

From literacy student to popular teacher: Post-literacy instruction in Nicaragua

Rosa María Torres

ABSTRACT

The scope acquired by the National Literacy Crusade confirmed it not only as the most prominent educational event in Nicaragua's history but also as one of the most relevant experiences in the historical struggle against illiteracy world-wide. Precisely because of its pervasive impact, there is still a tendency to believe that the National Literacy Crusade is the only revolutionary educational achievement of the new Nicaragua. As a matter of fact, the crusade came to an end, but adult education continues in Nicaragua. When Nicaragua completed its monumental task of teaching reading and writing, the Vice-Ministerio de Educacion de Adultos was created, leading to a second task: post-literacy instruction. However, it is not a predetermined process or a simple sequence of stages. On the contrary, we are talking about a dynamic and innovative process that, like the Revolution itself, is setting its own course as it advances. In order for the Nicaraguan experience to catalyze reflection and action in the area of popular education in Latin America, it is necessary to see it not as a crystallized "model" but rather as what it really is: a highly complex and contradictory sociopolitical-pedagogical process: a living process reflecting permanent and necessary contradictions between reality and projects. The project itself is an expression of a revolutionary process meant to redefine the limits of what is possible, relying on the surest guarantee for achieving its goal: namely, popular participation.

Introduction

The scope acquired by the National Literacy Crusade confirmed it not only as the most prominent educational event in Nicaragua's history but also as one of the most relevant experiences in the historical struggle against illiteracy world-wide. For Nicaraguans and indeed-for the whole world, the Crusade is one of the Sandinista People's Revolution's most fundamental achievements and the first demonstration of what a people-in-revolution would be capable of accomplishing. The "Nadezhda Krupskaya" International Award granted by UNESCO to Nicaragua in August 1980 represented the world's recognition of this "uplifting experience whose purpose transcends the field of education and aims at making profound changes in the mutual relationship between the country's different sectors" as Amadou-Mathar M'Bow, UNESCO general director, described it.

Precisely because of its pervasive impact, there is still a tendency to believe that the National Literacy Crusade is the only revolutionary educational achievement of the new Nicaragua. Internationally, the majority of research and publications about popular education in Nicaragua continues to revolve around the literacy campaign. In Nicaragua, the Crusade continues to have

such influence and validity that the very term has come to denote “adult education”. Many people, especially in the countryside, still talk about the “Crusade” as a kind of adult substitute for the notion of “elementary school”. The peasants who participated in the Crusade still say. “We are progressing in the Crusade,” now that they attend the Colectivos de Educacion Popular (CEP-Popular (Adult) Education Collectives), consolidating and putting their recently acquired skills of reading and writing into practice.

As a matter of fact, the crusade came to an end, but adult education continues in Nicaragua. And it continues not merely as an extension of that campaign but rather as a qualitatively different experience.

On August 23, 1980, a little over a year after the Somoza regime was ousted, Nicaragua completed its monumental task of teaching reading and writing. That same day the Vice-Ministerio de Educacion de Adultos (VIMEDA - Vice-Ministry of Adult Education) was created, leading to a second task: post-literacy instruction.¹ It is a long-term task which, having been nurtured during the Crusade’s Final Offensive, is today a process in full swing and searching for new forms. Through it are emerging new dimensions of popular education’s potential to stimulate change and action in the context of a revolutionary process.

Times have changed as have conditions and goals. The figure of the briquodista, the voluntary literacy instructor, has now been transformed into that of the Popular Teacher who emerged from the very heart of the popular sectors as a result of the adult education process’ own dynamics. The Unidad de Alfabetizacion Sandinista (UAS - Sandinista Literacy Unit) has been transformed into the Colectivo de Educacion Popular (CEP - Popular Education Collective). The Crusade was continued in the Sostenerimiento (Sustainment Programme) and in turn, the Sustainment Programme has been continued in the current Programa de Educacion Popular Basica (EPB - Popular Basic Education Programme)².

However, it is not a predetermined process or a simple sequence of stages. On the contrary, we are talking about a dynamic and innovative process that, like the Revolution itself, is setting its own course as it advances. In fact, this is precisely the spirit in which the post-literacy project was undertaken: as an experience that had to be continuously planned anew, contrasted and rectified on the basis of permanent feedback from its own reality.

As a result of this permanent adaptation to reality, plans and study programmes, schedules, teaching materials, methods, etc., have been undergoing major and minor changes that, seen as a whole, have meant major and minor changes at all levels. The social process itself, the limits imposed by the actual conditions and the growing active and creative response on the part of the popular sectors involved in the adult education programme have determined the results and redirected planning along the way.

Usually, the accumulation of tasks and the pace demanded by the revolutionary process conspire against the systematization of such a dynamic. This essay attempts to make a modest contribution to a difficult task, moreover limiting ourselves to the field of post-literacy instruction³. The urgent need of avoiding a repetition of what happened in Cuba following its 1961 campaign encourages us to make this attempt. There, the scant information available about its campaign and the early years of post-literacy instruction appeared much later, but by then it lacked the vitality and vigour that undoubtedly had pervaded such a pioneering experience in our continent. Above all, we are encouraged by the ‘certainty that the productivity and possibility of making an experience like this universal, lies precisely in grasping its movement and contradictory development, instead of looking at it as a rigid model or sequence of stages, as is likely to be reconstructed retrospectively after a few years.

In order for the Nicaraguan experience to catalyze reflection and action in the area of popular education in Latin America, it is necessary to see it not as a crystallized “model” but rather as what it really is: a highly complex and contradictory sociopolitical-pedagogical process: a living process

reflecting permanent and necessary contradictions between reality and projects. The project itself is an expression of a revolutionary process meant to redefine the limits of what is possible, relying on the surest guarantee for achieving its goal: namely, popular participation.

The crusade as the forge of post-literacy instruction

“It’s good that we be aware that this is only the beginning. Once the Crusade is over, the task of following up this first effort can begin. We will have to guarantee the integration into study and access to technical knowledge and culture, not only of those who have recently learned to read and write but also of those who only made it halfway and who gained their right to continue their education with this Revolution.” Carlos Nunez, Commander of the Revolution (First National Literacy Conference, 9 June 1980).

From its inception, the National Literacy Crusade was conceived of not as an end but rather as a starting point that would initiate a process of permanent education among the popular sectors. However, once underway, the need for an immediate process of post-literacy instruction became obvious, given the possibility of taking advantage of the organizational and operational network that had been set up for the Crusade, of keeping alive the “state of educational insurrection” among the people and of avoiding regression in learning as much as possible.

In the case of Nicaragua, the option of giving immediate continuity implied a very complex challenge. Making an effective uninterrupted transition between literacy and post-literacy instruction meant creating conditions for it according to its own progress - i.e. according to the dynamics of an intense social undertaking whose realization required committing the entire nation’s energies and demanded a display of effort and creativity only comparable with that demanded by the war of liberation itself.

On the other hand, there was a virtual void of experience regarding adult education in Nicaragua prior to 1979⁴ as well as a lack of reliable sociological data that would allow for anticipating the behaviour of the popular sectors, of the nascent mass organizations and of the new revolutionary State vis a vis a regular and systematic educational process such as that being attempted. On the other hand, the experience accumulated during the Crusade allowed for foreseeing some of the obstacles that would be encountered by a massive post-literacy instruction programme which was going to demand redesigning and transforming networks and institutions just formed and developed with the Crusade.

The first post literacy instruction proposal

Given the decision to provide immediate follow-up to the Crusade, the Crusade itself began to emerge as the matrix of post- literacy instruction.

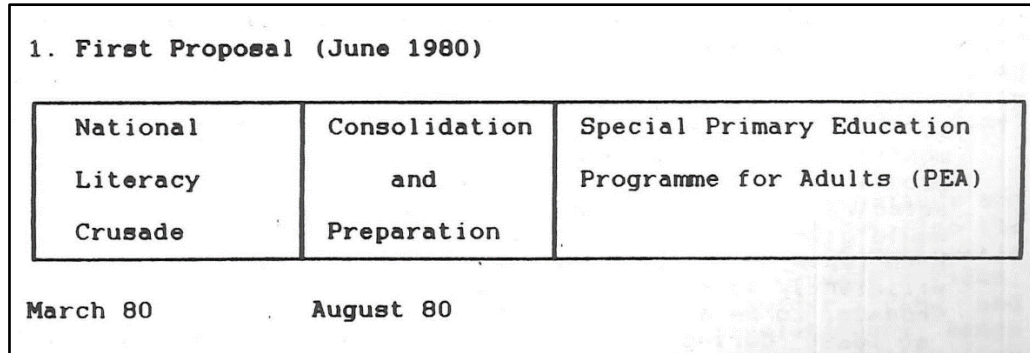
A few weeks after the Crusade’s start, the National Coordinating Board assigned a planning team the responsibility of preparing a post-literacy programme and at the First National Literacy Conference (9-11 June 1980) held halfway through the Crusade, the first project-proposal was presented⁵.

How was post-literacy instruction conceived of from within the Crusade? Under the aegis of the then future Vice-Ministry of Adult Education, it had to guarantee two basic tasks: providing follow-up for those who learned to read and write during the Crusade and structuring a universal, progressive and permanent adult education programme that would include both the recently literate sector as well as the under-educated masses.

These two tasks were to be carried out throughout a process articulated in three stages: (1) Sustainment. (2) Consolidation and Preparation, and (3) the Programme de Primaria Especial de

Adultos (PEA - Special Primary Education Programme for Adults), together with other informal educational projects⁶.

The Sustainment Programme was presented as a period specifically aimed at “sustaining” reading, writing and basic math skills among those who had finished the *El Amanecer del Pueblo* (Dawn of the People) primer before August 15, the Crusade’s last official working day. To that end, the Sustainment was seen as an integral part of the Crusade, parallel to its completion, based on the same Sandinista Literacy Units and under the responsibility of the same literacy instructors.



Once the Crusade and Sustainment were completed, a need was seen for a transitional stage prior to the Special Primary Education Programme for Adults in order to consolidate what the newly literate adults had just learned and, at the same time, integrate the under-educated who were on an equivalent level to the dynamics of auto-didactics, to the use of the mass media, as well as to drawing and the basic notions of history, geography, natural sciences, etc. It was explained that these subjects would not follow a systematic or exhaustive programme but rather would be organised according to “areas of interest” to be defined following a consultation with the mass organisations and an evaluation of the National Literacy Crusade.

Besides following-up the literacy campaign through the implementation of a “Back-Up Crusade” the Consolidation and Preparation stage would cover the country’s remaining illiterate population and those who had not been able to complete the primer during the Crusade. Since this stage was to be the bridge between the Crusade and the Special Primary Education Programme, it would also enable the basic conditions to be set for the following stage: the creation of the Vice-Ministry of Adult Education on the national, departmental (Translator’s Note: equivalent of state, e.g. Utah or New South Wales) and municipal levels, the creation of teaching plans and curricula, the elaboration of teaching materials and, basically, finding the teachers needed for the Special Primary Education Programme.

In effect, given that the end of the Crusade and the Sustainment Programme would result in the demobilization of the *brigadistas* - mainly young students and teachers from the urban areas - finding new teachers became an urgent priority, particularly in the rural areas. For that reason, on the basis of its structures and internal dynamics, the Crusade itself would be the main source of candidates for the future teaching posts, through both the direct action taken by the *brigadistas* and the mass organisations and a national motivational campaign that would include a plan to provide incentives for students and a plan of social service in education for teachers, which would have academic recognition.

Using the Crusade’s own experience as a reference, two types of teachers were envisaged: a full-time teacher responsible for monitoring several study groups with support from radio programme, teaching materials and “assistants” or “monitors” selected from the beet students; and a part-time teacher, who would give two to three hours a day, mainly in the city. For both types of teachers, the requirements would be: to have worked efficiently as a literacy instructor during the National Literacy Crusade, to be at least fourteen years old, to work without pay - at least during the

first phase - as well as having political and organisational qualities, the desire for self-improvement, etc.

Together with the *ex-brigadistas*, the integration of the country's regular teachers as well as of workers and peasants who had the "necessary teaching ability for this phase" was also reckoned. For this, a "special, accelerated and in-the-saddle training programme" was planned, to be implemented through the Talleres Sabatinos Sandinistas (Saturday Sandinista Workshops), short-term national, departmental and local workshops; the mass media and support materials, among other mechanisms.

With the goal of assessing the potential number of students who would be interested in registering for this stage, a census and national motivational campaign were planned, starting with the Crusade itself, to inform and encourage massive registration. It was also planned that a census be carried out to facilitate compiling an inventory of all schools and other buildings available for adult education and, as a second step, to explore the possibility of building schools throughout the country with the participation of the *brigadistas* and members of the rural communities.

This stage had then to lay the basic operational, organisational and pedagogical foundations for beginning the Special Primary Education Programme for Adults, toward which all efforts were concerted.

