

Learning from Mapuche Communities: Intercultural Education, and Participation in the Ninth Region of Chile

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Abstract

This paper examines the “indigenous question” through the lens of education reform within neo-liberal structural and ideological constraints in Southern Chile. Proyecto Kelluwün is set in a rural indigenous community “in conflict” with Chilean political authorities over issues of land rights and local autonomy. This project is the product of recent education reforms that aim to re-focus a system of schooling degraded after 17 years of military rule towards “excellence, equity, and participation.” Theoretically articulated in Freirian terms, Proyecto Kelluwün is aimed at increasing community participation in local educational and political contexts and has articulated itself as a potential force of social change as well as community empowerment and renewal. This paper further interrogates aspects of the seemingly progressive current “post-dictatorship” education project in order that some of the ideological and structural limitations left in place by the neo-liberal changes made during the military dictatorship in Chile may be further brought to light.

Introduction

Today Chile is living a process of neo-liberal capitalist development marked by a collection of grand contradictions within diverse aspects of its political, social, economic and cultural situation. In this paper we will not attempt to analyze the complexity of these relationships, rather we will center on one element of great importance and relevance in terms of its potential social impact. Our work refers specifically to the “indigenous question” and how it is being addressed in the XI Region, within a participatory educational project – Kelluwün. This project is historically contextualized within Chile’s less than illustrious record of policy directed

toward its indigenous communities. Also, it is contextualized within the potential opened by recent reforms in Education, La Reforma Educacional, and by a limited, though active, radical democratic mobilization by community members and educators.

In recent years a strong indigenous social mobilization has awakened in Chile, particularly in the Mapuche communities. This mobilization is demanding that the Chilean State recognize the cultural and semi-autonomous identity of the Mapuche as a people. An important part of these demands includes the question of land. Mapuche are reclaiming and demanding the return of territories, with differing degrees of autonomy and self-organization. These are territories traditionally belonging to the communities, which in the process of Chile's history have been usurped – through various mechanisms – by the State and Private interests. This robbery of land has obligated the Mapuche communities to live in small family groups organized as “minifundistas,”¹ in conditions insufficient for autonomous development (Vitale, 1999).

This recent political and cultural awakening has been expressed with force in the Región of the Araucanía, the IX Region in the South of Chile where the majority of the rural Mapuche population lives. In this region, important aspects of native identity thrive. Specifically those elements that link the communities to their identity as a specific native people, marked by the maintenance of linguistic, cultural, and social practices and resistance to “*huinca*”² society. The people of these communities constitute the poorest population in the region. They are also the poorest population in Chile when compared to other rural zones within the country, zones that have historically been marginalized and ignored.

The question of quality education for indigenous populations remains an issue marked by contradictions in theory and practice and remains one of the principle elements within Mapuche demands that have come out as a part of the ongoing struggle for autonomy. Rural schools that contain a large percentage of indigenous children are those that demonstrate the lowest levels of achievement in the country. Standardized tests show results far below those in urban sectors. These results are even more dramatic when compared to the test scores from schools serving mostly middle and high-income children (MINEDUC, 1998; OCDE 2004). The inequity within the

Chilean educational system finds its maximum expression in rural schools serving Mapuche children.

The problematic situation of inequity and marginalization of indigenous peoples through schooling is marked by the decontextualized nature of the official curriculum and traditional pedagogical practices that fail to recognize and incorporate knowledge of local communities, negating the experience of non-mainstream students.

Mainstream educational practice (in Chile as elsewhere) remains permanently fixed in the assimilationist function of the educational system – whose end is the progressive disappearance of the native peoples of this country³. Education maintains, and is often defined by, vestiges of authoritarianism, verticalism, and a hierarchical inequitable nature. These elements all constitute factors that undermine the quality of education and contribute to its failure to strengthen the development of native peoples.

In an attempt to improve the condition of the educational system in Chile, the government began a massive reform effort in 1997. The three guiding themes of this project are: *equidad* (equity), *calidad* (quality), and *participación* (participation) (Ministerio de Educación/MINEDUC, 1996). Though this reform is in marked contrast to the reforms, or institutional changes, that took place in the Chilean educational system during the Military dictatorship of Chile (1973-1990), they do nothing to directly challenge the problematic structure that girds the system of schooling in the country. However, the call for equity has been resurrected and given a legitimate space in educational discourse (the idea of equity was considered representative of “socialist” sympathies during the dictatorship and so was avoided for more than 17 years (Collins and Lear, 1995)). In addition, and perhaps the most potentially progressive element found within the current reform is the emphasis given to the idea of participation.

One of the legacies of the dictatorship in Chile is the virtual absence of civil democratic practices – participation - among the population. This absence is especially striking within institutional populations (schools, universities, government bodies, and in work situations). Distrust and even fear mark many social interactions. The traditional practices within schools and the types of relationships commonly observed between teachers and students, teachers and administrators, and parents and teachers are prime examples of this authoritarian, anti-democratic tendency (Pinkney

Pastrana, 2000). This legacy, when coupled with traditional racism and classist discrimination, is aggravated in rural areas, especially those with a large percentage of native peoples.

