

William T. Pink • George W. Noblit
Editors

Second International Handbook of Urban Education

Volume I

 Springer

Editors

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Chapter 27

Schooling Processes and the Indigenous Peoples in Urban Contexts in Mexico

Gabriela Czarny

27.1 The (In)visibility of Indians in Urban Contexts

Until the 1990s studies of “Indian education” in Latin America and Mexico in particular centered around a focus on rural areas where traditionally indigenous peoples have lived and still live. However, and taking into account that these regions have been the historic settlement areas for this population, this way of defining “indigenous” as related to rural, has been a contributing factor to ignoring the existence of Indians and communities who live and attend schools in different parts of the country, for example, in urban areas. As part of this perspective we have included the socio-anthropological view, which up until the mid twentieth century, was characterized by the fact that “anything Indian” is necessarily associated with a rural, community-based and peasant way of life. This contributed to a lack of recognition of long-standing socio-territorial mobility processes and the conformation of communities with an Indian identity where you can be Indian and recognized as a member of the community even if you live elsewhere, a phenomenon known as *extraterritoriality* (Oehmichen 2005), or as *moral communities* (Martínez Casas 2007). Nonetheless, discussions over the past few years related to a redefinition of the indigenous peoples, the topic of migration, as well as their rights, open up these areas for public policy to begin to be concerned with the indigenous communities that reside in small and large cities.

Changes in Mexico’s Constitution at the beginning of this century highlight the country as a multicultural and plurilingual nation and recognize the fact that this diversity is based on the existence of the Indian peoples who have lived throughout

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the territory since before the Spanish Conquest. This recognition is the result of struggles and demands by indigenous organizations that have shown a strong presence since the second half of the twentieth century, as witnessed by international agreements and changes in the Constitution and laws in the countries of the continent.

The presence of indigenous peoples in the socio-demographic and cultural composition of the nation is so important that some studies note, from the total number of countries that make up the American continent, Mexico is the nation that is home to the largest number of indigenous peoples (Pueblos Originarios 2007). The latest census data on Population and Housing (XIII) (INEGI 2011), states that of the 112 million inhabitants in Mexico, 15.7 % is defined as of Indian descent of the overall population in the country. What is particularly worthy of note is the fact that around 30 % of this population lives in cities with more than 100,000 people, and about 50 % in small cities and towns with a population between 2500 and under 16,000 people.¹

Visibility and identification of Indian peoples in Mexican cities is the result of several processes that have come on the scene since the 1990s: Progress made in Indian organizations after having their rights recognized under the International Labor Organization (Convention 169) and the 1994 uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) with its demands for recognition and the right to live with justice and dignity placed on the national political forefront citizens' concerns with the many faces behind the use of the concept *Indian*, not only in regions considered to be indigenous, but also in Mexican cities.

² For decades, the criteria for identifying this population in national censuses has been whether or not they speak an Indian language. As of the year 2000, other criteria have been included, such as self-recognition or self-adscription in the sense of being part of an indigenous home or community.² Comparatively speaking, one could say that even when broadening the criteria for identifying this population in terms of percentages, there are fewer Indians than non-Indians in the country, as was mentioned in the previous section. However, this last statement has explanations which are not of a quantitative nature. To assume the identity of an individual who belongs to an Indian group or community has not been nor will be easy. The discrimination individuals have been subjected to, having to hide one's identity and go unnoticed, and being able to survive in environments hostile to indigenous peoples, are processes that have been internalized for several generations and are not easy to turn around quickly. As various studies have shown, masked identity and self-denial

¹ The National Institute for Statistics, Geography and Information (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática [INEGI]) uses 2500 people as a minimum number of inhabitants to refer to urban areas or rural areas, while other institutions like El Colegio de México, for example, propose 15,000 inhabitants. Undoubtedly the same notion of *city* forms part of this debate and areas which 50 years ago could have been considered rural are now considered to be small cities.

