

Spring 2005

Non-Formal Education and Autonomous Spaces: CideCi's Independent Alternative and the Regeneration of Indigenous Cultural Spaces in Chiapas

Rachel Beatty
SIT Study Abroad

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection



Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [Politics and Social Change Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Beatty, Rachel, "Non-Formal Education and Autonomous Spaces: CideCi's Independent Alternative and the Regeneration of Indigenous Cultural Spaces in Chiapas" (2005). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 460.
https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/460

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

“Non-formal Education and Autonomous Spaces:
CideCi’s Independent Alternative and the
Regeneration of Indigenous Cultural Spaces in
Chiapas.”



-CideCI Photo Archives

Rachel Beatty
Project Director: Dr. Raymundo Sanchez
Academic Director: William Stone
Semester: Spring 2005
May 14, 2005

Table of Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 3 Methodology
- 6 The Indigenous of Chiapas and the Regeneration of Autonomous
Physical and Cultural Spaces
- 10 Education and Indigenous Cultural Space
- 12 From Formal to Non
- 14 CideCI's Non-formal Indigenous Alternative
- 21 Conclusion
- 23 Works Cited

*They want us to go to school
And to turn the pages of books...
Why learn the language of books
When the forest speaks to you?*

*One cannot eat books,
And pens and pencils are poor weapons
To kill the deer of the mountains
And the grunting boar...¹*

1. Taming Philippine Headhunters, California: Sanford University Press 1934, pp. 260-261 *In* Raymundo Roviños's "Education and the International Decade of Indigenous Peoples."

Introduction

I am coughing in the haze of uplifted dirt. Dr. Raymondo Sanchez is sitting in front of me in the old truck smoking his cigarette and gazing calmly out through the front window at the unpaved, littered landscape of a San Cristobal de Las Casas barrio, Nuevo Marivella (New Marvel). This bumpy truck ride is taking me to CIdeCI's (Centro Indigena de Capacitacion Integral, Fray Bartoleme de las Casas) new educational center, of which Dr. Raymondo Sanchez has been the Director since its founding in 1989. Little by little, as each new building is completed, the center is moving from its sixteen year old location to this new space just outside of the city, and I am privileged enough to receive a one-on-one tour by the Director himself.

I realize that I have yet to fully understand the purpose of CIdeCI's relocation, so I lean forward and chance the disruption of the Doctor's pensive silence with an inquiry.

"So, why exactly is CIdeCI moving? Is it basically for more space; to provide the students with more resources?"

"Well Raquel..." he begin slowly, "that is part of it. But we have been told that we must leave the other center, that we have no choice." And he leaves his response at that as the driver, Maestro¹ Domingo of the mechanic taller², pulls the truck over and Dr. Sanchez motions for me to step out.

Pointing forward, up the mountain to where a group of men were working with cement blocks and metal structures, Dr. Sanchez explains that this mountain-side has a fresh water source. CIdeCI has given piece of this new land to the two adjacent barrios, both of which are currently living without running water. CIdeCI's construction team is

¹ Spanish word for teacher.

² Spanish word for workshop.

helping them build a water tank that once completed will provide enough water to support both barrios.

As we continue meandering along the bottom of the mountain-side Dr. Sanchez waves hello to each person we pass, addressing them by name and pointing out each young man who is a student of CIdeCI's carpentry or electricity talleres. The students themselves are using their knowledge of design and construction to build their own physical space for learning.

* * * *

Received before my independent project began during a week of volunteer NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) work in San Cristobal de Las Casas, this personal tour provided the ultimate inspiration for my decision to conduct my independent study project on the theme of non-formal education by presenting a case-study of CIdeCI, Fray Bartoleme de las Casas: a free, non-formal educational center offering alternative options for the Indigenous of Chiapas. As a life-long student working within the beurocratic, standardized school system of the United States, as someone who with no choice but to passively watch as the brightest and most critically thinking individuals failed out of school year after year, CIdeCI's education system, so disparate from that which I had always known, initiated a sudden shift in the lenses through which I viewed the very definition of "education" and all of its presumptions.

