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Review of the State-of-the-Art on Strategies for Improving
Access and Retention in
Primary Education in Latin America

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Introduction

For the last fifty years, strategies to increase access and retention in primary education have been studied at length in Latin America. These studies have paid particular attention to the social and demographic ramifications of democratization. The results of this research clearly indicate that, despite great progress, the much-sought-after universalization of primary education is still far from a reality. There is a large segment of the population, characterized by extreme poverty, that either doesn't enter the system at all or drops out after only a short amount of time.

This review of the literature on strategies for improving primary school access and retention will:

- . provide decision makers and researchers in Latin American education with an overall view of the types of studies that have been done;
- . consider how the phenomenon has been interpreted in different countries, and what policies have been implemented in that regard;
- . examine what future action can be taken to solve the problem.

The hope that this paper will revitalize thinking and discussion about the underlying reasons for the sobering statistics on school attendance and dropout rates. Furthermore, we hope this review will help to create a new view of basic education that is as flexible and as varied as the realities of our countries and our peoples, and that it will produce effective and lasting improvements in education, ones which are less the result of legal decrees than they are of students' interest in learning.

I. The Contextual Framework

When Latin American countries gained independence from the Spanish Crown, they began to base their social policies on the principles of equality, justice and liberty, including the inalienable right of all people to education. During this time primary education was gradually incorporated throughout Latin America. By the end of the Second World War, virtually all of Latin America had begun to follow a developmental approach in which education was perceived as a necessary investment to ensure the human resources required for industrialization, and a means to achieve the material progress of "developed" countries. In the 50s and 60s, these two goals were inherent in an educational policy that sought to widen the base of the educational pyramid.

During the last several decades, Latin American has had a high population growth rate (2.8% per year) and projections are for it to continue with only a slight slowdown through the end of the century. This high growth rate implies a "rate of school dependency" (i.e., the population under 15 years of age that will require educational services) higher than that of other developing regions. In addition, national population movements (immigration/emigration) towards urban centers leave large rural areas with very low population densities, creating a difficult distribution problem in the planning of an education system: excessive demand for services in the urban belts along with high dispersion in difficult-to-reach, rural locations. Both of which these conditions have a significant effect on enrollment and dropout rates for the school-age population.

Despite this situation, Latin American governments have attempted to keep their educational growth rate at least on a par with the growth rate of their school-age population, risking greater budget deficits in the hope of reducing the stubborn educational backlog. Between 1960 and 1977, enrollment in primary education in the region doubled (27 to 60 million students). However, growth varied greatly from country to country. The countries

which already had high enrollments continued with these trends, while the countries at lower levels were unable to increase their growth rates above the median for the region. (UNESCO, 1980)

Several Latin American countries have initiated reforms to ameliorate the negative impact that explosive growth in enrollment has had on the attainment of basic educational skills. In these countries, the consensus has been that the democratizing effect of increased access has been partially offset by a segmentation of the population. The legislative bodies of all the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are presently considering laws dealing specifically with compulsory primary education (also referred to as first level or cycle, basic education or elementary education) for all school-age children. Although the laws vary in age requirements and years of schooling, their goal is the same: universalize primary education without restrictions of any kind, neither ethnic, gender, economic, social, geographic nor cultural.

The information available from the 32 countries in Latin America indicates that there are marked differences among them, both in terms of length of schooling and entry requirements. Length of schooling ranges from a minimum of 5 years in Colombia to a maximum of 9 in El Salvador. Seven countries require seven years of basic education, and three require eight years; however, most countries (20 of 32) require six years of compulsory schooling. The entry age requirements also vary from country to country, ranging from age five (in 10 countries) to age seven (in 7 countries). The general trend has been towards lowering the minimum age requirement from age seven to six (UNESCO, 1980:24). In 15 of the 32 countries, a child must have reached age six to begin basic schooling.

The UNESCO Principal Project in Education (Proyecto Principal de Educación en América Latina y el Caribe), in establishing educational policy guidelines for the years 1980-2000, set the goals of enrolling all school-age children by the year 1999; offering basic education of at least 8 to 10 years; and making

improvements in the quality and efficiency of education systems through reforms.

Legal instruments already exist for developing universal primary education; in fact, each and every country has specific (albeit different) plans of action in place both for implementing full enrollment and for improving the internal efficiency of their educational systems. These facts, however, are in stark contrast to studies which indicate that the goal of universal schooling has not been met despite a sustained rate of expansion in primary education up through 1970. And now, in recent years, there are signs of stagnation throughout Latin America (TEDESCO, 1981:63). A slowdown in expansion has occurred in all countries at a proportionally similar rate during the last ten years. This seems to indicate that the primary education system has reached its limit in feasible growth within the structural framework of the existing developmental model.

It is within this context that we will seek solutions to the problems of access and retention in primary education in Latin America.

IV. Studies of the Intervening Factors and Processes Influencing Student Performance

One hundred and five studies have been identified that researched the factors involved. These are divided into two major subject areas:

"descriptive studies" are those which attempt to correlate the reasons for dropping out (desertion, repetition, poor academic performance, etc.) with other factors that are internal or external to the education system, but do not attempt to explain the correlations observed. This group is divided into two sub-groups:

- single variable or univariate studies, which examine the effect of one specific variable, and
- multivariate studies, which examine the effect of several variables, primarily those related to the student, the school, and the teacher.

"interpretative studies" include a wide variety of studies that use a common model or theoretical framework, in order to discover the significant variables within the educational process itself, and to explain the relationships and influences and how they affect each other. This group, in turn, is broken down into four sub-groups:

- expository research based on systems analysis modeling, which studies processes by using statistical tools and field research techniques;
- studies that systematically observe the schooling process, using primarily ethnographic techniques;
- expository research from a sociological perspective; and
- expository research within a psycho-social framework.

1. Descriptive Studies

Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing throughout the 1970s, a number of studies were funded that sought to identify the variables affecting academic performance and the quality of education. Subsequently, emphasis was placed on comparative studies that would isolate crucial variables in order to develop educational guidelines.

1.1 Univariate Studies

Among the studies that correlate a specific factor with academic performance, we have selected those whose hypothesis includes several internal variables (such as class size, availability of textbooks, teacher training, standards for promotion), and one external variable (nutrition).

HADDAD (1977) performed a comparative analysis of 40 studies (based primarily on field research in numerous countries, including Latin America) in which he attempted to answer three questions: (1) Do students learn better in smaller classes?, (2) Do the benefits justify the greater cost?, and (3) What is the optimum class size for maximum cost-effectiveness?

- The body of research comes to no definitive conclusion regarding the relationship between class size and other variables in the educational process.
- It appears that the quality of teaching is more important than class size.
- Given that reducing class size implies a significant increase in costs, and that it does not automatically result in predictable gains, investments should be made in areas that have more predictable results.

HEYNEMAN, FARRELL, et al. (1978) examined published data from less developed countries on the relationship between the availability of textbooks and academic performance. The authors catalogued 19 studies that indicated a positive association between textbook

availability and academic performance; however, they did not consider the results conclusive, and recommended further research in order to determine this variable's degree of influence.

In concurrence with the two previous authors, a study by SCHIEFELBEIN and FARRELL (1975) did not find a significant correlation between class size and performance, while it did find a strong correlation between textbook availability and academic progress. This same study found a low correlation between teacher training and performance, although there was a higher correlation to student performance when teachers had a university degree in teaching as compared to other groups of teachers. There was also a negative correlation between the number of professional development courses taken and student performance.

In evaluating teacher performance in Peru, BARRIGA and VIDALON (1975) determined that while inservice training positively affects what teachers know, this is not translated into a measurable improvement in the academic performance of their students. MAGENDZO and HEVIA (undated), in a Chilean study, found a positive correlation between teacher experience and student performance, but only in the subjects of Spanish, science and math. This appears to indicate that the teacher's experience has an unequal impact on performance in different subject areas. One explanation for this might be, as MUELLE (1974) pointed out, that studies on the teacher's influence emphasize the cognitive, ignoring attitudinal factors. In this vein, AVALOS and HADDAD (1981) found a positive correlation between the teachers' evaluation of the students' abilities and the number of times children repeat a grade in school. SCHIEFELBEIN (1982) determined that teachers having teacher training obtain better results than those who don't, although the length of the training seems to be irrelevant.

Thus in the areas of both teacher education and training, there appear to be no conclusive studies to provide a teacher profile that guarantees better academic performance. In fact, one of the operant

determinants for dropout prevention is the promotion standards that are established within the primary education system. These have a direct impact on the repetition indices, as well as an indirect impact on dropout indices. Despite the importance of the problem, no research has been found that specifically studies the relationship between repetition and promotion standards, although there are descriptive studies that compare these standards in various Latin American countries.

In general terms, there are two basic types of promotion standards:

- One method favors homogeneous grouping, setting one final examination for each grade level, and requiring those who fail the exam to repeat the corresponding courses;
- A second method practices automatic promotion, and is based on the concept of individual differences in learning rates.

The opposing viewpoint is represented by promotion systems which favor the so-called "automatic promotion". This position is based on the assumption that each child evolves according to a very personal developmental pattern. It is usually encountered in a non-graded school that respects individual rates of learning, and has eliminated artificial barriers between grades, with classes that encompass at least two consecutive school years.

Some Latin American countries (i.e., Panama and Puerto Rico) began experimenting with this system early on, in the 1950s, and this procedure apparently resulted in markedly lower dropout indices. However, due to academic performance considerations, the standards were modified near the end of that decade. In another example, El Salvador adopted automatic promotion for the first year in each two-year "cycle", with an examination at the end of the cycle. Likewise, Chile began using this approach in 1966, at which time system-wide reform established an 8-year basic education cycle, consisting of two 4-year automatic promotion cycles, with a pre-determined minimum level of performance required at the end of each cycle.

A UNESCO study on failure in school (BLAT JIMENO, 1984), summarizes the key arguments in the debate over grade repetition versus automatic promotion. The defenders of repetition say that the measure is necessary to ensure that proper academic development occurs within more homogeneous groups, while at the same time allowing immature students to progress at their own speed. They argue that automatic promotion lowers the average performance of the group, diminishes both student and teacher motivation, and increases teaching problems in the classroom because it forces the teacher to manage a more heterogeneous group. Those opposed to repetition argue that subjecting a child, for a second time, to a program which may have been inadequate the first time around, will only cause the student to become even more disinterested. "Mere repetition does not make things any easier, and even less so if no special help is offered." (BLAT JIMENO, 1984:14) Those who advocate automatic promotion argue that the stigma of "failure" that a student feels when he or she is retained diminishes his/her desire to learn. In addition, the repeating student's chronological age is out of sync with his/her classmates at the same grade level. Finally, supporters of automatic promotion believe that the school is only one of many factors influencing performance, and they question the reliability of the teacher's evaluations of the student.

