah Joyce's *Scientific Dialogues* (1807) are representative examples. In the early years of the nineteenth century other series of texts were written in a proper catechetical style (without the fiction and interaction of the dialogue form), aimed at a wider, school audience. Mrs. Marcet's *Conversations*, Richard Magnall's *Historic and Miscellaneous Questions*, and Pinnock's series of *Catechisms*.



designed “indistinctly any book written in questions and answers”, and that the word was “used in this sense in all the cultured and Catholic countries in Europe”.<sup>84</sup> The catechetical style was presented as the most appropriate for teaching according to the monitorial system, a system “so well received in all the cultured countries, and so favourable for the propagation of human knowledge”.<sup>85</sup> The editor of one of Ackermann’s magazines, the rationalist, renegade Catholic Joseph Blanco White, complimented the catechetical method on the way it helped to “focus the attention on the particular idea the reader has to understand”, and praised the utility of the questions as “a pointer, so that even if the sight is moved away from the object, they bring it back to it with no waste of time”.<sup>86</sup> A Mexican civic catechism described the benefits of the interrogative style in the same terms, stating that it provided “more simplicity and easiness” and facilitated “clarity and understanding, putting away the tiredness that a long discourse usually generates”.<sup>87</sup>

When the process of adaptation of pre-existing methods to accommodate and convey new political principles is taken into consideration, it is possible to understand some of the reasons why the teaching of political

<sup>84</sup>“Para vencer todos los escrúpulos que pudiera ocasionar el uso de la palabra CATECISMO, aplicada generalmente a libros de Religión, debemos prevenir a nuestros lectores, que esta palabra no está exclusivamente consagrada a materias religiosas, sino que indistintamente significa todo libro escrito en preguntas y respuestas. En este sentido se usa actualmente en todos los países cultos y católicos de Europa.” *Catecismo de agricultura*, London, R. Ackermann, [1824]. (The texts deliberately overlooked the fact that England was not a Catholic country in order not to endanger the circulation of the catechisms in countries where the Catholic was the only creed officially recognised).

<sup>85</sup>“Este método [catequético]... es el más acomodado a la enseñanza mutua, tan bien recibida en todos los países cultos, y tan favorable a la propagación de los conocimientos humanos”. *Catecismo de química*, 3rd ed., London, R. Ackermann, [1828], pp. i-ii.

<sup>86</sup>“Este método [catequético] tiene muchas ventajas. La más principal es que fija la atención... Las preguntas, no sólo evitan distracciones, sino fijan la atención sobre la idea particular que el lector debe comprender; y sirven como de puntero, que aun quando se aparte la vista del objeto, la atraen a él sin pérdida de tiempo. [Joseph Blanco White] “Catecismos de geografía y química”, *Variedades, o Mensajero de Londres* (London, R. Ackermann), num. 6, 1824, p. 460. The perception of the catechetical style and of the monitorial system in the works published by Ackermann was itself shaped by the general purpose of the agents involved in the enterprise of adapting these methods to the circumstances of independent, republican Latin America. This publishing enterprise alone illustrates the process of transformation suffered by a body of ideals when transplanted to a different setting.

<sup>87</sup>“...me parece que el mejor modo de aprender, es el de preguntar y responder: este método proporciona más sencillez y facilidad, al mismo tiempo que facilita la claridad y comprensión, alejando el fastidio que suele causar un discurso muy largo.” *Catecismo de la doctrina social*.. (Mexico, José Uribe y Alcalde, 1833), pp. 1-2.

catechisms in the context of the monitorial system appeared as an attractive way to educate the democratic, law-abiding citizen. There were indeed some contemporary criticisms of the mechanistic nature of the monitorial system and the way it prevented critical thinking,<sup>88</sup> but in Mexico this kind of comments was isolated in the early period of enthusiasm about the system, becoming a sustained criticism only in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>89</sup> To learn by heart was still the equivalent of understanding: learning was beyond doubt the act of imprinting certain information in the mind that could be repeated as literally as possible. In this sense, the contradictions between the democratic content of the civic catechisms and the authoritarian methods of teaching can still be understood as serving the ideological function of fostering the hegemony of the new group in power, but they should not be explained as merely ideological in the strong sense of systematic distortion of a social and political reality in the service of legitimation of an authoritarian government.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

In early independent Mexico education was conceived as the principal vehicle to create a new form of thinking and acting - a new political culture - within a republican, representative regime. Extending elementary education to the majority of the population and introducing civics into the curriculum of primary schools was the most explicit way to begin the daunting task of making citizens out of the subjects of an absolutist regime. However, the underlying concern with citizenship was present, though not necessarily in an explicit or conscious manner, in education in its entirety: its purposes, its methods and its texts.