The final offensive: Epilogue of the crusade and forerunner of the sustainment

The results obtained in the First Conference and, particularly, the progress made by the Crusade during its last two months brought about substantial changes in the first vision of post-literacy instruction, which would have repercussions in a global and profound reappraisal of the process of adult education.

What were the elements that contributed to moulding the first proposal? Certainly, the collective reflection that was achieved at the Crusade's halfway point made it possible to gauge the pace and scope that a massive and intensive literacy campaign could in fact have - a campaign which spread throughout the entire country, was attacked ideologically, and whose members received death threats from the Revolution's enemies; which involved more than half a million people: aimed at teaching both reading and writing and math skills; mainly relied on voluntary young literacy instructors, and which planned to eradicate illiteracy from the country and declare Nicaragua an "Illiteracy Free Zone" in less than five months⁷.

In effect, the First Conference revealed the magnitude and quality not only of the progress made by the Crusade but also the obstacles it faced. These obstacles included: the systematic interference by religious sects against the Crusade's tasks, particularly in the countryside: the murder, rape and intimidation of *brigadistas* by counter-revolutionary bands operating inside the country⁸; the serious supply and communications problems experienced, particularly in the most remote zones, which were aggravated by the onset of the rainy season; frequent sight and hearing problems among the adult population⁹ and the countless cases of older people who slowed down the steady progress of the Sandinista Literacy Units: the students' irregular attendance due to the long distances they had to travel, the rain, their migration due to the harvests and their difficult living conditions; the lack of interest in the Saturday Sandinista Workshops; faulty use of the teaching method and deficient handling of teaching materials; lack of discipline among some *brigadistas*, etc.

In the area of pedagogy, all this was manifested in the very uneven progress of the Crusade, not only between the country's different regions or between the different Sandinista Literacy Units but also within these Units themselves. For this reason, in many cases, the *brigadistas* were forced from the very beginning of the Crusade to divide their units into different groups and work with them at different times or, in most cases, give different types of attention to students and in a

teaching/learning pace that, if it persisted, would mean that goals would not be reached on schedule.

Faced with this situation, the First Conference's basic resolution dealt specifically with "the need to make adjustments regarding the pace and quality of learning and with finding forms and energy to carry out the literacy campaign in order to meet the goal of declaring Nicaragua an 'Illiteracy Free Zone'¹⁰.

While by July 19 - hardly a month before the Crusade's set time limit - 103,377 people had already finished the primer (the Sustainment Programme had originally been designed for them), on the other hand, there were some 200,000 others who at that point in time were in the middle of the literacy acquisition process and were studying different lessons from Lesson 10 onward, out of the twenty-five in the primer. Therefore, the resolution adopted by the Conference immediately became an emergency call to all those involved in the Crusade to speed up the pace and raise the quality of teaching. This plan of action which was called the Final Offensive, was "in essence, an insurrectional strategy of the war of liberation, incorporated into the literacy campaign in order to pool all efforts and concentrate them around the Literacy Crusade's final objective"¹¹. With this goal in mind, the *brigadistas* were told to increase class hours by two hours a day, to set up "Sandinista Sunday Review Classes" to see the more advanced, students outside of regular class hours and to reinforce or to transfer to nearby Sandinieta Literacy Units once they finished activities in their own assigned unit.¹²

Under these conditions, completing the study of the reading and writing primer was made the priority, and consequently, in many areas the *Operaciones Practicas* Notebook designed for the study of arithmetic was discarded or simply never used. Given that all energies had to be dedicated to finishing the Crusade to the Sustainment Programme was effectively put aside and postponed, at least as a special, massive and systematic stage.

However, the postponement implied much more than a simple rescheduling. It presented the need for the Crusade to guarantee what had been seen as the next stage: the recruitment and training of the teachers who would- replace the *brigadistas* once the demobilization began.

The Crusade itself suggested the answer: "During the National Literacy Crusade, certain *brigadistas* began to encourage some of the more advanced students to act as monitors. Then, this gave us the idea that it was possible to encourage the students who had recently learned to read and write, to assume some teaching functions."¹³ Thus, calling on the recently literate population emerged as the only viable means of making an immediate and massive transition to post-literacy instruction in Nicaragua.

One month before the *brigadistas* were to begin to return to their homes, they were directed to select an outstanding student or under-educated member of the community and to begin preparing this person as a monitor so that, from then on, he or she could collaborate by tutoring the slowest members of the Unit and later, in the absence of the *brigadista*, could take on the tasks of the Sustainment Programme. This new figure - the Popular Coordinator who emerged during the Final Offensive, proved himself/herself during the Sustainment Programme and became established during the Popular Basic Education Programme - would make profound changes which would have broad implications for the process of adult education in Nicaragua.

Given the complexity of the task for this emerging Popular Coordinator, the need for a second figure - the Popular Promoter - was recognised. This second figure was to be a teacher, an activist belonging to the mass organizations, a member of the community or, once again, a student who had recently learned to read and write who, by virtue of his/her ability, political and organisational experience and amount of free time, would take charge of directly and permanently supporting, supervising and training several Coordinators while also serving as a liaison between them and the corresponding municipal body.

The Coordinator-Promoter's dual role demanded reassessing the organisational structures on which the National Literacy Crusade had developed. A unit like the Sandinista Literacy Unit which was basically centered on the family and, as a result, atomized and dispersed, had only been possible and manageable thanks to the vast corps of *brigadistas* in the Crusade but was not feasible given the new requirements. Therefore, besides choosing and preparing the popular coordinators and promoters, the *brigadistas* were instructed to begin the process of fusing two or more Sandinista Literacy Units immediately after finishing literacy instruction, in order to build more concentrated education units. These new groups, on which the Sustainment Programme was based and the EPB Programme is based, now were the Colectivos de Educacion Popular (CEP Popular Education Collectives), although originally seen as transitional.

While constituting the Crusade's epilogue, the Final Offensive this also became the organisational and operational forerunner to the Sustainment Programme. Besides the resources created by the Crusade such as the *Puno en Alto* (Fist on High) radio programme, the July 19 Sandinista Youth Organisation's *El Brigadista* newspaper, the *Desde la A hasta la Z* (from A to Z) television programme and the National Literacy Crusade's bulletin, all the mass media were made available for providing information and agitation around the tasks of the Final Offensive and those that would immediately be required by the Sustainment Programme. Also, various explanatory pamphlets about the activities to be carried out were written for and distributed to the instructors ("Instructivo par-a alfabetizadores" - 'Literacy Instructor's Instruction Book), as well as to the Promoters ("Instructivo para Promotores" - Promoter's instruction Book) and the Coordinators ("Manual para Coordinadores de Educacion Popular" - Manual for Popular Education Coordinators) together with the educational game called "El Beisbol" (Baseball).

Heeding the directive, the *brigadistas* spread out - this time on a massive basis - giving up to three and four sessions daily in order to attend to their students according to their rate of progress. With the help of their technical advisors, they selected monitors and began to train them, organised thousands of CEPs throughout the country, and made a final evaluation of their Sandinista Literacy Units before returning home.

However, in spite of all the efforts put into that "kind of Crusade inside the Crusade" which was the Final Offensive, it was impossible to complete the literacy programme within all the target population, finish turning the Sandinista Literacy Units into CEPs, and guarantee the replacement of the *brigadista* by a Popular Coordinator.

Thus the Sustainment Programme faced a broader and more difficult organisational and pedagogical task than originally anticipated. On the other hand, it began with an incomparable advantage over the Crusade: the experience of the Crusade itself, not only in that its launching pad had virtually prepared the conditions for the transition to post-literacy instruction but, above all, as an experience with profound meaning and strategic scope for the future of popular education in the country.

The sustainment programme as the forge of the popular basic Education programme (EPB)

We would have achieved nothing and the effort and sacrifice invested in this Crusade would go up in smoke were we not to now set out to create a popular system that introduces the recently literate brothers and sisters to the world of education and culture. Nicaragua must become one big popular school, a continuous school, to which the *brigadistas* can always return as teachers when and where they are asked. A school that never closes, that never loses its drive, enthusiasm and fervour. Sergio Ramirez Mercade, member of the National Reconstruction Government Junta (National Literacy Crusade Closing Ceremony, August 23, 1980)

The transition between literacy campaigns and post-literacy instruction has usually been complex¹⁴. If we add this difficulty which is inherent in the transition, to the enormous difficulties and

limitations Nicaragua faced when undertaking this task, it is easy to understand that post-literacy instruction - in the terms and on the massive scale which Nicaragua planned - could not help but stumble across obstacles as large as those faced by the Crusade earlier.

The second post-literacy instruction proposal

The dynamics of the final stretch of the Crusade had demanded an integral reappraisal not only of the Sustainment Programme but of the remaining stages of the adult education process as well. For that reason, at the final evaluation session which took the form of the Second National Literacy Conference (September 5-6, 1980) a second proposal was presented and approved¹⁵. This proposal further developed many aspects of the previous proposal but it also introduced important modifications, no doubt a product of the decisive approach to reality that the Final Offensive represented.

In what way did the changes that took place in the three months between the conferences affect the original version? Obviously there were major differences between a Sustainment Programme which was integrated within the Crusade and based on the same *brigadistas* and Sandinista Literacy Units and a Sustainment Programme taking place after the Crusade, that revolved around emerging Coordinators and Popular Promoters and on CEPs that, to a great extent, were still being formed. In reality, these differences meant that the Sustainment Programme was no longer the same.

1. First Proposal (June 1980)			
National Literacy Crusade	Consolidation and Preparation (Follow-up)	Special Primary Education Programme for Adults	
March 80	August 80		
2. Second Proposal (September 1980)			
National Literacy Campaign	Sustainment	Follow- Up	Special Primary Education Programme for Adults
March 80	August 80	January 81	

Whereas before the Sustainment Programme had been intended for those who had learned to read and write early on, it was now a stage that would cover the entire recently literate population. Also, the function of the Sustainment Programme now would not only be to sustain literacy skills but also to complete the primer for those who had only got halfway through it. Thus, originally conceived of as a post-literacy programme within the Crusade itself, this period would now be both the Crusade's follow-up and remedial programme. As this dual task - which in some ways had already been started during the Final Offensive - would now be the responsibility of a Popular Promoter and a Popular Coordinator who - particularly in the rural areas - were far from meeting the academic requirements originally expected. As a result, the Popular Coordinators would not only have the role of "coordinating" the CEP, seeing that the group continue studying in an organized

manner, but also would take charge of completing teaching, reading and writing to their fellow students. This was an extremely complex pedagogical task for which the Popular Coordinator was obviously not prepared.

The complexity arising from this new situation presented at least two possible alternatives within this second proposal: first, the use of the radio as a crucial element for reinforcing the residual literacy teaching; and second, the replacement of or support for the Popular Coordinator starting in October. October was seen as a crucial moment since classes would start again throughout the country and it was hoped that they would open up the possibility of achieving a significant incorporation of the former literacy instructors as well as including the participation of the rural teachers and eventually, or students in the final years of teacher training, either as teachers or assistants, in the CEPs during the second phase of the Sustainment Programme (October-December). For different reasons, as we shall see below, neither of these two alternatives could fully be put into practice.

Following the Sustainment Programme and beginning in 1981, the Follow-Up Stage (previously called Consolidation and Preparation) was to start. Here also, new conditions had prompted a restructuring of some of the initial considerations.

In the first place, since it had been impossible to carry out the planned census of school facilities, and the number of schools that had been built during the Crusade was far from meeting the actual demand, the study units would continue to be the same CEPs formed for the Sustainment Programme. But it was now specified that these should have a minimum attendance level of fifteen students in the rural zones and twenty-five in the urban areas¹⁶.

In the second place, the problematic presented by residual literacy teaching had made it necessary to restrict the Follow-Up to the recently literate population, postponing the incorporation of the under-educated. On the other hand, the more realistic approach toward the availability of teachers had led to the standards being lowered. Thus, the Popular Coordinators and Promoters were now seen as potential teachers - although only as monitors - and this time it was pointed out that "adults who had not been connected with the Crusade could be considered" on the condition that they had a minimum of a Sixth Grade education. However, reality itself would exact even more flexibility regarding these requirements and, in some cases, even meant that they were completely disregarded.

Thus, the Sustainment Programme was to rely on the coordinated action of three types of teachers. The popular teacher¹⁷ would be responsible for the regular teaching in the CEPs supported by the Popular Coordinators. As well, the Popular Teacher would be responsible for guiding the study groups with support from the Popular Promoters.

It was intended that during this stage the recently literate student "should arrive at a level whereby, even if they do not, later continue with a systematic formation, they would be capable of handling the level of education and training given in various means and forms by the Ministries, the mass organisations and even in the auto-didactic process, with or without guidance (personal or group study)"¹⁸. One of these future means would be the Special Primary Education Programme for Adults which at this time was still seen in a very general way.

