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Towards a world in which many worlds fit? Zapatista autonomous education as an alternative means of development

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Zapatista schools which arose in 1996 in the state of Chiapas in Mexico as a pillar of Zapatista autonomy and also as a result of the indigenous communities' dissatisfaction with the government's bilingual education programme. Based on ethnographic field work, the author reveals the objectives of the schools as being the protection of indigenous culture, values, languages and rights, the promotion of sexual equality, the gearing of education towards the rural context and the strengthening of communities' independence of external organisations. The author finds that despite the political, financial and didactic obstacles they face, the schools are succeeding in making progress in fulfilling their objectives and building an alternative to the neoliberal development model.

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1. Introduction

At dawn on the 1st January 1994, thousands of armed indigenous peasants emerged from the Lacandón jungle and descended from the mountains of the Mexican southeast, attacking five municipal seats of the state of Chiapas, interrupting the government's celebrations of its signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and re-voicing Emiliano Zapata's revolutionary cries for Justice, Land and Liberty for Mexico's indigenous population. The rebels of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (E.Z.L.N.) pushed the five centuries of poverty and oppression suffered by Mexico's indigenous population to the top of national discourse and called for a new phase of indigenous politics.

Chiapas is home to many of Mexico's indigenous groups, poor in monetary terms, and often marginalised. Whilst it is the richest state in Mexico in terms of natural resources (Chiapaslink, 2000), it is estimated that 47% of Chiapanecans live in poverty[1]: a significantly higher proportion than the national average of 18.2% (CONEVAL, 2007). President Salinas's 1992 reformation of Article 27 of the Mexican constitution, which invited *ejido* – communally held – lands to be bought and sold on the national and international market, and his negotiations of NAFTA with the United States of America and Canada, represented for the Zapatistas a step too far in Mexico's neoliberal modernisation, whose emphasis on production threatened to magnify the poverty and oppression of the indigenous communities. The rebels' messages of '*¡Ya Basta!*' – 'Enough is Enough!' – and 'Never again a Mexico without us!' echoed throughout the country and the world.

One of the Zapatistas' complaints, exposed in the 'First Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle' (E.Z.L.N., 1993) was that the indigenous population was being denied an education. This conviction arose from the series of failed education models which were implemented in rural Chiapas since the 1910 revolution. The government's Department of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública – SEP), created in 1921, embodied the philosophy of its first director, José Vasconcelos. Vasconcelos aimed to integrate all members of Mexican society into the 'cosmic race' (Vasconcelos, 1948) of the *mestizo* – mixed indigenous and European – culture through teaching indigenous Mexicans to read, to write and to speak Spanish. The Department of Indigenous Education and Culture, the SEP's rural schools, its 'cultural missions' and its *Casa del Estudiante Indígena* – urban boarding school for indigenous students – assumed the responsibility of assimilating indigenous students with the *criollo* population – Mexicans with direct Spanish ancestry (Meneses Navarro, 2007).

This integrationist education ideology was not dissimilar to the approach of other governments of countries with indigenous populations. Years of colonization saw indigenous peoples worldwide marginalised and socially and economically undermined (May, 1998). Many governments have more recently adopted a desire for centralization and homogeneity (Corson, 1998) and an emphasis on a common language and culture as an identifier of citizenship (May, 1998) and have thereby built an

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[1] These figures relate to CONEVAL's 'food poverty' category, defined as the inability to purchase a basic basket of goods, even if the entirety of the household's income were used to purchase these goods (CONEVAL, 2007).

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education system in which indigenous peoples' difference is not recognised and they are forced to assimilate with the mainstream culture. The history of North American Indian education, for example, has been described as a 'grand experiment in standardisation' with the aim of transforming indigenous people to match a national ideal (Lomowaima and McCarty, 2002).

The failure of this integrationist education in Chiapas, manifested in the hostility with which it was met by many indigenous communities, encouraged, in the 1960s, various indigenous organisations to demand a respect for cultural diversity in education. This culminated, alongside a shift towards allowing indigenous communities a greater control over their development, in the SEP's initiation of its bilingual education programme in 1978. This new phase of educational policy has not functioned to the satisfaction of the Zapatistas and other indigenous groups. Various studies have exposed indigenous groups' criticisms of the application of the SEP's bilingual education programme in rural Chiapas (Flores, 2003; Klein, 2001; Sobéranes Bojórquez, 2003), and found that an aim of these SEP schools is to create conditions within which the state's hegemony can be consolidated (Gutierrez Narváez, 2005, p. 242).

The census of the year 2010 showed that Chiapas manifested the highest illiteracy rate in Mexico: 18.4% of Chiapanecans above the age of 15 were illiterate, whilst the national average was 7.6% (INEGI, 2010). The indigenous population is the most affected: in 2005, 43% of indigenous adults of Chiapas were illiterate (National Institute for the Education of Adults in Herrera Beltran, 2005). For the Zapatistas, these illiterate adults acted as a testimony to Chiapas's underdevelopment and, alongside a wide gamut of socio-economic and political disappointments, pushed the Zapatistas to call for a change. They demanded a new world: a 'world in which many worlds fit'.[2]

The 12 day war resulting from the rebellion was followed by a series of negotiations between the Zapatistas and the government. Discussions included as a central theme the subject of indigenous culture and rights, and culminated in 1996 in the San Andrés accords, which with regards to schooling, declare that 'indigenous education must be bilingual and intercultural' (in Hernández Navarro and Herrera, 1998, p. 85). These agreements, whilst manifesting an undoubted progress for the Zapatistas in voicing and protecting their demands, were ultimately not signed into the Constitution. Since 1996, then, the Zapatistas have abandoned dialogue with the government and have been constructing their autonomous communities. Literature on the roots and goals of Zapatista autonomy has emphasised the homogenising forces of globalization and neoliberalism, and described Zapatista autonomy as an attempt to resist this oppression and to obtain political, economic and cultural self-determination (Stephen, 2002; Díaz-Polanco, 2007; Mattiace, 2003).

Alongside their autonomous production, health, communications, defence, and juridical systems, the Zapatistas have been developing their autonomous junior and senior schools. The Zapatistas' solution to their education concerns are comparable to other indigenous autonomous education initiatives, such as the Maori's 'Te Kohanga Reo' Maori language education movement in New Zealand, the autonomously run schools of the Cherokee and Navajo people in North America, and the self-administered schools of the Yanomami Indians in Brazil, all built upon the communities' desire for an increased self-determination and control over their futures. Many indigenous peoples are finding that community-based education has become key to empowerment and justice, and to cultural revival (Corson, 1998).

Other indigenous peoples, such as the Sami in Norway and the Guarani in Brazil, have demanded a greater input into decision making regarding how the government schools are run. Independent of the varying degree of success with which each of these groups is acting, the rise in education initiatives and demands derived from indigenous communities over the past forty years shows an increased awareness amongst indigenous peoples of the drawbacks centralized education can have, and an energy and confidence to construct new models.