Despite the fact that both types of promotion standards have been used at various times and places throughout Latin America, we know of no studies that have systematically evaluated the pros and cons of either practice. In summary, there is insufficient evidence to support any definite conclusions in this controversy. It does seem clear that automatic promotion, applied across the board without any regard for (1) psychological support systems in or out of the classroom, (2) appropriate teaching level, or (3) individualization of instruction, is not, in and of itself, a viable solution for the problem of low academic achievement. Moreover, there is no disagreement as to the need for cumulative evaluation of school performance. However, the establishment of any single evaluative

parameter to determine a student's performance is being questioned, because in reality it only judges a response at one given moment in his/her school year, without any consideration for the myriad factors that might affect this performance.

Other factors that influence the decision to promote or fail a child are related to attendance, discipline, and test scores based on writing and spelling. Attendance standards vary from country to country, but according to studies done by the Organization of American States (UNION PANAMERICANA, 1968), the most widely used policy sets a minimum of 75 - 80% attendance for the year. In Peru, the regulations state that any student who has over 25% unexcused, or 30% excused, absences shall not be allowed to take the final promotion exam. In Colombia, a maximum of 10% absences is allowed (with the exception of 20% maximum for illness). The Panamanian regulations are more forgiving, as they admit up to 50% absenteeism (UNION PANAMERICANA, 1968:25).

The strict enforcement of attendance standards is often reflected in high numbers of dropouts in the rural areas, where children often must assist their parents with agricultural or domestic chores, which causes them to be absent from school during certain times of the year.

There are few countries that consider discipline explicitly in their regulations. However, in Costa Rica, the "general conduct" grade has a direct effect on the academic evaluation. At the opposite extreme, Panamanian regulations state that "Disciplinary errors committed by the student shall not be considered when grading academic performance" (UNION PANAMERICANA, 1968:26). Notwithstanding any written provisions as to how discipline figures in promotion/repetition decisions, teachers, in fact, seem to reward or punish student behavior through academics. Take the example of writing and spelling: regardless of any explicit school rules on the matter, teachers tend to use subjective as well as objective criteria to evaluate work, grading not only on content but also on

presentation and neatness. The fact that subjective criteria can be visibly reflected in a test score that may ultimately cause a student to fail points out how important teacher attitude is in the educational process.

Among the univariate, descriptive studies that deal with external variables, there are several which look at child nutrition and its influence on academic performance. DONOSO, SCHIEFELBEIN, and MORALES (1981) evaluated the success of the Programa de Alimentación Escolar, PAE (School Nutrition Program) which took place from 1976 to 1981. They sought to determine the effects of nutrition on academic performance and school abandonment. The study established an association between level of education and nutritional condition: higher academic levels are associated with better levels of nutrition. The authors recommend assistance in the early school years since this is where the highest levels of malnutrition are found, and where the repetition and dropout rates are also highest.

On the other hand, POLLIT (1979) analyzed a series of studies and programs designed around this apparent association between nutrition and academic performance, and concluded that, "The policies and programs, in and of themselves, are not enough to change the situation for these children, whose lives continue to be ruled by poverty."

1.2 Multivariate Studies

For the purposes of this analysis, we examined two state-of-the-art reviews on the subject: SCHIEFELBEIN and SIMMONS (1979) and AGUERREDONDO (1983). We also looked at six studies carried out in Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile.

SCHIEFELBEIN and SIMMONS examined the effects of school, teacher, and student characteristics on academic performance, using statistical comparisons to determine levels of significance. We feel that their procedure lacks cohesion because it compares results

without first standardizing the concepts and the methodologies. In addition, the research was done in environments as socio-culturally diverse as Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The study concluded that the following characteristics were significant:

- School dependent: availability of textbooks, homework, average class size, amount of academic supplies and equipment, and school size.
- Teacher dependent: teacher certification and experience.
- Student dependent: socio-economic condition, whether repeating or not, malnutrition, weight, and access to television.

As the reader will observe, the results of this study do not always agree with others that have been done in the same field. The research into correlations between academic achievement and different economic, social, and cultural characteristics comes to varying conclusions: CLAVEL and SCHIEFELBEIN (1979) studied the factors that influence educational demand in Chile. Based on data collected from 400 families with children attending school, they attempted to determine the influence of 28 variables on the children's schooling. The study concluded that the independent variables accounted for only 30-50% of the level of schooling, and noted that expanding the educational system was not sufficient in itself to increase school availability for various groups; one must also be concerned with a whole range of variables.

SCHIEFELBEIN and CLAVEL (1980) made a comparative study of the factors that affect the demand for education in Paraguay and Chile using a sample based on family income. They confirmed that socio-economic level positively influences the children's relative level of education. The variables: "income of head of household, per person", "number of rooms per person", and "per person expenditures for nutrition", may explain between one third and one half of the variations in the demand for education, as was seen in the preceding case. They concluded that, in both countries, the effect of cultural and socio-economic variables was more pronounced

at the early ages.

In Brazil, WOLFF (1978) examined why children failed first grade; in a sample of 20,000 students, he evaluated the correlations between school characteristics and academic achievement, as measured by the student's grade in language at the end of the school year. There were four independent variables describing socio-economic status and 36 variables related to the school. The independent variables chosen undoubtedly skewed the results, making them less generalizable, since 75% of the variance is directly or indirectly correlated to socio-economic status. Among the "school" related variables, the most significant turned out to be kindergarten attendance. A change of teacher during the school year also correlated strongly with poor advancement. The "academic level" of the teacher, on the other hand, did not show a close correlation to the performance of students.

In Argentina, ECHART (1976) attempted to explain the inequality in academic achievement by examining how family, individual and school factors influence performance. The dependent variable was defined as performance in science and reading as measured by tests and grades. The independent variables were divided into two blocks:

a)

"family/student", as defined by: father's occupation, mother's level of education, and student's sex, age, and quality of nutrition, and

b) "teacher/school" as defined by: the school building, the student/teacher ratio, how well-equipped the school was, the teacher's level of education, and the teacher's experience.

The results indicated that a high dropout rate was associated with low socio-economic levels and low performance; a smaller class size improved academic performance only in the lowest socio-economic level; no significant performance differences were found between private and public schools; and neither the experience of the teacher nor his/her professional development seemed to improve academic performance.

Other research has established that the individual's achievement results from a vectoring of family, individual and school characteristics. In Ecuador, SWETT (1977), applying mathematical models relating these variables in equations of scholastic performance and delay, found that, although the family does have a decisive influence on keeping children in school, educational achievement is determined primarily by what occurs in the classroom and in the interactions between the student and the teacher, where teacher quality is strongly correlated with student success. The author concluded that family conditions and decisions, while necessary to student achievement, are insufficient in themselves to account for it.

In Chile, BRAVO and MORALES (1983) did a follow-up study on dropouts and repetition using a sample of 696 students from 8 different schools who had enrolled in the first grade in 1973. The methodology included reading and computational tests, and a survey on socio-economic background. As with the preceding study, the conclusions were that during basic schooling the most important factor for prevention of early dropouts is what goes on inside the classroom, particularly the learning of computation and reading. Grade repetition is the first step toward dropping out of school and the risk increases the higher the student's grade level.

AGUERREDONDO (1983) reviewed 58 titles on school dropouts and emphasized the idea that dropping out of school is not just the result of external, non-educational problems, but is also caused in great part by deficiencies within the educational system.

As a reflection of the evolution of descriptive studies on the subject, it is interesting to note the final results of a follow-up study by SCHIEFELBEIN and FARRELL (1982 and 1984) on a group of 3,500 youngsters during an 8-year period (1970-1977). The key variables related to personal, family, community, and educational characteristics. Three aspects of education were studied: level

attained (years of education completed), achievement (what students learned), and quality (availability of textbooks, school facilities, teacher training, class size, etc.). Highlighted among the major findings was the determination that educational variables are more powerful predictors of educational achievement than is the social status of the family. Moreover, within these educational variables, the most important relate to the "quality" of education, as it has been defined above.

SCHIEFELBEIN (1982), in a research study done for OREALC concerning access to schooling in Latin America, analyzed several variables associated with non-enrollment, repetition, and dropout. Some conclusions of the study were:

- Those students who do not enroll, or who enroll late, are either from the lowest socio-economic levels or have lower levels of intelligence than other students; (Ibid:9)
- o Class attendance, as measured by the percentage of days the student attended school, has an important impact on academic performance. (Ibid:10)
 - o "Some studies suggest that schools are not prepared to work with students from low socio-economic levels and that the curriculum should be modified..." (Ibid:12)

The research concludes that: "Some determining factors of access to schooling are external to the school system...but there are many other factors that depend exclusively on the way the system operates ..." "It is difficult to influence the former, except by changing society as a whole; however, it is possible to alter many of the internal factors." (Ibid:15)

2. Interpretative Studies

2.1 Systemic Perspective

The theoretical and methodological limitations encountered in the aforementioned studies have forced an emerging analytical perspective in the last few years. The research we have examined up to now conceived of the school process as an impenetrable "black box". It focused on the points of entry and exit from the system, but not on the system itself. This new perspective begins with the premise that the black box needs to be opened and its contents examined before we can truly understand the causes of poor academic performance and lack of effective teaching. This is done by focusing on the process itself, on what is happening between the two poles of the continuum, while taking into consideration the occurrence of intervening external variables.

Rather than focusing on the correlations existing between system inputs and outputs, Muñoz Izquierdo (1979) uses a theoretical model to analyze the specific processes inherent to primary education in the Mexican school system. The central hypothesis is that dropouts are caused by academic failure, which in turn is determined by a set of factors both external and internal to the educational system. The key findings of this study are as follows:

- Academic failure causes dropouts in a variety of different circumstances.
- Academic failure is a self-reproducing phenomenon.
- Academic failure produces a negative attitude toward the student in the teacher. The student senses less encouragement and more frustration, which reinforces his/her academic failure.
- The socio-economic status of the student is a determining factor in academic failure.
- Inadequate nutrition correlates positively to academic failure, particularly as one approaches Grade 5, the level at which a student must develop more complex mental operations.
- Inflexible standards of school organization foster dropout.
- The attitudes and behaviors of the teachers seem to reflect indifference towards academic failure, and in general, teachers tend to reinforce those students who already have more advantages.

Only a small percentage of teachers compensates by systematically helping those who are farthest behind.

