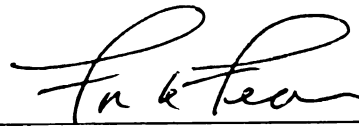This is to certify that the

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Participatory Research and the Evolution of a Grassroots
Organization in Southern Mexico

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Diane Lee Ruonavaara

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FROM ADAPTIVE TO CRITICAL LEARNING ORGANIZATION:
PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND THE EVOLUTION OF A GRASSROOTS
ORGANIZATION IN SOUTHERN MEXICO

By

Diane Lee Ruonavaara

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ABSTRACT

FROM ADAPTIVE TO CRITICAL LEARNING ORGANIZATION: PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND THE EVOLUTION OF A GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION IN SOUTHERN MEXICO

By

Diane Lee Ruonavaara

This participatory research endeavor describes and analyzes the organizational change of the Permanent Seminar of Resources for Rural Development in Oaxaca, Mexico. The Seminar is a unique collaboration of scholars and peasants joined in the search for answers to a variety of economic, inter- and intra-community and cultural challenges emerging during the latest stages of structural adjustment and globalization in Mexico. The Seminar and its modes of collaboration provides a model for fostering local alliances and coalitions of peasant communities who, with development professionals, learn together and support each other in innovative social and economic research and development initiatives. This research occurs as Seminar members come to the realization that successful strategies and frameworks of the past may no longer be adequate to meet the demands of a changing Mexican political economy. In response, Seminar members seek to increase the organization's diversity. The "logic of the *milpa*", a seminal concept of the Seminar, predicts that increased

diversity will enhance the Seminar's creative problem solving potential. The Seminar invites peasant leaders from the state of Nayarit and a graduate student from the United States to join in their endeavor. As the diversity of the Seminar increases, participants begin to reflect upon themselves as an organization. This research analyzes the Seminar as it changes from an "adaptive organization" to a "critical learning organization" (CLO). As a CLO, Seminar members reflect upon and reconstruct the social relationships within the organization. This research develops the concept of a critical learning organization and compares the organizational learning of the Seminar to organizational learning in other PR approaches. Additionally, the research presents the Seminar as a 2nd generation of PR that transcends the temporal, spatial, and conceptual boundaries that may restrict the collective learning processes of other PR approaches.

In memory of my grandmother, Mary Ida Cornelius.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD: Autonomous Development.

AR: Action Research.

BANRURAL: *Banco Nacional de Credito Rural.* National Bank of Rural Credit

CLO: Critical Learning Organization.

CONASUPO: *Companía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares.* National Company of Popular Subsistence.

EZLN: *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional.* Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

INEGI: *Instituto Nacional de Estadisticas Geografia e Información.* National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Information.

LO: Learning Organization

ODDDECO: *Organicación para la Defensa de los Derechos y Desarrollo Comunitario.* Organization for the Defense of Community Rights and Development.

NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement

PAR: Participatory Action Research.

PR: Participatory Research

PRI: *Partido Revolucionario Institucional.* Institutional Revolutionary Party.

PROCAMPO: *Programa de Apoyo al Campo.* Program of Assistance to the Countryside.

PROCEDE: *Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales y Titulación de Solares Urbanos. Ejido* Land Certification and Urban Parcel Program.

UNAM: *Universidad Nacional Autonomo de Mexico.* National Autonomous University of Mexico

Glossary of Spanish Terms

Agencia: A small settlement administratively subordinate to a *municipio.*

Alcalde: Highest village authority during the colonial period. In modern times the member of the *ayuntamiento* who judges intra-village land disputes.

Amigismo: Acquaintances that serve to gain access to governmental resources.

Amparo: Legal restraining order to protect an individual or a community from legal action until a definitive judicial decision can be reached. In agrarian matters, "*amparos*" are usually invoked against a presidential grant of land.

Ayuntamiento: The municipal government composed of the *presidente municipal, síndico, alcalde,* secretary, and *regidores* (councilmen); also refers to the municipal government building.

Bitacora: Logbook

Cacique: Local political boss.

Campesino: Peasant.

Cargo: An official post in either the civil or religious hierarchies of the *municipio* and its *agencias.*

Comisirado de bienes comunales: The committee or individual in charge of communal resources. The authority in an indigenous community formally elected by the *comuneros* according to terms stipulated by law.

Comisirado ejidal: The committee or individual in charge of communal resources in an ejido. The authority in an ejido formally elected by the *ejidatarios* according to terms stipulated by law.

Comunero: Member of an indigenous community that constitutes a specific and legally recognized land possession.

Costumbres: Micro-cultural differences between villages.

Coyote: A specific type of *cacique* or other agent who operates within the sphere of commercial intermediate.

Curandero/a: A folk healer.

Distrito: A territorial and administrative unit comparable to a county.

Ejido: Land expropriated from *haciendas* after the Mexican Revolution and given to peasant groups to be held in communal title.

Ejidatario: Member of an *ejido.*

Finca: Rural property. Estate.

Hectare: A unit of land surface equal to 2.47 acres.

Inspeción ocular or *vista de ojo:* Visual inspection.

Machismo: Refers to strongly masculine characteristics, especially courage, pride, and sexual prowess.

Maiz: Corn (*Zea mays.*)

Mandilón: An insulting term for a man who is dominated by women.

Mestizo: Mixed race.

Mestizaje: The process of creating the mix race of indigenous and Spanish blood.

Milpa: The traditional corn-based agroecological system typical through out Mesoamerica.

Municipio: A territorial and administrative unit intermediate between an *agencia* and a *distrito.* A *municipio* normally consists of one large village and any smaller surrounding settlements *(agencias* or *rancherias);* also the building in which *municipio* affairs are conducted.

Peones acasillados: Peasants who lived on large landholdings as paid or unpaid laborers.

Regidores: Councilmen.

Topiles: Community policemen.

Usos y costumbres: Traditions based on uses and costumes that determine how a community is governed.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This research falls within the purview of "Alternatives *to* Development."

These alternatives are a response to a growing dissatisfaction and

disillusionment with the dominant conceptualization of development as

modernization (Escobar 1995; Esteva and Suri 1998; Fals Borda 1998; Max-Neef

et al.1989; Rahman 1993; Rahnema 1995; Sachs 1995). Modernization is seen

as a linear process of "growth" and "progress" from "underdeveloped" to

"developed" and from poverty to affluence. Alternative approaches *to*

development, in contrast, share the idea that modernization is part of the

problem, rather than the "solution," to the challenges facing the majority of the

world's population (Carmen 1996: 64; Chambers 1997; Escobar 1995; Latouche

1991; Max-Neef et al.1989; Mueller 1991; Norgaard 1994; Rahman 1993; Sachs

1995).

1.0 Development as Modernization

The concept of development as modernization was introduced by U.S.

President Harry Truman in his inaugural address on January 20, 1949 (Sachs

1995),

> More than half of the world's population is living in conditions
> approaching misery.... What we envisage is a program of
> development based on the concepts of democratic fair
> dealing.... Greater production is the key to prosperity and
> peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more
> vigorous application of modern scientific and technical
> knowledge (Truman 1949 cited in Escobar, 1995: 3).

According to Truman, development was both a political and economic activity

supported by scientific investigation. Truman's speech followed on ideas

expressed at the earlier Bretton Woods conference held in 1944. Bretton Woods

established institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary

Fund, that were instrumental in shaping the world's economic activities (Korten

1996). The policies begun during Truman's administration and the institutions

created through Bretton Woods were intended to foster development

characterized by democratic governance, economic growth, industrialization,

urbanization, and ever-expanding consumption of material goods (Esteva 1995;

Korten 1996).

Under this doctrine of development, remarkable measures of success

have been achieved. Economic growth has expanded five-fold, while

international trade has increased twelve-fold (Korten 1996). World grain

production increased from 620 million tons in 1950 to 1,660 million tons in 1985

(Wolf 1999: 9). Farmers with access to new seeds, technologies and markets

have prospered around the world and produced enough food to feed the world's

growing population (Wolf 1986). In fact, by 1999, the number of overfed people in

the world was estimated to be approximately 600 million (Brown 1999: 117). It

appeared that Truman's model of development was a success.

On closer examination, however, it became obvious that large sectors of

the world's population were excluded from this model. Despite development

efforts, the gap between the "rich" and the "poor" was twice as great in 1992 than

it was in 1950 (Korten 1996). The United Nations reports that the disparity of

wealth between the richest nations in the world and the poorest nations had

increased from a ratio of 44:1 in 1973 to 727:1 in 1997 (Salopek 2000). The

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Report for

1992 states that twenty percent of the world's population receive 82.7 percent of

the world's income, while the poorest twenty percent receives only 1.4 percent

(Korten 1996: 24). In 1996, the World Bank reported that 1.3 billion people

earned $1.00 U.S. or less per day and were considered to be living in absolute

poverty (World Bank 1996 cited in Brown et al. 1999: 119). In the same year, the

FAO estimated that 834 million people were undernourished (FAO 1999) and 1.2

billion did not have access to safe drinking water (Brown et al. 1999: 116).[1] Many

of these poor and undernourished people live in rural areas or have migrated

from the countryside to slums surrounding large urban areas (Brown et al. 1999:

119-120). From these statistics, it appears that development has been successful

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[1] Omawale (1984) notes the World Bank and FAO have reported vastly different numbers of "hungry" people. In the early 1980s, the FAO estimated 460 billion undernourished people in the world, while the World Bank reported 1.1 billion. These disagreements are based on methodological differences.

for some, but not for others. Moreover, the very judgement of success may depend on the standpoint of the observer.

The proponents of development as modernization respond that the solution is to promote "more of the same" but with increased economic and social discipline, i.e., structural adjustment and population control by the developing world. However, a wide range of individuals and groups -- academics, development professionals, community organizers and people negatively impacted by development -- are beginning to question this assertion (Chambers 1997; Esteva 1995; Kothari 1988; Latouche 1991; Schon 1995). This rejection focuses on the nature of development and the myriad constructs that accompany the development as modernization paradigm, i.e., poverty vs. affluence, traditional vs. modern, livelihoods vs. production (Braidotti et al. 1994). These individuals and groups are dedicated to inventing new strategies for change and creating new visions of the future informed by socio-culturally specific notions of improvement (Kearney 1996; Wignaraja 1993).

1.1 Participatory Action Research as an Alternative *to* Development

An "Alternative *to* Development" approach is actually a collection of various approaches that challenge development as modernization on various fronts (Escobar 1995; Esteva and Suri 1998; Norgaard 1994; Shiva 1989). Participatory Action Research (PAR) is one such approach (Fals Borda 1985b;

Fernandez and Tandon 1981; Freire 1985; Gaventa 1991; Hall, Gillette, and Tandon 1982; Maguire 1987; Park 1993; Rahman 1993). As an alternative *to* development, PAR re-unites research and development activities, re-conceptualizes these activities in terms of knowledge generation and change. In PAR, the relationship between <u>knowledge generation</u> and <u>change</u> appears as an iterative and recursive process – each activity informing the other. Knowledge is seen as a contested resource. Control over knowledge – its generation and use -- are understood as fundamental to creating and maintaining relationships of equality. Development in the context of PAR is understood primarily in terms of an informed movement towards social transformation. In summary, PAR recognizes the political nature of both research and development while holding emancipation as its horizon (Fals Borda 1985b; Gaventa 1991; Hall 1979; Kemmis and McTaggart 2000; Maguire 1987; Rahman 1991).

1.2 Focus of the Study: Regional Development in Oaxaca, Mexico

This research entails participation in, and examination of, a particular Participatory Research endeavor with a regional organization called the Permanent Seminar of Resources for Rural Development[2] (*Seminario de Gestión sobre Recursos para el Desarrollo Rural*) (see Szekely 1995b). The Seminar is a collaborative research effort uniting academics and representatives from twenty-

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[2] The term the "Seminar" will be used from this point forward to denote the Permanent Seminar of Resources for Rural Development.

some ethnically distinct peasant communities.[3] The Seminar participants[4] -- both

local people and academics -- meet monthly in the city of Oaxaca, Oaxaca,

Mexico (see Figure 1) and are dedicated to resolving community problems

identified by the community members themselves.

Figure 1. Map of Mexico and Oaxaca

The Seminar evolved to its current form approximately eight years ago (Szekely 1995b). During these past eight years, the Seminar successfully assisted and advised member communities in struggles with large landholders and *caciques*.[5] The Seminar also helped develop socioeconomic projects based on opportunities emerging from these land struggles. Yet, more recently, the Seminar participants have begun to question the efficacy of their organizational framework and developmental strategies. These strategies had been devised to confront more powerful actors in the region. Now, however, it seems that these frameworks and strategies are incapable of addressing community challenges emerging from a globalizing economy and changing political situation (see Szekely 1994).

1.3 Overview of the Mexican Context

In the early to mid-1990s, Mexican government policy and international trade agreements designed to integrate Mexico into the world economy undermined an already tenuous economic situation in the countryside (Barkin et al. 1997; Cornelius and Myhre 1998; Randall 1996). As Collier (1994: 8) explains,

> In 1992, the government of President Salinas de Gortari brought land reform - the issue on which his party had originally risen to power - to a halt, he signaled an abrupt end to a traditional covenant with the peasantry and deprived many peasants not just of the possibility of improving their livelihoods, but of their power as a constituency.

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[5] Local power bosses.

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The national government declared that there were no lands left to redistribute, which virtually brought an end to agrarian reform. Amendments to Article 27 provided the legal framework to create a market in communally-held lands, threatening already economically vulnerable peasants with the potential loss of their *ejidos*[6] or *comunales*[7] (Schartz and Walker 1995). Additionally, the government reduced both direct subsides and credit to small producers. Finally, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) lowered agricultural trade barriers on basic grains, thereby exposing small farmers to competition from U.S. farmers.

In general, modernization theory favors private individual land holdings and the commodification of land. Communal land holdings are seen as an obstacle to a modern market society (Mander and Goldsmith 1996; Polanyi 1944). Mexican agricultural policies appear to be informed by a modernization theory of development that favors the introduction of "modern" social forms and technologies, and views traditional technologies and cultures as essentially backward and dispensable. This theory does not directly acknowledge the active and adaptive response of indigenous[8] communities to the crisis, and it fails to recognize the validity of people's knowledge in the search for alternative visions

[6] Lands distributed to peasants communally after the revolution of 1910.
[7] Lands held by indigenous communities "since time immemorial" and recognized as such after the revolution of 1910.
[8] According to Collier (1994: 155), indigenous people in Latin America "generally speak one of the native American languages as their first tongue, though many of them learn to speak Spanish. Many indigenous people identify themselves as members of ethnic communities that were

of the future (Barry 1995; Bonfil Batalla 1996; Braidotti et al. 1994; Esteva and

Suri 1998). Instead, the general tendency is to foster social simplification

(extinction of language, urbanization, etc.) by market forces of areas previously

protected by various mixes of tradition and isolation (Bookchin 1978).

1.4 Responses from the Mexican Peasantry

In Mexico and other Latin American countries, many of these marginalized

people view the current challenges confronting them as a continuation of the

Conquest[9] (Bonfil Batalla 1996). In Mexico, as in much of Latin America, the

Spaniards divided, conquered, and isolated indigenous populations. In response

to this, indigenous people took advantage of these "closed, corporate

communities" (Wolf 1966) to separate and defend themselves from outsiders.

These strategies of survival and maintenance of tradition were not and are not

static; they are dynamic processes. Contemporary indigenous peoples'

connection to the land, their skepticism toward modernization, their abiding

sense of community, and their diverse "traditional" lives appear as continuing

survival strategies of "accommodation, rejection and innovation" (Barry

1995;Bonfil Batalla 1996).

Currently, there are several examples of accommodation, rejection and

innovation emerging from the Mexican countryside. On January 1st, 1994, the

Zapatista Front for National Liberation (EZLN) staged an uprising in Chiapas,

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classified as "Indigenous" rather than "Spanish" or *mestizo* (mix race) under the period of colonial
rule.

Mexico to protest the government's signing of the North American Free Trade

Agreement (NAFTA) and to demand just treatment for the indigenous people of

Mexico (Collier 1994). In northern Mexico, a group of small and medium

producers known as *el Brazón* organized to protest the government's economic

restructuring, its international trade agreements and attempts to collect on their

defaulted loans (Barkin et al. 1997). In response, rural people, in ever increasing

numbers, are leaving their communities -- migrating or emigrating in search of

wage labor. They follow the harvests, head to urban centers, move to *maquila*

zones, or enter the United States (Kearney 1996). Increasing numbers of those

who stay behind turn to the cultivation of illegal crops that are one of the few

profitable agricultural ventures still available. These actions, both individual and

collective, are among the most dramatic responses arising from the rural sector --

but they are not the only ones.

1.5 The Study Site: The Permanent Seminar of Resources for Rural Development

Peasants are also responding organizationally to the changing political and

economic situation in Mexico through their community assemblies and peasant

organizations (Barkin et al. 1997; Bonfil Batalla et al. 1995; Esteva and Suri

1998). The Permanent Seminar of Resources for Rural Development has

evolved from such responses (see Szekely 1997). The Seminar was born in the

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[9] Indigenous people in southern Mexico & Guatemala have also shared this viewpoint with me.

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unique conditions of the 1970s. The Seminar is both an innovation of traditional and legally recognized community assemblies and an elaboration of peasants' strategies to ally themselves with influential outsiders. Several assemblies established collaborative relationships with sympathetic university-trained development specialists[10] to deal with the legal, political, and social problems relating to land problems, *coyotes*,[11] and the complex and bureaucratic Mexican agrarian reform system. The Seminar assisted in the successful resolution of land tenure problems of its member communities and initiated several effective economic activities associated with agrarian reform efforts.

Participation now includes some twenty Oaxacan communities comprising at least nine culturally distinct groups -- Zapotec, Mixe, Chiriguiri, Chontal, Mixteco, Masateco, Chinanteco, Triqui, and *mestizo* -- and several academics. Although the Seminar still addresses land conflicts, it is beginning to grapple with complex community socioeconomic development issues associated with globalization and the accompanying changes in the political economy (Szekely 1998).

1.5.1 The Logic of the *Milpa*

In such a diverse organization, one of the most difficult challenges is that of communication. In the Seminar, participants must communicate across ethnic,

[10] The attitude these academics brought to their work with the peasantry was informed by traditions of Maoism (Alexander 1999), French Marxism (Althusser 1976; Callari and Ruccio 1996), and liberation theology (Ecumenical Association 1986).
[11] Intermediaries who purchased from peasants at low prices and sold to them at high prices.

class, and gender differences to effectively address the problems emerging from the countryside. Communication between "situated" participants[12] has given impetus to the creation of a new "language" based on metaphors. These metaphors are used to develop, rationalize, explain and communicate many of the themes of the Seminar. This use is similar to Freire's "generative words" that contain relevant and existential meaning for people (Freire 1970). These words are filled with emotional content and reveal the social, cultural and political realities of a situation. These words can be codified according to conceptual themes and then re-codified to generate a deeper understanding of "reality" (Dickinson 1988; Freire 1985).

A key metaphor of the Seminar is the "the logic of the *milpa*." This "logic" emerges from reflection on the local *milpa,* the traditional corn-based agroecological system of Latin America (Robert 1995). A reflection by the Seminar upon the *milpa* leads participants to understand it as a system composed of multiple and diverse species that interact to produce outcomes that are not predictable by the presence of individual plants, e.g. maintenance of soil fertility, resistance to pests, and increased yields.

Further reflection on, and discussion of this "logic" as a social phenomenon leads to the idea that a socially diverse Seminar -- composed of people from distinct groups – may be more likely to devise creative and

[12] "Situated" refers to the idea that individuals are an intersection of complex identities including gender, class, ethnicity and related experiences. This complex of identifies permit a unique and

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successful solutions to common problems than any one individual or homogeneous group. This "logic" forms one of the conceptual foundations of the Seminar and helps participants justify uniting individuals and groups with different experiences and distinct ways of knowing the world.

1.6 The Purpose of the Study

The Seminar has been successful in resolving complex and potentially violent land tenure issues and devising economic ventures associated with these struggles for the land. However, the political and economic setting of NAFTA and the globalization era in which Mexican peasants currently find themselves present new challenges. Participants feel that the past problem-solving strategies associated with the Seminar and their communities are no longer sufficient. In the Seminar and in communities they ask, "What are we up against? Is this an intensification of what we've always faced or is this something new?" More urgently they ask, "How can we respond? What can we do?" At times, they feel there are no answers. In response, the Seminar has again turned to the 'logic of the milpa' to expand the diversity of the Seminar and to enrich its potential. In accordance with this "logic," the Seminar has extended an invitation to several community organizers from the state of Nayarit and to a few academics[13] from the United States. This invitation followed the model created by community

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located viewpoint (Haraway 1991; Harding 1991).

[13] In all, three Michigan State University graduate students participated with the Seminar and/or with member communities in various research activities (see Ishida 1999; Rivers-Rozdilsky, 2000).

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assemblies in the mid-1970s when the first academics were asked to collaborate with communities as a bridge to an outside world. As a *campesino* said to one of these earlier academics, "You are not the best card to play, but you're the only one we've got." With this humbling aphorism in mind, I began my participation with the Permanent Seminar of Resources for Rural Development.

This research is formulated to coincide with two primary concerns of PR: 1) how social relationships are constructed in research and 2) how knowledge generation and action are connected. Addressing these issues contributes to the organizational evolution of the Seminar and to the theoretical and methodological development of PR.

1.7 Research Questions

Three questions are addressed in this research:

1) How are the social relationships within the Seminar constructed along class, ethnic and gender lines; between the Seminar and communities; and between participating communities?

2) What framework and strategies are used in the Seminar to recognize, understand, and resolve problems facing participating communities? How are these framework and strategies changing in response to the changing socio/economic context?

3) How is the Seminar responding organizationally to changing internal and external factors?

Questions one and two emerged during pre-dissertation involvement with the Seminar. These two questions were formulated to be broad, and were refined

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through an interative and emergent process during my engagement with the Seminar. The third question emerged from this process, and arose as Seminar members (including myself) sought to understand and create a new vision of the future for the Seminar and its member communities.

1.8 The Methodological Framework

This research was both experiential and participatory. The experiential nature of this research required that I maintain flexibility, drawing upon existing methodologies and combining them in new ways when necessary. Combining the critical reflection[14] of PR enriched with the reflection of a critical learning systems approach is one example. The participatory nature of the research required that I remain sensitive to the needs and interests of the Seminar and its members.

In this research, I integrate elements of *praxis* (Fals Borda and Rahman 1991), Freirian Adult Education (Freire 1970, 1990; 1998) and a critical learning systems approach (Bawden 1997). *Praxis* forms the overarching methodological framework. *Praxis* is a process of reflection and action that occurs among and within participants as they seek to understand and generate solutions to problematic situations while at the same time creating the conditions for social transformation. The principle component of Freirian Adult Education used in this

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[14] I follow McLaren and Tadue Da Silva (1995) who define critical reflection as "a social act of knowing undertaken in a public arena as a form of social and collective empowerment...[and] which unmasks the social and cultural mechanisms of power as a basis for engagement in emancipatory action."

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research is that of *conscientização*. *Conscientização* is a learning process that people experience as they begin to recognize and reject oppression -- both oppressive situations and the "oppressor within." Finally, a critical learning systems approach expands the notion of reflection in *praxis*. A critical learning systems approach encourages the researcher to reflect upon the creation of knowledge, the process of knowledge creation, and on factors that contribute to how individuals and groups understand the process of knowledge creation itself.

1.8.1 Data collection

I engaged in field research for approximately two years, attending 22 monthly Seminar meetings from June 1997 to May 1999. For the first year and a half, I traveled back and forth from my home in Michigan to Mexico, attending Seminar meetings on a monthly basis. From October 1998 to May 1999, I lived in Oaxaca, attending Seminar meetings, visiting communities, and carrying out other research activities.

1.8.2 Multiple Methods

An integrated methodology as utilized in this research, does not preclude the use of multiple methods. In this research, multiple methods include dialogue (Bohm et al. 1991; Fals Borda and Rahman 1991), participant observation (Pelto and Pelto 1978; Thorne 1983), and open-ended interviews (Burgess 1991; Pelto and Pelto 1978) with Seminar participants and community members. Archival materials (the Seminar library and tape recordings of each Seminar session)

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were also drawn upon. Opportunities to carry out participant observation and interviews occurred during the Seminar and community visits. During my visits to and stay in Oaxaca, I accompanied the Seminar on seven community visits.[15] These visits enabled me to observe relationships within communities, relationships between the Seminar and communities. In addition, I was invited to stay in three communities outside of organized Seminar activities. During these visits, I was able to attend assembly meetings, interview community members outside the context of the Seminar, and observe and participate in several small community development projects.

1.8.3 Sharing Findings with Seminar Participants

Sharing findings was an ongoing and iterative process that contributed to the evolution of the Seminar and included a form of research validation. In September 1999 and again in June 2000, at the invitation of the Seminar, I returned to the Seminar to present my findings. These presentations contributed to the Seminar participants' reflection on their own activities and their comments helped me further refine my ideas.

1.9 Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study. Chapter 2 is a review of pertinent literature beginning with a brief introduction to development as modernization and alternative development approaches and a discussion of

[15] My first community visit is detailed in Vignette 4: *Chi liza* - Envisioning the Future.

Alternatives *to* Development. The chapter then moves to PR as an emerging research paradigm. Chapter 3 introduces the methodological framework of the study drawing on elements of *praxis*, Frerian adult education, and a critical learning systems approach. I present the research methodology, including a description of *praxis* as planning, acting, observing and reflecting. In this chapter, I also discuss the criteria for validity of the study.

Chapter 4 covers the context of the study at a national and local level. This chapter introduces the basic political, economic and cultural elements necessary to understand the research findings. Chapter 5 is an analysis of the Seminar including organizational issues of institutional affiliation, membership, goals, roles, and rules. Chapter 6 is an analysis of the Seminar as it confronts the turbulent world of a globalizing environment. In this chapter, the concepts of adaptive organization and learning organization are used as heuristic devices to understand the organizational change occurring in the Seminar. Chapter 7 contains a working model of a "2nd generation of PR" as a critical learning organization. This chapter also summarizes the contributions and main conclusions of the research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES

Pertinent literature from a number of related development perspectives are reviewed in this chapter: development as modernization, alternative development, Alternatives *to* Development, participatory approaches to research, and learning organizations. This review provides a point of departure[16] for the further development of theory relating to learning organizations within an Alternatives *to* Development framework (see Creswell 1998: 179). The idea of development as modernization and its major assumptions are introduced in this chapter. The chapter then turns to "Alternative Development," While offering corrections to perceived problems, the various approaches within the rubric of Alternative Development are seen to be basically reformist in nature. The discussion then turns to "Alternatives *to* Development" and highlights the basic tenets of this approach. An overview of Participatory Research follows, which notes the various approaches within this emerging paradigm -- Action Research, Participatory Action Research, and Autonomous Development.

The chapter culminates with an overview of the learning organization literature and distinct forms of organizational learning. Two organizational types are identified – adaptive organizations and learning organizations. These two

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[16] Following an emergent methodology, this chapter is not meant to be an exhaustive presentation of development theories, rather it presents an overview of the literature for the further elaboration of theory.

concepts will be later drawn upon as tools to further understand the organizational changes taking place in the Seminar.

2.0 Development as Modernization

Development is an elusive term. Black (1991: 1) points out that, development "has no precise meaning, no generally accepted definition.... Like other terms that have acquired a positive connotation, *development* is user-friendly: It means whatever one wants or needs it to mean." Despite this lack of clarity, on a general level, development has been identified with modernization.

Modernization, at the most general level, refers to the transformation of society from being essentially "traditional" to "modern" (Mander and Goldsmith 1996; Ullrich 1995). This means replacing traditional ways of doing things with modern ways, i.e. replacing social networks with markets, traditional legal systems with modern legal systems, communal landholdings with private land ownership, and community membership with citizenship. It is through the local application of this model that modernization occurs. However, the most influential idea of development tends to focus on economic issues with the emphasis on creating the pre-conditions for rapid export-lead growth. This kind of growth has been promoted as the driving force for successful developing economies and seen as essential for modernization.