It is within this context that the Universidad de La Frontera, through the department of education, has been developing – since the end of 1999, the Proyecto Gestión Participativa en Educación – Kelluwün. This project is located in an area of high Mapuche population, the Municipality (County) of Ercilla, in the Ninth Region of Chile – Región de la Araucanía.

The primary goal of this project is to support the social participation of the communities in education. It is organized along the principals of methodologies based in Investigación Acción Participativa/Action Research (Strauss, and Corbin, 1990; Thomas, 1993) and Critical/Emancipatory Pedagogy, specifically influenced by the work of Paulo Freire (Freire, 1970). These methodological approaches to education stress the importance of contextualizing learning and teaching not only within the realities of the students themselves, but also, as in this case, within the context of institutional work in schools. This project has several foci. One leg of the project encompasses the work being done with Teacher Education students at the Universidad de la Frontera who specialize in “Educación Intercultural Bilingüe” (Bilingual Intercultural Education). Another important aspect of this work is concerned with the promotion of a democratic culture and organization in Education within the schools themselves and within the municipal system of education in the region.

This article does not wish to focus on a description of the experience of the project thus far, rather reflect on some of what we, as educators and researchers, have learned from this ongoing participatory research praxis. These lessons will illustrate some of the projects currently underway. They also provide some interesting and challenging ways of problematizing some of the broader questions provoked by this work. Namely, how do our conceptualizations of Multicultural and Intercultural education play into marginalizing ideologies of social and economic development? And, in what ways can education reform and schooling either reinforce or challenge these tendencies? To further examine these issues we will first present the context in which this work is based in greater detail and describe the situation of the Mapuche people in the region. We follow the description of the physical reality encountered by these

communities with a discussion of some of the issues and reflections prompted by this project thus far. What follows is very much a cross-sectional look into an ongoing attempt to create communities consisting of very different social actors, with differing interests and histories who all happen to intersect within the context of formalized schooling. The challenge of re-conceptualizing the format and structure of institutional schooling created in the interest of the State into something which intends to enable spaces for political and social expression that may well undermine the traditional interests of the “Western” capitalist State is daunting on many levels. This project represents one ongoing process that means to explore the potential of alternative educational paradigms.

Regional Context of the Araucanía and the Mapuche people

People

The Mapuche people have the distinction of being the last native people to be defeated by Europeans in the colonization of America (and some would argue this process of conquest has never ended, implying that the defeat of the Mapuche as well has never been fully realized.) In Chile, the last frontier between Spanish/Chilean and Mapuche territory was the Bío-Bío river that runs through the City of Concepción. This final violent conflict is known as the “*Pacificación de la Araucanía*” and took place primarily in the 8th and 9th region of Chile (Vitale, 2000). In contemporary Chile, the Mapuche have since faced decades of structural violence. The majority of this population, in terms of numbers is urban (close to 80%) though there is a significant rural population that to a large degree maintains language (mapudungun), traditions and customs based on traditional rural practices. Though the Metropolitan Region of Santiago is home to the largest number of people identified as Mapuche, the highest concentration, who have been able to maintain a degree of cultural autonomy and participate in culturally specific community actions are found in the Ninth Region of Chile (Región de La Araucanía), the area of the country in which this project is being realized. The largely rural Mapuche population living in the Ninth Region of Chile faces many challenges in terms of maintaining traditional lifestyles based on subsistence farming practices, originally the mainstay of Mapuche livelihood. The situation of extreme poverty faced by many Mapuche communities, which will be detailed below, can generally be traced to decades of neglect, overtly

(and covertly) racist policies and government abuse often in terms of land policy, which has contributed to a generally degraded position for the Mapuche people in Chile.

One finds the principal cultural matrix of the Mapuche (land and language) in the rural zones of the IX Region and its communities. The mapudungun language is maintained in rural communities and constitutes the basic referent that defines the Region (and the country of Chile) as multicultural, multilinguistic and multiethnic. The agrarian sector, both Mapuche and non-Mapuche, is highly influential in the search, construction and permanence of various signifiers and cultural practices found in cities as well as in local rural and semi-urban contexts. The rural-agrarian culture, *minifundista* and campesino as well as that which defines mid-sized agricultural operations, both Mapuche and non-Mapuche, is an original source from which regional identity is constructed and contributes to the national culture.

According to the latest Census, *Censo de Población* (2002), there are 692,192 people in Chile who identify themselves as indigenous, 4.6% of the entire population. In the 9th Region of the Araucanía, out of a population of 869,535, 34% live in rural areas. Out of the entire indigenous population of the country, the majority people is the Mapuche, with a population of 604,349 of which 203,221 live in the 9th region (this is 23.5% of the regional population). At the national level, 69.5% of indigenous people under the age of 39 have attained an average of 8.5 years of formal schooling. This reflects the high drop out rate among young Mapuche of whom 30.4% never graduate from secondary school, often leaving before the 8th grade.