In this study I explore CIdeCI's role in regenerating³ autonomous cultural and physical spaces for Indigenous learning, and thus living, outside of the government system through its alternative educational methods and non-formal, independent status. I argue that

³ This term I am borrowing from Gustavo Esteva and mobilizing in my discourse in the manner in which he has defined it, which I will explore in more depth later in my analysis.

non-formal education plays an essential role in regenerating cultural and physical spaces necessary for ensuring that Indigenous forms of social organization retain and/or obtain their autonomy from state and national governments. I will begin by presenting a brief overview of my research methodology, followed by theoretical background regarding education and cultural spaces, specifically pertaining to the Indigenous population of Chiapas. I will then present the information I gathered during my research period, using anecdotal and observed material, as well as information gathered through formal interviews and CIDECI resources, as a means for understanding how the deeper theoretical insights apply to CIDECI in particular.

Methodology

I began gathering information for this project the day that I entered the public school system of the United States: I am no stranger to the governmental standardized system of education. I do recognize, however, that because of my life-long immersion in this system the very framework from which I address any of the following issues has undoubtedly been shaped and molded by this very system itself. So much so that from the first fateful day in September when my mother kissed me goodbye at the bus-stop until, sixteen years later, when Gustavo Esteva looked out at myself and the faces of fourteen other standardized American students and told us that the education system should be completely de-established, I had failed to consciously recognize the nature of the Western, government-sponsored education system. Thus, while it has recently been stretched and shaken, it is essential that I preface my analysis by recognizing that the framework from which I address these issues is rooted deeply in the formal education system. My analysis must not be seen as anything more than an attempt to break through the shroud of this

framework by both exploring and trying to understand issues of education and culture spaces in a culturally foreign and non-formal context.

I began my formal research by consulting CIdeCI's own material, i.e. annual reports, a structural outline of the center's internal functioning, the general project outline, and CIdeCI's informational flier, in order to grasp a better understanding of its functioning before beginning my inquiries. I complimented these resources with theoretical information regarding the formal and non-formal education systems, the Indigenous movement of Chiapas, and cultural spaces.

I began on-site at CIdeCI by participating in CIdeCI's Panaderia taller (Bakery workshop) for one week, every day from 9am-12pm. During this short period of participant observation I was able to witness the functioning of a CIdeCI taller first-hand, develop connections with a few of the students, gather observed material, and gain some insight regarding the nature of CIdeCI's educational system. It should be noted, however, that one week in one of the many talleres that CIdeCI offers is an extremely limited participant observation period. While recognizing these limitations, I do believe that my experience in the Panaderia offers insight into the issues I am exploring and has allowed me to make connections that would have otherwise gone un-noticed (which means that there surely remain others to be found). I also conducted informal interviews with a few of the Panaderia students during our class time together. The rest of my interviews were conducted formally with Maestros and others in administrative positions.

I feel as though my research would be more complete if I were to have conducted more interviews with the students themselves. While the information I received from the "higher"-ups was extremely useful and necessary, I had hoped that the voices of the students would have a much larger presence in my analysis. Further, with my limited

Spanish abilities, it was sometimes difficult to collect and understand all the information that I was given during my interviews. For this reason, the voices of my informants have mostly been lost in translation; I was unable to get as many specific quotes as I had originally hoped.

I was also limited in my ability to collect information due to the fact that CideCI was in the process of re-locating; there were restrictions on the resources that I had at my disposal. The majority of the talleres had already been moved to the new location, and therefore the majority of the students as well. Also, those with the ability to connect me with resources were very busy; two of the Maestros came from the New Center to CideCI's "old" center specifically to meet with me. I do not feel, however, that these restrictions have prevented me from being able to make solid connections between the experiential and theoretical information that I have been able to gather, but rather that there remains a large deal of gathering to be done.

One last, but certainly not least, note on methodology: in light of the project at hand I have consciously tried to use as few formal resources as possible. Rather I have chosen to mobilize the words of those involved in CideCI and the Indigenous struggle in Mexico as much as possible while still maintaining structure. The formal resources that I use form the necessary base for deeper understandings about the issues that I explore, and provide some of the language that I have mobilized to discuss these issues

The Indigenous of Chiapas and the Regeneration of Autonomous Physical and Cultural Spaces



www.ezln.org/fotos/antonio_turok/

“In their [indians, peasants, and ‘marginals’] space (which is at once physical and cultural) they carry out their projects, which are nothing else than to lead their own lives.”

