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# Organization of Schooling in Three Countries

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# Organization of Schooling in Three Countries

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We suspect for most readers, words like "chalkboard," "primaria" (Spanish for elementary school), "teacher," "textbook," "principal," and "worksheet" will conjure images of what, in John Goodlad's (1984) phrasing, is "A Place Called School." These words will likely connect to mental images of processes and places — sitting at a desk in a room with age-mates seated at other desks; paying heed to a professionally trained stranger as that stranger leads inquiry into a domain of human knowledge called a discipline, like math, literature, or history; or standing in a classroom or courtyard to ceremonially salute a flag.

These memories and images describe the "manifest" culture of schooling (Kneller 1965). But as Kneller pointed out, we can also posit an "ideal" culture of schooling, not focusing on what *is,* but rather on what *is supposed to be.* In the beginning of the twenty-first century,

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not only is most of our planet's land organized into nation-states, those states are host to a government-organized institutional apparatus called schools and school systems that have taken on large portions of the tasks of enculturating and acculturating the young — that is, not only teaching the next generation what it means to be American, Israeli, Japanese, or Cuban, but also including ideologies related to economic participation, self, governance, and more.[1] Each school exists not just as a manifest part of the culture, but as a vehicle intended to realize social goals, to bring into being something that is not yet (Conant 1945); whether that is as modest as helping a child gain the capacity to read or as grandiose as, in George Counts' (1978) words, "building a new social order."

This infrastructure is so widespread and ubiquitous that it seems both natural and enduring. Yet each school is a social creation that is not "natural" at all, but rather the alchemy of a number of human ideas and actions. More to the point of analyzing institutions, each school is host to a highly segmented population, with each segment performing well-defined roles that, reciprocally, further define and naturalize those roles. Those roles mean that other features of a given role-bearer's identity — a teacher who is also a spouse, a parent, a neighbor, a friend, a voter, a churchgoer, and a caretaker of an elderly parent — are subordinated when he/she is at school. A human being who is a teacher at school is mostly a teacher when at school. In being a teacher at school, that teacher both reflects and perhaps very modestly adapts the social understanding of what is to be a teacher. This professional identity can be sufficiently powerful that one is understood through it even away from its operative setting. So a nightwatchman at a Mexican inn who is a teacher by day is still called *maestro* (teacher) at his night job.

Most of those defined in these systems are physically present — teachers, students, counselors, administrators, or janitors — but even those less consistently present, like parents, are present within a certain imagined role and category when they are on site. Others — for example, curriculum developers, school inspectors, commissioners of education — may never be directly physically present in a given school;

1. Redfield *et al.* ([1936] 1967) distinguished enculturation, the task of learning one's own culture, from acculturation, the task of learning a new culture, with the latter term aptly describing what an immigrant student might face at school.

yet these humans too, in the roles that this complex educational organizational infrastructure defines for them, profoundly shape who does what and with what intent and consequence in this place called school.

It has been more than 30 years since Britan and Cohen (1980) assembled a number of leading anthropologists in a joint call for an anthropology of bureaucracies. Their call was a refinement and rearticulation of a more enduring concern in anthropology, illustrated in particular in the work of South Africa-born, British anthropologist Meyer Fortes (1938) who was interested in what McDermott and Raley (2011: 46) have summarized as "the acquisition of kinds of people by social structure."

One starting point for an anthropology of organizations that sees schools as a particular kind of organization meriting direct scrutiny is the anthropology of bureaucracies. Schools are very clearly bureaucracies (hence the directing of participants into so many role categories) that are embedded in further bureaucratic webs — for example, school districts and state departments of education in the United States, the federal *Secretaria de Educación* and the *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de fa Educación* (the teachers union that also has state governance responsibilities) in Mexico, and the panoply of entities (e.g., Department of Basic Education, provincial departments, and school districts) that have educational jurisdiction in South Africa.

A core question in the anthropology of organizations is how those organizations are meaningful to those who participate in them and, in turn, how that meaning-making by participants then reciprocally informs the structure and function of that organization. Schools are particular kinds of institutions, but, like other organizations, what they are is a hybrid of what those who are of the school do and what those both within and without think that doing means (in that sense a hybrid between manifest and ideal culture [Kneller 1965]). In other words, a school is a school because a teacher is a teacher, a student is a student, a counselor is a counselor, and so on. The organization becomes constituted by the *doing* and *imagining* of those who are part of it. Tangible physical cues often assist that constituting, like that a teacher seems to be a teacher because she is operating in a space that is imagined as a classroom, complete with the accoutrement of desks, a chalkboard, an overhead projector, a flag, etc. But also supporting that constituting are joint acts of imagining: A teacher is partially a teacher because she thinks she is a teacher and the children before

her and their parents at home all think she is a teacher. Because she is a teacher and other adults in her organization also affiliate as teachers, her actions and theirs together also help support the idea that their collective efforts deserve to be understood as schooling and the space where they work as a school. What then becomes of interest to an anthropologist is consideration of which actions and which dimensions of meaning-making are salient for the successful creation of the broader concurrence that "what this is *is* a school." Anthropologists want to know how such social facts get accomplished.