As the analysis of the discourse of its manuals suggests, the monitorial system was praised in Mexico more for its notions of emulation and competition than for its mechanisms of vigilance. The concern with competition was related to the purpose of shaping the civic behaviour of the

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<sup>88</sup> Andrés Bello, for example, criticised the abuse of memory by the monitors, who did not really understand what they were conveying to other students. Andrés Bello to Antonio J. De Irisarri, 11 September 1820, *Revista nacional de cultura* (Caracas, Venezuela), 65 (Nov.-Dec. 1947), pp. 84-85.

<sup>89</sup> Tanck, *La educación ilustrada...*, pp. 237-238. Tanck confirms that the criticisms of the monitorial system in Mexico in the 1820s and 1830s had to do with the lack of knowledge or resources to put it in practice as was prescribed in the manuals, but not with the principles of the system itself.

<sup>90</sup> For a description of the different senses of the concept ideology, according to degrees of sharpening of focus, see Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London-New York, Verso, 1991), esp. Ch. 1.

individual freed from the corporate links which constituted an obstacle to political and economic liberalism. The classroom was still divided into classes with well-defined hierarchies, but the boundaries could easily be crossed if the students worked hard, and this participation and mobility was seen as very appropriate to encourage republican values. Yet the republican values of equality and service for the common good stood in tension with the excessive emphasis put on individual competition, and the manuals did not always find consistent ways to articulate both sets of principles. At the same time, educators faced the challenge of teaching obedience to the new state and its institutions, and the way this was attempted did not fully correspond with the principles of a system of individual freedom. The interrogative style, with its pre-established questions and answers, suggested a verticality of power and resembled the authoritarianism of the religious catechisms which taught unquestionable, transcendental truths. However, in the context of the monitorial system, this style appeared to facilitate the active participation of the students in a way that the religious catechism in traditional schools did not encourage.

These contradictions speak of a society in political transition. The liberal enthusiasm and faith in the power of education characteristic of early independent Mexico endowed the monitorial system with a series of republican virtues without completely eliminating authoritarian overtones in the effort to attain allegiance of the citizens with the new government. Pedagogical manuals and civic catechisms reflected the problem of authority in this new set of relations between the individuals and the state, a problem which underlie the general political discourse. A distinctive feature of this period of political transition was that educational devices aimed at the reform of society were not invented anew, but old or foreign methods were adapted to convey modern and local political principles. This process of adoption and transformation of educational strategies has made it necessary to give a subtler account of their ideological function: whilst serving to promote the legitimacy of the new ruling group in a general sense, educational practices did not do that through a systematic distortion of reality. Rather, their contradictions may be explained in terms of the struggle to adapt a traditional genre and foreign materials to the new Mexican political discourse and not as a mere way to mask an unfair and authoritarian domination.

The initial belief in the capacity of elementary education to create law-abiding citizens did not produce good results and the educational reforms of the first decades of independence proved insufficient to solve the problem of authority of the Mexican state. The innumerable civil wars and the weak response to foreign invasions suffered during the first four decades of independence gave the impression that the Mexican society was divided from within as never before. The reasons had to do, in general, with the atomisation of power and the disruption of the economy generated by the overthrow of the centralised colonial authority - a fact which also prevented the spread of

education to the general population.<sup>91</sup> There was certainly a wide dissemination of the liberal principles of political representation at the national and local levels (even in rural areas),<sup>92</sup> but this did not result in allegiance to the general government in periods of crisis. Eventually, different conditions made possible the emergence of new political projects in the 1850s, the main concern of which was to achieve the unity of the country and constitute a modern state with strong authority. This goal was expressed in other educational plans and methods, which will in the long run be more successful. The initial faith in the value of education for the construction of a democratic society soon gave way to a more conservative educational discourse, as political instability made the masses seem more as a threat to order than as the potentially participatory citizens originally conceived. The monitorial system gradually lost its popularity and was replaced by less mechanistic methods of education, and less rational and more patriotic texts of morality displaced the civic catechisms of previous decades. National history was introduced into the elementary school curriculum for the first time in the 1860s. If education had been a chief concern of the state at the onset of independence, it took it almost fifty years to articulate a national and efficient system of public education, for which the monitorial method was no longer attractive.

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<sup>91</sup>There are no reliable statistics as to the level of national literacy for the first half of the nineteenth century. A rough estimation is that less than 40% of the general children population attended elementary schools, but this varied widely in different regions - the states in the centre of Mexico usually fared better than the rest. See M.K. Vaughan, "Primary education and literacy", pp. 36-37.

<sup>92</sup>A. Hernández Chávez, *La tradición republicana*, *passim*