² In Mexico there are some 68 language groups made up of 364 dialectal variants (INALI 2006).

with respect to belonging to an ethnic community are processes that are present in multiple indigenous sectors and it is for this reason that we know the census data do not capture under the denomination “indigenous” the multiplicity of processes this population is subject to at present, marked by a change of individual or community residence and the use of the Indian language, among others. At present Indians, just like many other sectors in the country, change residence and migrate for different reasons and in different directions. We know of Indian populations that have settled for generations in various cities around the country, and in these cases their insertion in the labor and educational sectors is very different from the first generation indigenous population that goes straight from their communities to the cities.

27.2 Educational Policies and Indigenous Population: A Look to the Cities

Under the concept of progress and development adopted by Latin American countries at the turn of the nineteenth century, the role of the school was of central importance. School was thought to be a place to bring together under a mestizo ideology based on the notion of citizenship for all sectors of the population, one of which were the indigenous peoples. Behind this search for “integration”, the rights of the indigenous peoples to live under projects that are part of their own civilization, known today as community-oriented, were denied.

Public schooling for Indians in the cities, as an educational project encouraged by the Mexican government, was preceded by a federally sponsored pilot project introduced in 1925 in Mexico City, known as The Home of Indian Students (La Casa del Estudiante Indígena). The purpose was to prepare indigenous youth from different parts of the country to take charge of education and cultural brokering in their home towns and communities. The project expected them “to complete their primary education, receive pedagogical training and training in the arts and trades” and then go back to their communities of origin (De la Peña 1998). The program was cancelled 7 years after it began, but led to boarding schools located in indigenous rural zones, which initially attempted to train professors without uprooting them from their communities. Since then, many educational experiences and projects have promoted a type of education that takes into account the languages and cultures of the Indian communities, mainly in the rural indigenous communities, which is an aspect that we cannot deal with specifically in this chapter. By 1978, with the establishment of the General Office for Indian Education (Dirección General de Educación Indígena [DGEI]), under the Secretariat of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública [SEP]), an official national indigenous education project, open to this population and the public as well, an educational sub-system was instituted for Indians at the pre-school and primary school levels. This sub-system was linked to indigenous policies –known as *políticas indigenistas*– that have since been reformulated in light of other changes engendered in Latin American

indigenous people.³ The school structure, with indigenous teachers trained along the way through various teacher training programs, has grown at the preschool and primary school levels under the denomination of *Indigenous education*, at facilities located throughout different regions, mainly in rural and semi-rural areas.

It is important to point out that the notion of what the curriculum has been over the past decades is known as basic education, and is the sole program for all Mexican children and youth since the establishment of SEP, in 1921.⁴ In other words, the curriculum design in place since then as the national curriculum is common throughout the country and also operates in public Indian education schools. This is also the case in the rest of the region; Central and South America have developed educational programs for Indian communities from the 1970s, known first as Bilingual-Bicultural Education (Educación Bilingüe Bicultural [EBB]) and then in the 1990s as Bilingual Intercultural Education (Educación Bilingüe Intercultural [EBI]), and Intercultural Bilingual Education (Educación Intercultural Bilingüe [EIB]).

If we consider the latest results regarding the level of *school achievement* attained by children in basic education in areas such as Spanish and Math, indicated by tests and evaluations applied by the National Institute of Educational Evaluation (Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa [INEE]), we observe differences that have always existed among the different modalities offered for primary school under basic education (urban, indigenous, rural). It has been detected that for sixth grade in the area of Spanish, primary schools that offer public Indian education were 75 % *below the level of achievement* in contrast to 37 % *below the level of achievement* obtained by students in the same grade under the modality known as public urban schools. In the area of math, public indigenous primary school student were 65 % *below the level* obtained by student in the sixth grade under the modality of public urban school (INEE 2015).⁵

Public indigenous education with an intercultural and bilingual approach has not been extended to secondary and high school education, nor has it been offered to indigenous urban populations. In recent years some projects have appeared known as community high schools as well intercultural universities. These projects

³ Indian education in Mexico has undergone various stages, just as has been the case in other countries of the region and is under DGEI-SEP. From this office proposals and educational materials have been designed to educate in the Indian tongues and in Spanish, as well as to update the teachers in Indian education. Indian education schools, mainly located in rural areas, generally include several grades, which means that the teachers have to cover more than one grade in the same classroom and sometimes serve as the principal of the school as well.

