

## Educating Women as Mothers and Workers in 1920s Mexico City

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This paper will examine women's vocational education in Mexico City under the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (SEP). It will show how the period 1920-1926 was one of transition for the newly founded government ministry: a transition away from its Porfirian roots and towards the role of a powerful tool supporting the institutionalization of the Revolution. It will also demonstrate that SEP education for women trained them not for industrial labour but instead prepared them for artisan work in their homes. SEP programmes underwent adaptations as teachers and students modified curricula for their own ends. First, this paper will discuss the ideological motivations behind women's vocational education and outline the programmes of the schools and their individual histories. Then, it will attempt to re-construct classroom realities of day and night schools, noting how the students, teachers and administrators of the various schools altered or enhanced SEP programmes. In order to do this, I will present two case studies: one concerning the dissemination of birth control information and the other concerning cooking and dress-making classes. Penultimately, this paper will examine night schools aimed specifically at working class women. Finally, it will study the students themselves. Who were they, what were their motivations and what became of them? This paper is part of a larger project of Church and State educational programmes and community work which forms my doctoral research.

### Ideologies behind Women's Vocational Education

The SEP viewed women as moralizers in the home, with an influence over the men and children in their lives. Technical education for women idealized the home as the heart of family life and a refuge from the outside world. Women learned in vocational education to perfect this idealization of the domestic space, through their unpaid labour or work in the home. Nonetheless, 'la mujer necesita hoy día a una preparación bastante amplia para que llene su cometido social.'<sup>1</sup> Although the primary focus was home, women's education had to be practical and theoretical, since 'la teoría sin la práctica es una abstracción y la práctica sola, forma empíricos que están bien en una escuela de carácter industrial, pero de ninguna manera deben salir de una escuela donde se prepara a la mujer para la difícil y ardua misión de directora de su hogar.'<sup>2</sup> The reference to 'theoretical' comes from the increasing focus on the scientific management of the home which permeated the SEP. The fascination with things scientific and the belief that science could make everything rational underlies much of the pedagogy of this period. The rationalization of the home made it an extension of the workplace and the market; a place which would further inculcate the values of time management and contentment with one's lot. However, women lacked skills to fulfill the promise of the rational home and vocational training filled the domestic lacuna educators observed.

While the skills which women learned could be an economic supplement, as well as an uplifting influence for the household,<sup>3</sup> overall the focus of women's vocational education was mothering and managing the home because 'en las manos de la mujer está y ha estado la

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<sup>1</sup> Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Educación Pública Departamento de Enseñanza Técnica, Industria y Comercial box 68 folder 29 document 4: Inspector to Director DETIC, 26 July 1923.

<sup>2</sup> SEP DETIC 74/15/ 8: 'Folleto de la Escuela Hogar "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz", 1926.

<sup>3</sup> SEP DETIC 68/34/6-9: Inspector night schools to Director DETIC, 26 July 1923.

humanidad, tan pronto como se logre imprimir una verdadera educación a la joven mujer se habrá echado las raíces en la regeneración social.<sup>4</sup> The women were young indeed, by our standards barely teenagers, but by the standards of the time, adult women ready to accept their corresponding responsibilities.

The stress in women's vocational education on the home, rather than the street, factory or *pulquería*, was part of a movement to de-politicize the women of Mexico City, and remove them from community activism. Considering the hardships the city went through during the Revolution, women's place within the community and family probably acquired a high profile, including rioting in the streets demanding food.<sup>5</sup> Women's education taught women to moderate the public presence which the Mexican Revolution had foisted upon them. While the SEP encouraged community involvement, the involvement needed to be within the boundaries the SEP placed on women's role in society.

Emphasis on the home was additionally a means to re-establish control and moralize. The home was preferable to the dangerous *cantinas* and *pulquerías* or streets, the latter being a site for both planned and unprompted action to redress grievances and the former a danger to morals.<sup>6</sup> If women learned that certain community space (like the streets), from which their protest movements arose, threatened the well-being of them and their families, and returned home, the State might reduce the spaces available to women and curtail their protests. The State herded women into the school, an environment which nominally followed the State's ideological programme, and the home, where women were probably isolated and overwhelmed with work and offspring. The SEP also tried to discourage women from working in the industrial sector, a space which fostered class-based organizing. After the Revolution, the number of women in industrial work declined while numbers in domestic labour rose.<sup>7</sup> This trend in employment coincided with a historical era when women were a strong presence outside the home and making demands in the political arena. It was a time when some Mexican women hoped for the right to vote from the new Constitution and when women rallied in the street to demonstrate against State anti-clerical policies. The question of the place of women in society at this time was not limited to Mexico and similar debates occurred in the United States and Europe.

Mexican educators discussed how vocational education would provide women with an honorable means to acquire their daily bread; women were educated for the office, shop or home, but not the factory. Though limited in sphere, the SEP voices validated and praised the work of women as necessary and challenging. The concern with an 'honorable' living which educators expressed was a reaction to the perceived increase in the numbers of prostitutes in post-revolutionary Mexico City. The years of conflict had unleashed passions which the revolutionaries were attempting to restrain in a cage of respectability. Women were always in great peril, because they were the 'weaker sex' under constant temptation and 'easily misled' by too abundant scoundrels. To read SEP documents, one might believe that women teetered on the precipice of prostitution and dishonor with vocational training the only handhold preventing their plummeting into the depths of shame. How realistic was this fear on the part of the State? Bliss cites an almost twentyfold increase in prostitution from 1872-1906.<sup>8</sup> Her research suggests that prostitution continued to rise in Mexico City during the Revolution

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<sup>4</sup>SEP DETIC 68/29/13-14: Inspector's report 'Informe Relativo a los cuatro Centros de Educación Cultural Femeniles,' 24 Dec. 1923.

<sup>5</sup>John Robert Lear. 'Workers, Vecinos and Citizens: the Revolution in Mexico City, 1909 - 1917,' (PhD dis. 1993, University of California Berkeley) 326, 357-65.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.* 361.

<sup>7</sup>Mary Kay Vaughan. *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982) 212.

<sup>8</sup>Katherine Bliss. 'All Alone in the City of Palaces: Migration, Work and Prostitution in Mexico City, 1900-1940,' (Paper presented at LASA Sept. 28, 1994) 4. Taken from Luis Lara y Prado *La Prostitución en México*, (Mexico and Paris: Librería de la Vda. de Ch. Bouret, 1908) 15.

itself,<sup>9</sup> while in the post-revolutionary period the ‘official numbers of registered prostitutes declined’ but ‘anecdotal evidence suggests that sexual commerce at least became more visible as women solicited customers on the street instead of inside brothels.’<sup>10</sup> Actual numbers of prostitutes aside, the perception of women leaping like lemmings into the canyon of dishonour motivated SEP discourse on the need for women’s education.

### School Programmes, Administration and Courses

Within women’s vocational education there existed a marked division between day and night schools. Nominally, one school operated two shifts, while in fact two separate schools shared a building almost by happenstance. The two schools which shared the same facility nonetheless differed in teachers and administration. Furthermore, students’ socio-economic backgrounds created varied uses, needs and goals from their education. Night classes catered to working class and office employees while day courses were for those who did not have others relying on their income. I will endeavor to develop this point below.

Before the Calles presidency, vocational students’ only cost appears to be school materials, including supplies for industrial training. The students manufactured goods for outside sale and often schools filled specific orders. It appears that students received a small percentage of the sale price.<sup>11</sup> Calles’ presidential decree of 1924 allowed the SEP *Departamento de Enseñanza Técnica, Industria y Comercial* (DETIC) to charge admission fees and invest these fees in vocational education.<sup>12</sup> This inevitably increased the hardship for families supporting students and may account for the continuous rise in night school enrollment. For part-time students, such as night school students, schools charged by the course. Grants were available for students of notorious poverty, with the minimum grade of ‘muy bien’ in their studies, who were enrolled full-time. In 1926, of the 50 scholarships available, 27 went to the *Escuela de Ingenieros Mecánicos y Electricistas* (a men’s vocational school for skilled labour), 15 to commercial schools, one to the *Escuela Técnica de Constructores* (for construction site supervisors), four to women’s vocational schools and two to technical schools in Europe.<sup>13</sup> While in sheer numbers, as we shall see shortly, women’s schools and students outnumbered men’s, at least in grants the men’s schools received priority.

Each of the technical schools under the DETIC required physical education classes, for the betterment of the entire student. To the SEP, physical education played an essential role in the development of the complete person, giving health benefits and providing students with a wholesome way to amuse themselves. Through physical education came the ‘mejoramiento de la raza, tan degenerada hoy, por la falta casi absoluta de cultura física, y además se pondrá a los alumnos en mejores condiciones para luchar en la vida y para obtener la mayor eficiencia en su trabajo.’<sup>14</sup> If the school succeeded in instilling exercise habits for life, employers were ensured of a healthy work force with minimal absenteeism and, in the case of women, the nation was assured of salubrious mothers to bear future citizens.

Classes in women’s household labour were generally defined as ‘trabajos manuales.’ This category encompassed everything from mending to ironing, budget management to childcare - skills which the State believed women needed to run a household. It also included

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.* 10.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.* 20.

<sup>11</sup> SEP DETIC 74/16/33: circular #10 Directora Queré taro to teachers, 11 Nov. 1926.

<sup>12</sup> *Boletín de la Secretaría de Educación Pública* Feb. 1926, 112.