The idea of "pre-conditions for growth" is based on early theories of economic development from Lewis, Rostow, Nurske and Rosentstein-Rodan.[17] Lewis (1955 cited in Escobar 1995: 77-78) originated the concept of the "dual economy." According to this theory, a country's economy was divided into two sectors - one modern, the other traditional. For Lewis, the traditional was analogous to backwardness and contributed nothing to a country's development. From this perspective, the modern money economy should and would overcome the traditional subsistence economy. Rostow (1960) contributed the concept of "stages of economic growth" identifying a "take-off" point at which an undeveloped country would begin to progress through various stages of sustained growth. The stages of growth theory emerged from observations made about the British industrial revolution. However, it was assumed that it could be applied to non-Western undeveloped nations as well. Nurkse and Rosentstein-Rodan (1953 cited in Escobar 1995: 75-77) added the concept of "balanced growth," arguing that countries had to develop a wide range of industries simultaneously if they were to succeed in achieving sustained growth. Nurkse elaborated the idea of balanced growth by developing the concept of "the vicious circle of poverty." The means to break out of this vicious circle was by "enlarging the size of the market and creating inducements to invest." While many of these

[17] The following summary is based on the viewpoint of several critics of the development as modernization model (Escobar 1995; Esteva 1995; Latouche 1991; Norgaard 1994; Shiva 1989). These critics are proponents of Alternatives *to* Development. These authors point out shortcomings & damages of development as modernization from the point of view of those who have suffered from it.

theories were not confirmed in practice, they still permeate current policies and practices of development.

2.0.1 Rural Development

In rural areas, modernization has confronted "pre-modern" social, political and cultural forms of being and acting. In the rural context, development as modernization includes those activities that "modernize" agricultural production. Modern in this context means an agricultural production system that is large-scale, mechanized, and utilizes chemical inputs and improved seed varieties or animal stock. Production is destined for regional, national, and international markets. Objectives of this form of rural development are to eliminate traditional production techniques, privatize non-modern land tenure forms, increase food supplies for the urban sector, and free surplus labor for industry (Gillis et al. 1983). Traditional production techniques as practiced by small farmers throughout the developing world are seen to be less efficient and less productive per unit of input, despite evidence to the contrary (see Alcorn 1984; Alvarez-Buylla Roces et al. 1989; Torres-Lima et al. 1994). These techniques are also negatively construed because they are labor intensive (Netting 1993). While modern authorities concede that traditional production techniques have been adequate in the past, they are seen as barriers to the production of sufficient amounts of food to feed the world's current and future population (Netting 1993).

Proponents of development as modernization portrayed the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s as the foremost example of how to transfer

the methods of modern agricultural production from developed to underdeveloped nations. Scientists and technologists developed and tested improved varieties and production practices at universities, laboratories, and trial sites around the world. These technologies were then "transferred" to the countryside by extensionists. Farmers were termed "innovators," "earlier adopters," "slow adopters" or "laggards" depending on the speed at which they began to utilize technologies developed by scientists and technologists (Rogers and Shoemaker 1971).

Farmers' "propensity" to adopt "improved technology" packages was not the only determinant of whether agricultural productivity would increase. A country's land tenure system -- the various ways people own and use land -- was also seen as critical. The four basic forms of land ownership common in Latin America are:

- *Large-scale modern farming and ranching*: Privately-owned large acreage where crops or cattle are raised. The production system is high input and utilizes paid, skilled labor.

- *Latifundia*: Privately-owned large landholdings with low-input production systems that utilize manual labor. Workers may receive monetary wages, but are often compensated with use of land, housing and access to other services such as health care, schools, etc.

- *Minifundia*: Private smallholdings where traditional agricultural practices are typically utilized. Labor is typically performed by family members.

- *Communal ownership*: Collectively-owned lands that are used jointly. Individuals gain access through mechanisms regulated by custom. Traditional agricultural practices are typically utilized and labor is often based on relationships of reciprocity. Communal landholdings usually can not be legally bought or sold.

In the development as modernization paradigm, the optimal form of land ownership and use is privately-owned large-scale modern farming and ranching. This form of land ownership is viewed as optimal based on the notion of economies of scale and the need for a market in lands. Economies of scale in agriculture refers to the belief that larger agricultural production units can produce more than smaller economic production units because of more efficient use of machinery and other inputs (Gillis et al. 1983). Private land ownership allows for legal sale of land, a condition that is seen as necessary for an economy to be fully "modern."

The successes and failures of the Green Revolution have been amply discussed (Cleaver 1973; Krishna et al. 1997). It is the <u>responses</u> to some of the perceived shortcomings of the Green Revolution, which are of interest here. Advocates of alternative development approaches sought to improve and expand upon the practices advocated by the Green Revolution and modernization (UNDP 1990; World Bank 1991a). Some of the staunchest critics under the rubric of Alternatives *to* Development sought to retake development and fashion something more in the image of their own cultures and communities (Escobar 1995; Esteva 1983; Rahman 1993; Shiva 1989).

2.1 Alternative Development

During the 1980s, several alternative development approaches emerged with the goal of addressing perceived shortcomings of the development as modernization paradigm. Shortcomings were seen as privileging scientific

knowledge over local knowledge, excluding minority groups and women from the process, professionalizing development work, and destroying the environment. For example, "Farmer First" and proponents of indigenous knowledge encouraged professionals to listen to rural people and take their "local knowledge" into account (Bronkensha et al.1980; Chambers et al. 1989). "Women in Development" (WID), as its name implied, was primarily concerned with incorporating women into the process of development (Braidotti et al. 1994; Sen and Grown 1988). Rapid Rural Appraisal sought to increase the efficiency of research and development activities in the countryside and include input from rural people (Chambers 1983). Sustainable Development focused on incorporating the criteria of environmental soundness and social equity into development (Adams 1990).

Advocates for these and other alternative development approaches sought to improve the practice of development by "including the excluded" - farmers, women, and indigenous people. The knowledge of excluded groups was to be incorporated into scientific research and development activities. These same advocates argued that economic growth must be balanced with environmental and social needs. The terms "laggards" and "slow adopters" were replaced with less derogatory terms, such as stakeholders, clients or participants. "Experts" and "professionals" were called facilitators, initiators or catalysts (Thompson and Scoones 1994). Development was to take place through "an

active and equitable partnership between rural people, researchers and extensionists" (Thompson and Scoones 1994: 60.)

Some critics argue that these alternative development approaches ignored the political and social complexity of development and research activities (Rocheleau 1994; Thompson and Scoones 1994: 61). Others argue that the basic hierarchical relationships implicit within scientific knowledge generation, development and transfer remained unchanged (Carmen 1996; Escobar 1995; Esteva 1995; Esteva and Suri 1998; Fals Borda and Rahman 1991; Hall et al. 1982; Kothari 1988; Wignaraja 1993). Consequently, the basic tenets underlying the development as modernization paradigm were left unquestioned by alternative development approaches.

2.2 Alternatives *to* Development

Proponents of Alternatives to Development approaches argue that it is not enough to "improve" development. Proponents of Alternatives *to* Development advocate an appraisal, rejection and the replacement of the development as modernization model. From this perspective, development as modernization is seen as both a cultural construct and an historical discourse that create and present the concepts of underdeveloped and developed as if they represented some kind of natural phenomena (Escobar 1995). Esteva (1995: 12) explains,

> The very discussion of the origin or current causes of underdevelopment illustrates to what extent it is admitted to be something real, concrete, quantifiable and identifiable: a phenomenon whose origin and modalities can be the subject of investigation. The word defines a perception. This becomes, in turn, an object, a fact. No one seems to doubt that the concern

does not allude to real phenomenon. They do not realize that it is a comparative adjective whose base of support is the assumption, very Western but unacceptable and undemonstrable, of the oneness, homogeneity and linear evolution of the world. It displays a falsification of reality produced through dismembering totality of interconnected processes that make up the world's reality and, in its place, it substitutes one of its fragments, isolated from the rest, as a general point of reference.

According to Esteva, that fragment is economics. For Alternatives *to* Development, the most general aim is to "re-member" (the opposite of dis-member) reality as a whole, to re-embed the economic in the social and to re-recognize and re-introduce the people's excluded from (or by) the development as modernization paradigm (Esteva and Suri 1998).

The Alternatives *to* Development approaches seek ways to regenerate a process of change that reclaims ownership and control by and for those who have been excluded or have been viewed as excluded. Alternatives to Development are grounded, to varying degrees, in theoretical frameworks as presented by feminism (Millman and Kanter 1975; Westkott 1979), Freirian Adult Education (Freire 1970, 1990; Freire 1985; Freire 1998; Freire and Macedo 1987), Gramsci (1979), liberation theology (Gutierrez 1975), and Marxism (Fals Borda and Rahman 1991). In the realm of practice, groups such as Bhoomi Sena *adivasi* (indigenous peoples) in Maharastra, India (Rahman 1993), the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico (Collier 1994), and the women rubber tappers of Acre, Brazil (Campbell 1996) are struggling to create a space in which their voices are heard,

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and their rights to fashion their own process of change are fully recognized and supported.

The notion that these excluded groups can participate actively in their own history contrasts with conventional notions of these people as essentially reactive and backward, fated to disappear into modern factories or their agricultural counterparts. Contrary to these expectations, historically excluded people have survived, demonstrating notable resilience and creativity when confronting forces of modernization.

Scott (1986) documents examples from Southeast Asia citing peasant efforts to thwart designs to capture resources that formerly belonged to the peasant sector. This struggle appears in both everyday economic and cultural forms, e.g. theft, pilfering, and misrepresenting harvest yields, as well as in struggles over meanings and symbols. Bonfil Batalla (1996) recognizes a similar phenomenon in indigenous Mesoamerica where the communal struggle with modernity "involves rejection, innovation and appropriation." Bonfil Batalla (1996) states that:

> Through its autonomous culture [indigenous Mexico] establishes relationships with the new world, adapting to new circumstances, resisting in order to preserve its social spaces in all areas of life, appropriating foreign cultural elements that prove useful and compatible. It invents new solutions and ideas and strategies of accommodation that allow the group to survive as different distinguished collectivities....

In the struggle between the "modern" world and the "traditional" worlds, the proponents of modernity assume the moral, the practical, and the intellectual

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high ground. These proponents advocate that, in the long-run, traditional people will be happier as consumers, better off as wage labors, and freer as individuals than if they had remained committed to "non-modern" ways of living and being. But traditional people do not agree. Sites of resistance, innovation, and accommodation are emerging around the world as local groups confront forces of development as modernization (Appfel-Marglin 1997; Rahman 1993; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996; Shiva 1989).

These struggles are also gathering an intellectual force. The Alternatives *to* Development approach allow development professionals and non-professionals to talk about development in new ways and to re-examine what marginalized groups are doing. When the dis-aggregated pieces of development are put back into the "whole" and the economic is reintegrated into and subordinated to the more general social sphere, then the innovations and actions of the peasantry again become visible (Chambers 1990; Escobar 1995; Esteva and Suri 1998).

These re-conceptualizations of development open the way for new forms of dialogue, and help forge change processes and systems that transcend the dominant model of development as modernization. PR is a collection of research and development approaches, many of which can be understood as Alternative *to* Development approaches. In general, PR approaches attempt to examine and reconstruct both the social relationships in research and development, and the

relationship between knowledge generation and change (Fals Borda and

Rahman 1991; Fernandez and Tandon 1981; Francis 1996).

2.3 A New Paradigm of Research and Development

Participatory Research (PR)[18] is more than a new set of research and

development tools or techniques (Maguire 1987: 9). PR can be understood as an

emerging paradigm of research and development. A paradigm can be defined as,

"a world view, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of

the real world" (Patton 1975 cited in Maguire 1987). Research paradigms are

based on different assumptions about the nature of society, the ways which

society should be investigated, and the kinds of knowledge that is possible to be

acquired about the world (Popkewitz 1984 cited in Maguire 1987).

PR is a paradigmatic response to the development as modernization

paradigm and the accompanying approach to research[19]. Conventional scientific

[18] I have chosen to use Participatory Research as the general term to refer to this form of
research. However, there is no one term that has been agreed upon by all PR practitioners to
refer to this emerging paradigm. In part, this reflects the political nature of PR and the ongoing
debate over terms and their definitions (Esteva and Suri 1998; Fals Borda 1998).
[19] It should be noted that practitioners of PR were not the first or only group to challenge the
conventional approach to scientific research; original critiques lie in sociology of knowledge and
feminist critiques of science (see Harding 1991).

research (Gaventa 1993; Maguire 1987; Whyte 1991) assumes that:

- the world exists as a system of distinct, observable "facts";

- objectivity is achieved only when the researcher is detached from the phenomenon being observed or investigated;

- the knowledge produced is impartial;

- the application of this knowledge should be left to others; and

- communication of this knowledge is a top-down and linear process.

The conventional scientific research paradigm separates reality into discrete "knowable" parts, divides knowledge from practice, and removes the researcher from the phenomenon under investigation. Elements outside the phenomenon of study "are held constant." The knowledge generated from these endeavors serves to enhance academic understanding of a given social phenomenon, but does not seek to change it.

2.4 Participatory Research

PR is based on a set of assumptions about the nature of society and about research that differ significantly from the conventional approach. These assumptions are expressed in two basic and interconnected themes:

1) the relationship between the generation of knowledge and change is a fundamental aspect of research, and

2) social relationships within research are re-conceptualized in theory and in practice, each PR approach doing so in a different way.

In contrast to conventional research, PR argues that knowledge is a resource to be shared and that the application of this knowledge is an integral and iterative

part of the research process itself. PR also assumes that the social world is a co-created or subjective phenomenon (Reason 1994). The participatory researcher is not detached from the "phenomenon being observed," but rather is a co-participant in the research process along with local people. The dichotomy of subject/object found in conventional social science research is replaced by a relationship between subject/subject (Fals Borda 1985b).

2.4.1 Three Approaches to PR

PR can be understood as three distinct approaches: Action Research (AR) (see Torbert 1991; Whyte 1991); Participatory Action Research (PAR) (see Fals Borda 1998; Fals Borda and Rahman 1991; Fernandez and Tandon 1981); and Autonomous Development (AD) (see Carmen 1996; Esteva, 1998).[20] Each of these approaches departs from the conventional approach to research and development and emphasizes distinct aspects of the PR paradigm. The primary distinctions, pertinent for this research, are the ways each approach constructs

1) the relationship between knowledge generation and change,

2) the social relationships between the expert (the outside researcher) and participants (local people), and

3) the relationship between distinct groups of local participants engaged in a participatory research process.

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[20] This is a simplification that may overlook some of distinctions in the numerous approaches to PR. At the World Congress of Participatory Convergence in 1997, over 40 terms were used to refer to different PR approaches.

These distinct responses can in part be understood by examining the context in which AR, PAR, and AD occur.

2.5 Action Research

Action Research originated in the industrialized countries as a new approach to addressing scientific questions and solving practical problems associated with the management of complex organizations, such as factories and schools (Brown and Tandon 1983; Whyte 1991). In the industrialized countries, Action Science was a precursor to AR (Argryis and Schon 1989; Reason 1994). In the developing countries, AR appeared in modified forms as Farmer Participatory Research, Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)(Kumar 1993) and the more recent Participatory Rural Appraisal (Chambers 1993; Chambers 1997).

A singular achievement of AR is to provide an alternative to what is termed the "professional expert model" (PEM) (Whyte 1991),[21] "external expert stance" (World Bank, 1996), or "normal professionlism" (Chambers 1993) of conventional applied social science research. As Whyte claims, the expert is engaged in studying a specific problem, recommending solutions or laying out alternative courses of action for the client. In PEM, the "researcher is completely in control of the research process except to the extent that the client organization limits some of the research options" (Whyte 1991). Whyte contends that such an approach is unsuitable for addressing real-world problems where "we need to

[21] While Whyte calls the PR he is engaged in PAR, it is well within an AR approach as defined in this paper. In classifying Whyte in this respect, I follow Hall et al. (1982), who point out the distinctions between PAR as practiced by Whyte and PAR as it appears in its emancipatory form.

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develop a process of change, resulting in organizational learning, over a considerable period of time" (Whyte 1991).

AR seeks to reconstruct the link between research and change, how research is conducted, and who participates in the research process (Fear and Lichty 1990; Whyte 1991). Research and change are seen as complementary, each influencing the other (Edwards and Jones 1976). AR is also conceptualized as a collaborative process (Rapoport 1970). Argyris and Schon (1978) note that AR brings together professionals with local change agents with the goal of producing research that is guided by, as well as contributes to, the knowledge base. These authors also contend that AR seeks to solve local problems while training local people in the problem-solving process. To successfully address both the practical and the scientific, non-professional and professional researchers must engage in the research process together.

Brown and Tandon (1983) list the goals of AR as: 1) research should generate useful knowledge, 2) the application of this knowledge should lead to developmental change, and 3) developmental change is designed to increase efficiency and productivity. In summary, AR emphasizes the scientific researcher's responsibility to help solve practical problems while at the same time contributing to social science theory. Through collaboration, professional and non-professional researchers, aim to bring about social change that is driven by both practical and scientific concerns.

2.5.1 Theory of Society from an Action Research Perspective

It becomes apparent, however, that AR's departure from conventional applied social science research and PEM is incomplete when its social assumptions are examined. According to Brown and Tandon (1983), AR posits a consensus theory of society and tends to address problems already framed by organizational authorities. These two positions -- one theoretical and the other practical -- allow action researchers to assume that all participants in the research process (both professional and non-professional) share common interests, at least in solving the problem at hand (Brown and Tandon 1983).

This procedure tends to mask important societal and organizational inequalities and divergent interests based on them. Meanwhile, the researcher still appears as an expert -- not as a co-learner -- and certainly not as a co-consultant on an equal footing with participants. Participants are viewed as means to an end. They may lend their knowledge, their opinion, and even their judgment to the research. They may be involved at various stages. However, participants do not have -- nor do they acquire -- control of the development process. Both in theory and in practice, a hierarchy is established between experts and others engaged in the research that is portrayed as "participation." Ultimate control remains in the hands of experts and their patrons (Selener 1997; Thompson and Scoones 1994).

AR also makes the assumption that the "participating group" is homogenous. Differences based on class, gender, race, ethnicity, age, etc. are

masked. Potentials for problem solving emerging from distinct viewpoints within the participant group/s are not realized, and possible issues of learning, cooperation, and communication among diverse and distinct participants groups are generally ignored.

AR has an additional shortcoming. Given its problem-specific approach, AR activities are bounded in time and space. When the research is completed, the expert leaves while the "participants" remain. Experts write up their findings, management submits their reports, but consideration is rarely given to institutionalizing AR activities to create a continuous learning process or system.

Although AR moves beyond applied social science research by focusing on useful knowledge in the context of organizational change, action and change remain at least conceptually under control. "Participation" is accordingly "instrumental" -- not designed to lead to a continuous process of shared learning and true collaboration. Yet, action researchers have sometimes exceeded their own restrictive assumptions and have helped produce forms of collaboration which anticipate more emancipatory approaches of PR (see Elden and Levin 1991; Englestad and Gustavsen 1993; Greenwood and Levin 1998).

2.6 Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research (PAR) may be defined as "a research process in which the community participates in the analysis of its own reality in order to promote a social transformation for the benefit of the participants, who are the oppressed" (Hall, 1981). PAR developed from social change efforts in the

Third World, where poverty, conflict, and oppression are commonplace. In the

Third World, where power and resources are concentrated in the hands of a few,

knowledge and its generation is subject to control by elites. As one PAR

researcher/practitioner explains:

> In their desire to dominate and control people, the Latin American governments have worked to make us believe that we are separate and cannot work together. They would have us believe that we cannot establish common goals and objectives, make use of common resources, or do common work. The governments have worked to destroy 'community.' Community means common unity, common goals, common work (Smith 1997: 15).

PAR seeks to loosen the control of elites and return it to oppressed and

marginalized groups of people.

Brown and Tandon (1983) summarize the main goals of PAR:

- research should generate practical knowledge,

- application of this knowledge should result in developmental change which changes power relationships, and

- the long term goal of PAR is social transformation.

While PAR shares AR's general goals regarding the generation of practical

knowledge through research, PAR explicitly recognizes the political implications

of knowledge production (Fals Borda 1985a; Fals Borda and Rahman 1991).

PAR views knowledge as a resource -- issues of access, ownership and control

become open issues. According to Rahman (1991), domination involves not only

the control of the means of material production, but the means of knowledge

production, including the social power to determine how practical knowledge is defined.

PAR intends to generate new knowledge that eludes elite control and recognizes the knowledge of local people as participants. As a PAR researcher in Latin America explains, "Participatory-action research permits us, little by little, to 'discover' the reality of our lives.... [and] in knowing that reality, taking action in order to transform the reality for the better" (Debbink and Ornelas 1997). Ultimately, this "knowledge" and "participation" combine to contribute to real social and political change.

2.6.1 A Theory of Society from a Participatory Action Research Perspective

PAR rejects AR's instrumental and restrictive construction of "participation" and its basic theory of society. Generally, PAR views society, as it currently organized, as unjust and therefore, essentially conflictual. Accordingly, the main goal of PAR is to create a process of social change in which participants are empowered to bring about positive social transformations (Fals Borda and Rahman 1991; Fernandez and Tandon 1981; Hall 1981).

Empowerment occurs in *praxis*. *Praxis* is understood as an iterative and expanding process of reflection and action between and within participants as they seek to understanding and resolve not only the problem at hand, but also to create the conditions for social transformation. In the course of this process, participants reflect upon and analyze facts and phenomenon as part of a

constantly changing reality. The knowledge generated by this reflection and analysis is drawn upon when implementing both personal and societal change.

Conscientização is a process of empowerment that occurs in *praxis*. *Conscientização* (Freire 1970, 1990), according to Freire, occurs when "people achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality." Individuals learn to see existing social, political and economic contradictions more clearly and to take action against unjust relations and structures (Smith et al. 1997). This strengthens people's conscious existence "in and with the world" (Freire 1970, 1990).

Conscientização is a learning process that marginalized people experience as they began to recognize and reject both the oppressive situation and the "oppressor within." In other words, they recognize and reject the internalization of the oppressor's construction of the marginalized groups (e.g. the poor are lazy and backward). Yet, in more current PAR theory and practice, the concept of *conscientização* is applied equally to *all* partners in the action, i.e., to the outside researcher as well as to local participants. Additionally, the idea of "situated identities" has begun to influence how participants -- both "outsiders" and "insiders" -- are viewed. When all participants are seen as complex intersections of class, gender, culture, race, work and education, they can all be understood to contain elements of both the oppressed and oppressor (Smith 1997). An outside researcher, in a process of *conscientização*, is more likely to

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learn with, from, and about the diversity of fellow participants and is more likely to see the potentialities emerging from these differences. This learning depends on the outside researcher's ability to recognize, rather than appropriate, the knowledge that emerges from the communication in the collaborative learning process.

2.6.2 Challenges for Participatory Action Research

PAR does not completely escape the hierarchical relationship between "expert" and "participant"(Rahnema 1995). Although the words "catalyst" and "facilitator" have replaced PEM's "experts" and earlier PAR "vanguards" to describe the roles of outside experts, these terms seem to imply that outside researchers have privileged knowledge that allows them to see what local people need. While, in theory, the problem under investigation is identified by local people, it is the outsider who recognizes the need for "liberation." These same researchers purport to know how this emancipatory process should occur, and the point at which local people are empowered to such an extent that the outside researcher can depart (Sethi 1993). This departure or "redundancy" seems to imply that the expert transfers knowledge to participants teaching them how to act and organize. This transfer of knowledge appears unidirectional. When local people have acquired the necessary skills, the expert leaves. Here again there appears at least an element of instrumentalizing of the local people by "experts" (Colburn 1989; Scott 1986; Thompson and Scoones 1994).

Another potential difficulty in PAR is recognizing outsiders as co-learners. While the concept of *conscientização* is said to apply equally to *all* partners, in practice it often appears that only the "marginalized" participants experience this phenomenon. Outside researchers engage in "self-reflexivity," a process of examining personal assumptions and biases. The concept of self-reflexivity adds a much needed element to PAR. Self-reflexivity suggests that humans, as social actors, have the capacity to think about their own thought, speech and action while they are engaged in them. This self-reflexivity serves as a guide for thought, speech and action while, at the same time, incorporating the reality of other co-participants (Schartz and Walker 1995; Schon 1983). However, at times this self-reflexivity resembles more a process of personal growth (see Smith et al. 1997). While not negative in and of itself, care must be taken that a focusing on the individual does not displace co-learning – that is, sharing knowledge among equals using dialogue (Freire 1970). This dialogical process, and not self-reflexivity, is the key to *conscientização*.

PAR appears to share a further trait with AR. Both AR and PAR overlook how groups of participants may be internally differentiated. With a few notable and promising exceptions (see Carmen 1996; Maguire 1987), there is no serious recognition of internal differences among the mix of actors and social groups in the PAR process (Escobar and Alverez 1992; Esteva 1995; Kearney 1996). Important and possibly decisive avenues of cooperation and creativity may be buried under generic terms such as "peasant" and "workers" (Carmen 1996). Yet,

PAR is not static or monolithic – it is an evolving approach (Smith 1997). PAR is beginning to go beyond a class analysis of oppression to incorporate an appreciation of the multiple identities of complex actors and social groups to see research and development as "people's own research and *praxis*" (Carmen 1996; Hall et al. 1982; Maguire 1987; Rahman 1993).

2.7 Autonomous Development

Autonomous development (AD), sometimes referred to as people's or grassroots development, is not usually considered a PR approach. AD emerges from efforts of marginalized groups to solve collective problems and involves both an envisioning of the future and a response to modernization (Carmen 1996; Esteva 1994; Rahman 1993). AD may range from solving everyday problems to engaging in major social change (Wignaraja 1993). AD differs from, and contributes to, other PR approaches in the way it conceptualizes "research" and "development" as activities that are initiated by local people and rooted in local knowledge, culture, and ways of organizing.

The goals of AD (Carmen 1996; Chambers 1997; Escobar 1995; Esteva 1995; Rahman 1993) can be summarized this way:

- Research, as practiced by local people, should generate practical knowledge;

- The application of this knowledge should lead to "developmental" change; and

- Developmental change is defined and controlled by local people

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Escobar explains:

> ... the organizing strategies of these groups begin to revolve more and more around two principles: the defense of cultural differences, not as static but as transformed and transformative force; and the valorization of economic needs and opportunities in terms that are not strictly those of profit and the market. The defense of the local is a prerequisite to engaging in the global.... (Escobar 1995: 226).

This is a clear departure from the apparent outsider-expert bias of AR and PAR. The assumption of AR and PAR is that research and development take place when experts are present. Therefore, if there are no experts, it follows that there is no research or development taking place. Indeed, many AD activities are "invisible" to outsiders. Farmers' experimentation, transfers of knowledge within and between groups, and community development efforts often go unnoticed (Chambers 1990; Ruonavaara 1996).

Hoping to become more visible and viable, marginalized groups in both urban and rural settings are beginning to organize regional, national, and even international networks to exchange information, create new knowledge, and bring about social change (see Forest, Trees, and People No. 18 Sept. 1992; Honey Bee; Cultural Survival Quarterly; Chiapas95; and Rocheleau 1996.) AD is an ongoing, expanding process of investigation and analysis of "real world" problems by "real world" people who devise independent and culturally appropriate solutions to build their own futures.

There is no one theory of society presupposed by practitioners of AD. Rather, the actors involved determine a vision of society based on their

worldviews, inter- and intra-community relationships and placement in the local and global arena. Life -- social or otherwise -- may be viewed as conflictual, consensual, or in entirely different terms. For example, indigenous groups in the Andes define "development" as wellbeing not only of the individual, but also of the world around them. Development in this sense, is a search for harmony between communities, with nature, and with the Andean deities (Saravia 1992).

