

**Educating for Progress and Educating for Economic Growth: Liberal and Neoliberal Educational Reforms in El Salvador**

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Even if extolling the virtues of education is part of the repertoire of recipes for a better life that liberals and neoliberals as well their detractors include in their stock speeches, pronouncements, and scholarly versions of both, educational policies are not the first thing that comes to mind when one enters a debate about 1890's liberalism or 1990's neoliberalism. Regardless of the sincerity of their concern for education, policy oriented types in Latin America would rather be ministers of finance or planning (where the latter position still exists) than ministers of education. Yet, for the very reason that it is a sideshow, the rhetoric around the issue of education may be more revealing of nuance than the sharp edges of economic policy discussions. My aim in this paper is to look at educational reforms as a window to understand the relevance of the use of terms such as liberal or neoliberal. A caveat is in order before I start. Although the term educational reform was widely used by educators and politicians, particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, keep in mind that what we are really talking about is public school reform, a much more limited topic. Given the limitations of space I will concentrate in three aspects of the reforms: the discussion around them, the systemic changes introduced, and their actual effect on the school system.

## 1. The discussion

In 1874 the Cartilla del Ciudadano, by Francisco Galindo was added by law to the few subjects included in the primary school curriculum (reading, writing, spelling, morality, arithmetic, and catechism).<sup>1</sup> The first edition of the Cartilla was dedicated to Field Marshall Santiago González, champion of the revolution that deposed conservative leader Francisco Dueñas in 1871 and leader of the government publishing the text. It is not clear to me at this point how widespread the use of the Cartilla was in the last quarter of the century, but the 1904 edition had 12,000 copies which indicates that by that time its use was ample (while primary school enrollment at the turn of the century was at around 30,000 students, attendance was typically less than half than enrollment).

In the prologue of the book Galindo explains his ideas about education. In his view, to educate was to “create good men [hombres de bien], good husbands, good parents and good citizens.”<sup>2</sup> The prologue was also a kind of manifesto seeking to establish that a new liberal era had begun: “The political chains have disappeared, preoccupations fade away, [conservative] fanaticism runs away from our shores, it is time to solidly establish our Republic over the ruins of opposing elements.” A new kind of citizen was necessary under such circumstances, and he (most definitely a he) was to be educated, the time had come “to start a campaign more glorious than that of independence: the republican education of the masses.” Field Marshall González could not agree more, in the letter thanking Galindo for the florid dedication of his opus he asserted that

This revolution would not have been more than a change in personnel in the government if it had not brought with it the regenerating idea of extolling men and even the dignity of citizens ... That is the reason why I have dedicated the most careful attention to basic learning, because it is in the schools where citizens ought to be trained.

He was linking the arrival of a new regime to a more enlightened attitude to education. The new regime was not only promising a new attitude, it needed it. As Manuel Méndez, Minister of Justice, Public Instruction and Ecclesiastical Affairs put it, “The importance of public instruction as indispensable foundation for any progress, particularly that of truly republican political institutions, is so evident, so tangible, that I ought not needlessly endeavor in demonstrating it”.<sup>3</sup>

Who had to be educated and what was the content of education was explicitly tied to the political project, to who was a citizen, and to what kind of republic was desired. This becomes clear in Galindo’s discussion of who the people were. In its catechism-like question-and-answer format the Cartilla asked, “who are the people?” the answer was bluntly unegalitarian. “The people are the same as the society, different from the vulgar meaning of the word in which people is equivalent to ‘the mob’. Thus, the statement ‘the people are sovereign’ is equivalent to this, less dangerous one: ‘society is sovereign’”<sup>4</sup> These statements show Galindo as an heir to a long tradition. Ever since the French and American Revolutions liberals had excluded significant segments of the population from the privileges of citizenship. An early Central American example can be found in one of the most radical liberals of the independence period, Pedro Molina, who in his definition of citizenship excluded among others domestic servants (who were subject to the influence of their masters), failed people, beggars and idlers. Galindo’s innovation in this regard was to describe the excluded in more abstract terms. Molina’s list has implicit efforts to justify their exclusion by insinuating personal failure and incapacity to perform the duties of citizenship, while Galindo’s undifferentiated mob is a strictly class criterion. This is emphasized by the suggestion of danger, the fear of the lower classes, which further blunts the ability to see individualized human beings. Neither of them include women in their definition of citizen or feel it necessary to mention their reason for doing so; one suspects that the reasoning would be similar to the one applied to domestic servants. Both of them are translating for the general public concepts contained in the constitution that ruled at the time, but it is important to remember that while few read the Constitution everyone who went to school had to memorize the Cartilla.<sup>5</sup>