## The Anthropology of Education

Another starting point for an organizational anthropology take on schools is the related sub-discipline of the anthropology of education, which in the United States first became a recognized section of the American Anthropological Association in 1968, although it traces roots to the works of George and Louise Spindler, Solon Kimball, and even Franz Boas and Margaret Mead (Spindler 1955). As Anderson-Levitt (2011) notes, many other countries also have traditions of anthropology of education, naming in her chapter Japan, Argentina, Brazil, the United Kingdom, and Denmark, to highlight the diversity of geographies. Of course, the anthropology of education is not only the anthropology of schooling (McDermott and Raley 2011), but schools and educational bureaucracies feature centrally in much of this field.

In his seminal essay on "What Makes the Ethnography of Schooling 'Ethnographic'?," Frederick Erickson ([1973] 1984) acknowledged that treating a school as a unit of anthropological analysis required some departures from cultural anthropology's classic Malinowskian model of a village as the basic unit for study. (Britan and Cohen 1980 made a similar claim regarding the anthropology of bureaucracies needing to depart from classic models.) Erickson pointed out that the boundaries of schools are permeable and temporary (e.g., children and teachers both usually go somewhere else at the end of the day and on weekends). He acknowledged that kinship status likely explains little of the social relationships at school. But he also acknowledged that a school, like a tribe, a village, or a work group in a factory, could be studied as a whole. He went on to say that the two core commitments of ethnography were to study social networks as wholes and to attempt to

portray, as at least one component of a study, the cosmology or meaning-making of the group under study. In other words, schools can be viable "wholes" of anthropological inquiry.

We contend, however, that an anthropology of schools as organizations need not bound itself just at the scale of an individual school. Schools may be physical settings (or even virtual ones [Tucker 2007; Warschauer 1998]) at which a particular collection of human beings are likely to interact in sustained and relatively predictable ways, but there are other wholes — for example, the collection of schools that a university's teacher education program uses for practicum sites — that might also share a culture and be wholes in a sense (at least concurring with the cultural idea that they share an affiliation with each other different than their relationship to nonaffiliated institutions). Susan Follett Lusi's (1997) study of interaction within two (the United States) state-level departments of education, Jill Koyama's (2010) analysis of for-profit, after-school tutorial service providers, and our (Hamann 2003) analysis of a binational collaborative partnership linking a Catholic Mexican university with several Georgia school districts would all count as anthropologies of educational entities for which an individual school is not the correct unit of analysis.

If Erickson's (1984) task was definitional, to clarify what makes school ethnography ethnographic, much work in this terrain (including some of Erickson's [e.g., Erickson and Schultz 1982]) has been in a more critical vein. McDermott and Raley (2011: 37) recently wrote in a sister *Companion* volume (Wiley-Blackwell's *Companion on Anthropology and Education*) that

> Schools are a great site to make explicit ties among the arts and artifices of teaching/learning situations and writ large cultural politics. By a strange twist of national and international political machinations, children in school have become increasingly a primal focus for conversations about equity and democracy. Elites and their governments have found it easier to make educational policy than to legislate change in the distribution of resources by race or class. Ethnographies of schooling are thereby about more than schooling because they and engage and rework the problematic vocabulary of the policy and measurement disciplines that serve national agendas for schools.

So, looking at teachers performing the role of teacher (as they understand it is to be performed), looking at students enacting the role of student, and so on, prospectively sheds light on dynamics that are much bigger: How does quotidian practice in this place called a school reflect a larger and perhaps unequal social order?

While an anthropology of schools as organizations need not be only ethnographic, nor derive only from the traditions of cultural anthropology — one can imagine a fascinating archaeological inquiry of a school that considered different size desks, the ability to move desks (or have them bolted to the floor), the floor spaces that evidence heavy traffic, and those that seemed less utilized — the charge of seeing those in a school as forming a whole and considering how those who compose this whole make sense of this school-world and negotiate it is an ample charge. That said, our goal in this chapter is not to compose a synthesis of contemporary anthropology of schooling. (The *Companion to the Anthropology and Education* [Levinson and Pollock 2011] already does so with much more space than is available here.) Rather, by looking across the history of education in three societies — the United States, Mexico, and South Africa — we want to see if we can explain the cross-national congruence across so many societies in what is now called school. Following the lead blazed by Eric Wolf (1982), we are turning to history to gain a clearer sensibility of from whence the ideas related to *what* and *how schools should be* have come. The fact that many of these ideas have persisted for so long, in turn, prompts us to wonder why they have proven so enduring.

## Tracing the Historic Idea of a Place Called School

Elsie Rockwell (2011: 66) recently nicely synthesized arguments for locating anthropology within history:

> [T]he task of recovering history in the anthropology of education is not simply that of adding a historical chapter on the a traditional ethnography. Rather, it is an attempt to comprehend precisely the 'complex dialectic' between central educational movements, such as hegemonic forms of schooling, and the diverse educational and cultural traditions that cross through and confront them on multiple space/time scales.

In tracing the development of schooling writ large and then more particularly in three distinct countries, we seek to honor Rockwell's charge. We contend that through a vertical orientation through history or a horizontal one across different settings — in our case the United States, Mexico, and South Africa — there are striking correspondences among organizations that call themselves and get called schools.