Once again, the project went just so far. In the same way that the results of the First Conference and the Crusade's final proposal, the Second Conference and the development of the Sustainment Programme were bound to demonstrate this second proposal's possibilities and limits.

The Sustainment Programme in Action

The very beginning of the Sustainment Programme saw a drastic drop in participation at all levels. Naturally, the huge mobilization which had taken place during five months could not last indefinitely. Following August 15, after a campaign which had kept the entire country alert and in

the face of the Revolution's old and new tasks which could not be put off any longer, demobilization was inevitable. Society resumed its specific tasks: the mass organisations, whose assistance was crucial to guarantee the smooth advance of the Sustainment Programme, objectively could not respond to the new demands.

Effectively, classes were reopened on October 6, but this did not attract the incorporation of rural teachers or teacher training students that was needed. In the cities, where the uninterrupted participation of a good number of the former *brigadistas* had been counted on, many said that "they could not or did not wish to cooperate after August 15"¹⁹. The recently created Vice-Ministry of Adult Education was thus without a large part of its own forces and faced a shortage of resources just when it was being structured and organised internally. As a result of all this, the Popular Coordinators and Promoters - far from being transitory in any way - were forced to put themselves to the test not only as auxiliary monitors of regular CEP teachers but also as Popular Teachers themselves.

What were the objective difficulties found in the transition to the post-literacy programme? On the one hand, in many cases, the Sustainment began without there being a Coordinator. Promoter or CEP in place. This made it necessary - just as during the first part of the Crusade - to dedicate a good deal of effort toward organisational and administrative tasks, thus diverting resources and time from the basic tasks.

Time constraints resulted in the *brigadistas* leaving many places without first having organised CEPs or, indeed, without even leaving behind substitutes. Also, they came up against an initial and predictable resistance to accepting the responsibility of the role of the Coordinator: for a start, it was an unpaid job that demanded a minimum of two two-hour sessions a week, not including the long trek by foot from one place to another or transportation costs; in addition, there was the natural insecurity and fear entailed in taking on a task for which one was objectively and subjectively unprepared.

However, there were thousands of people who, having learned to read and write during the Crusade, were willing to take on the challenge - as the following letters indicate.

1. Mr Carlos Tunnerman. I hope you're feeling fine like me. I'm writing to you now that I learnt how to with the *companeras*. AlPhabetizers from la Laguna and to tell you that I'm willing to teach my brothers and sisters who are not AlPhabetized when the *companeras* leave.

VICTorino Torres

2. La Pita: October 29. 1980

"Year of the Literary Crusade"

Companero Announcer of the radio station of the Programme *Puno en alto*. Accept a warm and revolutionary Greeting from Promoter Jose Maria Garcia, Velasquez.

I want to say how grateful I am to the *companeros* that took Part in the Literacy Crusade since they freed me and others from the ignorance to which we had been subjected, and following their example Now I Am integrated into the CEP So that I too can contribute in this way to the people who live in my district that were left behind and bring them up to everyone else's level.

3. North Sextor of Acoyapa 10 20 1980

Thankx totherevolution I am very happy because I am teaching my *companeros* to read--during this stage of the Sustainment inspite of my having just learned how to myself.

Clemente nunez Bravo.

4. Sunday, October 12, 1980.

Companero Minister of education Carlos Tunnermann. I rite you this letter in order to send you a Revolution ary Greeting. After this I will tell you the folowing I am one of the thousands and thousands of pesants helping our beloved Free Nicaragua One of the so many ow had been marjinalised and

exploited for not nowinghow to read or rite we lived at the mercy of the borjois sellouts who tookadvantage of us and our innorance to keepus enslaved with their blak conscience and their ambishun for money they tricked us like children but today for me and maNY brothers and sisters in these rustic and far away mountins the rays of a new sun have apeered, a nu dawn Shines in every Pesant home todey thanks to God and our Regolution we can read andrite a little I feel ashamed that I no nothing about the history of my homeland I am already 33 years old I can only do a little for my country but in spite of this lam willing to be evan a little husefull I am a Coordinater of a small group of fellow Pesants and lam leeching them the litTle I learnt from my *campanero brigadistas*.

5. I can't write verywell but withthelittle I learnt. I feel very hapy and very grateful I'll tel you, companero, that when I relised that my *companera briqadista* said Im going away soon seh told me that! would be like a Coordinater it sur prized me because I never thaut I would be able to do sumthing usfull to help my brother and sister pesants but now I've relised how usfull it is to read and rite, thatis why I feel hapy andat the sametime Committed To our Revolution, with the literacy Crusade nu ideas and hopes grow inthehart of all my brother and sister Pesants.

I live in a small Town call Sanluts in this Town there was a brave and determined Companera. She shared witus all the misery and povretys Somoza and his pack of vulchurs lef us: AraSeli-Errera-Martinicia was the brave girl - who ignoring her parents and brothers and sisters kame to lenus a hand and tofree us from that horrible slavery that no knowing how to read andrite is -- Somosa ' s legacy

I dedikate a brotherly and Revolutionary Greeting to this sister who even risked herown life to untie the ropes that kept us tiedup, the blindfold that didnot letus see today light shines thanx to the bravery of althe *Companeros* who participated in the literacy Crusade - many thankx to all of them.

I am a member of the C-DS and lam in the people's Milisha ... As a monitor Itak my leeve of all the Coordinators from these mountins we will fulfil The Comitment our Revolution has assigned us out of all my fellow literacy students Only too were taut--due to the shOrt time I was working with them--I will cuntinu teaching the rest of my Companeros in my free time since the coffee Harvest HasStarted and it is the time to Finnish off the post-literacy teaching, but out of the duty I feel Being the Nicaraguan lam i want to keepon teaching the little Iknow.

A greeting to all the Nicaraguan people Espesially toall my brotherpesants

Carlos and Sandino showed us the Way

Caetulo Olivas Castellon

However, even if the initial fear and resistance could be overcome, it became clear from the very beginning of the Sustainment Programme that the appearance of the Popular Teacher implied a profound upheaval of concepts, values and social relations, that was impossible to carry out automatically. The Popular Coordinator/Promoter's own identity, their former position as "just another student" in the group or "just another member" of the community, their obvious inexperience in handling teaching-learning situations and their very presence in effect embodied a break with the deeply rooted traditional image of the "teacher" among the people and provided an immediate contrast with the image of the literacy instructor whose role they were beginning to assume. Thus, even where the *briqadistas* had left a monitor behind in their place, there were CEPs that soon disintegrated due to the open or veiled rejection of the Coordinator. It was only on the basis of perseverance and dedication that the Popular Teachers were gradually able to win the confidence of their neighbors, their family and friends and the other members of their Sandinista Literacy Units and to be accepted for what they were, with all their weaknesses and potential.

There was a fundamental factor which is practically inevitable in a massive and intensive literacy campaign, that would enormously complicate not only the transition between the Crusade and the Sustainment Programme but also the later development of the adult education process: this factor comprised 42,639 people who are left in the middle of the literacy process on August 15, along with the 12.96% illiteracy rate and the motivation to learn that the Crusade had left behind. From the very start, this large group of students who had not fully learned to read and write pressed to join the CEPs, together with large numbers of altogether new students.

This situation posed the first big dilemma for the poet-literacy programme already under way. While it is true that the first proposal had foreseen the possibility of a remaining number of illiterates and semi-illiterates and even the need to implement a Residual Crusade, all these factors had been envisaged in the stage of Sustainment and under the responsibility of a teacher with more than a primary school education and with previous experience as a literacy instructor. In the event, the Residual Crusade had inherited a Popular Coordinator/Promoter, faced with a task of undeniable magnitude and urgency.

At that time, one possible solution could have been not to allow semi-illiterates and new students to register, or even to postpone poet-literacy instruction until all the teachers needed were available to until the Coordinators and Promoters were trained by means of that “special, accelerated, in-the-saddle training plan”²⁰. However, the response was to reaffirm the decision to carry out an uninterrupted process, giving the Popular Coordinators and Promoters a vote of confidence: “We said, if we are going to wait to have teachers who have graduated from teacher training programmes in order to start literacy instruction, if we wait for the peasants to stop being peasants in order to take on teaching tasks, we will never eradicate illiteracy.”²¹

Thus, the juxtaposition of literacy and post-literacy instruction - of the Crusade and the Sustainment - would come to substantially redefine the role of the Popular Coordinators and Promoters. But it also resulted in a new reality that emerged from the spontaneous initiative of the grass-roots themselves: namely, the mixed CEP. In a great many cases and particularly in the rural areas, the CEPs began to meet the needs of both the recently literate and semi-literate adults and even new literacy students and the under-educated.

One of the letters sent during this stage to the *Puno en Alto* (Fist Held High) radio programme bears witness to the complex and heterogeneous nature of the CEPs during this period better than any description we can give.

the mountains San Nicolas district

Department of Leon

Letter from the ceps.

To the *companeros* at *Puno en Alto*

A revolushunaryGreeting and after thisgreeting I goOn to the following

There are 7 of us studying 4 already finished Elamanecer del pueblo and operaciones practica and we went over the Sustainment manual and magazine*. The other 3 already know the letters and can write their names two

Nowweneeda teacher to coach them inreadingand Writing im arithmetic too

With Christ and mary we teach reading and wrting everyday

Signed Magdalena valdivia B.

**El Amanecer del Pueblo* (Dawn of the People) was the primer used to teach reading and writing: the Operaciones Practicos (Practical Problems) Notebook was used for teaching arithmetic. The Sustainment manual and magazine were materials designed for use during this stage.

This was the situation that prevailed throughout the entire Sustainment Programme. Operation Carole Fonseca Amador - a research project carried out in four departments in the country in order to diagnose the CEPs during the second phase of the sustainment - showed a “marked difference of levels in the majority of the CEPs: some are going one lesson in the Primer, others are doing other lessons, others are in the first week of the Sustainment, others are in the third, etc ... and revealed that forty per cent of the members of the CEPs were still in the midst of learning to read and write”²².

All this further complicated the Popular Coordinators’ tasks. Not only did they have to fulfill two functions (literacy instructor and post-literacy instructor) at the same time and in the same CEP, but they had to count more on their own creativity and initiative than on the training and reinforcement

they urgently needed. In effect, the organisational and administrative challenge facing the national, departmental and local bodies impeded them from providing any systematic follow-up to the incipient training begun during the Final Offensive. In any case this training would not have been sufficient to guarantee efficient pedagogical progress within CEPs given these new contingencies. Moreover, as Operation Carlos Fonseca Amador also showed, the overload of organisational and administrative tasks meant that the Saturday Sandinista Workshops had to be turned into instruments for operational coordination rather than pedagogical guidance. Also, the educational materials produced for the Sustainment - numbers 1 and 2 of *Revista 19 de Julio* (July 19 magazine) - proved to be inadequate and too complex for the actual level of literacy achieved by the majority of the Crusade's graduates.

Puna en Alto devoted part of its daily programming and good deal of its efforts toward giving instructions about the handling of residual literacy instruction. However, this support turned out to be weak and ineffective in terms of the "second teaching element" role it was expected to play during this stage. The report concluded that, together with the scarcity of radios, "the main difficulty is that its programming does not coincide with the activities being carried out in many CEPs"²³. Linear programming which took Lesson 10 in the primer - assumed to be the last lesson reached by those students who had not totally learned to read and write as homogeneous and uniform on a national level, proved incongruent with the needs of the mixed, heterogeneous and unstable CEPs that were emerging throughout the country.

While the organisational problems faced by Sustainment were extremely complex in themselves, a new factor emerged to complicate the process even further. This was the decision to scrap the Follow Up as a separate stage and to integrate it as the First Level of what was now called the Programme of Popular Basic Education. That displacement of the Follow Up meant that Sustainment really became a transition stage between the Crusade and the EPB. As a result, to the specific functions of Sustainment was added the very one the Crusade itself had performed in its 'moment': that of serving as a model and as an operational blueprint for the following stage.

This helps explain why Sustainment had to be prolonged 3 months beyond what had finally been programmed - until March 1981. It also explains many of the limitations and differences that arose at all levels. A regular adult education programme was now imminent. It now became the central purpose of this stage in proceedings to ensure a successful transition. Faced with these realities, the main efforts were directed - and particularly after September - toward planning and organising the Programme of Popular Basic Education.

Obviously, in view of the conditions, all this could not be done without paying high pedagogical costs. In fact, for the thousands of recent literates, this stage was precisely the interruption that every attempt had been made to avoid. As Operation Carlos Fonseca Amador indicated, at the end of the Sustainment forty per cent of CEP students were still struggling with an endless primer. A person who had been illiterate just a few months before and who found him or herself in such unfavorable conditions could not solve a pedagogical challenge that overwhelmed even the best of intentions. Therefore from a pedagogical point of view, the results of this stage - the true dimensions of which would be seen throughout the development of the Popular Basic Education Programme - were the most faithful testimony of this exceptionally difficult but also exceptionally rich and enlightening period.