Internal relationships in AD are formed as people come together around mutual concerns. While differences (and even conflict) may exist, ideally a collective identity emerges. Horizontal relationships are established in which all participants in the research process are treated as equals and contribute to the generation of knowledge that leads to resolution of shared problems. At the invitation of local people, an expert becomes a "participant" in the "collective construction of alternatives." But an expert's presence is not essential or even necessary (Escobar 1995). The outside researcher is one participant among many who shares what he or she knows, but is not allowed to dominate.

2.8 Summary of PR Approaches

AR, PAR, and AD differ significantly from each other in the way they construction social relationships within research. AR retains a hierarchical relationship between outside researchers and the client group. PAR, while advocating equality, distinguishes between outside researchers and local people who need to be "liberated." AD stipulates that control of change begins with, and remains in the hands of, local people. Outsiders may participate in, but not

control, the research and development activities. These various constructions of social relationships range from vertical to horizontal.

Despite these different constructs of social relationships in research, each of the PR approaches homogenizes the "participant" group as clients, as the oppressed, or as communities. Little attention is give to the complexity of the various participant groups in the PR process. In fact, this homogenization seems to repress the voices of subordinate sectors within participant groups.

2.9 Organizational Change: A Point of Convergence?

AR, PAR, and AD generally agree that the generation of knowledge should have useful application. AR, PAR, and AD advocate the notion that research should generate useful knowledge that integrates research and social change. However, each approach focuses on change at a different level. AR advocates organizational change. PAR promotes individual and societal transformation. AD focuses on problem resolutions and empowerment at a community or group level. Given PAR's concentration on empowerment and social transformation and AD's outcome focus, little attention is given to change at an organizational level. Yet, this lack of focus may hamper PAR and AD attempts to bring about community empowerment and long-term social change.

AR does not share these organizational shortcomings. Action Research in Organizations and Action Research in Education focus on organizational change in formal organizational settings, such as businesses and schools (Deshler 1995; Selener 1997). Organizations in AR (whether in businesses or schools) appear

as complex bureaucratic entities with hierarchically structured social relationships, a specialized division of labor, and differentiated rewards regulated by formal rules and procedures (Collins 1998). In general, AR in organizations and education aims to produce knowledge to improve professional capacitates and to bring about organizational change.

2.10 Organizational Learning and Learning Organizations

One form of organizational change that has gained considerable attention in recent years is that of organizational learning. Addleson (1999) defines organizational learning as "the process of gaining knowledge and developing skills which empower us to understand, and thus to act effectively within social institutions such as businesses, government departments, schools, or charities." Argyris and Schon (1978) define organizational learning as "the detection and correction of errors " at an organizational level.

Organizational learning appears through the creation of a "continuous learning process" known as a "learning organization" (LO). There are several forms of learning that occur in organizations – adaptive learning, generative learning and critical learning. The first two forms are explored within the organizational learning literature. The third will be elaborated in this paper.

2.10.1 Adaptive Organizations

In the literature on organizational learning, the "learning" organization is contrasted with an "adaptive" organization. Argyris suggests that this learning allows the organization to "discover sources of error, invent new strategies

designed to correct error, produce those strategies, evaluate and generalize the results" (Argyris and Schon 1978). An adaptive organization is defined as an organization that employs adaptive or single-loop learning to detect and correct errors in a way that allows the organization to continue its present activities, maintain its current policies, and achieve its identified objectives (Argyris and Schon 1978).

Adaptive learning is aimed at changing the rules of an organization (Macdonald et al. 1997). The underlying assumptions, theories or principles of the organization are not under discussion in an adaptive organization. Solutions are at the level of improvements -- the same, but better. In particular, questions that ask "how" rather than "why" are raised. Learning appears as a process of consensus making about organizational rules that define what people are allowed or obligated to do (Macdonald et al. 1997). Adaptive learning does not encourage members of an organization to reflect on the organization's goals, policies, values, or underlying assumptions. In addition, adaptive learning does not encourage members of organizations to question issues of leadership, management, or the social structure of the organization itself.

According to Lassey (1998), several assumptions underlie the

conceptualization of learning in an adaptive organization:

- Learning develops individuals.
- Learning is for beginners.
- Learners are recipients.
- Staff and their development are viewed as a cost.
- Memory is individual.
- Management and/or professionals are the source of new ideas.

(Adapted from Lassey 1998)

From this perspective, learning is individualistic, exclusionary and limited. Argyris

and Schon (1978) suggest that an adaptive organization's learning response may

even reinforce conditions that created errors in the first place.

2.10.2 Learning Organizations

According to Malhorta (1996), a learning organization is an organization

"with an ingrained philosophy for anticipating, reacting, and responding to

change, complexity and uncertainty." Senge (1990) suggests that the learning

organization is a "group of people continually enhancing their capacity to create

what they want to create." Addleson (1999) suggests that "a learning

organization builds collaborative relationships in order to draw strengths from the

diverse knowledge, experiences, capacities, and ways of doing things that

people and communities have and use." A learning organization, as a community

of individuals, takes a reflective stance towards change that not only incorporates

the ability to respond, but includes a commitment to analyses and learning from

the response experience.

A learning organization uses double-loop or generative learning (Addleson 1999; Argyris and Schon 1978; Lassey 1998; Limerick, Passfield, and Cunnington 1995). Generally, this type of learning is understood as a "process for enhancing an organization's capacity for effective change (Limerick et al. 1995). Argyris and Schon (1978: 24) define double-loop learning as "those sorts of organizational inquiry which resolve incompatible organizational norms by setting new priorities and weightings of norms, or by restructuring the norms themselves together with associated strategies and assumptions." Macdonald et al. (1997) suggests that double-loop learning is about changing not only the rules but also the underlying *insights*. Thus, it concerns learning involving "why" questions at the level of collective knowledge and understanding. Double-loop learning typically addresses problems of conflicts and controversies between departments and/or individuals. Double-loop or generative learning does not, however, encourage an organization to question underlying principles upon which the organization is based (Macdonald et al. 1997) or its hierarchical social structure.

Lassey elaborates the underlying assumptions of a learning organization:

- Learning develops the organization.
- Learning is for everyone.
- Learners are co-creative.
- Learning occurs through training and staff development.
- Staff is a resource.
- Memory is organizational.
- The work force is the source of new ideas.

(Adapted from Lassey 1998: 9)

Learning in a learning organization is both an individual and a collective endeavor (Argyris and Schon 1978; Lassey 1998). Argyris and Schon (1978: 20) state that "there is no organizational learning without individual learning, and that individual learning is a necessity but insufficient condition for organizational learning." Individual learning mutually reinforces appropriate responses and changes at an organizational level. However, learning as conceptualized through a learning organization perspective appears to be directed towards management. Senge describes a leader's role in a LO as that of "designer," "teacher" or "steward" who is responsible for challenging organizational assumptions and creating a shared organizational vision (Senge 1990). To do so, leaders must encourage and affirm a sense of community and collaboration in members of the organization.

2.11 Moving Beyond Action Research

Adaptive and generative forms of learning may improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Adaptive learning may help resolve organizational problems and may even lead to new appreciation and respect for workers. Generative learning may create a shared organizational vision and a sense of community. However, organizational learning does not automatically embrace an emancipatory position nor do adaptive and generative forms of learning call into

question existing hierarchical relationships within the organization itself or in the larger social environment[22].

2.12 Conclusion

An exchange between AR, PAR and AD focusing on organizational change has the potential to expand PAR's and AD's ability to promote organizational change in an emancipatory framework. However, in their seminal article on PAR and AR, Brown and Tandon (1983: 293-293) suggest that the ideologies and political economic differences between the two approaches present barriers to "productive exchange between action researchers and participatory [action] researchers." Thus, the potential for improving theory and practice may be hampered by the inability of PR academics and practitioners to learn from each other. The underlying social theories held by AR and PAR researchers -- a consensus theory of society and a conflict theory of society -- may be barriers to establishing a dialogue between all research participants. AR researchers may find it difficult to hear the voices of marginalized groups, while PAR researchers may find it difficult to accept the legitimacy of consensus.

Despite Brown and Tandon's assertion, a convergence within PR may be occurring. At the 1997 World Congress of Participatory Convergence in Knowledge, Space and Time in Cartagena, Colombia, proponents of various forms of PR engaged in dialogue to share common concerns and experiences.

[22] Some of the learning organizational literature has appropriated terms typically associated with radical theoretical frameworks, i.e. revolution and transformation, but this does not signify emancipatory intent (see Limerick, Passfield, and Cunnington 1995; Senge 1990).

They explored and sought to overcome differences (Fals Borda 1998). The time

appears ripe for an exchange of ideas between AR, PAR and AD. One such

potential for cross-fertilization is in the area of organizational change and

organizational learning. AR has a rich theoretical and practical understanding of

organizational change and organizational learning. An opportunity may exist to

enhance PAR and AD's emancipatory goals by drawing on AR's understanding

of organizational change and organizational learning. Examining the Seminar as

it begins to reflect upon itself organizationally may contribute to our

understanding of what it means to be a "critical learning organization."

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The methodological framework for this study is presented in this chapter. The chapter begins with a general introduction to research paradigms and then moves to a discussion of three major research paradigms: empirical-analytic, interpretive, and liberatory. A review of PR methodological approaches follows, including an overview of *praxis* and an introduction to both Freirian adult educational theory and elements of the critical learning systems approach. The methodology utilized in this study is then shared. *Praxis* at an individual level provides the methodological framework for the study. Bracketing (see Denzin, 1989; Denzin and Lincoln 1994b; Husserl 1970; Moustakes 1994) -- a concept utilized in phenomenology -- is adapted for PR. Once the outside researcher is bracketed, the individual process of *praxis* is then elaborated as a cyclical process of planning, observing, acting and reflecting.

This study focuses on a particular organization, the Permanent Seminar of Resources for Rural Development. The study of the Seminar falls between what Stake (1994) calls an intrinsic case study and an instrumental case study. As Stake points out, "Because we simultaneously have several interests, often changing, there is no line distinguishing intrinsic case study and an instrumental; rather a zone of combined purposes separates them." An intrinsic case study is

one that has inherent or unusual interest. An instrumental case study provides insight into a specific issue or the refinement of theory.

The Seminar is an intrinsic case in the ways it transcends the temporal and spatial boundaries of PR. The Seminar overcomes the temporal boundaries by creating an ongoing organizational entity and the spatial boundaries by creating an organization that unites individuals across community, regional, and national boundaries. The Seminar is also unique in that it reconstructs the relationship between research collaborators. It celebrates the diversity of participants, rather than homogenizing them into separate categories of community, the "oppressed," peasants, workers, or outsiders. In these reconstructed relationships, participants are no longer either insiders or outsiders. *All* participants are insiders *and* outsiders - insiders to their own specific problematic situations, and outsiders to those who are not members of their respective community or group.

Studying the Seminar as an instrumental case study presents an opportunity to reflect on and to develop theories of a "2nd generation of PR." On doing so, we are able to identify and to develop the idea of a critical learning organization and examine some of its key attributes.

3.1 Research Paradigms

PR is an emerging research paradigm. Research paradigms are based on a set of assumptions about the nature of society, the ways that society should be

investigated, and the kinds of knowledge that are possible to acquire about

society (see Table 1) (Popkewitz 1984).

Table 1. Philosophical Dimensions of Research Paradigms

Ontology refers to the nature of being. Ontological questions ask about the nature of reality.

Epistemology pertains to questions about the nature of knowledge and the relationships between the "knower" and that which is "known."

Methodology refers to how we know the world or gain knowledge about it. Methodological beliefs shape how the researcher sees the world and acts on it.

Rhetoric refers to the terms and narrative form utilized to document a study.

Axiology refers to the role of values in research. Values are defined as "preferences for courses of action and outcomes; relative values shape choices among perceived alternative actions" (Brown and Tandon 1983: 280).

Ideology refers to a body of ideas with reference to a certain political or cultural plan.

Practice refers to the application of knowledge generated through research.

Adapted from (Brown and Tandon 1983; Creswell 1998; Denzin and Lincoln 1994b: 12-15)

Guba and Lincoln (1994: 105) define a research paradigm as, "the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of methods but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways." These belief systems include choices about rhetoric, practice, and the role of values. Brown and Tandon (1983) suggest that paradigms also include an ideological dimension. However, the ideological dimensions of research paradigms are

usually not addressed (Brown and Tandon 1983; Creswell 1994; Creswell 1998; Denzin and Lincoln 1994a). Maguire (1987: 11) notes the power of paradigms to shape "in nearly unconscious and thus unquestioned ways, perceptions and practices within disciplines. It shapes what we look at, how we look at things, what we label as problems, what problems we consider worth investigating and solving, and what methods are preferred for investigation and action." Maguire contends that paradigms also influence what we choose not to see or investigate.

3.2 Three Research Paradigms

Distinct research paradigms have been identified and elaborated by Creswell (1998), Kemmis and McTaggart (2000), Maguire (Maguire 1987) and Smith (1997). Following Smith[23] (1997), these paradigms can be labeled as empirical-analytic, interpretive and liberatory. Maguire (1987) cautions that categorization in itself can be seen as a particular way of representing the world. Despite this caveat, find in Table 2 an overview of three major research paradigms.

The empirical-analytic paradigm is currently the dominant paradigm of social research (Maguire 1987). In this paradigm, "the detached scientist asks questions or proposes hypothesis, formulates a research design, and observes

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[23] Many of Smith's ideas are based on Habermas, but as represented by Kemmis (Kemmis 1991). Although Smith tends to dilute Habermas' (Habermas 1984) ideas, it is a useful way to summarize some of Habermas' ideas regarding empirical-analytic, hermeneutics, and emancipatory forms of knowledge.

Table 2. Three Main Research Paradigms & Assumptions

Assumptions	Empirical-analytic	Interpretive	Liberatory
Ontological - What is the nature of reality?	A unique, real social world exists to be studied by independent observers. Recognition is given to distinct, positive facts & observable phenomena.[1]	Pluralistic & relativist. People make purposeful acts based on their perceptions of feelings & events shaping their realities by their behavior.[1]	The social world is collectively constructed within a historical context.[2] People are active subjects in the world & are understood to be in relationships of power with self, with others & with nature.[1]
Epistemological - What is the relationship between the researcher & that being researched?	Objective truth exists. Objectivity & a value-free science is possible & desirable. Logical, deductive, rational findings. Knowledge is an end in itself.[1]	Knowledge is a social construction. Language contextualizes the meaning of data. The methods used justifies the knowledge produced.[1]	Objectivity does not exist. People can change their levels of consciousness through learning. Fundamental human needs drive the process of inquiry.[1]
Axiological - What is the role of values?	Research is value-free.	The researcher is open about the value-laden nature of study & reports biases as & the value-laden nature of data gathered.[3]	The researcher is open about political nature of research & reports biases as well as the value- & political-laden nature of data gathered.[3]
Methodological - What is the process of research?	Experimental. Begins with a hypothesis. Validity & reliability are important. Defined time frame. Quantitative data.[1]	Dialogical process between researcher & subjects to obtain meaningful data & insights into human behavior. Qualitative.[1]	*Praxis* within a historical & social context. Participants as owners of research process. Multiple, often creative, methods.[1]
Ideological[5] - What are underlying ideas about power relationships in research?	Academics are solely qualified to be researchers and therefore control the research process.[7]	Control over research is granted to multiple agents speaking from their own social locations.[7]	The research process itself is intended to question and change power relationships in research.
Rhetorical - What is the language of research?	Formal style, using the third person, past tense & quantitative terms.	Informal style using the personal voice, qualitative terms, & limited definitions.[3]	Engaging style of narrative. May use personal voice. Employs qualitative language.[3]
Practice - What is the purpose of the research?	Technical control.[4] Maintenance or evolutionary change of status quo.[1&2]	Practical knowledge.[2] Broaden communication & understanding among social groups.	Actionable knowledge. Transform social relationships. Fair distribution of knowledge as a resource.[1]

Adapted from: Smith (1997)[1]; Maguire (1987)[2]; Creswell (1998)[3], Kemmis and McTaggart (2000)[4], Wolf (1999)[5], Brown and Tandon (1983)[6], Harding (1991)[7].

people from a distance, taking note of observable phenomena and verifiable, distinct facts. The underlying assumption is that "truth" is represented by these observations and facts. The intent is to produce replicable, technical information that causally explains and predicts human behavior" (Smith et al. 1997: 179). From this perspective, the world is seen as "a system of distinct, observable variables, independent of the knower" (Maguire 1987: 13). The knowledge derived within an empirical-analytic paradigm is technical in nature and formulated as laws and theories. The horizon of the empirical-analytic paradigm is technical control of relationships within society and with nature.

The interpretive paradigm of research seeks to understand the meanings of a given social phenomenon from the perspective of those involved. As Smith (1997: 118) explains, researchers doing interpretive research

> hold that different people have different, subjective perceptions of reality, and that there are therefore multiple realities and multiple truths.... Generally speaking researchers want to deepen their understanding of the phenomena - what do people think, feel, and do during this event? What are their individual perceptions and interpretations of reality and how do these relate to and influence their subsequent social actions? The production of this interpretative knowledge is intended to strengthen understanding within and between people in the existing society.

The knowledge emerging from an interpretive paradigm seeks to illuminate how "human interaction produces rules governing social life, rather than discovering universal truths of human interaction" (Maguire 1987: 14).

Accordingly, the horizon of the interpretive paradigm is to expand communication and understanding through dialogue.

The liberatory paradigm of research seeks to support personal and social transformation. As Maguire explains, research conducted within a liberatory paradigm, "help[s] people see themselves and social situations in new ways in order to inform further action for self-determined emancipation from oppressive social systems and relationships" (Maguire 1987: 14). Maguire (1987) suggests that from a liberatory perspective the social world is seen as "humanly and collectively constructed within a historical context." Knowledge from a liberatory perspective serves to "uncover the systems of social relationships and the contradictions which underlie social tensions and conflicts" (Maguire 1987: 14). Consequently, the horizon of the liberatory paradigm is social transformation leading to liberation.

3.3 Methodological Context of this Study

The primary PR approaches drawn upon in this study are Action Research, Participatory Action Research and Autonomous Development. The various approaches of the PR paradigm fall within interpretive and liberatory paradigms. Most AR falls within an interpretive paradigm, while PAR and AD are more consistent with the liberatory paradigm. From a methodological perspective, the approach taken in this study most closely resembles PAR's methodological framework -- grounded in *praxis* or praxiology, yet borrows from

praxis as practiced in AR. *Praxis* in this research is elaborated with elements of a Freirian approach to adult education (Freire 1970, 1990; Freire 1985; Freire and Macedo 1987) and a critical learning systems approach (Bawden 1997) and AR's cycle of *praxis* (Dick na-a; Dick na-b). The melding of these elements creates a more complex presentation of *praxis* as a means to better explicate the reflective process associated with this PR effort.

3.4 The Methodology of this Study

The methodology of this study is <u>experiential</u> and <u>participatory</u>. By experiential, I mean that the research is inductive based on experience in the field and reflection on that experience (Fals Borda and Rahman 1991: 4; Reason 1994: 327, 333). By participatory, I mean that I am engaged in research as an active participant to help bring about informed change. The experiential nature of this research occurs through personal experience, shared experiences, and reflection. This approach is consistent with other PR approaches that are based on experiential ways of knowing arising from participation with others (Reason 1994: 333).

In general terms, C. Wright Mills (1959: 24) advises any researcher to "be a good craftsman [sic]: Avoid any rigid set of procedures.... Seek to develop and use the sociological imagination. Avoid the fetishism of method and technique.... Let every man [sic]," he says, "be his own methodologist." In more specific terms, Clandinin and Connelly (1994: 416) note that there is "an inevitable redefinition of

purpose, as new, unexpected and interesting events and stories are revealed" in experiential studies. These authors also note that "shifting interests and intentions of many participants need to be kept in rhythmic balance" in collaborative experiential studies (Clandinin and Connelly 1994: 416). The experiential nature of this research requires that I maintain flexibility, drawing upon existing methodologies, combining them in new ways, and innovating when necessary. The participatory nature of the research requires that I remain sensitive to the needs and interests of the Seminar. Accordingly, I approach this work as a methodological pragmatist drawing upon elements of *praxis*, Freirian concepts of adult education, and a critical learning systems approach.

Such an eclectic methodological framework invites the use of multiple methods. The use of multiple methods helps counter inherent "weakness and limitations" by "deliberately combining different types of methods within the same investigation" (Brewer and Hunter 1989: 11). The primary methods used during this research include dialogue (Fals Borda and Rahman 1991; Freire 1998; McLaren 1995), participant observation (Pelto and Pelto 1978; Thorne 1983), unstructured interviews (Burgess 1991; Pelto and Pelto 1978), and archival research (Brewer and Hunter 1989). Denzin and Lincoln (1994a: 2) describe this approach as *bicolage* research that is a "pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation." Nelson et al. (1992) cited in Denzin and Lincoln 1994a) uses the term *bicoleur* to describe

research that is a "choice of practice, that is pragmatic, strategic, and self-reflexive." This study adopts such an approach.

3.4.1 Bracketing

A dialectal relationship exists within PR between the individual as a member of a group and the group itself. A dialectical relationship occurs when two elements or forces act in relation to one another (Smith et al. 1997). In this research, <u>I bracket the methodological process of one individual -- myself as an academic -- from that of the group</u> (see Figure 2)(Denzin 1989; Holstein and Gubrium 1994).

Figure 2. Bracketing Myself as an Outside Researcher
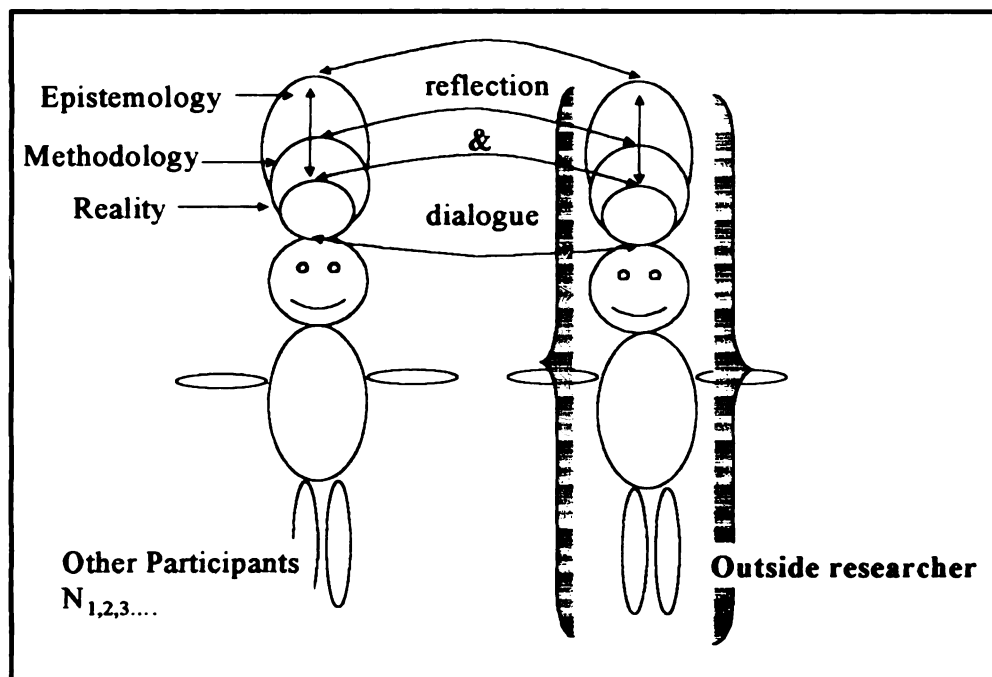
This allows me to present the individual methodological process, while problematizing the methodological process of the group. This is an artificial

separation; the individual process does not exist apart from the group process. Additionally, the methodological processes of the individual and group are dynamic. The evolution of both the group and individual process form part of the "findings" of the research.

Bracketing suggests that "all ontological judgements about the nature and essence of things are suspended. The observer can then focus on the ways in which members of life world themselves interpretively produce the recognizable, intelligible forms they treat as real" (Holstein and Gubrium 1994: 263). In PR, bracketing can be utilized to create a simultaneously objective and subjective stance. This stance allows the outside researcher to objectively observe the collective process of *praxis* while being engaged in it.

3.4.2 Praxis

Praxis, as defined earlier in this work, is an iterative and expanding process of reflection and action. *Praxis* takes place between and within participants as they seek to understand and resolve the problem at hand and to create conditions for social transformation (Freire 1970, 1990; Smith et al.1997).

In *praxis*, reflection and action can be understood as being in a dialectic relationship. The activities of reflection and action do not occur as discrete and separate activities. Rather, they appear as reflection-in-action and knowing-in-action (Schon 1983). Knowing-in-action is a type of tacit knowledge that requires the knower to understand what he or she does. In reflection-in-action, the knower

critically analyses what occurs in an action and makes explicit assumptions about action strategies, the practice context, and personal worldview. Knowing- and reflecting-in-action give rise to actionable theory and new forms of knowledge. Argyris (1993: 3) describes knowledge that is actionable as a series of if-then statements. "Knowledge that is actionable... contains causal claims. It says, if you act in such and such a way, the following will likely occur. That means that actionable knowledge is produced on the form of if-then propositions that can be stored in and retrieved from the actor's [researchers] mind under conditions of everyday life." From an emancipatory perspective, the reflection and action of *praxis* leads to increasing awareness of social realities and their historical origins (Freire 1970, 1990; Freire 1998). Freire names this increasing awareness *conscienctização*.

3.4.2.1 Conscienctização

Conscienctização, as proposed by Freire, helps move people through three levels of consciousness – magical, naïve, and critical (Freire 1970, 1990; Freire 1985). Freire (1998: 44) describes the process in this way: "As they [the oppressed] begin to apprehend a phenomenon or a problem, they also apprehend its causal links. The more accurately men [sic] grasp true causality, the more critical their understanding of reality will be." Through this critical understanding, people will be better able to organize to bring about social transformation (Fals Borda 1998: 159-160).

A person's understanding will be magical "to the degree that they fail to grasp causality" (Freire 1998: 44). At a magical level of consciousness, individuals do not question either their internalized image of inferiority based on relationships of oppression or resulting behavioral patterns. As Freire (1998: 44) explains, "Magic consciousness... simply apprehends facts and attributes to them a superior power by which it is controlled and to which it must submit." As a result, people at a magical level of consciousness accept the status quo and seek to blame themselves for their conditions of poverty, ignorance and the like.

At a naïve level of consciousness, individuals see oppressive relationships as individual failings rather than as a system of domination. The system itself is seen to be "sound and viable" (Smith et al. 1997: 194). At this level, individuals may reproach themselves for not conforming to societal norms and/or blame individual or groups of individuals for problematic situations. At a naïve level of consciousness, individuals tend to seek reformist changes rather than critically analyze issues and take action.

At a critical level of consciousness, people expand their sphere of awareness and become increasingly capable of reflecting upon and taking action to alter their conditions. As Smith (1997: 215) explains, "people reach a critical level of consciousness where they see their relationships to each other and to their world and its structures in a revealing and new light. Individual knowledge accumulates to become social knowledge as the group verifies what it knows and

understands. Conscientization creates new energy within and between group members." This energy is directed towards actions of social transformation.

3.4.2.2 Dialogue

> *Praxis* occurs through dialogue. As Freire (1970, 1990: 75,78) writes:

> As we attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon...Within the word, we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed - even in part - the other immediately suffers.... When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the world is changed into idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating 'blah'.... On the other hand, if action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into activism. The latter action for action's sake negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible.

In this research, dialogue is defined as horizontal communication among people engaged in a critical inquiry in order to solve the problems that jointly concern them (Freire 1998).

In this sense, dialogue does not begin with a set agenda or goal. It is a conversation, allowing participants to uncover unknown or unacknowledged concerns. Therefore, dialogue is not a discussion or a debate where individuals seek to win or impose their own viewpoints (Bohm et al. 1991) or is its goal to arrive at consensus. Rather, the aim of dialogue is to seek mutual understanding for emancipation.