⁴ Generally, private schools recognized by the SEP also have to meet the national Curricula criteria.

⁵ In the INEE's official statistics they mark a difference between public urban schools, rural public schools, Indian education, community courses and private education. There is no indication of the presence of Indian children in the modalities that are not defined as Indian education, which does not imply that Indians are not present. To the contrary, in what is defined as rural public education and community courses, it has been recognized in educational research that a high percentage of the students are of Indian descent.

have different origins and conceptions regarding the meaning of schooling for indigenous peoples. In some cases, they represent attempts to promote processes of autonomy, while in others they depend on the State for subsidizing these efforts under different modalities.⁶

Similarly, it wasn't until the beginning of the twenty-first century that an educational policy aimed at providing services to indigenous children in public schools located in urban contexts was proposed. With the establishment of the General Coordination of Bilingual Intercultural Education (Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe [CGEIB]) and through the National Plan for Education 2001–2006 (SEP 2001) a policy was created that distinguished between *Intercultural Education for All* and *Bilingual Intercultural Education for Indigenous Zones*. This policy of *Intercultural Education for All* is official but in juxtaposition with the other educational concepts.⁷

Currently, there are two governmental bodies that foster intercultural and bilingual education. CGEIB, which until a few years ago was the agency in charge of the program for a sector of primary public schools and which, according to the INEE classification, would include public urban schools in Mexico City. The public urban schools receive migrant Indian children from different communities around the country. States such as Nuevo León and Guanajuato have also promoted similar programs but as yet there are no evaluations available or descriptions of these programs.

In the face of limited structural conditions to cover the needs for basic education in rural and indigenous zones, migration—abandoning the community to continue studying secondary school, high school and, in some cases, the university—is a common experience in many indigenous communities. To gain access to higher levels of education—technical or university—those who have been able to pass previous levels (basic education) have had to migrate at an early age. This means that Indian children and youth attend public schools that do not focus on the indigenous population, and do not officially provide bilingual and intercultural programs. Thus for decades, as shown by different studies, there is an official and practical *invisibility* of the indigenous population in public urban schools (Czarny 2002, 2008; Martínez Casas 2007; Martínez Buenabad 2008).

⁶Support refers to the fact that the maintenance of the institutions, as well as the salaries of the teachers, is the responsibility of the State. To date only the educational proposal of the Zapatistas in one region of Chiapas has been defined as autonomous education sustained by organizations independent of the State (González Apodaca 2004; Baronnet 2011).

⁷For example, under the last educational reform, Agreement 592 (SEP 2011) for basic education (pre-school, primary and secondary levels), refers to the constitutional changes and the rights of the indigenous peoples to receive education that respects and takes into account their cosmovisions. The design of the curriculum of that reform separates the topic of *diversity* in different ways, such as special educational needs, manners and paces of learning, and for the case of indigenous peoples and migrating Indians in the country, makes reference to intercultural education.

27.3 Indians and Schools in Urban Contexts

Changes in migratory intensity and the demand for recognition of the rights of the indigenous peoples has meant that during the decade of the 1990s public policies moved forward with new programs,⁸ including some educational programs in the cities. These programs were put together specifically for “Indians migrating to the cities”.