The Field Marshall’s and Mr. Galindo’s attempts at positioning the new government as the champion of regenerating ideas in contrast to the previous government’s utter disregard for education was not a new tactic. In fact, it was a routine practice that has been repeated ever since. When the regime that they replaced, the conservative government of Francisco Dueñas, came to power in 1864 after defeating the great liberal leader Gerardo Barrios, the first editorials of the conservative newspaper accused Barrios of wrecking the school system leaving towns “condemned to barbarism”<sup>6</sup> Again, the link between education and republicanism was present in the minds of the retrograde conservatives, in an editorial that included quotes of Rousseau, the conservative newspaper informed its readers that “the need for education is more acute where republican principles rule, where the people have to be aware of the acts of the administration.” Moreover, the editorial was more inclusive in its idea of the benefits of education than Galindo’s prologue since it made a point of stating that education was not an exclusively male endeavor, as the other stated so bluntly, but the government gave “a preferential place to the teaching of the fair sex.”<sup>7</sup> Barrios, in turn, had began his term by reorganizing schools with a failed effort to centralize the system.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century reforming the school system (or talking about it) was a habit after each change in regime. Not much has changed; post-civil war El Salvador is not breaking the pattern. It is certainly apparent that the school system is not performing adequately and needs revamping, but discussion of school reform is about more than school funds and curricula. When the discussion about educational reform began in earnest in 1994, the 19<sup>th</sup> century emphasis on citizen formation was replaced, at least in the official rhetoric, by an emphasis on the economic role of education. This way of looking at the problem was couched in the lingua franca of end-of -the-millennium international technocrats. The first major salvo in the debate was a diagnosis of the state of education prepared by the Harvard Institute for International Development with aid of the Fundación Empresarial para el Desarrollo Educativo (FEPADE, more on this institution later) and the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, the Jesuit university. The result was a comprehensive document that painted a gloomy picture of the state of educational institutions. The Harvard Report, as it was called to take full advantage of the awe-inspiring credibility of the University, had an important compilation of data and analysis and became one of the key documents used to formulate the reform. The document emphasized the economic role of education using the human-capital concepts pioneered by The University of Chicago's economics department. In the document's words, "El Salvador finds itself at a stage in which prioritizing education would be the only way to adequately respond to a global economy, deepening democracy and consolidating the peace." Note that in this document the link between peace and democracy and education is not established necessarily as a matter of values taught as part of the curriculum, but rather through the economic consequences for the individual, through opportunities.. "Education is a strategic tool to increase opportunities for the children of the poor," says the Report.<sup>8</sup>

A quick comparison of the discussion of the purpose of education at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries offers a clear contrast that seems to fit easily in Salvadoran historiography. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when coffee exports were booming and providing funds to consolidate an oligarchic state, liberals influenced by positivistic ideas emphasized education as a tool for elite formation. In turn, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the pressures of globalization helped to shape reconstruction after the civil war, neoliberals influenced by Chicago-boy ideas emphasized education as a tool for human capital formation. In both cases the arguments have something to say about the project of the elites. The economic argument was absent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the aim was not economic growth per se but the consolidation of an elite which had its economic base on export agriculture. Today an educated labor force seems indispensable to compete in an international markets in the context of globalization.

This is the point when it becomes necessary to complicate the picture since the twentieth century discussion was not the exclusive domain of neoliberal intellectuals. One thing was the rhetoric of the people who formulated policy and a different thing that of the public at large. In 1994 President Calderón Sol appointed a twelve-member commission (the Comisión de Educación Ciencia y Desarrollo) with representatives from different sectors of society (including a vice-rector of the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, a member of FUSADES, the Deputy Bishop, two former commanders of the FMLN, business leaders and academics.) ostensibly to draft a blueprint for educational reform but also to secure support for future decisions which were bound to be difficult.<sup>9</sup> A full fledged debate took place after the commission presented its report.

The section of the Commission's report that had the greatest resonance was not the one dealing with the economy but the one linking democracy to the content of the curriculum. While policy makers worried about human capital formation the public discussion quickly shifted to the issue of values, citizen formation and socialization. One of the catch phrases to refer to this problem was to refer to "moral, urbanity and civics" (moral urbanidad y cívica) the name of a course taught in public schools in the 1950's and 60's whose disappearance from the curriculum was seen by conservative commentators as the turning point when society went into sharp decline. Both defenders and opponents of the educational reform who wrote editorials for newspapers spent most of their ink debating values and civic education. Newspaper editorials had titles such as "The Educational System and Civic Values"<sup>10</sup>. In the context of 1995 the values referred to had much to do with the new national project. The writer of this particular editorial was concerned about children having knowledge about municipalities, an important concern for those who favor a decentralized state where municipalities play an increasingly important role in the future. Others put the issue in a wider context. La Prensa Gráfica, a newspaper sympathetic to the reform, described the issue as follows: "The destiny of peace and democracy, to touch upon the most current aspects, depends in good measure on how values are internalized and made viable by means of education in order to bring about peace and democracy. The entire enormous task of positive change that has taken place in the country as a result of the end of the war would be left dangling if it is not indelibly reflected in the national conscience by means of systematic learning."<sup>11</sup> In contrast with the Harvard Report the editorialist saw the connection between education and democracy as a matter of implanting ideas in the national conscience as opposed to economic empowerment of the poor.

Particularly those who opposed the reform did so on "citizen forming" grounds as opposed to economic considerations. The notoriously conservative newspaper El Diario de Hoy in an editorial entitled "Let us not open the door to the indoctrination of children" ("No hay que abrir la puerta a la indoctrinación del niño") showered scorn on the idea of "introducing in student's heads, in synchrony [with standard subjects], foggy notions about peace, democracy, solidarity, eternal values and the like."<sup>12</sup> Its strongest criticism of the Education Commission were based on its unwillingness to commit to a curriculum based on bedrock Christian moral principles, "There is a lamentable confusion on how to teach morality" was the title of the editorial that assailed the Commission's work.<sup>13</sup>

This discussion was not circumscribed to editorial writers, people in the streets seemed equally preoccupied. In focus groups conducted in 1994 with parents, teachers and principals, I heard parents expressing similar views, a parent of a student in an urban school said verbatim: "there is talk about a new reform, it would be advisable to teach again moral and civics, today we do not value enough the symbols of the fatherland." But at this level this idea was connected with fear of crime and unruly youngsters, "I think that there should be a better control of the media because some television programs create problems with our youth, violent programs glorifying youth gangs, programs where men look like women.. ." Without solution of continuity the conversation turned to the need to build fences around schools in order to keep gangs away. Parents also expressed preoccupations about the economy, their main concern was that changes in the system could make it less adorable and would block their hopes for their children's social mobility. This concern was more clear among parents with children in secondary school.<sup>14</sup>

In the end, early in 1997 the Ministry of Education bowed to the public's preoccupation with values (in the context of the beginnings of the political campaign for National Assembly and municipal elections) and announced their systematic incorporation in the curriculum. The values mentioned by the Ministry's spokesperson were not the "foggy notions about peace, democracy, solidarity, eternal values and the like," that worried editorialists in El Diario de Hoy, but a list that seemed to come from the quill pen of a Victorian pamphleteer: "work, generosity, fortitude, cooperation, friendship, truth, love to family, charity, order, honesty, loyalty, and goodness"<sup>15</sup>.