- Gustavo Esteva -

History books have led me to believe that the Indigenous story, from whatever continent it may originate, begins with the arrival of the Europeans and continues with valiant “discoveries” about those dark, strange, and already lost peoples. However their story begins long before that, before they were stripped of their land, freedom, and dignity, and continues today in millions of communities around the world. The Indigenous of Mexico are no exception; their story has become one of persecution, bloodshed, and colonization. With the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadors more than five hundred years ago the Indigenous of Mexico have been forced into, and continue to suffer from impoverished living conditions, land expropriation and exploitation, cultural and societal marginalization, and externally regulated and oppressive economic and political policies. But the Indigenous peoples of Mexico, after hundreds of years of marginalization and

oppression, are fighting back, re-claiming their cultural autonomy, physical spaces, and histories.

On January 1st, 1994, the same day that NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) was officially put into action, the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) entered the city of San Cristobal de Las Casas of Chiapas, Mexico, armed with weapons and black ski-masks, raising their guns and voices in the name of “land, justice, and freedom”(2003, El Color de la Tierra). Overnight the Indigenous peoples of Mexico received global attention, bringing to the fore-front of the national and inter-national stage their enduring struggle for rights, respect, and autonomous forms of living. A mere twelve days later, when the Mexican Army sent 7,000 troops into the State of Chiapas, the EZLN dropped their arms, opting to mobilize palabras⁴ and non-violent resistance as their weapons against the powers of the Mexican nation-state (2003, El Color de la Tierra). Since then the EZLN has remained in the global spotlight as one struggle among the millions that are being realized in the name of autonomy and self-determination from national and global neo-liberal powers.

It is important to note that the very word autonomy, and thus the Western concept of autonomy, does not exist in any of the hundreds of languages that are spoken by the Indigenous peoples of Mexico. Their adoption and mobilization of this word can be understood as an attempt to use the discourse of the dominant force in order to restrain its power (1998, Esteva). Speaking on behalf of the EZLN, Subcomander Marcos, the most well-known of all Zapatista leaders, explains that the EZLN’s definition of autonomy is locally rooted and locally exercised within their cultural spaces. “We have our own notion

⁴ Spanish word for “words.”

of autonomy and we exert it in our own spaces. But we know that it is not the only one...” (1987, Esteva: 293).

In February of 1996, after two years of dead-end negotiations and physical abuse by Mexican Army personnel in the Indigenous communities of Chiapas, the Mexican state and the EZLN met and signed the San Andres Accords, a written agreement that would grant the Indigenous peoples of Mexico the “right to self-determination and autonomy as collectives with different cultures and with the ability to decide of issues central to them...” (1996, San Andres Accords). The San Andres Accords define autonomy as “the concrete expression of the exercise of the right of self-determination,” thus granting the Indigenous the right to “decide on their forms of internal governance and the ways in which they organize themselves politically, socially, economically, and culturally.” One of the most pressing issues facing the Indigenous communities and their ability to realize these autonomous forms of self-governance is the rights to the very land on which they live – their physical spaces.

Colonialism, wherever it is enacted, necessarily implies the exploitation and robbery of the conquered land and its resources. This colonial trend has continued in Mexico, and particularly fierce in the state of Chiapas. Chiapas is the richest state in Mexico, home to an abundance of natural resources and agricultural production, and yet the state of Chiapas is also home to the poorest population in the country. “As in 1919, the Zapatistas must pay in blood the price for our outcry for Land and Liberty! As in 1919, the land doesn't belong to those who work it. As in 1919, arms are the only path which the evil government has left for those without land. For this reason, we rose up in arms” (1994, Communique from the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee). Subcomandante Marcos of the EZLN elaborates on the issues of land and resources facing the Indigenous of Chiapas:

Chiapas loses blood through many veins...(t)his land continues to pay tribute to the imperialists:...raw materials, thousands of millions of tons of them, flow to Mexican ports and railroads, air and truck transportation centers. From there they are sent to different parts of the world: The United States, Canada, Holland, Germany, Italy, Japan, but with the same fate--to feed imperialism. The fee that capitalism imposes on the Southeastern part of this country oozes, as it has since from the beginning, blood and mud... The trees fall and dynamite explodes on land where campesinos are not allowed to cut down trees to cultivate. Every tree that is cut down costs them a fine that is 10 times the minimum wage, and a jail sentence. The poor cannot cut down trees, but the petroleum beast can, a beast that every day falls more and more into foreign hands. The campesinos cut them down to survive, the beast to plunder.