The topic of indigenous migration to urban centers is not a new phenomenon in Mexico. In the literature and socio-anthropological research, the notion of indigenous migration that addresses the issue of *pendular movements from outlying areas* by these groups dates back to the 1960s, as mentioned in Arizpe’s study (1978). Later on the use of the concept “migrant” was introduced to refer to the Indian population that leaves their communities and home regions and moves around the country, even crossing international borders. This constitutes a problem that has been alluded to by different indigenous organizations that operate in the cities. For example, in Mexico City the Assembly of Indigenous Migrants (Asamblea de Migrantes Indígenas)⁹ has attempted to talk to city government authorities in an effort to gain recognition as indigenous peoples with their own rights, among which is the right to an education that respects their traditions and languages, and at the same time treats them as Mexican citizens. Along these lines they point out that they cannot be thought of and treated under the label of “migrants”, as though they were “foreigners” in their own country, since leaving their communities of origin in the various states is a right that all Mexican citizens have to freely move about different parts of the country.

However, the identification of Indians living in urban contexts turns out to be a topic of particular relevance, in certain states and cities. It is clear that only some states have moved forward in this regard: studies show that an indigenous presence has been identified only in the Mexico City and metropolitan area, Guadalajara and its surroundings, Puebla and its outskirts, and Mérida with its suburbs (Martínez Buenabad 2014).

The fact that the presence of Indians has been detected in these cities does not mean that there is no Indian population in other urban areas of the country, particularly if we take into account cities in states like Oaxaca and Chiapas, where we see the largest concentration of Indian population.¹⁰

⁸ Some of these social programs have been implemented by the Commission for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples (Comisión para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas [CDI]) and various agencies that have made other proposals within the framework of the authorities of the various states.

⁹ This denomination was a way of showing and making visible ethnic differences and thus part of the search for the recognition of rights as Indian groups in the face of city government’s authorities.

¹⁰ States report that report a higher percentage of Indian population, even though they do not differentiate between urban and rural areas, are Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Veracruz and Puebla. In these states there are no educational nor research programs on school processes for indigenous children and youth in public schools in urban areas where they undoubtedly are in attendance.

Likewise, systematic data are not available on school performance by Indian children in regular public urban schools. However, in a report on schooling for the Indian population (Schmelkes 2013) – and in spite of a lack of information on this specific population that attends regular urban schools – it has been estimated that 30% of school-age children from indigenous families in pre-school and primary school are attended in the regular school system and not under the sub-system of Indian education.

There is not much recent investigation on schooling for Indian children and youth in public schools in cities, and the studies carried out mainly report on Mexico City and its metropolitan area; Guadalajara and suburban areas; Puebla in the state of Puebla; Pachuca, in the state of Hidalgo; and the city of Monterrey in the state of Nuevo León (Czarny and Martínez Buenabad 2013). The largest number of studies of schooling for Indian children in cities are in Mexico City and its metropolitan area. These research studies are centered on the situation of school insertion for indigenous communities with the largest number of representatives in the cities, among whom we could mention the Zapotecs, Otomis, Mazahuas, Triquis, and Mazatecs (Bertely 2006; Czarny 2002, 2008; Rea 2009; Rebolledo 2007; Santana 2014). They report on the complexity of the processes, as do Molina and Hernández (2006), in their sociodemographic study of the Indian population in the metropolitan area of Mexico City. These studies also point out that even under the labels of “mazahuas”, “zapotecs”, “triquis”, “otomís”, etc., these groups are not homogeneous. The common ethnic denominations refer to migrants from different communities, also the way in which they insert themselves in the city varies among the groups and within the same group. Moreover, many urban sectors are composed of second and third generations living in the cities.