Research has found that Zapatista autonomous education aims to allow indigenous groups to learn in their own language and about their culture, and that a main goal of autonomous education is the continued independence of the communities (Flores, 2003; Klein, 2001; Gutierrez Narváez, 2005). This paper considers these findings, but freshly examines the objectives of the autonomous schools, following from the recognition that the Zapatistas are engaged in a continual uphill struggle and their demands are constantly evolving.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork, this paper answers the question:

How successful are the Zapatista autonomous schools of Morelia, Chiapas, in meeting their objectives?

The initial stages of the research found the objectives of the autonomous schools to be the protection of indigenous culture, values, languages and rights, the promotion of sexual equality, an education geared towards the rural context and the strengthening of communities' independence of external organisations. Through an analysis of the progress made on each of these goals, this paper shows that although they are facing political, financial and didactic obstacles, the schools of Morelia are successfully making progress in meeting all their objectives, each to a different extent and with a different degree of ease.

2. Critical pedagogy for resistance against oppression

The potential power of education in the socio-economic development of rural communities and in the democratisation of states has been widely recognised.[3] Various educationalists and philosophers have argued that the teaching approach of 'critical pedagogy' must be adopted in order for this transformation to occur in a context of oppressive social conditions.

Freire (1985, 1996, 2001, 2007) argues that the economic, social and political domination of the poor prohibits them from achieving a critical awareness of their world, and maintains that only through a non-authoritarian model can students liberate themselves from any oppressive force. He opposes the model of 'banking education' in which passive learners receive static information with a participatory model whereby students engage in dialogue to create their own knowledge (Freire, 1985, p. 93).

Freire's insistence on individuals 'naming their world' (1996, p. 118) in order to gain a capacity to engage in their struggle for liberation is echoed by the pedagogical theories of Giroux (1983), Chomsky (2000) and Dewey (1997). Giroux's radical pedagogy proposes that teachers must address aspects of the every-day lives of the students in order to make education meaningful, critical and emancipatory (Giroux, 1983). Chomsky (2000) criticises the aforementioned banking education and urges that schools must act as interactive spaces where students can think independently in order to create their own truths. Dewey echoes the stress of critical pedagogy on participation, indicating that teachers should incorporate the students' ideas into their

[2] The fight for a 'world in which many worlds fit' has become a deeply ingrained slogan of the Zapatista movement, used to denote a world of mutual respect and interethnic coexistence, and voiced by individuals in conversation, in murals on walls of Zapatista communities, and in various E.Z.L.N. speeches and documents. See, for example, E.Z.L.N. (2007).

[3] See Chomsky (2000), Coombs (1974), Dewey (1997), Freire (1985, 1996), Giroux (1983), Gould (1993), and Hamel (2001).

educational programme, which is a 'cooperative enterprise, not a dictation' (Dewey, 1997, p. 72).

The revolutionary pedagogy of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara shares some of the principles proposed by these pedagogues, and merits mention owing to E.Z.L.N. spokesman and strategist Subcomandante Marcos's indication that 'our (the Zapatistas') guerrilla referent... was Che' (Subcomandante Marcos in Le Bot, 1997, p. 135). Holst's analysis of 2000 pages of Guevara's writings finds the main themes of his educational pedagogy to be that education must develop values in people as a key to building a new society, that all members of society must learn together and overcome the teacher–student hierarchy, and that learning through action helps facilitate the learning process (Holst, 2009). Guevara's 'humanistic pedagogical project' (Ibid, p. 166), in aiming to create a new consciousness amongst its participants, resembles the educational philosophy of the Zapatistas, but his ideas, having arisen primarily in reference to the Cuban situation, cannot be directly transposed onto the Zapatista autonomous schools.

The constructivist theories proposed by these critical, revolutionary and emancipatory pedagogues imply the individual constructing his/her own understanding of the world through experience and through interaction with other individuals. This bottom up model is pertinent to the Zapatista schools whose focus lies in the students' participation in the construction of their own educational project. However, the models of Freire, Dewey, Giroux and Guevara are not used as strict guides by the Zapatista schools; the decentralised nature of Zapatista education ensures that aside from following loose regional guidelines, each school is free to conduct its classes as it sees fit. Thus, this research does not assume that the autonomous schools are completely loyal to the critical pedagogues, rather refers to this framework whilst using the fieldwork to expose the evolving philosophy of the Zapatista schools of Morelia.

3. Methodology

This paper provides an ethnographic analysis of Zapatista autonomous education in the Zapatista autonomous region of Morelia, Chiapas. The core of the field work took place in the communities of Pico Aglando and Riocolán,[4] home to circa 300 and 180 inhabitants respectively. Much of this territory is home to the Tojolabal ethnic group, and is situated on the eastern edge of the Highlands region of the state, bordering that of the Lacandón jungle.

I participated in daily life in the schools, family homes, on and around the basketball courts, around the community shop, on the daily walk to collect firewood, and the weekly trip to the river to wash clothes. The ethnographic tools I employed in the communities were those of participant observation, informal interviews, group discussions (see Appendix A for a list of interview questions), and analysis of teaching textbooks and booklets and students' drawings.

I also spent three days in the *caracol*[5] community of Morelia, where I conducted interviews and group discussions with education promoters and photographed murals. I spent two days in the *caracol* of the region of Oventic, speaking informally with visitors from surrounding communities. I conducted an interview with five members of the Council of Good Government[6] of the Zapatista region of Roberto Barrios, and with eight members of the board of authorities of the civil society group Las Abejas.[7] Lastly, I conducted interviews with seven individuals working with organisations involved in the Zapatista communities and academics familiar with the subject of Zapatista autonomy.

4. Presentation and analysis of the findings

4.1. Towards the horizon

The majestic mountains, covered in a blanket of tall green vegetation, fell into rolling hills and a wide, winding valley. We made our way along the dust track, sometimes parallel with the river Tzaconejá, heading towards the horizon and met by more green at every turn. In the back of our open-top truck, there were men, women, children, babies, chickens, sacks of corn, crates of chili, bags of vitamin biscuits, and a box of plastic bottles of fizzy cola.

"This is NOT *Coca Cola*", a teenaged boy assured me. "It's the cola we have here. We drink it on special occasions", he added.

The journey to Pico Aglando took us past a few small villages of wooden houses, past countless coffee and corn fields, and past a few areas of dramatic drops in the mountains. They were being carved away by bulldozers, revealing the bare yellow rock of their interior. The sandstone would be loaded into trucks and much of it transported north or exported.

Every 20 or 30 minutes, we came across a cluster of buildings emerging from the vegetation. A few were PRIísta[8] communities, whose cement-built schools introduced themselves with the large letters painted on their walls: '*SEP – EDUCACION BILINGUE*'. The majority of the communities we passed were Zapatista communities, whose wooden-built schools introduced themselves with the large letters painted on their walls. 'Autonomous School', they read, followed almost always by the name of a revolutionary icon. '*Escuela Autonóma Emiliano Zapata*', '*Escuela Autónoma Francisco Villa*', '*Escuela Autónoma Ricardo Flores Magón*', '*Escuela Autonóma Ernesto 'Che' Guevara*'. I had set out to understand what had pushed the SEP schools out of the Zapatista communities, what the objectives were of the autonomous schools, and, most importantly, to what extent the latter were making progress in meeting those objectives.