<sup>13</sup> *BSEP* Feb. 1926, 114.

<sup>14</sup> *BSEP* Sept. 1922, 117.

skills training in the local artisan work which could ‘sirven para mejorar las condiciones materiales de la escuela y del hogar de cada educando.’<sup>15</sup> In the schools women ‘puedan darse cuenta de la manera de arreglar toda una casa con poco gasto, uniendo la economía a la belleza para hacer el hogar atractivo.’<sup>16</sup> These courses professionalized the housewife and transformed her into a manager of the domestic economy. They also gave women the responsibility to make up for their man’s low wages with their own income and through creative budget management.

Although a wide range of activities tempted students, the ‘product models and consumer values’<sup>17</sup> inspiring courses generally reflected the tastes of the well-to-do. For example, one women’s technical school offered classes in painting porcelain and making decorated boxes.<sup>18</sup> At the same school, cooking classes had an entire section devoted to desserts while sewing classes offered lingerie making as well as ‘corte y confección de trajes de novia, teatro y soire.’<sup>19</sup> Cooking was a notable exception to this elite orientation, which I will discuss below. The models which the SEP paraded as ideal, whether elite or popular, were not unilaterally accepted. Particular curricula became the subject of passionate patriotic debate, as I will elaborate later.

No matter how good a woman’s training, the SEP could not guarantee positions for its students after graduation, nor did this task fall within the SEP’s mission. For example, the *Escuela de Enseñanza Doméstica* offered courses for both housewives and teachers of home economics, yet the *directora* noted that students who completed degrees in home economics could not find suitable employment. None of the primary schools offered home economics and secondary schools preferred to hire teachers with more general knowledge.<sup>20</sup> As far as I can tell those criticisms effected little change in SEP hiring practices or primary school curriculum. At least until 1926, primary education programmes did not include mandatory domestic skills training.

State vocational education was a crazy quilt of schools created in different periods by Don Porfirio’s government and that of the revolutionary State. In 1922 under the DETIC the women’s technical schools were: *Escuela de Arte Industrial ‘La Corregidora de Querétaro,’ Escuela Nacional de Enseñanza Doméstica* and *Escuela de Arte y Oficios para Señoritas*. That year, the SEP founded the *Escuela Hogar Gabriela Mistral* and the *Escuela Hogar Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* was created in the mid 1920s. The early years of the SEP saw an expansion in the number of students each school enrolled, as well as the number of schools. At the *Escuela de Artes y Oficios para Señoritas* enrollment went from 1,444 in 1922<sup>21</sup> to 2,883 in 1925.<sup>22</sup> From 1924 to 1925 total women’s enrollment in technical education rose from 17,475 to 19,745; an increase of approximately 13%. In that same period the number of teachers stagnated.<sup>23</sup> There were almost twice as many women as men enrolled in either technical or commercial training. I can only speculate why the SEP chose to devote many of its resources for Mexico City to the women. As the mothers of future generations, the SEP saw women as a pivotal force to moralize citizens. Furthermore, as I have already noted,

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<sup>15</sup>SEP Departamento Escolar 44/59/3: José Vasconcelos, ‘Bases conforme a las cuales deberá organizarse la Educación Pública Federal los Delegados de la Secretaría de Educación,’ 12 Feb. 1923.

<sup>16</sup>SEP DETIC 74/15/19: Pamphlet “Escuela Hogar Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz,” without day without month 1926.

<sup>17</sup>Vaughan. *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico*, 205.

<sup>18</sup>SEP DETIC 74/19/11: Folleto de la Escuela de Arte Industrial ‘Corregidora de Querétaro’, [sic] para el año de 1927, Jan. 1927.

<sup>19</sup>SEP DETIC 74/3/34: programa de Corte y Confección de Vestidos para las escuelas Técnicas, que fué aprobada en la Junta de Profesoras, verificado en la Escuela N. [sic] de Artes y Oficios para Señoritas, Feb 1927.

<sup>20</sup>BSEP 1923 3/4, 236.

<sup>21</sup>SEP DETIC 72/51/51: Report from Director DETIC, 17 June 1922.

<sup>22</sup>BSEP Mar. 1925, 114.

<sup>23</sup>BSEP Feb. 1926, 109.

women's political role in the Revolution and afterwards was of street mobilization for rights as citizens, consumers and Catholics. The aim of women's vocational training was to push women back into the home and make them forget their own recent involvement in the fray. Finally, the SEP may have been responding to a demand from women for more educational opportunities.

The *Escuela de Artes y Oficios para Señoras* (EAOS), founded in 1871, was one of the Porfirian technical and adult schools which continued to operate into the revolutionary era. It was located on *5 de febrero #90*, in the historic centre of Mexico City. Classes and specialization at the EAOS included hand or machine embroidery and lace-making; cooking, dessert and confection making; manufacture of children's clothing; hat making; making of 'objetos artísticos;' flower arranging; clothing design and hair dressing. All courses included physical education in the ample covered terrace, which protected young women from direct sunshine. Fourteen was the minimum age of enrollment and the girls had to have completed the first half of primary school. Once fees were introduced, they varied according to the selection of subjects.<sup>24</sup> The list of classes above is similar to those offered at other women's vocational schools. While difficult to generalize about the social position of students at the EAOS, at least part of the student body was working class. We shall see below that one of the math classes was filled with seamstresses.

Located on *Santa Marí a la Redonda* and *Primera de Mina*, the *Escuela de Arte Industrial Corregidora de Querétaro*, named after the heroine of Mexican independence, was a two storey building with 45 rooms and two patios. Founded in 1910, the Querétaro School prepared women 'para conquistar su independencia económica,'<sup>25</sup> as long as the students did not attack their economic independence through industrial labour. Besides acquiring skills to make products, students learned how to value their articles for sale. The Querétaro School was aimed at single young ladies and housewives. Courses were basically the same as at the EAOS, including sausage making, porcelain painting, film making and photography. Anyone registered on the full-time course was required to take five hours per week of Spanish and arithmetic. Admission requirements included proof of completion of both halves of primary education, which meant the students attending the Querétaro School had more education to begin with than their counterparts at the EAOS. In 1922, the school had an attendance of 1,603 day students and 827 night students, with 79 teachers for the day school and 17 for the night school.<sup>26</sup>

The *Escuela de Enseñanza Doméstica* trained women to be state of the art housewives or 'profesoras de Economía que más tarde impartirán los conocimientos fundamentales que habrán de transformar los hogares.'<sup>27</sup> Located on the *Calle de Aztecas #1*, the school served the north and east areas of the city.<sup>28</sup> The night school at *Enseñanza Doméstica* offered courses of shorter duration aimed specifically at servants.<sup>29</sup> In addition to courses I have mentioned previously, the *Escuela de Enseñanza Doméstica* provided classes in mothering. With no appropriate texts available to discuss the subject, the teacher designed the course herself basing it on her own observations.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, the instruction had a

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<sup>24</sup>SEP DETIC 74/3/13: Folleto de la Escuela N.[sic] de Artes y oficios para Señoras, without day or month 1926.

<sup>25</sup>SEP DETIC 74/3/24: Folleto de la Escuela de Arte Industrial 'Corregidora de Querétaro' para el año de 1927, without day Jan. 1927.

<sup>26</sup>SEP DETIC 72/51/48: Report from Director DETIC, 17 June 1922.

<sup>27</sup>SEP DETIC 68/70/16: Directora's 'Informe de la Exposición de los trabajos hechos durante el año escolar de 1923 en la Escuela N.[sic] de Enseñanza Doméstica,' 29 Nov. 1923.

<sup>28</sup>BSEP Mar. 1922, 244.

<sup>29</sup>BSEP Sept. 1922, 94.

<sup>30</sup>SEP DETIC 72/7/36: Directora to Director DETIC, 25 Aug. 1922.

technical and scientific character: studying the baby and mother, dividing their experience into phases of development, explaining circulation and respiration, as well as reasons for crying and problems associated with breast feeding. For students in the motherhood classes, field trips away from school took them to the *Casa de Cuna*, a state-run orphanage, in order to practice ‘el manejo de los niños, baño del niño y juego con los niños.’<sup>31</sup> Another possible major at *Enseñanza Doméstica* was ‘housewifery.’ The school offered tips to these future housewives so that ‘con poco dinero puedan hacer del hogar un lugar atractivo que retenga agradablemente a sus miembros.’<sup>32</sup> At *Enseñanza Doméstica* women trained to be educated consumers, going on field trips to orchards and fruit processing centres to learn to select the best produce.<sup>33</sup> The students at *Enseñanza Doméstica* were probably more middle class than in other women’s vocational schools. Some volunteered to help distribute the free breakfasts which the SEP offered to poor children, but they promptly quit, feeling that it was beneath them. Their supervisor complained that they had little concept of cooperation or work.<sup>34</sup>