The previous discussion should be enough to show that neoliberal ideas of education as investment in human capital were limited to a policy-making elite but were hardly the main preoccupation of parents or the public at large. The fact is that this way of thinking about education is entirely a new concept for most people. Neither the Salvadoran right nor the Salvadoran left used World Bank ideas to fight the civil war. It would be extremely hard to find references to the role of human capital in economic development in the political debates before and during the Civil War.

It is relatively easy to show how these concepts crept in the discussion. Part of it has to do with the need to cater to foreign donors. If the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank offer more than 80 million dollars to finance educational reforms, it makes good sense to speak the language that they approve of. This is a first reason why the concept of human capital, particularly in its World Bank version, was constantly mentioned.<sup>16</sup> This is not the end of the story. As could be imagined, much of what happens in El Salvador today is connected to the traumatic 1980's. During the Civil War and the reconstruction the international community became not only a political actor but also a vital economic support to the government of El Salvador.

Needless to say that the member of the international community that had the strongest presence was the United States. While its role in supporting military activities during the war has received the most intense scholarly attention, its aid package included other programs with a much wider scope. Particularly relevant for our discussion is the concerted effort to transform the Salvadoran right into a partner more acceptable according to American criteria (or in terms of potential congressional support) through projects financed by USAID. Recent scholarship has begun to illuminate these aspects and we are learning more about efforts to modernize the Salvadoran right. The main institutional expression of this project was the creation in 1983 of a business-oriented think tank called FUSADES (Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social) that, with the advice of prominent American economists like Arnold Harberger, became a wellspring of neo-liberal wisdom and an active participant in policy debates and policy formulation.<sup>17</sup> This institution provided much of the personnel and many of the ideas of the Cristiani administration (1989-1994), President Cristiani had been a member of its first board of directors. In 1987 a spinoff of FUSADES, the Fundación Empresarial Para el Desarrollo Educativo (FEPADE) was created to deal with educational issues, particularly vocational training.<sup>18</sup>

According to FUSADES' newsletter the educational challenge was "To overcome one of the most serious disadvantages faced by the country as it faces the process of economic globalization, the low educational level of its human resources, demands realism, creativity, financial resources and perseverance. It would be difficult to revamp the productive base, improve technology, insure competitiveness etc., without considerably increasing the average

level of schooling..."<sup>19</sup> In a different issue of the same publication similar ideas are elaborated in starker terms: "To articulate the educational system to the productive base means to 'produce' human resources in the desired quantities and with the quality that is necessary to incorporate it to the job of bringing growth and development to the different branches and economic activities of the productive base. One way or another it has to be acknowledged that the educational system is a service enterprise that puts into the system a 'human product,' be it a child, a youth or an adult."<sup>20</sup> These ideas, hardly mentioned in the 1980's, have taken some root in the business community. The National Association of the Private Enterprise (ANEP in its Spanish acronym) echoed FUSADES rhetoric adding a distinctly World Bank flavor in a widely publicized manifesto published in 1996. The manifesto's section on "social expenditures" stated that "One of the main lessons of the miracles of accelerated economic development of countries such as Germany, Switzerland and, more recently, the Asian Tigers, was the investment in primary and vocational education."<sup>21</sup> The reference to the Asian Tigers did not happen by chance, international experts have used their example again and again as a way to impress on Salvadoran entrepreneurs the virtues of the neoliberal approach. When Salvadoran leaders visited the World Bank in November of 1994, a lunch with the author of The East Asian Miracle was organized and each member of the delegation received a copy of the book.<sup>22</sup> A reform of the school system was fully consistent with this agenda of emulating the successful examples of Asia. Foreign assistance was targeted to prepare the territory for the reform. One of the early steps was mentioned above, USAID sponsored the project that produced the Harvard Report.

Even if the widespread use of economic arguments to promote education was a novelty in El Salvador, the basic ideas behind it have been around probably for about as long as the connection between education and enlightened citizenship. The menu of ideas used to promote school reform in the 1990's was not altogether different from what 1880's scholars had available to them. As their liberal counterparts had done a century earlier, the last generation of reformers were selective in which ideas to use and how to appropriate them. Economists in the 1990's may prefer to quote Becker than Bentham or Schultz than Smith, but the connection between economic growth and education has been the subject of much thought ever since the time of the classical economists. In mid-nineteenth century Massachusetts Horace Mann used what we would now label as "human capital" arguments to promote common schools.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, the role of education in preparing for citizenship was as familiar to enlightened Spanish kings as to liberal radicals. The interesting question is why one set of concerns is emphasized over the other at a particular moment. Mann himself, being a great promoter, used economic arguments only with those constituencies that were likely to be receptive.