4.2. Dissatisfaction with the SEP's bilingual education programme

The policy of the government's bilingual education programme is to provide an education which recognises and embraces cultural and linguistic diversity, in which Spanish and the students' indigenous language are given equal importance, with lessons being given in a mixture of the languages. Part of its mandate is to 'develop curricula which are appropriate for the diversity which exists, foster and diffuse indigenous languages, and produce

[4] It must be noted that these are not the real names of the communities; following from the political sensitivity of Zapatista territory, I have assigned pseudonyms in order to protect the participants' identity. This should not act as a limitation: most of the findings relate to the educational situation of Morelia as a whole, and those specific to the two communities act as illustrative examples of the more general information.

[5] The Spanish word *caracol* literally means 'snail shell'. Apart from being used to refer to the base community of each of the five Zapatista regions of Chiapas, it has become a symbol of Zapatista resistance, referring to the Mayan use of the shell as a horn to summon a community gathering, and its spiral pattern conjuring too the image of the Zapatista resistance as an ongoing evolutionary process without a starting or ending point.

[6] There are five Zapatista autonomous regions in Chiapas, each with their regional Zapatista authorities, referred to as the 'Council of Good Government'.

[7] Las Abejas (The Bees) are a pacifist Christian civil society group composed of Tzotzil Mexicans of the municipality of San Pedro Chenalhó, Chiapas. Whilst supporting the Zapatista demands, they do not agree with the Zapatistas' use of violence in rebellion.

[8] The PRI – Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party) is the centre-left political party which ruled Mexico for the 71 years between 1929 and 2000. It is one of Mexico's three main political parties, the others being the centre-right PAN – Partido Acción Nacional – National Action Party, which currently holds the Presidency, and the centre-left PRD – Partido de la Revolucion Democratica – Party of the Democratic Revolution.

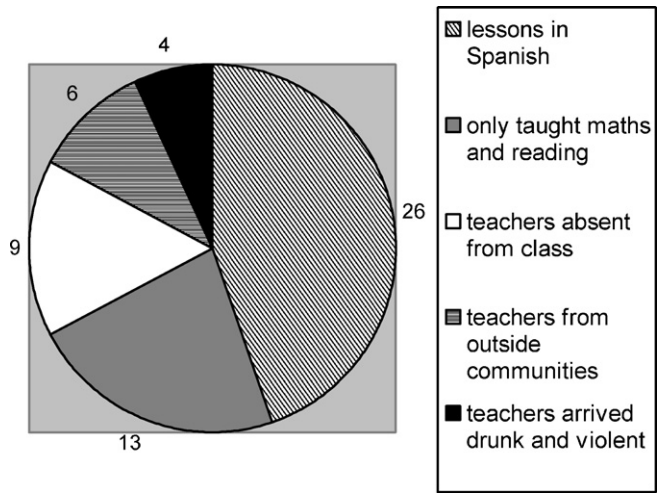

Fig. 1. Participants' primary responses to the question 'what were the problems with the education available to indigenous communities before 1994?'.

didactic materials in indigenous languages' (Secretaria de Educación Publica 2001).

Arnulpo, an elected representative of Pico Aglando, reflected upon his schooling experience as we sipped our evening coffee:

> I studied at the government primary and secondary schools. The teachers weren't enthusiastic; they came from far away and often didn't arrive to class. Sometimes, they even arrived drunk, and they were violent... They only taught us to read and write, and always in Spanish – *pure Spanish!* I didn't enjoy it – it gave me a headache.[9]

Consensus amongst all participants of the research was that the SEP's 'bilingual' education available to the indigenous communities of Chiapas before 1994 was unsatisfactory.

I asked a total of 58 individuals and groups the question 'What were the problems with the education available to the indigenous communities before 1994?'[10] Respondents were representatives of the Council of Good Government of Morelia, elected representatives of Pico Aglando and Riocolán, education promoters, adults of the communities, academics, and individuals working for Zapatista-related organisations.

As shown in Fig. 1, 26 respondents indicated as their main answer that the lessons were all in Spanish. Whilst in theory, the bilingual schools teach in both Spanish and the students' mother tongue, it appeared that in practice, this was not the case. This response was reiterated by Juan, a teacher who used to work at a bilingual school in the 1990s. 'I taught in Spanish', Juan told me. 'We all did. I do speak the indigenous language of course, but there was no push to use it. I only used it on occasion to explain words the students did not understand in Spanish'.

13 respondents indicated that students were only taught mathematics and reading, nine indicated that the teachers were often absent from classes, six indicated that the teachers came from outside the communities, and four indicated that the teachers arrived drunk and were violent. Almost all respondents indicated at least one other of the above factors in addition to their main response, and 21 of them mentioned three of the above reasons. There was a clear concurrence that these were the problems of the SEP's bilingual schools.

4.3. The objectives of the Zapatista autonomous schools

I asked the Council of Good Government of Morelia, one representative of the Regional Education Commission, four education promoters of Pico Aglando, and two of Riocolán, to list the objectives of the Zapatista autonomous schools of the region of Morelia.

All respondents indicated that the autonomous schools aimed to protect indigenous culture, values and languages, and to provide an education which was relevant to the rural context. The Council of Good Government added that education was intended to strengthen the protection of the communities' rights. The representative of the Regional Education Commission, and three of the education promoters, added that the autonomous schools aimed to promote sexual equality. Four of the education promoters indicated that the autonomous schools aimed to strengthen the communities' independence of external organisations.

This paper thus takes the objectives of the Zapatista autonomous schools of the region of Morelia to be as follows:

1. the protection of indigenous culture
2. the protection of indigenous values
3. the protection of indigenous languages
4. the protection of indigenous rights
5. the promotion of sexual equality
6. an education geared towards the rural context
7. the strengthening of communities' independence of external organisations

The following sections will present and analyse the findings related to the schools' progress in meeting each of these objectives, in turn. However, it will be apparent in the crossover of the discussions that since many of the objectives are interlinked, they cannot be examined in complete isolation.

4.4. The seven objectives

4.4.1. Autonomous education for the protection of Indigenous culture[11]

'After the conquest, the missionaries forced the indigenous population to accept their customs. The injuries are still felt... And we do not want it to happen any further. That's why we must focus on teaching our children about our roots, about our traditions... about the meaning behind our daily practices'.

(Pati, young mother and health promoter of Riocolán)

Chiapas's indigenous groups practice a Mesoamerican culture derived from their Mayan roots; their political organisation, dress, culinary traditions, celebrations, medical practices, spiritual beliefs, and cosmovision, contrast with those of *mestizo* Mexico. Cultural variation exists also between the ethnic groups; the Tojolabals practice a slightly different culture than that of their Tzeltal and Tzotzil neighbours. Participants asked to list the objectives of the autonomous schools indicated that in such a context, it is extremely important that culture is studied and practiced as part of the children's education.

One of the subjects learned at the autonomous schools is named 'Our Culture'. Students learn about the historical roots of their daily practices, about their community rituals and about the tasks that constitute the preparations for festivals. Culture is also intertwined

[9] All quotes are derived from personal communication in July 2009 with the individual and groups cited, unless otherwise indicated, and all participants have been assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. All translations are my own.