In terms of material resources, in the communities that participate with the project Kelluwün, the area of land on which the average family group lives varies between one and ten hectares. The average size of a home plot territory supporting a family of five people being not more than one or two hectares. Having been dispossessed of more fertile traditional territories (often through very questionable land deals made in favor of “*latifundistas*” some are currently owned by large private or international timber interests) many of the Mapuche occupied lands are found in areas with very poor soils, marked by scarce productive capacity and suffering from very grave environmental degradation. These communities have been virtually without technical

assistance for decades and rely upon traditional technologies only marginally effective in the ecologically degraded land.

Economics

The productive development of the Región de La Araucanía is associated directly with its rural economy that generates diverse economic modalities: fish farming, tourism, fishing, forestry, agro-industry, commerce, services, and public investment. The contribution of the specific sector of economic activity related to fish farming in relation to the regional GNP is 27.43% and this supports 35.5% of regional employment (1997). Over 30% of the land is currently held by small indigenous *minifundista* holdings or small privately owned land. There is another similar percentage of the land in this region held by small farmers who are not Mapuche. These small farmers utilize strategies of production based in the family economy, and share with local Mapuche communities many similar rural conditions including land that is environmentally marginal due to extensive erosion. They share a high poverty level and low productive resources, and this sector is also marked by little access to modern technology and low organizational levels. According to data of the Ministry of Agriculture for the Region (1998), the total agricultural land is 2,430,000 hectares, made consisting of 45,000 individually owned plots. Of these, 21,000 or (47%) correspond to subsistence level farming operations; 9,000 (20%) to small owners lacking the amount of land necessary to generate massive agricultural economic exploitation; and 15,000 (33%) of this agricultural land is held by farmers who possess the structural conditions necessary to connect themselves to the market (*“Agricultores con Condiciones Estructurales para Conesctarse Al Mercado y Capacidad de Acumulación de Capital”*). Of these farming operations, 21,000 participate as beneficiaries of INDAP (46.6%): 8,000 are in condition to integrate into this system and 13,000 remain subsistence farmers. 24,000 do not participate directly on these government programs though participation in social programs related to the INDAP is possible. Within these last two groups one finds the Mapuche producers, in other words the agricultural sector in which the Mapuche are found is significantly excluded from any modern technical assistance offered by the State. The associated economic levels are low, especially among the Mapuche that rely on subsistence economies, due to the conditions of international and national competition and the

region's insertion into diverse markets seeking the agricultural products. This situation remains a limiting factor upon the development and economic integration of the Mapuche as it does for non-Mapuche farmers in similar situations. However, the significance of racial and cultural discrimination cannot be underestimated. Racism runs rampant in Chile, and people of native origins face particular marginalizing dynamics in addition to the negative aspects of classism faced by poor rural non-Mapuche Chileans (Gómez, 2004).

The Ley Indígena⁴ does not permit the sale of Mapuche land to anyone who is not Mapuche. This land is not incorporated into the broader market, but represents a superficial amount of the regions' total that actually remains in indigenous hands even in the cases where the Ley is maintained and respected. Though relatively superficial this law stands as institutional resistance to the growing pressures of large Multinational and National Forestry Companies and other capitalist agricultural sectors. It is especially troublesome to these sectors since it limits the extension of capitalist companies into territories that could potentially generate large amounts of capital. La Corporación Nacional de Desarrollo Indígena (CONADI) has been regulating the land in order to amplify and consolidate indigenous property. Strong pressure from Forestry Companies and Tourism (either for profit or pleasure) for the land, both Mapuche and non-Mapuche held parcels, has provoked expulsion of many people from the countryside to the cities thus raising the price of the land.

However, these pressures have been met with a growing, strong and militant social indigenous resistance movement combating the encroachment of capitalist business interests. Since the end of the last decade, many communities and organizations have inserted themselves directly into this conflict with the State and private interests in the attempt to reconstruct their original communities. Others have sought change through political venues, integrating into the legal processes established by the government to redistribute the land through land redistribution mechanisms. One way or another, the goal is the same: recuperation of land considered historical property of the indigenous communities. On these lands the project is to re-establish the conditions of existence, reproduction and resistance of the Mapuche people, in order to constitute – with or without geographical continuity, a territory in which the Mapuche have cultural autonomy and liberty through self-governance.

At the same time, the general economic crises within the country has generated an indigenous movement of return from the cities (mostly Santiago, the capital of the country) back to the rural communities of origin. This emigration has generated a new demographic dynamic and a phenomenon of cultural encounter and reencounter between urban and rural Mapuche. It has also created a situation of even greater demand for usable land especially since new families returning to family land holdings mean more mouths to feed in the same precarious conditions continually faced by the families who have remained on the land.