The understanding that to carry out changes in the school system it was necessary to engage a variety of constituencies was not lost to 1990's reformers in El Salvador. The appointment of a pluralistic commission was just a first step in the process. The Ministry of Education also engaged in a concerted effort of consultation with teachers, parents, students, Ministry staff, private schools, mayors and private universities.<sup>24</sup> Ministry representatives were displaced to each department to hold seminars with the above mentioned groups, to listen to concerns, and to discuss the main points of the reform that was still taking shape. International agencies sought to encourage this process. USAID sponsored another consultation event in January of 1995 with a little over 200 participants representing sectors interested in education

across the political spectrum, from ANDES, the teacher's union, and NGO's linked to the FMLN, to think tanks associated with the Christian Democrats or with the ARENA party. Later that year, in July, FEPADE sponsored another event directed to members of political parties again with a wide spectrum of participants. The more extreme elements of the right were uncomfortable with this idea. An editorialist in El Diario de Hoy published "Consensus is Never a Criterion for the Truth," a piece expressing preoccupation with the fact that "opposition parties--particularly the FMLN--the leadership of ANDES, liberation theologians and other organizations squarely in the opposition camp support and applaud [the Commission's Report]." <sup>25</sup> The political appropriateness of seeking consensus can be inferred when one compares the fate of the main legislation associated with the educational reform (changes in rules governing the teaching profession, creation of school councils and rules for higher education) which were passed, with the fate of a highly publicized but poorly debated economic package which flopped early in 1996.

Needless to say that neither negotiation at the local level nor the search for a measure of consensus did anything to keep the purity of ideological agendas. The school reform was viable because it recognized the plurality of constituencies. Even if the motivations of some of its promoters can be understood in the framework of the role human capital in bringing about economic growth, its translation into law and successful implementation cannot be explained solely in terms of the rationale of some of its promoters.

## 2. Systemic changes

But perhaps a discussion of how reformers conceptualize the role of education is too limiting for an understanding of the problem. As we have seen, educational reform initiatives have been launched after every important change in Salvadoran political life <sup>26</sup>. The rhetoric has always been one of lofty phrases praising the virtues of education and rightly condemning the failures of the past (of course there is always a recent past deserving well-founded condemnation). Perhaps more can be learned about changing ideas of government by studying the organization of the system created.

Consistent with the atomization of power that took place shortly after independence, the few schools established at the time were controlled by the municipalities and paid for with funds raised by them. Legislation dating back to as early as 1827 ordered that any surplus in municipal funds ought to be spent on education. <sup>27</sup> Somewhat more detailed decrees passed in 1832 established the roles of the different levels of government. The central government was to be policy maker and ultimate supervisor of schools; financing, teacher appointments and direct supervision were in municipal hands; and provincial governors acted as overseers of the actions of the municipalities. <sup>28</sup> Municipal boards of education appointed teachers, attended public exams (a form of supervision common in the Lancasterian system) and worried about school supplies and school attendance. Contemporary documents such as board of education minutes and correspondence between municipalities and governors indicate that the legislation was implemented without significant deviations. <sup>29</sup>

The decentralization of the system was to a great extent due to the form of financing. Before the expansion of export agriculture the central government had serious difficulties raising



revenue and resisted any effort from the part of the municipal boards to divert national funds to education. As a result of this, the development of the school system was firmly tied to the only source of funding assigned to it by the law, the tajo, a municipal tax over cattle slaughtering that had its origins in the colonial period. The system was such that local beef consumption was the independent variable and educational expenditures the dependent variable.<sup>30</sup> Unwittingly, the Catholic Church aggravated the financial problems of schools with its prohibition to eat meat on Fridays. Lent exacerbated the problem. In official statistics and public speeches the central government counted expenditures on education coming from the tajo tax as part of its own initiatives, but this seems to be the equivalent of walking in front of the parade and pretending to be leading it.

This decentralized organization seemed a reasonable option when more than four fifths of the government's revenue came from transactions taxes, government monopolies, and small fees raised locally.<sup>31</sup> But the rise of the export economy meant an increase in customs earnings, a rapidly growing source of income that the central government could use without having to negotiate with municipal authorities always ready to protect hard-to-raise funds for their local needs. By 1871 customs taxes amounted to 43% of the total revenue and by 1887 to 60%.<sup>32</sup> Gradually, these changes were reflected in efforts from the part of authorities in San Salvador to share the burden of financing them. By 1883 the central government covered 84% of the expenses of the school system of La Libertad province.<sup>33</sup> With greater funding came greater control; according to the 1875 compilation of laws, creating schools was still a responsibility of municipalities, but the central government began to appoint delegates to the provincial boards to carry out supervision. Twenty years later the government's treasury was covering the deficits of the local school funds (Tesorerías de Instrucción Pública) and principals were appointed by Ministerial decree even if teachers were still appointed by principals.<sup>34</sup> The centralizing efforts become more apparent at the secondary school level, to the point that the Secretary of Public Instruction started keeping track of the grades obtained by students in every single high-school in the country (hardly a daunting task in a country with only 18 high schools in 1887.)<sup>35</sup> In the end, municipalities surrendered school control in exchange for central government funding.

The new centralized, more regulated system that emerged was also more explicitly exclusive and made very clear its attitude to women's education. While boys were compelled to attend school from ages seven to fifteen, the law left girls education to the discretion of their parents or guardians and directed girls schools to teach only the fundamentals devoting the rest of the time to "needlework, domestic economy and other exercises particularly suited for women."<sup>36</sup> Boys who lived more than two kilometers away from the schools or who had to go over dangerous roads were exempted from attending school, this exemption may have been the product of practical considerations, but it left out of the school system a substantial part of the rural population. If education was a preparation for citizenship and women and "the mob" did not qualify, there was something superfluous about their education.

The situation of secondary schools in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century deserves a separate comment. One would expect that an elite controlled government never shy about using public funds to advance class interests would have given great support to secondary schools that catered to young men who definitely satisfied the requirements for citizenship, instead, it chose to promote private initiatives while closely supervising curriculum and graduation requirements. By the end

of the century there were only three official high schools. So far I do not have enough information to have a clear view of what was in the minds of policy makers. A variety of possibilities come to mind. High schools were the exclusive domain of college-bound upper class students the curriculum seems to indicate that high school was mainly a preparation for the university. There was a great emphasis in studying French, the language used in many of the texts used in college, and up until the 1980s secondary education was supervised by the university. Students in this category could afford to go to private high schools and keeping secondary schools private effectively locked the gate to the main road to social mobility. There is a complementary possibility. If one sees the school system, particularly at the secondary level, as a screening device for those entering the higher end of the job market, one can see how it was a lower priority in a country where the foremost screening mechanism is class rather than any other criteria.