These analytical references regarding the type of Indian population that resides in Mexico City are important because they allow us to propose that work in public urban schools cannot be carried out in the same way for all these groups in terms of a sole approach to implement and develop academic proposals. It is not the same thing to formulate an intercultural and/or bilingual proposal (Indian language and Spanish) at schools where the Indian population is second and third generation and born in the city, as it is for those designed for the first generation population that has arrived only recently from their home communities. Along these same lines, quite a few of the studies from Mexico City report that this population found in certain boroughs and districts where children from various indigenous communities attend school, may or may not be speakers of an indigenous language as well show different settlement patterns. At these schools we see a mixture of boys and girls recognized as “mestizos” (in contrast to “indigenous”) and also as “migrants”. In many sectors of Mexico City they are mixed with those who form part of the so-called “original” settlers and who, as descendents of the Náhuatl culture, are characterized by historical collectivities with a differentiated territorial base and cultural

identification and live in the various boroughs that make up Mexico City and its greater metropolitan area (Sánchez 2004).¹¹

All of these population reconfigurations make these schools true multiethnic and multilingual sites that go beyond the picture the censuses try to paint, and based on them, public policies attempt to design programs for peoples and communities identified as indigenous. Research on indigenous schooling in urban contexts once again touches upon the age-old topic in this field of study in the sense of how schools are used and what formal schooling means for the indigenous peoples.

27.4 The Meaning of Schooling

Research has shown that access to different levels of schooling in the regular public education system has several different meanings for members of indigenous communities. Some feel that access to higher levels of schooling for members of indigenous communities has meant the introduction of intracommunity *hierarchization and distinctions* based on levels of schooling experience, an element that did not previously form part of epistemological horizons in many of the communities. In other words, “to be somebody” by way of obtaining academic credentials marks differences among members of these indigenous communities that plays out in many different ways (Czarny 2008; Martínez Buenabad 2008; Chávez 2010; Santana 2014). Studies in the 1980s, such as Vargas (1994), pointed out that indigenous teachers had turned into a type of “elite” within their communities, not only by becoming literate in Spanish—a sign of prestige in the national mestizo society—but also by having become *intermediaries* between the community and local and federal governments.

Over the past few years, access to higher education for those populations which historically were excluded from this level—like the indigenous peoples—has allowed for new Indian professionals to become visible. This is not only true for teachers of basic education in Indian areas, a policy that had been promoted since the 1970s, but research reports on other aspects as well. We could mention stories and narratives on schooling formulated by indigenous youth from different cultures, communities and linguistic groups, that show the advantage of becoming more professional and having access to different legitimate arenas and discourses allowing them to address and work for recognition of their rights, and denouncing inequalities, racism and discrimination (Martínez Buenabad 2011; Czarny 2012; Rea 2009; Flores 2015). In the same way, several of these professionals head civil organizations, and educational and political projects designed in their communities, where they are seeking a type of education that matches their own interests and demands.

Research has also reformulated and shown the way in which cultural identities are approached and understood in the process of their formation. The *resignification*

¹¹ This line of research on the indigenous population that originally settled in the valley of Mexico City and schools is not well developed, see Ornelas (2002).

of the subjects themselves and their indigenous communities, has taken place through their every day life and interaction in cities and schools; through the use of identity and indigenous languages present in contexts with different players and with ethnic tensions (Martínez Casas and Rojas 2006; Domínguez 2010; Martínez Casas 2007). Undoubtedly language displacement faced by indigenous languages during migratory processes and population movements is a topic that merits special attention under the multilingual scenarios in the cities and particularly in the schools (Martínez Casas 2012).

Studies carried out in public primary schools in different cities where intercultural proposals were fostered and came on the scene as part of the latest educational policies¹² mention the discrimination that this population suffers, both at school as well as in metropolitan areas where they reside (Saldívar 2006; Barriga 2008). Others also show that what has been called “learning problems” attributed to Indian children are not this at all, but rather the result of cultural and communicative distance linked in some cases to the use of Indian languages by the children and the lack of knowledge of these languages by the teachers. In addition, differences in the so-called school culture and cultural practices affect different modes of learning, interacting and ways of being children in indigenous communities (Rockwell 2008). These tensions between school culture and the culture of migrating indigenous children are expected to be resolved through an intercultural approach that centers on the indigenous as “what is different”, which, ironically, tends to reinforce stereotypes. In this sense what we see is a concept regarding the attention given to a population known as “migrating Indian” and generally associated with the notion of cultural differences as a situation of “poverty” and “disadvantage” (Saldívar 2006; Rebollo 2007; Raesfeld 2008; Czarny 2010). In addition, these studies leave open the lack of potential of this type of intercultural educational discourse by conceiving it as a compensatory action, a proposal to provide for “what is different”, and although this program is not announced as such, it suffers from a disadvantageous bias in its pedagogical proposal.