[10] Phrasing of the question varied according to the level of formality of the communication.

[11] Following from the participants' clear separation of cultural practices and moral values in our communication, this section will use the term 'culture' to refer to customs, practices and belief systems.

with the students' history lessons, which emphasise the events and practices of the pre-Columbian years.

"The SEP schools didn't teach us about our culture or our history", education promoter Rigo recalled. "For the SEP, the history of Mexico begins with the Spanish conquest. Now, the children are starting to learn about our *own* history and practices".

The students are encouraged to discuss their culture further during and after attending one of Morelia's regional education gatherings where students participate in workshops, give speeches about their communities and practices, and enjoy a series of traditional festivities. Upon her return from such an event, Liza, a 13 year-old student of Riocolán, updated me on what she had learned:

> We talked about our communities, and I heard about the saints they honour in other places, as well as the roles other children have in their families... We learned about how to organise festivities for the whole group – the cooking, the music, the dance, and the speeches.

Aside from their traditional practices, the Tojolabals possess a deep chest of spiritual beliefs centred on a mixture of their worship of the gods of the sun, the moon, and other deities, and the Christianity brought by the Spanish in the 15th century. They maintain also a gamut of myths and stories passed down orally by community elders. This particular belief system and 'community wisdom', ingrained in the Tojolabals' cosmovision, must be taken into account for education to protect culture. Absalón, a representative of the Regional Education Committee, as well as four of the education promoters, emphasised that the promoters, as members of the community in which they teach, are familiar with the local cosmovision and thus naturally incorporate this into their teaching, unlike the teachers of the SEP who often came from other towns or communities.

The role of education in protecting indigenous culture can thus be seen as a dual force. First, the schools are used to actively promote the Tojolabal culture, providing a theoretical basis for and an active enforcement of community practices. Second, the schools are used as a defensive tool with which to shield the students from the growing force of external cultural influences as the Communications Revolution continues to export ideas and practices of Western culture to Mexican cities, and of modern Mexican culture to its previously isolated rural areas.

"The men have begun to wear modern clothes", Bila (student, 14 years old) pointed out one misty morning in Riocolán. "We like our colourful dresses, this is what we wear; we do not want to start wearing those city clothes".

4.4.2. Autonomous education for the protection of indigenous values

'There is an element of our values which bothers the rich, the neoliberals, in their plan: that is our tradition of living together, thinking together, and working together... This makes us stronger and allows us to defend ourselves'.

(Morelia Education Commission, n.d., p. 11)

"We're all equal here; it doesn't matter if one of us makes a mistake, because we are all learning together", was a message that I heard frequently at the schools. The education promoters of Riocolán stressed that they are constantly learning alongside the students, following from the poor education which they themselves received. The promoters' own learning, together with the Zapatista emphasis on equality amongst all individuals, encourages the promoters to step back from their leading role and allow the students to participate. Activities in Pico Aglando and Riocolán include group story-writing sessions, and the students creating exercises such as mathematical sums or poetry fill-in-the-gaps for the rest of the group to tackle. This teaching methodology represents an alternative dynamic of student–teacher roles: a focus on participation in lessons with an 'education promoter' rather than the passive absorption of information from an authoritative 'teacher'.

Promoter Eliseo explained:

> I don't have a fixed lesson plan ... I let the students guide the class, with suggestions of activities for learning particular subjects. The atmosphere is relaxed and we all work together... by the time they leave school they are prepared to work and think together, for example when the community makes its joint decisions.

Eliseo's words are echoed in the final verse of Morelia's Education Hymn, sung each morning before classes begin:

> We'll fight all together
> For our education
> Which is of the people and for the people
> Heart-felt and conscientious

Indeed, many participants indicated that the focus on participation and dialogue acts to prepare the students for the cargos[12] – community roles – they will occupy when they finish school and for the process of community decision making, a crucial part of the Zapatista governance structure.

The education promoters are elected into their roles by their community. Rather than receive a salary, the promoter is supported by other community members who ensure that he/she and his/her family have enough food and resources. That the promoters are unpaid is an expression in itself of the norm of reciprocity and working for the good of the community, rather than for personal gain, a core Zapatista value often voiced in the phrase '*para todos todo*, *nada para nosotros*' ('for all of us, everything; for each of us, nothing').

This strong sense of solidarity between promoters and the rest of society forged by the voluntary nature of the system is replicated amongst the students. They work together in the cleaning of the classrooms, and the trips to the hills around Pico Aglando to collect sand for the maintenance of the school's basketball court. A popular school activity in Riocolán is the cleaning and harvesting of the plants of the school's sugarcane plantation, which functions as a collective looked after entirely by the students and education promoters. Promoter Miguel explained the benefits:

> Not only do the students enjoy this, and it allows us to grow a good amount of sugarcane, but it also teaches the students to work as a team. This will be particularly useful for them when they begin to work in collectives... Because that's how we work. We have our individual plots of land but almost all of us work also in collectives for the production of our corn, beans, and coffee.

It emerges that the schools are succeeding in protecting the key Tojolabal values of reciprocity, group work, and equality through the school structure and the teaching methodology, rather than through an explicit teaching of community norms.

4.4.3. Autonomous education for the protection of indigenous languages

'I went to school up there, in the mountains. We only learned in Spanish. Life is happier here. It is really important that we have this school now, this school which teaches in Tojolabal, the language of our ancestors, our language'.

[12] The Zapatistas operate the ancient cargo system as a means of appointing duties – community roles and responsibilities – to community members. Roles are unpaid and individuals are elected into their role by the community. Once elected into a certain role, the individual must perform that role unless he/she has good reason not to. Roles exist for all aspects of community organisation, for example in the domains of health, education, communications, security and production.

(Maria, community elder, Pico Aglando)

Of the 37 people asked whether they feel their language is being protected by the autonomous schools, 32 replied positively. Three indicated an importance of protecting the Tojolabal language, but added that since the students speak Tojolabal at home, the school is not such an important mechanism for linguistic protection. The remaining two respondents said that the autonomous schools are helping to protect the indigenous language, but that it is still at risk of being eroded due to the communities' growing contact with the Spanish-speaking world.

The education promoters of Pico Aglando and Riocolán conduct the majority of their classes in Tojolabal, following regional instructions to do so and also following their natural inclination to converse in their mother tongue. The promoters also engage in an active effort to teach the reading and writing of Tojolabal words. Miguel informed me that the SEP's methods of teaching reading were not functioning well when applied to the learning of Tojolabal.

"So we created our own teaching method", he enthused, "we learn each letter one by one, through stories and through drawing... Stories and drawing are important in our tradition, even more than the written word".

Aside from the promoters' own teaching techniques, *Let's learn to read and write in Tojolabal* is the main textbook that is used by the schools of Morelia. Designed by a group of promoters in 2005, it contains drawings and names of objects, plants and animals in the context of rural scenes familiar to the students. The students of Riocolán were sitting out on the grass after school one afternoon, excitedly reading out the words.