Late nineteenth century centralization efforts were the beginnings of a national school system that by 1992 had 1.25 million students and 26,000 teachers. The system evolved into a Ministry in charge of appointing every single teacher and principal and where bureaucrats included among their duties pencil purchases and chalk consumption monitoring together with curriculum design and teaching supervision.

The 1990's reforms, in contrast with its counterpart a century earlier, are about decentralizing school administration.<sup>37</sup> With strong support from international donors and lenders, particularly the World Bank, the new reforms include an effort to transfer functions from the central Ministry of Education to the schools themselves. In rural areas decentralization will take place by expanding a program began in the last years of the civil war, the EDUCO program. The main feature of this program is the formation of Ministry organized parent's associations that hire teachers and administer funds according to set guidelines. This rapidly growing program is transforming the way in which decisions are made at the school level.<sup>38</sup> A similar although less radical scheme has began in urban schools where school councils with representation from parents, teachers and students is in charge of school administration decisions.<sup>39</sup>

Again one can fall in an easy dicotomy and simply state that the liberal reforms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were about the consolidation of the state and the neoliberal reforms of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century are about a redefinition of the state into a neoliberally-correct smaller entity. This is not far from the truth. But although the idea of a smaller state apparatus with an even smaller role, a state that limits its intervention in the economy to the provision of public goods and lets market forces to decide the allocation of resources and the distribution of rewards, is at the core of the recommendations of Chicago-school economists, the identification of centralization or decentralization with certain political agendas varies from country to country. Decentralization may be neoliberal, liberal, or outright left depending on the peculiarities of the political culture. In the case at hand it is useful to point out a feature of the decentralization of the school system that is less consistent with a cardboard view of neoliberalism: its community participation component. Both in the EDUCO program and in the urban school councils, parents, often from very humble background, have an opportunity to participate in decisions that affect not only their children's school but also their community. Oftentimes women, who in the household division of labor prevalent in El Salvador are in charge of the education of their children, find in these

programs avenues to acquire leadership in the schools and that leadership is transferred to other community organizations. The active presence of parents in the schools not only brings benefits to their children but also has also served to check common abuses such as sexual harrasment and racist behavior within schools.<sup>40</sup> This community-participation feature helps to explain the support of some groups in the left (despite initial misgivings) to this form of decentralization. This use of community participation in development projects is consistent with initiatives promoted by the World Bank throughout the world which appeal to small-government neoliberals as well as to community organizers with ideological roots in the left.<sup>41</sup> If in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the bargain was less local control in exchange for more central government funds for education, today it is a decentralized system in exchange for greater community involvement in school affairs.

### 3. Effect of reforms

Whatever the specifics of the reforms, one can ask how much difference they make in terms of increasing access to education and improving the classroom experience (the content of the curriculum and quality of teaching). I would argue that both in the 1880's and in the 1990's school reforms one observes more continuity with the past than dramatic change. Schools are, after all, very conservative organizations that, in the end, reflect society at large.

The number of students enrolled in primary schools did increase after liberals gained power in 1871 . Even though the figures have occasional sharp increases that raise suspicions as to their reliability, the trends are clear. Enrollment in the early 1870's was under 12,000 and had doubled by the late 1880s where it reached a plateau until the end of the century.<sup>42</sup> After the liberal reforms the growth rate of school enrollments was much larger than population growth (roughly 5% vs. 1.6% for the period 1874-93) and twice as large as in the previous quarter of a century.<sup>43</sup> Without dismissing this trend, one can point out that this movement takes place at the same time that two critical variables were also increasing: fund availability and demand for schooling. The fund availability issue is easy to assess, public revenue was growing very rapidly (at about 9% a year) thanks to export growth.<sup>44</sup> It is more difficult to understand what happened in the demand side. Throughout the first three quarters of the century school absenteeism was rampant due to the role that children played in the household economy, to the perceived lack of relevance of basic education in an agricultural economy, and to cultural conflict. There is evidence of resistance to schooling from the part of Indian communities that entered into conflict with teachers who saw themselves as “civilizers” and whose attitudes to Indian children were patronizing or much worse. An example of this attitude can be found in the teacher of the Indian town of Nahuizalco who in 1853 wrote to the mayor complaining that Indian children were “by their customs, language and other circumstances are naturally rough and as a result they cannot learn what they are taught with as much ease and promptness as the ladinos.”<sup>45</sup> Yet, even after the number of schools rapidly increased in the last quarter of the century the number of students per teacher remained between 30 and 40 (I am assuming here that most schools had only one teacher, as happened in the vast majority of the towns for which I have individual records.) This seems to indicate that the school system was growing at least as much as a response to an increase in demand as to a change in commitment from the authorities. (It is worth mentioning

that in 1994 there were 40.9 students per teacher, not a very different figure from what we have for 1894. Even if today there are substantial differences in terms of the quality of education (the training of teachers, availability of instructional material and the overall school environment) in 1994 the rates of repetition in the first grade were extremely high, which means that students were not learning how to read and write.<sup>46</sup> That is to say, the rate of failure of the school system with respect to demands and expectations remains high after a century and numerous reforms.)