- Subcommander Marcos of the EZLN, August 1992

The EZLN and the Indigenous communities that identify with their struggle, in attempt to re-claim their land and thus culture, have formed over thirty “autonomous municipalities,” communities in which the people practice locally rooted forms of self-governance within their local physical spaces (2001, Esteva). While the global giants and transnational corporations continue to exploit the natural resources of Chiapas, the Indigenous have begun to struggle against these forces by the only means that they can: within their local, physical, and cultural spaces.

There lies a fundamental necessity for the existence of autonomous physical space in order to realize space for autonomous cultural and social organization. Only through first reclaiming their physical spaces does it then become possible to regenerate their local, cultural ways of living. “‘We’ are learning once again to first rescue and then to master our space...what ‘we’ are doing enables ‘us’ to become radically de-linked from the institutional and ideological world that attempts to control us and which antagonizes and blocks us” (1987, Esteva: 293). It is in this manner that I mobilize the term “regeneration:” the initial reclamation of physical space followed by the realization of autonomous cultural practices within this space. Further, regeneration is not an attempt to return to the past, which has long been re-shaped and manipulated by the colonial and national powers at

work. Rather, these cultural spaces are being regenerated within the current cultural context as a means for preserving what remains, and regenerating autonomous forms of living within this context. The Indigenous communities in resistance are struggling for the right to live free of oppressive external forces. “Life is what they owe us: the right to govern and to govern ourselves”(1998, EZLN *In* Esteva: 43).

Education and Indigenous Cultural Space

There is no doubt that the issue of education plays a central role in the struggle for autonomy and self-governance. In each colonial history education has been one of the most powerful means through which the colonizers impose their own external values, social mores, and ways of thinking about the world on the colonized population, thus indoctrinating them into the system of the very colonizers themselves. Friere, an education theorist, characterizes colonialism as the “culture of silence,” and thus the colonial element in schooling as being an “attempt to silence particular ways of speaking about the world” (2001, Smith). Education is a cultural space that socializes children into a particular framework of thought and supplies them with both practical and cultural knowledge. The Indigenous of Chiapas need an education that is formed out of their own cultural framework, that serves the communities’ needs and that is executed in their own Indigenous languages.

It has been explicitly recognized by the EZLN that the state education system has done little if anything at all to improve their lives. In the words of EZLN’s Subcomandante Marcos:

Education? The worst in the country. At the elementary school level, 72 out of every 100 children don’t finish the first grade. More than half of the schools only offer up to a third grade education and half of the schools only have one teacher for all the courses offered.

There are statistics, although they are kept secret of course, that show that many Indigenous children are forced to drop out of school due to their families' need to incorporate them into the system of exploitation. In any Indigenous community it is common to see children carrying corn and wood, cooking, or washing clothes during school hours. Of the 16,058 classrooms in 1989, only 96 were in Indigenous zones.

Within the San Andres Accords, under the heading "Education and Culture," the importance of an Indigenous education is explicit. The Accords call for the "creation of indigenous institutions who study, spread, and develop indigenous tongues," and the "creation of centers of higher education in Indigenous regions which promote the study and diffusion of the Indigenous cultural wealth, as well as the actual questions and needs of their cultures." Further, as part of the "Commitments of the Federal Government to Indigenous Peoples," the San Andres Accords state that "The State should ensure for Indigenous peoples an education that respects and takes advantage of their knowledge, traditions and forms of organization," and that "(t)he State should respect the educational activities of Indigenous Peoples within their own cultural space."

From Formal to Non

The formal education system, that which the One-third World's⁵ nation-states have declared essential for the possibility individual success, has long been under scrutiny by social critics, many of whom completed and excelled in their own formal educational endeavors. Ivan Illich is one such critic who became well-known when his book "Deschooling Society" was published and released in 1973. Illich suggests that the only means for alleviating the extreme social problems plaguing both the One-Third World and

⁵ I use this term as Gustavo Esteva uses it, to refer to the ruling social minorities of the world, or what is more commonly know as the "First World."

Two-Thirds World⁶ is the radical deschooling of society, the total elimination of its current structure and existence. While I am inclined to take such a position, for the purposes of this paper I must limit my discussion of the formal education system as it relates to the Indigenous struggle in Mexico, using Illich as the major touchstone for my insights.

The state system of education has aided in the marginalization and invisibility of Indigenous peoples by offering an education that fails to grant equal opportunity within the system, or conversely, a culturally appropriate means of learning outside of the system. The standardized nature of the curriculum and the Western framework from which this education is based offers little room for the Indigenous peoples to succeed. The state has offered nothing but an education system that perpetuates and deepens social inequality. “...(T)he mere existence of school discourages and disables the poor from taking control of their own learning,” (1973, Illich). By convincing the poor that they need a formal education to succeed, and then making success within that system (that is culturally inappropriate and does not serve the needs of the poor) nearly impossible, the state strips the poor of their personal and communal power.