Poverty

According to the poll CASEN (1996), the IX Region is that with the highest – and growing - rate of poverty in the country (34% in 1994 and 36.6% in 1996, 34.9% in 2000). This poverty is concentrated in rural zones of which the 9th Region has the highest percentage of rural population (33.42%, 2001). Here, one out of two children (48.9%) lives below the poverty line, in Chile the statistic is one in three (in 1990 that figure was closer to 60%). However, the jobless rate was only 4.5% in 2004 due to the productive structure based in micro, small and medium enterprises, common in small agricultural production. Extreme poverty in the rural sectors, (31.1%) is concentrated in Mapuche communities though communities marked by “non-extreme” rural poverty (47.17%) are predominately sectors with a relatively small indigenous population. Of the 31 Comunas of the Region, 15 are labeled as in conditions of “Extreme Poverty,” this correlates to a large majority of the rural indigenous population. Those Comunas showing the highest degree of “extreme poverty” are: N. Imperial, P. de Las Casas, Carahue, Lumaco, Galvarino, Saavedra and Ercilla. These are the Comunas with the highest percentage of Mapuche population.

In recent statistics compiled by UNICEF and the Ministry of Planning, dramatic differences are seen between the lived conditions faced by the Chilean population living in different sectors of the country. In relatively affluent, urban areas, the standard of living meets the standards of more affluent developed nations, whereas rural sectors and Comunas within these sectors with a high percentage indigenous population, especially in the IX Region (the region in which this project is located) are consistently the most impoverished sectors of the country. There are other sectors in the country facing similar conditions. This same data measuring differences in

liveability, health, income, and education of urban Chilean children living in impoverished areas of Santiago – without the added burden of rural scarcity and lack of infrastructure, or the violence of racism – reveal that poor urban children face conditions similar to those faced by children in the most impoverished sectors of the country (Williamson, 2004).

UNICEF DATA ON THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN (2003)

UNICEF Childhood Index (range 0.00- 1.00)	Ranking – IX Región	Ranking – National Average	Ranking – Select High- income sectors	Ranking – Select Rural, high % indigenous sectors
Overall Ranking	0.491	0.619		
Education	11 th *		Vitacura (Santiago) 1.00	Ercilla (IX) 0.188
Health	12 th *		Futaleufú (XI) 1.00	Puerto Saavedra (IX) 0.186
Income	13 th *		Vitacura (Santiago) 0,998	Puerto Saavedra (IX) 0.000
Livability	13 th *		Las Condes (Santiago) 1.00	Puerto Saavedra (IX) 0.094

Fondo de Naciones Unidas para la Infancia, UNICEF & Ministerio de Planificación y Cooperación, MINEPLAN (2003)

Another dramatic example of this situation of exclusion from the development of the country as a whole (through this situation has been gradually improving since the initiation of the democratic transition processes following the end of the military dictatorship in 1989 and the reinstatement of freely elected governments) is the rate of

infant mortality. This clearly indicates that in the case of the IX Region of the Araucanía, the poorest Region in the country, these indicators are much worse than the National average.

INFANT MORTALITY RATE (Per 1000 live births)⁵

YEAR	CHILE	IX REGION	DIFFERENCE
1984	19.6	30.6	11
1990	16.0	26.6	10.6
1997	10.0	13.9	3.9

These figures blur particular realities, in this case the Mapuche population, in which the health conditions are very negative. One study carried out in indigenous communities of the IX Region between 1987 and 1990 (Amigo, etal. 2001), revealed that the rate of mortality was roughly double the national average (15 per 1000 live births versus 9). This study also indicated that in terms of growth, nutrition, and health, the worst conditions are found in areas where the majority of the population are mapudungung speaking Mapuche (Lumaco, Puerto Saavedra, Cararruhue, Ercilla, Lonquimay y Los Sauces). Another example of the consequences of living in the impoverished conditions found in this study are the findings concerning height. Stature deficit is higher in poor areas, with a high incidence in Mapuche areas where 50% of school-aged children entering 1st grade being below the norms of height for their age group. This finding is a direct result of poverty and its effects on the living conditions encountered by pregnant women and young children – it is not the result of genetics. All these findings, medical and economic, express another component of the exclusion and historical discrimination that has been historically directed against the Mapuche people. It constitutes an unfavorable starting point from which the development and learning of Mapuche children is manifested in inequity and inequality within Chilean national and regional society.

These differences and the harsh realities discussed above reveal the inequalities found contemporarily and historically in Chilean society. They pointedly illuminate specific dimensions in which inequities are manifested with respect to Mapuche and non-

Mapuche children in Chile, and detail the specific material repercussions of discrimination and exclusion. Clearly there are intermediate factors that contribute to these dramatic differences, however the data reveals a reality that clearly describes the social injustice inherent in the “Social Democrat” capitalist system of Chile.

Education

Indicators show serious inequities in access to information, years served by the educational system and quality of instruction. According to the 1992 Census, 5.4% of the Mapuche population has never attended a school. 47.1% have had some basic education, 37% have attended high school and only 10.5% have some level of higher education. In rural zones, 14.7% have never attended school. 69.2% have had some primary schooling and less than 17% have attended high school and beyond.