Changes in the content of education, perhaps the item that was most emphasized in the rhetoric of the 1870's, seem to be the area where less substantial change took place. Even though the little education that took place in the colonial system put the greatest emphasis on religious education, by the end of the colonial regime, particularly under the influence of enlightenment ideas, civic education began to be emphasized.<sup>47</sup> As soon as the leaders of the independence movement had time to concentrate on the content of the curriculum they began to emphasize civic education. Francisco Galindo's Cartilla was explicitly modeled after one written in 1825 by Pedro Molina, one of the foremost liberals of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Either Molina's work or some other civic education text was used consistently in primary schools, often together with a catechism. The 1832 curriculum included civic education, and book requests in the 1840's and 50's included either the Cartilla or Las obligaciones del hombre en la sociedad together with copies of Ripalda's catechism. Molina's Cartilla remained as a standard and it was reprinted for its use in primary schools in 1861.<sup>48</sup> That is, the introduction of Francisco Galindo's text less than a revolutionary innovation was an update of a standard practice.

The discussion of innovations in the 1990's reform has been limited although some hints of the curricular ideas can be obtained from the textbooks introduced at the primary and secondary levels. The primary school textbooks are characterized by higher production values than the traditional ones (plenty of illustrations and, for the first time in official textbooks, color). As someone who is not a specialist in pedagogy I have to be tentative in my assessment, but in discussions with teachers I was told that the textbooks demanded more interaction, more dynamic pedagogical techniques such as asking children to sit in a circle around the teacher. The text books also give greater emphasis to the representation of images more consistent with the children's real life and occasional references to environmental and gender issues. The introduction of these textbooks has encountered some problems and there are teachers who, trained long ago, find it difficult to change their rote memorization teaching style and revert to old textbooks. The secondary school books, (one in history, in whose production the author of this paper participated, and one on natural history) by their very nature, offer more opportunities to engage in complex issues. In both cases the texts make an effort to engage students in the complexities of their country's realities and the teachers receive a teacher's guide that includes discussion exercises and other pedagogical innovations. There is no yet an assessment of how these books are used in the classrooms or if in practice there is a change in the teaching of these subjects.

As mentioned earlier, the most clear departure from the past is to be found in the organization of the school system. Yet, even in this area it is possible to find precedents. A liberal regime centralization was first attempted in the 1860's by President Gerardo Barrios, the initiative had disastrous results since the government did not yet command enough resources to take responsibilities away from municipal authorities. There are fewer precedents for the

decentralization of the 1990's. The only example that I have been able to find goes back only to early in the decade when successful experiments were carried out to give schools authority over funds administration, but the use of Fondos Educativos Distritales, as they were known, was carried out in a very limited basis.

#### 4. Conclusion

It is not surprising to find vigorous talk about school reform not matched by dramatic change. Changes in schools systems are more likely to be the result of complex forces and a long period of gestation as observed by Albert Fishlow in his analysis of the common school revival in 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S.<sup>49</sup> School systems involve a variety of social actors and the marshaling of abundant resources so that they are difficult to change simply by top-down decisions. Curriculum and teaching methods innovations have to be applied by teachers who, by and large, have been trained to do something else. This is as true today as it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the recent reforms in El Salvador I had the opportunity to observe first-hand how this happens. In the "José Martí" School in Santa Tecla, La Libertad province, less than two miles from the Ministry's headquarters, school teachers refused to use new reading textbooks because they didn't use the teaching system they were accustomed to. In other schools the teachers claimed that parents did not understand the homework given to their children and put pressure on them to go back to old textbooks. More dynamic teaching techniques were also resisted. While practical considerations were sometimes mentioned (how do you sit 40 children in circle in a tiny classroom?) the obstacles were created to a large extent by the natural resistance to moving away from many years of teaching in a certain way.

Introducing a new rationale for the educational enterprise, such as human capital concepts, is no easier task since most parents have many more things in mind when they send their children to school. The previous discussion shows how the traditional idea of the school as a place to form citizens still has a more prominent place in people's minds than strictly economic considerations, even if no one denies the economic role of education. It is hard to trace changes in the school system to one single rationale, the variety of actors called to participate in any reform is so large that it seems impossible to make them sing the same note. The conceptualizations of an elite are just one element in the picture. In fact, if there is hope that the recent school reforms will be successful, it would be because they were preceded by a long period of consultation and because the project has more than one note. This is, of course, not consistent with the view of small foreign-educated elites imposing a neoliberal program fresh out of the can.

The argument is not that change does not take place, in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century one does observe the strengthening of an elite, a more exclusive idea of who is a citizen, a centralization of power and a certain growth of the school system. But all these trends can be traced to long term phenomena that go back to decades before the advent of the liberals, issues such as the European demand for tropical goods, lowering of transportation costs and stabilization of political life that led to the expansion of export agriculture, consolidation of an elite and increased availability of funds for the central government. Similarly, one can say that late 20<sup>th</sup> century demand for changes in the school system respond to long term trends, the

globalization of the economy and the fall of the Soviet Union make it more apparent the importance of the economic value of education and permit more experimentation with forms of organization (government-sponsored community participation projects would have been difficult to imagine in Cold War El Salvador). Other more recent issues help to explain the acceptance of the idea of an educational reform such as the increase of political participation after the Peace Accords and people's anxiety with crime and unruly children, partially a product of phenomena unleashed by the War (economic depression, unemployment, migrations and the like).