Named for the celebrated Chilean poet, the *Escuela Hogar para Señoritas Gabriela Mistral*, founded in 1922, provided women with an education which would not lead them into ‘fracaso o a la disilusión.’<sup>35</sup> The school duplicated the mission of the *Escuela Nacional de Enseñanza Doméstica* because one institution was not sufficient to meet the demands of parents for women’s education.<sup>36</sup> The Mistral School was located on *Sadi Carnot* #63, where it would serve the working class areas of Guerrero, San Rafael, Santa María de la Ribera; the middle class neighbourhoods of Juárez and Roma and the towns of Popotla, Tacuba and Atzacapotzalco.<sup>37</sup> Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957), an independent woman herself, promoted home life for other women with the fervor of a missionary.<sup>38</sup> Initially, students learned to be content with their lot and how to run their homes rationally. They were also instilled with a sense of camaraderie for fellow students.<sup>39</sup> By 1928 the school added ‘inculcar en el corazón de las alumnas el bien de todos haciendo abstracción de razas, nacionalidades y partidos políticos.’ At the Mistral School, students were supposed to elevate their characters and develop their hidden talents. They learned that it was not just professional careers which gave them an advantage in the future but that in other kinds of labour they could find ‘use,’ particularly in areas they could pursue from their homes.<sup>40</sup> The majority of students came from the ‘clase social más desvalida.’<sup>41</sup>

The *Escuela Hogar Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, founded in the mid-1920s and named for Mexico’s most famous woman poet, also offered a major in ‘housewifery.’ The De la Cruz School was located on *Sadi Carnot*, and probably served a similar area as the Mistral School. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695) was ‘the most celebrated critic of machismo,’ and ‘in her plea for a single sexual standard and equal educational opportunity for men and women, [she] prefigured the modern feminist movement in Mexico.’<sup>42</sup> The school which took her name trained women for service in the home and taught women to fulfill their sense of self as wife and mother - both sentiments foreign to those of Sor Juana. As part of

<sup>31</sup>BSEP Feb. 1926, 125.

<sup>32</sup>SEP DETIC 68/70/17: Directora’s ‘Informe de la Exposición de los trabajos hechos durante el año escolar de 1923 en la Escuela N.[sic] de Enseñanza Doméstica,’ 29 Nov. 1923.

<sup>33</sup>BSEP Feb. 1926, 126.

<sup>34</sup>BSEP Mar. 1922, 112.

<sup>35</sup>SEP DETIC 74/18/2: Finalidades de la Escuela, Directora Chirón y Gómez, 21 Nov. 1928.

<sup>36</sup>BSEP Mar. 1922, 240.

<sup>37</sup>BSEP Mar. 1922, 244.

<sup>38</sup>Vaughan. *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico*, 207-08.

<sup>39</sup>SEP DETIC 72/4/1: school rules, Directora Pacheco, 22 July 1922.

<sup>40</sup>SEP DETIC 74/18/2-3: Finalidades de la Escuela, Directora Chirón y Gómez, 21 Nov. 1928.

<sup>41</sup>BSEP Dec. 1925, 206.

<sup>42</sup>Macías, Anna. *Against all Odds The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940*. (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1982) 4.

the training for housewife, students learned about the ‘influencia de la mujer en el hogar,’ ‘selección de cuadros y adornos,’ ‘presupuestos diarios,’ ‘importancia de las plantas en el comedor,’ ‘lavado y planchado de camisas de hombre’ and ‘reglas generales para conducirse en la familia y fuera de ella.’<sup>43</sup> As one can see, the subjects ranged from practical questions of ironing to decorum and decoration. A contiguous kindergarten allowed the young women to practice their mothering skills on someone else’s children.<sup>44</sup>

### Conditions in Women’s Vocational Education

The programmes I have described above were not unilaterally accepted by the teachers who needed to implement them. Furthermore, practical questions thwarted the intentions of the SEP. At the vocational level of education, some classrooms were overcrowded and under-supplied. For example, the 30 students in the Mistral School’s class of *corte y confección* lacked sufficient tables and chairs to work simultaneously.<sup>45</sup> In a 1922 report on the cooking class, the inspector noted almost 260 students in a space only equipped to accommodate 30. Even if the class had been small enough, the students still would not have been able to simmer or boil anything, as the stove was broken.<sup>46</sup> In a similar situation, the *bordado en máquina* class had only 30 sewing machines for 53 students.<sup>47</sup> These problems may have been because the Mistral School was founded in 1922 and still in the process of acquiring necessary equipment.

The other women’s schools appear to have been better equipped. However, the hat making class at the EAOS lacked a bookshelf, mirror and three irons and, finally, the sink was broken, according to the *inspectora*.<sup>48</sup> The EAOS also had problems with insufficient lighting for the *clase de corte*, which the *directora* was not taking pains to remedy.<sup>49</sup> The *directora* defended her school, saying that while most of the *inspectora*’s criticisms were accurate, they ignored the fact that everyone was making do admirably. She ended her letter saying, ‘la señora Macías Gutiérrez ve con ojos negros lo que se relaciona con la administración y dirección de esta Escuela y está equivocada al decir que “durante sus visitas ha observado”, [sic] pues es la primera vez que visita estas clases.’ While the relationship among SEP employees falls beyond the range of this paper, sufficed to say that the above quotation was typical rather than exceptional.

Inside classrooms, teachers struggled with large numbers of students who had widely divergent levels of knowledge. Enrollment requirements notwithstanding, for some adults vocational education was their only experience of schooling. Vocational night schools generally had lower admission requirements than day schools, which meant that night schools had students with less educational background. In some instances, students without previous experience of a school environment created discipline problems. In 1923, an *inspectora* reported that students in *corte y confección* were rowdy and undisciplined at the Mistral School. She attributed it to the students being ‘fuera de la edad escolar.’<sup>50</sup> The students at the Mistral School seemed in general rather more boisterous than their counterparts at other schools.<sup>51</sup> Although the *inspectora* did not specifically mention it, younger teachers may have

43SEP DETIC 74/15/19-20: pamphlet ‘Escuela Hogar “Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz,” without day without month 1926.

44SEP DETIC 74/15/6: pamphlet ‘Sor Juana,’ 1926.

45SEP DETIC 68/20/2: Inspectora Emilia R. vda de Macías to Director DETIC, 24 Mar. 1922.

46SEP DETIC 68/20/5: Inspectora R. vda de Macías to Director DETIC, 24 Mar. 1922.

47SEP DETIC 68/21/7: Inspectora R. vda de Macías to Director DETIC, 16 Mar. 1923.

48SEP DETIC 68/17/5: Inspectora R. vda de Macías to Director DETIC, 14 Mar. 1923.

49SEP DETIC 68/13/3: Inspectora Macías Gutiérrez to Director DETIC, 27 July 1922.

50SEP DETIC 68/21/3: Inspectora R. vda de Macías to Director DETIC, 3 Mar. 1923.

51SEP DETIC 68/23/2: Inspectora Margarita S. de Fontaura to Director DETIC, 3 Mar. 1923.

had trouble gaining and maintaining the respect of their older pupils. Without this respect, classroom discipline would have been impossible.

The division between day and night schools is vividly exemplified by the report on the exhibition which *Enseñanza Doméstica* staged, from the *Excelsior*:

La exposición de sombreros, clase nocturna, que corresponde a la Señorita profesora María Cristina Alvarez del Castillo, fue interesantísima además de por la variedad en la producción, en estilos económicos por la circunstancia de que todo aquellos es obra de gente humilde, mujeres trabajadoras que durante el día se ganan el pan en trabajos arduos y por la noche van perseverantemente a recibir sus clases, a aprender aquellas industrias femeninas que lenta pero seguramente, acaban por redimir las.

La exposición de clase diurna, también de sombreros, correspondientes a las profesoras señoritas Guadalupe Fernández Almendaro y Esther Gutiérrez, ofrecieron labor de más refinamiento y de más costo, pero todo verdaderamente sorprendente por su excelencia.<sup>52</sup>

Teachers were limited in the number of courses they could give. Thus, within vocational education, day school teachers probably did not teach in the night schools. If this was the case, it would have engendered further stratification within schools. In addition, day schools appeared to receive teachers with more experience and training, while night schools employed a lower caliber of teacher. Director of Primary Education Morales wrote, regarding the move of a library to the Normal night school, that because of the disgraceful ‘diferencias que existen entre maestros diurnos y nocturnos... y la división también acentuada entre normalistas y no titulados, me dan fundamento para creer que seguramente pasaré a la Biblioteca al servicio de una parte de los maestros solamente.’<sup>53</sup> He implied that night school teachers would not study independently as their day school counterparts did. It is also possible that night school teachers worked a full day before classes, just as many of their students. Although the SEP consistently discouraged working multiple jobs, for poorly paid teachers it was economic necessity.<sup>54</sup>

Many night school students arrived after a full day’s work. For the students at the *Escuelas Nocturnas para Obreras*, workers’ schools which I will discuss below, the afternoon and evening were not marked by rest or sustenance. After an insufficient meal at mid-day, they worked through the afternoon. In the evening, they arrived at school hungry and listless. *Inspectora* María Baños Contreras requested that the *Servicio de Desayunos Escolares* serve snacks at the night schools she inspected so that students could have sustenance before starting the second shift of their day. The Breakfast Service approved her idea, and students presumably benefited from increased caloric intake.<sup>55</sup> Inspector Abraham Arellanos noted at the *Centro Industrial #2*, for working women, that students of the ‘clase humilde’ were ‘casi adormecido[s].’<sup>56</sup> He made no attempt to explain the students’ listlessness, but malnutrition could account for the symptoms. The attentiveness of one inspector presumably improved the health and learning capacity of students, while the lack of perception of another may have aggravated students’ malnutrition. In summary, it appears that in SEP night schools teachers,

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<sup>52</sup>BSEP 1924 5/6, 301.