Mapuche School Attendance in Chile (Census, 1992)

	No Formal Schooling	Elementary	High School	Higher Education
Total	5.4%	47.1%	37%	10.5%
Rural	14.7%	69.2%	14%	2.2%

The average number of years in school in the population aged 15 years or more in 1990 (when “re-democratization” was institutionalized) was 7.8 years in school, by 1998 this had increased to 8.7 years. This is to say that in eight years the country has been successful in getting the majority of children at least to high school⁶. Although the quality of schooling remains low, especially in those establishments within small communities with a large Mapuche school-aged population.

An example of low quality and high inequity in education is expressed in the case of High Schools “Liceos” which have never produced a single student to go on to study any professional field within the University. This clearly demonstrates an abandonment of these establishments by the system. A recent thesis developed in the Liceo of Ercilla, illustrated the abandonment of youth – mostly Mapuche - by high schools. Above all, not a single student of the different cohorts studied, had entered the university in a professional field, and only 5 out of 40 continued in higher studies

(two in vocational-technical institutions, two in “Institutos Profesionales,” and one to a police academy). None of these five going on for higher study was Mapuche. The remaining students work in low wage jobs requiring no formal qualifications, or are unemployed living with their families and communities (Romero Romero, 2000).

To these facts one must add the problematic of decontextualized curriculum that fails to recognize both the local culture and local knowledge that are the product of socialization of children within their communities of origin. Pedagogical practices and the design of the teaching environment do not value the social and traditional modes of relation of the students. Neither do they value the knowledge these children bring with them to the school, nor does it consider cognitive characteristics within the processes of learning generated in social practices and traditional culture. The language of pedagogical discourse corresponds to the dominant culture. The texts and contexts represented in schools as official knowledge do not recognize the productive capacity of the culture of the students nor of their families and communities. In other words, the current educational reality within these communities fails completely to consider the epistemological aspects that define the lives of the students. In this sense, the historical function of assimilation and acculturation that the school has played remains intact, despite recent efforts to change this reality and create effective schools that respect culture and the needs of native peoples.

The Project of Participatory Organization in Education – Kelluwün

The Proyecto Kelluwün has been created as a collaborative project responding faithfully to the sense of the word in Mapudungun whose closest translation is: *cooperation, collaboration* (very close in meaning to what we often understand as solidarity). This project has generated spaces of conversation and dialogue between the various agents involved in the theme of linking community and school, in line with the various needs and expectations of the communities.

The Comuna of Ercilla in which this project is located is rural, with a high indigenous population, a high level of poverty (as detailed earlier), economically linked primarily to traditional agricultural practices, and educationally known for its low results on standardized measures (SIMCE scores in the Comuna, the national exam taken by all children in the country, are the second to the lowest in the country) and generally low

quality of education (SIMCE, 2003). According to the 2002 census the Comuna has a population of 9,041, this represents an increase of 2.3% from the previous census period (1992). 64% of this population are rural, 46.5% Mapuche, 30% are classified as living in poverty, the literacy rate in Ercilla is 84% (the official national literacy rate is 94%), and the average years of schooling for the Comuna is 5.64 years.

Ercilla is a Comuna where historically, the Mapuche movement has taken on a particularly violent and activist character⁷. Indigenous conflict in this region has not stopped and has currently reorganized itself around demands for traditional lands and social/political autonomy. The degree of mobilization of the population is higher than in most areas of the country and stems from the strong links the Mapuche community in this Comuna maintains with traditional culture in terms of social relations, economics, and community politics despite the case that in general the Mapuche people have been losing traditional practices as well as use of their native language of mapudungun.

Part of this work includes the presence of “monitors” from the local community. These monitors are trained alongside the educational team in the processes and methodologies associated with Action Research as applied to educational contexts. This partnership has inspired an increased interest within these specific individuals and their communities as to methods and means of participation within ‘formal’ educational contexts.

From this point of view, the ‘successes’ obtained at this point are partial. Interestingly, the communities have become involved in this project and this has permitted them to participate in themes that are relevant to their needs. An element that stands out in all of this is the acceptance of the work of the project Kelluwün in the area, considering the incorporation of the idea and appropriation on the part of the community of the necessity of actively participating in these educationally defined processes.

The following represent five themes that have grown out of the Kelluwün project. These themes frame the contexts of participation, community – school (and institutional factors) – project, and represent areas in which significant dialogue and transformative change is taking place (Williamson and Gómez, 2004).

1) Production of knowledge through linking education to issues of local development and local knowledge, particularly including social and indigenous participation in education.

This implicates reflection and awareness of the learning processes, concepts, methodologies and experiences, of all the people principally involved in the project (the central team, the Municipal Head of the Department of Education (DEM)⁸ of Ercilla, and teachers). The concept of the production of knowledge is a theme about which very little has been considered in Chile. It is our hope that ideas and conceptual proposals generated by the praxis of this project, as well as methodologies of the project, which are being shared liberally and critically with the current educational debate in the country. These ideas are generating much critique and discussion and will hopefully contribute to the reorganization or reconceptualization of certain “concrete knowledges” and various omissions now found within the current Reforma Educacional (MINEDC, 1998; Pinkney Pastrana, 2000).