The use of the terms liberal or neoliberal may carry the danger of focusing on ideological elites when trying to explain major policy shifts. The previous discussion suggests that this is not a good idea, it is more fruitful to explore why there is enough receptivity to their ideas for their projects to become a reality. Answers are likely to be found in long term trends. The interesting question is how elite projects are shaped to find acceptance. The next issue is whether this argument can be extrapolated to political and economic projects. For the political aspect I would like to mention Elisabeth J. Wood's analysis of the 1992 peace accords where she makes it clear that "without sustained reference to the domestic political actors we will not understand the political dynamics of the peace process and their political and economic implications".<sup>50</sup> This "sustained reference," I would argue, is necessary to understand any major policy likely to take root. It would take another paper to use the same argument for economic policy, but I think that it is possible. As shown above, the accelerated reeducation of the Salvadoran right was, by-and-large (although not exclusively, one cannot dismiss the effect of the Chilean and Mexican examples on leading intellectuals and of the arrival of foreign educated economists) part of a conscious effort from the part of the U.S. aid programs. As with many other adult education programs, its lasting results remain to be seen. Even if one dislikes the neoliberal program one has to remember that it has many aspects that are not consistent with cherished privileges of the Salvadoran elite. Even if more than a few have gained lasting neoliberal literacy, their ability to write public policy has become more difficult by the vigor of the electoral game (witness the March 1997 elections when the ARENA party lost control of the legislature and found itself at the mercy of its ability to form alliances). Voters in El Salvador, as their counterparts elsewhere, are not easily swayed by elegant theoretical models. This does not mean that trade barriers are about to be restored in full or that inflationary policies are the wave of the future, it means that to explain significant changes in policies one has to go beyond the study of ideological elites.

It is commonly accepted that 19<sup>th</sup> century liberalism was not a homogenous or an ideologically consistent movement. Our liberal ancestors were highly selective in their borrowing of ideas and quite imaginative in their adaptations. There is no reason to think that our neoliberal contemporaries are less inclined to borrow selectively or to imagine freely.

ENDNOTES

1. Francisco E. Galindo. Cartilla del Ciudadano 4<sup>th</sup> edition (San Salvador: Imprenta Nacional, 1904). Galindo was an influential politician and educator who in his free times wrote poems and plays such as Las Dos Flores, Rosa o María a romantic play published in Paris in 1872 by the Correo de Ultramar. See David Escobar Galindo. Índice antológico de la poesía salvadoreña Third Edition (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1994).p.72. According to the law children had to memorize the Cartilla. Cruz Ulloa. Recopilación de las leyes patrias desde la independencia hasta el año 1875 (San Salvador: Imprenta Nacional, 1879) p. 269.

The school curriculum for 1874 comes from the subjects taken by the students of the school of Santo Domingo. In Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), Gobernación SV 1853-1. The official curriculum spelled out in Ulloa, Recopilación p. 269 is fully consistent with what was taught in Santo Domingo.

2. Galindo, Cartilla, p. XI

3. El Salvador. Memoria que el Ministro de Estado en el Departamento de Justicia, Instrucción Pública y Negocios Eclesiásticos Presenta al Cuerpo Legislativo en el Año de 1872. (San Salvador: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1872).

4. Galindo, Cartilla, p. XII.

5. Article 13 of the 1824 constitution of the Federal Republic of Central America gave citizenship to men married or over 18 “as long as they practice a useful profession or have means of survival” and Article 21 explicitly suspended citizen rights to servants. The constitution is reprinted in ODECA. Digesto Constitucional Centroamericano (San Salvador: Imprenta Nacional, 1962).

6. El Constitucional, November 28, 1863. For a discussion of Barrios’s contribution to education see Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, “Los límites del poder en la era de Barrios” in Arturo Taracena and Jean Piel eds. Identidades nacionales y estado moderno en Centroamérica (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 1995).

7. El Constitucional, January 14, 1864.

8. Harvard Institute for Educational Development. Diagnóstico del Sistema de Desarrollo de Recursos Humanos de El Salvador. p. 1. Este proyecto fue financiado por USAID.

9. Disclosure: the author of this paper was one of the academics in the Comisión.

10. Ricardo Córdova Macías, "El sistema educativo y los valores cívicos," La Prensa Gráfica, 18 July 1995.

11. "Una transformacion vital," La Prensa Gráfica, 17 July 1995.
12. "No hay que abrir la puerta a la indoctrinación del niño," El Diario de Hoy , 19 July 1995.
13. "Hay una lamentable confusión sobre como enseñar moral," El Diario de Hoy, July 18, 1995. See also the articles by Carlos Sandoval "El informe pedagógico de los ilustres," El Diario de Hoy, 14 July 1995 and "La preocupación moralizadora de los ilustres," El Diario de Hoy, 17 July 1995.
14. The focus groups were conducted during October and November of 1994. There were meetings with 27 groups, 12 of teachers, 12 of parents and 3 of principals. The groups were conducted in the three main regions of the country, some were urban and others rural. The participants were randomly selected.
15. "Incorporan valores morales en formación básica," La Prensa Gráfica (Internet edition), 7 February 1997.
16. One of the seminal works on human capital is Gary Becker. Human Capital (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1964). For an excellent selection of articles on this topic see Mark Blaug ed. The Economic Value of Education: Studies in the Economics of Education (Aldershot, England: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1992). The World Bank's approach is heavily influenced by international comparisons that find that elementary education has a higher rate of return than secondary education. See George Psacharopoulos, "Returns to Education: An Updated International Comparison," Comparative Education 17:3.
17. For an analysis of U.S. assistance in the 1980's and the origins of FUSADES see Herman Rosa. AID y las transformaciones globales en El Salvador (Managua: CRIES, 1993).
18. FEPADE. Memoria de Labores 1993 (San Salvador: FEPADE, 1993).
19. FUSADES. Boletín Económico y Social No. 102 (May 1994) p. 2.
20. FUSADES. Boletín Económico y Social No. 103 (July 1994) p. 5
21. ANEP. El manifiesto salvadoreño: una propuesta de los empresarios a la nación (San Salvador: ANEP, 1996).
22. This lunch is mentioned by James K. Boyce, "The Peace Accords and Postwar Reconstruction" in James K. Boyce ed. Economic Policy for Building Peace: The Lessons of El Salvador (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1996) p. 1. World Bank. The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
23. For a discussion of the classical economists views of education see Margaret O'Donnell, The Educational Thought of the Classical Political Economists (New York: University Press of America, 1985). Horace Mann's role is discussed in any good textbook of history of American education. See for example Joel Spring, The American School 1642-1993 (New York, McGraw Hill, 1994)



24. See Ministry of Education, El Salvador. Reforma educativa en marcha en el Salvador, Documento II, Consulta 95 (San Salvador: Ministerio de Educación, 1995).