For that very reason, the Sustainment Programme should not be evaluated principally from a pedagogical point of view. In spite of all the obstacles, between 150,000 and 180,000 people had continued or started their education in the thousands of CEPs operating throughout the country²⁴. In this way, the Sustainment Programme's main achievement, was keeping grass-roots organisation active around educational activities, perhaps even more than maintaining reading and writing skills. The CEP's efficacy was proven not only in terms of its larger size in comparison to the Sandinista Literacy Unit but also in terms of its possibility to go beyond the family unit that had characterized

the latter. In fact, the CEP was a genuine body of community organization capable of gaining autonomy and of stimulating the formation of community leaders.

The first positive results of the Sustainment Programme were seen from the outset. Specifically, one of the conclusions the Technical and Pedagogical Commission presented at the Second Literacy Conference, pointed out that "one proof of the independence being gained by the CEPs as community units is that, upon finding themselves forced to do without outside help, they have assumed their own leadership and are solving their own organisational and pedagogical problems which is giving them confidence in themselves to solve future problems"²⁵.

In this process, the Popular Teachers acquired a preponderant role and began to emerge as true community leaders. The following extract of a letter sent to the Vice Minister of Adult Education by a Coordinator during this period describes very eloquently the role played by the Popular Coordinators and Promoter's in community self-management, using the CEPs as a base:

I've gone from house to house taking a poll and rallying these children's parents' support to help open a school and all the parents agree with me since I'm the coordinator. They ask me where we could build the school and at the same time I remember my teachers - the Primer and the pencil and I've learned something from them in order to be able to address you so that you can lead me and help me with these tasks I'm presenting to you. I've only found one suitable site for the school, bordering on Sector One. That is all from Coordinator Justo Hernandez Acuna. Municipality of Jalapa.²⁶

Thus, in spite of initial rejection ("Aunque se burlen de nuestros coordinadores, no abandonaremos nuestras labores" - Even though they may make fun of our coordinators, we won't give up our work), of the complex job awaiting them ("No importa que quedemos como esqueletos, pero no dejaremos ningun analfabeto" - It doesn't matter if we wither away to skeletons, we won't leave anyone illiterate) and of their clear understanding that they faced a task far beyond their abilities ("Aunque no somos maestros de gran nivel, sabremos cumplir con nuestro papel" - Even though we're not very skilled teachers, we will do our job well), the Popular Teachers made their CEPs progress with dedication, enthusiasm and creativity: "Cayendo, levantando, los CEP avanzando" (Falling down, getting up, the CEPs progress). "En la paz triunfante, los CEP seguiran adelante" (In triumphant Peace, the CEPs will continue moving ahead). "Patria culturizada, en los CEP continuaremos la Cruzada" (In a country which educates its people, the CEPs will continue the Crusade). "Si los brigadistas estan ausentes, los del CEP estan presentes" (While the brigadistas are absent, the CEP's members are present). "Campes-inos y trabajadores sustituyen a los alfabetizadores" (Peasants and workers substitute for the literacy teachers). "En cada alfabetizado consciente, un coordinador presente" (In very conscious student who has learned to read and write, a coordinator is present). "Con los Promotores y Coordinadores, de los CEP saldran hasta escritores" (With the Promoters and Coordinators p the CEPs will even produce writers). "Si la ignorancia ee regresara" el CEP organizado la derrotara" (If ignorance were to return, the organized CEPs would defeat it). "Bajo l lluvia y viento, no dejaremos la tarea de Sostenimiento" (Come wind or rain, we won't abandon the tasks of the Sustainment Programme). "Aunque tengamoe que morir, enseñaremos a leer y eacribir" (Even though we may have to die for it, we will teach reading and writing). "Pueblo que aprende a estudiar, nadie mas lo podra enganar" (A people who learn how to study won't be fooled anymore). "En cada CEPista, un miliciano sandinista" (In every CEP member, a Sandinista militia member). "En cada coordinador, Carlos Fonseca Amador" (In every coordinator, lives the spirit of Carlos Fonseca Amador). "Hoy somos eiples coordinadores, pero manana seremos futuros profesores" (Today we're just coordinators, but tomorrow we'll be teachers). "En cada CEP organizado, un Somocista aplastoda" (For every CEP that's organised, another Somocista is crushed).

These and many other slogans which emerged during this stage reflect the spirit that encouraged the Sustainment and made it possible, and summarize what one of the hundreds of letters that were written describe in the following way:

Year of the Literary Crusade

Achuapa. Dept. Leon

El Cacao, municipality of Achuapa

Campaneros who work on the *puno en alto* programme, accept a fraternal, revolutionary greeting on behalf of the members in the Popular Education Collectives of the el Caco district.

Companeros, here in this district we are working hard on the tasks of the Sustainment stage, there are 12 CEPs continuing the work started by the guerrilla-fighters of our great Literacy Campaign, we will always follow the ideals for which the martyrs of our literacy campaign dyed heroically, because as the slogan goes, after the first step we will never stop walking. We have certain problems, e.g., attendance but we always work hard because we know that this is our battlefield and from here we will fight as long as our strength holds out, because as peasants we want to shout like the members of the People's Literacy Army. Commander Carlos we did our duty

we have another problem and it is arithmetic because very few people have radios and it is really quite a problem, with nothing more to add we sign off here hoping to continue harvesting success in our work for the wellbeing of our people.

Sincerely,

Sebastian Espinoza M.

promoter

"In Sandino's homeland, worker-peasant alliance."

Thus, during the seven months that the Sustainment Programme lasted, the leaching formula of the Popular Coordinator/Promoter and the organizational formula of the CEP were confirmed as a valid unit not only due to their circumstantial functionality but also, and above all, due to their enormous potential for generating a truly popular model of education which was under the immediate direction of the popular sectors and was indirectly aimed at the consolidation of a unique and relatively autonomous form of popular organisation.

By this means, the Sustainment established a new alternative in which the people had become not only the beneficiary but also the active agent of their own education.

The popular basic education programme: A path cleared along the way

We have no specific formulas, there is no written text which can tell us what to do. The only guarantee is to maintain this level of mobilization, of reflection, of permanent evaluation, of daily contact with the popular classes. And day by day, we will discover where the path lies.

Francisco Lacayo, Vice-Minister of Adult Education

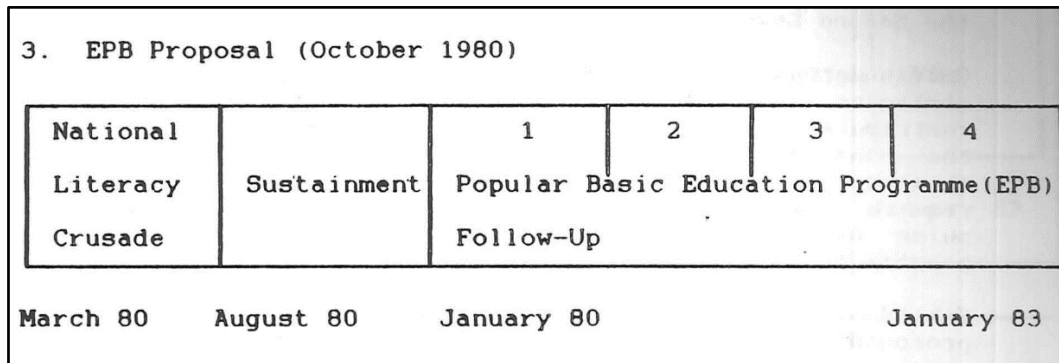
(First National Literacy Conference, June 6, 1981)

During the Crusade, the magnitude and urgency of the tasks at hand prevented detailed planning of the adult education programme that would be developed later. At that point in time, the only certainty was its necessity. In the short run, this necessity would require consolidating and deepening the great national effort that the Crusade had meant, whose sense would be given only "to the degree that its educational and popular activity are prolonged in an Adult Education Programme guaranteeing the masses a flexible, permanent, progressive and systematic education."²⁷

It was within and during the Sustainment period that the programme's general lines began to take shape and to be refined. In October 1980, the first document discussing preliminary thoughts about organisation and structure of the popular education programme appeared.²⁸

The Programme would consist of four levels - each one equivalent to a school semester - and would be roughly equivalent to the primary, school education given in the national education

system, after which the students could “register in the basic general cycle, the basic production cycle or any technical major at the intermediate level”²⁹. The programme would start in January 1981, beginning with the First Level and a parallel level of Permanent Literacy Instruction. Later, the Second, Third and Fourth levels would be opened semester by semester so that by mid-1982 all levels would be functioning simultaneously and, by the end of that same year, the Programme would have its first graduates.



The fact that in April 1983, two additional levels were added to the original four, and that the programme was barely into its fourth semester in early 1984 demonstrates once again that the successive approaches to reality have been responsible for redefining the project’s possibilities and limits.

What were then the decisive elements of contrast? The Sustainment had shown the impossibility of continuing to rely on large scale replacement or reinforcement of the Popular Coordinators and Promoters and, therefore, had established an ongoing need for Popular Teachers in any continuing educational process. This, together with the decision to eliminate the Follow-Up as a prior step, made important modifications to the nature and structure of Popular Basic Education. Substituting the notion of a “special primary education for adults” with “popular basic education” demonstrates the limits of this reformulation to a certain extent.

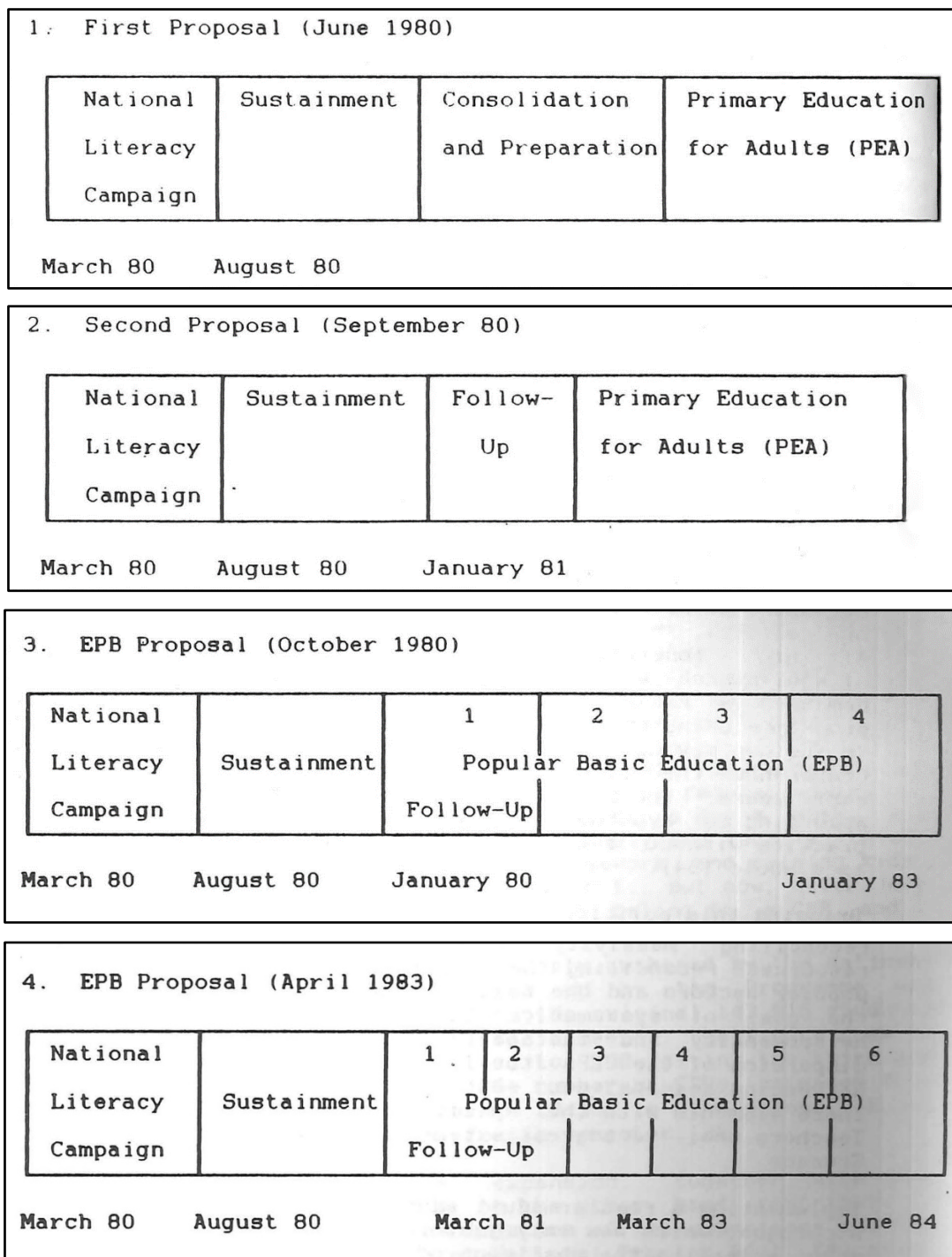
Thus, while the figure behind the early versions of the Special Primary Education for Adults (PEA) was a regular teacher or, in any case, a person “with the necessary teaching skills” and with “more than a primary education” the Popular Coordinators and Promoters were already behind the Popular Basic Education Programme as the basic teaching supports. Also, while the search for equivalence with the country’s regular primary education system had been important in the PEA - nevertheless it was made known that the PEA would not be a “reproduction of the ‘school’ system nor would its contents be a pedagogical extrapolation of the basic education given to children, for adults”³⁰ - behind the EPB was basically the search for what “historically we believe the adult belonging to the popular sectors needs in order to begin to participate more intensely in all areas of the Revolution”³¹.