The poor, in this case the Indigenous of Mexico, have long been plagued by an externally regulated system based on the belief that “real” learning happens only in the formal classroom, when in fact most learning happens outside of the school system all together. “A...major illusion on which the school system rests is that most learning is the result of teaching” (1973, Illich). Children learn first languages, learn to walk, learn to hold their own spoons, and to communicate with strangers without the instruction of a state-

⁶ This term is being used to refer to what is more commonly known as the “Third World.” I have opted to use this term and the one above as a means of contributing to a shift in the way that we speak, and thus think, about global divisions and social positions.

certified teacher. “Work, leisure, politics, city-living, and even family life depend on schools for the habits and knowledge they presuppose, instead of becoming themselves a means of education” (1973, Illich). It is partly upon this Illich-defined illusion, that there need be a teacher in order to learn, that the formal education system defines itself. But the Indigenous of Chiapas are beginning to realize autonomous systems of education that serve their communities culturally and practically.

Some Indigenous communities have begun creating their own autonomous education centers within the physical space of their own communities, naming members of their communities “Autonomous Education Promoters.” In the words of one such man, “We are managing plans and projects according to our needs; what we need to know, what we want to learn, and we’ve prepared these plans and programs ourselves” (2003, El Color de la Tierra). These alternatives have been founded out of a vision of autonomous and community-centered learning that serves the people. The fact remains, however, that within such communities resources are scarce; the State has hardly achieved its San Andres promises. Still, these kinds of alternatives offer hope and provide autonomous alternatives to the state system of formal education that can only begin to grow as they gain their footing. As one Autonomous Education Promoter explains, “Education is important, because it’s fundamental in our struggle to know the facts. The object of this school is that all the students who are studying now are the ones who teach at primary schools in the Indigenous communities where they are now” (2003, El Color de la Tierra). Once the current students complete their learning they can then go on to be the teachers within these same educational spaces, handing down their autonomously learned cultural knowledge to the next generation.

CIdeCI's Non-formal Indigenous Alternative

I was introduced as a “new student,” though I hardly felt like such. Standing in the door-way of CIdeCI’s Panaderia taller, looking into the surprised faces of fourteen Indigenous girls and women, I felt more like an alien species come to conduct a cultural autopsy than a “new student.” I managed, however, to nod and smile, and sputter out an “Hola” while looking for an appropriate place to leave my back-pack.

I made it my next task to try to identify the Maestra. The majority of the women were standing at the main table in the center of the room rolling dough into small balls, half-moons, and other shapes, while a few others washed bowls and cooking trays in the big sink. No one bothered to address me with anything other than a quick glance, so after a few minutes of silence I leaned forward and timidly addressed the room, “So, is there anything I can do to help?” My question was met with giggles and palm-muffled laughs. One of the ladies stepped away from the table and motioned me to take her place.

“Thanks.” Judging from her demeanor I thought I’d take a guess. “So, are you the teacher?” I inquired.

“Yes, look,” she told me, and began to demonstrate the art of making half-moons out of dough balls. I stood nervously observing, making mental note of the exact positioning of her hands, trying to measure the strength with which she held and squeezed the dough, watching the movements of each of her fingers. I made no more than four very sloppy half-moons and the table was suddenly dough-free and a dozen trays full of pan dulce⁷ were being slid into the large oven.

⁷ Sweet bread.

Every day at the Panaderia I learned something new, though Maestra Gloria had little if anything to do with it. Many mornings she arrived late, after we had already begun kneading the dough. Eliazer, a nineteen year old Indigenous girl from the Gresia Municipio de Chicomuselo, Chiapas, was most helpful by allowing me to lean over her shoulder and observe while she worked. During my second morning there, after I'd spent nearly half an hour trying to figure it out on my own, Eliazer demonstrated the correct hand position for making nearly-perfect dough balls. By the last day I was spinning out dough balls like an amateur.

Creating and kneading the dough was the hardest of tasks, but one which I was determined to complete before my time was up. I would stand with my hands in the egg, sugar, flour, and butter pile in front of me, copying as closely as possible the other girls. Maestra Gloria, recognizing my need for help, would sometimes appoint another student to help me, but never did so herself. The students rarely consulted Maestra Gloria for help, but rather with technical questions about the exact amount of flour or butter needed to complete the pan⁸ they had decided to make that day.