At the same time we hope to contribute concepts, categories, and methodological proposals of interest to indigenous needs (as well as the needs of other social movements within marginalized populations). These conceptual and practical strategies may act as tools to serve the popular indigenous movement as they continue in their ongoing process of the construction of a social, indigenous/Mapuche discourse in unique opposition to the State and society.

The first challenge with respect to the ‘institutional’ has been to generate an institutional, public and private, solid and creative, articulation between these different arms of the project. The purpose of this is to improve the quality of education in all of its expression, particularly in line with the current Reforma Educacional. The construct, “community of learners” and its attendant practices, is an idea that has been slowly and progressively developed nationally and locally. It is a concept that implies potentially progressive pedagogical practice, and a concept which can be fitted nicely into the call for greater participation in education, one of the requirements of the current educational reform. Within formal institutional settings, such as the university and government agencies (the Regional Ministry of Education, SEREMI), relevant departmental organization has been developed to aid in the

development of the Proyecto Kelluwün, without significantly altering the nature of the process.

It is worth mentioning that the project has also been linked to program of teacher training as well as the training of other professionals in the University. This linkage takes place through elective courses and thesis projects in which the students can participate with or base their studies on the project.

2) Methodology and development of Investigación Acción Participativa (IAP)

Methodologically, Action Research as expressed in this participatory project, has shown its potential to mobilize local communities, especially in terms of social reflection concerning a problem of collective interest. In the case of the project Kelluwün, the particular concern has been education in the community. In practice this project has demonstrated the need to adjust the original design to each of the four contexts in which it is situated – one urban (the small town of Ercilla), and 3 rural. Though each context is made up of a similar population, none of these contexts follows exactly the same organizational and cultural dynamic. This example of spatial situatedness underlines the importance and poignancy of contextualized learning.

This project has permitted that the educational theme be inserted in a variety of organizations and institutions that make up civil society and local government within this Comuna. It has helped the local authorities to become more aware of ways in which to create and enact democratic practices, from the level of Mayor to the levels of representatives and service providers within the local government.

This project has enabled the participation of the people in this Comuna. Through the process of free reflection concerning educational themes it has helped to reactivate community organizations. This community organization, as well as the educationally motivated themes in which this transformational discourse has been embedded, is contextualized and grounded in the realities, necessities, the interests of local social movements.

Local organizations have begun to think in terms of expanding the legitimacy of community voice beyond the local context. New impetus has grown to critique and

act in ways considered institutionally “legitimate” - formally, in writing, and publicly - upon issues affecting a broader geographical area. These actions are tied to the logic of community development (but may extend beyond the immediate concerns of water infrastructure, health, and housing).

3) Social conflict and the development of participatory collaboration

The existence of rural communities in conflict and marked by internal divisions that, to some degree, reflect the larger path of conflict between the State and the indigenous communities in Chile, generates difficulties and has obliged the design of the project to extend the period of time initially envisioned. Simultaneously, the conflicts of the community of Temucuicui with the Forestry Company Mininco and its holdings at the “Fundo Alaska” has resulted in situations of violent conflict.⁹ Schools that participate with the project have been occupied by people claiming their lands during conflicts either with companies, or private land owners. These situations demonstrate the degree of complexity faced in the development of this project, they constitute difficulties that are very hard to overcome. Still, the communities participate despite these conditions and this creates the possibility to open real spaces for the expression of educational longings and aspirations.

This collaboration has significantly advanced the amount of participation between the community and the educational institutions that serve this region. In this matter it has become a positive contributor to relations between School and Community. Through the exchange of opinions and ideas – often oppositional and critical – concerning the work in local schools, the project has facilitated a greater understanding between the teachers in this area and the communities in which they work. All of the staff involved with these local schools have put together an analysis of their responsibilities, including projects completed and those they have not completed in order to improve the educational process of the community, as it plays out in the schools themselves.

4) The praxis of the fundamental rights of the people

The invitation that has been extended to the various sectors that make up the educational community and the local community is a concrete advance in the exercise of the right of participation of the people in the rural communities of Ercilla. One

interesting contribution of the project, both in the rural and urban contexts, has been the consultation of rural Mapuche communities, organized and demanding a better education as to their specific needs and the possible means to realize this in schools. This is valuable information for a system that tends to be formal, traditional, racist and unreceptive towards understanding the needs and experience of the marginalized sectors within the scope of its practice.

5) Intercultural vs. Multicultural education in Chile

In Chile, the concepts of “Multiculturalism” and “Interculturalism” are used, and there has been much discussion in the attempt to define the work of educators within non-mainstream contexts, as to which of these terms and their attendant understandings best defines the work of the Kelluwün project.

Multiculturalism tends to be conceived as a more descriptive term referring to cultural pluralism. The notion of Critical Multiculturalism, that is, of a multiculturalism that affirms a radical, transformational political position is a theoretical construct still considered by a minority of practitioners and academics in Chile. In general, for the majority of academics, educators, and intellectuals, multiculturalism remains a concept connoting descriptive pluralism within modern society. Within the context of globalization and re-democratization (as is the case in Chile) this term refers to the plurality and the existence of multiple visions of the world which co-exist within a single society.