Dialogue as practiced in PAR draws upon Freirian Adult Education (Freire 1970, 1990). In this context, dialogue gives rise to problematizing, a particular

way of presenting the "situation" as a puzzle to be solved or a problem requiring and suggesting action. More specifically, questions are formulated and answers are sought to both immediate problematic situations and long-term issues of social transformation.

Once a "problem" is established, "coding" is utilized by educators to share information with participants engaged in the learning experience. In Freirian adult education, this means that educators code teaching material in a manner appropriate to the group engaged in the learning experience. Coding gives rise to thematic investigation or generative themes through which learners can begin critical self-reflection and self-appraisal. By examining generative themes, learners may begin to revise their previous views of their world. They may then achieve a higher level of understanding about their previous knowledge and in doing so extend the limits of that knowledge (Freire 1970, 1990; Freire 1998; Freire and Macedo 1987). Variations of coding and generative themes are used in the Seminar to establish common understanding and for the basis of social change.

In PAR, people engage in dialogue to reflect and act upon problematic situations while holding emancipation as a horizon. However as, some participants at the Cartagena Conference on PR[24] pointed out, some definitions of PAR focus on action as the "essence of participatory research" (Fals Borda

[24] The World Congress of Participatory Convergence in Knowledge, Space and Time. May 31 - June 5, 1997.

1998: 165). Consequently, conferees argued that reflection was not always elaborated and tended to remain an enigmatic term. In this research, elements of a critical learning systems approach are drawn upon to explicate the reflective process of PR.

3.4.3 Critical Learning Systems Approach

A critical learning systems approach directs researchers to simultaneously reflect upon cognitive, epistemic, and meta-levels of knowledge generation (see Figure 3) (Bawden 1997). In other words, research involves reflecting upon the creation of knowledge, the process of knowledge creation, and on factors that contribute to how individuals and groups understand the process of knowledge creation itself.

According to Bawden(1998), viewing research from a critical learning systems perspective can help researchers recognize "community" as a space in which people enter into a conversation about "rationality at the same time that they are applying reason to their situational analyses. At a practical level, researchers "explore the nature and significance of their most basic ideas and values at the same time as they are exploring the matter at hand" (Bawden 1998). The researcher can grasp that the focus of change shifts from the "thing out there," and from the "individual person" to the learning relationships between people and the world about them (Bawden 1998). Researcher reflexivity

contributes a self-critical aspect and directs the researcher to problematize his or her activities and relationship to the research (Schartz 1995).

Figure 3. Expanding *Praxis* with a Critical Learning Systems Approach
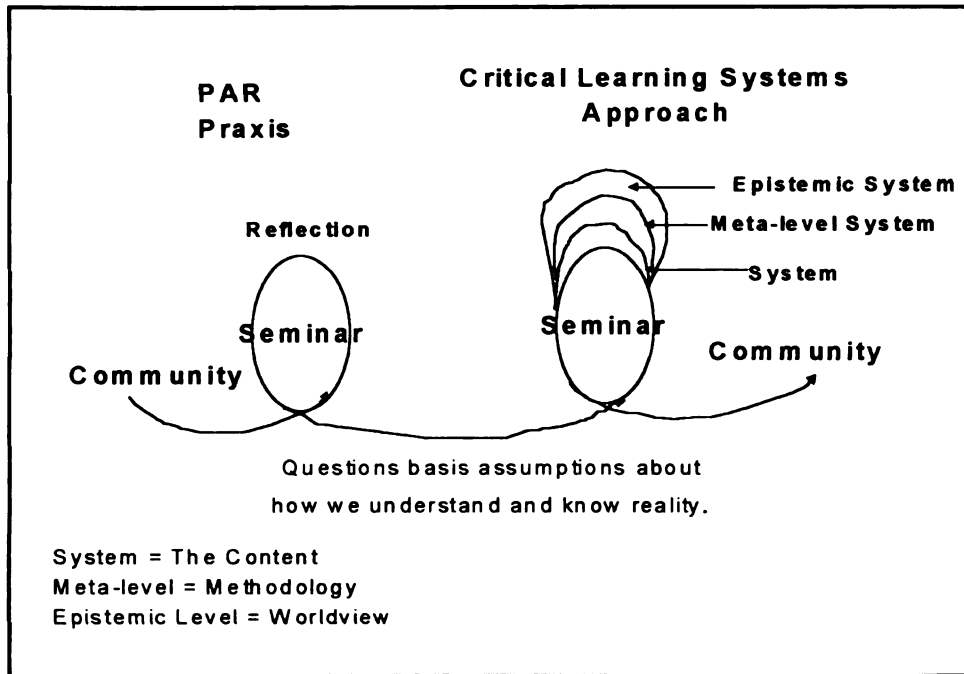
3.5 Employing *Praxis* as Research Methodology

Praxis, bracketed at an individual level, is carried out through a cyclical process that consists of four elements -- planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Dick na-b; Kemmis and McTaggart 2000). This cycle resembles the *praxis* of PAR, but emphasis is given to individual reflection rather than group reflection through dialogue.

During the first cycle of *praxis*, planning consists of identifying an organization or community interested in solving problems in a participatory

fashion, gaining acceptance, and negotiating a role. In consecutive cycles, planning includes formulating questions, identifying whom to ask, and deciding how to ask them. "Acting" entails engaging with the organization or community and asking the questions identified during the planning stage. Observations made during the PR engagement are used to gather further information. Reflection is a two-part process that takes place on multiple levels. First, the researcher compares and contrasts the information gathered during interviews with information gathered during observations. This information is then compared to the relevant literature. The second part of the reflective process is interpretation. In subsequent cycles, questions – based on reflection -- are refined and ways to test emerging interpretations are devised. Each cycle is intended to improve the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon and to refine the methodological skills needed to carry out further stages of research (Dick na-a).

3.5.1 Planning: Identifying an Organization and Negotiating Entry

Dick uses the term "planning" to refer to the first stage of the cyclical process (Dick na-a). In this research however, planning took on a rather serendipitous nature. I began considering where and with whom I could do dissertation research as I finished up my Ph.D. course work. I was interested in doing research with a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Latin America that worked with marginalized rural communities using a participatory approach.

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Ideally, I wanted to work with an NGO that appreciated and built on rural people's knowledge. At that point in my development as a participatory researcher, I defined "participatory" research as a form of research where local people determined the research goals and methods, while outsider researchers served as advisors, catalysts, and/or facilitators of the research process.

I was primarily interested in continuing my Master's thesis research -- documenting Mayan and *mestiza* women's knowledge relating to traditional household gardens (Ruonavaara 1996). A model of traditional gardens emerged from this research -- putting local gardeners on an equal footing with NGO garden project "experts." However, that research had taken place in Guatemala. Given the difficulties and dangers of working there, I hoped to find another location to continue my work. Southern Mexico seemed a good choice given its large indigenous population, relative calm, and the apparent prevalence of traditional household gardens.

In June 1997, I received predissertation funding for a pilot study in southern Mexico. I visited various NGOs in the states of Quintana Roo, Oaxaca, and Chiapas. The NGOs in Oaxaca and Chiapas offered intriguing research opportunities. However, community leaders at the most promising site in Quintana Roo had just asked my NGO contacts to leave the area. The community no longer wanted outsiders to participate in their development process. Another organization -- an NGO in Chiapas -- had proposed a participatory organic garden project and was interested in my collaboration.

However, the political situation in Chiapas was problematic, especially for a researcher interested in PR. The government had interrogated, jailed, and canceled the visas of several foreign visitors who had "participated" in particular development efforts taking place in the region.

3.5.2 The Permanent Seminar of Resources for Rural Development

In Oaxaca, I attended the June meeting of the *Seminario de Gestión sobre Recursos para el Desarrollo Rural* (the Permanent Seminar of Resources for Rural Development). My first impressions were positive. The organization worked with marginalized rural communities, many of them indigenous. While the organization did not specifically focus on agricultural development, the academics showed their respect for the knowledge and traditions of the rural people with whom they worked. There also appeared to be a degree of equality between the academics and the *campesinos* that I had not witnessed in other projects.

I was intrigued by a seemingly contradictory relationship between what the Seminar members said about the organization and how the organization appeared in practice. While the academics appeared to accept the *campesinos* (peasants) as equals, they spoke more often and longer than the *campesinos*. Additionally, the few women who were present sat on benches against the walls behind the tables where the men sat. They listened, but did not join the conversation until it was their turn to present their concerns.

I was familiar with the non-homogenous nature of indigenous groups and "oppressed" peoples from previous research experiences. Given its impressive ethnic diversity and underlying philosophy, the Seminar seemed to be a unique opportunity to further develop this understanding. In addition, while the Seminar participants dedicated their time investigating and analyzing specific community and group problems, they seemed less concerned about the Seminar's development as an organization. The Seminar seemed willing to accept my participation. I was intrigued by the research possibilities presented by the Seminar, but I was unsure what my "participation" would entail or contribute.

3.5.3 My Role

When I raised this issue with the coordinator, he suggested that I could be a *participante de otra experiencia* (a participant with different experiences and perspective) who could help the Seminar participants see themselves more clearly. Following the "logic of the *milpa*," my presence would increase the diversity of Seminar and enlarge its problem-solving potential. At the time, neither of us fully understood the implications of his suggestion.

The participants themselves soon problematized the very notion of my role as an outside researcher. This was done informally at first as participants tried to figure out what I was good for, and then formally as I asked them to think about my place in the Seminar. After approximately six months of participating in the Seminar, we openly discussed my role. This occurred during a conversation

about outside experts, extension workers, and academics. One member said that my very presence had changed how he viewed women. My presence and participation helped him realize that, "*si, las mujeres pueden*" (yes, women can.) Several other members identified various roles for me, saying I was:

- a "mirror"
- an "echo"
- a "bridge."

As a <u>mirror,</u> I could reflect back to them their own image, but through my own cultural lens and experiences. As an <u>echo</u>, I could carry their voices to my "world" telling others of their concerns and their attempts to confront the changing times. As a <u>bridge</u>, I could connect both participants and communities to a world that was at times inaccessible and/or incomprehensible to them and help initiate a dialogue between the "two worlds." Although I did not feel prepared to carryout these roles, my abilities expanded as my language skills and capacity to communicate increased, I earned a deeper level of participants' trust, I gained further experience, and I better comprehended the problems member communities were facing.

Initially, the newness and strangeness of the whole situation overwhelmed me. At the first meeting of the Seminar I felt surrounded by nameless and expressionless faces and voices in Spanish, Mixe and various dialects of Zapotec. I was whiter and taller than anyone in the room. I was also one of only a few women and the only *gringa*. How was I supposed to participate in this? I was

struck by the way the group worked together, but it was an impression based on images that I did not fully understand, and a *campesino* Spanish that I did not fully comprehend. Despite this partial understanding, one thing was clear - *I* was not in control of this research process.

3.5.4 Identifying Questions

At this step of the research process, my initial research questions tended to be rather general:

- What is the Seminar?

- What does it do?

- How does it accomplish these things?

- In what context is the Seminar operating?

Over time, my questions became more focused and specific. As I acquired a better understanding of the Seminar and my role in it, I categorized the questions into two general types. One type focused on questions designed to increase my own understanding and further my dissertation work. The second type pertained to questions that I asked to advance the Seminar's development as an organization -- to challenge members to be more self-reflexive. As my understanding of, and commitment to, the Seminar increased -- and as I gained the confidence of Seminar participants -- my individual goals and the goals of the Seminar members merged.

Initially, I asked "naïve" questions – at times out of my need to learn more

and at other times designed intentionally to move the Seminar members to

reflect. To Freire (1970, 1990) "naïve" thinking refers to an uncritical stance

towards the world, an acceptance of and an accommodation towards what is

perceived to be "normal." Freire (1970, 1990: 81) explains, "to naïve thinkers, the

goal is precisely to hold fast to this guaranteed space and adjust to it." When I

used "naïve" questions to move the Seminar to reflect, it was to draw attention --

in a non-threatening manner – to what I considered unquestioned assumptions.

This is reminiscent of a comment made by a reviewer of Corbin and Strauss's

work (Strauss and Corbun 1994: 284 footnote) who said, naïve questioners

"may be even more likely to see things that don't make sense, and therefore ask

questions why? or may be more likely to ask why don't you think about it (do it)

this way?" At first, I asked questions not to push members to take a critical

stance, but rather to implicitly present the idea that there were other ways to talk

and think about the world. Only after I considered myself a full participant in the

Seminar (based on my own commitment and the trust of other members) did I

begin to ask questions that resembled what Freire would call critical questions --

questions that encourage participants to reflect on their own answers and the

"answers" given to them by society at large (Shor 1995).

When I asked "naïve" questions to expand my own understanding, they

also served to help Seminar members reflect on their own perceptions and

actions in order to respond to me in a way I could understand. This form of

questioning is in some ways similar to what Schein (na) refers to as the work of a

process consultant:

> A process consultant acknowledges that [he or she] is not an expert
> on anything but how to be helpful, and starts with total ignorance of
> what is actually going on in the client system. One of the skills,
> then, of process consulting is to 'access one's ignorance,' to let go
> of the expert... role, and get attuned to the client system as much
> as possible.

While the terms, "consultant" and "client" do not describe my relationship

with the Seminar, I did try to use my ignorance in a way that contributed to the

overall learning process of the Seminar. My lack of knowledge on the specific

issues brought before the Seminar did not limit my ability to ask questions and

even, at times, to make suggestions. More importantly, my ignorance did not

allow me to assume that I was an "expert," arriving with ready-made answers.

Gradually, as I went through numerous cyclical iterations, naïve questions

gave way to questions of a more critical stance. I began to ask questions about

1) the social relationships in the Seminar; 2) how these relationships might be

related to the construction of social relationships in member communities and in

Mexican society at large; 3) the apparent dissonance between Seminar

strategies and the needs of communities and groups; and 4) the apparent

discord between the ideals of the Seminar and some of its practices. In the final

stages – my last two months with the Seminar -- the questions I asked merged

with the questions that most of the Seminar participants were asking. The focus

of those questions was on the Seminar itself, and what it had to be as an

organization to meet the needs of its members in the rapidly changing world of southern Mexico.

3.5.5 Reflection and Analysis

Reflection and analysis were an integral part of the overall research design and occurred throughout data collection. As I became more fully engaged in the process of the Seminar, I began to analyze answers to the questions that I was asking. I developed categories and concepts, and looked for emergent patterns and themes. During the development of these categories and concepts, I compared what participants had said about the Seminar and the issues they had raised in Seminar meetings with the actual practice of the Seminar. I also drew upon the *bitacora* library, the tape recordings of past meetings, and informal interviews of individuals not affiliated with the Seminar but working with rural communities in Oaxaca. I also made comparisons to pertinent literature. However, some of the literature was not available in Oaxaca, so I could not access it until my return to the United States.

As research progressed, my skills in reflection and analysis become more acute, and I incorporated a critical learning systems approach. I began to analyze "data" at a cognitive, epistemic and meta-level. The ability to reflect and critically analyze became clear to me during a difficult meeting with the Seminar coordinator. The following vignette is an example of my emerging reflective skills.

Vignette 1. Susto[25]

At the September seminar meeting, the medicinal plant group -- a group of Mixe women from San Carlos -- presented their *bitacora* about an illness known as *susto*. The word *susto* means fright. *Susto* is also an illness common throughout indigenous Central America. The illness is caused by a sudden and frightening event usually resulting in a form of paralyses or inability to function normally. During the previous month's Seminar, the women had been asked how they diagnosed *susto*. In their September *bitacora,* the women gave their response.

After the women's presentation, Manuel (a *mestizo* from the state of Nayarit) challenged the women's diagnostic techniques implying that his knowledge as a *curandero* (healer) was superior to that of the indigenous women. When he was done speaking, a long silence ensued. The coordinator broke the silence by asking the women a few questions about how they did their diagnostics, but he did not challenge the way Manuel had framed the issue. Juan, the husband of one of the women from San Carlos, responded for the women as he attempted to explain why and how they diagnosed *susto*. Again, Manuel imposed his "superior" knowledge about the disease and its diagnosis.

The women were already dispirited because of the negative treatment they had received in their own community. Even though the women had won a national contest for their medicinal plant knowledge, the community had responded to the women's attempts to recapture the communities medicinal plant knowledge by calling them witches and punishing them. The group described their feelings in the Seminar as "a candle whose flame is about to go out." In an attempt to move the discussion from what seemed to be an attack on the women, I tried to direct the conversation to a more general and, I hoped, more useful look at *susto* and its diagnosis.

In the Seminar, we had discussed the situation of rural Mexico in an era of globalization, we had asked what free trade meant to rural communities and we had asked why the price of corn had fallen. I tried to turn the focus of the discussion in that direction by asking, "This makes me wonder if a country or a community can suffer from *susto*?" I receive blank looks from everyone. I tried again by being more specific, "For example, could Mexico be suffering from *susto* and are we trying to cure the sickness with modern medicine instead of

[25] From my notes of September 1998.

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traditional medicine?"[26] In a way, I succeeded in what I was attempting to do. I diverted attention away from the women from San Carlos, but only to have the anger redirect towards me. The coordinator later told me it was like throwing gasoline on a fire. Manuel puffed out his chest and stood erect responding, "Are you saying Mexico is afraid?" The coordinator tried to help me out of the dilemma I had inadvertently created asking if I only meant Mexico. I responded, "no many countries appear to be suffering from an illness like *susto*, the United States and Japan. May be we are trying to cure the illness with modern medicine instead of traditional medicine." No one responded. It appeared from their faces that several other participants' had reactions similar to Manuel. After a brief silence, the discussion turned to other topics.

Later in the month during a meeting with the coordinator, he brought up the incident. He shared an interaction he had with Sergio at lunch right after the *bitacora* presentations and discussion on *susto*. It appeared that Sergio, the anthropologist of the group, had an even stronger reaction towards my questions than Manuel. He accused me of being paternalistic and, as proof, referred to a remark I had made three months earlier to the women of San Carlos. At that time, the coordinator was mapping out a complicated discussion about traditional medicine on the board, creating a systems-type diagram. I copied the diagram in my notebook and asked if the women of the medicinal plant group would like a copy. I was sitting next to them and they were not taking notes. In fact, they had no paper or pencils with which to take notes. I offered to share what I had copied adding that I wasn't sure they would be able to understand my notes. Sergio must have thought I was implying that the women were not capable of understanding the diagram. So, this remark made him angry. Instead of talking to me or anyone else about his anger, he let it fester. By the time of the September Seminar, he was so angry after the *susto* discussion that he would not even talk to the coordinator about it.

When the coordinator told me about Sergio's reaction, my response was a mixture of anger, hurt feelings, and tears. I felt anger because I was offended that Sergio, of all people, could assume that I would intend anything that implied superiority in any form. After all, he was an anthropologist and should be more sympathetic to the challenges of communicating across cultures. I felt anger and hurt because it was so difficult to engage in this work. I was trying so hard to understand and contribute in a way that was positive and unassuming. I was trying so hard and yet I failed.

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[26] Or at least that's what I intended to say. My less than perfect competence with verb tenses could have confused and compounded the supposed insult.

At the same time as these thoughts were racing through my mind and tears were running down my face, I was thinking -- this raises a tremendous number of theoretical issues. What does it mean to apply Behar's (1996) concept of the vulnerable observer to my own situation? Am I willing to put myself emotionally at risk? Is this worth it? What about this perception of paternalism? Where does that come from? What does it mean for the Seminar? How can an outsider engage in PR when insiders have such feelings which appear to be repressed most of the time, but emerge in almost a knee-jerk reaction? What does this do to the concept of equality between insiders and outsiders? In the Seminar, everyone is an insider and outsider at the same time. What happens to Freire's concept of the "oppressor" and the "oppressed" here?

The coordinator and I began to talk. He described Manuel and Sergio as Mexican *machos*. As I reflected, I could understand to some degree the nationalism, but was not sure about the gender issue. Did the fact that I was a woman make my comments more offensive? Did they see me, the North American woman, challenging the masculinity of Mexicans as such a "horrible offense"? The coordinator pointed out that these interactions called into question the very foundations upon which the Seminar was based. The logic of the *milpa* could not exist in an atmosphere were participants became angry with each other over misunderstandings and cultural differences.

Later that night I wrote in my notebook, "So now, I have to figure out how to respond. I can quit - my first reaction. Who needs this! I have very little to gain from participating in the Seminar and a lot to lose given the mess some of the communities have gotten themselves into and the uncertain future of the Seminar...." After a moments reflection, I divided my reaction in three parts: 1) my emotions, that I knew would mellow over time; 2) the ontological, ideological, epistemological, and methodological issues raised by this event, and 3) figuring out how to deal with the situation on a practical level.

My closing entry, "Fascinating stuff this PR!"

Bawden's (1997) presentation of reflection from a critical learning systems

approach became much clearer to me through this event. Schon (1983: 241-242)

terms this type of reflection as reflection-in-action. He describes this form of

reflection as it occurs in an organizational settings. "[I]t consists in on-the-spot

surfacing, criticizing, restructuring, and testing of intuitive understanding of experienced phenomenon; often it takes the form of reflective conversation with the situation." While not all (thanks goodness) my reflections took place in such on-the-spot situations, overtime my reflective abilities improved with practice.

This vignette also illustrates some of the barriers to dialogue as it takes place in the Seminar -- gender biases and nationalism, being but two. These barriers to communication entwine with complex constructions of identify and oppression. The women from San Carlos are vulnerable as women and as indigenous people. I am vulnerable as a woman, but also am attacked because of my national identify from the "imperialistic" North. It is possible that Manuel and Sergio felt like I, as a North American, was acting like an oppressor and denigrating their country. They may also have felt that it was not "my place," as a woman, to question them or their country. The exchange both in the Seminar and with the coordinator served to reinforce my own commitment to acquiring the communication skills and understanding to participate more fully in the Seminar.

3.5.6 Community Visits

During field research, I visited three communities that I had identified as the more "advanced communities" in resolving land tenure problems (i.e. they had begun community development efforts.) These communities included two Oaxacan communities, San Carlos, a Mixe community; and San Mateo, a mestizo community; and one community in the state of Nayarit. These stays

allowed examination of enterprise development strategies, relationships within communities, between communities; and between the Seminar and communities. It also allowed me to attend community assembly meetings.

3.5.7 Recording Information

During field research, I kept a notebook that included notes of each Seminar meeting, field notes, and my reflections. During the Seminar meetings, I recorded important aspects of the dialogue and my reflections on them. Taking notes in the Seminar was not intrusive. It was an integral part of participating in the Seminar. Most group and community representatives took notes of the meetings as a means to report back to their communities. After reviewing and analyzing my notes, I went back to the tape recording of specific Seminar meeting for verbatim transcriptions of pertinent sections.

Taking notes also offered an opportunity to further strengthen the bonds that I was forming with Seminar participants. At first, my notes were recorded mostly in English. Some participants, especially some of the women, were interested in the English I was writing. They asked if I would teach them a few words in English. I did so, and they taught me Mixe and Zapotec words. For several months, an interesting dynamic was set up in the odd minutes of free time during the Seminar meetings. Several of us exchanged words in English, Mixe and Zapotec amongst much laughter and with Spanish as the universal language. This exchange presented a mini-*milpa* logic for some to participate in,

and for everyone to observe, without many of the complicated social relationships that hindered the full potential of the logic of the *milpa* in the Seminar.

3.6 Rhetoric and Narrative

PR has a unique rhetorical approach relating to three issues -- the voice of the researchers, the verb tense utilized, and an inclusive style. In PR, the voices of research participants are heard. In this research, I utilize the first person singular to represent my voice and the first person plural to represent the voice of all of the Seminar participants together. This is an appropriate rhetorical form for qualitative research (Creswell 1994). In sections of the presentation, I have sought to suppress my own voice to some degree, especially in Chapter 5 (see Clandinin and Connelly 1994; Geertz 1988). This is, in part, a response to recent PR research that seems to over-emphasize the individual experience of the outside researcher, that can overpower the voice of local participants (see Smith et al.1997). I want to represent myself as one voice among many. After all, this research is not my story -- it is a story of the Seminar and *all* its participants. I also make a value-based decision in presenting the voice of the *campesinos* (peasants) with whom I worked. Frequently, accounts from the countryside represent peasants as less capable, less articulate, and less intelligent than their more "sophisticated" urban neighbors. I attempt to counter this impression by

presenting the voices of Seminar participants through their own words and in vignettes.

Verb tense is another rhetorical issue. In quantitative literature, use of past tense is used to establish and maintain a distance between the researcher and the object of research. In contrast, in qualitative research present tense is often used to express a different social relationship. When the work is participative, the verb tense also may be used to imply a continuity of social relationships, i.e. the outside researcher is a part of an ongoing process without temporal boundaries. In this work, I use various verb tenses. I use the past tense to refer to events that happened in the past and have ended. I use the present tense to refer to things that are ongoing or that do not change significantly over time.

I have chosen to use an inclusive style of writing, rather than an exclusionary style. This approach seeks to avoid the use of jargon or excessive technical terms. When a term is used that pertains to a specific theoretical framework and may be unfamiliar to the reader, I seek to define it at its first use. This approach is appropriate for participatory research in which the potential audience is broader than for most research report.

3.7 Vignettes

I have chosen to use vignettes in this work as a way to convey feelings, events, and the setting that form the foundation for this study. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) provide support for using this type of narrative approach. These

authors differentiate between field text and research text. Field texts are more commonly thought of as data - journal entries, field notes, photographs, etc. These authors prefer to think of this data as "constructed representations of experience." Field texts are constructed around experience, tend to be descriptive, and are shaped around specific events. The vignette, as utilized in this study, is a form of field text. The field text however is not an analytic presentation of meaning and social significance. Therefore, each vignette is followed by an analysis that points to "patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes either within or across individuals' personal experiences" (Clandinin and Connelly 1994: 422).

3.8 Validity

Smith (1997), following Lather (1986), suggests that the validity of PAR is built into the methods employed and includes triangulation, construct validity, face validity, and catalytic validity (see Table 3).

Table 3. Forms of Validity in Participatory Research

> ***Triangulation:*** The incorporation of multiple methods and sources of information and various theoretical schemes to cross-check information and strengthen the trustworthiness of data.
>
> ***Construct validity:*** Reflexivity that builds in systematic ways to critically question actions and practice and thereby construct knowledge.
>
> ***Face validity:*** The return of data to the participants for analysis and interpretation to increase credibility of data.
>
> ***Catalytic validity:*** The use of a process that reorients, focuses, and energizes participants to take actions for transformation.

(Smith 1997: 242)

In this research, these forms of validation are utilized throughout the research process. Triangulation occurs through the use of multiple methods. Construct validity takes place through self-reflexivity, which is an integral part of the research methodology. According to Olesen (1994: 165), self-reflexivity can be used as a guide to data gathering and for understanding a researcher's interpretations and behaviors in the research. Self-reflexivity helps the researcher, "uncover what may be deep-seated but poorly recognized views on issues central to the research and a full account of the researcher's views, thinking, and conduct" (Olesen 1994: 165). Face validity acts as a check on the imposition of a researcher's biases and beliefs in interpretation and analysis. In this research, face validity occurs informally throughout the research process as I

present emerging categories, concepts and patterns to various Seminar participants. Face validity occurred formally when preliminary findings were presented to the Seminar and I sought feedback from Seminar participants. Catalytic validity is a central focus of my involvement in the Seminar as the organization seeks to understand its present situation and transform itself to meet new challenges.

3.9 Research Constraints

Participatory researchers, with a commitment to work with marginalized and oppressed groups of people, may find themselves in a research setting fraught with political tensions. In this research, my travels in rural Oaxaca were somewhat constrained by the economic and political situation in the countryside. The political situation in southern Mexico is becoming increasingly tense with military or paramilitary attacks on communities or groups who are "sympathetic" to revolutionary groups (Hilbert 1997). In Chiapas, the government continues to cancel visas of foreigners engaged in "political" activities such as teaching indigenous groups how to use video equipment (Hanson 1999). There has not been the same intensity of military activity in Oaxaca or has there been an attempt to remove foreigners working with indigenous communities. However, in this research, my decisions about modes of inquiry, lines of questioning, and relationships with individuals and communities were guided by an awareness of these kinds of issues.