After each session was complete and the pan had been put into the oven Maestra Gloria would join me at the counter to give me the ingredients and measurements of the pan that we made that day, be it Pasta Ojaldrada, Galletitas, or Pan Pasta Seca. After writing down the ingredients I would proceed to take my notes for the day: observations, ideas, and questions to be answered. It was during this time that I received the most direct attention from the girls. One after another would walk up and lean her head into my notebook. "It's all in English?" Eliazer inquired, smiling curiously. "Is that cursive?" Miriam questioned. I was confused by their interest in my written work until I asked Eliazer to write for me the

⁸ Bread.

name of her community. She wrote nervously, one letter after the other, stopping more than once to cross out and begin again.

* * * * *

CIdeCI was founded on August 24, 1989, five years before the Zapatista uprising, by Dr. Sanchez, Maestro Rafael, Maestro Domingo, General Administrator Patricia, Maestro David, and others who to this day continue to work at the center. CIdeCI was formed out of a notion of resistance against the state and national governments as an affordable and practical means for Indigenous peoples of all ages of Chiapas to realize their educational potential in a non-formal context that caters to their needs. “Not resistance just to resist,” explained Dr. Sanchez, “but resistance to realize that another world is possible.” While CIdeCI has undergone immense structural and practical changes in its organization since 1989, Dr. Sanchez explained that the notion of resistance is the one transversal concept that has continued through every aspect of their work. The Center, while without any official ties to the EZLN, has played, and continues to play a large role in the Indigenous resistance of Chiapas.

As a physical space independent from the government, funded by personal donations and mostly international foundations, CIdeCI offers its space as a resource for others in resistance, in need of help that the government does not offer, and a space for other educational activities. For example, while I was conducting my project CIdeCI hosted women overnight from all over the state of Chiapas who were headed for Tuxtla, a nearby city, to participate in a Women’s Rights demonstration. CIdeCI also offered a tremendous deal of logistic support for the policy initiatives taking place between the EZLN and the Mexican government in the late 1990’s by offering participants places to stay, caravanning people to and from the events and their communities, and for years, housing refugees

displaced due to the uprising (Dr. Sanchez, Interview). Dr. Sanchez himself was even a member of CONAI (Comisión Nacional De Intermediación, National Commission of Mediation) that worked to create negotiations between the EZLN and the government, the San Andres Accords. CIdeCI also holds an on-going session of seminars during which intellectuals and NGO members in the area gather to discuss national and international issues. Their independent status, and thus non-governmental physical space, makes such kinds of social work possible. But more importantly, their Non-formal educational system grants an educational freedom that would be otherwise impossible within a government-funded space. CIdeCI is mobilizing a Non-formal education system as a means for regenerating Indigenous autonomous spaces for learning and living.

Non-formal education, Dr. Sanchez explained to me, falls somewhere between the formal and the in-formal; formal being that of the state's obligatory curriculum, prerequisites, and standards, and in-formal being all that is learned outside of any education system - all that is involved in the process of socialization. Non-formal, then, incorporates elements from these two poles, creating a system that is much more open and free than the formal system while maintaining an educational structure. Dr. Sanchez explained that Non-formal education, as compared to formal, directly prepares the student for life. Maestro Domingo of the Mechanic taller told me that the certification that students receive from CIdeCI, while not recognized by the government, is more valuable because it shows that the student can actually *do* something. CIdeCI, as a Non-formal education center completely independent from the government, has the freedom to construct and re-construct both its organization and teaching and learning styles.

Most of the students who come to CIdeCI have not received a formal education. Many cannot read or write or even speak Spanish. CIdeCI offers these students equal

