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Title: Cultivating an Insurrection: the Complexities of Popular education and the Zapatistas social justice movement

Popular Education and Social Justice Movements

Numerous social movements have used popular education to organize and empower participants to address social concerns, especially social injustices. These social movements have relied on popular education during the different phases of their undertakings, as objectives change, and as approaches shift from systemic compliance to noncompliance. Popular education frequently utilizes a pedagogy and methodology associated with Paulo Freire (Fink, and Arnove, 1991) to mobilize potential, and current participants by raising their critical consciousness, providing the necessary inspiration, and preparing them with the practical skills to participate in social movements (Freire, 1973, 1993).

In México, popular education is central to the Zapatistas in eastern Chiapas. The Zapatistas used popular education to garner enough support, experience, and momentum roughly ten years before the formal inception of the organization in 1984. Initially, popular education placed emphasis on addressing systemic inequities through government channels. Eventually these efforts shifted their focus to resolving their concerns in armed opposition to the state, which materialized in 1994. Currently, they rely on popular education to meet their educational needs, and sustain the vision of their movement. However, the praxis of popular education raises several questions about the school's role in raising critical consciousness.

Purpose of Study

This ethnographic community study will examine the current implementation of popular education in the Zapatista community of La Realidad. I plan to take a multiple-tier approach in order to fully capture these efforts and experiences by conducting context, content and interview analysis. Part of this research study will also examine the complexities of conducting research with indigenous communities.

This study will apply qualitative research methods with certain principles reflective of the research topic and context. I want to conduct research in a social justice movement and incorporate certain democratic principles in the research design. Therefore, the research methodology will attempt to be multi-vocal, collaborative, and mutually beneficial by engaging with the research site as a partnership. I will rely on previous visits and understandings of the context as a guide to discover, understand, and develop the research design with this approach in mind.

Part of this research study will also examine the complexities of conducting research with indigenous communities, democratically (multivocal, collaborative, and mutually beneficial) and in unstable research sites. Initially, I planned to study the use of popular education during the preliminary stage of the Zapatista social movement in the Zapatista community of La Realidad. I wanted to collect oral histories by collaborating with the research site, and conducting a community history preservation project. The project involved working along with the teachers of the school to document the history of the community. The second part of the project was to convert the oral histories into a curriculum by also collaborating with the local teachers. However, this led to

complications, and the possible shift in the focus of the research study. Therefore, the central research questions are:

1. What are the essential elements of popular education for the Zapatistas in La Realidad?
2. In what ways are the Zapatistas using popular education to raise critical consciousness and empower participants?
3. What are the complexities of implementing a popular education policy?
4. What research methodologies can be used to document and reflect the spirit of this social justice movement?

Although there has been a vast amount of research done on the Zapatista social justice movement (Collier & Quaratiello, 2005; Ross, 2000; Womack, 1999), the use of popular education by the Zapatistas has gone surprisingly unexplored, especially in La Realidad. This is surprising considering the significant role popular education has and continues to play in the Zapatista communities and their movement. This study will attempt to fill this lack of attention by examining the implementation of popular education in La Realidad. This dissertation study will also highlight the dynamic nature of conducting research, especially in indigenous communities and in a democratic and just manner.

Relevant Literature

Defining Popular Education

Numerous social movements, especially in Latin America, depend on popular education to empower and mobilize participants to address social concerns by raising their Critical Consciousness. According to Freire (1973, 1993), Critical Consciousness is a process where participants develop a critical analysis of the social inequities in their environment (e.g. inadequate schooling, or socioeconomic disparities), and inspires participants to locate themselves as actors, and not passive objects in addressing existing grievances. However, popular education should not be confused as a propaganda tool with indoctrinating intentions. Instead, the aforementioned critical consciousness encourages participants to also be critical of themselves, their organization, and their social movement by encouraging active dialogue.

Pedagogy and methodology of popular education

Popular education frequently utilizes a pedagogy and methodology associated with Paulo Freire (Fink, & Arnove, 1991) to facilitate the raising of Critical Consciousness. The pedagogy and methodology encourages active dialogue and participation, deconstructs the classroom, grounds the curriculum to the contextual realities of the participants, and generates solutions to addressing their existing grievances. For example, in Chile, Bosch (1998) describes how in Santiago, in order to establish and develop a dynamic learning environment, all participants acknowledged and built on their differences in education, social class, gender and age. In the Philippines, Toh and Floresca-Cawagas (1999) demonstrate the promotion of dialogue through theatre, where the content of the play (social power dynamics) facilitated discussions afterwards between the actors and audience members. Both approaches established and developed a dynamic learning environment conducive to active participation without the

need of the teacher to act as an authoritative figure, and telling the students what they should think. These methods allow participants to constantly question their thoughts and prevent the indoctrinating of the participants. In La Realidad, the Zapatistas incorporate a similar popular education pedagogy and methodology to raise the Critical Consciousness of its member. However, certain inconsistencies between theory and practice become apparent when taking a closer look.