Rockwell also noted Hymes's (1980) call for an ethnology of schools, an effort to determine "What kind of schools are there?" We are sympathetic to this impulse, but are actually struck not by the diversity of types of schools, but rather the remarkable similarities across very different cultures and geographies regarding the idea of what a school is and is not. Why do very different people in very different places in their distinct school buildings engage in the organized and routine practices that are largely but not entirely socially reproductive and that, in their wholeness, make particular settings and human aggregations into something much more familiar — that is, school? Are there a few core ideas that define what constitutes a school and what those who have roles there should be thinking and doing? Through historic or ethnological analysis, is there an answer to the question, "Schools are always at least *this?*"

In the first volume (subtitled *Before the Middle Ages*) in his three-volume *A History of Education,* Graves (1918) considered the "Non-Progressive Education" of "Savages or Nature People" and "Barbarism or Early Civilization" before committing a chapter each to the history of education in Egypt, Babylonia and Assyria, Phoenicia, China, India, and Persia. The second half of this volume becomes more consistently Western-centric, focusing on Judea, Sparta and Athens, Rome, and Early Christianity. There is much to be criticized in Graves, and rereading his works allows one to consider how much a product of early twentieth-century Western imperialism they are. Nonetheless, he is worth mentioning here because of how he acknowledges the existence of very old schools and school traditions in China, Persia, and elsewhere, even as he rejects their having more than peripheral relevance to most contemporary practice of schooling (which for him was the beginning of the twentieth century).

Lawrence Cremin (1970), in his history of American education, found some of its oldest roots in Saint Augustine of Canterbury's (not to be confused with St. Augustine of Hippo) arrival in England at the end of the sixth century. St. Augustine not only converted the

Anglo-Saxon king to Christianity, but was also allowed to set up monasteries and to engage in a larger process of conversion. This created the immediate challenge of creating a clergy that could communicate in Latin and that was grounded in Roman Catholic liturgy. The answer was a version of schools to train this new priesthood that was patterned on those from the late Roman period and charged with a similar challenge: to transmit the structure and substance of the ancient liberal curriculum — that is, grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. Cremin notes that Latin grammar schools of this type (which directly served only a tiny portion of the population) operated through the Middle Ages and a few into the present era. Some of these served as preparation for another very old form of educational institution: the university.

Not many centuries after Latin grammar schools were created in Christian England, a second formal, but inferior, category of school also came into existence, what Cremin called "petty schools" (Cremin 1970: 169). This second kind of school introduced more elementary and restricted fare — training to be an altar boy, for example, or for rudimentary accounting, or a trade. Individual merchants and guilds were often the organizers of these.

Later, in central Europe, Johannes Gutenberg invented the moveable type printing press and in the 1450s began printing the Gutenberg Bible in Germany. These efforts dramatically changed the value of being literate and laid the technological groundwork for an equally important revolution that shortly followed: the Protestant Reformation, which expected the laity to become literate, not just the priests.

As the era of European colonization began, as Renaissance ideas spread north, and the Enlightenment came to the fore, there was already an array of ideas about what formal educational environments could entail. They could exist for religious or secular purposes. They could exist to teach the languages, disciplines, and epistemologies of the Ancient Western world, notably Roman and Greek. They could meet contemporary demands like knowing how to sing or make arithmetic calculations. They could come with formal sponsorship of institutions (i.e., the church), with the blessings of the state (not necessarily conceptualized as different than the church), or as relatively short-lived endeavors of a particular individual or trade guild. While the point of this chapter is not to offer a definitive history of schooling, this backstory matters because it suggests that at the dawn of

European colonial expansion, there were already ideas, technologies, and perceived social needs that fit together in a loose model which would be recognizable today and still called "school."

In his preface to *Towards a Theory of Schooling,* David Hamilton (1989: vii) offered,

> Schooling is not the same as education. Schooling is an extensive and elaborate human institution. It began to take its present shape in the Middle Ages, and it has been repeatedly reformed since that time. In the process, schooling has become a malleable instrument of the political state — an agency charged with the transformation of immature human beings into appropriately-socialized adult citizens. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that, on an international scale, schooling was conceived by Christianity and raised by capitalism.

Hamilton introduces two new terms that are not obvious from our discussion so far — "political state" and "capitalism" — but much of the rest of his observation should feel familiar. To bring these two terms in requires that we return to recounting some more history, this time by considering the United States, Mexico, and South Africa.

## What Constitutes a School and the Roles in It: United States

As British colonists came in the seventeenth century to what became the United States, they brought with them their Britain-informed ideas of what schools were and should be. But they, or at least some of their key leaders, also brought with them a particular utopian sense of mission. In John Winthrop's famous turn of phrase (borrowed from the Gospel of Matthew) as he and his fellow Puritans headed to found Boston in 1630, they were to recognize that they were building "a city on hill," that is, a city that would be seen by others and, for that, a city that should aspire to be a beacon or model. In 1647, just 17 years after the establishment of Boston, and 12 years after the founding of Boston Latin (still the oldest public high school in the United States), Massachusetts' colonial legislature asserted an interest in the establishment and shaping of schools. Its first school act declared

> that schools should help learners see through the "false-glosses of saint-seeming deceivers," which is an overlap with the contemporary argument that schools should teach critical thinking, and that schooling should be paid for by "the inhabitants in general" which also matches public education practice to the present day (Cremin 1970: 181-182).