On the other hand, the objective need to consolidate literacy skills before starting the Programme - a matter confirmed by the Sustainment - meant that the First Level became the follow-up period. This had previously been seen as a separate prior stage. This meant postponing the “start of a systematic cultural formation of adults”³² i.e. basic education in itself, until the Second Level.

Once underway, the Programme’s own development and the endless obstacles and contradictions that have crossed its path, contributed to setting its pace and reaffirmed time and again that one of “this Programme’s basic features is that its strategies can never be defined from behind a desk because they require great flexibility, they demand that one be monitoring the pulse of the process and of variations and turns within the popular masses.”³³

Behind these internal rearrangements and displacements is a profoundly complex and contradictory and yet, profoundly dynamic, creative and invigorating reality. Behind them there is the permanent resolve and effort to overcome obstacles and limitations and to achieve with every

step further integration and cohesion with the revolutionary project. Behind them there is also an attitude totally open to innovation and constant revision, to the endless search demanded by every undertaking which blazes new trails.



What challenges did setting up a basic adult education programme entail for revolutionary Nicaragua, within the process of education begun with the Crusade?

In the first place, it was a matter of defining and building a programme that - while finding two great sources of inspiration in the War of Liberation and the Crusade and a laboratory for trial and error in the Sustainment did not suppose merely prolonging earlier stages but rather sought to define a qualitatively different model based on the CEP and the Popular Coordinator-Promoter,

thereby breaking substantially with the model of the Sandinista Literacy Unit and the *brigadistas* employed during the literacy campaign.

Unlike the Crusade, which had found a frame of reference in previous similar literacy instruction experiences, this new stage had no sufficiently close or related precedents from which to elaborate itself. The historical and, in many cases, social and cultural differences between Nicaragua and other revolutionary processes which had carried out similar educational experiences the special quality which the Popular Teachers social and cultural traits had stamped on the Nicaraguan process, made it necessary to seek answers and direction from within Nicaragua's own reality.

All this - together with the impossibility of establishing terms of equivalence with a national education system that itself demanded a radical and parallel transformation - led to the programme being conceived as a process that had to be developed in its own making. At the First National Popular Adult Education Conference, the Vice-Minister said "We believe that during the early years, the planning of this programme will have to be done according to hypotheses constantly being challenged by daily practice, without ever losing sight of the revolutionary project as a whole."³⁴

Bringing this political and pedagogical challenge to a programme that aimed to be massive, progressive and systematic, entailed solving multiple contradictions. Among other things, it implied reconciling 'massivity' with a shortage of material and human resources; reconciling the Programme's pace with that of the popular sectors and the revolutionary project itself: reconciling the goal of systematic and progressive education with the heterogeneity and instability of the potential students, the dispersion of the CEPs, the limited time available for studying, harvesting seasons, etc. But above all, it meant reconciling all these elements with the specific characteristics of the Popular Teachers who, to a great extent, were themselves products of the Crusade.

Implementing a regular adult education programme in revolutionary Nicaragua, which was only just beginning to take its first steps, meant accepting the challenge of turning everything that at first glance might appear negative into something positive; the challenge of "300% more creativity and revolutionary imagination for converting all around us into a direct or indirect tool for teaching-learning; ... 300% more dedication and austerity to know how to use intelligently the limited resources we have ... ; reaffirming our traditional principle of the multiplier effect that guarantees that none of our activities be carried out unless they lead to their own multiplication"³⁵.

The popular basic education programme underway

In March 1981, almost exactly a year after the National Literacy Crusade had begun, the first semester of the EPB Programme was initiated. Thought of as a period of experimentation and apprenticeship, this first semester would serve to forebode and synthesize a good part of the Programme's future problematic and nature, unearthing contradictions and establishing tendencies that would be reaffirmed in later semesters.

The first data which allowed the Programme to be evaluated were the 143,816 people who registered for the first semester. Seen in the light of the over 480,000 people who had come out of the Crusade and the estimates made by the Vice-Ministry of Adult Education, this registration figure would appear to be low³⁶. But bearing in mind normal behaviour patterns following massive literacy campaigns, the large number of older people who took part in the Crusade and saw it as a final stage, the fact that the "mass organisations did not lend the support hoped for during the agitation, motivation and registration period"³⁷ the prolonged and irregular nature of the Sustainment Programme and, especially, the living conditions of the masses, this initial registration figure be interpreted as 143,816 poor people who were eager to continue or to begin their regular education, sacrificing two or more hours of rest after a day's work. All this because, as one woman student simply and lucidly stated, "Before you were only good for doing housework and raising kids. Since they were going to school. I couldn't. But now, after July 19 and so wonderful a Crusade, today I belong to a CEP and I don't plan on quitting, because it's as necessary as drinking a glass of water."³⁸

The motivation to study which was rudely awakened by the National Literacy Crusade and capitalised on by the Programme was maintained in later semesters: from the original 143,816 students who registered during the first semester, the figure rose to 167,852 during the second semester, to 148,369 in the third and 166,208 in the fourth. Also, the number of CEPs increased from 15,187 during the first semester to 20,561 in the second, 18,444 in the third and 19,056 in the fourth semester.³⁹

However, this quantitative expansion, together with the uninterrupted pace of work did, on the other hand, contribute to limiting the qualitative consolidation of the experience and the ground gained.⁴⁰ At the First National Popular Adult Education Conference held halfway through the first semester (June 6-7, 1981), a retrospective look highlighted the urgent need for a period dedicated to gathering forces that would permit the reinforcement of the levels achieved, and to allow wider margins for planning, evaluation and control of the pedagogical tasks. This period was not possible, however, until the third semester had ended, when the state of national emergency, a redivision of the country into regions and the Programme's own internal problems made a break necessary. As a result, a fourth semester was postponed until the beginning of the following year. This allowed a pause for collective summation and evaluation of the distance already covered as well as for reflecting upon and planning systematically the road that lay immediately ahead: in effect, the first time since the tasks of the National Literacy Crusade had been undertaken that such a 'pause' had been possible.

The heterogeneity characterizing the Programme became clear from the start, due not only to the accumulative overlapping of the different levels but also to the differences among the students seen in social extraction, age, academic levels and modes of schooling. For that reason, the First Conference posed the need to "define the strategic and priority nuclei coherent with the Revolution's priorities. Thus, for example, Popular Basic Education has priority over the Permanent Literacy Classes; within the different age groups participating in the Programme, adolescents and those involved in production are the priority. And we must establish priorities among the different sectors of production according to the definitions and criteria indicated by our Revolutionary Government"⁴¹.

However, during its first two years the Programme continued moving toward a growing heterogeneity. The significant participation of children - which had already been a definite tendency and reality during the Crusade and the Sustainment-increasingly emerged as a constant element (between 20 and 30% of the student population) and as another factor to be integrated into the Programme's logic, demanding a redefinition of the very concept of "adult education". Also the young 10 to 14 year old Coordinators' and Promoters' effective and enthusiastic participation soon questioned the validity of the original requirement to exclude those "under 14 years old".

The strong predominance of the rural sector - 79% of the registered students and 84% of the CEPs belonged to this sector during the first semester - which has remained constant during the EPB, shed light on the basically peasant character that the Programme would have and indicated the strategic role that it could play in the transformation of agriculture in Nicaragua, as an axis of support for agrarian reform and the cooperative movement. But how could the specific needs and problems pertaining to the peasant sector and agricultural development be dealt with inside a single programme which had content, methods, teaching materials and schedule throughout the entire nation?⁴²

A first step taken in this area was the publication of the *Caminemos* (Let's Walk) magazine, a support material aimed at accompanying the thousands of farm workers who are forced to temporarily leave their CEPs during the harvest seasons⁴³. The need, however to "find an answer in every case, and suitable answers according to whether one is dealing with the countryside or the city"⁴⁴ remains an open challenge facing the Programme.

Contrary to all calculations and forecasts, the pressure for literacy instruction continued to be surprisingly high. If the Permanent Literacy Classes had been foreseen as a task parallel to the

Programme's development, its magnitude - 257% of the goal set for the first semester - certainly was not.

The steady and heavy demand to learn to read and write - between 30 and 40% of the registered students - has been maintained in later semesters. Evidently, the registered students include people who make up the 12.96% of the population who are still illiterate and also include semi-illiterates - as the high figure confirms that only made it halfway or even reverted to illiteracy within the duration of the Crusade.

Contributing factors included, in the first place, "the high incidence of regressive illiteracy that occurred between the end of the National Literacy Crusade and the beginning of the Sustainment Programme"⁴⁵ and, undoubtedly, during the Sustainment Programme itself. In addition, the first stretch of the Programme objectively could not solve the problems posed by the Permanent Literacy Classes. On the one hand, "the gradual regression of the recent literate population which took place during the Sustainment, was not taken fully into consideration"⁴⁶ and preparations had not been made to meet the magnitude of the problem. On the other hand, greater efforts were put into the First Level, given that it had been prioritised during the first semester and literacy instruction was relegated to second place, resulting in a high drop-out rate and a low percentage of promotions from this level during the semester. However, beyond all possible planning, the same dilemma persisted: how to tackle literacy instruction again with Popular Teachers who, according to the data gathered in the second semester, had themselves either only passed their own literacy instruction (4%), the First Grade (16%) or experienced a few years of primary school (32%)?

The importance and weight that teaching literacy acquired during the programme has slowly made it necessary to divert resources and a great deal of effort from the EPB's own tasks and successively adopt different measures. Thus, starting with the second semester, it was decided that Permanent Literacy Classes would be incorporated, as a regular level of the Programme, now called the Introductory Level. Simultaneously, a new primer and teacher's manual were constructed according to the Popular Coordinator's needs and possibilities⁴⁷. A plan of "open literacy instruction" was also drawn up consisting of a kind of mini-Crusade to start in 1982. Coinciding with the beginning of the third semester. Finally, within the framework of the UNESCO sponsored Major Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean whose principal objectives include eradicating illiteracy by the end of the century - literacy instruction was made a priority within the Cive Ministry of Adult Education's plan of action for 1983.

Internally, the most direct and immediate result of the push for literacy instruction was the definitive institutionalisation not only of the mixed CEP but also the mixed training workshop. Thus, contradictory to the original plan, the CEPs, the Coordinators and the training workshops began to diversify in order simultaneously to cover literacy instruction and the other levels of the EPB. "We thought that every Popular Teacher would have people in the First Level, in the Second Level, in Literacy Classes. And when we went to the rural areas, it turned out that we found Popular Teachers with people learning to read and write and others in the First Level and in the Second Level (in the same CEP). How did they manage? They saw to the more advanced students first who, in turn helped the others. And when we saw how they did it, we then drew up the guidelines on how it was to be done. But this didn't come out of our desks."⁴⁸

These mixed CEPs - 51% of the total during the first semester, 90% of which were located in the rural sectors - not only maintained similar proportions in later semesters, but also their internal composition became increasingly heterogeneous as new levels were introduced. Obviously, this has resulted in the growing complexity' of the task facing the Programme and, especially, facing the Popular Teachers.

With the role of the Popular Teacher as the pillar of the Programme (and the great challenge this implied) clearly perceived from the first semester, it was stated that "the Coordinators are the mirror and the measure with which the texts, the methodology, the organisation and the problems are to be tackled. Every decision must be taken bearing them in mind because they are the students

and the ultimate expression of the magisterial universe⁴⁹. As experience made very clear, this need turned out to be particularly acute and pressing in respect of pedagogy.

In effect, and contrary to the norm in the area of planning and elaborating teaching materials, the Popular Teacher forced them to be conceived not so much from the position of the students, but from that of a teacher- student- who teaches-learns through them. But additionally, growing diversification and the CEP's own internal composition and dynamics presented the challenge of finding a method and designing textbooks that would meet the demands of an internally heterogeneous CEP and a characteristically unstable population.

It was, then, a matter of "setting up a scientific and effective teaching-learning methodology that was at the same time, simple, agile and flexible,"⁵⁰ that would be able to harmonize all the factors in play and which would be within the reach of the Popular Coordinator and Promoter. However, rather than imposing that methodology, it was necessary to create and recreate it through constant attention to the dynamics of the popular sectors and the material everyday dynamics of the CEPs.