On the basis of these conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

- Reduce the frequency and magnitude of the conditions that foster academic failure by introducing differentiated and individualized pedagogical techniques;
- Introduce remedial strategies that are aimed at and adapted to the specific differences between rural and urban areas;
- Initiate programs to provide food for undernourished students;
- Make school organization standards more flexible so that schools can adjust to varying situations;
- Review micro-planning procedures to increase access to schools;
- Raise the awareness of teachers, principals, and supervisors regarding the school's responsibility for academic failure;
- Implement systems to channel students in order to prevent or remediate academic failure.

2.2 Ethnographic Perspective

Using a methodological perspective based on ethnographic cross-section, ROCKWELL (1982) observed everyday school practices in order to illuminate the functions and effects of primary schooling in Mexico. In order to structure, analyze, and interpret the observations, the formative dimensions of the school were viewed in terms of:

- the structure of the school experience (selectivity and grouping, time spent in school, types of participation, out-of-school impact of schooling);
- the definition of teaching practices (teachers' duties, views about teaching, teaching methods);
- the school's presentation of academic knowledge (organization by subjects, formal presentation, distinction between everyday knowledge and academic knowledge);

- the school's definition of learning (rituals and uses, the use of language, implicit reasoning, independent learning);
- the transmission of views of the world (transmitting values and concepts about the social world).

After viewing the basic nature of the school from various points of view, the study suggests that the intrinsic organization or structure of the school experience carries with it a message of systematic, socialized segregation that should be counteracted in all its many manifestations. The study concludes that it is impossible to "decree" changes, regardless of whether the changes be to eliminate social differentiation or to improve teaching practices. Among other strategies, the study urges the creation or reinforcement of horizontal communication networks among school teachers, promoting the exchange of ideas on ways to work.

Another interesting study, which also takes an ethnographic perspective and explores why there are failures in marginal¹ schools, was carried out by BALDERRAMA, BALDIVIESO, and SALDIAS (1982) in four different geographic areas of Bolivia. The study poses the following questions: (1) What is the definition of academic success and failure for those people who are directly and indirectly affected by the school?, and (2) What is the process that produces failure in school? To answer these questions the authors carried out an extensive observational follow-up study of teacher/student interaction and the interrelationship of school and community. The components of failure were analyzed in the classroom, in the school, and in the community. The research was centered on four schools in low income neighborhoods in the rural and urban areas of La Paz. Thirty-two general observations and 370 focused observations were made on topics culled from previous observations. School documents, student notebooks, textbooks, and

* "Marginal" and "marginality" are used here to mean "the state of being socially deprived or disadvantaged." The terms are anglicisms of the Spanish "marginal" and "marginalidad," which in the text refer to the life in the slum areas surrounding most population centers in Third World Countries.

official schedules were also analyzed. The following are highlights of the study's conclusions:

- The causes of failure are found primarily in the school structure, as well as in the larger bureaucratic structure of which it is a part.
- Curriculum plans and schedules contribute to the problem because their content is often obsolete, abstract, and irrelevant to the children.
- Teachers reinforce failure in school through top-down and authoritarian leadership.

TEZANOS, MUÑOZ, and ROMERO (1982) also carried out an ethnographically-based study in Colombia, exploring the relationship between the school and the community in order to examine the learning environment in schools and to explain the teacher's role in students' success or failure.

2.3 Sociological Perspective

PARRA and ZUBIETA (1982) summarized the key findings of two experimental studies carried out in Colombia, one in a marginal urban community and another in a campesino setting, in order to study the relationship between education and marginality. They began by defining the process of socialization, making a distinction between "primary socialization" (defined as that which takes place during infancy, usually through the family) and "secondary socialization" (wherein institutional sub-cultures are assimilated). The authors state that since the urban marginal environment suffers from outside exclusion, reinforced by its own structures which promote internal solidarity and aggression toward the outside world, the socializing actions of educational institutions only reaffirm on a daily basis the existing structural and cultural disassociation. This occurs because school culture has the functions of legitimizing, complementing, and continuing the primary socialization. Thus, it is through these socializing mechanisms

that the school system "includes" or "excludes" different sectors of the population.

BROFENMAJER and CASANOVA (1982) studied the relationship between social classes, schooling circles, and pedagogical practices in Venezuelan primary schools. The study initially separated the schools into three groups: "circles of excellence", reserved for the highest strata; "deteriorating mass circles", which include most of the school population; and last, "very deteriorated circles", consisting of the schools found in the marginal ghettos and the impoverished areas surrounding metropolitan Caracas. The research included observation of teaching techniques, analysis of programs and methods, and the construction of an "integrated index" of academic performance based on subjective and objective evaluations in language arts and math. The authors state that: "By comparatively analyzing the results (differentiation of the clientele, the hierarchization of the schools and the inequality in school work), one can conclude that the differing practices emphasize the importance of school-related factors in the stratification of the teaching process and primary education in Venezuela." "...The different results and accumulations produce equally different scholastic capital." "...The accumulation of competences, or, in most cases, deficiencies, will play a key role in the child's career in school. For a large part of the population attending public schools, the performance differential between the various circles results in a lack of qualifications that proves insurmountable at subsequent stages..." (IBIDEM, 1982:53). In summary, the authors stated that the school responds in different ways to the task of transmitting and recreating culture, producing scholastic circles that tend to stratify the students according to their social origin.

Another study along this line analyzed the impact of urban marginality on formal education in a low-income neighborhood in Bogotá, Colombia. Through the application of systematic observation techniques, interviews, and tests on verbal comprehension and

written expression, research indicates that low school productivity in marginal schools may be attributable to the division between the school culture and the culture of the children living in marginal neighborhoods (PARRA and TEDESCO, 1981).

In Mexico, LAVIN, (1986 (1)) analyzed the contradictions between the "democratizing" goals of educational policies in the past 30 years, and the actual trends of stagnation and regression seen in the indicators for access and retention in primary education. The results show that stagnation results from the standardized use of a uniform education model. In addition, many essays and articles address the issue of "educational marginality". DE SIERRA (1981) analyzes the situation within a regional context; PODESTA (1980) discusses the socio-political and cultural functions of Chilean education in the Aymara highlands; MAURER (1979), from research with the Tseltal Indians in the State of Chiapas (Mexico), concludes that the education offered by the State is contradictory to the indigenous children's values, characteristics and needs, and does not even give them the opportunity to become integrated into modern society.

Several socio-cultural studies support the assertion that the supposed "unity of the school" and policies of homogenization produce enormously unequal results because they are dependent on different economic, social, and cultural contexts. The following assessments deserve to be highlighted from the studies:

- The more remote a school is, the more precarious its situation (Muñoz IZQUIERDO, 1979 (1)).
- Better equipped schools are associated with better performance (Muñoz IZQUIERDO, 1979 (1)).
- The younger the users of the educational service, the fewer (percentage) the resources that are allocated to them (DE MOURA, CASTRO, 1980).
- Younger, less experienced teachers are sent to the most distant rural schools and the most marginal urban areas (TEDESCO, 1981).

- The use of homogeneous models implies that any innovative initiative must be made at the expense of some basic goal of the school or of one of its participants (DEALC/22, 1979).
- The more distant and less developed rural communities actually subsidize the education of the higher social strata through their obligatory contributions to the construction, maintenance and repair of school buildings (SCHMELKES, 1983).
- The more rural the school, the fewer hours of teaching a student receives, because there is greater absenteeism among both students and teachers (BLAT JIMENO, 1984).

It is important to note that parental involvement in the schools is a factor that has a favorable impact on academic performance (RODRIGUEZ et al., 1982). However, a parent's involvement is often limited exclusively to financial assistance for the building and repair or maintenance of facilities, and seldom involves organizational decisions (schedules, shifts, attendance), extracurricular activities (such as work on school grounds, coops, sports, recreational, or cultural activities), or decisions about what curriculum to use or how to evaluate student performance.

This general overview of the facts, as substantiated by numerous studies throughout Latin America, indicates that hidden below the principles of integration and democratization espoused by schools, lie a variety of levels of educational layouts, and the school's role as selector.

The enormous socio-cultural differences that foster inequality in education, the relationship between basic education and a population's essential needs, and the lack of relevance of primary education for the marginal culture in Latin America, have all been the subject of recent studies that emphasize the importance of adapting basic education to the needs of the majority of the people in the region. (MELLO and TEDESCO, 1982; BOROSOTTI, 1984; MAGENDZO and LATORRE, 1985; LENNON, 1985; and ROJAS, 1986).

2.4 Psycho-social Perspective

LEMBERT (1985) studied a group of urban low-income families in Mexico City, in order to determine the influence of the mothers' beliefs, expectations and attributions on second grade children dropping out of school. The study proposed the following hypotheses (in quotes) and arrived at the conclusions indicated:

"High and low performing children and dropouts read at different levels." The results are as expected.

"Mothers differ in their beliefs, expectations and attributions, depending on whether they belong to the high performer, low performer, or dropout group." The data clearly support the hypothesis, with the opinions of mothers of dropouts being much less positive regarding their children's achievement in school. They also have low expectations for their children regarding number of years of schooling and academic performance. In addition, they tend to have external and unstable attributions regarding reasons for school abandonment, and the attributions were more oriented towards "avoiding" problems than towards solving them.

"The mothers' patterns of beliefs, expectations and attributions vary depending on the sex of the child." Although there were greater expectations and more positive attributions for males, the differences were not statistically significant.

"The mother's beliefs, expectations and attributions correlate positively with the child's performance in reading." This hypothesis was approached from several construct variables such as early stimulation, help with homework, presence of reading materials at home, etc. The analysis showed that despite the fact that the children were all from similar socio-economic levels and were exposed to similar school systems, the school does not compensate for differences between the homes but tends to perpetuate them. These results are consistent with what has been reported in developed countries in terms of the out-of-school

variables being quite consistently related to performance in school. However there have been some recent findings in developing countries that indicate that the socio-economic level of the student has a relatively lower impact on academic advancement in developing countries than in developed countries. This might be explained in that the in-school variables are significant only to the extent that they meet a certain minimal acceptable level of quality or a minimal level of family socio-economic status.

"The three groups of children (high performers, low performers, and dropouts) will be distinguishable through analysis of the mothers' beliefs and expectations." This hypothesis was proven through differentiated analysis. The results suggest that there are more differences in the high performance group with respect to the mothers' expectations of high academic performance, help at home, and early stimulation.

It is suggested that future research examine: the fathers' beliefs, expectations, and attributions (since their positive influence has already been demonstrated in other cultures) (RADIN & EPSTEIN, 1975); the children's influence on their parent's beliefs and expectations; and the beliefs and attitudes of the teachers towards the child and his/her parents.

LEMBERT'S study provides theoretical background material for understanding low academic performers and dropouts, and has the additional richness of exploring variations within the group. Moreover, it points out the importance of linking beliefs, expectations, and attributions together, rather than focusing on just one issue. It also contributes theoretically through the formulation of another category of analysis in the attribution theory: that of "approximation" versus "avoidance".