"The kids love this book", Erlinda, mother of seven, assured me. "Of course they can speak Tojolabal fluently, but they need to learn to read and write in Tojolabal if we are going to keep our language from being destroyed. This book is great, the kids are learning to read and write, quite fast".

The dominance of the Tojolabal language is, however, sometimes broken during mathematics lessons.

"Triangle, square, hexagon", listed Rigo in Spanish at the start of a geometry lesson for the third level students.[13] The students repeated the names of the shapes in Spanish.

Later, the first level students, counting aloud, initially spoke the numbers in Spanish.

"In Tojolabal!" exclaimed promoter Vicente. "Why are we not counting in Tojolabal?"

The tendency to use Spanish words for mathematics and counting is possibly a result of community members' interaction in the Spanish language with buyers and sellers in the town markets, according to Vicente. The training sessions given in Spanish to the promoters by civil society organisations have also unintentionally encouraged the use of Spanish in subject matter such as mathematics.

The use of Tojolabal is also broken during the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language. The third level students complete Spanish lessons before their entry to senior school. The younger students work in Spanish occasionally, as seen through their labelled drawings on the classroom walls, some of which use Spanish alongside, or instead of, Tojolabal, and the songs which they sing in the Spanish language. This use of Spanish does not, however, appear to pose a threat to the survival of the predominant Tojolabal, as it is learned to a limited extent and as a foreign language.

The autonomous schools are thus succeeding in protecting the Tojolabal language by conducting their classes primarily in this language, and also by paying a particular attention to learning to read and write in Tojolabal. The Spanish which is entering the teaching discourse through the promoters' training in Spanish is an influence which will need to be monitored as long as the Zapatistas continue to wish to protect their indigenous languages.

4.4.4. Autonomous education for the protection of indigenous rights

'We indigenous people have been oppressed time and time again. The cries of Zapata are still alive, but the government has been silencing them, has been pushing us to the side... Now we are fighting back and educating our children. They are the next generation of the Zapatista movement and they must learn about our history and about neoliberalism so that they can defend our rights'.

(Eliseo, education promoter, Riocolán)

The vast majority of participants who were asked whether they felt that the autonomous education was allowing them to build confidence in protecting their rights responded positively, indicating that the students were learning about historical, political, land and economic issues which were not taught in the SEP schools, and that through this, the students were becoming better equipped to fight for their rights. The rate at which this process was occurring, however, was a matter which divided opinion. Of the 51 people or groups who responded positively to the first question, 16 replied that it has had an immediate effect. The remaining respondents concurred that this was a gradual process, which was slowly taking effect and whose results would be greater as the promoters become better trained.

The words on the blackboard of the school of Riocolán had been left untouched since the previous week's classes:

How did our ancestors live?
What is neoliberalism?
What does the term 'to command' mean?
The answers to these questions had been discussed with the students of levels one and two, children of between five and 12 years of age.

The promoters of Riocolán and Pico Aglando, as well as Absalón of the Regional Education Commission, stressed that the subjects of history and politics are given great importance in classes of all levels. The history lessons encourage the students to discuss their Mayan ancestors, the Spanish conquest and Mayan rebellions, and the roles of Zapata, Villa and Madero in the 1910 revolution.

"This means our TRUE history", promoter Caetano emphasised. "Not the lies that the government schools used to tell us about our past, and not merely the past 500 years, rather, the whole history of our Mesoamerican ancestors".

The students of all levels learn also about political concepts, through basic discussions of issues such as class divisions, past revolutions and socialism. Throughout the students' school years, the principles of governing obeying and communal decision making are highlighted as the basic political dynamic of the Zapatista community, and as a better model than the system of the 'bad government'.[14]

I asked a group of third level students what they learn in their politics lessons.

"We learn about governing obeying, and about the cargo system", Rocio declared.

"Yes", agreed David, "when we finish school we will have our responsibilities in the community. We all share and work together,

[13] First level students are usually between five and eight years of age, second level between nine and 12, and third level between 13 and 15. All students are encouraged to attend senior school between the ages of 15 and 18. However, these ages are loose guidelines and a student's level depends on his/her own progression.

[14] The Zapatistas almost always assign the word 'bad' as a prefix to the word 'government', in speech and in writing.

not like the bad government. And we learn about the land. We must be strong and we must protect our land".

The land occupied by many of the communities of Morelia was taken from its rich *mestizo* and foreign owners in the years following 1994, under Zapata's principle that 'he who works the land has the right to own it'. The school of Riocolán is a cement building with high ceilings, glass windows and elaborate iron decorations. A sharp contrast with the community's small wooden houses, this building was once the home of the landowner. Now, the students' drawings are plastered over the walls, and the house's garden with its beautiful views of the valley is used as a playground. It is in this building that the students discuss the key importance of land rights, learning about their parents' and grandparents' labour as *baldíos*,[15] about the significance of the revolution's success in bringing about the *ejido* land-sharing system and of Salinas's 1992 abolishing of this system.

"The people used to work very, very hard", one student informed me. "Now, we are much more free, we can work on our own land and grow our own food", she added proudly.

'We don't want NAFTA, we want freedom!' reads a poster next to the blackboard of a classroom in Pico Aglando. The promoters use a booklet created by the Morelia Education Commission (n.d.) to guide discussions about neoliberalism and discuss its impact on their lives. Vicente explained to his third level class:

> We are poor because of the system, because of capitalism. Very few people gain from the system, especially since NAFTA ... We are agricultural people. We produce, we consume, and we try to sell any excess. But we only receive a low reward for our work. We must organize ourselves so the neoliberals don't rob us of our land and culture.

In the context of a government whose neoliberal policies continue to ignore the needs of the indigenous population and the climate of 'low-intensity war' – harassment, killings, kidnappings and other violence – which has existed in Chiapas since 1994, the promoters are urged, at the educational meetings in Morelia, to ensure that they spark interest amongst the students of socio-political and economic issues. The aforementioned booklet and the promoters' training sessions in Morelia are used to orient the promoters and equip them with a point of departure from which they can conduct their politics classes.

Although progress remains to be made in terms of the promoters' full knowledge of the political situation, and their consequent ability to address more than one side of the debate, the interest and discussion sparked in the students indicates a growing political conscience and the strengthening of students' confidence to protect their rights.

4.4.5. Autonomous education for the promotion of sexual equality

'I cannot read or write... My parents didn't send me to school because there was a lot of work to be done in the house and on the land. I am learning now, but it is difficult and I am learning very slowly. My daughter goes to school on every school day; I hope that she will learn and have more opportunities than I had'.

(Juliana, Pico Aglando)

Article 6 of the E.Z.L.N.'s Revolutionary Law of Women states that 'women have the right to education' (E.Z.L.N., 1994). The 11 education promoters and members of the Good Government Council of Morelia, and the 21 parents of students with whom I spoke on this issue stressed that all children were urged to attend school, and that in general the number of girls attending the junior schools was almost equal that of boys. Six of the parents mentioned that there was a slight lag in girls' attendance of the senior school, but that this was gradually diminishing. The male/female composition of the classes of Pico Aglando and Riocolán is close to 50:50, with 33 boys and 29 girls attending the school at Pico Aglando, and 24 boys and 19 girls attending the school at Riocolán. The girls and boys learn the same subjects, together. According to Manuela (mother, Riocolán), this male–female mixture and equality within the school is 'giving girls a greater self-confidence and helping to give women greater opportunities'.