As a part of this attempt, the two basic textbooks used by the Programme - *Nuestra Trinchera* ("Our Trench" for language skills) and *En March* ("Underway" for arithmetic) have undergone constant revisions in an effort to incorporate the suggestions made at the Programme's base and to decode the keys to a permanent refining of its content, methods and techniques.

Various factors have entered into the frequent reformulation and restructuring of the plans, curricula and textbooks - including the absence of a strict definition regarding the character and nature of EPB which, in a constant search for identity, has undergone numerous shifts in its relation with the national education system. Originally conceived of as a special primary education for adults which would be equivalent to a sixth grade primary school education. It later began to be seen as integrated into the "Battle for a Fourth Grade Education"⁵¹, and even to be presented as a programme without equivalence. Thus, as the Minister of Education staged, it was more a "slowly but surely doing away with the original notion of an accelerated primary education", for it is not appropriate to think of "adult education in terms of a strict grade by grade equivalence (with primary schooling), but rather to think of a broad equivalence in terms of overall levels of educational attainment".⁵²

"The lack of experience within the Programme, the attempt to harness us to the school calendar, the lack of effective integration with other institutions and mass organisations, poor cohesion with other state-initiated programmes, and the increased demands of the cropping season within the productive cycle",⁵³ are other factors contributing to constraints on study time which have come up in each semester.

All of these things have had a marked effect on the performance of the study plans and programmes, leading finally to a decision to add the 5th and 6th levels.

The pedagogic method drawn up for the Programme has also required some revision. Even though its three step approach - 1. Let us observe and analyse reality: 2. Let us interpret reality: 3. Let us transform reality - accords with the basic principles of the new education, the inadequate way in which it has been applied in the great majority of CEPs has shown a need to modify it. For a start, the needs of a Popular Teacher are essentially different from those of "the educator" or "the animator", upon whom the methodology of popular education observing the principle Practice-Theory-Practice⁵⁴ is predicated. Secondly, the mixed CEP is a far cry from the 'ideal' CEP, in which the steps of observing, analysing, interpreting, and transforming reality could effectively be 'made real' in collective dialogue.

In the area of resources, the pressing need to bolster the work of the coordinator led to implementing a Programme Manual in which the steps to be followed during each lesson are itemised and an answer key to the various exercises provided. Actual experience has, however, demonstrated limitations in this tool. For while it ensures that Coordinators fulfil their task within

the set expectations, the Manual has in practice become a kind of recipe book and been followed literally. In this way it has encouraged a mechanised approach to method, eliminating any possibility of creativity and sacrificing the Coordinator's individual development through the answer key."⁵⁵

The possibility of easing the burden in the area of teaching materials was obviously linked to the need to systematically train the Popular Teachers, which to some extent had been delayed since the Sustainment. Thus, shortly before the first semester was to start and using the same multiplication method for training during the National Literacy Crusade, a series of workshops was conducted with the participation of thousands of Coordinators and Promoters throughout the country. Unfortunately, having a single schedule for the entire country, which conflicted with the coffee harvest, etc., resulted in the training being neither as effective nor universal as planned. Later, during the first two semesters, countless factors combined to ensure that there would be no systematic follow-up to this initial effort. The need to guarantee textbooks for use in the first two semesters forced the national bodies to adopt an exhausting workplace which demanded more time at the desk than in close contact with the CEPs. It also limited the programming and feedback of the *Puno en Alto* radio programme via a via the strategic role it had been given for training the Coordinators in a sort of correspondence course, and hindered consistency in setting up the planned *Unidades de Capacitacion Permanente* (Permanent Training Units). Also, the strong and persistent presence of the mixed workshops. This significantly hampered the systematic and permanent training through the *Taller Semanal* (Weekly Workshop) which was destined to become "true teacher training school for the popular sectors.

By this third semester, all this together with the growing complexity of the Programme's content as successive levels were incorporated resulted in the inevitable: summed up by a Coordinator interviewed by *puno en Alto* in this way - "I would like to continue helping my *companeros* in the CEP but I've reached the limits of the little training I had."⁵⁶

Effectively, by the 3rd level those recently literate peasant teachers who had been able to make progress during the First and Second Levels had reached the limits of their own training in the areas of the natural sciences, history, geography, mathematics, grammar, etc. The course content now surpassed their own ability to comprehend and put them - literally - in the same situation as their students. This was not so much, then, a problem with their *pedagogical* competence as with their learning experience and knowledge.

The contradiction between the Popular Teacher and the curriculum had thus reached its limits. Under these conditions, training became an unpostponable task that jeopardized the Programme's own continuity and very survival, as statistics demonstrated in the third semester. And so, tackling the most critical and imminent point, it was seen as necessary to give a basic education to the teachers themselves before giving them pedagogical training.

The result was the *Plan de Capacitacion en Contenidos* (Content Training Programme: November 1982 to February 1983) which involved the participation of thousands of Coordinators and Popular Promoters, and whose goal was to raise their cultural and political level as regards the specific content of the EPB's first four levels. It was a matter of the teachers temporarily becoming students in the first four levels so that they could later handle "their work in the CEP with greater confidence and security."⁵⁷

One peasant Coordinator who participated in this training programme commented. "Now I understand a lot of things and words they asked me in the CEP and well it even embarrassed me ... like if Nicaragua is next to El Salvador and we discovered that none of us really knew ... Others said that Mexico was really close ... For example I don't know much about the Spaniards and that they were here for three hundred years! ... I'm good in maths and I can handle anything ... But, of course, everything I've learned will help me in the future as a teacher and I'll be more useful to my students in the CEP and to my brother and sister peasants ... From now on, I'm going to have to look by myself for the way to continue learning on my own, getting together with other Coordinators or maybe even reading books ... because with training, once you start, you never stop..."⁵⁸

Thus, content training gave results: it restored the Popular Teachers' confidence and encouraged them to continue preparing themselves on their own. However, given the complexity and multifaceted nature of the problem of training that awaited the Programme, this was just the starting point. Within a permanent training programme, defined as one of 1983's priorities, a continuation of Content Training was planned in addition to methodological and didactic training for 25,000 Popular Teachers.⁵⁹

Confronted with many contradictions and material, natural, and human obstacles: "poor in financial resources. but very rich in revolutionary consciousness, in voluntary work, in popular participation. in Sandinista emulation and in revolutionary creativity"⁶⁰; this is the context in which the Programme functions today and will continue to develop in the coming years, in a constant search for internal balance and coherence with all the difficulties confronting the Revolution.

However, while the questions have become clearer and accrued, the Programme's development has also clarified and consolidated its achievements. It has gained legitimacy, support and respect from the mass organizations. State institutions and the Revolution's leaders. It has demonstrated its ability to contribute to popular organization and mobilization through the national meeting that takes place in the city and the country, five days a week, two hours a day, in the CEPs. The EPB has also shown its enormous flexibility and creativity in adapting to the limitations and demands of each situation and to the dynamics of the revolutionary process. It has taken up its vocation to serve the needs and tasks of the Revolution and those of the mass organizations and state organisms, through the CEPs, the Popular Teachers and the *Puno en Alto* radio programme. It has demonstrated its profoundly *popular* character which "is popular in its two agents (the student and the teacher), in its content, and in its project. It is popular even for the enemy, because activists in adult education appear on death lists of the Somocista bands".⁶¹ In short, the Programme has demonstrated its ability to contribute to the transformation of, society and to deepening and consolidating the revolutionary process.

Pace: A basic question

It is possible to judge from the results what could have been done differently: what was not done at the right moment or what could have eventually been anticipated and avoided with more time, more preparation and less pressure. It would, however, be useless to examine in retrospect possible alternatives to a process which finds its unquestionable merits precisely in having opened the way and made progress in spite of countless traps set by reality. But if we had to characterize the principal internal sources of tension and conflict which define the dynamics, nature, and current problematic of EPB, they are basically related to two questions: pace and the popular teacher.

Indeed, if there has been a constant and unresolved theme during these years of adult education, it has been the question of pace. It is clear that massive literacy campaign such as the Nicaraguan Crusade - for which it was necessary to close the schools, colleges and universities for five months could only be intensive. As experience has shown, however, this pace could not be maintained and was neither viable nor desirable for the subsequent stages of the adult education process. As one author points out. While the Crusade's basic trait was the intensive pace of learning to read, to write and to acquire the basic principles of arithmetic, this is not a suitable pace or the main goal of the EPB's other stages. Now it is a matter of establishing the basis of a permanent, diversified and decentralized popular education that correctly and systematically meets the needs posed to society by the Sandinista project". The uninterrupted rhythm of work that, starting with the Crusade's own planning, made it necessary to repeat the overlapping of stages, turning each new stage into the forge of the following stage as well as a remedial stage of the previous one, could only result in sacrificing quality for the sake of guaranteeing transition to the next stage.

This is what happened in the Sustainment Programme and what has happened in the EPB's initial development with respect to the new stage coming after the Programme's six levels. In fact,

the root of the problem is to be found in the Crusade itself since the literacy and post-literacy programmes were not planned together as an integral process. Thus, just as Cuba warned twenty years earlier when evaluating its own literacy campaign, the Nicaraguan experience also contributes to confirming “the dangers the venture of post-literacy instruction must confront when the tasks of literacy instruction as such are not conceived from the start as adult education.”⁶³ Obviously, these dangers include that of bureaucratizing popular education by turning it into a race against time in which its true and ultimate goal - the solid, critical and participatory formation of the people - may be lost from sight due to the haste and impatience of the people themselves to reach the next stages. In short, it entails the risk of reproducing “the old conceptions and practices of education according to which each ‘region’ of the education system - ignoring the real formation of those being educated - is turned into a mere alienated and alienating moment of preparation for the next stage.”⁶⁴

However, while this danger does exist, popular education in Nicaragua has created its own antidote against bureaucratization. For the same process whose pace and massivity became pedagogically unsustainable, aided the emergence of a second element that, partly due to this very pace and massivity, substantially defines the EPB Programme: namely, the Popular Teacher.

This Popular Teacher, the driving force behind the present stage of the Nicaraguan process of adult education, represents the greatest challenge facing the Programme. At the same time, however, it is the Programme’s greatest, firmest and most revolutionary strong point.

The popular teacher: Historical product of the revolution

- I didn’t know how to read or rite but I learned in the Crusade now I am the coordinator of a cep.
- with the revolution I’ll learn good things and I will teach my *companeros* who are learning to read, to be revolutionaries.
- we believe that now with the Revolution we hav new values and that is why we are willing to move forward with our revolushunary Process organized in the ceps and taking out *companeros* out of darkness so that the burgoisee won’t exploit them anymore. Raising their consciouness so that united together we can better move forward in this new Nicaragua.

While the appeal to the recently literate and under-educated population arose in Nicaragua as the only alternative capable of guaranteeing the immediate and massive continuity of the Crusade, the emergence of the Popular Teacher cannot be interpreted as a mere conjunctural solution or as directly attributable to the lack of resources but, rather, as a political option based on genuine confidence in the people and determined by the revolutionary context, process and project.

If, on the one hand, only steadfast political resolve could challenge the heavy economic and social pressures and make the formulation of this alternative possible, only the confidence in broad popular support could allow it to be considered a true alternative. But also, only an immediately prior and successful experience of popular organization and mobilization such as the National Literacy Crusade, which in turn was inspired by the historical experience of the war of liberation, could anticipate that alternative as an effective response. “If during the war of liberation it was possible for a 13 year old to fight in his neighbourhood, if it was possible for an old lady to participate militarily and politically, for a peasant to become a military strategist, why shouldn’t it be possible for a conscious and organized people, and not only the specialists, to be capable of fulfilling the basic requirements at the elementary level of teacher-learning?”⁶⁵ In short, only a triumphant revolution with extremely limited resources and therefore forced to tap its audacity and creativity, could conceive of the Popular Teacher. And only this mystique, the new values of solidarity and the new human potentiality released and developed by a revolutionary climate could make a reality of this Popular Teacher in the heart of the people.

Who are these Popular Teachers? They are mainly peasants, workers, housewives and even children, whose first and in many cases, only contact with education was during the Crusade, during a prior school experience which ended during the first grades or during the Programme's own duration.⁶⁶ Beyond their low educational level, their inexperience and elementary skills, what unites this nascent and improvised generation of teachers is their common class background and their willingness to share their limited knowledge with others, enriching themselves in the process. 'It prides me,' said Faustino Rivera, a peasant Promoter, during the First National Adult Education Conference, "to be a peasant and to be able to teach my companeros and to serve as a guide for my brothers and sisters both in the countryside and the city."⁶⁷

What has been the response of these Popular Teachers throughout the Programme? Not only were they not discouraged by the complexity of their task but they have increased in numbers. The 18,449 Coordinators and Promoters who came forward at the beginning of the first semester, were 21,994 by 1983 - more than one third of them are farmers and more than half are women. Not only have they faced the difficulties but have repeatedly demonstrated their determination and ability to overcome new obstacles. Just as they overcame the lack of electricity, the inadequate conditions of the locale, the shortage or late delivery of the study materials, the long distances they have to walk to reach the CEP, etc., they have also overcome the coexistence of different levels within the CEPs, the demands implied by the method, the complexity of the content and, above all, their own inexperience and lack of training.