In contrast, “Interculturality” refers to the character of the relationship between cultures, specifically the intersection between: indigenous – global society – and “Chilean” culture. When linked to the idea of bilingualism, as in “Educación Intercultural Bilingüe” (Bilingual Intercultural Education), it is associated with the education with/for the indigenous peoples in historical context. In this sense Bilingual Intercultural Education, and within this the concept of Interculturality, has a more political connotation. This term is used by the State in its educational policies with respect to the indigenous peoples. It is a term also used in the Ley Indígena, having resulted from the indigenous demands for relevant education. Within education, in Latin America, Bilingual Intercultural Education is the concept most often used when referring to native peoples as it implies the historical context that defines the current

relationship to the global society. It is important to make this distinction clear. One could say the concept of Intercultural Bilingual Education, refers to how, in Latin America and Chile, indigenous educational issues are contextualized within the relationships between cultures, between culture and global society – hegemonic and dominant – and to the original or traditional –subordinant and resistant – culture of native peoples. From a Latin American perspective Multicultural Bilingual Education does not capture the complexity of the social and historical dynamic in which human, cultural and political, interactions take place. This is especially true considering that the ideological context of “Multicultural” discourse in Latin America tends to be infused by the logic of domination and assimilation, as many may argue is the case within the United States as well. Hence, “Bilingual Multicultural Education” cannot replace “Bilingual Intercultural Education.” Neither can the terms Multicultural replace Intercultural, and this concept is also distinct from the term Bicultural. The term “intercultural” itself implies and is integrated into the educational context.

This project has reconfirmed that an intercultural approach is a necessity within the curriculum as well as in the organization of adequate pedagogy responsive to the necessities of the students in Ercilla. These practices can be translated into practical application in many ways: class projects, didactic innovations, reformulation of curricular units, methodological changes, the incorporation of linguistic elements, mapudungun, in the curriculum, schools for parents, etc. These projects and possible practices would create spaces in which neither the theme nor content of central binding ideology would represent that of the educational authorities. Rather these spaces would respond to the exigencies generated from social indigenous and non-indigenous reflection.

Participation in Education, La Reforma Educacional Chilena, and the Proyecto Kelluwün

As mentioned earlier, the ideal of opening up Chilean educational communities to more participatory practices represents the most radical element found within the current Chilean education reform. Participation implies the possibility of agency, and agency implies that ‘we can make history from the concrete conditions in which we find ourselves’ (Marx, 1977). Participation suggests that communities come together and join forces around common interests to realize and create new social formations.

The concept of participation follows logically in line with the tenets of curricular reform as expressed by many projects aimed at curricular renovation (MINEDUC, 1998). Primarily the current educational reforms being implemented in Chile are grounded in constructivist paradigms that point to the socially constructed nature of learning, and the importance of “communities of learners” in the learning process. It is impossible by definition to create community without its members engaged as participants.

In this curious and contradictory arena of Chilean education reform the concept of participation seems trapped between two different ideological visions. The first, the “progressive,” (as it marks a retreat from the earlier social practices of the authoritarian dictatorship that insisted upon an absence of popular participation and exercised centralized decision making in all significant instances) is primarily a functional vision in which educators become active participants in the technical necessities of schooling. It is within this framework of participation that majority of the teacher development projects are oriented as teachers and administrators are prepared, “*capacitados*,” to undertake the projects of the reform (Pinkney Pastrana, 2000). This concept of participation seeks to empower communities toward realizing school autonomy within the decentralized structure of Chilean schooling. It assumes that the vision of schooling presented by the Ministry of education is ideal and in the best interest of Chile, and does not invite that “participation” be extended to include discussions questioning the problematic aspects of the reform (Colegio de Profesores, 1999).

The second possible interpretation of “participation” is the more radical because of its suggestion that broad community involvement be included, and welcomed as an equal partner in definitional and foundational decisions, actions, and design. This includes involvement in the social, cultural, and political process of schooling, and invites the potential of critical agency. In terms of the radical potential of teaching this type of participation invites that,

“the classroom...be transformed into a hybrid pedagogical space where permission is not denied students who wish to narrate their own identities outside of marketplace identities and the politics of consumerism, a space where individual identities find meaning in collective expression and solidarity with cultural others, where mimetic,

Eurocentric time recedes into the lived historical moment of contemporary struggles for identity. Here the imperatives of consumer culture and the hegemony of market identities are challenged by narratives of identity that are underwritten by a concern for liberation and social justice.” (McLaren, 1996, pg.105)

Extending this possibility of liberatory, critical participation to the broader community can create spaces in which shared decision-making concerning school centered and community centered activities can be explored. This participation is based in relations of solidarity, and can include conversations concerning the very purpose of education and pedagogical practice. This type of participation invades spaces beyond the immediate classroom or school, and provides access to potentially transformative political and social action through the epistemological naming of the real conditions inhabited by the community members themselves.