The mixture of girls and boys at the junior schools is particularly apparent when contrasted with the separation of the class in Pico Aglando's adult literacy programme into male and female groups.

"We don't feel comfortable learning with the men", Claudia lamented. "They are more advanced than us, and we feel embarrassed to learn alongside them ... We do not want this gap to exist amongst our children. At school, they all learn together and they all have the same opportunities".

By educating girls in the same manner and to the same level as boys, and by attracting nearly all of the girls of the communities to attend classes, the autonomous schools of Morelia have succeeded in promoting a sexual equality which has begun to play out in practice with more and more women qualified to occupy positions of responsibility in the communities. It must be noted that most Zapatista women maintain their role of looking after the home, the children and making the tortillas, a task which commences at dawn and requires hours of work, whilst there are more men than women elected to the formal 'cargo' positions of responsibility. Indeed, all nine of the education promoters of Pico Aglando and Riocolán are male. However, as more girls complete their education, the number of women occupying 'cargo' roles is increasing, and women are inventing new ways to enjoy the opportunities open to them. Sofia (women's agri-cooperative member, Riocolán) explained:

> We women are organising ourselves into cooperatives; we work together to produce vegetables, crafts, and honey, and to look after the children ...The Zapatista principles allow us the same right as men to participate in all political activity of the community and the region; as more girls complete their education, they will be literate and they will possess enough skills to be able to take up these opportunities, if they wish.

4.4.6. Autonomous education as geared towards the rural context

"What is the land like where you live?" I was asked on many occasions by adults and teenagers of the communities. "Are there many mountains? Does it rain? Do you have a good corn crop? And beans?" The resultant conversations demonstrated the centrality of the land to the lives and cosmovision of the Tojolabals. Within such a context, the universalized SEP bilingual education faced obstacles, and the Zapatista schools were called upon to reflect and coincide with the routine, activities, and beliefs surrounding the students' rural lives.

First, the school timetables and calendars are centred on the needs of the land. Students attend the junior schools on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, with the rest of the week free to work on the land or in the home. The senior school of Morelia, in turn, runs classes for 15 days, followed by a break of 15 days in which the students return to their communities.

"The days off are not a holiday like those they have in the government schools", Absalón stressed. "It is a change in activity. The students need this time to go and work with their families."

Second, the importance of the rural context is reflected in the subjects studied at the school.

[15] The term 'baldío' refers to a sharecropper whose lands were absorbed by estates created from 1847 when state laws dispossessed indigenous Mexicans from their land, and who consequently was forced to work on the newly created estates (Mattiace, 2003, p. 163).

"Let's go and eat some Zapatista sugarcane!" Eliseo invited the students one afternoon.

As we walked down the hill to the school's sugarcane plantation, the children sang, laughed, and excitedly explained to me that this month, the sugarcane was particularly delicious. Upon arrival at the plantation, the students inspected the plants to ensure they were growing healthily, and then expertly used their machetes to chop the plant which would provide us with our afternoon treat. Activities such as these teach the children to work together on the land, this preparing them for their working lives as farmers in agricultural collectives.

Within the classroom, the students discuss the most effective techniques to work the land. They also learn about the animals, insects and medicinal plants of the surrounding countryside, about the science behind the transmittance of malaria, and about the necessary precautions to minimise the likelihood of being infected with the disease. These classes act as a base for the students' secondary education, as part of which they learn subjects such as construction, accounting, and mechanics for the reparation of basic machinery, all deemed important for the evolution of the community's agricultural collectives.

Third, the schools act as a space in which students can learn through a free expression of their rural existence. Students of Pico Aglando learn the Tojolabal and Spanish names for the months of the year in relation to the corn planting and harvesting calendar. The children's preferred subjects for their drawings are butterflies, cows, chickens, snakes, horses, trees, armadillos, corn plants in their various stages of maturity, and corn cobs in their various forms and colours. Stories used as teaching aides speak of woodcutters, cows, and men going to work in the cornfields: people and animals familiar to the children's world and thus stories which gauge their attention and encourage their learning.

Thus we see that through its school calendar, its stress on the natural sciences in terms of theoretical lessons and practical activities, and its allowing the students to think freely as individuals living in the rural context, Zapatista education is more relevant to the lives of its students than the universalized SEP education could be. Indeed, the geographic and climatic variation within Chiapas implies the necessity for each Zapatista region to independently design its school structure, a step even further from a centralized education system.

4.4.7. Autonomous education for the strengthening of communities' independence of external organisations

At various points along the roads and dust tracks of Morelia, large plastic signs greet the traveller. '*Chiapas Solidario. Proyecto de Gobierno – Construcción de Pisos Firmes*', they boast. 'Construction of Solid Floors'. The Zapatistas have been rejecting any such government projects since 1996.

"The government implements these projects so as to appear proactive", Nico (health promoter, Pico Aglando) regretted. "They do not actually give the people what they need, nor does a cement floor mean a place where one can live with dignity".

Following their rejection of all government projects, the Zapatistas have benefited from various health, education, infrastructure and environmental initiatives from civil society organisations. However, their quest for true autonomy and self-sufficiency has encouraged them to demand a significant degree of control over these projects, and to rely as little as possible on this aid.

The autonomous schools, by promoting the political values of the Zapatistas, by teaching the value of the cargo jobs system and by preparing students to be trained in specific areas, pave the way for the students to occupy positions of responsibility in the various areas of social organisation. As an increasing number of young Zapatistas are completing their education in the autonomous schools, they are training as doctors and nurses or being elected into a position of responsibility at the community or regional level. The knowledge acquired through individuals' practice in these roles is accumulating as the Zapatistas' autonomy matures, and thus there is a decreasing reliance on external organisations for development projects or for aid in training individuals in their specific field. The optimism shared by almost all the community members with whom I spoke is summed up by Eliseo:

> We are becoming stronger: more children are attending school, and we are learning how to do things by ourselves. When we arrived on this land, for houses we had twigs and a few large leaves over our heads. Of course, the rain came in and soaked us every night ... Now we have proper houses; even though we only have mud floors, the walls and roofs are strong and the rain does not enter.

Whilst the schools act as the base from which the Zapatistas are becoming more independent of external organisations for the development of their communities, it must be noted that civil society organisations are still called upon for help with certain projects, and there is still a way to go before a complete self-reliance is reached. Moreover, the Zapatistas continue to stress the importance of external individuals and organisations in the promotion of Zapatista principles in the international arena. Nico, looking up from the book he was reading about the life of Che Guevara, explained:

"We need international awareness of what we are doing", he emphasised. "We want people to know, we want to share our idea. 'Far from here, close to there', as Che says... We need our ideas to be transported."