The practical application of Lember's study may lie in the design of preventive and remedial programs to decrease the dropout rate by: including mothers in the programs through non-formal education

channels; designing information and motivation campaigns for raising mothers' expectations; expanding preschool education; etc.

The International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development has sponsored several psycho-social studies on the problem of school failure among depressed populations (FARRELL, 1983).

KOTLIARENCO, FRIAS, NEUMANN, and ASSAEL (1983) studied the psychological factors of poverty that influence adaptation to the school system and academic performance. Using a "naturalist observational" method, they worked with a group of mothers at a pre-school community center in a marginal town near Santiago de Chile. Seventeen mothers were randomly selected, and mother/child verbal and non-verbal interaction was noted through directly or indirectly observable behavior. One of the most significant results was that the greater the mother's schooling, the greater the amount of direct interaction with the child. However, as the child grew older, interaction decreased. Type and frequency of communication were also analyzed. The main topics of communication were rules of behavior, health and habits. Indicators such as "gives orders" or "reprimands", versus "asks for information", or "gives information" were used to determine whether the communication was discipline-related or not. The children responded better when an "explanation" was provided.

This study descriptively assessed the mother's behavior in the home and discovered what influenced the child: child's age and sex, location of the home, family size, etc. It also used a naturalist methodology to detect the most common interactions between mothers and children in their everyday activities. In addition, this analysis initiated important, in-depth poverty research.

MAGENDZO and GAZMURI (1983) performed a "cultural-environmental" analysis of families, studying in-depth the different ways in which poor people within the same population educate their children. The study hypothesized that characteristics cannot be divided by

socio-economic sectors, since within one population there are many different environments. The study used non-structured interviews and direct observation of mothers. Family environments, classified by their different psycho-educational attitudes and behaviors, were categorized as: "good", "fair", "inadequate", and "damaged". While the "good" environments showed planning in their educational-social actions, the other environments did not. Also the study appeared to indicate that financial instability did not affect families in the same way. Families with higher "psychological quality" (more stable attitudes and values) were less affected by the loss of important social benefits: the family did not necessarily become "different" or isolated (Ibid, 24).

A study by FILP, CARDEMIL, DONOSO, TORRES, DIEGUEZ and SCHIEFELBEIN (1983) on selectivity in school highlighted the importance of preschool education for low-income children in terms of learning to read and write. The research also dealt psycho-socially with the "quality" of education received and hypothesized that "the social and affective relationship that the teacher establishes with the students in the poorest sectors, has a much more crucial impact on low academic performers than does the 'quality' of the teaching" (Ibid, 29).

FILP, CARDEMIL, and VALDIVIESO (1984) expanded on their earlier study by exploring different teacher-related factors that have an impact on the academic performance of first graders in low-income areas. They concluded that the most "effective" teachers showed greater expectations of success for their students than the less effective teachers did; they were also more aware of students' personal needs and feelings, and they spent more time with the children who were farthest behind.

FARRELL (1983), commenting on other projects as well as on the ones mentioned above, stressed the importance of isolating the operant factors determining why some poor children fail while others learn and succeed. He pinpointed two areas of interest: a) the family

environment and the socialization patterns within the family, and b) factors related to interaction within the school environment. Farrell suggests interdisciplinary research that combines both areas, either through large scale surveys, structural analyses, or micro-surveys that observe the behavior of small groups or individuals.

BARRIGA and VIDALON (1978) assumed that the individual teacher operates as part of a total system that is focused on meeting specific objectives. As such, the teacher's influence is measured by how well these goals are met by his/her students. Under "teaching behavior" the authors distinguish between cognitive, attitudinal, personality, vocational, pedagogical style, and teaching experience. The dependent variable was defined as academic performance during the first cycle of basic education. Math and language scores determined the student's cognitive score. The attitudinal score was determined by a student's critical attitudes, openness to change, willingness to enter into dialogue, autonomy, participation, cooperation, and humaneness. The sample consisted of 90 teachers and 1,254 students who had completed three years with the same teacher. The study's conclusions included:

- The more democratic and affectionate the teacher's behavior, the better the students performed in language and math, and the more positive their attitudes.
- Favorable teacher attitudes towards change, criticism, dialogue, autonomy, democracy, cooperation, and humaneness were positively associated with student's attitudes and performance in language and math.
- The greater the teacher's verbal capabilities, the better the students' language performance.
- The greater the teacher's mathematical capabilities, the higher student performance in math and language, but there was no correlation with student attitudes.
- Teachers' "work satisfaction" correlated positively with student performance in the three dependent variables.

- No correlation was found between the teachers' theoretical-methodological knowledge of a subject and student performance in the related area.
- A negative correlation was observed between years of teaching experience and student achievement in language and attitudes.

The above-mentioned set of factors explained 51.6% of the performance variation in math, 50.8% in language, and 54.5% in attitudes.

The study recommended the following teacher training policies:

- Promote the development of attitudinal and affective aspects more than the development of cognitive aspects in teacher training.
- Achieve a balance between authoritarian direction and guidance.
- Emphasize the exercise of verbal and numerical skills in cognitive development.
- Reassess the social status and training of teachers.
- Establish interaction with students as a criterion in the training, selection, and evaluation of teachers.

BRINKMANN, MORALES, and FIGUEROA (1979) analyzed the activities of a group of primary education teachers in Chile who were instructing children with mental deficiencies and children with normal intelligence. Implementing H. Gough's (1952) attitude-measuring instrument ("The Adjective Checklist") on 46 randomly chosen teachers, they found that teachers tended to make hasty diagnoses about children's learning difficulties. As a result, the authors recommended that teacher training include information and sensitivity-training regarding the problems of slow learners.

BONAMIGO and PENNAFIRME (1980) carried out an exploratory study of grade one repeaters based on the theories of motivation and development of self-image. The authors conducted unstructured interviews and filled out questionnaires on "self-esteem" for a sample of 84 teachers, 91 specialists, 43 retained students, and 43

students who had not been retained. A wide-ranging analysis of the problem of repetition was performed and possible solutions were suggested. The authors noted that teachers tended to perceive retained students as "defective" (immature, slow, shy, deficient, etc.), while they viewed promoted students favorably (hard-working, intelligent, obedient, attentive, disciplined).

V. Strategies for Improving Access and Retention in Latin American Primary Education

Both the studies on correlates of school performance and the research on access and repetition suggest a variety of responses and specific actions. Moreover, research of different design methodologies (experimental, quasi-experimental and ex-post facto) has tested whether certain practices actually do affect the incidence of one or another aspect of the problem. These experimental designs were prevalent in the 1970s. Since the end of the '70s and continuing into the 1980s, as the social sciences turned to dialectical reasoning to interpret reality, and "transformation" became the goal of social investigation, participatory and/or active research methods have gained precedence in the search for ways to overcome academic failure. The many different strategies presented in this review have been organized according to the goals that the various programs pursue.

Programs that propose preventive strategies are based on "early stimulation" of children aged 0-6, and usually combined with nutritional supplements and preschool programs to support the intellectual development of the child in order to prevent academic failure in elementary school. Projects that propose compensatory strategies focus on disadvantaged populations, such as: repeaters (potential or actual), dropouts, children with slight learning disabilities, geographically dispersed school-age populations, and indigenous populations. And finally, there are projects that use community participation in the school process, to respond to the basic needs of the child and adult population, as determined by their specific reality and daily life.

1. Endeavors that Propose Preventive Strategies

Interest in programs to raise academic achievement among marginal sectors through preventive strategies has been growing in Latin America since the 1970s. These programs arose from a recognition of the effects of malnutrition on the children's intellectual development, and the need for early stimulation of socio-culturally

deprived children so that, by the first grade, they are on an equal footing with children from higher social classes. We reviewed a compendium prepared by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) (1983), which analyzed eight representative Latin American cases along with cases from other countries.

ORTIZ (1983) presented the results of a longitudinal study in Colombia that began in 1973, and was comprised of 456 families at risk for malnutrition. One of his conclusions was that stimulation at an early age fosters the acquisition of abilities that can enhance academic achievement. He also observed that purposeful psycho-social stimulation, either by the mother or another main caretaker, promotes positive interactive changes, which are measurable both quantitatively and qualitatively. He concluded that although early stimulation programs do have favorable effects on cognitive development, the child will still be conditioned by what goes on in the classroom.

BRALIC (1983) reported on the medium term effects of an early stimulation program which had taken place in Santiago de Chile for 2-year-old children from low socio-economic backgrounds. Bralic observed the children 4 years later, at age 6. The objectives of the study were to determine: the level of intellectual performance, the degree of basic skills development, the degree of social development, and the frequency of behavioral changes. A quasi-experimental research program was developed which compared four experimental groups of children with similar characteristics who had and had not received the early stimulation.

The results indicate that the early stimulation program, despite its success during implementation, did not make a noticeable difference in either the intellectual or socio-emotional development of the children when measured four years later. However, in order to check the validity and reliability of the results, it would have been necessary to address issues that were not clearly taken into consideration: abandonment among the experimental groups; the need for a formally established control group; and the use of instruments that have been validated or

adapted for the sample population, to measure the development and socio-emotional adaptation of the children.

FEIJO (1983) reported on an evaluative study which hypothesized that one year of pre-primary school education improves academic performance. The study was carried out in Ceara, Brazil, and the sample consisted of 57 children who attended preschool in 1979 and 70 children who did not. Both groups were followed throughout their entire first grade year. The study concluded that the children who did attend preschool had greater success in school than those who did not, specifically in the reciprocal reading achievement subtest, in coding and in oral expression. However, there was no positive corollary in the comprehension subtests.

MAGENDZO, GAZMURI, LATORRE and LOPEZ (1980) carried out an empirical study on the impact of a nursery school program in the psychomotor development of children ages 0 to 2 who lived in an extremely poor area of Santiago de Chile. The study found that attendance had a positive effect, particularly in those children who showed the most delay in psychomotor development.

The results of the "threshold" ("Umbral") study in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, and Chile reflect the impact of a preschool education received one year prior to entering school. FILP, SCHIEFELBEIN (1982) partially analyzed the results and concluded that preschool attendance prepared children for learning in elementary school. Those who benefited the most were children from low socio-economic levels in rural areas. The study also confirmed a significant relationship between academic performance and the following variables: children's family, environment, and physical health.

ROJAS, REPOSSI and JIMENEZ (1984) presented the results of a psycho-educational stimulation program using children in the first grade who showed signs of a lack of reading/writing readiness at a public school in Valdivia, Chile. The results of basic skills and perception tests indicated that the experimental group had clear advantages over the control group. There was also

improvement in their social development both in and out of school.