<sup>53</sup>SEP DE 41/13/3: Director Primary Education Morales to Jefe DE, 24 June 1924.

<sup>54</sup>SEP DE 56/4/4: Directora Querétaro to Director DETIC, reprinted in Mancera to Jefe DE, 17 Mar. 1924.

<sup>55</sup>SEP DETIC 68/31/3: Jefe DE to Directora Desayunos Escolares, 11 July 1924 and Jefe DE to Director DETIC, 24 July 1924.

<sup>56</sup>SEP DETIC 68/35/21: Inspector to Director DETIC, 23 Aug. 1924.



who worked two jobs to survive, led classes while their students struggled to understand the material in spite of exhaustion and a deficit of attention.

Considering the differences between day and night schools, there would have been a *de facto* stratification of education in which the curriculum underwent alterations to fit the perceived needs of different social classes. If, indeed, courses were tailored to the social level of the students, vocational education further reinforced existing social differences and social stratification rather than offering students a means for class mobility. While students from servants to upper middle class girls with parental support shared the classroom, the same skills could help run a middle class home, or provide a living in domestic service or through labour in the home. Furthermore, when the students made goods for their own use they appeared to pay for their supplies. The students with fewer pecuniary resources would have had to work with inferior materials even in their early training.

As I have discussed previously, vocational courses emphasized practical skills. Academic and vocational subjects were taught as applied more than theoretical courses. For example, teachers and inspectors taught speaking skills which ‘quitan la timidez para hablar en público.’ Through careful selection of subject matter, morality could be incorporated into these courses. During his visit to the EAOS inspector Juan León noted:

... les narré un cuento sobre la gratitud, y recomendé a la clase siempre que tuvieran una oportunidad contaran cuentos morales de los que hubieren leído, empleando siempre, para ello, un lenguaje sencillo, claro y preciso, o que escribieran cuentos morales originales; porque estos ejercicios de lenguaje desenvolverán en ellas la facultad de escribir y hablar que son tan útiles a toda persona culta.<sup>57</sup>

To begin forming ‘personas cultas’ inspector León told a moral story in simple, clear and comprehensible language. Inculcating the ‘less cultured’ with the desire and means to become ‘cultured’ was a fundamental tenet of vocational education. Each class provided a fresh opportunity to improve the level of culture and morality of the ‘humble classes.’ Of course, ‘improvement’ was in the eye of the beholder. While the SEP may have seen middle class morality and ideals as an improvement, students adapted what they learned in school to fit into their lives and their community, even if their adaptations did not fit into the SEP’s scheme. Throughout this paper I will point out cases of students using education for their own ends.

Math classes also used examples from students’ experience as the basis of study. León observed from his visit to a math class at the EAOS that ‘los problemas se referían a los de la vida práctica. Un problema fue el siguiente: “cuántas operarias se necesitarán para terminar tres docenas de vestidos en ocho días sabiendo que tres hacen cinco en tres días.”’<sup>58</sup> Setting the problem in a sewing workshop presumably illustrated how mathematics’ uses were ubiquitous and incorporated the SEP’s directive on practical education into the math class. The SEP instructed teachers to describe the entire process of production, from manufacture to distribution and sales, to their students. Men’s vocational education provided more in-depth training in commercial skills, including courses in accounting and market forces. Nonetheless, seamstresses with math knowledge could calculate their output, plan production and finish their party dresses on schedule.

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<sup>57</sup>SEP DETIC 68/3/3: Inspector to Director DETIC, 28 Aug. 1922.

<sup>58</sup>SEP DETIC 68/3/4: Inspector to Director DETIC, 28 Aug. 1922.

### Case Study: Margaret Sanger's Pamphlet

Equipment and supplies alone could not teach a student, and even the most well-equipped school still needed good teachers, who operated within defined limits of acceptable subject matter. Although the SEP encouraged the practical application of education, using daily life in the curriculum could lead to turmoil; daily life encompassed not just the joys but all the ugliness of the human experience. Teachers needed to take care in their words and not invite revolutionary challenges to morals and mores into the discussion. The society which contained and created these vocational schools was in the midst of flux. By the early 1930s education would be called 'socialist' and be a fundamental means of spreading the Revolution, particularly its anti-clerical elements,<sup>59</sup> but in the early 1920s the SEP was still embryonic and close to its Porfirian roots. This was an era when single sex education was preferable, and when many biological functions were not considered appropriate for classroom discussion.

One notorious case of the Revolution in the classroom involved the dissemination of birth control information. Voracious rumours were fed by the Mexico City press that the SEP was using Margaret Sanger's pamphlets as teaching tools. Margaret Sanger (1879-1966) was an early birth control advocate from the United States. She founded clinics and wrote works to teach women to control their own reproduction. Although I have found one reference to an actual clinic of hers in Mexico City in 1925,<sup>60</sup> I have not found supporting evidence in Sanger biographies.<sup>61</sup> If such a clinic existed, it was probably established by her followers. While Sanger's work was scandalous in Mexico City, Yucatán's Governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto authorized the publication and distribution of a Spanish translation of Sanger's pamphlet 'Birth control, or the compass of the home.' He invited Sanger herself to the Yucatán to set up clinics and, while unable to attend, she sent Mrs. Anne Kennedy, executive secretary of the National Council of the American Birth Control League, in her stead. As a result of Kennedy's visit, two clinics were founded in the Yucatán.<sup>62</sup>

Reports appeared in Mexico City periodicals that SEP teachers were distributing a Sanger pamphlet. One article reported that the pamphlet was routinely used in SEP girls' primary schools. From the interview SEP Undersecretary Francisco Figueroa gave the Mexico City newspaper *La Raza*, it seems clear that either he had never heard of Sanger's pamphlet and knew nothing of its subject matter, or considered feigning ignorance his safest tactic. In either case he responded to the rumours saying that 'las autoridades educacionales están dispuestos, en caso de que el folleto mencionado sea, como se ha dicho, inmoral e impropio de ser leído por las colegiales, a ordenar que, por ningún motivo se permita su circulación entre las niñas que concurren a las escuelas.'<sup>63</sup> While charges that the pamphlet was distributed among primary school children seem like the product of wild imaginations and tabloid-style reporting, at least one women's vocational school used Sanger's work.

Through a newspaper article or perhaps parental complaints, the DETIC began to suspect the Mistral School's civics classes taught birth control using Sanger. On 8 August 1922, the DETIC ordered the *directora* of the Mistral School, Rosario Pacheco, to suspend civics classes and cease giving civics lectures at school assemblies.<sup>64</sup> The SEP appeared more interested in quelling damaging rumours than defending itself, its teachers or its schools from

<sup>59</sup>David L. Raby. 'Ideología y construcción del Estado: la función política de la educación rural en México: 1921-1935,' *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 51 (1989) 317-18.

<sup>60</sup>Shirlene Ann Soto. *The Mexican Woman: A Study of her Participation in the Revolution, 1910-1940*, (Palo Alto: R & E Research Associates, Inc., 1979) 76.

<sup>61</sup>See Chesler, Ellen. *Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), Kennedy, David M. *Birth Control in America; the Career of Margaret Sanger*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) and Sanger, Margaret. *Margaret Sanger; an Autobiography*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1938).

<sup>62</sup>Macías. *Against all Odds*, 92-93. See also Joseph, G.M. *Revolution from Without Yucatán, Mexico and the United States 1880-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 216.

<sup>63</sup>*La Raza*, 30 July 1922.

<sup>64</sup>SEP DETIC 72/7/2: Massieu to Director Mistral, 8 Aug. 1922.

accusations of immoral instruction. Two days later, the *directora* of the Mistral School gathered staff and students to explain the suspension. The report produced at this meeting relates that, after hearing the allegations against them, the teachers vehemently protested their innocence. Condemning the pamphlet, they claimed they had nothing to do with it. Afterwards, they re-affirmed their goal of creating moral and virtuous women to sustain the domestic sphere.<sup>65</sup> Over 270 teachers and students signed the report in a school with only 434 students.<sup>66</sup>

In addition, the teachers wrote to the SEP protesting the suspension of the morals and civics classes. In a letter filled with innuendo, which makes no mention of Sanger's pamphlet, the teachers described their work. For them, the civics course provided a forum where they struggled against the ignorance of their students. This ignorance was the primary cause of 'errores y vicios de nuestro medio.' It was not the teachers' role to expose young women to matters distant from their lives. Nonetheless, the teachers felt it was their duty to answer students queries honestly.<sup>67</sup> The teachers' defence was carefully worded to allude to the Sanger scandal, without providing evidence of misconduct which could be used against them. I suspect that the teachers at the Mistral School were using Sanger's pamphlet because of their reluctance to provide specific examples of 'teaching from daily experience.' They were defending themselves, saying they were the most suitable people to discuss sensitive matters with their students, without presenting the charges they faced. Among the signatories of this missive was Dolores Castillo.