4.5. Progress and obstacles

The autonomous schools of Morelia have used the Zapatista emphasis on hope – hope of creating a new world, hope of attaining Democracy, Justice and Freedom, and more immediately, hope as the driving force behind the construction of their autonomy – to develop significantly as a pillar of the communities' autonomy. Since their birth in 1996, they have succeeded in fostering an appreciation of the importance of education amongst community members, and, according to the Council of Good Government, the rate of school attendance, junior and senior, has been continuously rising. Rigo confirmed that whilst the junior school at Pico Aglando was attended by thirty students in 1996, around sixty students – almost all the children of junior school age – now attend classes each day. If this trend continues, the schools could establish themselves further as a focal point in young Zapatistas' lives, and a means to shaping their societies.

The schools' fostering of teaching methods similar to the concepts proposed by the critical pedagogists is allowing the students to relate to and understand their school activities, this encouraging them to attend school with enthusiasm each day. This enthusiasm is magnified by the contrast between the autonomous Zapatista and the state bilingual schools.

It appears that none of the aforementioned problems with the bilingual schools occur with the autonomous schools. The voluntary nature of the teachers' roles implies that they are not obliged by any written contract to work, and therefore it could be argued that their attendance at the schools cannot be guaranteed. However, the Zapatistas related that the teachers were absent from the schools very infrequently, thanks to their dedication to the students and also the responsibility and expectation that the teachers will fulfil their role, which comes with the cargo jobs system.

E.Z.L.N. Comandante Tacho's view that 'we are continuously constructing Zapatismo' (Tacho in Le Bot, 1997, p. 234) is reflected in the constant evolution of the schools through the promoters' accumulation of practice and knowledge. Promoters Eduardo, Caetano and Rigo emphasised that they did not know much about some of the subjects they were teaching, especially mathematics and history, and that this was the schools' main problem, but that they were learning as fast as they could. "Así es", stated Caetano. "That's just the way it is." He professed:

> We face many obstacles, but we're moving forward. It's not just a theory we're talking about. Look: we're implementing it in practice. It's tough because we adults don't have much knowledge of the subjects we teach ... We don't know much, but we're learning. We must continue to build our fight... for our children.

Aside from the need to accumulate more teaching knowledge, Absalón highlighted the biggest challenges of the autonomous schools as being the fear of harassment and threats from government and paramilitary groups, and the insufficiency of teaching resources. Eliseo echoed the latter point:

"Do you have a book about Zapata?" he asked me. "This year we have received some booklets guiding us for maths lessons ... we are receiving more and more useful resources, but I could really do with a history book ... I want to read about Zapata – his life, his principles – so that I can answer the children's questions".

Whilst the Zapatistas aim to cease being dependent on external organisations, it is clear that in the short term, some financial support to acquire sufficient resources for the schools is of great use. As non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and funding bodies have fewer financial resources to offer in the aftermath of the global economic recession, the Zapatistas might not receive all the support they require as quickly as otherwise might have happened, and it is possible that their accomplishment of their aim to cut dependence on links with external organisations may be delayed.

Five individuals with whom I spoke, whilst appreciating the achievements of the autonomous schools, suggested that it was problematic that the qualifications granted by these schools were not recognised officially, and that thus the students could not use them to proceed to university. These participants were individuals working for organisations in the town of San Cristóbal, rather than community members. I asked 12 further respondents (the Council of Good Government, three education promoters and eight parents of students) whether they considered the lack of university possibilities a problem.

"No", they almost unanimously responded, indicating that the lives of the Zapatistas were agricultural lives, and that no university could be of any use in the training for such a vocation.

"*Tenemos nuestra Universidad del Campo*", Maria smiled. "We have our University of the Countryside."

It could be argued that as the Zapatistas' autonomy progresses, they may feel more desire or need to attend university, including as a means of strengthening their ability to protect their rights. Thus, the issue of whether, despite the Zapatistas' indications that there is little utility or desire of community members to attend University, it is unfair to deny students this *possibility*, is a matter for further discussion. Meanwhile, the regional educational structure continues to progress, *caminando preguntando* – making progress by asking questions – and testing new methods. The Council of Good Government indicated:

> We are all recognising more and more the value of education, and we are holding meetings to discuss the opening of a technological school, where students will learn about computers and the use of small machinery. Who knows, maybe in a few years time we will have our own university – a Zapatista University – here in Morelia!

5. Conclusion

Since their creation in 1996, the Zapatista autonomous schools of Morelia have evolved considerably as a key component of the autonomy into which the communities have injected their innovative energy and creative hope. The schools are proving successful in meeting all their objectives, through the explicit teaching of certain subjects and the more subtle embodiment of norms and values within the teaching methods and the school structure. However, obstacles remain and certain objectives are being met with more ease and success than others.

The development of Zapatista autonomous education as a home-grown project rather than as a model imposed by external actors has allowed the schools' objective of protecting indigenous values to be met with great success. The embodiment of the Tojolabal norms of reciprocity and group work and thinking in the schools' participatory teaching method and in the system of electing promoters has allowed a subtle reinforcement of the values surrounding the students in their everyday lives. Similarly, the gearing of education towards the rural context is working with ease as the schools are free to organise their timetables around the needs of the land, and the subjects taught relating to the natural sciences are supported by the promoters' and the students' already deep familiarity with the rural context.

The protection of the Tojolabal language is permitted through the promoters' natural tendency to converse in their mother tongue together with their active effort to create new teaching methods and materials for the strengthening of students' ability to read and write in Tojolabal. The autonomous education is succeeding in protecting Tojolabal culture by encouraging discussion of the significance of traditions, and the implementation of cultural practices at regional education gatherings. The success of the schools in protecting indigenous language and culture, however, must be monitored: whilst the communities are currently relatively isolated, access to television and computers is beginning to appear and the schools will need to ensure that they adapt their teaching according to the influence of the latter if they wish to avoid or limit the erosion of the Tojolabal language and the uptake of external cultural practices.

Although communities continue to benefit from resources and training courses from civil society organisations, the schools' preparation of students for the cargo system is acting to strengthen the communities' capacity for self-sufficient development. The encouragement of girls to attend school and the gradually increasing total rate of attendance which has resulted from this, acts too to strengthen communities' internal organisation. Meanwhile, the rising number of girls attending junior and senior school is a promising trend which if maintained will bring women's educational levels to a par with those of men. Whilst sexual 'equality' is far from reach with most women still maintaining their traditional role in the home and a lower quantity of women than men currently occupying cargos, the equality of opportunity in education and in political participation that is now open to women represents a significant step from the pre-1994 years.

The discussion of political, legal, historical and economic issues encouraged at the schools is beginning to develop in students an increasingly critical conscience and a heightened confidence in protecting their rights. Combined with the centrality of dialogue and participation to the schools' teaching methods, this is encouraging individuals to become agents of their liberation, as suggested by the critical pedagogues. The promoters' initiation of

these discussions is aided by the training courses they receive and the booklets produced by the Regional Education Commission. However, as the Zapatistas of Morelia themselves recognise, much progress remains to be made in meeting this objective. Whilst the development of a political confidence is a very gradual process, there is also a need for both a greater amount of didactic resources, and the passing of time, for promoters to accumulate a more detailed knowledge of socio-economic, political, historical and legal issues.