The Complexities of Policy Implementation

The implementation of education policy is dynamic considering the complex nature of the policy process (e.g., Honig, 2006). Levinson and Sutton (2001) debunk the functionalist formatting of the policy process as a linear undertaking, where policy implementation is one inevitable step in a sequence. Levinson and Sutton argue that other factors affect policy implementation, and a negotiation takes place between the contextual reality and the different stakeholders of the policy. As a result, policy is not implemented, but appropriated. This appropriation can help facilitate the implementation of education policy. For example, in Quiroz (2001), language minority teachers shaped and reshaped district policies in order to best navigate the education system for their students. However, community stakeholders can also impede the implementation of education policy, especially when done without collaboration of local stakeholders (e.g. Murthada-Watts, 2001; García, 2005). For example, Porter (2001) illustrates how the Appalachian community, who felt their regional autonomy threatened, organized against the perceived imposition by the state government of the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990. In La Realidad, the practice of popular education falls into this complexity considering its contextual background.

Context

On the Zapatistas

Since their rebellion in 1994, the Zapatistas have forged a loose network of indigenous campesinos from eastern Chiapas into an autonomous state within the state. The area under Zapatista influence is organized into five regions. Each region is composed of several municipalities with an epicenter or *caracol* (literal translation is conch shell, but has symbolic implications). Each caracol has a governing council or *Buen Gobierno* (Good Government) and is responsible for the oversight, and management of its respective region. This organizational approach has help put into place the necessary infrastructure for the Zapatistas to become self-sufficient and independent from the state. They have their own schools, juridical system, and economy. The Zapatistas cooperatives trade locally, nationally, and internationally. The Zapatistas also have effectively used the Internet to develop a national and international network of support to help aid this autonomy.

The study of popular education takes place in the Zapatista community of La Realidad, which is located in a valley of the *Selva Lacandon*, or Lacandon Jungle, in relatively close proximity to the Guatemalan border. The research site is highly militarized. It is no coincidence that one of the largest military bases in eastern Chiapas, which includes an airstrip, is located near La Realidad. La Realidad hosts one of five Zapatista *caracoles*. Besides its functional role, this particular caracol has added symbolic significance since the Zapatistas consider the region as the birth of the Zapatista

organization. The *caracol* resembles a town square, and is the focal point of the host community and the region. Besides the governing offices, the caracol also has health clinics, a library, conference rooms, guest housing, a women's collective café and two community stores (one funds activities for the women's collective and the other for the governing offices).

La Realidad as a divided community

The community, the other physical space within La Realidad, is highly polarized along political allegiances with no middle ground. Various families and community members have decided to abandon the Zapatista organization, and switch loyalties to the government. In exchange for their allegiance, the defectors have access to resources, such as government projects, and solar panels, and live slightly better off than the Zapatistas. Currently, the majority of the residents in La Realidad are defectors, which was not always the case. This phenomenon reflects an alarming attrition rate within the Zapatista organization, and has slowly eroded the Zapatista support base throughout eastern Chiapas. In talking with Zapatistas from this and other communities, many communities in the region have few or no longer have Zapatista members.

The political and social divisions within La Realidad have created a tense and volatile environment. The defectors have developed their own parallel infrastructure alongside the Zapatistas in La Realidad. They have their own elementary school, community store, town hall, and governing offices. As a result, a competition over resources and disputed common spaces has ensued, and has further divided the community. For example, in 2006, there was a violent confrontation between defectors and Zapatista members over control of the Zapatista elementary school and grounds. Although Zapatista children primarily attend the school, defectors felt entitled to the school grounds based on an unequal distribution of land within La Realidad.

Experience with Popular Education

La Realidad has previous experience with popular education. From around 1974 to 1984, eastern Chiapas experienced a frenzy of grassroots organizing using popular education. The National Indigenous Conference of 1974 initiated this frenzy as organizers from throughout the country arrived in the region to assist in the organizing efforts (Collier & Quaratiello, 2005). By 1984, a faction decided to change directions, and go underground using popular education as part of their preparation for an armed insurrection. Since then, the Zapatista schools, referred to as Escuelas Revolucionarias Autonomas Zapatista (Zapatista Autonomous Revolutionary Schools or ERAZ) use popular education to teach basic academic skills, and cultivate their leadership.

This study examined the implementation of popular education at the Zapatista elementary school in La Realidad, and its function in the Zapatista organization and social movement. This study would still like to analyze the practice of popular education in non-school contexts, such as in women collectives, which also play a vital role in raising critical consciousness, and analyzing social injustice issues. Unfortunately, scholarly research has yet to capture these efforts and experiences. Implementing popular education in a community such as La Realidad, as elsewhere, illustrates the complexity of undertaking efforts to achieve a truly transformative education. These complexities

illuminate the relevancy of research on the nature of public policy formulation and implementation.