25. "Consensus is Never a Criterion for the Truth," El Diario de Hoy July 14, 1995.

26. Just to fill the gaps, there were reforms after the defeat of the Ezetas in 1893, during the Meléndez-Quiñonez dynasty, during the presidency of General Martínez, with the arrival of General Osorio, and during the heyday of the PCN with General Sánchez Hernández.

27. "Decreto legislativo para que se establezcan escuelas de primeras letras para niños de uno y otro sexo" Isidro Menéndez. Recopilación de las leyes de El Salvador en Centro-América. 2 vols. (Guatemala: Imprenta de L. Luna, 1855-1856). 2:3.

28. As an example of this role of the central government (then the government of the State of San Salvador, a part of the Federation), in 1836 the executive demanded reports from the Juntas Departamentales de Educación (departmental boards) about the creation of schools. El Iris Salvadoreño, October 2, 1836.

29. An early example of the role of municipalities can be found in the minutes of the board of education of the town of Sonsonate in 1836. "1836. Libro de actas de la Junta de Educación Pública de este Distrito" Archivo Municipal de Sonsonate. The early documents in the Archivo Municipal de Sonsonate are classified merely by year. (Hereafter I will refer to this archive as AMS). The practice of public exams and the worries about attendance and supplies are in evidence in the communications with school teachers found in "1849, Carpeta de Comunicaciones que los Preceptores de 1as. Letras de Este Distrito hacen al Presidente de la Junta de Instrucción Pública" AMS 1849.

30. In 1853 the Board of Education of Sonsonate wanted to divert funds from the tax on alcoholic beverages to build a new school. The issue had to be brought to the attention of President Dueñas and the Minister in charge told the Board that it was impossible to divert monies from a fund that was essential to pay administrative personnel and that if its suggestion were followed "it would be necessary for the administration to disappear and for the State to fall in a state of anarchy". Ministerio General to Presidente de la Junta de Instrucción Pública de la Ciudad de Sonsonate, 18 de noviembre de 1853. AMS 1853.

31. Based on 1849 figures. Gaceta del Salvador, May 27, 1857.

32. GBPP 73 p. 28. Rafael Reyes. Apuntamientos estadísticos sobre la República del Salvador (San Salvador: Imprenta Nacional, 1888). p. 22.

33. Matías Castro Delgado, "Copia del informe emitido con fecha 31 de Diciembre del año pasado, por el Gobernador del Departamento de La Libertad," in Adán Mora, Memoria del Ministerio de Gobernación y Fomento presentada al Cuerpo Legislativo el 4 de Febrero de 1884 (San Salvador: Imprenta Nacional, 1884) p. 32.

34. Diario Oficial, July 6, 1894.

35. The AGN has copies of high school grades for the period 1886-1940.

36. Ulloa, Recopilación, p. 274

37. The authorities of the Ministry of Education characterized the reform as a “process of decentralization of the educational system” within the framework of “modernization of the state.” La Prensa Gráfica, July 19, 1995.

38. Ministerio de Educación. EDUCO una Experiencia en Marcha (Ministerio de Educación: San Salvador, 1994).

39. This organizational scheme is similar to the experience of the colegiados, the school councils operating in Minas Gerais, Brazil. Governo de Minas Gerais, Secretaria de Estado da Educação, Governo de Minas Gerais. Colegiado em Revista (Belo Horizonte: SEE, 1992).

40. Based on focus groups conducted at EDUCO school in Caserío San Nicolás, Cantón La Magdalena, Santa Ana province, El Salvador, and with colegiado of Escola Estadual José Mendes Júnior, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, March 16, 1995.

41. See World Bank. The World Bank Participation Sourcebook (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1996).

42. Official enrollments in primary schools were as follows:

Year	# Schools	# Students
1850	201	6696
1874	353	11468
1887	559	21200
1888	732	27342
1889	795	29361
1892	585	29427

Sources: La Gaceta, Reyes, Apuntamientos p. 3, GBPP89, GBPP 90, Diario Oficial.

43. Population figures were extrapolated from Rodolfo Barón Castro, La Población de El Salvador (Madrid: Instituto Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1942) p. 467.

44. This rate is for the period 1874-93, which was used to calculate school enrollment growth. The 1874 figure comes from J. LaFerrière, De Paris à Guatémala, Notes de Voyages au Centre Amérique, 1866-1875 (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1877) pp. 190-91 and the 1893 figure from the Stateman's Year Book 1897.

45. José Andino to Alcalde 1o de Nahuizalco. 12 April 1853. AMS 1853.

46. Harvard Institute for Educational Development. Diagnóstico, Chapter 4, p. 23.

47. The earliest surviving reading primer printed in New Spain, the Cartilla para enseñar a leer, attributed to Pedro de Gante, was almost exclusively devoted to prayers. See Emilio Valtón. El primer libro de alfabetización en América (Mexico D.F.: Antigua Librería Robredo, 1947). After de Cortes de Cádiz a Cartilla del ciudadano was printed to be used in schools.

48. Pedro Molina, Cartilla del Ciudadano (San Salvador: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1861) AGN Impresos III #31. Letter from M. González Pavón, teacher of Juayúa, October 18, 1849 AMS 1849. A list requesting school material in 1853 includes a request for Cartillas AMS 1853.

49. Albert Fishlow “The American Common School Revival: Fact or Fancy?” in Henry Rosovsky ed. Industrialization in Two systems: Essays in Honor of Alexander Gerschenkron (New York: John Wiley, 1966).

50. Elisabeth J. Wood. “The Peace Accords and Postwar Reconstruction” in James K. Boyce ed. Economic Policy p. 74.