A century later, Benjamin Franklin argued for additional and more secular charges for education: to teach practical skills and enable upward social mobility. In other words, there was a role for school in making students more employable and industrious. Concurrently, Thomas Jefferson made his famous argument that schools needed to teach the "three R's" (reading, writing, and arithmetic), subjects that much more recently have become the central testing concern of America's federal No Child Left Behind Act. Jefferson also argued that education offered a core underpinning for the viability of republican government (only if educated could people wisely guide themselves in voting and other civic affairs), and he argued for setting resources for scholarships so a "diamond in the rough" of modest background but superior talent could continue to advanced schooling (Proefriedt 2008).

In the 1840s, partially in response to xenophobic concerns that new immigrants needed to be assimilated into the American way of life (lest they otherwise pose a threat to the republican order), Horace Mann became an outspoken advocate for expansion of public schooling and became the first commissioner of a state department of education (in Massachusetts). At almost the same time, John Pierce (in Michigan), Caleb Mills (in Indiana), and others became successful advocates for the idea that expansion Westward should be accompanied by the construction of schools (Butts and Cremin 1953). In other words, as European Americans settled new locales, school creation was to be part of that settlement.

In the twentieth century, four ideas dominated that, like what we have mentioned so far, have all become fundamental to the contemporary imagining of what school is and to the related issue of how those who operate in school environments understand and enact their varying roles. The first was the idea that through systematic, scientific inquiry schools could be improved; they were laboratories of practice, as John Dewey's lab school at the University of Chicago illustrated just

as the century started. Or, quite differently, they became settings for application of scientific principles of management. Fixed class periods and bells for passing both continue as manifestations of the idea that schools should be organized like factories. The use of standardized testing for diagnostic and sorting purposes is another increasingly common manifestation.

Second, schools were to be vehicles for promoting democratic practice and civic engagement. With roots in the ideas of Jefferson and Mann, this challenge was particularly acute as the United States negotiated massive waves of immigration. Third, also somewhat related to immigration, but also to race as the century advanced, was a concern with equity and opportunity. The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was grounded in the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which promises equal protection under the law. By identifying a constitutional logic for American federal government's involvement in schooling (the U.S. Constitution never directly mentions schooling), Brown also set the stage for the series of Elementary and Secondary Education Acts, including No Child Left Behind (Stein 2004); it was the rationale for busing for integration and the formal identification of English language learners (ELLs); and it buoyed what has come to be known as the standards movement. This asserts that what all children need to know in discipline after discipline can be defined and measured and that more contextual knowledge, what pertains to one child but not another, is subordinate in importance (Hamann 2008). Equality has become conflated with homogeneity.

Finally, American education in the twentieth century became increasingly concerned with the link between schooling and economic opportunity. This informed the massive investment in math and science education that followed Sputnik in the 1950s and that underlay the federal 1983 *A Nation At Risk* (ANAR) report, which saw school improvement as the only way America could remain economically competitive with Germany and Japan (the two leading economic competitors at the time). It also rationalized (in many circles) the application of market principles to the praxis of schooling (e.g., the creation of school choice programs) and the large-scale involvement of businesses in schools, whether through corporate sponsorships at the school level or national educational policymaking pursued by the Business Roundtable and similar groups.

Somewhat tied to this fourth theme was a more general conceit that schools are a crucial vehicle for building a nation. By the twenty-first century, schooling as practiced in the United States included the 3Rs, was understood as a public responsibility and a public good, was to be guided by scientific principles and applied scientific measurement, was to contribute to national prosperity, was to promote equality and social mobility, and embraced an increasingly standardized curriculum that defined what was and was not important to know. Each of these charges, none fully reconciled with the next (Labaree 1997), framed the organizational task, giving purpose to what teachers were to do as teachers, students as students, and so on.

Underlying them were equally powerful less overtly articulated ideas that often were more individual or sectarian in their purpose rather than for the commonweal; for example, "I want school to mark *my* child as 'smarter' or 'more capable' than *your* child." Anthropology has been particularly successful at illuminating some of these tacit and more controversial propositions and how they shape day-to-day negotiation of school. There is not space to mention more than a fraction of this body of work, but Foley (2010), McQuillan (1998), Pollock (2004), and Varenne and McDermott (1998) each offer important examples.

## What Constitutes a School and the Roles in It: Mexico

The history of education in Mexico differs from that of the United States and South Africa in that the arriving colonial power (Spain) did not have much of a history of schooling and the cultures encountered were complex empires. Some of Mexico's indigenous population at the time of European contact did have what we might identify as schools — children of Aztec nobility attended the *Calmecac* and *Calmecac feminino* (for girls). Instruction for boys included mathematics, hieroglyphics (literacy), astronomy, history, time measurement, and plant and animal identification, with each subject area interwoven with religious instruction. There was also a military academy, *El Telpochcalli*) directed at the middle class (Larroyo 1988).