<div align="center">Conceptual Framework</div>

The theoretical framework is grounded in certain concepts to better understand popular education in La Realidad. According to Fraser (1992), a subaltern counterpublic sphere, "a space protected from the dominant discourse in which an alternative can be imagined, lived, and articulated" (112). This sphere becomes a safe space for critical discussion, and the validation of different expressions (Kohn, 2001). In doing, an organizational entity formulates oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs or counterdiscourses in these parallel discursive arenas (Fraser, 1997, 81). For example, Johnston (2000) explains the use of subaltern counterpublics in a social justice movement by indigenous communities. The Zapatistas use subaltern counterpublics to build a subaltern counter-identity, "based on indigenous and campesino identities, and in terms of interacting with the official public to broaden the meaning of democracy in the dominant public sphere" (483). This framework will help better understand the role, practice, and impact of popular education in La Realidad and the Zapatista social justice movement.

<div align="center">Research Methodology</div>

Guiding Principles

The research design for this study is informed by previous studies of the context, which includes a literature review of historical events, and preliminary visits to the area and the community of La Realidad. I selected La Realidad because of its status as a caracol, its size (relatively larger than the other caracoles), and its symbolic significance within the Zapatistas. The relative ease to accessing the community was another reason for selecting La Realidad as a research site. Unlike other caracoles, the school and community are highly integrated. This degree of integration is not the case in other caracoles.

My research interests in examining popular education in La Realidad apply qualitative research methods with certain guiding principles. Ginsburg and Gorostiaga (2001) insist that research often does not contribute to the empowering of marginalized communities nor does it act as a tool in addressing their social injustices. In response, Callero (2003) advocates researchers to adapt methodologies that critically examine the role of research in marginalized communities and societies and "[adopt] an emancipatory agenda & a praxis orientation toward theory" (61) In doing, Harrison (2008) argues for the democratizing of research, and "enhancing the discipline's ability to produce knowledge uncompromisingly aligned with the promotion of social justice and human liberation" (8).

This discussion leads me to ask, how can scholars democratize research and conduct it for the empowerment of the research site to address existing grievances? Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) advocates for research to emerge from the context of a specific community, where the researcher can become familiar with the needs of the community. In doing, I propose research can be collaborative, multivocal, and mutually beneficial. In La Realidad,[1] I immersed myself with the community in order to conduct a research

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[1] I placed extra emphasis on my entry into the community for a variety of reasons, including ethical, ideological, practical, and procedural. It was also important to get acquainted with the community and educational landscape, especially if the research design was to emerge organically from the research site. It

study in this democratic and just manner. I was then able to identify the matter in which study could be mutually beneficial to the community – by supporting a teacher's previous attempt at preserving the history of the school and community. This partnership proved to be strategic in identifying key research collaborators and assuring the incorporation of multiple voices. However, even with these practices, conducting research proved to be difficult.

The Complexities of the field

Initially, I had planned to study the use of popular education during the preliminary stage of the Zapatista social movement through the aforementioned community and school preservation project. The community history preservation project involved working along with the teachers of the school to document the history of the community and school. we were to collect the oral histories of various community elders (60 years of age or older). The second part of the history preservation project was to design a curriculum with the oral histories. However, the complexities of conducting academic research soon began to reveal themselves shortly after the start of the history preservation project. I had to accept these conditions and adjust accordingly by shifting the focus for the dissertation study to the use of popular education at the elementary school.

Methods

There are two inter-related approaches to extensively examine the use of popular education in La Realidad. An embedded case study design (Yin, 2003) offers an aggregate cross-case analysis, as well as localized contextual specificity within case analysis. The second approach is an emergent qualitative research design, which allows the research study flexibility to be responsive to differences at each organization (Creswell, 2003). As a result, research questions and processes can emerge and be modified based on the data and participant responses to the a priori assumptions and questions created at the onset of the study.

Data Collection Instruments

The proposed study will incorporate a multiplicity of data collection instruments to fully grasp the context and gain a complete understanding of the experience of the organization, the youth and the community. This research study will examine the context, including the educational, and political landscape of the community. I will also analyze curricular materials, which includes the teacher's handbook, textbooks used in the classroom as well as those that are not being used. I noticed a stack of teaching materials collecting dust in the library. This curricular material will expand to consist of curricula that exist outside of the classroom (murals, movement songs, community presentations, meetings for the women's collective, and both local and global context, such as historic and contemporary events). I will then analyze field notes from observations in the classroom, and from weekly staff meetings, which I attended. This research study will look at the perspectives and experiences of the youth, teachers, and community members about their experiences, perceptions, and opinions on the school, and its role in their

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was then essential to establish, build, and maintain trust as another necessary practice for democratically conducting research in La Realidad.

movement by conducting individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews (at least two administrators, two teachers, and two community members), and at least three focus group interviews (4-6 students in each group).

Modes of Analysis

The analysis for this study follows the conventions of the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specifically, I will define and apply data component codes and categories to each interview and focus group text. I will then perform a *within case* content analysis on the interview and focus group transcripts using a consensual qualitative research (CQR) method (Hill, Thompson, & Nutt Williams, 1997). I will review the transcripts to generate the codes. I will follow the same procedure for theme identification within cases, and for the *cross-case analysis*, constantly comparing perceptions of youth, and youth advocates.

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