The overriding need to open educational institutions to old-new actors who now, under the theme of diversity and interculturality, demand the right to be recognized as different, poses a central challenge that this “difference” should not be translated as inequality. Also, and taking into account the poor academic results shown in the evaluations at primary indigenous schools (DGEI-SEP), where this bilingual and intercultural proposal is or is not in force, several indigenous organizations have posed the urgent need to *change schools*. This change not only refers to real conditions of equity with respect to schools with infrastructure and teachers trained to work with diversity in different contexts, but also to the fact that people should be able to contribute their knowledge to the construction of broader scope and more democratic school experiences (López 2009).

¹²I am referring to the programs mentioned in previous paragraphs and promoted by CGEIB known as the Program for Bilingual Intercultural Education for migrating indigenous children that was applied in some public primary schools in Mexico City.

27.5 Challenges for Schooling in Societies That Enjoy a Reputation for Being Multicultural and Plurilingual

Working with diversity in the field of education presents many challenges. In this case I refer to the school experience of indigenous populations in urban contexts (regular school). One level refers to the conceptualization present at schools regarding diversity centered in indigenous students. Going beyond the legal framework and policies, there is a performance criterion and agencies that facilitate or hinder diverse processes that impact life at school, learning and becoming citizens with rights. Another level refers to the reformulation of the notions of citizenship to remedy the socio-cultural fracture between Indians and non-Indians that has persisted since Colonial times in order to reconstruct the multicultural and multilingual map of contemporary Mexico. I will describe these two levels in the understanding that they integrally cover the implications for political, social, pedagogical and cultural studies.

27.5.1 *Conceptions of What Is Indigenous at Schools in Urban Contexts*

There is no doubt whatever that the ways of looking at the differences in the educational system, which in this paper center around indigenous peoples and basic education, have an impact on processes that are unleashed at many institutions. These processes work to both reach and diminish the potential of identities and thus open or close learning opportunities with multiple meanings.

Education under the label of intercultural as envisioned for public primary schools in some states and cities, has the indigenous population as its target, although this is not proposed for all levels of the system. Although, the obstacles these programs face can be attributed to different dimensions, the shared central issue is how the migrant Indian population in urban school settings is perceived.

Once again, it is undeniable that the topic of teachers and their conceptions are a key issue to be included in any educational program that attempts to transform and change the situation at school. Teachers from public urban primary schools who receive Indian children from diverse communities and linguistic backgrounds, recognize the complexity of schooling in a "diversified classroom", given their particular features, whether they be physical, cognitive, linguistic, cultural or gender considerations. As has been mentioned by many critics of educational reforms during the 1990s, these reforms have made the teacher shoulder the demands for change. More abilities are needed and more time as well in order for them to do their job in the classroom (Hargreaves 1998). In spite of this, the regulatory and conceptual school structure has not changed, nor have the ways of generating participation by teachers and communities in defining school projects, among other considerations.

Teachers in urban regular schools have trouble recognizing “differences” among their students. When they are recognized as belonging to an Indian ethnic group, these differences are often understood to be “problematic” for learning. Emphasis is placed on the word “problem” when, for example, the mother tongue of indigenous children, as well as their cultures, are identified as obstacles for academic achievement.

Also, the results of intercultural educational policies for all implemented in certain schools in Mexico City where Indian children are enrolled had not been considered previously; the introduction of this topic has meant that many teachers “rediscover” both their country as well as their own origins. We start to hear comments from the teachers like *“For me the topic (of Indian peoples) affects me a lot... I was never able to accept that my grandparents come from a community...”* “...until only a while back I thought that there were no Indians in Mexico and if there were some, they were way up in the mountains...” (Czarny 2010: 211). These statements indicate that “intercultural” programs that center on ethnicity have had an impact on the school community and on teachers in particular. I identify at least two tendencies among teachers and administrators when they have an indigenous presence at school.