The Spanish response to Aztec educational institutions (and to Mayan institutions in southeastern Mexico) was largely one of alarm and destruction. Codices were burned, the transmission of sacred knowledge was blocked, and indigenous armies were demobilized

(León-Portilla 2003). While this tragic history merits long explanation, for our purposes, the major point that matters is that although there was, precontact, social organization that included schooling, that tradition was largely destroyed, the long-term and more subtle continuation of indigenous life ways notwithstanding (Bonfil Batalla 1987).

Yet akin to Saint Augustine of Canterbury's arrival in England being followed quickly with evangelization and the educational tasks related to that project, in Mexico too, the Conquest was quickly followed by efforts at converting the indigenous population to Catholicism. This included efforts by Dominican, Franciscan, Augustinian, and later Jesuit friars and the early establishment of new institutions of higher education, like El Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco in 1536 and La Real y Pontificia Universidad de Mexico in 1551, which remains the oldest university in the Western hemisphere, now known as the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (El Colegio de México 2004). But evangelism was mostly not associated with schooling for the majority of the population. Although Mexico spawned some leading intellectuals during the colonial era (with Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz perhaps the best known), few in Mexico well into the nineteenth century would have thought of themselves as teachers or students. These roles did exist, but they described a very small urban elite portion of the population.

Mexico's successful war of liberation from Spain, culminating in independence in 1821, gave birth to a relatively weak country that politically was wracked by dramatic changeovers in government and wild swings in the ideology regarding government's role in the lives of its citizens. The American invasion in 1845, which led to the deaths of thousands, impoverishment of an already meager treasury, and ultimately the loss of a third of Mexico's territory further impeded any immediate expansion of schooling.

The liberal constitution in 1857 promised a federal government response to all Mexico's citizenry, but mattered more as an idea than as a practice, because Juarez' government was quickly interrupted by the short-lived French occupation (1862–1867). During the three plus decades of rule by dictator Porfirio Diaz that followed President Juarez' death in 1872, Mexico began to build an educational bureaucracy that tied the state to creation of schools.

Still, when the Mexican Revolution again engulfed the country in chaos from 1910 to 1920, few in the cities and fewer outside of them

regularly attended school. Crucially, for our purposes, this violence gave rise to a new constitution of 1917 that promised in its first article that "Every person in the United Mexican States shall enjoy the guarantees granted by this Constitution" and in its third article explicitly promised that elementary education *(primaria)* would be compulsory and made available to all. At this historic moment, a young Franz Boaz-trained Mexican anthropologist, Manuel Gamio (1916), published *Forjando Patria,* a treatise that challenged Mexico to create a government and governmental institutions, among these school, which would at last give rise to a modern state.[2] This included an overt charge to build loyalty to the nation, which, in turn, meant creating and celebrating the constituent ingredients of Mexican national character. Mexico's famous mural movement (including celebrated works by the likes of Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siquieros, and José Clemente Orozco) was launched as part of this campaign. Gamio himself led another part of this effort. He headed to the Valley of Teotihuacan where he engaged in archaeological and ethnographic research that he conceptualized as the first of 10 like efforts in indigenous parts of Mexico that would support what he called Integral Education. Gamio anticipated that indigenous Mexicans would soon be incorporated into a Spanish-speaking, modern nation-state, but he felt that their existing lifeways should be documented both as a starting point for their integration through education and to preserve a historical record of folkways (Gamio 1922, 1925, 1936). That the remaining nine imagined projects of this effort were never pursued matters less (for our purposes) than that he helped create the "backstory" that would guide Mexican history and geography education in the ensuing decades to the present.

Realization of most of the promises of Mexico's 1917 Constitution lagged until the presidency of Lázaro Cardenas (1934–1940), but schooling, with the intent to help build a coherent national identity, was an important exception (Dewey 1929). In the early 1920s, under the leadership of Mexico's first Secretary of Education,

2. The use of the term "modern" here is quite intentional. It acknowledges Mexican leaders' preoccupation with the modernist project and its implicit social Darwinism. As Urias Horcasitas (2007) has laid out both compellingly and scathingly, Spencerian and eugenicist ideas advanced under the moniker of anthropology were part of this orientation, a critique that includes Gamio.

José Vasconcelos, Mexico constructed hundreds of *primarias*. Later, through championing by Moises Sáenz, a former student of John Dewey, that number grew to thousands. Mexico also renewed its tradition of creating model schools, for example, erecting the Casa Indigena, in Mexico City, a boarding school that drew promising non-native-speakers of Spanish (i.e., *indios*) from far-flung corners of the country to, among other things, prove that the indigenous population could be schooled successfully. The policy of inclusion did not necessarily recognize that those who were to be included brought much of value to the table.

At the end of the Cardenas administration, Mexico became the first country in North America to begin sustained efforts at bilingual education with its indigenous population, although in the decades that followed, financial resources and overt political support for this project waxed and waned in multiple cycles. In the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, the federal reach of education grew constantly, as more schools were built in more places. In 1968, just prior to the Olympics in Mexico City, university students were central figures in a growing series of protests for more social equality that culminated in the Mexican military massacring hundreds of its own citizens in the Plaza de Tlatelolco (Poniatowska 1975). The massacre dramatized the continuing gap between the ideal culture that, partially through schooling, students had learned to aspire for and the manifest culture that fell far short of these ideals.