Where, as is common, there are children regularly taking part in the CEPs, the Popular Coordinators test their creativity and skills to harmonize everyone's individual pace and interests. If their students stop coming, they go from house to house persuading them to come back. If the CEP is mixed, they stretch themselves to cover two, three or even four levels at the same time, or ask the more advanced students to help those who are on earlier lessons. If the CEP is not mixed but the different learning paces or the students' irregular attendance result in each one being on a different lesson, as is frequent, the Coordinators divide their time between them "like a juggler trying to keep all the plates spinning on the sticks."⁶⁸

Faced with a task for which they themselves have more questions than answers, their own insecurity and lack of "professionalism" naturally has forced the Popular Coordinators to seek support in the group to find collective solutions. In this way, the "teacher role" ceases to be monopolized and unilateral and becomes a social and socializing role that unites and pertains to the Coordinator-student, to the student-Coordinator and to the CEP as a whole. This continuity and open "complicity" between the teacher and the students aids in breaking down the verticalism typical of the classic teaching-learning situation and encourages new values of solidarity that transcend the atmosphere of the CEP and are extended to building new social relations within the community itself.

On the other hand, the small and large dilemmas that their tasks continually present, have unleashed the Coordinator-Promoter's own intuition, imagination and initiative. This creativity, often revealing a powerful didactic intuition, is an inexhaustible source for recovering lost ground the extremely valuable raw material for systematising a popular pedagogy recumbent upon the people's own daily experience. To this extent there is no paradox in the fact that it is precisely those Popular Teachers with the least experience of formal education and who are more directly the product of the education process started with the National Literacy Crusade, who are the most creative, least inclined to be authoritarian, and who have best been able to interpret and apply the collective dialogue, search, and reflection advocated by the method.

This "lack of professionalism" - which from a purely pedagogical point of view would be seen monolithically as a limitation and even as a serious threat to the proper progress of any educational programme - is then turned into the driving force of a new dynamic encouraging qualitatively different social relations, values and behaviour, in the light of the CEP's sociopedagogical practice. Thus, the Popular Teacher is doubly revolutionary: both as an historical product of the Revolution,

and for giving rise to a system of relations that is laying the foundations for a genuine revolution in the theory and practice of popular education.

By opting for a Coordinator-Promoter with the characteristics that these two social subjects have acquired in the Nicaraguan adult education process. Nicaragua has chosen not only an original and novel teaching formula but also a new educational concept favouring social and political organizational qualities over the pedagogical quality of education. By transforming those who know a little more into the educators of those who know a little less and fusing both in a common experience in which each leaches and learns at the same time, the Nicaraguan Revolution broke with the traditional models associated with the figure, role and status of the “teacher.” But also, by objectively and subjectively minimizing the distance between the educator and the student—both as the result not only of a cultural proximity but also of a full social identity between teachers and students—the Popular Teacher refutes knowledge as a legitimising basis of pedagogical authority. By this, the very validity of the principle of authority in the teacher-student relationship is cut. Popular teachers have broken with conceptions of education based on a dichotomy between teaching and learning.⁶⁹

Thus, conditions exist for a true revolution in education that, as such, could bring about a profound transformation not only of the sociological parameters but also the pedagogical parameters of education. To overlook this dual possibility and the unity of teaching and learning necessary for sustaining and developing the institution of Popular Teacher would stunt and constrain the rich transformation which this new alternative education is capable of generating.

If when faced with this new socio-educational phenomenon we maintain a vision of pedagogy based on a supposedly universal asymmetry between teachers and students, we run the risk of evaluating the Programme as a socially valuable but pedagogically rudimentary experience, seeing the Popular Coordinator as a dedicated but empirically improvised and ultimately ineffective teacher, whom it would be necessary quickly and systematically to train in accordance with a defined set of tools accepted as scientific in the frame of that pedagogy. In this sense, we would (implicitly or explicitly), be seeing the training of these Popular Teachers as simply plaster-casting knowledge, with the goal of “optimizing” and, ultimately, “standardizing” their task. In this way, “banking” education, while eradicated as regards pedagogical relations within the CEP, would gain impetus on the level of pedagogical relations in those settings where the Coordinators and Promoters are trained. It would, then, inevitably, tend to be reproduced in other instances. To all intents and purposes, the stage through which the EPB is passing would then be seen as the conjunctural expression of an “unsought” combination of a series of objective “limitations” that must be “overcome” along the road toward more “modern” “scientific” and “efficient” educational forms. Taken to an extreme, this position would take on a ‘pedagogicist’ character and would even argue that it would have been better to discontinue adult education until all the qualified personnel needed were available in order to comply with “standards.” This position - not a caricature but an actual position in the history of adult education in fact responds to a specific concept of popular education which, while revolutionary in the sense that it advocates people’s liberation and consciousness-raising, ultimately continues to follow the asymmetrical teacher-student model.

In our opinion, the only way to overcome this ‘vision’ and to act consistently in the case at hand is to understand that the transformation of the teacher-student relation that we are witnessing in Nicaragua can not be seen as an accidental event, but rather as a socio-political-pedagogical alternative that opens up important possibilities and has multiple repercussions, not only for education itself but also for society as a whole and, therefore, should be evaluated and treated integrally.

By transferring teaching functions to the people. Nicaragua set the conditions for an authentic democratization of education, not only in the broadest and unique sense of extending education to the masses, but also in the strictest and deepest sense of an un-authoritarian relationship in the very act of teaching-learning. Popular education, then, has a dual goal: to educate and to democratize.

To educate not to merely transmit knowledge in a collective social practice in which a Popular Coordinator teaches-learns but also, and perhaps most importantly, 'teaches' the process itself. To democratize (education) - and not merely give the people access to it - by giving the people the chance to educate and, thereby, the possibility to demand access to intellectual work as a class, through a means "which does not ask the popular classes to stop being popular classes in order to join in the process and the state of teaching-learning."⁷⁰

Seen in this way, popular education becomes something more than a teaching/learning process: it becomes a process of collective self-esteem, in a process whose ultimate goal is not a learned people but, rather, "a people above all that through this cultural and political process understand the importance of their organization."⁷¹ In this sense, perhaps the sentence which best sums up this option's nature and magnitude is the slogan the Popular Teachers themselves spontaneously and proudly coined:

WE MAY NOT BE CERTIFIED TEACHERS. BUT WE ARE AN ORGANIZED CEP!

The Nicaraguan process of adult education: Basis for a model of popular collective self-education

Our Revolution gave a vote of confidence to the ability of our people to educate themselves and it is among our own people, among the Sandinista people, that we have found our Coordinators and Promoters, our Popular Teachers. Our Revolution confirms its confidence that the people are the subject and agent of their own education.

Carlos Tunnermann. Minister of Education (First National Popular Adult Education Conference June 6, 1981)

The process of adult education begun in Nicaragua with the National Literacy Crusade is an experience currently in process and, as such, can not be crystallized as though it were a finished product. Moreover, its capacity as a social process prevents it from being seen as the univocal result of an original model, conceived and implemented as a projection of central planning, totally regulated by a state subject. In fact, this process has produced a 'duplication of its subject'. Starting basically with the emergence of the Popular Teacher - with the specific characteristics that this concept and this institution have adopted in the Nicaraguan case the people have been gaining the leading role, not only as the beneficiary and source of feedback, but also as an active agent in the process.

The State and the people together guarantee and promote the adult education programme among the popular sectors, giving concrete historical form to the claim that "revolutionary action must be the product of the joint effort of the State and the working people."⁷² Precisely as the result of this joint task the people have not only taken on functions, but have also taken initiative, and have autonomously searched for and found answers. Within these dynamics, the process itself has given results that were often unforeseen and which, in turn, have conditioned subsequent developments. Among these, the emergence of the Popular Teacher is undoubtedly the one that has had the greatest and most transcendent repercussions. The Popular Teacher, expression of multiple contradictions and challenges, is presently the supporting base for the adult education programme and the focal point in which State guidance of the popular education process is condensed.

Obviously, the nature, magnitude and scope that popular education has acquired in Nicaragua can ultimately be explained only in the context and perspective of a revolution. We believe, however, that it is justifiable to try to grasp and interpret this experience from a more universal point of view-that of its possible contribution to other processes in which popular education hosts revolutionary action or even popular protest movements. On the one hand, it is justified by the enormous creative richness and by the extraordinary and multi-faceted potential of a people-in-revolution that is being confirmed by the Nicaraguan experience. On the other hand, it is justified

by the need to support the long search taking place in different situations throughout Latin America for forms that turn popular education into another bastion for consolidating a hegemonic popular project.

It would be useless to ignore the huge gap that lies between popular education as part of a revolutionary process and popular education in pre-revolutionary situations, such as is the case in the great majority of Latin American countries and the Third World, in general. It would be folly, then, to try and extrapolate in a mechanical way from this experience outside of the particular social, political and ideological dynamics, in which it emerged and is developing. It would also be impossible to take a complex situation such as the case in study as if it were a “model of popular education,” since it is an incomplete experience that is redefined as it advances and overcomes the very contradictions it creates, and will undoubtedly undergo important changes in the future. There remains, however, the legitimate quest to reconstruct a truly popular and democratic model of popular education, starting with the basic elements that are taking shape within the Nicaraguan process of adult education.

Without doubt, the same reality facing Nicaragua at the outset of the Crusade namely, scarce resources coupled with a wide spectrum of the public desperately in need of education - is recurring, and will continue to be recurring, in other revolutionary processes: the same need to provide immediate follow up to literacy, and the lack of available qualified teachers and resources with which to do it. Wherever the option for (truly) popular education is taken, similar contradictions, dilemmas, and challenges to those arising in Nicaragua will emerge at the point where the attempt is made to consolidate and deepen the educational experience of an initial literacy phase.

What can Nicaragua contribute to other peoples in terms of anticipating this search? By developing a Popular Teacher picked from the recently literate or under-educated population, the Nicaraguan Revolution created the most radical alternative of all: that of a possible model of the people’s collective self-education. Giving form and life to this option, though the same Experience, it demonstrated that the Popular Teacher is an historic possibility and consequently, made it a new historical option for other revolutionary struggles in the future. But also, the Nicaraguan Revolution enriched this option by emphasising that it can lead, although the numerous contradictions, to a highly democratic alternative form of adult education capable of effectively contributing to social organization and communication within the heart of the masses: a popular education capable of strengthening the people’s self-esteem and, to this extent, consolidating the people’s autonomy; encouraging and developing their creativity, promoting and revitalizing the many forms of individual and collective self-effort that spring from an organised people staking their historical claims as human beings.

On the other hand Nicaragua has shown that maintaining and consolidating the option of the Popular Teacher implies a challenge to educational theory and method by forcing a radical revision of the pedagogical parameters assumed in traditional education. The Popular Teacher option is more than a proposal for new social relations. It is also a proposal for a new *pedagogy*. Constructing this popular pedagogy means thoroughly revising the foundations on which the ‘classical’ approach to education rests. It also requires developing a whole new educational dynamic: a dynamic supported on theoretical grounds as well as by the empirical results of unfolding experience which responds to the character of the new student-teacher relationship, and which incorporates those elements discovered by participants in the course of their own pedagogical practice.

Notes

1. Here will simply refer to “post-literacy instruction” as the process of development of adult education as a follow-up to the National Literacy Crusade, without entering into a discussion of its nature or limits.
2. At the time of this writing, the Programme as in its fourth semester (March-June 1983).