GRANTHAM-MCGREGOR (1983) did a follow-up study to previous research done by the Unidad de Investigación del Metabolismo Tropical (Tropical Metabolism Research Unit), and based his results on the evaluation of several projects that have been carried out in Jamaica since 1971: a home visiting program; a study on malnutrition and mental development; a model program of home visits by a community worker specializing in mother/child health care; the "child to child" program (through older siblings in school); and "backyard day care centers" (home owners who watch the children of working mothers). The study concluded that despite the amount of data available, there are still many unanswered questions, particularly regarding the long-term effects of these programs. Because of this, and because of the structural alterations that occur in research models when they are enlarged to actual, large scale programs, the authors suggest that it might be premature to implement nationwide programs.

MYERS (1983), referring to experimental developments in Latin America, concluded that although preschool education seems to facilitate the development of skills associated with reading and writing, it does not eliminate inequities among children from differing socio-economic backgrounds. The author contended that the preschool education centers for poor children deliver a restrictive learning environment in comparison to the wide range of opportunities offered in the upper-middle class preschools.

The IDRC (1983) compendium concluded that programs have changed their emphasis from custodial aims to those involving the wholistic development of the child; the assistance approach has been replaced by one of prevention. Finally, the report made the following recommendations:

Third World countries should not adopt preschool education models from developed countries. Strategies for dealing with socio-economic problems, cultural features and basic needs of the children must be developed locally.

Preschool education should include health and nutrition programs that involve the parents, the family and the community as a whole.

Given the enormity of the need involved, any alternatives chosen should be as low-cost as possible.

CARVALHO (1985) in the report on the Seminar on Child Care Alternatives for Latin America and the Caribbean (1984), after analyzing several projects, pointed out that conventional preschool care alternatives generally do not respond to community needs. Thus, any strategies must focus on community participation. In addition, attitude, structure, and methodology must change.

LATORRE (1983) developed a financial feasibility study projecting the cost of meeting the basic needs of the Chilean preschool population, through the implementation of a far reaching program expanding three different model programs: La Plaza Prescolar (The Preschool Center), Programa Padres e Hijos (Parents and Children Program), and El Programa de Estimulación Precoz (Early Stimulation Program). The study concluded that the resources required would add another 25% to the present educational budget and 3% to the total Chilean budget. Nevertheless, the author endorsed the implementation, stating that in addition to being necessary, the program could show both medium and long term profits. However, Latorre noted that the political will to implement change is an indispensable precondition to eliminating the extreme poverty found in the country.

2. Projects That Propose Compensatory Strategies

The following projects are characterized by their attempts to compensate for disadvantages in socially, culturally and intellectually underprivileged populations. A variety of mechanisms have been used. We have chosen to examine:

Projects that study subgroups such as: repeaters (either potential or actual); dropouts; child's age/grade discrepancies; children with slight learning disabilities; marginal

populations; and indigenous populations. These projects apply a variety of curricula strategies (programs, methods and techniques) as well as specific teacher training strategies to bring all learning up to the same level.

Projects or measures that introduce reforms in the various planning areas: such as school organization, microplanning, nuclearization, etc.

2.1 Studies Focusing on Various Sub-Group Strategies

2.1.a Focus on Children who Fail a Grade

CURONE, REYBET, LUJAN, and ORTIZ (1983), designed a summer school project in the province of Neuquén, Argentina, whose primary objective was to remediate students who had been held back. The project also attempted to develop a methodology useful to teachers with different areas of expertise and from different grade levels. At the primary school level, the classes, with a student/teacher ratio of 15:1, were grouped according to difficulties in language and math. The teachers were given great freedom to plan their activities according to their own individual preferences. The program reached its goal of recovering 30% of the participating population. The authors also reported that a dynamic, integrated, flexible and individualized methodology translated into better teaching performance. The entire population of 155 students achieved significant progress in both language and math. The authors noted that achievement was also seen in the affective area: strengthening the self-esteem of participating students.

STOVER, BAIRUTE, and Ortuño (1976) presented a collection of five guides developed in Costa Rica, and addressed to parents and educators wishing to help children overcome learning difficulties. No reports on a follow-up to the project were found.

BACCA JARA (1981) reported on Escuelas Libres de Verano (Free Summer Schools) in Costa Rica that were aimed at assisting students with academic difficulties. The project evaluation indicated that the quality of the teachers was "very good" and the services

"sufficient", but there was no report on the students' achievement.

CORTES and GUERRA (1983) in Guatemala, analyzed the results of a local program, AUGE, sponsored by PNUD-UNESCO. AUGE's goal was to give individualized attention to students, primarily in Spanish and math, according to their particular learning styles. The report presented detailed analyses by area and by item of the tests administered, but it did not indicate the overall results of the project.

ALVAEZ (1986) reported on a project begun in Mexico in 1979 to provide academic help to slow children, operating within the framework of a national program aimed at improving the efficiency of primary education. The project was structured on three different levels: failure prevention (1st and 2nd grades); bringing up to grade level those who have failed first grade; and bringing up to grade level children whose grade/age correspondence is out of sync (2nd through 6th grades). Materials were developed in the following areas: motivational, instructional assistance, organizational, and parental participation. The project was initially begun and experimentally evaluated in four states of the Republic with a sample population of 4,000 students. An average promotion rate of 84.8% was obtained for the three levels. An expansion stage began in 1980-81, and by the 1985-86 school cycle, 213,000 students in 26 institutions were participating, with an average promotion rate of 77.8%.

A "radio mathematics" project in Nicaragua was much smaller, but also compensatory in nature. JAMISON (1978) statistically analyzed the impact of the project on the repetition rates, concluding that the project significantly improved the first grade students' mathematical achievement, with participants' scores $\frac{3}{4}$ of a standard deviation higher than those of the control group. In addition, the students exposed to radio lessons were less likely to fail than the comparison group. The probability of failure for the former was 0.33, while the control group was 0.45. As an indirect effect, there was also a slight reduction in the dropout

rate among the experimental groups.

2.1.b Focus on Dropouts

In Bogotá, Colombia, the Bosconia program has been in existence since 1971 as an alternative education source for street urchins, (gamins). DUQUE, CHAMORRO and NILO (1983) reported on the project, noting that during the period, 1,200 boys were cared for, with direct assistance from the municipal government of Bogotá. No evaluative data was available for the program.

In Mexico, the Centro de Estudios Generales, A.C. developed a model program, CEBI, Centros de Educación Básica Intensiva (Intensive Basic Education Centers), designed for young people between the ages of 9 and 14 who had never enrolled or had dropped out of primary education. Begun experimentally in Chihuahua, Mexico, the program was extended and adapted to other urban and rural localities by the Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo. LAVIN DE Arrivé [1986 (1)], presented the background, bases, aims and structure of the program, which attempted to adjust curriculum and organization to the interests and needs of slow children. The central purpose of the curriculum was that children obtain "basic cultural skills", understood as the ability to communicate orally and in writing, and to apply basic math in their daily lives. The project was guided by the assumption that development of these skills is only possible through practical use in everyday situations and activities. "Socially relevant activities" were developed, providing a catalyst for the creation of additional programs by the community itself (health, communication, personal development, etc.) The program of study encompassed three consecutive levels, lasting a total of approximately 24 months (4-hour sessions per day). Upon completion of the program, students were supposed to be in a position to receive credit for primary school and to take the entrance exam for secondary school.

LAVIN, MACIEL et al. (1983) evaluated the CEBI program in both urban and rural settings. A representative sample of the enrolled population was studied using surveys, interviews, academic

achievement tests, and classroom observation. The authors concluded that the program managed to keep about 75% of the enrolled population, and that the overall academic performance of the CEBI students was similar to control groups representing the traditional schools. Moreover, the CEBI "Alfa" students tested significantly higher in math achievement, and CEBI top level students were higher in the Spanish and "self-taught" areas. Adaptation of content to local needs, flexibility of structure and school organization, personalized attention, and the close relationship that was established with the community were considered to be key elements in this program which allowed the re-integration of these young people into the system, and assured their academic recovery. Another important achievement was the increased self-esteem seen in the participating youngsters.

The Mexican Servicio Escolarizado Acelerado (Accelerated Schooling Service), developed by the Department of Educational Research of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional and implemented in the Federal District by the Mexican Secretaría de Educación Pública has offered another alternative for the dropout population. The project developed a series of teaching guides in mathematics, Spanish, social science, and natural science for the different levels that make up the curriculum. Unfortunately evaluations of the project are not available.

2.1.c Focus on Children with Slight Learning Disabilities

Much of the research on the slow learner population has shown high indices of children with slight learning disabilities, generally perceptual in nature (visual, auditory, hand-eye coordination, etc.). These students can be remediated through short treatment periods running concurrently with their regular academic course of study. Numerous studies have emphasized the need to give teachers the ability to diagnose these students early on, so that they can be quickly routed in the right direction, and so avoid the frustration of not being able to keep up with classmates.

In Chile, MAGENDZO, MARTELLI, RITTERSHAUSEN and VERGARA (undated) produced a programmed textbook that attempts to help the teacher detect and treat learning problems within the classroom. No evaluations of its use were found.

VACCARO and SCHIEFELBEIN (1982), reported on the first stage of work (1978-1979) in Talleres de Aprendizaje (Learning Workshops) taking place in a lower class neighborhood in Santiago de Chile for children between the ages of 6 and 12 who have learning disabilities and emotional problems. In addition to cognitive aspects, the project included factors such as value development, self-esteem, and communication. It was premised on the theory that the residents themselves would assume the role of educators, pursuing a common goal of social education. The report noted that in 1978, of the 45 children enrolled, seven were held back, while in 1979 of a total of 68 participants, only five were held back. The effectiveness of the program for preventing school failure seems clearly indicated in the positive correlation between the "promotion" and "workshop attendance" variables.

The Grupos diferenciales (differential groups) project, developed in Chile's Décima Región and reported by SCHIEFELBEIN, VILLAROEL et al. (1983) studied the treatment of children with slight learning problems. The authors analyzed the impact of teachers on the children's dropout and repetition rates in primary schools. The study concluded that the differential group factor appears to lower both the repetition and dropout rates in rural areas.

The large scale Mexican project Grupos Integrados de Aprendizaje (Integrated Learning Groups), which has been ongoing since 1981 under the auspices of the Secretaría de Educación Pública, involves children who demonstrate specific problems which are remediable through special, short term treatment. The remediation takes place within the regular school and throughout the school year. The project has been expanded to include all of the Mexican States and the participating primary school teachers have undergone advanced training. No evaluative information is available.