By the twenty-first century, practically all of Mexico's age-eligible population was attending both *primaria* (grades 1–6) and *secundaria* (grades 7–9), with the latter having become compulsory in 1992. Early in the new millennium, a year of preschool also became required. Roughly half of the age-eligible population for high school *(preparatoria)* was attending at that level, although in rural areas in particular there was little *post-secundaria* infrastructure. Anthropological research in Mexican schools documented a striking commitment to equality (Schmelkes 2004) and avoiding social stratification among *secundaria* students (Levinson 2001) and also revealed the invisibility of a small but growing population of students who had had school experience in the United States prior to their enrollment in Mexican schools (Zuniga and Hamann 2009; Zuniga *et al.* 2008).

### What Constitutes a School and the Roles in It: South Africa

The first formal institutions in South Africa that bore the label school (and had accoutrements that contemporary readers would recognize as schooling) were created by Dutch settlers in the former Cape colony in the late 1600s. Soon these schools were outnumbered by schools created by British settlers (and sometimes open to natives). So, like the United States (Cremin 1970; Justice 2008), the initial South African model borrowed heavily but not exclusively from British practice and the issue of what language should be used for schooling was contested.

During the colonial period, the Afrikaaner (Dutch-descent) population resisted English language instruction and British domination and enrolled in much lower numbers in school. After the Boer War (which ended in 1902), the measured adult literacy rates (among European descent populations) were much lower in Afrikaaner-dominated areas — the Orange Free State and Transvaal — than Cape or Natal, but there was a Dutch language education system (parallel to the British one) and an Afrikaaner educational ethos called Christian National Education. After the Boer War, when Prime Minister Jan Smuts committed himself to Anglo-Afrikaaner reconciliation, one route for doing so was promoting local control of education (in a sense a national policy not to have a national policy).

But it was not local control by all. The British High Commission government had created hierarchical ranking of races at the beginning of the twentieth century that described a new "race" called Coloreds (mixed ancestry), as well as whites, Indians, and Africans. Whites, including those of British and Dutch descent but also some other groups like Eastern European Jews, were on top. Indians, descendants of South Asians who had been brought to South Africa as indentured servants to work the sugarcane fields were ranked second. Coloreds were third, while indigenous Africans, the largest population by far, ranked at the bottom. This hierarchy was formalized by the mid-twentieth century, with the tragic implementation of apartheid (grounded also in a eugenicist model of racial hierarchies). Apartheid as a national social organizing framework was mirrored in school policies and organization.

Yet if schooling was used as a vehicle of official ethnic boundary marking and maintenance (Barth 1969) to maintain white privilege atop a complex racial hierarchy, it was also a venue to protest that hierarchy.

Indians, Coloreds, and Africans found solidarity in collectively being Black (i.e., not white). In the 1970s, enforcement of a governmental dictate to have half of all high school classes taught in Afrikaans led to rioting and then a massacre in Soweto. Among the more than 500 killed were at least 130 under the age of 18. Youth abandoned school in droves and the decidedly inferior facilities for indigenous Africans were often targets of vandalism. In 1982, the University of Western Cape became the first postsecondary institution in South Africa to oppose using racial criteria to guide admissions. It faced dramatic budget cuts and protracted legal battles as a consequence (Anderson 2002).

Sketching all of this history (and including examples from after the end of apartheid momentarily) is not, of course, in and of itself, an anthropology of organizations. But as was noted earlier, schools are sites for the quotidian and local negotiation of much larger social dynamics. To understand why teachers would enthusiastically reiterate or downplay and subtly critique the ideology of racial hierarchies requires first knowing that this was a fault line that South Africa has negotiated for most of its existence.

Since apartheid formally ended with the elections of 1994, schools have become settings (with various degrees of enthusiasm and success) to "build a new social order." Expectations have largely outstripped capacity, however. Resources that sufficed during apartheid to sustain the advantage of a small privileged portion of the population (i.e., whites) have been diluted when trying to improve the lot of the vast majority. Moreover, the first priorities postapartheid were to build a rudimentary infrastructure where there was none (e.g., in rural areas with indigenous African populations) rather than to improve average systems and infrastructure so that it matched that available at the top end. Among other things, this has meant that in urban perimeter African townships, infrastructure that was hated as proof of marginalization during apartheid has been neither much improved nor often reimagined as a vehicle of upward mobility.

After apartheid, the South African Schools Act (Act no. 37 of 1997) catalyzed by the Bill of Rights, and the South African Constitution formalized the process of desegregation of schools in South Africa. As a result of these Constitutional measures, the public schooling system in South Africa underwent radical changes. Officially, it created the opportunity for students from diverse cultural backgrounds to attend public schools of their choice (Vandeyar 2008).