- (a) Teachers “see” communities with “low expectations”. In terms of achievement at school being Indian represents a “shortcoming”. In other words, if the children are Indian this is considered to be a stumbling block and we hear comments by teachers and administrators like “They don’t speak Spanish well and that’s why they have so much trouble”, “Their parents don’t care about school, they only want them to help out at their market stand”. These attitudes, along with the fact that they are usually poor and marginalized, increases teachers’ low expectations for their success at school.
- (b) To the contrary, teachers try to situate indigenous children and their parents in a position of “equality”. They take into account that these communities do have expectations about schooling, just like other non-indigenous children and parents. In some cases, they recognize that Indian children have the same abilities and place a high value on school as do other children and their parents. This has been expressed in statements such as “Indigenous children are like all the other children at school” or “Indigenous parents are always attentive to what the school asks them for”. Under this vision of equality between indigenous and non-indigenous children, differences are hidden or minimized.

Undoubtedly group work and collaboration with the teachers are key ingredients for educational transformation at school, where differences should not be understood as a “disadvantage”. Instead, it is important to recognize that we live in multicultural and plurilingual societies crosscut by deep social and cultural inequalities, an aspect that has to be borne in mind for the undertaking of any educational development program.

27.5.2 *Reformulation of the Perspective of Citizenship*

Instead of designing educational programs for minorities—in this case those considered to be indigenous and in public urban or general schools—what is needed is a complement in the form of policies, like the social actions by means of changes in the laws that have been introduced in Mexico over the past few decades.¹³

The Indians of the Americas cannot be treated simply as ethnic minorities, but rather as people with special rights who have been able to place their demands in international arenas and within their own countries, seeking recognition as the original settlers who inhabited these lands before the arrival of the Spaniards. The present, after 500 years of imposition first by the Colony and during the period of Independence and the establishment of national states, finally finds Indians in different contexts, both rural and urban within the country. Some are speakers of their Indian tongues and Spanish, while others only speak Spanish, but maintain Indigenous cultural practices. Therefore, to introduce an approach known as “inter”, “multicultural” and “bilingual” (Indian language and Spanish) in education, does not provide one single answer to what is a right. As some authors have proposed, what is needed is an approach—at present known for some as an intercultural approach—that will allow for the construction of what in some contexts of the region has been called democratic and pluralistic intercultural education (López 2009). This approach implies the notion of plural and democratic intercultural citizenship, where the indigenous peoples are not treated as minorities with rights but as part of a society which is recognized as pluricultural and multilingual. It follows that under this reformulation at school we are betting that indigenous peoples can contribute their knowledge and practices to a new societal formation.

There are Indian youth who want to study at schools that offer different levels, including the university, in cities or in places closer to their communities, where they can share with other non-indigenous youth what could be called a youth culture where music, internet and their bodies are languages that bring them together beyond ethnic considerations (Urteaga 2011). Thus, we speak of contemporary indigenous youth, with identities that go back to the past, but who live in the present, images that turn out to be complex even without thinking about schemes where mestizaje has played and continues to play a central role in the formation of a unique historical statement on how national identity is defined.