Whilst we see that the autonomous schools are meeting their objectives at varying rates of success, it must be emphasised that apart from the objective of strengthening independence of external organisations, the goals have no fixed end points in the foreseeable future and the schools are constantly striving to maximise their impact on the objectives. The continuous nature of this process implies that further studies will need to be implemented to gauge future progress. Moreover, the decentralised nature of Zapatista education means that these findings are not necessarily applicable to the other four Zapatista regions of Chiapas. Of use would be an examination of the progress of the autonomous schools of the other regions to allow a comparative study of how Zapatista autonomous education plays out in different cultural, linguistic and geographic settings.

The Zapatistas are showing that it is indeed possible to construct a home-grown education system without the intervention of the government, which satisfies the demands of indigenous communities and allows them greater self-determination. Whilst indigenous education initiatives are springing up worldwide, the Zapatista example is more large-scale than most in terms of the number of communities and individuals involved, this requiring a carefully planned and administered central and regional organisation. Despite the long time frame required to produce such an education model, it is being looked upon by educationalists and indigenous communities worldwide as an example of the empowerment that can be achieved through education, and this will surely continue as indigenous peoples are ever more aware of and intent on protecting their rights.

The Zapatistas' desire to 'build from below and for below an alternative to neoliberal destruction' (E.Z.L.N., 2005) has been partially fulfilled by the autonomous schools of Morelia, which by working to meet their seven objectives have challenged the 'homogenising national project' (Hernandez Castillo, 2003, p. 82) and constructed an alternative educational model: a new space in which indigenous identity can breathe and thrive. Whilst significant political, financial and didactic obstacles remain, and progress is very gradual, the schools of the mountains of the Mexican southeast are showing that home-grown development techniques can function effectively, and that it might just be possible to build a world in which many worlds fit. Indeed, as voiced in the latest Zapatista Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle, 'Education has advanced (here) in this territory in rebellion for Humanity and against neoliberalism, that is, in Zapatista skies and land' (E.Z.L.N., 2005).

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Appendix A. Interview questions

Note that owing to the unstandardised nature of the interviews, not every interviewee was asked every question, and unlisted questions were asked as they arose from the conversation. This table acted only as a rough guide.

Topic	Students	Parents/adult community members/education promoters	Zapatista spokesmen/Councils of Good Government/community representatives	NGO employees/volunteers/ academics
General/open	What do you think is the purpose of going to school? Do you enjoy school? Do you think it is important for you to go to school? Do you go to school every day?	What is the purpose of (your) children going to school? Do (your) children enjoy school? Do you consider it important to send your children to school? Do they attend school regularly?	What is the purpose of children attending school? Do the children enjoy school? Is it important for the children to attend school? Do they attend school regularly? Are you satisfied with school attendance?	What is the purpose of children attending school? Do the children enjoy school? Is it important for the children to attend school? Do they attend school regularly? Are you satisfied with school attendance?
		How much do you consider the school to be a key central institution of the community? E.g. in comparison to church/ shop/meeting place? More or less so now than before the autonomous system?	How much do you consider the school to be a key central institution of the community? E.g. in comparison to church/ shop/meeting place? More or less so now than before the autonomous system? What do you see as the potential of the autonomous system? What are its aims? Are these being met? If not yet, when do you envisage them being met?	Have you seen a rise or fall in community members' interest in and serious attendance of school since the launch of the autonomous system?
1. Protection of indigenous culture	Do you enjoy learning about your traditions? What do you learn about your traditions/ practices/festivities?	Do you feel that the school system protects Tojolabal traditions? A lot more than the previous system? If so, how is education protecting Tojolabal culture?	Is the autonomous system protecting indigenous traditions? A lot more than the previous system? If so, how is education protecting indigenous culture?	Do you see the autonomous system as an effective way to protect indigenous traditions? Much more effective than the previous system? If so, how is education protecting indigenous culture?

(*Continued*)

Topic	Students	Parents/adult community members/education promoters	Zapatista spokesmen/Councils of Good Government/community representatives	NGO employees/volunteers/ academics
2. Protection of indigenous values	Do you work together with your friends at school? Do you enjoy this? Outside school?	Do you feel that the school system protects Tojolabal values? A lot more than the previous system? If so, how is education protecting Tojolabal values?	Is the autonomous system protecting indigenous values? A lot more than the previous system? If so, how is education protecting indigenous values?	Do you see the autonomous system as an effective way to protect indigenous values? Much more effective than the previous system? If so, how is education protecting indigenous values?
3. Protection of indigenous languages	Do you enjoy learning in Tojolabal? Do you prefer to speak Tojolabal or Spanish at school? At home?	Do you feel that the school system protects the Tojolabal language? A lot more than the previous system? If so, how is education protecting the Tojolabal language? In which language do students learn? Converse?	Is the autonomous system protecting indigenous languages? A lot more than the previous system? If so, how is education protecting indigenous languages? In which language do students learn? Converse?	Do you see the autonomous system as an effective way to protect indigenous languages? Much more effective than the previous system? If so, how is education protecting indigenous languages? In which language do students learn? Converse?
4. Protection of indigenous rights	Do you learn about land ownership/politics/the government/ the economy/money at school? Do you enjoy learning about this?	Are students learning a lot/ efficiently? More or less so now than before the autonomous system? Have you seen an increase in the confidence of young people in the protection of their rights?	Do you think students are learning a lot/efficiently? More or less so now than before the autonomous system? Have you seen an increase in the confidence of young people in the protection of their rights?	Do you think students are learning a lot/efficiently? More or less so now than before the autonomous system? Have you seen an increase in the confidence of young people in the protection of their rights?
5. Promotion of sexual equality	Do boys and girls study the same amount? Enjoy the same amount? Are boys or girls more successful at school?	Do you think that there is more equality between women and men since the introduction of the autonomous school system? Do boys and girls perform equally well at school? Do they attend school equally as frequently?	Have you seen a change in male/ female equality since the introduction of the autonomous system? Do boys and girls perform equally well at school? Do they attend school equally as frequently?	Have you seen a change in male/ female equality since the introduction of the autonomous system? Do boys and girls perform equally well at school? Do they attend school equally as frequently?
6. Education Relevant to rural lifestyle	Does the school day fit in well with your lifestyle? And the subjects you study? Do you attend school daily? Do you work with your parents?	Does the school day fit in with your lifestyle and (your) children's lifestyle? Do the subjects learned fit in with your lifestyle and (your) children's lifestyle?	Does the school day fit in with the children's and the Zapatistas' lifestyle? Do the subjects learned fit in with the children's and the Zapatistas' lifestyle?	Does the school day fit in with the children's and the Zapatistas' lifestyle? Do the subjects learned fit in with the children's and the Zapatistas' lifestyle?
7. Strengthening of communities' independence of external organisations	Do you work or would you like to work with groups from your community who organise projects for making your community a better place?	Have you seen a change in young people's confidence in building their own community development projects? Has there been less reliance on NGOs since the introduction of the autonomous system?	Have you seen a change in young people's confidence in building their own development projects? Has there been less reliance on NGOs since the introduction of the autonomous system?	Have you seen a change in young people's confidence in building their own development projects? Has there been less reliance on NGOs since the introduction of the autonomous system?

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