This choice, however, precipitated a plethora of reactions. First, it initiated an ongoing migration of students. As African students flocked to historically white and Indian schools in search of quality education, a large percentage of white and Indian students migrated to Model C white schools (Jansen 2004; Vandeyar 2006). In 1990, with the "writing on the wall" for the end of apartheid, many of the schools serving whites successfully petitioned to become Model C schools that were self-governing and self-supporting through fees, with the government only retaining responsibility for teacher salaries. Schools that used to be 100% white by law under apartheid are no longer so, yet most Model C schools remain mostly white (as whites still control most of South Africa's wealth), and the apartheid-era hierarchy of which schools were seen as the strongest remains largely intact. Exacerbating this, the strongest public schools have more applicants than they can accommodate, so these schools can be and are selective as to whom they admit.

In turn, other English speaking schools (notably those in former Indian townships) have seen a large increase in indigenous African enrollments and the related departure of many Indian students. With postapartheid school choice, the phenomenon of "busing in" has also emerged as a major dynamic. In this dynamic, because residential desegregation has not corresponded with school desegregation, nonwhite parents send their children away from their local community to attend the "best school" available.

Remembering that the white population during apartheid selected between two languages for schooling (English and Afrikaans), the Afrikaans-medium schools faced a different challenge postapartheid. With Afrikaans comparatively less important, many former Afrikaans-schools changed their language policy from Afrikaans-only to dual medium (English and Afrikaans) in an attempt to survive (Soudien *et al.* 2004). Although not the vehicles to power that they used to be, this stance has meant that many former Afrikaans medium schools remain mostly white, as even partially Afrikaans instruction remains unattractive to most of those from groups who were subordinated during apartheid. Complicating attempts to remedy social inequalities through schooling since apartheid has been South Africa's emergence as a leading destination for South-South immigration. This has mostly consisted of Africans from Malawi, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and other Southern African Development

Community (SADC) countries coming to South Africa, but adults and school-age children from India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka have also entered the schooling system of South Africa.

Seventeen years into democracy (writing in 2011), there has not been a marked change in schools as vehicles of opportunity for the majority of children in South Africa. Akin to the US assumption after the *Brown v. Board* decision that African-American students would come to "better" white schools, migration of South African students has been in one direction only. So only former white schools have all four "old racial categories" of students, namely White, African, Indian, and Colored. The one-way migration is mainly because of the perception that former white schools are better resourced and offer higher quality education, a perception that has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In the former Indian schools, the student population comprises mainly Indian and African students. Former African schools in the township have not desegregated along racial lines, but a new dynamic of ethnicity has come into play. Furthermore, former Model C and former Afrikaans medium public schools that were well resourced in the apartheid era continue to enjoy "privileged status" and to cater to the middle and upper crust of society. In the hierarchy of South African education, race has successfully been displaced by class (which retains racialized patterns), so an educational hierarchy remains.

## Conclusion

In telling (however briefly) the history of schools in these three countries, we want to emphasize that the introduction of schooling has occurred in multiple contexts with different particular problem diagnoses that schooling has been intended to address. Yet we also want to emphasize that the product — schools and school management systems — in these three different societies look remarkably similar. A South African visiting a Mexican classroom would readily be able to identity the teacher and the instructional intent of the space. A Mexican visiting a US school would likely have little difficulty distinguishing an American textbook from a regular book. An American visiting South Africa, upon talking to a child, could ask "What grade are you?" and would find the reply easily comprehensible.

A task of the anthropology of organizations is to identity the roles, formal and informal, that those who participate in the organization understand and endeavor to enact (and how that enactment effectively configures the organization). Related to schools and school systems, there is a small number of easily identified roles that are common across national systems and cultures — for example, teachers, students, parents, school directors (called principals in the United States). Even where the systems differ in detail — for example, in the United States the federal Secretary of Education does not have formal jurisdiction over schools, while in Mexico and South Africa there is a national-level minister who is the highest in the hierarchy for school governance — there is still tremendous similarity. In all three societies, the highest authority for school governance is perched atop a hierarchy and is well removed from a particular classroom or even a particular school.

Erickson (1984) is correct. Schools can be studied as wholes. There are those who are within and others who are without. There are patterns to the meaning-making engaged in by those who are within, with those patterns deeper and more consistent (but hardly determinative) for those who share a kind of role. Two teachers are more likely to agree that a student is acting out of turn than would a different school tandem of, say, a teacher and a student. It is also true that schools, as entities, are linked to complex institutional frameworks, and these webs or networks too can be studied as wholes.

While the consideration of schooling in Mexico, the United States, and South Africa supports these points, it is worthwhile to scrutinize why this is so, why there is similarity across systems. Moreover, we need to address what can be gained by not only triangulating from these three cases, but also considering what might be missed from our larger understanding of the anthropology of the organization if we only look at them. Finally, we can more explicitly consider what has been gained from using a longitudinal or historic vantage point to relate three national cases, as compared to a more traditional ethnology that might have looked at many more contemporary cases (from more countries) but without similar time depth.