Political and economic tensions at a community level may impact research as well. I was sensitive to the negative impact the presence of an outsider could have on communities already embroiled in internal divisions. I tried to minimize the negative impact of my presence when ever possible. So, for example, before visiting San Carlos, I asked the community representative if there were any issues that I should be aware of so that I would not inadvertently say something that would increase the difficulties the group from the community already faced. He replied, "No, there's nothing to worry about. Just don't say anything that has to do with God." This did not come as a complete surprise to me. In Seminar discussions, it had emerged that the main political divisions in this community currently ran along religious lines. A second set of circumstances caused me to cancel a trip to another community. I had considered visiting this community as part of a comparative study of craft production, but was cautioned by local people that it was a community that an outsider "could get into, but would not come out of." I decided to visit a craft project in another community.

CHAPTER 4

THE MEXICAN CONTEXT[27]

To understand the Seminar and the complexities that the organization is confronting, it is important to understand the sociopolitical context in which it operates. This understanding includes the historical dimensions of the transformation occurring in the national economic and political arena, and specific cultural and political dynamics of rural communities in Oaxaca. This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section is a brief historical account of Mexico beginning with the Revolution through the present day. The second section provides a short description of the socio-cultural and economic situation in the Oaxacan countryside.

4. 0 Introduction

The socioeconomic transformation that is currently taking place in Mexico can not be separated from the country's turbulent and contested history. According to Barkin (1990: 3):

> Mexico's transformation is the history of the country's progressive integration into the world economy. In the process, the people were wrenched from their local communities and regional cultures into a new national polity and were increasingly subjugated to the designs of an international market.

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[27] Those familiar with Mexico may find this chapter an oversimplification or superficial. However, this chapter is intended for readers unfamiliar with Mexico, in general, and Oaxaca, specifically. For more in-depth coverage of the history of Mexico see Ruiz (1992).

The struggle between cultures and the global economy can be understood as a ongoing struggle between two distinct and conflicting Mexicos -- Mexico *moderno* and Mexico *profundo* (Bonfil Batalla 1996; Collier 1994; Hilbert 1997: 117).

Mexico *moderno* is characterized by a market-driven and export-focused economic system, and a state-dominated political system. Mexico *profundo* is indigenous Mexico, "the basic nation that lies beneath the modernizing surface" (Botey 1996: 16). Bonfil Batalla (1996: 2) describes Mexico *profundo*:

> ...Mexico profundo is formed by a great diversity of peoples, communities, and social sectors that constitute the majority of the population of the country. What unifies them and distinguishes them from the rest of Mexican society is that they are bearers of ways of understanding the world and of organizing human life that have their origins in Mesoamerican civilization and that have been forged here in Mexico through a long and complicated historical process. The contemporary expressions of that civilization are quite diverse: from those indigenous peoples who have been able to conserve an internally cohesive culture of their own, to a multitude of isolated traits distributed in different ways in urban populations. The civilization of Mesoamerica has been denied but it is essential to recognize its continuing presence.

Those who populate the modern Mexico tend to view indigenous Mexico as antithetical to the national project of modernization, a project that entails the imposition of a national identity upon the culturally diverse indigenous world. Mexico *profundo* includes the idea that the national project is a continuation of the Conquest. This view does not, however, reject *all* the elements of the modern world. It recognizes to varying degrees the right to select and adapt elements,

and combine them in new ways with the traditions and cultures of the indigenous world (Bonfil Batalla 1996; Esteva and Suri 1998).

4.1 Modern Mexico

The history of modern Mexico begins with the Mexican Revolution. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 was a reaction to the vastly uneven distribution of wealth in the country and a lack of responsiveness of the national government to the demands of the peasantry. On the eve of the Mexican revolution, less than 1 percent of the country's population owned 97% of the land (Esteva 1983: 28). Nearly half of the rural population worked as *peones* (laborers) on large *haciendas* under stark conditions (Simon 1997: 31). The mortality rate was 32.5 per 1000 (Beltran and Arciniega 1954: 152). Eighty-four percent of the population was illiterate, and the vast majority of these people resided in the countryside (Cockcroft 1998: 82). The unequal distribution of the nation's wealth, the dualistic social structure, and the unresponsiveness of the government made the country ripe for revolution.

The Revolution, however, was not simply a struggle between the elites and the rural poor. Three factions opposed the rural elites -- the Zapatisitas, the Villistas and the Constitutionalists. During the course of the Revolution, these forces not only fought against the elites, but also against each other in a bloody civil war.

Emiliano Zapata who came from the indigenous community of Anenecuilco, Morelos, led the Zapatisitas. Zapata acquired his position of leadership in a time-honored fashion. Simon (1997: 30) recounts:

> Almost every one of the hundred towns in Morelos was feuding with some nearby hacienda over land, water, or timber rights. Village councils elected delegates, filed petitions, and hired lawyers, but to no avail. The Profirian regime, the courts, and the state government invariably sided with the haciendas. José Merino, who had been representing the town of Anenecuilco in its battle with an encroaching hacienda, had traveled to Cuernavaca and Mexico to make his case. In the summer of 1909, Merino convened a village meeting in Anenecuilco at which he said that at seventy years of age he was too tired to continue the fight. The two hundred men of Anenecuilco - hired hands, small farmers, and merchants for the most part - elected a thirty-year-old part-time mule skinner, small farmer, and share cropper to represent them. His name was Emiliano Zapata.

Under the banner of "Land and Liberty," Zapata and his peasant followers fought for social justice through land reform. Ironically, Zapata's Plan de Ayala -- written in 1911 — did not call for the elimination of the hacienda system, but rather for expropriation of only one-third of large land holdings and, then, only with compensation (Esteva 1983). Zapata and his peasant followers seemed more concerned with recovering lands stolen from them by large landholders than eliminating the hacienda system (Esteva 1983: 29).

Pancho Villa led a faction in the north. Villa began his public career as a thief and cattle rustler. Later he was persuaded to take up arms against the legal authorities (Ruiz 1992: 329). Villa's followers were a mixed lot that crossed class lines -- workers, ranchers, shop owners, and day and migrant laborers. Given the

make-up of his followers, employment issues were more important to Villa than land ownership (Cockcroft 1998: 100-101). Villa's stand on agrarian reform was ambiguous, but, in general, he favored small producers and private properties. Villa also advocated free elections and a purge of the judicial and political system.

Carranza (a planter and member of the Sonoran aristocracy) and Alvaro Obregón (his field marshal) led a third faction. Ruiz (1992:332) describes Carranza as a conservative who believed in law and order, and in firm and vigorous leadership. The Carranza forces became known as the Constitutionalists because of their professed defense of the constitution and democracy. The Constitutionalists were composed primarily of professionals, prosperous farmers, ranchers, and large landholders. The Constitutionalists advocated capitalism based on competition and free trade. However, recognizing the need for popular support, Carranza announced progressive labor and agrarian reform laws.

In 1915, Carranza received support from the industrial workers union. In addition, the United States backed the Constitutionalists with financial and military support. Support from the union and the United States swung the growing civil war in favor of the Constitutionalists. By 1916, Carranza and the Constitutionalists claimed victory. The triumphant Constitutionalists convened the Constitutional Convention of Querétaro, where the Constitution of 1917 was drafted and approved (Cockcroft 1998: 101; Ruiz 1992: 333-335).

The 1917 Constitution appeared to incorporate the multi-class nature of

the Mexican Revolution. Carranza was forced to adopt Article 27 by the more

radical elements of the Convention. Article 27 established the legal framework for

redistribution and governance of the land, and gave the state the authority to

regulate private property and the use of natural resources. It also gave the state

responsibility for the equitable distribution of the national wealth. Certain types of

landless communities, or those with insufficient land, had the right to petition for

lands from neighboring *haciendas*. Large landholdings were subject to

expropriation to be redistributed either as smallholdings or as communal lands.

The owners were to be compensated with government bonds based on the tax

value of the property -- a value that greatly understated its market value -- over a

twenty-year time period (Katz 1996; Ruiz 1992). Katz believes the land

distribution elements of the Mexican Constitution make it one of the most radical

constitutions ever implemented (Katz 1996: 32).

Carranza, however, did little to implement the agrarian reform. Only

132,000 hectares were redistributed to 38,000 peasants during his presidency. In

some states, a few large landholdings were redistributed. In other states, pacts

were made with local elites (Sanderson 1981). In still other areas, expropriated

lands were returned to former hacienda owners (Katz 1996).

Land that was redistributed to the peasantry took two communal forms:

ejidos, created from lands expropriated from large landholders or from unclaimed

lands; and *comunidades*, formed from indigenous land holdings that had been in

possession of indigenous groups "since time immemorial" and now were formally

recognized by the revolutionary government (Randall 1996). In addition, new

areas of the country were open to settlement. The majority of the peasants,

however, were excluded from the reform (Esteva 1983). *Peones acasillados*

(peasants who lived on large landholdings as paid or unpaid laborers) could not

receive lands under the new agrarian reform laws.

In summary, while the power of the large landholders had been

weakened, the revolution did not fulfill its promises to the Mexican peasants and

workers (Katz 1996). Industrial and agricultural elites continued to dominate

Mexican society (MacEwan 1991: 17). Yet, the peasants emerged from the

Revolution with a new consciousness and recognition of the legitimacy of their

demands (Katz 1996).

4.1.1 The 1920s and 1930s

During the 1920s and 1930s, the peasantry gained possession of some of

the land, but it gained neither political power nor succeeded in eliminating the

hacienda system. By the mid- to late-1930s, land redistribution had virtually come

to an end. Government support for *ejidos* gave way to support for small private

holdings utilizing modern agricultural production methods and producing for the

market (Esteva 1983: 39). The government promoted massive infrastructure

development, primarily targeting the North where large landholdings were concentrated.[28]

In 1929, Calles established a new political party, the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PRN) -- the precursor to the *Partido Revolucionario Institutional* (PRI). The PRN united the most powerful political actors in the country. According to Centeno (1994), Calles (and his successor Cardenas) established several policies that would define political life for the next seventy years. These policies were as follows. The prohibition on the reelection of the president, combined with an immense concentration of power in the presidency, meant that no one individual could dominate the political system. The party established control over both the military and the state bureaucracy. In addition, revolutionary nationalism became the ideology of the state. This last effort involved the creation of a new national identity.

A central notion of the new national identity was that of the *Mestizo* -- the "cosmic race" produced through the mixing of Indian and Spanish races. The notion of *mestizo* contained a sense of revolutionary valor and sacrifice while, at the same time, romanticizing the Mexican indigenous civilizations of the past. In contrast, the indigenous present was seen as an obstacle to the project of modernization (Novela 1995). Government programs actively promoted *mestizaje* by encouraging indigenous assimilation into Mexican society and by

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[28] Between 1940 and 1970, 60% of public investment for irrigation projects went to the North and North Pacific zones (Esteva 1983: 40)

fostering the creation of cultural works that depicted Indian heritage as a "central

pillar" of modern Mexico (Bonfil Batalla 1996: 117; Hilbert 1997).

When Cardenas came to power, only 6 percent of the nation's land had

been redistributed. Between 1934 and 1940, Cardenas redistributed another 20

million hectares to over one million peasants. This added another 12 percent to

the amount of land given out to peasants in earlier years -- more than had been

redistributed during any other previous administration (Gunder Frank 1969;

Thiesenhusen 1996). To support the *ejido* sector, the government established

the *Banco Nacional de Crédito Ejidal* (National Bank of Ejido Credit) and rural

education became a priority. The government viewed and promoted rural

community development as an integral component of the educational program.

With the Camacho presidency, many of the gains of the peasantry were

lost (Ruiz 1992). The national government returned to a contradictory policy

towards the *ejido* system. On the one hand, the *ejido* sector was seen as a "pillar

of the political project of national development with social justice." On the other

hand, the creation of the *ejido* sector was seen as a temporary political tactic or

as a source of reserve labor (Fox 1994).

4.1.2 The 1940s-1970s

Fueled by a post-war boom, Mexico experienced high economic growth as

it became increasingly integrated into the world market system (Barkin 1990: 3).

This expansion was supported by foreign investment, government loans, and

growing oil production. Gross national product expanded at about 6 percent a year (MacEwan 1991). The later part of this period became known as the "Mexican miracle."

This period was characterized by the internationalization of industry and agriculture. However, industrialization efforts were concentrated in the North and in the Federal District. Production centered on consumer goods primarily for upper and middle-class Mexicans. Most Mexicans could not afford to purchase the goods -- primarily "luxury items such as processed food, appliances, cosmetics and later, automobiles" (Barkin 1990).

In the agricultural sector, the state provided credit, crop insurance, and fertilizer. However, most of this investment was again directed toward the Northern states. Gunder Frank (1969: 305) notes that, between 1947 and 1958, 60 percent of all funding for irrigation went to three northern states of Baja California del Norte, Sonora and Tamaulipas. Additionally, the majority of agricultural credit and all mechanized farm equipment were distributed in the same area. Agricultural output of industrial crops rose 309 percent and food crop output rose 113 percent between 1939 and 1954. The industrial crops were grown primarily for export to U.S. markets (Gunder Frank 1969). In the mid-1960s, the Green Revolution with an emphasis on hybrid rice, wheat, and corn varieties further stimulated food crop production. The increased production of food crops kept food prices low, providing a hedge against wage inflation, while

the export of industrial crops provided foreign exchange to further fuel industrialization (Warnock 1995).

By the end of the 1960s, it was apparent that the prosperity of the Mexican miracle had not translated to increased wellbeing for all. As Ruiz (1992: 418) notes, "...by the end of the 1960s, the inequality in the distribution of income and wealth was alarming, ranking among the worst in Latin America." Cockcroft (1998: 183) notes that by the 1970s, "...half of Mexico's farms were so miniscule as to represent not so much landholders as landless farmers with access to subsistence plots for supplementing whatever income they could obtain from selling their labor power to others." In the 1960s, 3 million peasants had migrated from the countryside to urban areas in search of work. Between the late 1960s and early 1970s, average caloric intake per Mexican declined by 10 percent (Cockcroft 1998). By the 1980s, schooling in rural areas averaged only 1.3 years, medical services were minimal, 62 percent of households lacked safe drinking water, 80 percent of adult workers suffered from malnutrition, and 75 percent of the workforce received a total annual income far below the equivalent of the legal minimum wage. The poorest of the poor were indigenous people and women (Cockcroft 1998: 196).

Several governmental efforts sought to address the needs of the peasant sector, with the expectation that the peasantry would then support the PRI, which it did. These efforts included (but were not limited to) price supports, marketing programs, farm credit, input programs, etc. The *Compañía Nacional de*

Subsistencias Populares (CONASUPO), formulated in 1961, was charged with the export of surplus grains, the setting of guaranteed prices, the storage system, and the wholesale and retail distribution of basic goods to rural communities. By the early 1970s, there were 10,000 CONASUPO stores operating in the poorest rural and urban areas (Warnock 1995). For a brief period (1980-1982) the government also implemented the Mexican Food System (SAM) in response to rising food imports. The program was designed to support rainfed agriculture to stimulate maize and bean production. SAM provided guaranteed prices on basic grains. These programs, although falling far short, did provide a certain level of support and social insurance for the peasantry.

4.1.3 The 1982 Crisis

In the early 1980s, Mexico's success came to an abrupt end. In 1982, a world depression hit, demand for Mexican exports fell, inflation soared, and Mexico's foreign debt multiplied. Oil prices collapsed, leading to the loss of billions of dollars in government revenue. Mexico could not meet its foreign debt payments. By the summer of 1982, Mexico was bankrupt (Ruiz 1992: 455).

As a result of the crisis, the government changed its rural policy by restructuring the nature of state intervention. The state withdrew from most of its regulatory and productive activities. SAM was abandoned, state subsidies to agriculture were drastically reduced, and many research institutes and technical assistance programs were terminated (Warnock 1995). As Fox (1994) recounts,

the government dismantled its "revolutionary nationalism" and replaced it with "neoliberalism".

4.1.4 The 1990s

According to its proponents, neoliberalism meant privatization, deregulation and the free market. Opponents said that such policies meant sacrificing the majority to enrich the minority, while undermining national sovereignty (Barkin 1990; Esteva 1998).

In any case, the process of maintaining political support and control in the countryside has become more complicated. It appeared that at best the Mexican government would be able to mitigate the pace of change that it was promoting. Polanyi (1944: 36-37), analyzing the devastating effects of industrial revolution on the rural sector in nineteenth century England suggests that "the rate of change is of no less importance than the direction of the change itself...." Polanyi suggests that the dislocations in the English countryside could have been much worse if the state had not implemented policies specifically aimed at slowing the pace of change. It remains to be seen if the Mexican government can ameliorate the negative effects of its new agrarian policies. It is possible, however, that the declining mix of rural programs will be increasingly accompanied by security forces, paramilitary groups, and military intervention. The states of Guerro and Chiapas are already experiencing heavy militarization and violence.

In a way, there is a kind of "continuity" in the countryside. As Centeno

(1994) explains, "... agricultural policy in Mexico was never determined by

economic criteria as much as by political rationales. The *ejido* vote was and is

the most secure electoral base of the PRI." Peasants responded to the reduced

state support, their protests forcing the state to maintain subsidies on maize and

beans. The government, however, intends to phase out these subsidies over a

fifteen-year period. Most subsidies, however, were still directed to the better-off

third of the *ejido* sector (Harvey 1998). The government continued some social

programs, principally PROCAMPO, CONASUPO, rural clinics, village level work

programs, and the new National Solidarity Program. The continuation of these

programs did not indicate support for the peasantry as producers, but rather as a

political or even security problem to be managed (Fox 1994: 248).

4.1.5 NAFTA

On January 1, 1994, the United States, Canada and Mexico signed the

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This agreement removed all

nontariff barriers to agricultural trade between the United States and Mexico. In

addition, many tariffs were eliminated immediately, with others to be phased out

over a period of 5 to 15 years.

The pro-NAFTA stance towards the peasantry is as follows -- peasant

producers are not able to compete with U.S. agricultural producers, so their

numbers should be reduced. Policy makers predicted that the NAFTA, through a

combination of subsidy cuts, trade opening, and privatization of the agrarian reform sector, would reduce the rural population by half within one to two decades. In fact, Undersecretary of Agriculture, Luis Télez predicted that the economically active population in agriculture would fall from 26 percent to around 16 percent in the coming decade (Golden 1991). The worst case scenario was seen to be in the short run. It was predicted that 850,000 heads of households, 12% of the rural labor force, would leave agriculture (Fox, 1994). Of this number, policymakers predicted that 600,000 of these displaced peasants would emigrate to the U.S. (Fox, 1994). The principle disagreement was over how many jobs would be created in the Mexican export agriculture sector.

4.1.6 The Constitutional Reform of Article 27

In preparation for NAFTA, the government attempted to "modernize" the country's land tenure system. Article 27 came under scrutiny. The reform of Article 27 of the Constitution had inter-related economic and political goals. Efforts to stimulate economic growth sought to accelerate the modernization of the peasantry and strengthen existing commercial, export-oriented agricultural production. As a political strategy, the reforms were devised to strengthen both the role of the government and the influence of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in the countryside (Pisa 1994).

The reform of Article 27 brought an end to the agrarian reform implemented after the Revolution. Specifically, the reform ended the

redistribution of land and provided a mechanism to individually certify, title, and subsequently privatize *ejido* and communal lands. Pisa (1994) notes that these changes "officially shift[ed] property relations from [the] collective to individual dominion." The reform directly affected over 10 million men, women, and children who live on *ejidos* and indigenous communal land holdings. These land holdings represent approximately 103 million hectares of land -- 50 percent of all arable land in Mexico (INEGI 1998; Pisa 1994).

These changes also mandated major changes in the institutional structure of the *ejido* community. The *ejido* was now recognized as a legitimate form of tenancy allowing inter-*ejido* land transfer. The powers of the *ejido* "commissar" (*comisario* or *comisariado*) were weakened, while the community assembly was strengthened. Government intervention in internal *ejido* affairs was reduced. Finally, *ejidos* and *comunidades* were permitted to engage in joint ventures with domestic or foreign companies (Procuraduria Agraria 1993).

The process of titling property was given to the *Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales y Titulación de Solares Urbanos* (PROCEDE). PROCEDE was charged with granting land certificates to individuals with usufruct rights to plots in *ejidos* or *comunidades* and titles for house plots (Pisa 1994: 273).

PROCEDE inherited a tremendous backlog of cases, largely a creation of the agrarian reform itself. This was, in part, because only 2,000 of the 28,000 *ejidos* in the country had clearly defined internal boundaries between parcels. A second issue slowing the certification and titling process was the numerous

conflicts between communities over competing claims to land. Earlier efforts to

resolve these conflicts had met with bureaucratic obstacles and political

maneuvering. Warman (1980) describes the agrarian bureaucracy that

confronted *campesinos* as they sought clear title to their lands:

> All the petitions or demands were lost from sight. They passed from
> hand to hand and climbed the hierarchical ladder until they were
> lost in the heights and descended again, not infrequently in some
> other direction; the apparatus swallowed them. It was necessary to
> wait, to apply again and go on waiting, to get support and influence,
> to seek out circuitous routes, and again, to wait.

Initially, PROCEDE chose to work with *comunidades*. Officials soon found

that *comunidades* had many unresolved land tenure conflicts, complex cultures,

and distinct sociopolitical organizational structures. In addition, *comunidades* had

gained a higher level of political autonomy from the federal government than

ejidos, further complicating federal and local interactions (Pisa 1994: 277).

PROCEDE changed its policy to a focus on *ejidos*. In practice, PROCEDE chose

to work with *ejidos* that had relatively few internal or external land conflicts.

Despite PROCEDE's efforts to focus on *ejidos* rather than the more complex

comunidades, officials found that the *ejidos* in Oaxaca had similar problems of

unresolved land tenure disputes and political complexities as *comunidades*.[29] By

1993, only two *ejidos* had completed the PROCEDE process. Pisa (1994) notes

that the two *ejidos* "were handpicked by the government as pilot communities...

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[29] INEGI (1998) reported that by 1998, 432 of 761 Oaxacan *ejidos* started, but had not finished, the PROCEDE process.

and were not representative of regional diversity and conflict-ridden landscape of rural Oaxaca."

4.2 A Profile of Oaxaca -- The Study Area

The complexity facing PROCEDE in Oaxaca is not surprising. Oaxaca is the most ethnically and geographically diverse state in Mexico -- it is also one of the poorest. The state of Oaxaca is located in the southeastern part of Mexico bounded by the states of Puebla and Vera Cruz on the north, Guerrero to the west, Chiapas to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the south. Oaxaca covers 95,364 square kilometers and is divided into eight regions: the Mixteca, the Cañada, Papalopan, Sierra Norte, the Sierra Sur, the Central Valleys, the Coast, and the Isthmus. Regions are divided into thirty districts each with a district capital. Regions are further divided into territorial and administrative units called *municipios* (similar to a county). There are 2000 municipalities in all of Mexico, 570 of them in Oaxaca (see Figure 4) (INEGI 1998). The large number of municipalities in Oaxaca is an indication of the historic autonomous nature of indigenous communities in Oaxaca.

4.2.1 Geography

The Sierra Sur and Sierra Norte converge in the state, contributing to a multitude of microenvironments. The mountain soils in these microenvironments, however, are fragile and highly susceptible to erosion. Oaxaca has been called the most devastated landscape in Mexico (Simon 1997: 36). The United Nations predicts that, in "less than thirty years this region

Figure 4. Municipalities

(INEGI 1997)
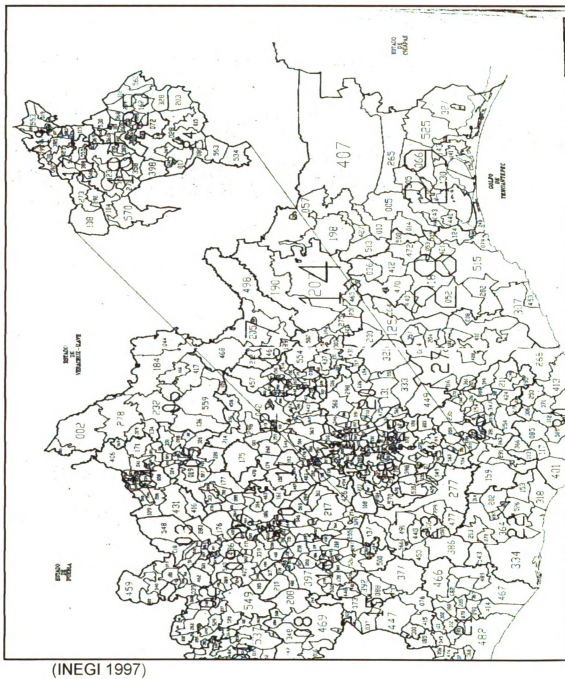
[Oaxaca] will become an arid zone with desert vegetation, in which exists small communities in the middle of mountains wasted by wind and water" (Simon 1997: 36). The federal Ministry of Social Development (SEDASOL) reports that two million or 21 percent of Oaxaca's soils are already totally eroded. This is the highest percentage of erosion of any state in the country.

4.2.2 Demography

The total population of Oaxaca is 3,228,895 (INEGI 1997). In 1995, 43.5 percent of the population lived in communities with populations between 500 and 5000, while 26 percent of the population lived in communities with populations of less than 500 inhabitants (INEGI 1997). Approximately one-fourth of the state's population is indigenous (712,006) with 16 distinct ethnic groups (INEGI 1995). Ethnic groups native to Oaxaca include: Zapoteco, Mixteco, Mazateco, Chinanteco, Mixe, Chatino, Triqui, Amuzgo, Chochopoloco, Chontal, Cuicateco, Huave, Nahuas, Nuaves, Ixcateco, and Zoque. Of this population, 15.4 percent are monolingual in their native language. Adding to the high level of ethnic diversity in Oaxaca is a tremendous diversity based on community identity (Bartolome and Barabas 1996; Diaz Hernandez 1986).

4.2.3 Socioeconomics

In Oaxaca, as in much of indigenous Latin America, households have historically engaged in diversified socioeconomic strategies to maximize self-sufficiency (Bonfil Batalla 1996). These strategies include a mix of agricultural

production, artisan production, wage labor, exchange of goods and services based on reciprocity, loans, etc. Agriculture is one of the central elements of this survival strategy. Approximately 50 percent of the total population -- 70 percent of the indigenous population in Oaxaca -- work as agriculturists, primarily for subsistence (INEGI 1995).

Traditionally, the *milpa* is the mainstay of Mesoamerican agriculture. The *milpa* is generally complemented by a household garden, wild plant gathering, hunting, fishing, and domestic animals. Often family members are also skilled artisans. Family income comes from the sale of surplus agricultural crops and crafts. When the market value of agricultural crops falls, or in communities where there is no artisan production to supplement family income, people often work as migrant laborers in Mexico and the United States.[30] The efficacy of the socioeconomic strategies available to rural households is changing with the increasing pressures of globalization and the penetration of market forces. Families are finding it increasingly difficult to compete with international prices for basic grains and with cheap imports from other areas of the world.

4.2.4 Intra-Community Relationships

Social relationships within indigenous communities are, in large part, based on relationships of reciprocity (Barabas and Bartolome 1999: 21). Intra-

[30] Cook (Barabas and Bartolome 1999) notes that between 1960 and 1984 more that 500,000 Oaxacans between fifteen and sixty-five left Oaxaca in search of wage labor. This out-migration continues and has negatively impacted communities' ability to maintain political and cultural continuity.

community relationships are often formed through exchange of labor, goods, and cash among households (Cook 1984; Diskin 1986; Stephen 1991). Stephen (1991) notes in her study on Zapotec women that relationships of reciprocity are particularly important for women as they form support and mutual aid networks throughout the community. These networks are important for both men and women, and serve as an account to be drawn upon at some future time for various activities such as financing a ritual or fiesta, carrying out a productive activity, or advancing a political activity.