2.1.d Focus on Culturally and Geographically Marginal Populations

The Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo, CONAFE, a decentralized body within the Secretaría de Educación Pública in Mexico, promoted the development of a specialized primary education program, designed to help school-aged children living in small, remote villages. Based on the regular primary course of study, the program was presented simply so as to be accessible to instructors with limited secondary education. Called Cursos Comunitarios (Community Courses) because they depended on the assistance of the parents, who promised to cooperate in building classrooms and supporting the instructor, the program began in 1973 and presently covers all the states of the Republic. The curriculum materials (Community Course Manual, levels I, II and III) were developed by Rockwell in collaboration with the Department of Educational Research of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional. A nationwide evaluation of the program, carried out in 1979, found that the program provided extensive access to school, and was seen to be at least equivalent to the education that is officially available in rural localities through state-run "one-room schoolhouses" (taught by a single teacher) (CONSEJO NACIONAL DE FOMENTO EDUCATIVO, 1975).

The Brazilian Alfa Program (POPOVIC 1977), was designed to provide a special curriculum for culturally disadvantaged students during the first years of school. The ongoing program is aimed at both teachers and students and uses specially created materials that cover the entire curriculum for the first three grades of primary education. It is specifically aimed at children from marginal social classes. As a result of being evaluated during its development in the outskirts of São Paulo, the program materials and methodology underwent some modifications.

ARDOINO (1980) analyzed the Alfa Program three years after the POPOVIC study. The author noted that it emphasized the "process" of learning, stressed the importance of the affective area, and showed respect for the child's indigenous culture. Ardoino

believed that the method, although initially more expensive, has proven to be cost-effective because of improved student performance.

NEIRA (1977) reported on a project in individualized education aimed at children in rural campesino areas. This project in early childhood public education was implemented by a group associated with the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular, CINEP, in small rural communities on the Atlantic coast of Colombia. The curriculum was rooted in the reality of the child and directed toward developing the child into an agent for change, who can later energize his/her community. It sought to replace the professor-lecturer and student-listener with the professor-catalyst and student-investigator. "Study guides", based on situations close to the child's reality, were developed to replace standard textbooks. Neira reported on the children's improved attitudes of cooperation, dialogue, and motivation. The study emphasized the need to have teachers with a high degree of commitment and social conscience, and reported that the project generated parent and community involvement in the educational process. There are no known follow-up studies or evaluations of the project.

TOBIN (1977) catalogued seven projects that changed school curriculum and organization in Argentina. All the projects had an innovative feature in common — the inclusion of productive tasks in routine schoolwork. No formal evaluation was reported, but the author pointed out that in all cases, a strong commitment on the part of the teacher and a high level of community participation in the school activities were verified. No subsequent evaluations have been found.

2.1.e Focus on Indigenous Populations

Among Latin American countries, Bolivia has a long tradition in the education of indigenous populations. A particularly noteworthy program is the Proyecto de Educación Bilingüe Experimental (Experimental Bilingual Education Project) that was carried out in twelve rural centers in the Department of Cochabamba between 1977

and 1980. The goal was to assist children in rural schools by using the indigenous language during the early primary grades. FRITZ, BERRY, DOLSON and LAURIE (1980) published a comprehensive document on this subject which covered the background and basis for the project; its objectives, goals, curriculum design and teaching materials, and its institutional and organizational aspects. DOLSON (1983) evaluated the Project. The program covered first through third grade, and had four instructional components: reading in Quechua, oral Spanish, transitional reading, and math in Quechua. The evaluation centered on six aspects of the program: academic progress, dropout rate, language and linguistic activities, attendance, advancement in reading and math, and relations between parents and the school. Tests were administered to 340 students in eight schools. The main conclusions of the study were that bilingual education has resulted in psycho-social, linguistic, and academic improvements among Quechua-speaking students living in the rural areas of Cochabamba. The participating students performed higher in all three areas than students from traditional schools. These results seem to indicate that bilingual education can be more effective and efficient than traditional methods.

Several authors have reported on the Bolivian Warisata Escuela Ayllú (Warisata Ayll School) project. One major evaluation, carried out by HUACANI, MAMANI and SUBIRATS (1978), was based on both documentary research and fieldwork. It reviewed the evolution of the project from 1931 through 1976, and concluded that the Warisata Ayllú model school project, as a means of liberation for the indigenous population, was destined to fail because it tried to make a nationwide generalization based on a dying society. Nevertheless, and despite the initial negative conclusions, subsequent research has indicated its applicability to other situations. HUACANI and YAMPARA (1981) reviewed an expansion to the ayllú experiment in the regional agrarian centers of Chimisiwi and Tacobamba, Bolivia, where a self-managed project was being attempted. Here the school was transformed into an energizing force and motivator for agrarian social life. No subsequent evaluations are available.

Another experiment in indigenous regions was the Proyecto de Educación Bilingüe (Bilingual Education Project) carried out in Guatemala between 1980 and 1983. Several authors have reported on this Project: TROIKE (1983), KELLY (1984) and CIFUENTES (1984 and 1985). KELLY (1984) reported that the curriculum, as confirmed and standardized by the national bilingual education program, Programa Nacional de Educación Bilingüe (PRONEBI), had two central goals: to re-validate the Mayan culture in all of its components, and to teach in the mother tongue so that the indigenous child could clearly understand the ideas being taught, and would be capable of applying them in his/her own culture. The evaluation of the project indicated that it had a profound impact on school attendance, as well as on promotion and dropout rates. CIFUENTES (1985) reported that the dropout rate per grade level was significantly lower for students in the pilot schools as compared to students in the control schools. In fact, in first grade, 7% of the students in experimental schools dropped out, while 25.7% dropped out of the comparison groups. Statistically significant differences were also observed in the average scores obtained. The level of superiority in first and second grades was 6.9% and 7.2% respectively. In a parallel study of the same project, CIFUENTES (1984) reported that parents showed strong acceptance for the promoters of bilingual education, particularly when they resided in the local community.

In Mexico, the CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS EDUCATIVOS, A.C. (1985) developed a model curriculum in bilingual and bi-cultural basic education that proposed that the curriculum be organized around "formative lines" and "relationship areas" (nature, family, community and work). A "Guidelines Handbook", developed as a teaching tool, required the bilingual teacher to develop his/her lessons based on "work kernels". These pedagogic-didactic units integrated different events or problems of interest to the indigenous child into the regular primary education program. The Project began in 1984 and presently is being implemented on a test basis with indigenous teachers from two different ethnic groups: Mazahuas in the state of Mexico and Tseltales in the state of Chiapas. It is

being implemented in coordination with the General Administration of Indigenous Education of the Secretaría de Educación Pública. Because the Project is in the developmental stages, no overall evaluation has been done yet.

BIRHUETT, MILLER and MILER (1982) studied an educational project from the Altiplano region of La Paz, Bolivia. The project was developed during 1981, and designed a reading and writing textbook in Aymará, using actual expressions of speech and thoughts of indigenous children. Unfortunately, there are no known evaluative reports on its implementation.

2.2 Studies Focusing on Planning Strategies

A second group of projects can be characterized by their focus on the introduction of reforms, especially in the area of planning. Within this sub-group, we have chosen to highlight programs of educational nuclearization, which, in addition to linking education to local needs, attempt to offer a complete range of school services within each nucleus.

In 1977 the Organización Regional de Educación para América Latina y el Caribe, OREALC, prepared an educational planning methodology for the project, Desarrollo Integrado de las Zonas Rurales (Integrated Development of Rural Areas), which guided integrated rural development projects in Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, Panama, and Peru. ALAIX (1984) (1985), in reporting on these projects, defined "an educational nucleus" as a special organization with four main characteristics:

- . A focus on a specific geographic environment,
- . Encouragement of the local community to use its own resources for self-development,
- . A decentralized approach to educational management, and
- . The integration and coordination of activities.

ALAIX's 1984 state-of-the-art review on rural basic education in Latin America also covered additional nuclearization experiments in Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru. A Bolivian project by Pérez and Chaure drew its organizational strength from the ayllú or community. The school's ideology and objectives were community-oriented; the curriculum was adapted to the socio-cultural and economic reality of the region; the methodology was based on ayni (cooperation) mink'a (work performed and repaid) and wagui (means of production). The educational activities were suitable to the area both socio-culturally (reading, counting, writing) and in terms of economic productivity. The Bolivian Educational Code (1955), modified as a result of the experiments, now allows the organization of rural schools into campesino school nuclei. No results on academic performance were reported.

The Colombian nuclearization project sought to create model schools offering a complete primary school education with a curriculum adapted to the needs of the rural environment. The Ecuadorian program Nucleo Educativo para el Desarrollo Rural (Educational Nucleus for Rural Development) formed the basis for decentralization in Ecuador; and in Peru, a school nuclearization system was the basis of that country's educational reform.

Projects in Colombia, Guatemala, and Peru were summarized by TAMAY (1977). Costa Rican projects were summarized by the Costa Rican Ministerio de Educación Pública (1977); Peruvian projects were reported on by RIVERO (1978). In addition, other reports were done by ministries of various countries in the region.

ALAIX concluded, after reviewing all the projects summarized in his report, that 'school nuclearization, in and of itself, has not achieved the objectives that were set for it.' (ALAIX, 1984:102) He theorized that changes in institutional structure are necessary at both the local and the national levels if there is to be any hope for real improvement in access to and quality of rural education.

PRAWDA (1985) reported on a regional education micro-planning project in Mexico which presented yet another strategy for administrative restructuring aimed at distributing educational benefits more efficiently. The author fully summarized the methodology used as well as the criteria applied both locally and regionally. He also noted that this micro-planning strategy allowed for widespread community implementation of many projects being nationally promoted by the Secretaría de Educación Pública.

The Programa Primaria para Todos los Niños (Primary Program for All Children) carried out in Mexico between 1978 and 1982 (SECRETARIA DE EDUCACION PUBLICA, 1982) was another attempt to solve, through integrated planning, the problems of access to primary school and dropout prevention. The program's central purpose was to give all children aged 6 through 14 the opportunity both to enter and to

complete primary school. The strategies were aimed at:

- . solving problems at the administrative and technical pedagogical levels, and
- . anticipating remedial needs which might arise from existing economic and social inequalities.

Three main courses of action were established: (a) expanding the system in an orderly fashion; (b) making it possible for children to stay in school; and (c) contributing to greater administrative efficiency. Thirty-six specific projects were organized under these three primary actions.

The first course of action consisted of identifying unserved groups and localities and designing non-traditional approaches to provide them with services. The second course of action involved designing, revamping, and expanding projects for assisting the teaching process in rural localities, paying special attention to one- and two-teacher schools, remedial programs for potential and actual dropouts, and other dropout prevention projects. The third course of action was directed at facilitating the recruitment and hiring of teachers, and optimizing the delivery and use of resources.