This chapter has maintained that one value of the three-country comparison is that each of these contexts differs from each other, and on many dimensions surely they do. The colonial legacy of the United States is British, that of Mexico is Spanish, and that of South Africa

is Dutch and British.[3] Two of the countries are mainly tropical and subtropical, while the third is mainly temperate. Two are recipients of large-scale migration, while the third is more of a sending country than a receiving one. Yet some readers might push back and say that all three share a legacy of Christian European colonialism, that all three are places where the European-descent colonizing population played central roles in the end of formal European dominion, that all three have been economically organized under capitalism, that all three have ethnically marked subordinated populations, even that all three have hosted the World Cup. These points are all true, but (excepting the World Cup tangent) they also describe the history of many, many nations around the world. In studying these three, we are seeing dynamics that also have occurred elsewhere.

As importantly, for nations that are not described by all of these patterns — for example, Saudi Arabia and South Korea — we still find governments using recognizable models of something called school to inculcate national loyalty, teach literacy and numeracy, and ready youth for future participation in the workforce. (See Jordan 2011 and Seth 2002.) In these countries too, there are recognizable roles (e.g., students, teachers, school directors), recognizable physical spaces (like classrooms and schools), and attendant recognizable larger bureaucratic structures (i.e., school systems). If we endeavored to finish the phrase "schools and school systems are always at least this ... ," adding more countries, we could still generate a remarkably coherent answer.

The issue then is why they are so consistent across societies and, to some extent, across time. The anthropological answer to that has communication, political ecology, political economy, and social reproduction dimensions. One accurate if incomplete answer for why similar structures, aptly labeled as schools, exist in so many different societies is that the idea of schools has been disseminated, ultimately if not necessarily originally, in a secular guise that traces its origin to various challenges of Christian Europe (e.g., to teach reading). Yet the fact that an idea was shared hardly explains why it was received and

3. The point here is not to deny that parts of what now constitutes the United States have been under the colonial and or national yoke of other countries (e.g., Florida being part of Spain, Alaska part of Russia); nor is there an intent to deny the more complex demographic histories of colonialism in Mexico and South Africa. Rather the more modest goal is only to note that the primary colonial dominion in the history of each country differed from that of the other two countries.

acted upon so robustly. To explain that requires thinking about several challenges that schools answer particularly well.

Schooling is well suited to tying geographies to social boundary maintenance. That is, if you live on *our* side of the border, we can teach you what it means to be one of *us* and to live *here*. If you are Mexican, you should know the names of Mexico's states and its most important rivers, but also the social contract connecting the citizenry with its government. It is not an accident that the great expansions of schooling in society after society occurred as that society organized itself as a nation-state. Schooling and state formation often intertwine.

While the origins of schooling in the West may precede a society's large-scale participation in the globalizing economy, schools have readily adapted themselves and amplified their remit because of the linkage between formal education and the economy. The social organization of preparing the next generation for economic participation requires the paradoxical cocultivation of capacity and differentiation; school can be a vehicle for both marking competence and difference. Students learn and advance, being marked as more capable at each level — "you are now a fourth grader, not a third grader" — but are subject to comparisons with peers and ranking: the "A-student" identified as more academically capable than the "C-student." Capitalism rewards both of these dimensions of schooling; there is a public good generated through schooling as students gain competencies that will make them more capable as employees, but there is also the private good of wanting to be marked as more capable (and meriting more remuneration, access to a more select university, etc.) than a peer (Labaree 1997). That schools can concurrently meet these paradoxical needs is one reason for their robustness as social institutions. They unify, advance, and divide.

Schools as social organizations are robust for another reason that is also paradoxical. The great faith of Mexico's rural school expansion in the 1920s, the United State's *Brown v. Board* decision in the 1950s, and South Africa's School Act of 1997 was that schools could build a new social order, could right previous social wrongs, could teach new norms. Yet even as Mexico was to be transformed by schooling, it was to be reaffirmed by that same schooling. The *Brown* decision was to end the blocking of African-American students from better-resourced facilities, but it concurrently reiterated that the white facilities (that African-Americans were now to have access to) were the models

for what quality schools should look like. Thomas Jefferson thought schools could identify "diamonds in the rough" and help transform such talented individuals into leaders, but he also thought these would be exceptional students rather than the norm (Proefriedt 2008). Since the end of apartheid, some nonwhite students in South Africa have gained access to the most prestigious, previously all white schools, but the hierarchy of which schools are reputed to be the best and which are conceptualized as weaker has stayed unchanged. Schools are concurrently vehicles of social change and amelioration and of social reproduction. As such, they mediate social forces that might otherwise be more destabilizing.

As a final point, schools have successfully inserted themselves into the social imagination. They are the locations where it is understood children should learn to read, to calculate, to sing patriotic songs. They are where children should engage in practices that their parents engaged in when they were younger, whether the social ritual of prom or homecoming (in America) or protest and disparagement of the school as obviously inadequate (as in some South African townships). They are where children should become something different, but only to a point. They are to be different from their previous self, but only to fit into another socially sanctioned category — becoming employable, civically minded, young adults, for example, instead of remaining children. At a larger scale, schools are to create transformation only partially. There is much angst in America about the need for schools to produce "better" graduates (a transformation) to preserve America's sense of its own preeminence (the status quo). Ultimately, schools have found a niche tying themselves to both manifest culture and ideal culture. As manifest culture, they differ in resource allocations, prestige, physical plants, and more, but they are also seen as sites where ideals of *what is not yet* must be shaped and strived for.

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