Although the director of the DETIC, Juan Mancera, gave permission for civics classes to resume a week after the suspension, the matter was far from concluded.<sup>68</sup> While submitting to pressure from teachers and students, Mancera was still concerned, and probably wondering what prompted the allegations. To make further inquiries into the matter, the DETIC sent in an inspector.<sup>69</sup> Juan León suspected Castillo of using Sanger's work before he began his investigation at the Mistral School, as he devoted the most space and time to her class. León never explained why Castillo was his primary target and his objective report fails to convey his own opinion on the matters under investigation. After observing her teach, León noted that Castillo

dijo, entre otras cosas, que hasta ahora el hombre se ha impuesto la carga del Gobierno de la sociedad; pero que a la mujer le corresponde tomar participación en esa ardua labor para lo cual cuenta con infinidad de recursos en el hogar, como esposa, hija, hermana o madre. Que a nadie se oculta el nuevo movimiento que la mujer está llevando a cabo para defender sus legítimos derechos, y que tiempo vendrá en que igual al hombre, podrá ocupar los mismos cargos que aquél.<sup>70</sup>

León found nothing scandalous in Castillo's summation of the situation of women in Mexico and call for women's political action. Castillo tempered her analysis by using women's roles in the family and home as the rationale for their political role. While she envisioned full equality between men and women, that day had not yet come.

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<sup>65</sup>SEP DETIC 72/7/4: Report of the meeting, 10 Aug. 1922.

<sup>66</sup>BSEP Mar. 1926, 106-07.

<sup>67</sup>SEP DETIC 72/7/17: teachers at Mistral school without addressee, 10 Aug. 1922.

<sup>68</sup>SEP DETIC 72/7/19: Massieu to Director Mistral, 14 Aug. 1922.

<sup>69</sup>SEP DETIC 72/7/21: secretary of Director DETIC to inspector Juan León, 19 Aug. 1922.

<sup>70</sup>SEP DETIC 68/11/1-4: León to Director DETIC, 22 Aug. 1922.

León returned to observe Castillo at a later date. This time she ‘manifestó a sus discípulos cuál era el objeto de mi presencia allí , agregando que en su clase siempre se habían tratado asuntos dentro de la moral más pura, y que nunca se había dicho nada de lo que aseguraban algunos diarios de la Capital.’ León visited other civics classes, but Castillo remained the principal suspect of immoral teachings. From her own comments to her students, it appears she was named in news articles as a corrupter of morals.

Classroom observations failed to produce traces of the notorious pamphlet, so *Directora* Pacheco arranged for León to interview Castillo’s current and former students. Pacheco also recalled that some of Castillo’s students had requested transfers to other civics classes. They wanted to move because their teacher ‘daba enseñanzas inmorales y que su confesor... les había prohibido que volvieran a la Escuela.’ One student recalled that Castillo, after discussing women’s emancipation, espoused that ‘era preferible que la mujer se divorciara tres veces a que soportara las humillaciones del esposo.’ One of the former civics students reported that Castillo taught inappropriate materials, including ‘cosas íntimas que ellas no obstante ser señoras, les daba pena repetir.’ Although embarrassed to mention the unmentionable to a SEP inspector, this student told her mother, who forbid her to return to school. Gossip also circulated that Castillo had said for a married couple two children were best and rumours credited Castillo with promising to tell her students how to avoid pregnancy.<sup>71</sup> But the rumours had no one to substantiate them; for all León’s investigations, he was not able to find one witness to charge Castillo with using Sanger’s pamphlet.

During inspector León’s first visit, Castillo appeared unaware of the allegations against her. León’s second time in the classroom, a slightly chastened Castillo enlisted her students’ support and defended herself from questions about her moral judgement. It is notable that her first lecture about women’s equality and political rights did not raise the wary inspector’s eyebrow. Castillo’s fate as a school teacher in a federal school remains a mystery. Since the report on her teaching came in August and the records from the period appear complete, Castillo probably stayed on at the Mistral School. The DETIC tried to please everyone, from the voracious local press to anguished teachers and outraged parents. The SEP’s campaign was to control the situation and encourage a speedy return to normalcy. If Castillo was forced to resign, she was sacrificed as a scapegoat and warning to the other civics teachers, who were probably using similar materials and teaching the same subject matter. Because the Mistral School was founded less than a year before the scandal occurred, I presume it was freer from constraints created by staff and history rooted in the Porfiriato.

After receiving León’s report, the SEP made inquiries at other women’s vocational schools about the pamphlet. The other schools all denied any improprieties.<sup>72</sup> This tempest lasted for several more months, as the press continued to allege inappropriate materials in the classrooms. Throughout September and into October 1922 the local press published related stories. The tarnished image of her beloved school moved one student to write in its defence to the director of the DETIC. This student was from the United States, according to the note scrawled in the margin of her letter, and held a both B.A. and a normal school certification. She concluded her letter, which described the moral merit of the civics classes and enthusiasm of the students, by asking ‘¿Quién es más poderoso en este País su Gobierno o la Prensa? - Ustedes contestará n.’<sup>73</sup> Perhaps her questions were dismissed as the complaints of a foreigner, for there is no record of a reply.

<sup>71</sup> SEP DETIC 68/11/1-4: León to Director DETIC, 22 Aug. 1922.

<sup>72</sup> SEP DETIC 72/7/26-31: Jefe DE to Director DETIC and Director DETIC to Directores women’s technical schools, 24 and 25 Aug. 1922.

<sup>73</sup> SEP DETIC 72/7/46-48: Mrs. C. de Dávila to Director DETIC, 4 Oct. 1923.

The scandal grew to such an extreme that the SEP finally held a press conference at the Mistral School, hoping that the students could end journalistic enthusiasm for the story. Luis Massieu, director of the *Departamento Escolar*, spoke about the shameful articles which had recently appeared and his faith in the students present.<sup>74</sup> Obviously, the scandal had reached unconscionable levels and needed to end. Apparently the press conference succeeded, for the investigations and circulars making the rounds at a furious rate ceased.

In this instance, we see the SEP still closely rooted to its conservative Porfirian origins and some distance away from public school curricula which included sex education, as they would in the 1930s.<sup>75</sup> We also see a conflict raging between the institution and the individuals who composed it. While Vaughan concentrates on the conservative elements within the body of SEP teachers, those educated under Porfirian normal schools,<sup>76</sup> a new generation of teachers who had been formed into adults by the Revolution took their experiences and beliefs into the classrooms, perhaps Castillo and her colleagues among them. The first half of the 1920s was one of transition for the SEP away from its Porfirian history and towards the role of bearer of the Revolution. While this case may appear to be an isolated incident, teachers of both primary and vocational education committed acts which the SEP interpreted as breeches of morality. Circulars cautioned teachers not to teach illicit dances or sing the national anthem with bawdy lyrics. Teachers were also instructed not to use pornographic materials as reading matter.<sup>77</sup>

### Cooking up scandal

This case study arises because the SEP tried to force the cultural nationalism of the Revolution on unwilling teachers and illustrates the SEP's inconsistent models and norms in the early 1920s. The controversy surrounding women's cooking courses shows how reforms from above became a polemical debate about the place of nationalism and culture in vocational education when resisted by well-entrenched teachers. Vasconcelos himself began the criticism of the cooking curricula. In April 1923 he deprecated the curricula because it was dominated by European foods and designed to teach 'lo que pomposamente se llama alta cocina.'<sup>78</sup> Instead, he called for simple Mexican foods suitable for daily meals. Teachers resisted attempts by Vasconcelos and the SEP to invade their kitchens and jettison complicated or ornate cuisine. Instead, they justified their curricula, saying that students would later seek employment in exclusive Mexican kitchens and needed the skills to make European high cuisine. While their argument may have contained a dash of truth, teachers probably preferred preparing foreign dishes rather than the simple inexpensive meals which the SEP promoted.

Vasconcelos condemned the European orientation of the teachers, labelling it 'el hábito de imitar a las clases ricas de una manera servil.' He continued, explaining that vocational schools needed to fulfill the needs of the general population and teach students how to make nutritious low cost meals for a family. Furthermore, he quibbled with the teachers' justification for their curriculum, expressing doubts that cooking students would ever attain the skill level necessary to satisfy a discerning palate or find employment within renowned kitchens. He also complained that students could not even cook in large quantities, so that the SEP had to hire outside caterers for its events instead of patronizing one of its own

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<sup>74</sup>SEP DETIC 72/7/49-50: Jefe DE without addressee, 6 Oct. 1922.

<sup>75</sup>Guadalupe Monroy Huitrón n. *Política educativa de la Revolución (1910-1940)*, (México D.F.: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1985) 38-39.

<sup>76</sup>Vaughan. *State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico*, 204.

<sup>77</sup>SEP DE 39/17/53 and 61. circulars 45 and 57, Morales to teachers, inspectors etc., 18 Feb. 1921 and 14 Mar. 1921.

<sup>78</sup>SEP DETIC 68/18/1: Vasconcelos to Directors, teachers and students of women's technical schools, 8 Apr. 1923.

vocational kitchens. The pandemic invasion of U.S. dessert styles further aggravated Vasconcelos; he was determined to detain the encroaching armies of ‘cakes’ with an army of his own. For this end, he appointed two inspectors to revive the dying art of Mexican desserts. Vasconcelos wanted cuisine taught in the vocational schools to be a bastion of nationalism and a source of Mexican pride.