opportunities to learn. Firstly, as I was told by each informant, the only pre-requisite for attending CIdeCI is the desire to learn; age and/or previous education is of no importance. Further, they offer courses orally in Indigenous languages, courses in reading, writing, and Spanish, and exams that are taken experientially rather than in written form for those students who do not speak Spanish. The majority of the Maestros speak Indigenous languages themselves (Maestro Domingo: Tsotsil. Maestro David: Tseltal and Tsotsil.). Maestro David, from the community of Huixtan, Chiapas, the man in charge of the Granja Integral⁹ talleres, told me that he gives courses in ecology and architecture in both Tsotsil and Tseltal, and that the students choose what it is that they want to learn, not him. Maestro David told me that part of what it means to him that CIdeCI is Non-formal is that he has. Though she does not speak an Indigenous language, Maestra Gloria of the Panaderia¹⁰ told me very simply that if a student does not speak Spanish she merely shows them how to do it with her own hands. Also, as Maestro Rafa explained, students can arrive at CIdeCI any day of the year and begin their chosen talleres the very next day. If after one week or two the student decides that she or he wishes to change her/his taller(es), it is completely acceptable and encouraged. CIdeCI's curriculum is anything but obligatory and standardized; CIdeCI caters to the needs of each individual student and exercises its independent status by using alternative and non-formal means of teaching and learning.

The three main pillars of CIdeCI's pedagogy is that the students "Aprender a hacer, Aprender a aprender, y Aprender a ser mas¹¹" (2004: CIdeCI Proyecto). Not only are CIdeCI students learning to do something, they are learning how to learn to do something through hands-on experiences, a skill that they can carry with them for the rest of their

⁹ Integral Farm

¹⁰ Bakery.

¹¹ "Learn to do, Learn to learn, and Learn to be more."

lives. General Administrator Patricia explained that the students come to CIdeCI to learn, “like a sponge,” but that it is just as important that they learn to teach. Within each taller there are beginner students, advanced students, and students at every level in between. This environment fosters and requires that the more advanced students transfer their knowledge to the less advanced, providing experience in both the act of learning and learning how to transfer knowledge. Patricia explained that this is what is meant by “Aprender a ser mas,” that the students learn to transmit what they have learned to others in their communities.

CIdeCI explicitly encourages its students to return to their communities following the completion of their studies (which is determined both by the students experiential ability, and the student her/himself – when she/he is ready to leave). However, it is also made explicit that the students are free to make their own decisions about their own lives (Patricia, Interview). CIdeCI offers the initial support for students who choose to return to their communities and start micro-projects with their new skills: providing a Corte and Confección¹² graduate with her/his first sewing machine, or a Carpentry graduate with the necessary tools to start his own bench-making business, or a Granja graduate with materials for constructing a chicken coop. Maestro David of the Granja told me that he always hopes that his students return to their communities, and that the majority of them do, both practicing and teaching others about ecologically sound farming techniques. Those who return to their communities and start small businesses, such as a bakery or a mechanic shop, are creating local economic spaces in which they have control and power over their own economic well-being, while simultaneously providing the community with a local service, diminishing independence on outside or government run businesses. In this manner, CIdeCI not only provides a physical and cultural space for autonomous learning, but also

¹² Sewing.

contributes to the regeneration of autonomous spaces within the Indigenous communities of Chiapas.

The daily upkeep of CIdeCI is in the hands of the students. Maestro Rafa explained that every student has an internal responsibility because “this is their house, not ours.” While the teachers and administrators return home at night and on the weekends, the students live in CIdeCI-provided housing, on site. Thus responsibilities such as trash, lighting, and the cleaning of bathrooms and talleres are assigned, negotiated, and executed by the students themselves. The General Administrator, Patricia, explained that if the students have concerns regarding the way things are running she is there to listen and make changes accordingly. She thinks of herself and the others in administrative and Maestro positions as being there to accompany and accommodate the students. Patricia also told me that it is partly through the internal responsibilities that CIdeCI ensures the students’ full participation in their own daily lives and the functioning of the center - that they retain a sense of community. Because the students leave their communities to come to CIdeCI it is important that they retain a sense of power and control over their community environment. In this same vein, CIdeCI students have been granted the responsibility of constructing and designing their own, new physical and educational space.

Back in 1989 CIdeCI was granted the space for its project by a Christian group called Salicianos. This group technically remained owners of the land while CIdeCI was granted the right to use it, thus building from the bottom-up its own buildings and housing facilities. In the year 2002 CIdeCI was informed by Salicianos that they would have to leave the land by the date August 24, 2005, the same date of its initial founding sixteen years earlier. According to Maestro Rafa and Patricia, the main reason for this decision on

the part of the Salicianos is because they make no profit off of CIdeCI's presence on their land, and thus they are looking for other options from which they can monetarily benefit.