Intra-community relationships are also established and maintained through the *cargo* system. Males of the community are required to participate in official community positions as a service to the community. An individual gains prestige and status as he progresses from the lower level *cargos* to the highest level -- that of *majordomo* who is responsible for organizing the community fiesta. As an individual progresses through the system, he gains experience and respect. Participation in the *cargo* system also indicates an individual's acceptance of the basic norm that determines group membership. As Bonfil Batalla (1996: 37) explains:

> ...participation is an indispensable condition for being recognized and admitted as a member of the group. And it is the group that is the exclusive repository of the cultural patrimony that has been inherited. To gain legitimate access to cultural patrimony and to be able to participate in decisions about it one must be a member of the group. To be a member...one must prove that he accepts the collective norms. Participation in the cargo system, with all it implies in terms of fundamental orientation toward life, is one of the basic norms that identifies group members.

Yet, increasingly the traditional system of *cargos* and relationships of reciprocity are being eroded. The authority of traditional leaders is weakening, while that of the civil authorities grows (Dennis 1987; Stephen 1991). Relationships based on reciprocity are waning, while relationships established through the market increase.

4.2.5 Local Political Structure

The community assembly is the highest decision-making body at the community level in Oaxaca. Membership in community assemblies is generally limited to males of the community over fifteen years of age. The community assembly elects officials to three authoritative bodies sanctioned to govern at the local level. These three parallel authority systems are the constitutional authority or town council (the *ayuntamiento*), the agrarian authority (*comite de bienes comunales* in indigenous communities or the *comite ejidal* in *ejidos*), and the traditional authority or council of elders.

The specific duties of each of these authorities vary from community to community and ethnic group to ethnic group based on *usos y costumbres*[31]. The *ayuntamiento* typically consists of the municipal president, a *síndico* (legal advisor), an *alcalde* (mayor), a secretary, a treasurer, *regidores* (councilmen) and *topiles* (policemen)(Dennis 1987; Kearney 1972; Stephen 1991). In general, the constitutional authorities provide services and promote development projects,

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except those that pertain to land and agricultural development. The agrarian

authority or *bienes comunales* concern themselves with communally held

resources, such as land, irrigation, forest, etc. and development projects that

relate to natural resources. The *bienes comunales* is headed by a *comisariado*,

his *suplente* (second), a secretary and treasurer. The traditional authority refers

to the council of elders. It appears that in some communities the influence of the

traditional authorities has waned (Stephen 1991) while in others the agrarian and

traditional authorities are one and the same.

Community authorities are charged with the task of resolving internal

community conflicts through persuasion to maintain community unity and/or

through fines and sanctions. Peaceful intra-community relationships are

imperative to the preservation of community. Yet, Dennis (1987: 129-132)

recounts that intra-community conflict is common in Oaxaca. Dennis lists the

issues that may disrupt the communal "we": religious differences, struggles

between local *caciques* (power bosses), different political allegiances, jealousy

and love affairs, envy of another's economic success, and/or suspicion of

witchcraft (Dennis 1987: 127). Despite the propensity for internal conflicts to

emerge, there is strong social pressure to conceal them and present a united

front to outsiders.

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[31] Traditions developed at a community level pertaining to how the community governs itself.

4.2.6 Inter-Community Relationships

A primary reason for presenting a united front to outsiders is the widespread inter-community conflict in Oaxaca (Dennis 1976; Kearney 1972). Inter-community conflicts are usually long and may entail bloodshed. Disputes over community boundaries are one of the major causes of inter-community conflicts. There may be diverse reasons for these boundary conflicts. In some cases, boundaries between communities were not clarified when lands were distributed by the Spanish crown. In other cases, boundaries were large and relatively undefined markings such as a field or low lands. At other times, there is disagreement over the location of markers designated as boundaries. Given these irregularities, a community may be involved with several communities in boundary disputes at any given time.[32]

Dennis speculates that historically inter-community conflict has benefited the state. With communities divided against each other, it is difficult to organize against the state. There have been instances when inter-community animosities have been forgotten and coalitions formed to unite against a common enemy (Diaz Hernandez 1986; Martinez Luna 1995). However, in 1976, Dennis (1976, 1987: 181-182) noted that communities had not yet come together in cooperation with each other to resolve their problems;

> A permanent, umbrella-type political organization among villages, organized and run by them, would be without precedent in

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[32] The federal government now claims that all land disputes in Oaxaca have been settled, yet newspapers in Oaxaca continue to report conflicts over boundaries on a daily basis.

Oaxaca.... I believe the best possibility for resolution of the long-lasting rivalries is not for a future, more efficient government bureaucracy to resolve conflict for villagers. In any paternalistic system the elements of dependence and control will remain. Instead, I believe resolution must come from the villagers themselves, who decide that there is more to be gained from cooperation than from conflict and who then act accordingly. Strong intervillage organizations are a positive step in that direction.

Rural Oaxacan communities still face the challenge of intra-community conflict. However, increasing pressures of globalization have added to the complexity of conflict. Now communities not only face the enemies of the neighboring community or *caciques*, but the more amorphous forces of modernization.

CHAPTER 5

THE PERMANENT SEMINAR OF RESOURCES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

This chapter presents an analysis of the Seminar. The organization, its membership, the types of issues addressed and some of the problems faced by the Seminar and its participants are highlighted. The analysis is based on Seminar meetings, community visits, conversations and interviews with Seminar participants, and materials available in the Seminar library. This presentation is interspersed with quotes and vignettes to provide a sense of the ethos, culture, and beliefs of the Seminar and its participants, and to allow the voice of participants to be heard. This chapter, with its quotes and vignettes, is designed to help the reader to understand the "essence" of the Seminar.

Several important relationships are a focus of attention in this chapter: the relationship between <u>communities and outsiders</u>, the relationship between leaders of <u>the Seminar and other participants</u>, the relationship between <u>participant diversity and creativity</u>, and the relationship between <u>new problems facing communities and changes in the Seminar</u>. These ideas appear again in Chapter 6, and contribute to a discussion of the "transformation" of the Seminar.

5.0 The History and Institutional Affiliation of the Seminar

When I arrived in Oaxaca for the first time, I was overwhelmed by what I had to learn before I could participant fully in the Seminar. I wanted to understand how the Seminar began, why it existed, what it was, and what its

members were currently trying to do. I also needed to better understand the

context in which the Seminar was enveloped - Mexican politics, rural policy and

the impacts of globalization. I began piecing together features until a picture

emerged. The Seminar coordinator and other members began to teach me, and

the "library" held a wealth of information in reports, tapes, and past *bitácoras*.

Stories told by people involved in "establishing collaborative relationships"

present a turbulent and colorful picture of the origins of the Seminar as revealed

in Vignette 2.

Vignette 2. The Origins of the Seminar

A young and rather naive upper class Mexican who had recently returned from graduate studies in the U.S. took a job in a rural indigenous area of the country. He soon realized that, despite many years of schooling, he knew little about indigenous Mexico and his rural countrymen. His ignorance was obvious to the *campesinos*, but he was tolerated and even befriended. They slowly began sharing their concerns with him.

The region was in the midst of an intense political upheaval -- a violent struggle for the land that had begun some twenty years earlier. A community leader was shot far from his home. His family and community feared he was dead. No one was safe to travel, as they were all under suspicion. Only the newly returned academic could move about without attracting unwanted attention. He slipped away and rode on horseback through the mountains to reassure the family and community that the man was alive and under a doctor's care.

As time passed, a relationship of trust was established between the young academic and the community organizers. As the organizers negotiated the Mexican agrarian reform system, they sought relationships with individuals who had access to a world they could not enter - a world of power, status, *amigismo* and money. They told their new friend, "you are not the best card to play, but you are the only card we've got." They sent him off to Mexico City to find a lawyer and government officials who could assist

them. He returned to the community, but had to admit he had returned with no answers. He said, "Those who have the knowledge are the "enemies" and will not help you." After a period of contemplation, the community leaders responded, "We have the knowledge, but it is scattered throughout our people." When the coordinator of the *campesino* confederation went to meet with government agrarian reform officials several people attended, but always different ones. "You are an academic. You know how to collect knowledge. Talk to all of these people and find out what they know. Help us put our knowledge together. "

This story in some ways serves as a "foundation" myth for the organization. The fundamental relationships in the Seminar between academics and communities are expressed in terms of academics at the service of communities and their leaders. It also establishes the presence and legitimacy of community knowledge and the role academics have in helping to consolidate and clarify that knowledge.

The story also serves to express the degree of commitment that academics and community leaders have, and the risks that they are willing to take for each other and their communities. This story also provided a guide for me as I began to participate in the Seminar.

Official documents of the Seminar leave out the details of this early period, and present an abbreviated narrative. In the mid-1970s, several community assemblies established collaborative relationships with university-trained development specialists working in their communities. They hoped to devise non-

violent strategies to combat large landholders and *caciques*[33] and to tackle the complex and bureaucratic Mexican agrarian reform system. This commitment to nonviolence was based on a practical position, rather than on a principled one -- the *campesinos* knew, if they resorted to violence, they would lose.

In 1989, the Seminar for the Protection of Rights of Agrarian Communities was created with the objective of institutionalizing a "shared learning process." During this period, the Seminar focused primarily on land tenure and related issues. The academics provided access to a world to which the *campesinos* could not enter and to knowledge they did not have. Community leaders contributed years of experience in the struggle for the land.

At the same time, the Seminar affiliated with the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) through the Institute for Social Research (IIS). The coordinator position of the Seminar became a permanent appointment with IIS. The *campesino* participants were named co-consultants to "special projects." These participants were community and group representatives. The special projects refered to issues identified by communities or groups and brought before the Seminar by the representatives.

Communities and groups were connected to the Seminar by these representatives who were elected by the community assemblies or selected by their respective groups to participate in the Seminar. In 1991, the organization evolved to become the *Seminario de Gestión sobre Recursos para el Desarrollo*

[33] Local power brokers.

Rural (the Permanent Seminar of Resources for Rural Development). This

change was primarily a response to the shifting socioeconomic context of

peasant communities and the concurrent issues being raised in the Seminar (see

Szekely 1997). The overall structure and the main relationships of the Seminar

are illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5. The Overall Structure of the Seminar
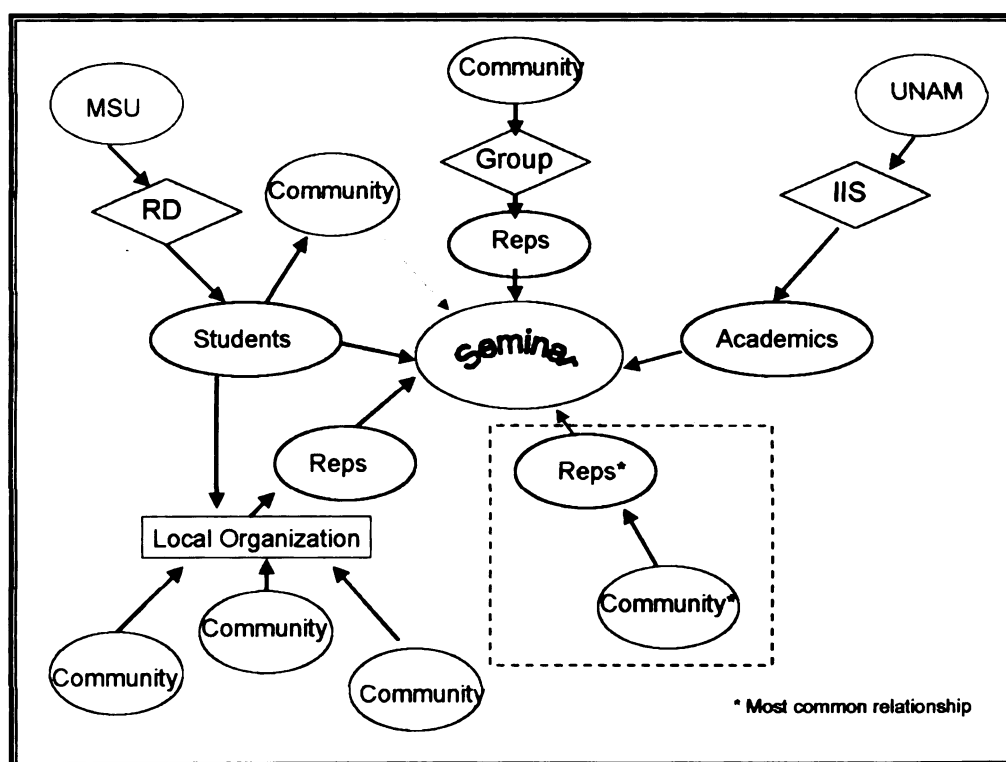
MSU = Michigan State University
RD = The Department of Resource Development
IIS = The Institute of Social Research
UNAM = The National Autonomous University of Mexico

5.1 Funding

The Seminar, as an official organization affiliated with IIS, received

funding through grants and contracts for consulting work from national and

international development agencies. These funds covered the Seminar's expenses and fellowships for peasant participants administrated through IIS. The fellowships ranged from $300-350 Mx., depending on the availability of funds and covered expenses for the trip to and stay in Oaxaca.

Recently, IIS agreed that peasant participants would receive funds on a contract basis -- rather than as fellowships -- for the work that they would do as co-consultants in the Seminar. The coordinator continued to receive his salary from IIS, other academics associated with the Seminar received support through various grants and fellowships. Current funding is problematic, as the coordinator has asked that the Seminar be given a sabbatical year from contract work to analyze and reflect upon what socioeconomic and political changes in Mexico mean for the Seminar. In 1999, funding came from individuals interested in supporting the work of the Seminar.

5.2 Seminar Participants

Seminar participants include community representatives, small group representatives, and individuals. In principle, any community or group can send representatives to the Seminar and any individual can attend. However, the majority of participants are representatives elected by community assemblies. Typically, representatives from eight to ten communities attend the Seminar at any one time. Normally, two to three small groups send several members every month. In addition, three to four *campesinos* and three to four academics attend

on their own. These *campesinos,* however, seek permission from their community assembly to attend.

The community representatives are usually respected and experienced community leaders who see themselves as leaders "at the service" of their communities. The small group representatives are a mix of experienced leaders and individuals new to leadership roles. The *campesino* participants attend as individuals, rather than as representatives of a community or group. They come from communities that have resolved their land tenure problems through the Seminar and have stopped participating in Seminar activities. These participants explain that they are motivated by a desire to learn so that they can better serve their communities. Academics who attend the Seminar include three Mexicans and two U.S. graduate students. The Mexican academics include the coordinator, who is an engineer by training, an anthropologist, and an agricultural engineer -- two men and one woman, respectively. The U.S. academics, including another graduate student and myself -- both women -- are from the Department of Resource Development at Michigan State University.

The Mexican academics are motivated by an abiding commitment to the peasantry. Several are veterans of the "struggle for the land." The other graduate student and I are motivated by the need to fulfill degree requirements certainly, but also by our interests in alternative approaches to development and collaborative forms of research (Carmen 1996; Escobar 1995; Sachs 1995).

Each Seminar participant has a particular identity, based primarily, on the intersection of culture, class, and gender (Kaufman 1997; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996). *Campesino* participants, whether attending as representatives of communities or small groups or as individuals, see themselves primarily as members of distinct communities and secondarily as members of broad cultural groups, e.g. Mixe or Zapotec. The communities and small groups that participated in the Seminar during the two years of my engagement represent nine culturally distinct groups. However, each rural community in Oaxaca can be seen as having a distinct cultural identity based on distinct *usos y costumbres* (broadly defined as traditions) (Dennis 1976; Kearney 1972). Thus, the cultural diversity of the Seminar is even greater than it might at first appear.

The major class distinctions in the Seminar are represented by the categories of academic and *campesino*. In rural Mexico, academics are typically seen as "upper class," while *campesinos* are seen as rural working class. In principle, all participants are leaders of the Seminar. In practice, the leadership of the Seminar consists of the coordinator, the other Mexican academics, and several veteran *campesino* members.

Gender also plays an important role in member participation. While the majority of the Seminar participants are men, a number of women participate (approximately 25 women attended the Seminar, including the U.S. academics, during the two years of my engagement.) This cultural, class and gender diversity of the Seminar contributes significantly to the dynamic nature of the Seminar as

the organization, and its members, seek to address the rapidly changing world of rural Mexico.

5.2.1 Gender and Participation

Women's participation is a problematic issue for the Seminar. Despite a commitment to diversity, women typically participate differently from men. Women who attend the Seminar usually do so as members of small groups. Three of the small groups are composed solely of women -- the medicinal plant group from San Carlos, the young Triqui women, and the young women from San Juan. Only on one occasion did women attend the Seminar as community representatives and that was before my arrival.

The lack of women as community representatives can be explained, in part, by the nature of community assemblies. In Oaxaca, community assemblies tend to be male domains. In some communities, women are not allowed to attend assembly meetings. In others, they are allowed to attend, but typically they sit to the side and do not join in discussions. In addition, land tenure is seen as a man's issue. Community representatives are typically elected to address land tenure problems in the Seminar. Not surprisingly, the community assemblies elect men to represent them at the Seminar meetings. The women, who attend the Seminar come, as wives, daughters, or in moments of community crisis.

The women from the Mixe community of San Carlos follow this pattern. Pablo is the elected representative of the community, and his wife is a member of

the medicinal plant group. The other women from the medicinal plant group can attend because they accompany Pablo, a male member of the community. A group of young women from Tierra Piedra attend regularly, but they come with their fathers. Several years ago, I was told, a group of women came from the community of Nuevo Santa Ana when the community was on the verge of a violent confrontation with a neighboring community. The role of peacemaker appears to be an accepted one for women in the indigenous communities of Oaxaca. Ribeiro (a women and church activist in Acre, Brazil) observes that the role of peacemaker is a typical one for women (Rocheleau et al. 1996: 33). It is not unusual for women to acts as mediators in potentially violent situations in an attempt to deescalate tensions. In this instance, as soon as the situation in Nuevo Santa Ana was resolved, the women returned to their communities and ceased participating in the Seminar.

The Triqui students are an exception to the rule of attending with a male community member. The young women have left their communities because of endemic violence in the Triqui region. They are now attending the university in the city of Oaxaca. The young women cannot return home because they are at risk, e.g. being kidnapped or killed in retaliation against their fathers who are leaders in their home communities. A male community member does not accompany these women to the Seminar. However, before the first meeting the group attended, the leader of the group was introduced to the Seminar coordinator by her father -- a past participant in the Seminar.

The Seminar seeks to encourage women's attendance and participation in the Seminar. It has even positively impacted women in how they view themselves and their own abilities. When I visited her community, Silvia told me,

> You might not believe this now, but before I was very quiet. My husband is a teacher in our community and he would invite people over to our house. As is our custom, I would ask them if they would like something to eat or drink, but I would never speak with them. I felt afraid and ignorant. Now I come to the Seminar. I am the only woman in our group. In the Seminar, I listen and sometimes I think about giving my opinion. I have confidence in myself. But I don't speak yet because I am still afraid I might say something foolish or make a mistake. But in my own house and in our group I am not afraid to speak and I say what I think.

Despite this positive impact, the patriarchy of Mexican society is reflected in women's limited ability to participate in the Seminar (Stephen 1993 Stephen 1998). Furthermore, no special effort is taken to seek out women's groups that are dealing with land tenure or other community issues and invite them to participate in the Seminar.

5.3 Goals of the Seminar

The Seminar seeks to invent and deploy strategies to solve problems portrayed by participants. To be successful, these strategies need to overcome obstacles associated with communication, cooperation, and learning that are normal features of rural Mexican life. Specifically, the Seminar aims to assist and empower rural communities and peoples by:

- Establishing a process of communication between individuals and communities where situations, experiences, and ways of viewing the world differ,

- Creating useful knowledge that helps groups and communities address concrete problems and recognize mutual concerns, and

- Assisting member communities in applying knowledge informed by a collective vision of the future.

These specific goals suggest why the Seminar cannot be neatly categorized within any one PR schema. The Seminar shares AR's commitment to generating useful knowledge. It coincides with PAR's political analysis of knowledge generation and control. As in PAR, dialogue among equals is the norm for participation. Like AD, it has a pragmatic view of society and places "popular" knowledge on an equal footing with scientific knowledge. Yet, the Seminar goes beyond these other PR approaches in its premise that communication between "situated" individuals can result in new and creative solutions to the problems facing rural communities (Braidotti et al. 1994; Haraway 1991; Harding 1991). These issues will be discussed in the "logic of the *milpa*," a key concept of the Seminar.

5.4 Theory of Society

Unlike AR and PAR, there appears to be no acknowledged or hidden theory of society. Instead, there is a pragmatic and eclectic image of society composed of complicated, and often conflictual, relationships that directly impact member communities, internally and externally. This conflict theory does not

depend on a class analysis. There appears to be a complex and shifting list of ingroup-outgroup conflicts. The concept of the "enemy," often the neighboring community, is a central theme in discussions of land tenure problems, while the "enemy within" or the division of the communal "we," is at the heart of many discussions relating to community economic and political development (see Szekely 1995a).

The Seminar is attempting to teach *campesino* members to be community leaders – persons who can develop effective strategies to mitigate powerful forces in their political-economic environment. The Seminar also intends to create a space where social differences are not allowed to be an obstacle to communication, and where it is assumed that dialogue can lead to resolution of conflict.

5.5 Communication through Dialogue

Ideally, communication occurs in the Seminar through dialogue. The dialogue in the Seminar is used in a way similar to what Bohm (1989) describes:

> ... dialogue may well be one of the most effective ways of investigating the crisis which faces society, and indeed the whole of human nature and consciousness today. Moreover, it may turn out that such a form of free exchange of ideas and information is of fundamental relevance for transforming culture and freeing it of destructive misinformation, so that creativity can be liberated.

Using dialogue as a means to communication is no easy matter, especially in an organization comprised of members who speak several different languages,

represent nine different ethnic groups, and includes academics, peasants and a North American women all holding differing worldviews.

Given its diverse membership, the Seminar confronts challenges to dialogue by creating a new "language" based on metaphors. The use of metaphors is similar to Freire's "generative words" (Freire 1973). In Freire adult education, generative words help adult learners to examine their world in new ways, and to recognize oppressive social relationships. Dickinson (1988) refers to the ability of generative words to revel the social, cultural, and political realities of a situation.

In the Seminar, metaphors not only reveal, but also *conceal* important realities. The dual nature of the metaphoric language of the Seminar allows participants to understand each other, and to speak about things that do not or can not normally be discussed. Topics in "hidden realms" can be alluded to, but do not need to be explicated, for understanding to occur. Metaphors also serve to develop, rationalize, and explain many of the key themes of the Seminar. Finally, metaphors provide a conceptual bridge between different ways of knowing the world (Sfard 1998). These words promote dialogue and contribute to the synergistic capacity of the Seminar.

5.5.1 The Logic of the *Milpa*

An important and seminal metaphor of the Seminar, the one that rationalizes its very existence, is the "the logic of the *milpa*" (see Szekely 1997).

This "logic" emerges from a melding of academic and indigenous reflection upon the local *milpa,* the traditional corn-based agroecological system found throughout Latin America. While the core crops of a traditional *milpa* are corn and beans, a *milpa* may also include squashes, tomatoes, peppers, an occasional fruit or forage tree, herbs, medicinal plants and ornamentals. Some "weeds" are also allowed to grow if they "have use." Some traditional *milpas* contain as many as 40 species. These species all have distinct properties and growth patterns that complement, rather than compete, with each other if properly managed -- a sort of "fertility-in-diversity" (see Szekely 1997).

The *campesino* who introduced the "logic of the *milpa*" to the Seminar explained that you need to know "what to plant, when to plant and how to plant, but even more you need to know what goes with what and when they go together." Reflection on this biologically diverse system leads Seminar participants to understand the value of biological diversity and interaction. Reflection on this agroecological system is then applied to social phenomena, leading to the idea of an "*amarre social*"[34] - a socially diverse Seminar that is more likely than an homogeneous social group to devise creative and successful solutions to common problems. These dynamics are illustrated in Vignette 3 and reveal the essence of the emergent properties of the logic of the *milpa.*

[34] The Seminar has struggled to find a word to describe the logic of the milpa (*el amarre milpero*) when applied to a social group. In one of my *bitácora* presentations, I used the term *amarre social.* This term has now entered the language of the Seminar. The verb *amarrar* means to bind or tie together diverse elements.

Vignette 3. "*Camote de Venado*"

The representatives from the Mixe community of San Carlos asked in the Seminar how to deal with a group of Italians buying up supplies of a wild plant known as "*camote de venado*" which grows on their communal lands. The plant is said to have strong curative powers, but the community has all but lost any medicinal knowledge relating to the plant. The Italians will not say whom they represent or why they want the plants. As an outcome of discussion in the Seminar and in the community group, the group launched a study to observe the plant's growth habits and preserve the plant in areas they have designated as protected. Specimens of the plant were brought to the National Autonomous University of Mexico for identification and chemical analysis. The community began subtle questioning in the area to ascertain the identity of the visitors and their intentions.

The discussion provided a point of departure to address another issue. While the group expressed a need for additional income, they did not want to accept the money offered by the Italians. Through a long and thoughtful process of dialogue within the group and between the Seminar and the group a small project focusing on coffee cultivation was started. A coffee project was primarily seen as an opportunity or "pretext" to invent themselves as a social organization rather than as an economic endeavor.[35]

San Carlos has never been a coffee-growing community. In fact, they were the "human mules" who carried the 45 kilo sacks of coffee on their backs from producers to local collection points. However, when the road system was finished, the "human mules" were no longer needed. The group from San Carlos was uncertain if their area was suitable for growing coffee, nor were they confident in their own abilities to develop an economic enterprise. They turned to the Seminar participants for advice. The Seminar participants readily volunteered their advice and material to the coffee project. The coffee-growing Zapotec and Mixe communities in the Seminar donated seeds and contributed advice on cultivation practices. The workers from a coffee *finca* agreed that they could share

[35] One of the challenges that the group confronted in "creating" itself was the religious division in the community. The coffee group carefully formulated its membership to unite both Catholic and *Evangelicos* in a joint activity.

their knowledge on how to care for the coffee trees. Through discussions on coffee cultivation, a new concept entered the vocabulary of the Seminar – the *"cafe milpero."* The question was asked, *"*Can you plant coffee *como si fuera un amarre milpero*[36] - as if it were a biologically diverse *milpa*? Although an abundance of "experts" exist who could answer this question in all its technological dimensions, the group from San Carlos decided to invite the Seminar participants - academics, coffee communities from the coast, and laborers from the coffee *finca* - to visit San Carlos and share their knowledge and experience.

During the Seminar's visit to San Carlos, the group was asked why they had not grown coffee before. They responded, "Our soil is not rich enough." Ernesto, from a rich coffee-growing region to the east, responded, "But your soil is better than ours." The group added, "It is too cold for coffee here." Jose, from a coffee *finca* on the coast reminded them that the best coffee grows in cool climates like that of San Carlos. The group then replied, "But we do not get enough rain." When asked how much rainfall the area got the visitors pointed out that it was more than sufficient to grow coffee. The group was silent for a moment. Then one young man replied with chagrin and a shy smile, "We did not grow coffee, because *we* did not grow it." He had recognized that the choice to grow coffee was theirs.

Based on the logic of the *milpa*, Seminar participants understand that the point of coming together is not only to find answers, but to engage in the social process of searching for them. This methodological focus of the Seminar is similar to the "methodology of symbolic sites" practiced by the Network Culture in Morocco (Zaoual 1992 in Carmen 1996: 153). Carmen describes the methodology of the Network as one that recognizes cultural diversity and multiplicity of practices in a listening process leading to specific understandings and procedures to cope with specific problems. These "symbolic sites" can be

[36] This is an example of "naïve" questions that I asked in the Seminar.