Vasconcelos’ opinions were unpopular with inspectors and teachers of cooking alike. A few months after his decree, the *Inspectora de Cocina y Repostería* requested permission to teach more elaborate dishes. She worried that student cooking exhibitions would disappoint the crowds which wanted to be delighted and astonished by extraordinary dishes. Exposition audiences would not queue up for food which they could cook themselves, she argued. To further support her request, she reiterated the argument of the cooking teachers; students needed to learn European cuisine if they were to earn a living in the capital’s kitchens. She downplayed her own preference, portraying herself as the mouthpiece of public, teacher and student demands.<sup>79</sup> Luis Massieu, director of the *Departamento Escolar*, refused her petition and referred her to Vasconcelos’ April circular.<sup>80</sup> While circulars shuttled around administrative offices, the cooking classes continued on a steady diet of European food. For the month of May 1923, for example, a second year class heard about the ‘historia de helados.’ That spring, the women learned to make sherbert, ice cream, canapé s and a ham mousse.<sup>81</sup>

The questions over cooking curricula were only some of the ingredients in the simmering debate. The larger and potentially divisive issue was which models, ideals or norms to teach students. In technical education, there was no consistent SEP policy guiding models: should they come from Mexico or beyond the borders? While affecting a nationalistic stance about cooking and drawing courses, Vasconcelos offered the masses Cervantes and translations of Goethe.<sup>82</sup> The SEP under Vasconcelos staged student performances where in one part students adorned in ivy garlands wore togas, and the next section was a typical Mayan dance.<sup>83</sup> The resolution of the question of models in vocational education depended on who was asking and when. In a larger context, the use of Mexican models was part of the cultural nationalism which was a child of the Revolution. José Vasconcelos, promoter of Mexican cultural nationalism in popular art and cooking curricula, was a Europhile in literature and fashion. We shall see below how his contempt for aping the elite did not extend to women’s apparel. One is left wondering if his inconsistently applied nationalism was a reflection of personal taste rather than personal convictions. Perhaps Vasconcelos enjoyed his *mole poblano* but preferred women in Parisian fashion instead of *rebozos* and braids.

Just as Vasconcelos had appointed special inspectors for desserts, he appointed inspectors for dress-making courses. For cooking classes he wanted the students to learn simple Mexican dishes, while in clothing manufacture he wanted students to mimic the styles of high fashion. Consultants to teachers and students both, inspectors were on their guard against any signs of bad taste. They were ‘escogidas entre personas que por sus roce con las clases altas de la sociedad han podido adquerir há bitos de refinamiento... ellas procurarán demostrar a las alumnas que bastan pobres elementos para lograr el buen parecer, con tal que

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<sup>79</sup>SEP DETIC 68/18/9-10: Inspectora to Director DETIC, 22 Sep. 1923.

<sup>80</sup>SEP DETIC 68/18/11: Jefe DE to Director DETIC, 10 Oct. 1923.

<sup>81</sup>SEP DETIC 68/19/20: Segundo Trimestre. Temas Teóricos y Prácticos para las Clases de Cocina y Repostería. 2o año de noche, without day May 1923.

<sup>82</sup>Bravo Ugarte, José. *La Educación en México (...1965)*, (México: Editorial Jus, 1966) 157.

<sup>83</sup>BSEP Sept. 1922, 208 and 214.

se les arregle con modestía y verdad.’<sup>84</sup> Instead of looking for forms of dress which would appeal to working class women, fit into their budgets and reflect their own tastes, Vasconcelos tried to fashion working class women into cheap copies of the elite. Thus, he promoted European styles and discouraged domestic forms of dress, while for the cooking curricula he endorsed the opposite.

Generally, Mexican styles were regarded as quaint but inferior, as folk art not high art. In a favourable report about a decorative drawing class at the EAOS one *inspectora* reported that the teacher, Mr. Ovando, taught ‘el primitivo sistema de decoración que usa nuestro pueblo.’<sup>85</sup> Although Diego Rivera’s murals in the SEP building glorified the pre-Colombian past, Vasconcelos did not extend cultural nationalism to fashion. Nonetheless, he promoted nationalistic cuisine. Within the private space of the working class home, Mexican styles would not detract from attempts to make Mexico City a cosmopolitan European-looking capital, while still inspiring patriotism from the ‘humble classes.’ In public, European high fashion reflected the modern thinking of a forward-looking nation.

Regardless of which styles teachers taught their students, Vasconcelos and his inspectors frowned on frippery and agreed that good taste was fundamental. The *Inspectora de Estilo* praised the hat-making teacher at the Querétaro School for ‘su gusto refinado y serio; pues todos los sombreros que he visto dirigidos por ella me parecen a la altura de cualquier casa de modas elegantes por el muy buen criterio que tiene en mezclar sus colores y telas.’<sup>86</sup> The report continued, criticizing another teacher because her hats lacked any vestiges of style whatsoever. In the clothing making class, the *inspectora* found Miss MacGregor’s class produced clothing without merit or taste and ‘los trajes que salen de allí tienen un sello de haber sido hechos en casa.’ The rest of her report was a censorious litany of which teachers had taste and which did not. She then mused that taste was difficult to improve:

todas las jóvenes (como dice el licenciado Vasconcelos) quieren vestirse de una manera inpropia de su condición, prefiriendo los colores vivos y las hechuras complicadas, aparentando un lujo que no pueden tener; creo que este defecto se corregirá a fuerza de constancia, presentándoles ejemplos que demuestran que el buen gusto es compatible con la sencillez y que deben fijarse en que sus vestidos sean elegantes, sobrios y hechos de telas que resistan el uso diario.

Her disdainful and haughty remarks imply that this *inspectora* counted high society names among her friends and was familiar with *haute couture*. Her social connections and her good taste would have been her most important job qualifications. She may have even believed that she was a missionary of sorts, preaching the gospel of elegant style to the badly dressed masses.

### Working Class Night Schools

Working women had multiple options for their night school education. While the vocational schools mentioned above had both day and night classes, additionally, there were women’s night schools specifically aimed at working class women, teaching primary education and crafts skills. Worker night schools numbered 26 in 1923,<sup>87</sup> sixteen for men and ten for women. It appears that these schools were free. They were under the DETIC until 1926,

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<sup>84</sup>SEP DETIC 68/18/2: Vasconcelos to directors, teachers and students in vocational schools, 8 Apr. 1923.

<sup>85</sup>SEP DETIC 68/3/1: Inspector to Director DETIC, 2 Aug. 1922.

<sup>86</sup>SEP DETIC 68/16/10-11: Inspector to Director DETIC, 21 Apr. 1923.

<sup>87</sup>SEP DETIC 72/18/5: lista de las escuelas nocturnas, 12 Apr. 1923.

when, because they did not teach industrial courses but rather small scale homecrafts, the schools were transferred to the *Departamento de Enseñanza Primaria y Normal*. Conditions in these worker night schools were far worse than those in vocational schools, probably partially due to the fact that the schools did not charge fees. However, they were also more flexible and responded to the needs of students, who helped direct their own education.

Located mostly in the centre of the city and just north of the Zócalo, there were also worker night schools in the Colonias Guerrero, San Rafael, Morelos and Juárez. Women's worker night schools were divided between the *Centros Industriales Nocturnos* (four) and the *Escuelas Nocturnas para Obreras*. In the *Centros Industriales* the students were half industrial workers and half domestic workers. Inspector Arellanos noted again and again the enthusiasm of the students for the learning which they received in these centres. Although the classes were called 'industrial,' technical courses were similar in content to those offered in women's vocational schools and worker night schools focused on women's work at home, as did the vocational schools. Unfortunately, I do not have attendance figures for the worker night schools but they must have varied widely because in 1923 *Centros Industriales* #1-4 had the capacity for 300, 600, 700 and 900 students respectively.<sup>88</sup>

In 1923, the *Escuelas Nocturnas para Obreras* curriculum expanded to include small scale industrial training. According to DETIC plans, the *directoras* of the night schools would design technical courses to meet the needs and interests of their students.<sup>89</sup> This technical instruction in the *Escuelas Nocturnas* depended on the facilities and teachers available. For example, sewing classes could not occur unless the school had the necessary equipment and a qualified teacher to lead the class. *Directoras* had licence to use their own initiative to adapt their school to the needs of their students. Nonetheless, as schools depended on the *directora* to design the curriculum for technical training, without energetic leadership, schools languished. Furthermore, students brought heterogeneous backgrounds and skill levels to their classes, while sharing the attentions of one teacher.<sup>90</sup> Teachers had to devise one class for myriad levels of knowledge, or teach and plan several smaller classes.

I have not found a significant difference between the two types of women's night schools described above. *Inspectora* of women's night schools, Consuelo Rafols, made a distinction based on the social class of students. From her observations, the *Escuelas Nocturnas para Obreras* catered to a poorer and less skilled student than did the *Centros Nocturnos*. She called the students at the *Escuelas Nocturnas* 'un elemento más humilde, tales como sirvientas y operarias, se lucha con la torpeza manual de gente que ha desempeñado trabajos rudos durante el día y además sumamente pobre que sólo lo puede hacer gastos muy pequeños.'<sup>91</sup> The class distinction Rafols made between the two types of women's industrial night schools is difficult to judge since she did not provide a thorough description of the students. According to inspector Arellanos, the students at the *Centros Nocturnos* were both servants and working class. If that were the case, there would have been no occupational distinction among the students at either type of school. According to Rafols, the work produced at the *Escuelas Nocturnas para Obreras* was cruder than work produced at other industrial schools; nonetheless, when she considered their background she thought the students' work showed great effort and could help their financial situation. Perhaps their work was cruder, but Rafols saw the students as members of a lower socio-economic class

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<sup>88</sup>SEP DE 63/5/28: 'Número de alumnos que según...' Mancera, 26 Feb. 1923.