3. The National Literacy Campaign will not be discussed here except as the matrix and point of departure for post-literacy instruction. About the Crusade, see: Ministerio de Education, Documentos Primer Congreso nacional de la Alfabetización "Georgino Andrade Rivera". Managua, 9-11 June 1980, and Documentos Segundo Congreso Nacional de la Alfabetización "Heroes y Martires para la Alfabetización", Managua, 5-6 September, 1980; Hugo Assmann. Nicaragua triunfa en la alfabetización: Documentos y testimonios de la Cruzada Nacional de la Alfabetización (San Jose: DEI: MED, 1981); Fernando Cardenal and Valerie Mille, "Nicaragua 1980: The Battle of the ABC's" Harvard Educational Review. No. 51 (1981); Valerie Miller. "The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade," in Nicaragua in Revolution, ed., Thomas W. Walker (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982).
4. It is true that adult education in Nicaragua was not born with the triumph of the Revolution. Various developmentalist programmes sponsored by traditional international organizations and/or the government, had been attempted in the country. However, adult education as such was beyond the limits of official legislation. On the other hand, both of these programmes as well as some experiences inspired by Paulo Freire's method were carried out in the country but were very localized and limited in their nature. See Edgard Macias Gomez. "Análisis de la-estructura y el funcionamiento del sistema nacional de educación de adultos." in Educación y dependencia: el caso de Nicaragua. Juan B. Arrien. et. al. (Managua: Editorial El Pez y la Serpiente, 1977).
5. See, Documentos Primer Congreso Nacional de la Alfabetización, pp. 117-23. Actually, it was a working paper presented at the Conference, taking advantage of its forum.
6. Later, the Consolidation and Preparation Stage would be called Seguimiento (Follow- Up) and the Special Primary Education Programme for Adults would become the present Educación Popular Básica (EPB - Popular Basic Education Programme.)
7. It should be pointed out that here we are only referring to the pedagogical goals the Crusade set itself. We do not include the collateral by-products resulting in the areas of health, culture, archaeological findings, the compilation of the Insurrection's oral history, etc., that had also been contemplated. Also, when we talk about the "Crusade," we are only referring to the campaign in Spanish, leaving aside the campaign in the local languages that took place on the Atlantic Coast. At the time of the First Conference, the materials to be used in these languages (Miskito, Sumu and English) were being developed. The Cruzada en Lenguas (Languages Crusade) was carried out in late 1980 and resulted in 12,664 Nicaraguans learning to read and write, thus reducing the illiteracy rate to 12%. See La Educación en tres años de Revolución (Managua: Ministerio de Educación, July 1982).
8. This Conference was named after the first brigadista killed by the contras only a few days earlier: Georgino Andrade Rivera. He would be followed by eight others.
9. About this problem one brigadista priest wrote in his field diary. "The high number of peasants with eyesight problems at a seemingly unnatural age is surprising. Perennial malnutrition, a completely unbalanced diet and the little use they give their eyes has ravaged their eyesight." In Assmann, p. 370.
10. Documentos Segundo Congreso Nacional de Alfabetización. p. 53.
11. Ibid. p.231.
12. It is interesting to note that very similar situation rose during the final stretch of the Cuban literacy campaign in 1961. Under the slogans "Mas horas de trabajo" ("More working hours") and "Mas Control" ("More control"), efforts were considerably intensified. "Campamentos de Aceleración," "Avanzadas Revolucionarias de Alfabetización" and "Repasadores del Sabado y Domingo" ("Speed-Up Camps," "Revolutionary Advance Literacy Detachments" and "Saturday and Sunday Review Sessions," respectively) were created while the National Literacy Commission decided to authorise a temporary closing of schools.
13. Francisco Lacayo, former Vice-Minister of Adult Education, "Charla sobre el Programa de Educación de Adultos al Consejo Nacional de educación." Managua. March 1981, p. 1. mimeo.
14. In fact, this was an continues to be the case in the large majority of literacy campaigns undertaken in recent years in Latin America. This was clearly the case in Cuba more than 20 years ago where, of the 707,212 people who learned to read and write during the campaign, only 70% registered for the Follow-Up classes; "not even the reading circles which can be considered one of the most open forms of post-literacy instruction, could escape this eclipse after a period of great success. This eclipse could

have made one worry about a progressive failure but fortunately was remedied in time." In UNESCO. *Metodos y medios utilizados en Cuba para la supresion del analfabetismo* (Havana: Instituto del Libros. 1970). pp. 74-75.

15. See, Documentos Segunda Congreso Nacional de la Alfabetizacion, pp. 117-36.
16. In reality, however, the CEPs have continued to be units which are sometimes as small as the Sandinista Literacy Units were during the Crusade, especially in the countryside where the dispersion of the population and the lack of adequate means of communication make larger concentrations of people impossible.
17. The "Popular Teacher" being discussed here was clearly different from the Popular Coordinator and Promoter precisely due to his/her expected higher level of education and previous experience as brigadista during the Crusade. Today, following the redefinition of the role of the Coordinators and Promoters that emerged during the Sustainment Programme, the notion of the Popular Teacher has been reappraised and is specifically applied to the Coordinators and Promoters.
18. MED. Documentos Segundo Congreso Nacional de la Alfabetizacion. p. 121.
19. Ibid. p. 62.
20. For example, this was the option Cuba chose. On the one hand, an experimental post-literacy project was started in only eight municipalities two months after the campaign was over. With the experiences obtained during this first stage, the Follow-up was carried out from August to December 1962: a year later, this would be turned into the First Worker and Peasant Education Course. On the other hand, the quality of the teachers became a priority condition for the continuation of the adult education programme on a massive scale. From the start, emphasis was laid on the intensive training of teachers and raising their technical levels through various means: initial training courses. Saturday programmes, etc., along the lines of the main principle which defined and synthesized the Cuban option: "Anyone who wants to do well in the classroom, must first do well in the seminars." See Raul Ferrerm *Educacion de Adultos en Cuba* (Havana: 1976).
21. F. Lacayo, "Participacion en el Encuentro de Educacion de Adultos, organizado por el Centro de Estudios Economicos y Sociales del Tercer Mundo (CEESTEM) y por el Consejo de Educacion de Adultos para America Latina (CEAAL)," Mexico City, 14-15 May 1982, p. 7, mimeo.
22. See "Primer informe del Operativo Carlos Fonseca Amador de diagnostic de los CEP durante la segunda fase del Sosteenimiento" (Managua: December 1980). In Assman, pp. 302-5.
23. Ibid., p. 305
24. Programa de Educacion de Adultos, Evaluacion 1981-Plan 1982 (Managua: Ministerio de Educacion, 1982).
25. Documentos Segundo Congreso Nacional de la Alfabetizacion.
26. Taken from Lacayo, "Charla sobre el Programa." P. 7. Since this is a transcription from a secondary source, this is not the original punctuation or spelling.
27. Lacayo, Documentos Primer Congreso Nacional de la Alfabetizacion, p. 117.
28. See Division Tecnico-Pedagogica, "Organizacion y Estructuracion del Programa de Educacion Popular Bascica," in Assmann, pp. 309-14.
29. Speech presented by Nicaragua at the "Seminario Nacional sobre el Proyecto Principal de Educacion en America Latina y el Caribe y sus incidencias en el proceso de transformacion educativa en Nicaragua," MED-UNESCO, Managua, 20-21 November 198, p. 15, mimeo.
30. Ibid., p. 13
31. Lacayo, "charla sobre el Programa," p. 8.
32. Primer Curso de Capacitacion a Nivel Central, Documentos Series (Managua: MED-VIMEDA. September-November 1981), p. 19.
33. Lacyo, "Charla sobre el Programa," p. 16.
34. Lacayo, in Documentos Primer Congreso Nacional de Educacion Popular de Adultos, p. 178.

35. Ibid., p. 174.
36. In fact, of the projected registration of 168, 058 students for the First Level, only 97, 299 actually did, i.e. 58% of the target figure. On the other hand, a total of 18,084 students were expected to sign up for the Permanent Literacy Classes and 46,517 registered, i.e., 257% of the target figure. However, even with this over-registration for literacy classes, the number of registered students did not reach the estimated total. See MED, Programme de Educacion de Adultos, pp. 26-28.
37. Ibid., p. 28.
38. Francisca Velez PARRALES, EPB First Level student, quoted in Documentos Primer Congreso Nacional de Educacion de Adultos, p. 137.
39. Figures taken from official MED-VIMEDA sources and 1983.
40. For an analysis of the problematic within the school system as a whole, see Miguel De Castilla, "La contradiccion escuela capitalista y clases populares in la fase actual de la transicion revolucionaria en Nicaragua," III Congreso Nicaraguense de Ciencias Sociales "Recardo y Armando Talavera Salinas," Managua, October 1982, mimeo.
41. Lacayo, Documentos Primer Congreso Nacional de Educacion Popular de Adultos, p. 176.
42. An analysis of the EPB Programme from the perspective of its impact and role in Nicaragua's agricultural development is found in marcos Arrund, "Por una educacion popular al servicio de la transformacion Sandinista del campo en Nacaragua" (Rio de Janeiro: July 1982), mimeo: Malena De Montis, "La potencialidad de la educacion popular en el proceso de transformacion social en las zonas rurales en Nicaragua: el caso de El Regadio" (Managua: 1983), mimeo.
43. About this aspect, see: Programa de Educacion de Adultos, "Los cortes de café y sus implicaciones en el Programa de Educacion de Adultos" (Managua: Ministerio de Educacion, May 1982).
44. Carlos Tunnermann, Minister of Educacion, De Cara al Pueblo (Face to Face with the People) Television and Radio Programme, 18 March 1983.
45. Operation Carlos Fonseca Amador, in Assmann, p. 304.
46. MED-Programa de Educacion de Adultos, op. cit., p. 28.
47. A complete set of material was designed: a reading and writing primer-which would keep the name El Amanecer del Pueblo - a Literacy Instructor's Orientation Manual called El Machete, and a workbook.
48. Lacayo, "Participacion en el Encuentro," pp. 11-12.
49. Lacayo, "Charla sobre el Programa," p. 5.
50. Lacayo, in Documentos Primer Congreso Nacional de Educacion Popular de Adultos, p. 57.
51. Informe final del Seminario Centroamericano para determinar las accidones subregionales de la Coordinacion Educativa Centroamericana-CEC-dentro del carco del Proyecto Principal en la esfera de la educacion en la region de America Latina y el Caribe, Panama, 22-26 June 1982, pp. 6-7.
52. Tunnermann. De Cara al Pueblo. 18 March 1983.
53. Ministerio de Educacion. Adult Education Programme, op. cit., p. 47.
54. In the tradition and practice of popular education developed within the parameters set by Paulo Freire, prior training of the educator is a sine qua non for the method's definition and effectiveness. "How is this need reconciled with the need to rapidly train a large number of literacy instructors?" is a question Freire himself has posed. In the case of Guinea-Bissau, the answer was a gradual and intensive training plan that began with fifteen literacy instructors, who were followed by fifteen others and so on. Obviously, when there are thousands and not hundreds of instructors to be trained within a short period of time. Freire-style training - while "ideal - is not possible. For some of Freire's reflections about training, see Paulo Freire. Cartas a Guinea-Bissau, Apuntes de una experiencia pedagogica en proceso, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1979).
55. The evaluation made of the materials at the first EPB Conference indicated that this problem was central. "The steps are applied mechanically..."; "the inflexible presentation of the methodological

steps in the lessons curbs creativity in developing these classes"; "there has not been a complete application of the steps in practice, since it is difficult to apply them to reality," etc. However, this situation has yet to be solved satisfactorily. Evidently, only as the Popular Teachers advance in their formation and training, will they depend less on the guidelines presented in the Manual. On the other hand, the method itself must simultaneously tend to create the conditions for this breakthrough.

56. Puno en Alto, 12 November 1982.
57. Adult Education Programme. "Cuaderno de Capacitacion en Contenidos para Maestros Populares," Arithmetic. 1982.
58. Interview with Norberto Garcia, Popular Coordinator, March 1983.
59. Ernesto Vallecillo, Vice-Minister of Adult Education, 1982. Evaluation Session, Tepeyac, November 1982.
60. Lacayo, in Documentos Primer Congreso Nacional de Educacion Popular de Adultos, p. 174.
61. Lacayo, "Participacion en el Encuentro," p. 8. In effect, following the Crusade, the string of murders of Popular Teachers in the Adult Education Programme has not ended: fifteen were murdered in 1981 and twenty in 1982. In the first months of 1983, as part of the escalation of aggression of the counter revolutionary bands penetrating from Honduras, several others were killed. It was for this reason, that the "Law to Protect CEP Promoters and Coordinators" was decreed on January 24, 1983, in response to a request presented by the Asociacion de Trabajadores de Campo (ATC - Rural Workers Association.)
62. Arruda, p. 18
63. UNESCO, p. 74.
64. Freire, p. 60.
65. Kacatim "Participacion en el Encuentro," p. 4.
66. Ministerio de Educacion, Boletin Estadistico, EPB Programme, No. 7 (Managua), 1984.
67. Faustino Rivera Gonzalex, Popular Promoter, quoted in Documento Primer Congreso Nacional de Educacion Popular de Adultos, p. 145.
68. Arruda, pp. 4-5.
69. On this topic, see P. Bourdieu and J. C. Passeron, *La Reproduccion: Elementos para una teoria del sistemas de la ensenanza* (Barcelona: Editorial LAIA, 1977).
70. Lacayo, "Participacion en el Encuentro," p. 7.
71. Commander Bayardo Arce, member of the National Directorate of the FSLN, quote in Assmann, p. 44.
72. Arce, quoted in Documentos Primer Congreso nacional de Educacion Popular de Adultos, p. 30.