"thought of as a cultural mold, which is constantly being shaped and reshaped ... by the actors ... who inhabit that particular site" (Carmen 1996: 154). In symbolic sites, beliefs, knowledges, skills, modes of behavior, attitudes and practices come together and interact. In the Seminar, the metaphor, fertility-in-diversity, adds the idea of synergy to social interactions - an alchemistic-type interaction among distinct parts that produces something greater than the original elements.

Participant diversity appears to make major contributions to the emergence of innovative ideas – more than any one individual could bring to the mix. Fertility-in-diversity is similar to Haraway's (1991) discussion of the need to recognize and combine "situated knowledges." She postulates that the "power of partial perspectives" joins many "knowers on the basis of affinities" to build a joint, expanded understanding of social transformation (cited Rocheleau 1996: 5). Haraway suggest that "struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over how to see" (Haraway 1991: 194). The Seminar answers the question of "how to see" through the logic of the *milpa* and fertility-in-diversity. In the Seminar, the success of the *milpa* logic and the idea of synergistic convergence depend on an active form of communication both within the Seminar and between the Seminar and communities.

5.5.2 The *Bitácora*

Communication is established between the Seminar and communities or groups through the *bitácora* or logbook.[37] The *bitácora* was the idea of one of the *campesino* participants to help representatives transmit ideas that emerge both in Seminar and community assembly meetings. During each Seminar meeting, the representatives of communities or groups take notes of Seminar discussions. In the Seminar, each *bitácora* is given a title that describes and summarizes experiences or steps of the problem-solving process that emerged from Seminar discussions. The title of the *bitácora* is designed to arouse curiosity in the community assembly or group meetings and to stimulate questions and dialogue. Examples of *bitácora* titles include:

- *El camino viable es dos caminos* (The viable road is two roads),

- *Que se muevan las artistas* (Let the actresses begin to act), and

- *La tecnica al servicio de las comunidades* (Technology at the service of communities).

When the representatives return home, they read their *bitácoras* as part of their reports to their respective community or group. Issues are discussed in the assembly, decisions are made, and actions are carried out, all of which are recorded in a new *bitácora* entry that is read at the following Seminar meeting.

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[37] The *bitácora* also served as a form of archive, documenting the history, knowledge and strategies of a given problem or issue.

Dialogue within the Seminar -- and between the Seminar and communities -- continues until the problem under discussion is resolved satisfactorily.

At the monthly Seminar meetings, the *bitácora* readings are meant to inform participants and to stimulate dialogue among them. Details are often added by other members of the group -- to help Seminar participants understand the issue under discussion. Others participants ask questions to clarify issues of the *bitácora* presentation that they did not understand or to acquire additional information. A dialogue ensues in which knowledge, experiences, and concerns are shared.

Some participants even learn to read and write Spanish so that they can keep a *bitácora*. This achievement does not come easily for many of the participants. Gabriel, a twenty-five year old Mixe apologized for the quality of his first *bitácora*, a 1/2 page document. He presented it to the Seminar explaining it took him over an hour to write. Camilo, an older coffee laborer suffering from tuberculoses, shared how difficult it was for him to write his *bitácora* saying, "My *bitácora* is not very good. I write slowly and I don't see well. Sometimes I fall asleep while I am writing after working in the coffee plantation all day." Despite these difficulties, the participants struggle to "make themselves literate," motivated by their desire to serve their communities and improve themselves.

Literacy in Spanish also allows participants to discover, interpret and write a history of their communities and the problems they are experiencing. It gives them access to official documents, laws, and news. Participants see that

obtaining literacy in the dominant language of the country as more than a means

to facilitate communication. It is viewed as a means of empowerment, as well

(see Freire 1985). However, in Freirian forms of adult education, an enlightened

(radical) outsider intervenes. In the Seminar, on the other hand, the impetus for

literacy comes from (and is achieved by) the participants themselves. This model

of literacy training may not have the same elements of Freire's education for

emancipation. It appears to be motivated by an autonomous and independent

expression to improve individual and community conditions.

5.5.3 Community Visits

During my first trip to Oaxaca, I found that communication between communities and the Seminar also occurs through Seminar visits. Community visits frequently take place at a crucial moment in a community's life, i.e., when violence threatens or when an outside stimulus is needed to overcome a particularly difficult impasse. These visits also help to establish and maintain relationship between the community and the Seminar, and to create a sense of solidarity among the Seminar members who go on the trips. In addition, these visits serve to expand the world of the Seminar participants - a world that is often limited to their own restrictive communities. As Samuel explains, community visits serve as a means "to see the outside world better and to understand and value what each of us has."

On my first trip to the Seminar, a community visit had been planned to Cerro Niebla. Eight members of the Seminar volunteered to go, and I was invited to go along. The group included Zapotecs, Mixes, *mestizos*, two academics from UNAM and myself. On our way out of town, we joked paraphrasing what is said of Oaxaca[38], "Here we have the most ethnically diverse population per *combi*[39] in the world."

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[38] Oaxaca is popularly said to be the have "the most ethnically diverse population per hectare in the world."
[39] Microbus

The community assembly had invited the Seminar to attend an assembly meeting to help the community resolve an impasse relating to the government's suspicions regarding alleged community members' support of a guerilla group, governmental demands relating to that suspicion, and the community's lack of response. This visit, while unique in its focus, exemplifies the responsiveness of the Seminar to community requests, the attitude that Seminar participants bring to these visits, and the dynamic nature of the dialogue that exists between and within the Seminar and communities. The visit is described in Vignette 4.

Vignette 4. *Chi liza* - Envisioning the Future

Nine of us left Oaxaca in the early morning to visit Cerro Niebla at the invitation of the community assembly. We had been invited by the community assembly to discuss with them the last requirement imposed by the government -- to remove suspicion of the community's involvement with a revolutionary group operating in Oaxaca.

The problem began several years ago when the community allowed a family of outsiders to settle on their communal lands. The family took over some of the community's best lands during a period when the community was internally divided. The struggle with this family was long and turbulent. Cerro Niebla sent representatives to the Seminar. Through lengthy discussions within the Seminar, and between the Seminar and the community, several strategies were devised to regain the land. The issues were resolved peacefully in favor of the community -- or so the community thought.

Shortly after the court settlement, the military invaded Cerro Niebla accusing twenty men of being guerrilla supporters. Women were threatened, homes were broken into and several men were arrested, imprisoned and tortured. The men signed confessions. Through discussion with Seminar participants and the community assembly, a strategy known as *caras limpias* or clean faces was devised to secure the men's release and remove suspicion from Cerro Niebla. The rest of the men who had been accused but were not caught, presented themselves to the government authorities and demanded that they be

interrogated to uncover any wrong doing. The only stipulation put forth by the community was that there be an outsider present during the interrogation to prevent further torture.

The Seminar sent a representative to be present during the three-hour interrogations. After hours of questioning, the men were declared innocent and released. The governor published a retraction in the regional newspaper. However, the governor requested that Cerro Niebla participate in a governmental educational program and submit an educational plan drawn up by the community assembly. The community did not comply. The community suspected the motives of the government. The military looked on with suspicion as the month passed and no move was made to complete this final requirement. Some members of the community feared the military's reprisal, and invited the Seminar's opinion.

The Seminar members, who volunteered to visit Cerro Niebla, left the valley of Oaxaca following the winding roads though the Sierra Madres del Norte. It was an eight-hour trip by road, and four hours walking over mountainous trails of hard red clay. We walked down the mountain slopes, crossed the river in a boat christened Noah's Ark, and headed up the last part of the trail to a village that sits in the clouds - Cerro Niebla. When we arrived, Reynaldo greeted us and brought us to an adobe building where the *comisariado* and his advisors were waiting. Reynaldo formally introduced us. Outside once again, the Zapotec members of the Seminar tried talking to some of the men from Cerro Niebla, but there are four Zapotec dialects and they are not mutually intelligible. The conversation had to take place in Spanish.

The assembly meeting was to begin the next day at 11:30 a.m. with representatives from all *anexos* or villages within the *comunidad*. However, there seemed to be some doubt whether they would all attend. According to law, the assembly could not take place without representation from each *anexo*. Slowly, people began to arrive following trails through the forest. Finally, representatives from all of the villages were there, totaling about 150 men. No women were allowed to attend the assembly meeting. I wondered what they thought of me, this *gringa* in their midst.[40] The assembly members decided that the meeting would be conducted in Spanish and translated to Zapotec for the monolingual Zapotecs.

The *comisariado* opened the meeting and explained that the Seminar had been invited to the assembly meeting to talk to them about the community's *inquietud* (uneasiness) in complying with the government's request and the possible risks associated with non-compliance. The men of Cerro Niebla listened to the history

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[40] This was my first community visit with the Seminar.

with stoic faces. A long silence ensued, broken only by a few quite voices in Zapotec as men spoke to each other. Finally, the coordinator of the Seminar broke the silence and asked, 'How do you say ten years in Zapotec?' Several community members responded, '*chi iiza.*' He repeated the word amongst smiles at his mis-pronunciation. "*Chi iiza*, what do you want to be in *chi iiza*? Do you want to be a community of only old people and children? Or do you want to be a community of old people and young people, of men and women, a community that is alive and well? The men broke their silence and began to converse. The coordinator sat down and lit up a cigarette as voices swelled around us in Zapotec. Men turned to each other to discuss what had been said.

After several minutes he stood up again and in a quiet voice, "I just realized, if I make this pledge to you to help you arrive at *chi iiza* and I smoke I may not be here in ten years. If I want to be sure that I am here, I must give up smoking -- now." He threw down his cigarette and ground it out on the floor. There was a momentary silence followed by applause and nodding of heads from the men of Cerro Niebla.

After a few moments, another seminar participant – from San Pablo – a Zapotec community in the south of Oaxaca, slowly stood up to share his community's story. "I made a similar commitment, but mine was to quite drinking. I made a commitment to the Virgin that I would not take a drop of liquor for five years while I dedicated myself to solving my community's problem. Ninety-six years ago, my community found itself with a similar problem that divided us. Our grandfathers would not deal with it; our fathers would not deal with it. Now, we have inherited the problem and we must deal with it. Do not be like my community. Do not make your children ask, 'Why do we have this problem? Why didn't our grandfathers or our fathers resolve it?'" Samuel's eyes fill with tears as he recounted his story.[41]

Sergio stood up, "Solving community problems is a little like playing basketball." The community basketball court was right behind us, and the young men had been playing a game during the meeting. "When you make a few baskets the game doesn't end." The coordinator explained, "This is the Seminar, this is what we do, we talk and we move ahead. We ask what is there like this cigarette that could harm Cerro Niebla so that it might not be here in ten years... We have to invent a new path...like the *cara limpias.*" *Don*[42] Salomon added, "The Seminar gives support to *campesinos*. We are not trying to scare anyone, but we are trying to point out the risks to Cerro Niebla." A man from Cerro Niebla responded,

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[41] I found out later that 20 men were killed in the land struggle between *caciques* and the community, including the father of a young man who had accompanied us to Cerro Niebla.
[42] *Don* is used as a term of respect in the Seminar for Sebastian who has been a committed and tireless leader in his community and in the Seminar.

"We need time to discuss this among ourselves. We need to ask, did we make a mistake and what should we do...." *Don* Salomon replied, "You have the answers. We're here only to advise you. You are the ones who can do things. If you have made an error recognize it and move ahead." The Seminar participants realized that it was time to leave for Oaxaca while the assembly continued the discussion. The next month Cerro Niebla carried its decisions back to the Seminar through its *bitácora*.

This vignette presents a community visit illustrating the Seminar's attempts

to establish and maintain a relationship with the community that places the

Seminar at the service of the community. The experience and expertise of the

Seminar is there to draw upon when needed. The original problem in Cerro

Niebla has not been completely resolved, but for many months following the visit

to Cerro Niebla the words *chi iiza* centered in Seminar discussion. The words

came to symbolize an envisioning of the future, not only to the Zapotecs of Cerro

Niebla, but to all Seminar participants.

5.6 Learning in the Seminar

The concept of learning in the Seminar is an experiential and dynamic

process. Participants learn not only from their own experiences, but also from the

problems and discussions relating to other communities, groups or individuals.

These learning experiences evolve over time as a more in-depth understanding

of issues and problems is achieved through dialogue and reflection.

The Seminar members understand this learning in terms of "fertility-in-

diversity." As the Seminar coordinator explains:

We were never concerned with how we learned until we realized we didn't have the answers for the new problems we were faced with. So, we began to look back on our history to figure out how we actually learned to do what we did so successfully. We realized that we didn't have the answers then either, but we found them. We had to ask ourselves how, and came up with the idea of the logic of the *milpa*. We became conscious of how we learned what we didn't know. We started to exchange stories about our joint actions that had been born out of necessity and our diversity.

This lead to the 'fertility-in-diversity' idea.

The learning process of the Seminar can also be understood as a form of *praxis*. Smith (1997) conceptualizes *praxis* as having three open-ended phases. The first phase appears as an <u>analytical and educative phase</u> of naming and defining reality. The second phase is an <u>investigative phase</u> of finding out more. The third phase is an <u>action phase</u> of working for change. In the Seminar, *praxis* appears as three phases as well. The first phase encompasses community representatives presenting issues, and participants asking questions of each other to help clarify the situation. The second phase includes participants recognizing that answers are not readily available and further information, investigation, and refelction is needed. The third phase consists of each community making decisions to act by either carrying out further investigation or implementing solutions.

In order for learning to occur through *praxis*, participants must be able to communicate with each other through dialogue. As Freire explains:

Dialogue requires an intense faith in human beings; their power to make and remake, to create and recreate.... Founded on love, humility and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of

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mutual trust.... [that] cannot exist unless words of both parties coincide with their actions. Nor can dialogue exist without hope. Hope is rooted in our human incompleteness, from which we move out in constant search, a search which can be carried out only in communication with other people.... Finally, true dialogue cannot exist unless it involves critical thinking which sees reality as a process, in transformation...[and] constantly involves itself in the real struggle without fear of the risks involved (Freire 1970, 1990).

In the Seminar, learning through dialogue occurs at an individual level, at an organizational level, and at the community level.

5.7 Joining the Seminar

Communities do not necessarily join the Seminar to learn. There appear to be multiple and intersecting reasons that motivate communities and groups to join the Seminar: 1) problem-solving skills are sought; 2) the Seminar is perceived to be an avenue to expand contacts and to gain leverage; and/or 3) other avenues of support do not meet their needs, are closed to them, or can not be trusted.

The first reason stems from the changing situation in rural Mexico. In the past, communities employed a wide array of strategies to counter the common "enemy". The concept of "enemy" united community members against a more powerful foe - the *caciques*. But that struggle, known as *la lucha heroica* or the heroic struggle for the land is over. Now the peasants ask "*despues de la tierra que?*" - Now that we have the land, what do we do? Mateo explained "We used to have a clearly identified enemy, but that enemy has disappeared" and everyone agrees it is difficult, if not impossible, to unite against the "enemy" of

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neoliberalism. The external force that helped maintain community unity has all but disappeared.

The second reason relates to the hierarchical nature of Mexican society, in general, and the institutionalization of *amigismo*. [43] Peasants recognize that it is important to have friends in high places in order to receive favorable legal judgements, to procure information and services, or to secure governmental resources. Accordingly, they seek relationships with sympathetic and well-connected individuals. The Seminar to a limited extent can play such a role. This is in part due to the identity of the Seminar coordinator. He comes from an elite family, has attended the best schools, and is a professor from UNAM (the most prestigious university in Mexico). He can call upon government officials, friends, and acquaintances when he or the Seminar members need advice, information, or a favor. Additionally, in Oaxaca the Seminar has a reputation for the successful mediation of community conflicts. The presence of Seminar members at meetings between *campesinos* and government officials appears to influence government officials to treat *campesinos* with more respect.

Communities and small groups view the third reason -- the lack of trusted contacts -- differently. Communities are concerned with frustrations in dealing with governmental and non-governmental officials and other outsiders. Small

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[43] *Amigismo* has its roots in colonial Mexico in the role of the *patron*, typically a local elite member, who assisted the community in the resolution of disputes. The patron could influence high officials in a way that the community could not (Stephen 1991).

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groups encounter similar difficulties, but also run into problems with their own fellow community members. At times, they seek mediation through an outsider.

In the Seminar, members recount their experiences with governmental officials who were reported to have dismissed communities' representatives. Officials told one group from a Zapotec community, 'You are only *indios*[44], come back when you have a lawyer.'" One community representative shared his perspective of government officials' attitudes. He said, "We're Mixes and the officials *no nos hacen caso* (they do not pay any attention to us)." Another community representative spoke of a government project that had been promoted in his community, "The government gave us chickens for an egg laying project, ten chickens to each family. But the chickens didn't lay eggs; most of them were roosters! *Es todo mentiras* (It's all lies.)"

The case of San Carlos illustrates the dynamic and complicated reasons that communities and small groups decide to participate in the Seminar. In Vignette 5, internal divisions in the community force a small group to join the Seminar in search of support, while the newly elected *comisariado* seeks advice to resolve boundary disputes with five of its six neighboring communities. This vignette also introduces some of the gender-related issues that confront participants in the Seminar and generally throughout southern Mexico.

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[44] *Indio* is a derogatory term for indigenous people in Mexico.

Vignette 5. San Carlos - Joining the Seminar

San Carlos is a small Mixe community six hours from the city of Oaxaca. With a population of about 150 families, the community was relatively isolated until the early 1990's when a regional system of all-season roads was completed. As in most rural Latin American communities, a gender-based division of labor prevails in this community. Women's primary responsibilities are to care for the family and home, while men tend the *milpas*. Women often assist in agricultural production by planting, collecting seeds, weeding, harvesting, and storing harvested crops. Women also provide for the household wellbeing through the cultivation of plants near the house and the collection of medicinal plants. Before the roads arrived, the men and some women of San Carlos were also the 'human mules' who carried the region's coffee production on their backs from remote coffee growers to local collection points. Today, their labor is no longer needed, and the men have begun to leave the community in search of work. Many women are left behind for long stretches of time to fend as best they can.

A group of women from the community began to organize in search of activities to improve their own, their families' and their community's wellbeing. They decided to work together to collect and revitalize the community's knowledge of medicinal plants. As one women explained, "I was a young mother and I did not know how to cure my children's illnesses. There were no doctors here and medicine was very expensive. My husband was away when one of my babies became very sick and died. I began to learn what I could to keep my remaining children healthy and care for them when they were ill. I asked my neighbors, my family and my friends and slowly I began to learn." She and several other women began to pool their knowledge and seek out others in the community with special knowledge of medicinal plants.

An elderly man, a *curandero*[45], from the community was willing to share what he knew with the women. In addition, several of the women were experienced midwives. Together they went to the forest to identify and collect plants, sharing what they found with others in their group and in the

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[45] A *curandero* (male) or *curandera* (female) is a healer.

community. They slowly began to recover the community's medicinal plant knowledge and practices.

The government sponsored a national contest for groups of indigenous women working with medicinal plants and traditional medicine. The women of San Carlos entered the contest and won. They received a monetary award, a small clinic with a space for a traditional pharmacy was built for them, and a demonstration garden started. The women continued to share their knowledge and medicines with the community at a nominal cost to patients. The group received local, national and international attention for their medicinal knowledge particularly on midwifery and the traditional Mixe sweat baths. However, the women's fame and benefits were short-lived.

The community did not respond with pride at the women's achievements, but rather imposed severe social sanctions and physical punishment on the women. They were accused of being witches, they were thrown out of their clinic, their prize money taken away, and their garden was destroyed. I later learned that the main impetus behind these sanctions came from the evangelicos[46], community members who had established a protestant church in this formerly Catholic community. The evangelicos in San Carlos saw themselves as more 'modern' than the Catholics and took a firm stance against 'superstition.' Traditional plant knowledge and medicine were viewed as witchcraft.

Not only were the women punished. The reprisal extended to the husband of one of the curanderas for supporting his wife and the other women. The other men of the community branded him a mandilón (an insulting term for a man who is dominated by women). He was then elected to head the community assembly. While this may appear to be an honor to outsiders, in the cultural context of indigenous Mexico it can also be seen as a burden or even a punishment. The officeholder may not engage in employment for the three years he holds office and therefore has few means to support his family. To penalize him further, two women were elected as his secretary and treasurer. This was the first time in the history of the community that a woman had ever held an elected position. The community was embroiled in five land tenure disputes with neighboring communities. Pablo, the new comisariado, and his female secretary and treasurer turned to the Seminar; with them came the women from the medicinal plant group.

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[46] The term evangelicos, in Latin America, typically refers to people of any protestant religion. Most groups are of an evangelizing nature and hence the term, evangelicos.

The motivations that bring communities, groups and individuals to the Seminar usually have long and complex histories that involve personal, interfamily, political, and cultural elements. At times, an issue seems to be resolved only to reappear years later. The Seminar offers a space where problems can be discussed, where advice can be sought and given, and increasingly, where concerns and fears can be expressed.

There are time, however, when the advice of the Seminar does not suit a community's or group's needs. There have been cases when the advice given out in the Seminar seemed irrelevant or contradictory to what communities feel is in their best interest. These communities often stop coming to the Seminar. Such was the case with two communities that were involved in boundary disputes with their neighbors. The Seminar's advice to both the communities was to re-examine the veracity of their claims and to analyze whether pursuit of these claims was warranted. The communities did not agree with this advice and presumably continued to press their claims, but without the help of the Seminar. A few communities ceased attending because they had solved their immediate problems. San Pablo is an example. With the help of the Seminar, the community has resolved its land tenure struggles with the neighboring large landholders. The original reason the community joined the Seminar is resolved, so the community no longer sends an official representative to the Seminar meetings. However, an individual from the community continues to attend. On several

occasions, communities quit attending only to reappear several years later when an old problem resurfaces or new problems emerge.

There are also occasions when a community or individual has brought an issue before the Seminar that Seminar members prefer not to address or cannot address (for political or other reasons). Such was the case with Pancho, a past participant in the Seminar. He returned after several years' absence to report that a large sum of money that had been donated to his community by an international NGO had "disappeared." His presentation seemed less than forthright. While the Seminar gave him advice, he was not encouraged to attend unless the community itself became involved in the resolution of the problem. He has not yet returned.

5.8 Issues Addressed by the Seminar

The San Carlos vignette presents a complex example of issues that are brought to the Seminar. The issues addressed by the Seminar revolve primarily around community land tenure struggles and socioeconomic issues. Typically, communities deal with land tenure issues, while small groups address socioeconomic issues. The land tenure issues center on a mixture of disputes with neighboring communities, internal struggles relating to land, and/or disagreements with the government. The more typical struggle is between a community and its neighbors -- as in the case of San Carlos -- and its dispute with five of the six communities with which San Carlos shares boundaries.

Vignette 6 illustrates internal struggles relating to land tenure issues. Santa

María is a Zapotec community located a few hours from the city of Oaxaca.

Given this location and its access to Oaxacan markets, it is relatively more

affluent than other communities that participate in the Seminar. However, relative

affluence has not protected it from land tenure problems. In fact, it may have

exacerbated the problem.

Vignette 6. Internal Community Struggles in Santa María

In 1996, the *comisariado* of Santa María went to the Agrarian Reform to submit a request to the government for additional lands for his *comunidad*. He encountered much more than he expected. He found that when the *comunidad* was reorganized in 1938, it had been declared an *ejido* rather than a *comunidad* without the community's knowledge. Of the 324 families that made up the community, only 37 of them had been recognized as *ejidatarios*. With this act 287 families and their descendents were excluded as *ejidatarios* and thereby prohibited from voting in the community assembly, the primary ruling body of rural communities. The *comisariado,* fearing reprisals from community members, fled to the United States without notifying the community of the situation.

The community only became aware of the problem when an official denial for additional lands arrived. In early 1997, four community members were selected to serve on the newly created *comisión de gestoría agraria* (committee of agrarian investigation) to investigate and suggest solutions to the problem. The committee contacted government officials who responded that the community was unimportant and the officials couldn't be bothered with this minor problem. The committee sought out the Seminar. At the suggestion of the Seminar, the four members of the committee initiated a census to find out who had rights to *ejido* lands based on their pre-1938 status. They found that the original 37 families had grown to include 1067 individuals while those who were excluded now numbered 8387 individuals. A relatively simple solution appeared to exist - call a community assembly to vote on the issue. The community assembly could vote to include the excluded individuals as *ejidatarios* creating one large *ejido*. When this was accomplished, the *ejido* members could vote to become a *comunidad* -- once again returning them to the status they had originally held.

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Unfortunately, the new *comisariado* was a member of the families recognized as *ejidatarios*. He and a small group controlled the assembly and they refused to allow a vote to be called. Thus, the rights of those who had been excluded were denied. The threat of violence in Santa María was high. In a neighboring community, several community leaders had been lynched a few years earlier. Some community members looked to this example as a means to solve their own problem. However, most of the excluded community members in Santa María did not want the problem to be resolved through violence saying, "A problem created with paper should be resolved with paper, not with blood." But the government refused to intervene and the *comisariado* refused to give in.

The struggle in Santa María, while unique in its details, is one variant of the internal conflicts that beset rural Oaxacan communities. These internal conflicts, while not new, take on an added importance as the economic situation in the countryside worsens, people leave for the North, and/or turn to the cultivation of illegal crops to survive. In the Seminar, communities confront these destructive dynamics and wonder how they can survive both culturally and economically. Increasingly, problems of a socioeconomic nature are dominating Seminar discussion. San Carlos' venture in growing coffee is proceeding successfully. There are now sixteen families participating in the project with approximately 100 coffee tree seedlings apiece. They are also experimenting with several other plants donated by Seminar members or local NGOs including vetiver grass, papaya, ginger and several medicinal plants. They will experiment with planting these in their "*café milpero.*" However, not all projects are proceeding as successfully as that of San Carlos. The women's group in Tierra Piedra is progressing slowly in their quest to find economic opportunities. The following

vignette describes the various attempts of the young women, a task made more

difficult by government "assistance" programs.

Vignette 7. In Search of a Project

The young women of Tierra Piedra want to find a way to earn some income that will allow them to stay in their community. Thirteen young women formed a group, the "Committee in the Defense of Women." In the Seminar, they presented their *bitácora*, saying, "Women do not have a voice [in our community, so] we bring this to the Seminar for an opinion and an answer. We want help to generate employment so we don't have to immigrate. Single women have to leave their children to find employment. But we don't want to leave our communities and abandon our children.... Women always have work helping men in the *milpa*, but how do we find employment?...Women are always helpers and sometimes we do the hardest work. We want less difficult and more secure employment."

The young women considered raising rabbits, ducks, or chickens and were also interested in a sewing project. Some of the people from the community had started several successful broasted chicken businesses in Mexico City. This success inspired the young women to start a chicken project.

The Seminar suggested that they consult both individuals in the community with experience in raising chickens and their fellow community members who had migrated to Mexico City. One participant suggested that they develop a work plan including a market analysis. The women agreed. They asked the Seminar to lend them money to start their project, but the Seminar had no funds for this type of activity. Rather than begin a large enterprise, the women scraped together a little money to buy a few chickens each. But they had not done their research. They purchased the chicks in November, a month known to be the time of deadly poultry disease. Most of the chicks contracted the disease and died. The project ended.

In the Seminar, members gave the women advice and encouragement.

"*Just think what would have happened if you had bought many chickens and they had died. Think about what you have learned. The best way to learn is thorough experience, through your own initiative.*"

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"Chickens are like coffee, it gives an opportunity to come together to discuss, to explore alternatives, and to come to agreement. An opportunity to platicar[47] to organize and decide what you are going to do."

"The idea of the companeras[48] is very important because it is their own idea. It is born from within. This is the beginning even if it is not chickens."

"We weren't born experts, you shouldn't become disanimated."

The young women did not give up. The government was offering a course on hand-embroidered traditional Oaxacan dresses. The women decided to take advantage of the training and two of the women enrolled in the course. These two would return to the community and teach the rest of the group. Again, the members of the Seminar encouraged the women to do a simple market analysis. It seemed apparent to those with more experience that the market was saturated with hand-embroidered dresses. Once again, the young women agreed, but proceed without examining the market. The cost of the course was $500 pesos plus the added expense of staying in a town several hours from Piedra Tierra. The instructor hired by the government was paid before she began the course. She taught the young women only a small part of the embroidery process and then disappeared without finishing the class. Regardless of their disappointment, the young women returned to their community to teach what they have learned to the rest of the group. In a Seminar meeting, they proudly displayed the dress yokes that they had learned how to embroider. They began to teach themselves how to finish the dresses and asked me if I could help them learn how to sew.