<sup>89</sup>SEP DETIC 68/37/40: Informe Año de 1923 Escuelas Nocturnas para Obreras, without day Dec. 1923.

<sup>90</sup>SEP DETIC 68/30/12: Inspector to Director DEPN, 9 Mar. 1923.

<sup>91</sup>SEP DETIC 68/32/19: Inspectora to Director DETIC, 22 Dec. 1923.



and may have been expecting lower quality of production. While obviously within the categories ‘servant’ or ‘worker’ there are many sub-divisions, the inspectors did not elaborate further. Since the two inspectors held different opinions, I will consider the students of both types of schools to be representatives of approximately the same social class.

I have not found records explaining the process behind establishing worker night schools, but the decision to found a school must have been based on worker population, suitable facilities and student interest. While the SEP may have tried to locate schools near factories, counting on the workers to form the student body, unless the employees lived and worked in the same neighbourhood attracting students was a problem.<sup>92</sup> Students seemed to prefer schools in the neighbourhood of their homes, rather than work. Safety concerns may have influenced this decision. Students who lived near their school would have less area to traverse on their homeward journey, when the streets were more dangerous.

When debating the transfer of a school to another building or neighbourhood, neither directors nor inspectors appeared concerned by the possibility of losing students. In one case a director suggested moving a school to a ‘barrio más populoso’ to increase attendance. He never mentioned that the students in the current location might suffer.<sup>93</sup> Wanting high attendance for his school, the director was willing to move to a distant neighbourhood and leave his students behind. While the school in this example was a men’s night school, I believe it is a representative case. Decisions to move a facility could rouse the neighbourhood. Although at one women’s night school the facility was insufficient to meet student needs, each time moving the school was proposed *Liga de Vecinos* protests stopped the transfer, presumably because the new location was too far.<sup>94</sup>

While Arellanos judged women’s night schools more successful than men’s, he was still critical of the effort to educate women workers. He believed that hygiene talks were wasted, since most students lived in situations of squalor related to their scarce financial resources. He reassured the DETIC that the training women received did not provide them with the skills to earn an independent living, or enable them to be the head of their households. Instead, he believed the skills would help women improve their homes and families both economically and morally.<sup>95</sup> Arellanos appeared to want women’s technical training only to supplement the income brought home by the primary wage earner, a man. In contrast to Arellanos’ criticism, *inspectora* Rafols praised women’s night schools. They responded to ‘la necesidad de dar a las obreras mejor medios de vida, abrirlas un campo de acción más [sic] grande y darles iniciativa industrial y comercial sin perder femineidad, inspirándoles amor y cuidados por su hogar.’<sup>96</sup>

Of all the problems women’s worker night schools faced, the bulk involved the building which housed the school. Many of these conflicts were about responsibility for the buildings and contents at a given moment. Another source of conflict was access to sections of the buildings. The SEP had to use and re-use all the resources available, which meant that most buildings housed multiple activities. Altercations arose because day school directors felt possessive towards the building and resented the night tenants as interlopers. Besides using buildings which the day school directors considered theirs, on at least one occasion day school directors had to show inspector Arellanos their furniture so that he could decide what day

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<sup>92</sup>SEP DETIC 68/30/29: Inspector to Director DEPN, 31 Mar. 1923.

<sup>93</sup>SEP DETIC 68/30/17: Inspector to Director DEPN, 9 Mar. 1923.

<sup>94</sup>SEP DETIC 68/37/43: Informe Año de 1923 Escuelas Nocturnas para Obreras, Dec. 1923.

<sup>95</sup>SEP DE 68/29/5: Inspector to Director DETIC, 26 July 1923.

<sup>96</sup>SEP DETIC 68/32/4: Inspectora to Director DETIC, 14 May 1923.

schools needed and what he could distribute to the night schools.<sup>97</sup> The day school directors probably saw this as legalized raiding, which could only have increased ill will.

Fortunate night schools had full use of their building, but if the director of the day school had some sort of grudge against the SEP or territorial conflict with the night school, sections of the school would be kept locked and dark in the evening. In an extreme case, the night school students were not even permitted access to the toilets.<sup>98</sup> Directors were not the only ones who felt possessive towards their school. At the *Escuela Nocturna para Obreras #9*, day school students milled about while the night school was in session, and *inspectora* María Baños Contreras, worried about possible disturbances, ordered the caretaker to bar their entrance.<sup>99</sup>

Buildings which housed multiple night time activities had even more problems. The *Centro Cultural Femenil #4* (another name for the *Centros Industriales Nocturnos*) shared a building with an *orfeón popular* and a free English class. The men's choral society used the facility's central rooms and the women's night school used the rooms around the periphery of the singing workers. Certain unmentioned improprieties occurred because of the mixing of men and women in this situation and the inspector requested that the *orfeón* find another place to practice. These improprieties must have happened in the hallways, since classroom space was not shared. According to *directora* Castillo the choral group was not the only problem, the free English classes which Mr. Maxquini offered in another room hindered the moral teachings which the *Centro Cultural Femenil* emphasized. Although she did not elaborate on the moral threat the English language students posed, Castillo described her goals in terms of a school where 'la acción educativa impartida allí, sea controlada por la dirección para que sea más efectiva cada día y el prestigio sea en todos sentidos cada día más completo.'<sup>100</sup>

This could have been a power struggle between the teacher of English classes, the director of the chorus and the *directora* of the women's night school. The *directora* was interested in prestige for her school and perhaps for herself. She may have been a woman of ambition who found sharing the facilities with other institutions an imposition which the SEP foisted upon her. While Castillo's complaints about the English classes were unusual, conflicts with men's choral societies were frequent enough that when peace reigned between a night school and a choral society inspector Contreras noted it.<sup>101</sup> These conflicts were not gender based; in men's night schools, as well, *orfeones populares* were magnets for trouble.<sup>102</sup>

The aforementioned choral society was intended for working class men, and functioned under the SEP's *Departamento de Bellas Artes y Cultura Estética*. Theoretically, singing 'canciones populares' lifted these men to a superior cultural level and the workers entertained family gatherings with the typical music they had learned.<sup>103</sup> *Orfeones* may have been intended to bring culture to the 'cultureless,' but instead became an excuse for socializing. Referring to these choral societies, our trusted inspector Arellanos commented that

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97SEP DE 46/50/63: Circular #43 Secretary of Director Primary Education to Inspectors, 5 Apr. 1923.

98SEP DETIC 68/30/18: Inspector Contreras to Director DEPN, 9 Mar. 1923.

99SEP DETIC 68/31/6: Inspectora to Director DETIC, 14 Oct. 1924.

100SEP DE 68/29/7: Inspector to Director DETIC, 26 Sept. 1923.

101SEP DETIC 68/30/7: Inspector to Director DEPN, 8 Feb. 1923.

102SEP DETIC 68:30/17: Inspector to Director DEPN, 9 Mar. 1923.

103BSEP 1923 3/4, 414-17.

gozan los alumnos de una completa libertad, que lleva a un desorden completo, unos permanecen en saguán [sic], otros en las puertas y por últimos se pasan buen tiempo bailando y platicando en grupitos o por parejas, y de cuando en cuando organizan fiestecitas como tamaladas, así es que prefieren el desorden y las pláticas entre compañeros y compañeras, que asistir a las Escuelas de un solo sexo donde van a estudiar y a aprender algo útil.<sup>104</sup>

According to Arellanos, the men who enrolled in *orfeones populares* preferred them to worker night schools. They enjoyed a situation where they had the liberty to chat with friends and loiter in the halls; the choral societies offered more opportunities for mingling and meeting women.

Night school students created their own disturbances as well, and day school staff had reason to worry about what they would find in the morning. At the *Escuela Nocturna #67*, when students arrived to find no authority figure present, some of the women stayed to vandalize the school.<sup>105</sup> At the *Escuela para Obreras #9* four students destroyed the day school's vegetable garden.<sup>106</sup> Although in both of the above cases students caused the damage, they had no financial responsibility for their actions. The night school staff was responsible for pecuniary damages inflicted on the goods or building by their students.<sup>107</sup>

Besides discipline problems within the school, enforcing frequent attendance was a struggle. Attendance suffered because of a range of factors. Multiple educational offerings in the same neighborhoods competed with each other for students and could affect attendance. The *Escuela Nocturna para Obreras #12* had to cope with students defecting to the Mistral School.<sup>108</sup> Outside events reduced the number of students present. In one report for a men's school, inspector Arellanos blamed lowered attendance on the *Congreso Eucarístico*, a 'carpa de Variedades' and the local cinema.<sup>109</sup> Building maintenance and renovations also took their toll on regular classes.<sup>110</sup> Finally, the internal atmosphere of the school could attract or repel students. At the *Centro Industrial Nocturna #4*, attendance diminished because a workers' choral society shared the hallways with the women's night school, and families were concerned about immoral influences on the women students.<sup>111</sup> During the wet season, strong rains and transportation difficulties produced a decline in attendance.<sup>112</sup> Lists of attendance problems show an incomplete picture, because some students were dedicated to finishing their education and receiving its fullest benefits. The *Escuela Nocturna para Obreras #67* closed for two months while changing buildings because of problems with the day school director at the original location. When the school opened again attendance figures were the same as before the closure, which suggests that students waited for their school to re-open and returned to classes when possible.<sup>113</sup>

While attendance figures moved up and down like the tide responding to the moon, tardiness disrupted classes constantly. Teachers, students and even directors arrived hours after classes should have begun. Once inside the crowded building, students would meander

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104SEP DETIC 68/34/14: Inspector to Director DETIC, 5 Sept. 1923.