For the last two years CIdeCI has been working to construct their new center, the students themselves doing the bulk of the hands-on work of designing and constructing the building themselves, as well as the furniture within. By May 20, 2005, Dr. Sanchez expects that each new building will be ready for occupation and use. While there remains a great deal of work to be done, CIdeCI is ready to move to their new piece of land, upon which they will be able to exert a complete autonomy from the government and/or any other organization.

Conclusion

CIdeCI occupies an independent physical space within which they exercise alternative forms of teaching and learning that cater to the needs of their Indigenous students, thus providing a means for the regeneration of cultural spaces. CIdeCI, as a free and Non-formal center, is mobilizing alternative education as a non-violent means of resistance against the nation-state of Mexico, and has been doing so since before the EZLN brought this movement of resistance to the inter-national stage. CIdeCI offers space and resources for experiential, hands-on learning, with the ultimate goal of creating autonomously designed and executed micro-projects within Indigenous communities, thus bettering the lives of those suffering from the external forces of the national and international giants. CIdeCI is working within the context of the current national and international situation, creating spaces where autonomous forms of learning, and thus living, may be regenerated. As the most powerful means of transferring cultural knowledge,

it is no wonder that education occupies a central role in the Indigenous struggle for autonomy.

While CIdeCI offers a much needed social service to the Indigenous population of Chiapas there still remain issues to be explored, that due to my time and resource constraints I was unable to investigate. What kind of actual impact has CIdeCI had within the communities themselves? Are there micro-projects flourishing, and if so, what kinds of obstacles do they face? How does the migration of the students from their communities to CIdeCI affect the lives of their families and the communities they have left behind? How does migration to the city impact the world-view of the students? What potential does Non-formal education have for communities world-wide? These kinds of questions are more than worth exploring, and could potentially uncover some very important insights regarding the role of Non-formal education as a world-wide option. In the words of an Autonomous Education Promoter in Chiapas, “We are not talking about a Mexican education, or an Indigenous education...but an education for everyone” (2003, *El Color de la Tierra*).

Works Cited

- Centro Indigena-Intercultural de Educacion No Formal: Centro Indigena de Capatacion Integral 'Fray Bartoleme de Las Casas' A.C.
2004. Proyecto: Formación, Capacitación y Microproyectos con Jóvenes Indígenas del Estado de Chiapas, México. Operación y consolidación del Centro Regional de Educación No formal 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas:' 2004-2006. San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, México.
- Communique from the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee- General Command of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, Mexico.
April 10, 1994. Electronic Document,
<http://www.ezln.org/documentos/1994/19940410b.en.htm>, accessed April 29, 2005.
- El Color de la Tierra
2003 Jose Gaya. 48 minutes. MIRADAS.
- Esteva, Gustavo
2001 The Meaning and Scope of the Struggle for Autonomy. *In Latin American Perspectives* 28(2): 120-145.
- Esteva, Gustavo
1987 Regenerating People's Space. *In Alternatives*, 12(1), 125-152.
- Esteva, Gustavo and Madhu Suri Prakash.
1998 Grassroots Postmodernism: Remaking the Soils of Cultures. New York: Zed Books Ltd.
- Illich, Ivan
1973 Deschooling Society. Great Britain: Calder and Boyars Ltd.
- Informal and Non-formal Education, Colonialism and Development: the Place of Informal Education in Development – the Experience of the South.
2001 Smith, Mark K. Electronic Document,
<http://www.infed.org/biblio/colonialism.htm#colonialism>, accessed May 1st, 2005.
- Rovillos, Raymundo.
1999 Education in the Internacional Decade of Indigenous Peoples: Bringing Education Back into the Mainstream of Indigenous Peoples' Lives. Tebbabba Breifing Paper No. 3: Indigenous Peoples and Education.
- San Andres Accords.
1996 Electronic Document, http://www.ezln.org/san_andres/acuerdos, accessed April 23, 2005.

Subcomandante Marcos.

1992. Chiapas: The Southeast in Two Winds, a Storm and a Prophecy. Electronic document, <http://www.ezln.org/documentos/1994/199208xx.en.htm>, accessed May 1, 2005.

Interviews

Administradora General Patricia de la Fuente, April 28, 2005, her office in CIdeCI

Dr. Raymundo Sanchez, May 6, 2005, his office in CIdeCI

Maestro David, April 29, 2005, his office in CIdeCI

Maestro Domingo, May 3, 2005, his office in CIdeCI

Maestra Gloria, May 3, 2005, Panaderia

Maestro Rafael Gutierrez, April 27, 2005, his office in CIdeCI