In quantitative terms, the results appeared favorable, as the 1.3 million slow learners were statistically reduced, and greater uniformity was achieved in the starting age for primary education. In terms of the objective of keeping children in school, the increase in the "efficiency index" went from 46% in 1977-78 to 52% in 1985-86, which was far below the targeted goal. The lack of evaluations and follow-ups to measure the actual impact of the various projects in reducing dropout and repetition hampers their large-scale implementation and assistance in rural education. However the projects did foster the experimental development of individualized teaching strategies for slow learners.

Improving transportation is another way to increase primary school access, making more efficient use of rural educational facilities and placing the existing organized school system within the reach of campesino children. An interesting school location and

transportation design model was developed by CEN ZUBIETA, LATAPI, PATIÑO, (1971). Unfortunately the plan was never implemented.

ALCANTARA (1985) studied transportation, schooling, and rural education policies in the state of Sao Paulo, Brazil. The author concluded that the then existing transportation system seemed to encourage the under-utilization of rural schools. Alcantara suggested a rethinking of the problem of school transportation in terms of the overall rural economic picture.

3. Projects Centered around Community Participation in the Educational Process.

This section analyzes a number of projects that are presently being developed in various countries in Latin America under the theory that community participation is the key to improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance of the educational process. The great majority of these Latin American projects began in the 1970s as a way to encourage mothers' participation in preschool daycare. Later on, other areas of the community became involved.

One of the pioneer projects in this field was the Proyecto Padres e Hijos (Parents and Children Project), which was implemented in several locations in Chile, and demonstrated the ability to improve the quality of life for families as a whole while positively affecting the development of the children. Originally it was conceived of as an informal educational program for marginal communities and used a participatory methodology which involved children between the ages of four and six, their parents and the community at large. The projects were developed by the Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación (CIDE, 1971).

The evaluation of the Parents and Children Project by RICHARDS (1985) made a significant contribution to the literature on cultural action projects, as it combined an empirical study with philosophical exploration and practical social science research techniques. It is impossible -- in addition to being contradictory

to the spirit of this paper -- to try to summarize the "results" or "products" of the program. We will only note that the project has been developed into a 2-year preschool education course with programs in 50 communities. However, its success cannot be accurately reflected or summarized by these numbers alone. It is sufficient to quote -- as does Richards -- the campesino José Felipe Naguil, who, at the end of the project says: "Perhaps this enthusiasm will only last for a day or for a couple of months; but let it be ours from here on out. Let this be the beginning of our own organization, the beginning of our coming together as individuals and as neighbors. To show our children that we are indeed people." (IBIDEM, 1985:236).

Many different variations of this initial project were developed and they have been reported on in a number of papers. AURELIUS (1977) reported on the program Toda la familia enseña y aprende (The Whole Family Teaches and Learns), developed in campesino communities in Osorno, Chile. The project was supported by CIDE and the Fundación Radio Escuela para el Desarrollo Rural (FREDER) — which also supported the Parents and Children Project. The program's objective was to promote interaction between the home and the community and thereby stimulate informal education for both children and adults within their own community. The program promoted changes in parental behavior towards their children, in relationships among family members, and in child care.

BALMACEDA and GIMENO (undated) reported on case studies in a preschool project for children between the ages of 4 and 6 in the community of Isla de Maipo, Chile. The authors' investigations discovered a method combining demonstrations and direct experience to prepare mothers to educate their children. They concluded that the demonstration model was effective in training mothers to help in their children's schooling.

VACCARO, SCHIEFELBEIN and YAÑEZ (1976 and 1979), developed a project in collaboration with the promoters of a free basic education school in Santiago, Chile. They reported on a series of physical and artistic activities carried out by the mothers and

fathers, which managed to motivate and convince the parents that their presence and involvement in the school fostered their children's development and the well-being of the family as a whole.

In Colombia, several community education alternatives have been developed. MAYRIDES and RIVERA (1977) reported on the project called Escuelas de barrio (Neighborhood Schools) developed in Cartagena, a preschool education program which used resources from within the community. These neighborhood schools began as a private response to the lack of space in the State schools, and operated out of individual mothers' homes. The children brought their own desks, notebooks, and pencils. The mothers turned teachers did not have more than a fifth grade education and were trained to use educational materials to develop the children's skills and abilities in language, math, problem solving, and self-esteem. The project originally proposed to train ten teachers; however, at one point there were reportedly thirty-three schools in operation. We are not aware of any formal evaluations of the project.

Another Colombian project, Escuelas populares (People's Schools), in Buenaventura was investigated by the FUNDACION DE INVESTIGACIONES DE ECOLOGIA HUMANA (1980). Like the Neighborhood schools, the People's schools were an outgrowth of the aspirations of the community and closely tied to the family unit. The project undertook the training of staff to educate children between the ages of four and seven and began under the auspices of the Escuela Normal Práctica Popular. By 1970 it had reached almost 15,000 children. Later, the government and other national and international organizations became interested. The Foundation's study pointed out a lack of material and human resources, but they did not evaluate the project in terms of the children's progress or any consequences seen in the children's subsequent performance in primary education.

CANDANEDO (1978) reviewed the history of Cerro Batea, Panamá, a low income neighborhood created in 1976, where the local school, which grew up together with the neighborhood, underwent a transformation

from a traditional school to a general basic education center. The parents were very involved in this process, which included the building of new classrooms, the management of an adult literacy center, the installation of a low-income lunchroom, and even the adaptation of the curriculum to relate academics to community life. The report noted changes in attitude among the students, teachers, and parents, as well as increased involvement by the parents in the school.

CANDANEDA and BLANCO (1978) also reported on cooperative projects between the school and the community in the Jaqué Jurisdiction, an agricultural community with a subsistence economy, where, with the active participation of the local commercial cooperative, a general basic education center was established. Students, teachers, parents and local authorities all worked together to develop a workshop to study the community. As a result of this workshop, "mini-research" was carried out, followed by a series of educational initiatives: student participation in planting crops, adult literacy courses, construction of dwellings for residential students, and development of a center for infant care. No subsequent evaluations of the project are known.

In Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, PANTIN (1980) reported on a case study on the creation of a Living Center in the marginal village of Shanty Town which had come into existence around 1949 and whose residents took part in the 1970 uprisings. In that year, 1970, the Service Volunteered for All (SERVOL) was organized and began working with residents to set up a preschool education center. Later, an integrated development plan, called "Integrated Education for Development", was channeled into the preschool center. The report did not discuss evaluations of the center nor any later impact it might have had on the children's formal education.

PELEGRINO, SCHROTT and STRASCHNOY (1983) produced the final report for the Argentinian program Educación de la familia para el aprestamiento del niño que ingresa a primer grado (Family Education for First Grade Readiness). One of this study's key conclusions was that establishing a relationship with the parents is a

necessary precondition for increased stimulation of the child. In addition, adult family members developed a greater understanding of the child's reality, and they were trained to encourage those activities that would widen the child's interactive-stimulative field of interest. After participating in this program, the children were observed to have an improved self-image and a greater capacity for learning.

TRUJILLO (1980) discusses a model taller curricular comunitario (Community Curriculum Workshop) that was designed for rural areas in the province of Imbadura, Ecuador, as one of the "nuclearization" experiments. The objective of the project was to integrate organized community participation with the efforts of educational services, development agencies and the authorities, in order to achieve the goals that the community had set for itself. Trujillo concluded that the community workshop did indeed integrate the work of these three sectors in a jointly developed program. The increased involvement of the teaching sector was also noted. The community reacted very favorably once it became aware of the purpose and focus of the work, and this support became the most important reason for the project's success.

In Mexico, SCHMELKES et al. (1979) carried out 15 case studies analyzing community-school interaction, and measuring its impact on the quality of rural education. These case studies resulted in two projects. The first, Participación de la Comunidad en la Escuela Primaria Rural (Community Participation in Rural Primary School) had as its principal players the teacher and the parent, and was designed as a research-action plan for various rural communities in the states of Guerrero and Michoacán (RODRIGUEZ, SCHMELKES, ALVAREZ, 1980). As a result of this project, two manuals were prepared, one for teachers and one for parents. These manuals became the basis for the second project, aimed at experimentally developing a strategy of comprehensive attention for slow learners. These projects are currently being evaluated and systematized.

The Mexican Centro de Estudios Educativos developed an alternative pre-primary education program for residents of marginal, urban areas. Called Nezahualpilli, it was based on the socio-cultural life of marginal children in Mexico City and promoted self-management of the program by area mothers. A formal evaluation of the achievements confirmed that it attained conventionally set development levels for preschool education. However, more importantly, the model demonstrated the feasibility of a self-administered community organization that can generate benefits for the children and their families. The project was reported on by PEREZ ALARCON, ABIEGA, PAMPLONA and ZARCO (1984). Subsequently, the model project was detailed in its entirety in a book written by PEREZ ALARCON, ABIEGA, ZARCO and SCHUGURENSKY (1986).

VI. Conclusions

First of all, it should be stated that all the Latin American governments are fully aware of the need to help those who have been excluded or are failing to thrive in the primary education system. We see each new administration propose policies and plans aimed at solving these problems. Therefore, we believe it is important to preface this paper's conclusions with four statements that in one sense or another synthesize the common theoretical and historical underpinnings sustained by the many studies and investigations we have reviewed:

- . The broadening of educational offerings through a single, supposedly homogeneous educational system has a democratizing effect only insofar as the targeted clientele is also homogeneous in economic, social, cultural, and geographic factors.
- . In an environment of severe economic crisis, resource allocation to education in general, and to basic education in particular, in the best of cases, will tend to remain level funded, which in real terms means a reduction based on the gross national product of each particular country.
- . The indiscriminate allocation of more resources to basic education will not achieve greater democratization in terms of more access to schooling and better retention. On the contrary, it is most likely that with greater resources, the educational benefits will be more highly concentrated in the upper and middle classes. The lower classes may also receive additional support, but the benefits will always go to people belonging to or dependent on the formal sector of the economy, to the detriment of those in the informal sector, (i.e., those people located in the urban belts of poverty and underdeveloped rural areas, as well as those people of minority indigenous backgrounds.)

- . In order to have a favorable impact on access to education and dropout prevention in the school-age population, policies must be viewed in wholistic terms. This involves paying special attention to the language, culture, and context of those who are excluded from or failing to thrive within the system.

It is also important that decision makers keep in mind that access to the educational system and permanence within it are influenced by certain rules and regulations that either facilitate or hinder the process, in which they, the decision makers, usually have some say. In our review, several of these conditioning factors have been identified, such as: legal stipulations, school organization, and educational planning at the local, regional, and national levels.