105SEP DETIC 68/37/16: Director DEPN to Director DETIC, 2 June 1923.

106SEP DETIC 68/31/1: Inspector to Director DETIC, 18 June 1924.

107SEP DETIC 68/31/2: Director DETIC to Inspector, 3 July 1924.

108SEP DETIC 68/37/41: Informe Año de 1923 Escuelas Nocturnas para Obreras, Dec. 1923.

109SEP DETIC 68/35/24: Inspector to Director DETIC, 1 Nov. 1924.

110SEP DETIC 68/30/3-4: Inspector to Director DEPN, 8 Feb. 1923.

111SEP DETIC 72/41/1: Director to Jefe DE, 19 July 1925.

112SEP DETIC 68/35/14: Inspector to Director DETIC, 17 May 1923.

113SEP DETIC 68/37/46: Informe Año de 1923 Escuelas Nocturnas para Obreras, Dec. 1923.

to their classroom through the hubbub of fellow students. Dogs and cats roamed halls; students stopped to greet each other, mingling and exchanging laughs with friends as they went.

Considering the constant ebb and flow of people within night schools, including the family and friends of the caretaker, day school students looking for excitement and singing and dancing workers, a high theft incidence was not surprising. The director of the *Escuela Nocturna #43* remarked that the facility's caretaker was incompetent and light bulbs, necessary for the men's school to function, went missing with frequency.<sup>114</sup> Even with proper vigilance the *Escuela Nocturna #16* had things stolen. The querulous caretaker for the day school claimed no responsibility for the goods of the night school, and thus no responsibility for the robbery.<sup>115</sup> In the men's *Escuela Nocturna #31* some enterprising thief cum plumber stole the water main to the w.c.<sup>116</sup> Without the water main, hygiene became a pressing issue and classes were temporarily suspended. Anecdotes such as the above raise questions about overall hygiene in night schools, but surprisingly complaints about unsanitary conditions were infrequent.

Conflicts and tensions took place within the schools, as above, but also outside and around the schools. Not all communities were thrilled with the local night school and residents made their feelings known. However, others may have seen the schools as a source of customers. Filing into the entrance of some night schools, students passed neighbours hurling threats or offers. Prostitutes, loitering and looking for work, may have offended the honour of the women workers whose school shared a building with a men's school.<sup>117</sup> In cases such as that of the *Escuela Nocturna #26*, schools may have been an unwelcome intrusion. There 'el rumbo es malo y convendrí a poner un gendarme en la puerta para evitar el continuo asedio en que tiene a las alumnas la mala gente del barrio.'<sup>118</sup> Conflicts which led to dangerous streets would have lowered night school attendance. Students, families and administration perceived that these dangers were greater for women students than for men and thus these dangers were more damaging to women's night schools.

#### And what of the students?

I have dedicated the better portion of this paper to the realities of vocational and specialized training courses. But what of the students who took the courses? What can we know of them? As I have mentioned briefly, the dual character of SEP vocational education (full-time and single course) encouraged the enrollment of different types of students. Thus, day school students probably came from middle-class families which were able to support an unemployed adult member. These middle class families valued education and were willing to invest in their child's future. On the other hand, night schools, both within a vocational institution or a worker night school, were specifically designed for working class, domestic employees and white collar workers. These students worked a full day and then mustered their remaining energy for night learning. Their commitment to a double day shows these students valued education and suggests that their training offered concrete possibilities for improving their situation. Perhaps it gave them hopes and opportunities for a better future. Since they had to struggle and sacrifice to attend school, they may have valued their education more than their day school counterparts. Day courses could be construed as a finishing school

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<sup>114</sup>SEP DETIC 68/30/8: Inspector to Director DEPN, 8 Feb. 1923.

<sup>115</sup>SEP DETIC 68/37/14: Inspector to Director DETIC, 23 May 1923.

<sup>116</sup>SEP DETIC 68/30/18: Inspector to Director DEPN, 9 Mar. 1923.

<sup>117</sup>SEP DETIC 68/32/9: Inspector to Director DETIC, 23 May 1923.

<sup>118</sup>SEP DETIC 68/32/3: Inspector to Director DETIC, 13 May 1923.

experience; students refined their taste and learned to run a household. Women who trained in night schools learned skills similar to their day school counterparts but with the understanding that they would use their skills to earn an income. As the skills were the same, it is safe to assume that the middle class orientation and emphasis on women's place in the home as a mother would have been present in worker night schools.

Regardless of the SEP's intentions, students used vocational training for their own ends. They did not feel an obligation to finish their courses, rather, they wanted immediate utility from their education. I believe that some students dropped out of vocational schools and night programmes because they found employment. Selecting courses, students preferred those with practical value. One inspector said that students gave preference 'a los cursos que les proporcionan enseñanzas de aplicación inmediata utilitaria como son el de corte y confección, la cocina, postizos y peinados y las flores artificiales.'<sup>119</sup> The DETIC, in its report on student progress for 1923, minimized exams as a reliable indicator of students' advancement. To the DETIC, the low rate of examinations was an embarrassment which required explanation.<sup>120</sup> The students in technical education attended courses to work on a particular skill and thus improve their job prospects. Attaining their anticipated skill level, students dropped-out of school and many students did not sit for exams at all. The report for 1923 noted that low exam attendance did not mean that schools were failing to teach their students. According to the DETIC, low exam attendance proved that technical schools were functioning as they should. Vocational schools provided accessible and rapid skill improvement through technical training. Once students had their training they stopped attending institutions of vocational education.

Inside the classrooms, students influenced their education and adapted it to their needs. All students had the weapons of tardiness and absenteeism in their arsenal. Students could attend or not attend courses, arrive on time or late. While inspector Contreras held dull classes and unenthusiastic teachers to blame for problems of attendance and lack of punctiliousness,<sup>121</sup> students may have deliberately missed selected courses. Late students cited work as a justification, often without regard for its veracity. Contreras found a number of students at a men's school lied about their schedule, knowing that work was a valid excuse for tardiness.<sup>122</sup> In night schools, academic classes were usually first, followed by technical courses. Tardy students would miss part or all of the academic portion of their education, while arriving in time for the skills training. Some students may have only wanted the technical training, but not the academic courses.

Students influenced which courses schools offered through official and *de facto* means; student enthusiasm or lack of interest helped shape the curricula. For example, students could tell their teachers or director which classes they wanted. A group of young women at the EAOS dropped their cooking class upon learning that chemistry was a requirement, as well.<sup>123</sup> By telling the director what they valued, students helped ensure that appropriate courses would be available. Even if students never verbalized a preference, enrollment figures showed which courses students found useful.

It is difficult to estimate how vocational training improved job prospects or the economic situation of students. The fact that students did not attach importance to

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<sup>119</sup>SEP DETIC 68/15/1: Inspector to Director DETIC, 7 Mar. 1923.

<sup>120</sup>BSEP 1924 5/6, 111-12.

<sup>121</sup>SEP DETIC 68/30/22: Inspector to Director DEPN, 9 Mar. 1923.

<sup>122</sup>SEP DETIC 68/30/28: Inspector to Director DEPN, 31 Mar. 1923.

<sup>123</sup>SEP DETIC 68/18/7: Inspector to Director DETIC, 13 May 1923.

certificates indicates that employers did not either. The SEP vocational schools and worker night schools did not include job placement as part of their service, nor was there a sense that this was their responsibility. As I mentioned before, at *Enseñanza Doméstica* students who majored in home economics with hopes of teaching in primary schools soon discovered that there was no demand for their skills and that the SEP made no effort to coordinate the supply and demand between vocational and primary schools. Because the skills taught there were not in demand, *Enseñanza Doméstica* suffered low attendance and a high drop out rate.<sup>124</sup>

### Conclusion

This paper has outline SEP programmes for women's vocational and night school education and then shown how reality was more complicated than syllabi. Throughout this paper I have shown that the SEP trained women not for the industrial sector but rather for household labour. SEP educators tried to return women to the private sector and stress their role as homemakers and secondary wage earners in a domestic sphere.

SEP intentions were filtered through teachers and administrators before finally reaching the students themselves. The programmes were changed in the classroom by teachers, as in the case of Castillo teaching an active role for women in politics and promoting birth control. Students also changed the programmes; they preferred their own styles while suffering the scrutiny of inspectors sent to enforce SEP models and norms. I mentioned the criticism of a style inspector at the end of her wits because young women preferred to wear ostentatious clothing which she thought inappropriate for their lifestyle and class background. I mentioned that women were far from the angels of the home which the SEP idealized; students created disturbances ranging from rowdy classes to ruined gardens.

Furthermore, while the SEP taught women that they were adequate to educate the boys and the men in their lives, but not ready for a place in public life, it created a contradiction which women would begin to challenge. Overall, the early years of the SEP were ones of flux, of finding a mission and encountering boundaries. Educating women of the Revolution, the SEP focused on their role as mother and homemaker, but this conservative trend met with resistance from the classrooms and from the streets where women continued to exercise a political role and challenged the Revolution in power to meet their needs.

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<sup>124</sup>BSEP 1923 3/4, 236-37.