In the debate on indigenous organizations and different collectivities where indigenous youth participate, the right to equality is proclaimed, while at the same time they want recognition of the fact that they belong to ancestral communities. Part of the discussion has evolved around the search for a plural citizenry where “we all fit in” (Villoro 1999). Nevertheless, there is a deepening of social inequalities, expressed in part because of the lack of access to basic quality services such as

¹³For example, the Law of Linguistic Rights promulgated in 2003, under which the indigenous languages are recognized as national languages, mentions that Indian peoples and communities are entitled to receive education in their native Indian language, as well as to participate in the development of educational programs throughout the national territory (INALI 2006).

education and health, among others, as well as growing political repression in their communities. As a result, we see a greater polarization in discourse and in political and pedagogical practices which in the twentieth century have tried to reach an articulation between the State and indigenous organizations and communities. This is related to a rise in the number educational proposals generally designed for rural Indian regions under the notion of “their”, “alternative” or “autonomous” attempts to reformulate and correct inequality and cultural injustice in the field of education. These proposals range from the redefinition of academic objectives and content that includes curricular design and educational materials, to the profile of the teachers who work with indigenous groups, including how to finance these projects with greater or lesser dependency on the State.

All of the preceding reminds us that even if formally we are all equal citizens under the law, in practice socio-cultural fracturing exists. Taking this into account and picking up on what Tubino (2005) has stated, we have to highlight the fact that policies of recognition – be they multicultural or intercultural – are not enough. We must also consider distributive policies that complement them. The demand for justice and socio-cultural equity regarding indigenous schooling in urban contexts is a point that has undoubtedly become a common thread in these debates: the urgent need to recognize cities and schools as multicultural and multilingual environments that characterize present-day Mexico.

27.6 Conclusions

As described above, research on school processes for the indigenous population in Mexico is a field of studies that has developed over the past 20 years. Its development is attributable to the fact that up until the beginning of the twenty-first century the existence of Indians and communities who have settled in the cities was not officially recognized by the public education system. In spite of this bias regarding who is Indian and who is not is still present in the national imagery. The perception is that Indian people supposedly live in rural areas, are monolingual in their indigenous languages and wear traditional attire.

This is why socio-anthropological and educational research have pointed to *invisibility* as a way educational institutions deny the presence of people who belong to indigenous communities and who live in cities. Many of this population are second and third generation families and students who reside in cities and attend regular public primary and secondary schools. They do not attend schools that are part of the public educational sub-system that traditionally has provided services to the Indian population, mainly in rural areas.

Studies carried out on the presence of Indians in regular public schools in urban contexts have reported discrimination against children and adults from different ethnic groups and also those considered to be mestizo. Studies also point to the reformulation of identities of these Indian communities, allowing them to position and maintain themselves with a new life in the cities and to change modes of

socialization and language displacement processes. Moreover, teachers have been challenged to change the way they look at diversity, in this case regarding their expectations of Indian students, as well as the implications involved in generating significant teaching processes and learning.

Some analyses with regard to programs known as intercultural that provide schooling for the Indian population show that they do not always operate from a cultural relevance and equality standpoint. These proposals, when they form part of school programs in the urban contexts denominated "regular", underscore the "cultural disadvantage" of Indian children by placing ethnic and cultural dimensions as a difference that is frequently considered problematic. Criticism of inter or multicultural approaches heard in Mexico and in Latin American have made it possible to highlight the urgent need for these proposals to advance in the recognition of rights with equity, social and cultural justice.

We need to understand the role of public schools as a means that allows thousands of people to gain access to education. Nevertheless, with the increase and spread of public education systems, different modalities have been offered, such as schools for Indians, technical secondary schools and televised schooling, that have often led to inequalities due to structural conditions affecting these schools.

The demand for *changing (transforming)* schools presents some knotty problems. While public policy and educational programs are trying to define their agendas, the fact is that Indian children, together with their families and their communities, are attending schools that are part of the national public education system and are undergoing conflictive experiences marked by discrimination yet they are also, at the same time, opening and shaping new spaces for inter and multicultural production.

The discussion remains open, as does the need for more research on the implications of what is meant by an educational proposal to provide services that take into account diversity without suppressing cultural differences and without turning them into a "disadvantage". The field of studies on curriculum design, the formulation of course materials and proposals to work in multiethnic and multilingual societies, still maintain mechanisms that under the guise of interculturality frequently mask societal and cultural inequalities.

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