The laws of all Latin American countries address the question of mandatory primary education for the school age population. Despite the fact that the legal stipulations and regulations also call for no-cost primary school, parents still have direct costs throughout the school year, (e.g., uniforms, school supplies, fees for construction of buildings, for equipment, etc.), and these costs are usually a contributing factor to absenteeism or desertion. Indirect costs, such as transportation and opportunity costs (income not earned by the child because he/she is attending school), are also common contributing factors.

Organizational impediments to student attendance include: one standardized school calendar for the entire country that ignores regional or local needs; shifts and time schedules that are not location specific; and the requirement for a minimum number of students before a group or a school can open.

With regard to promotion standards, two trends were observed: one that defends "automatic promotion" and another that defends "repetition". While there is insufficient evidence to decide definitively one way or the other, one can conclude that neither standard represents the solution to the high dropout problem, especially when it is instituted alone, without any

psycho-educational foundation, or without applying individualized instructional techniques or other supports inside or out of the classroom. In addition, evaluation criteria that include concepts such as "discipline," "order," "spelling" and "writing" contribute to low promotion rates, because they either subjectively or objectively influence the grading (scoring) process.

In the area of educational planning, the following considerations will help to achieve greater access to primary education systems:

- . Tailor educational services to the target population, taking into account the density of the school age population, distances, availability of transportation, and geographic distribution of the population, giving special attention to sparsely populated communities and marginal sectors of urban areas.
- . Offer differentiated services to heterogeneous populations, such as indigenous education (adapted to different ethnic groups); special education (for the gifted, the less endowed, and children with slight learning problems); education for older children (who are out of phase chronologically with the grade they should be attending) and dropouts.
- . Use a variety of means to make all primary grade levels accessible in order to guarantee a complete education to people in all areas of the country, however remote and sparsely populated.
- . Assign teaching and didactic resources in the quantity and quality necessary to offer adequate services, with special attention to the marginal zones.

Trends Observed in Factors that Influence Access to Primary Education and Dropout Prevention

The bibliographic review identified 654 documents on the subject. Two principal types of work were identified: descriptive studies

and interpretative studies. The descriptive studies attempted to identify influential factors by correlating various independent (external and internal) variables with the dependent variable.

In analyzing the principal conclusions from the research, we should note that internal factors (e.g., class size, teacher background, teacher training), did not show any conclusive correlations with the dependent variable being studied. However, the external variable nutritional status was shown to have a positive association with the student's education level. Nevertheless, the thinking is that programs offering nutritional assistance are not enough to significantly counteract the student's permanent condition of poverty. The most advanced multi-variable studies concluded that academic performance is a function of a vector of educational, individual, and family characteristics, with the educational variables being more powerful predictors of school achievement than the socio-economic status of the family.

In contrast to the descriptive studies, there were fewer empirically-based interpretative studies, and the existing ones date back primarily to the late 1970s.

Some major conclusions of the interpretative studies were:

- . The structure of the school experience (introduction to knowledge, language, implicit world view) communicates and implies a social stratification that exacerbates the high rate of failure among children from the most disadvantaged sectors of society.
- . Falling behind in school is self-perpetuating and often culminates in dropping out of school.
- . Teachers reinforce failure in school through indifference and through vertical and authoritarian teaching styles.
- . The social and affective relationship that the teacher establishes with students from the poorest sectors has an

important influence on the children's performance, more so than the "quality" of the teaching.

- . The more democratic and affectionate the teacher's behavior, the greater his/her verbal and numerical capabilities, and the greater his/her job satisfaction, the better the performance observed in students in math and language, as well as in attitude.
- . Teacher attitudes that are receptive to change, criticism, dialogue, autonomy, democracy, cooperation, and sensitivity, are positively associated with better student performance in math and language, as well as in attitude.
- . More "effective" teachers have higher expectations of success for their students than do less effective teachers.
- . The beliefs, expectations, attributes, and aspirations of mothers correlate positively with their children's performance in school.
- . Lack of economic well-being does not affect all families equally. Family environments with greater "psychological quality" (more stable attitudes and values) produce children who are less affected by deterioration in their standard of living.

As can be observed, these studies affirmed the selective impact of the school system not just through the "schooling circles" determined by the students' social origin, with their great power for social stratification, but also through the so-called "hidden curriculum," which transmits views of the world, structured relationships, and participatory patterns that implant a systematized social stratification.

In considering students' performance, these studies tended to give greater importance to the socio-affective over the strictly cognitive factors. This was seen both in teacher/student and in student/parent/school relationships.

In general, it can be stated that interpretive research has the virtue of suggesting various courses of action based on: teacher education, motivation, and sensitizing; specific teaching practices; curricula; methodology; and the advisability of involving parents in the education of their children.

Strategies for Improving Access and Retention in Primary Education

From the bibliographic review of 294 papers reporting on projects to increase access and reduce dropouts in primary education, one can identify three types of strategies:

- . those that proposed activities to prevent failure at school;
- . those that saw compensatory programs as a solution; and,
- . those that revolved around community participation in the educational process.

Preventive strategies have the advantage of developing skills that can be used later in primary school; however, by themselves, these programs do not eliminate the differences between children from differing socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, it is proposed that preventive programs include attention to the child's health and nutrition, and that parents are involved in these aspects. In addition, given the vast numbers of people in need, it is suggested that low cost alternatives be adopted.

A number of compensatory projects were found that proposed strategies to help:

- . students who have already failed or are at risk of failure;
- . dropouts;
- . children with slight learning problems;
- . children in sparsely populated rural areas; and
- . indigenous populations.

With regard to the first category, students who have failed or are at risk, it is important to note that, for the activity to have the desired effect, the strategy must not be limited to didactic factors (guides or textbooks) but must also include sensitizing the teacher as to the meaning of failure for the student. Strategies

must also involve the parents in the recovery of the student, particularly his/her psychological recovery.

Regarding dropouts, it was demonstrated that despite the socio-economic problems (working children) that cause children to drop out of school, strategies such as flexibility in scheduling and length of school day, as well as making curriculum content and methodology relevant, managed to successfully recover students who were falling behind.

The research shows that to help children with slight learning problems, it is of vital importance that teachers be trained to do preliminary testing at the beginning of the school year. This allows children with learning problems to be channeled to parallel alternatives that will rehabilitate them quickly, thus avoiding the frustration of academic failure.

The projects that have developed diversified strategies for reaching rural populations have greatest success when the family and community have been involved in the educational process, and where the school program has been adapted to the local circumstances. These programs have shown better results than standardized programs that are supposedly adapted to the "rural environment". Programs aimed at indigenous populations have been successful when they use the native language, use content close to the reality of the group, and when they adopt methodologies that recover and recreate the world view of the people they seek to instruct.

In the final analysis, compensatory projects have encouraging results when they counteract, or even overcome, the problem of absenteeism and failure in school. The most promising attempts are those integrated plans that adapt content, methods, and school organization to the specific circumstances of the target population.

Within the compensatory projects, we have included local, regional, and national planning strategies. These strategies show promise

in their integration of spatial and organizational activities. Among those studied were: nuclearización educativa (educational nuclearization) desarrollo integrado de zonas rurales (integrated development of rural areas), and a macro-planning program which brought together political will, programs and resources specifically aimed at the problem of access and dropout prevention.

Lastly we looked at educational projects revolving around community participation, those which the community itself initiated as a result of their own perceived needs. These projects have taken place primarily in the area of educación popular (the people's education) and educación popular infantil (the people's education for children). The earliest of these projects were characterized by their attempts to involve mothers in preschool education projects that would prepare their children for later school experiences. Subsequently, they developed into integrated projects that involved not only preschool children, but school-age children, and adults. Some even reached the level of community projects. While most of these projects have not been evaluated sufficiently or even documented, preliminary reports speak of important changes in attitude among participants (students, parents and teachers) in the sense of greater solidarity, commitment, and a desire to succeed. This can be characterized as a general improvement in the "quality of life" for the participating communities. These projects suggest alternative routes for overcoming lack of access to education and failure to thrive in the traditional school system. As wholistic activities, they are breaking down the educational barriers that presently exist between adults and children, as well as eliminating boundaries between formal and informal education.

The predominant investigative technique used in this type of project has been action-oriented, participatory research and direct observation. Its method of evaluation is in tune with present trends that emphasize improvements in the quality of the everyday life of participants.

In summarizing the conclusions of this review, it is evident that socio-economic and cultural conditions, the allocation of resources, and the structure of the school system are all closely associated with whether or not a child maximizes his/her academic potential or even remains in school. And this success or failure is measured first at the school's gates, which are officially open to everyone in Latin American countries. However, there has been an evolution in the theoretical interpretation of failure in school, and therefore, also an evolution in the interpretation of its causes and effects. These interpretations have run the gamut from one-sided viewpoints to multifaceted views that interpret the situation from various theoretical perspectives.

Similarly, the solutions offered have advanced from proposals to change one determining factor to proposals that emphasize a combination of: teaching that conforms to the differing socio-geographic and cultural realities; tracking students according to their individual differences; and modifying the school's structure and organization. The most recent trend is to involve the family and the community together, in the hope of achieving greater efficiency, effectiveness, and relevance in basic education.

Likewise, in terms of methodology, one can see a clear evolution from the almost exclusive application of more or less sophisticated statistical techniques, to the parallel use of qualitative measurements, to present techniques that have been developed within the framework of participatory, action-oriented research. Evaluations of the experimental projects have also moved from experimental and quasi-experimental designs to models of cultural action, where "explanatory" evaluations are emphasized.

Reductionist interpretations of the issue under discussion have led to a practice of "itemizing" variables, without taking into account their many connotations and nuances. Consequently, a belief has emerged that by merely "adding up" a series of positive influences on variables associated with better performance, one can combat failure in school, dropping out, and failing to thrive. However,

it has been acknowledged that the problem does not lie in finding a "guilty party", blaming the teacher, the program, the method, or the family as responsible for the problem. It is not that simple. On the contrary, we are faced with complex situations that have multiple economic and social origins, requiring individualized solutions. There are certain ethnic groups and classes of people who historically have been affected to varying degrees by analyzable and characterizable problems. But the solutions cannot be generic prescriptions aimed at all "marginal urban classes," "rural classes," "indigenous groups," or "regions". Rather, the answers seem to be in the recognition and close examination of the different learning styles of target populations, and in the legitimization of the curriculum by making it relevant to the student and his/her community. As a result of this process, model programs can be created that will benefit from the richness of each individual's experiences and cultural heritage, and incorporate them into the educational system.

Diversification, a crucial element for raising the quality of education, does not happen in isolation nor in a vacuum. It will only be possible with the generation of integrated strategies that will invert the traditional direction of the education system -- bottom up, rather than top down -- promoting greater autonomy in the decision making process, and encouraging responsibility and initiative within each community, both in the articulation of their own educational needs, and in the generation of alternatives and possible solutions.

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