This much deeper conceptualization of participation represents a shift from the purely technical, operational level of “symbolic” participation, to the more powerful and significant level of “radical” participation. At the level of radical participation we approach education as articulated by Paulo Freire (1970; also, McLaren, 2000), in which education is at once political, creative, and educational, and cannot be realized in the absence of community solidarity and ontological activism. This is the level of pedagogical praxis, reading the word and the world, i.e. social and transformative literacy.

In order that the educational communities in Chile take full advantage of the many material benefits of the reform the full participation of many actors within the education community is required. For example, in the programs MECE media, many projects, such as PME, Montegrande and others make large sums of money and a considerable amount of prestige available to teachers and schools. These market incentives have provided the basis for justifying neo-liberal education reform. The common sense view that ‘competition creates a better product’ is held by many and vigorously promoted internationally, though there is growing concern about its consequences (Fiske & Ladd, 2000; McLaren, 2000; Puiggrós, 1996). In terms of rural education, particularly the education of native peoples, the Chilean record remains abysmal. Requiring that achievement be measured only through functionalist standardized measures based on the cultural capital of the dominant culture dooms

these schools to ‘failure.’ Necessarily, democratizing incentives collide with the traditions of exclusion and favoritism, and calls for participation in the absence of an emancipatory project can become co-opted by oppressive ideologies. Unfortunately, one too often sees the potential suggested by the call for “participation” domesticated into a product of and support for current “neo-liberal” logics that drive the social reproduction of capitalist relations of power within schools and society.

In considering the radical potential for “participation” in the Chilean education reform we see a democratizing concept co-opted by the functional, market driven necessity of making de-centralized schools independently autonomous. Again, participation at this level will make the mechanism of school organization run smoothly, but it does not challenge assumptions of social Darwinism. It privileges a position that holds competition and survival of the fittest - the assumptions that translate into market logic applied to the educational system, and that sees the goals of economic development through education based on enactments of human capital theory, rather than democratizing conceptualizations of education - necessary social precursors for countries that wish to articulate themselves in the global arena. This is quite different from participation grounded in solidarity among school communities on the basis of an ethical commitment to education as a human right and necessary foundation for democracy. The project for transforming education into a site of emancipatory praxis involving the participation of a broad popular sector is the radical potential participation offers. In this ideal vision of education as facilitated by the La Reforma Educacional, the possibility of developing radical ‘autonomous’ schools exists, and so too the radical potential for counter hegemonic, democratic social change.

The project Kelluwün stands in dramatic contrast to the unfortunate interpretation of ‘participation’ that largely defines Chilean education reform. Kelluwün represents a model of emancipatory practice. It is firmly grounded in the praxis of transformative pedagogy, and committed to resist the redefinition, co-optation, and “domestication” of the various epistemological and ontological positions of the participants in the project. The project is dialogical and the many ramifications of this praxis may not necessarily turn out to be measurable through traditional, standardized means, steeped in the oppressive logics of logical positivism, and capitalist technicism. Narrowly defined evaluations will never be able to capture the many layered ramifications of

dialectical practice, though the project does hope for improvements in traditional measures to accompany the immeasurable, thus lending a degree of ‘official,’ ‘traditional’ legitimacy to the work underway. The ongoing challenge is the struggle of the local people in Ercilla for self-determination, and the manner in which non-Mapuche educators and representatives of the dominant institutional cultures are able to negotiate alternative democratic practices that recognize the dignity of all peoples within national territories.

“La Historia es nuestra, y la hacen los pueblos”

- Salvador Allende, Sept. 11, 1973

Notes

1. Within the communities that participate with the project Kelluwün, the area of land on which the people live oscillates between one and ten hectares. The average size of a territory supporting a family of five people being not more than one or two hectares. These lands are found in areas with very poor soils, marked by scarce productive resources and suffering from very grave environmental degradation. These communities are virtually without technical assistance and rely upon traditional technologies.

2. Mapuche (mapundungun) word that refers to non-Mapuche people, Chileans. The literal translation is “thief.”

3. In fact, during the 20th century southern Chile has seen the disappearance of several language groups and cultures: Lican Antay, Colla, Kawaskar, and Yagán. In the case of the latter two, the entire people have ceased to exist as a definable population.

4. Constitutional law aimed at regulating and normalizing the State’s relation with indigenous peoples.

* Signifies a comparative ranking of each Region in the country. There are a total of 12 geographical Regions in the country, plus the Metropolitan Region of Santiago, making a total of 13. Hence, the ranking is on a scale of 1-13, 1 being the highest possible ranking.

5. INE (1999) CIT. P.23

6. Data from the Encuesta de Caracterización Socio Económica (CASEN), 1998.

7. In fact, the initial two criminal convictions brought through the Chilean judiciary in response to the recent Mapuche conflict were against individuals from the Comuna de Ercilla.

8. This is roughly equivalent to the position of district Superintendent.

9. There have been 5 community members from Temucucui detained, who at this moment have been charged and are being processed by the legal tribunals.

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