I also wanted to help them better understand the marketing of their crafts, and so I set up a meeting with a friend who operated a small textile store. She told them how she had gotten started and suggested that the young women visit two government agencies charged with the training artisans and marketing artisan crafts. At one agency, the young women were told that the warehouses were full of traditional Oaxacan dresses that couldn't be sold. Additionally, while the government had commissioned them to buy large quantities of crafts, the funds for the current year had not, and probably would not, arrive. This agency could not help. But the young women began to grasp some basic ideas of supply and demand.

Not deterred, the young women solicited another government agency for sewing machines. The agency readily agreed. Finally, a large box arrived in Tierra Piedras. The women opened the box with anticipation. However, when the box

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[47] Formally translated as to talk informally or chat, but understood in this context as dialogue.
[48] Companions or friends often associated with partners in a struggle as in comrade-in-arms.

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was opened it did not contain sewing machines. The box contained a large, antiquated knitting machine called a *Tricadora*, made in the 1950s with instructions written in German. The young women were disheartened, but again did not give up. They attempted to find someone to teach them how to knit with the machine. They did not want to consider the fact that there was only one machine and 16 young women, that more modern knitting machines were faster and more efficient, and they had no idea if there was a market for sweaters.

During a Seminar visit to the community, *Don* Salomón invited us to his house to see the machine. A large long gray wooden box covered with dust was tucked up against the wall in his living room. It looked for all the world like a coffin. This sight was made even more poignant, because *Don* Salomón's wife had died a month earlier. We joked that it contained Dracula. When we opened it, we saw the knitting machine. Our amusement at the "coffin" turned to a mixture of anger and disbelief as we gazed at the useless piece of equipment. We could find no humor in the situation. The young women continue to wait for a government instructor to "teach" them how to knit.

The Santa Ana vignette illustrates the dependency rural communities have on government programs and the often dysfunctional nature of this relationship. The Seminar challenges communities to reconstruct this relationship, to become "actors" instead of passive recipients of aid programs. However, it seems that the strategies and advice devised in the Seminar to confront the new problems facing communities are less effective or efficacious than those devised to confront land tenure problems. Increasingly in Seminar discussions, the question of *despúes de la tierra que?* (Now that we have won the struggle for the land, what do we do?) was turned on the Seminar itself. What did the Seminar need to do and be to help communities face their changing reality?

5.9 Summary

The "logic of the *milpa*" forms the underlying philosophy of the Seminar. As a social "*milpa*," the Seminar views itself as a space where representatives from diverse communities and cultural groups come together and contribute to the discussion and resolution of problems facing their communities. In theory, each Seminar participant has the opportunity to contribute as an equal to discussion and reflection. However, in practice, participation is distorted by both class- and gender-related barriers to communication. In addition, the co-joined knowledge of all participants seems insufficient to the task of finding solutions to problems emerging from the rapidly changing environment of rural Mexico.

CHAPTER 6

THE EVOLUTION OF THE SEMINAR

The Seminar faces new challenges relating to external and internal factors. External pressures of globalization, both economic and cultural, seem to have intensified with the passage of NAFTA. Reduction of agricultural subsidies, falling corn prices, changes in land tenure laws, and out-migration negatively impact family and community survival. Internally, the empowerment of Seminar participants as they learn to become better community leaders has changed the quality and quantity of their participation in the Seminar. Old patterns of participation are being challenged both implicitly and explicitly. Additionally, the inclusion of new members -- with markedly distinct experiences from the state of Nayarit and from the United States -- increase the diversity of the Seminar, and thereby, the scope and nature of the dialogue in the Seminar.

We, the Seminar participants, had asked communities to reflect upon what they were doing, why they were doing it, and what they wanted to be. We had consistently encouraged them to dream, to develop a plan, to envision the future. We had admonished them to be disciplined, to be organized, and to tell the truth. Yet the Seminar -- as an organization – could not or did not want to recognize its own shortcomings and inconsistencies in terms of the typical criticisms and suggestions given to communities, groups and individuals (see Argyris 1993). It

even seemed to be reproducing the types of relationships found in broader

Mexican society.

Gradually, the Seminar began to recognize that in the advice given to

communities lay ways to address some of its own challenges. The processes in

the Seminar as it came to this realization are discussed in this chapter. As in

Chapter 5, vignettes and quotes are used extensively to present these processes

from the perspective of the participants themselves. In this chapter, the voices of

the participants are heard more frequently. Vignettes give way to quotes, shared

as excerpts from the dialogue and discussions of Seminar meetings.

The organizational change of the Seminar appears to be similar to the

change an organization makes when moving from an adaptive organization to a

learning organization (Argyris 1993; Argyris and Schon 1978; Lassey 1998).

These concepts -- "adaptive organization" and "learning organization" -- are

typically applied to businesses, government departments, schools, or charities in

industrialized countries. In this research, these concepts are used as heuristic

tools to better understand the changes that occur in the Seminar. The use of

these terms does not imply the application of the learning organization theory as

a whole. Rather, I follow the advice of Mills (1959: 225) who says:

> In formulating and in trying to solve these problems, do not
> hesitate, indeed seek, continually and imaginatively, to draw upon
> the perspectives and materials, the ideas and methods, of any and
> all sensible studies of man and society. They are *your* studies; they
> are a part of what you are a part of; do not let them be taken from
> you by those who would close them off by weird jargon and
> pretensions of *expertise*.

Accordingly, the use of these terms represents a transdisiplinary and experiential effort to gain insights into a given social phenomenon.

Argyris and Schon (1978) define an <u>adaptive organization</u> as a problem-focused organization that makes incremental improvements in its action without examining the organization's underlying assumptions. In contrast, a <u>learning organization</u> is one that begins to look at the world differently, and consciously transforms itself and its own basic "functions, ideals and beliefs" (Argyris 1993; Bawden 1995). In the Seminar, this movement is termed, the "transformation" of the Seminar.

6. 0 Themes

In order for the Seminar to contemplate this transformation, certain themes -- both real and conceptual -- needed to be in place. By "real," I mean a change in procedure. By "conceptual," I mean that new ideas became a part of the language and practice of the Seminar. These themes helped disclose the individual and collective assumptions that underlie the "mental model" of the Seminar. Senge (1990: 8-9) defines a "mental model" as "the deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action." These assumptions are often unconscious and effect behavior in unrecognized ways. The themes of the Seminar that helped make these assumptions more visible are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Themes of the Seminar

Real	Conceptual
• Establishing Saturday -- the day of truth	• The idea of the Seminar as a learning process
• Introducing the *ronda* as a means to encourage participation	• Identification of obstacles to learning
• Using regional diagnostics as a means to develop a historical perspective and analyze existing resources	• Picturing and discussing internal social organization
	• Framing the issue of *mandadero*[49] & other concepts of leadership
	• Confronting issues of how to escape relationships of dependency
	• Formulating ideas of new technicians and experts
	• Creating a vision of the future for the Seminar

In this chapter, these themes will be further elaborated, and their relationships to the "transformation" of the Seminar will be highlighted. The meaning of these specific achievements in the Seminar, the order in which they occurred, and their relationships to each other are intertwined and evolving.

[49] A person at the "service" of their community.

Accordingly, this list of themes does not imply a linear relationship among them,

but rather, serves as a means to introduce them[50] (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Moving towards a Learning Organization

* The Seminar as a "learning organization"

* The Transformation of the Seminar

* La Ronda

* Lack of Participation

* Saturday -- the day of truth
* Regional Diagnostic

* Chi iiza - envisioning the future

* Ideas of new tecnicos and experts

* Escaping relationships of dependency

* Mandaderos - examining leadership

* Obstacles to learning

* The Seminar as a learning process

* The Seminar as an "adaptive organization"

These themes appeared in the Seminar in various ways -- serendipitously,

accidentally, or emerging from other themes. Despite the unpredictable nature of

their appearance, there was a pattern associated with how these ideas emerged

and circulated. Themes first appeared during the analysis of community or group

issues. Issues were brought to the Seminar by representatives and, then, were

processed through discussion and analysis. Specifically, these themes provided

a means to communicate across differences and/or as a means to synthesize

[50] I presented this diagram as part of a validity check. The curved line was drawn in at the suggestion of Seminar participants. They also suggested that we had not yet fully become a

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hours of discussion. Both during and after discussion and analysis, themes were returned to communities as suggestions and/or solutions by community representatives through their *bitácoras*. As the Seminar began to question some of its underlying assumptions, particular themes re-emerged and were applied to the Seminar in a critically self-reflexive manner (see Figure 7)

Figure 7. Reflecting on the Seminar

Themes applied to the Seminar

Themes

Themes

Themes

Seminar

Community

Community
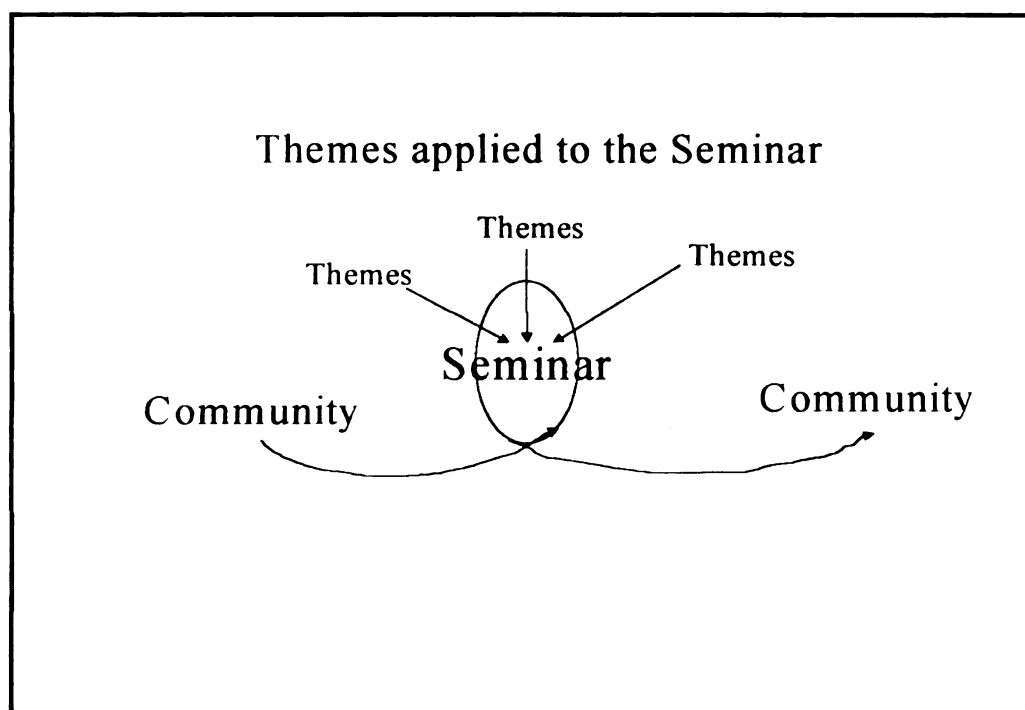
These discussions were often long and complicated, during which a new understanding of the Seminar emerged. The application of these themes to the Seminar marked the transition of the Seminar from an organization that appeared to be an "adaptive organization" to one that more closely resembled a "learning organization."

"learning organization."

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6.1 Theme 1: The Seminar as a Learning Process

A fundamental concept needed to be in place before participants could

begin to reflect on themselves as an organization -- the Seminar was, at least

potentially, a learning process (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. The Seminar Reflects on Itself as a Learning Process

Themes applied to the Seminar

• *The Seminar as a learning process*

Community   Seminar   Community
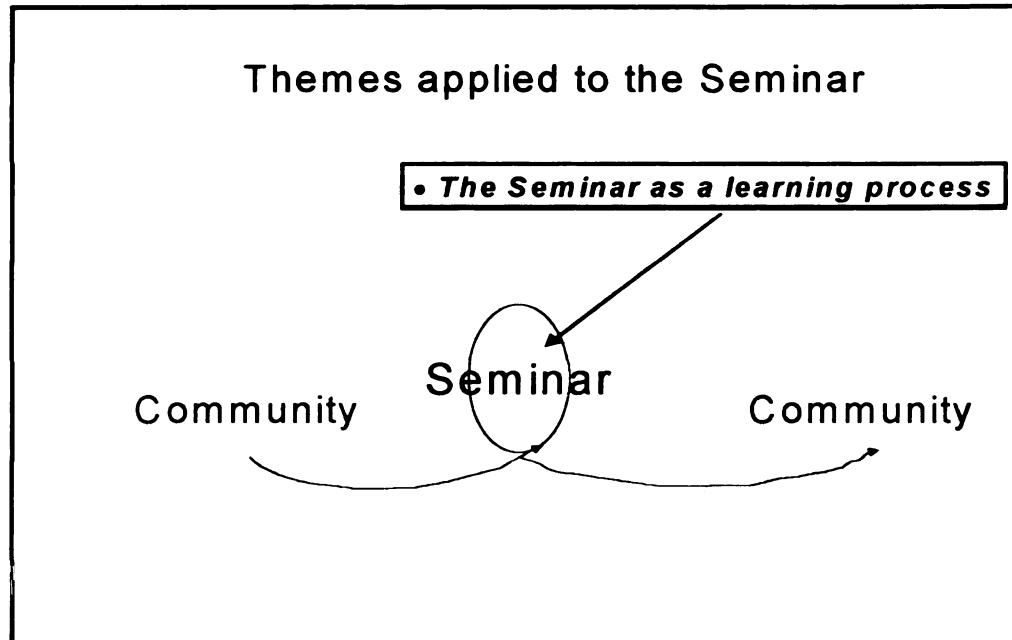
By a learning process, I mean a form of *praxis* -- a space where people can learn

together over time in order to inform action (Argyris 1993). While this definition

may appear simplistic, embedded within it are fundamental issues relating to a

dissonance between ideals and practice, struggles over meaning, forms of

knowledge, social relations and the situated nature of learning (Freire 1985: xiii;

Lave and Wenger 1991: 33).

The following quotations communicate member's initial understanding of the Seminar as a learning process both for individuals and for the organization itself.

"The Seminar is a school where we learn to discover things, not just gather prescriptions."

"I come to the Seminar...because of what I learn. For example when a little problem comes up in the [community] *assembly, I raise my hand and say why don't we do this. My suggestions come from something I've learned here."*

"We're learning a new way of thinking, but we don't know what to do yet... We are changing our way of talking about and thinking of things."

"The Seminar is a school, not of children, but of adults. It helps us a lot in improving our practice."

Understanding the Seminar as a space where learning occurs allowed the Seminar participants to step back from a focus on outcomes (the solutions to community and group problems) to include a focus on process (how these solutions were conceived.) This expansion shifted the standpoint from one that looked primarily towards the outside to one that also looked inward. This shift enabled Seminar participants to begin to reflect upon the organization and its internal workings.

Conceptualizing the Seminar as a learning process opened a space where obstacles to learning could be addressed. Furthermore, comprehending the Seminar as a learning process provided a point of reference for members to think about, and make sense of, relationships within the organization. In addition,

examining the Seminar's ability to provide learning experiences for members

helped increase the organization's own learning capacities.

6.2 Theme 2: Obstacles to Learning

Initial sparks of recognition regarding the potential of the Seminar as a

learning process emerged from Seminar discussions of arch-typical problems in

several of the communities. These problems involved obstacles to community

learning, and micro-political divisions and power struggles that could paralyze

communities for years (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Obstacles to Learning
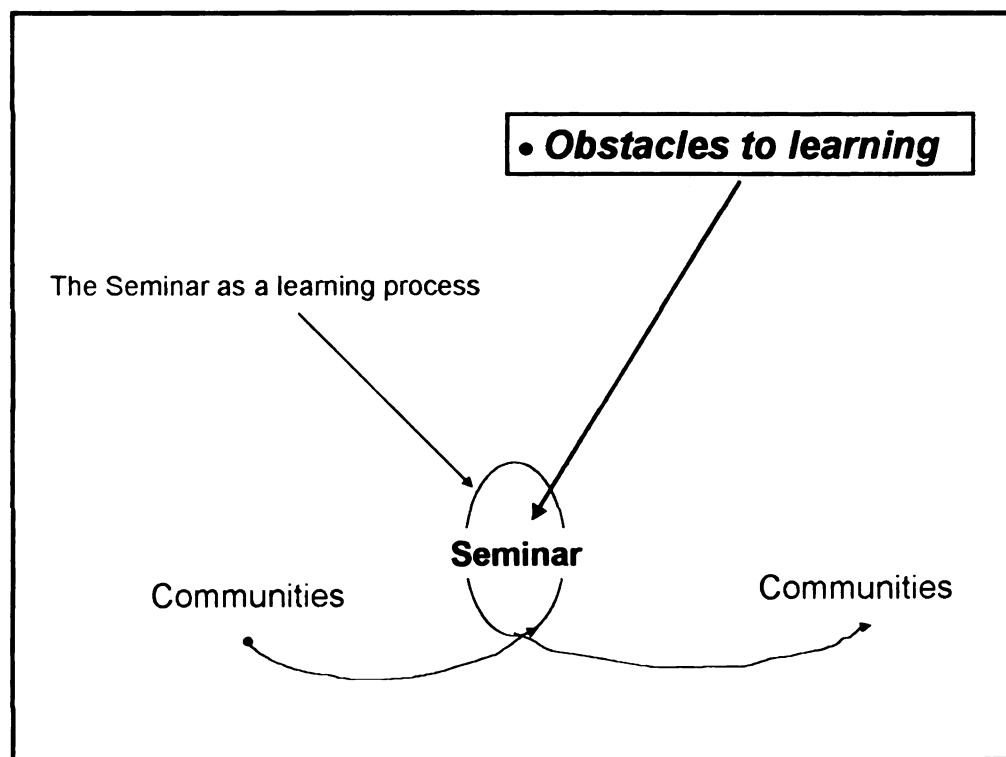
These problems often resulted in, among other outcomes, unwillingness of

members to learn from each other and the subsequent deference to and

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dependence on experts. Once these obstacles were identified, the organization could more consciously begin the process of organizational change.

A reoccurring topic relating to obstacles to learning in communities was the propensity of new *comisariados* to reject advice from ex-*comisariados*. In fact, the departing *comisariado* and his advisors were often ostracized from the leadership circle of the community. The three years of knowledge and experience of the retiring *comisariado* and his advisors were lost and could not be drawn upon. The new and often inexperienced *comisariado* would not or could not ask his predecessor for assistance or guidance for fear that he would appear weak or ignorant. This seemed to be driven by considerations of personal pride and a perceived need to impress the community of the new *comisariado's* superior skills and the notion that "anyone who is not with me is against me."

Vignette 8 illuminates several of these issues that later become a part of the Seminar's self-reflexive process. The case of Tierra Piedra presents problems stemming from individual pride and the *comisariado's* inability to accept counsel from his fellow community members.

Vignette 8. Obstacles to Learning in Tierra Piedra[51]

mid-1800s - The land is a large hacienda. Indigenous workers from several different ethnic groups are forcibly relocated to the hacienda to cultivate cochineal[52] for a large landholder.

1930s - By this date indigenous identities and languages are lost. The workers cultivate cochineal for the landholder until the mid-1930s when aniline dyes force natural dyes out of the market. The workers turn to subsistence farming to survive.

1977 - Details of the 1910 revolution and accompanying land reform reach Tierra Piedra. The community elects to become an *ejido* and submits a *solicitud* to the government.

1978 - The community names a committee to address land tenure issues.

1983 - The community receives a negative response to their *solicitud* to become an *ejido* because the neighboring community San Pablo also claims the land.

1991 - Tierra Piedra joins the Seminar.

1994 - The government surveys the land, recognizing Tierra Piedra's claim.

1995 - The community is officially recognized as an *ejido*.

1996 - San Pablo, a neighboring community, challenges the boundaries of Tierra Piedra and initiates an *amparo* – a legal hold on the titling process. An agreement is reached that all parties will submit their arguments and claims to the government. A visual inspection or survey must accompany these claims.

1997 - A new *comisariado* is elected in Tierra Piedra. In June, the *comisariado* and his advisors make a trip to Mexico City to see the agrarian reform officials. They have not made an appointment and the officials are not there. When asked in the Seminar what they have learned from the trip the *comisariado* replies, "We will have to go again."

1998 - The *comisariado* hires a surveyor and lawyer against the advice of several community members and the Seminar. The surveyor is invited to the Seminar where the government's requirements for a visual inspection are clarified. The survey is completed and legal documents prepared. These documents are brought to the Seminar b the *comisariado* and reviewed. It appears that the documents may jeopardize Tierra Piedra's claim; they contain errors and extraneous details and omit crucial information. Community members are concerned. The *comisariado* will not take

[51] This vignette draws from several *bitácoras*, Seminar discussions and *The History of Santa Catarina* written by Don Bernabe Martinez Vazque with his permission.

[52] A parasitic insect that infects nopal cacti and is used as a dye.

anyone's advice and stubbornly continues to rely on the costly and poor council of "experts."

Current Situation - In April 1999, the community assembly invites the Seminar to attend a special assembly meeting to discuss these issues. The Seminar members are conscious of the need not to make the *comisariado* feel threatened. They decide to simulate the learning process of the Seminar by reading and discussing the legal documents submitted by the lawyers and the surveyor. As these documents are read it becomes apparent that no one in the community assembly understands the legal language of the documents. Yet, the community assembly accepted, and the *comisariado* signed, the documents. The Seminar simulation shows that these documents are written in a "foreign" language that needs to be "translated" to be understood. Seminar members suggest that: 1) if documents are not understood, they should not be signed; 2) having a lawyer is no guarantee that the work will be done correctly; 3) a community can seek advice from outside "experts" when necessary, but should recognize their own capabilities and ability to control the process. During the next Seminar, meeting participants encourage the new *comisariado* to break the obstacles to learning he has constructed. An ex-*comisariado* says, "There are no laws that say this has to happen - that those that have learned can't share with those who are new. When I was elected *comisariado*, I met with the old *comisariado* in my community every eight days."

The situation in Tierra Piedra appears typical of many rural communities of Oaxaca in which incoming *comisariados* can not and do not cooperate with exiting *comisariados* (Dennis 1987; Kearney 1972; Nader 1990). The knowledge and experience acquired by the past leaders can not be drawn upon without the new *comisariados* appearing weak. In Tierra Piedra, this lack of communication and sharing of knowledge clearly led to reliance upon outside legal experts without examining whether these experts merited their status as knowledgeable and competent individuals. In the case of Tierra Piedra, marginalizing

experienced former leaders added to the real risk that the community would lose its land tenure struggle.

In the Seminar, personal pride and ego were seen as destructive forces when they prohibit community leaders from consulting with and drawing upon more experienced community members (see Rahman 1993). The need for leaders to learn from the experiences of others was emphasized as an essential ingredient for communities to move forward. The consequences of not doing so could potentially jeopardize the wellbeing of communities and often led them to rely unnecessarily and unwisely on outside experts. The Seminar suggested that a dependency on experts was not necessary; rather experts should be at "the service of the community." The Seminar's advice intended to increase community leaders' abilities to learn from their peers and help them recognize their own agency and capabilities to take both action and maintain control of that action.

The participants in the Seminar could see the destructive nature of these relationships in their own communities. Yet, they did not recognize that they were reproducing similar relationships in the Seminar through dependence on academics and experienced community organizers. While these individuals had special knowledge and experience, this dependency appeared to inhibit Seminar participants from learning from each other and from recognizing and improving their own capacities. Fitfully, Seminar members began to apply to themselves the same critical analysis they had used to reflect on community problems. Some of the earliest indications of the Seminar moving towards becoming a learning

organization was this incipient questioning of relationships in learning and leadership in communities. Some members occasionally admitted that they had "failed" as leaders in their communities, and in the Seminar and that they could not justify their behavior. However, they did not at this point change their practice.[53]

6.3 Internal Social Organization

The Seminar made an initial move towards self-reflectivity during discussions of a case highlighting destructive social relationships in communities. Social divisions in Oaxacan communities, generally, are based on internal land squabbles, family rivalries, religious differences, or political party affiliation that lead to destructive and often violent internal power struggles and micro-political divisions (Dennis 1976). Generally, the dialogue and reflection of the Seminar stimulated participants to think critically and encouraged them to examine the nature of these relationships and how they might be changed or mitigated. Vignette 9 provides an example of the type of issues raised in the Seminar regarding internal social organization and the advice given to community members. It also demonstrated the complexities of a learning process that

[53] This phenomenon appears similar to what Brunsson's found in his study of Swedish local authorities. He states that although leaders knew they were doing wrong, they continued their behavior (Brunsson cited in Argyris, 1993: 16).

combines individual and community learning. This case presents an instance in which a long-standing leader is attacked by his fellow community members. The leader takes a step towards recognizing his abilities and influence as a community leader. At the same time, a community institutionalizes a healthier attitude towards its own leaders.

Vignette 9. Samuel

Samuel has participated in the Seminar for eight years. He has diligently and capably served his community as a *comisariado* for three years and played a decisive role in the resolution of a 600 year-old conflict with the neighboring community. The neighboring community has treated the smaller and poorer community of Loma de Aquila as its vassal, extracting labor, food and servitude. Samuel and two other community members were elected by the community assembly to participate in the Seminar. With other Seminar participants, they developed a complex series of strategies that eventually released Loma de Aquila from the destructive grip of its neighbor. The struggle required wit, commitment and sacrifice. During the three years of service as *comisariado,* Samuel received no pay nor did he have much time to devote to the subsistence of this family. Despite the personal difficulties this service entailed and the sacrifices made, Samuel was accused by his community of stealing community funds. For months, he struggles with how to handle the situation. He says, ""The mule is beaten when he will not move, the *comisariado* is beaten when he makes progress.... If I was a responsible person, I wouldn't have this problem." Finally, he presents his *bitácora*, smiling shyly, yet sadly, saying he would never serve his community again -- "The same people we serve throw stones at us. *Ni un dedo más*" (not a finger more)."

The Seminar addressed the issue of leadership and the difficulties it implied. The Seminar coordinator posed a question to Samuel, "If you could turn back time, what rules would you impose on the community?" Samuel responded, "The rules I would put are these: there would have to be proof before anyone could make accusations; if someone has proof they would have to present it publicly or they would be accomplices; and depending on the severity of the accusation, a false accuser could be jailed."

A year passed and Samuel was once again elected to a community position. This time he told the assembly that he would not accept the position unless the

community accepts his terms. He told the assembly that: the community must pay for expenses associated with the work (it was not a salaried position), any accusations made against a public official must be made publicly, and the accuser must have proof of a crime. The assembly voted to accept his demands and Samuel once again took a position of leadership and responsibility in the community, but now with an increased sense of confidence. The community adjusted its approach to leadership by adopting a less destructive attitude.

This vignette presents an issue that re-occurred regularly in Seminar discussions - a community leader being punished after years of service.[54] Leaders typically react to various forms of punishment by withdrawing from public service for a period of time. Often, they work behind the scenes to regain a position of authority -- an action that further divides communities -- or they wait until the community once again calls them to service. In effect, little learning occurs, either for the individual or the community. The Seminar helps participants learn how to confront and change these destructive forces by giving them confidence in their own leadership abilities. Recognizing their own agency seems a necessary condition for leaders to deal with, and learn from, these negative experiences. In this instance, Samuel gained increased confidence and self-esteem in responding to the community's demands. In addition, the community began to develop a new way of conceptualizing leadership, an attitude that

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[54] For an additional example of this phenomenon, see vignette 5.

seemed necessary for the community to move ahead. In a small way, Samuel's

interaction with the community began to change the community's perspective

towards leadership. Yet, while individuals were learning to be better leaders in

their own communities, they did not fully exercise these fledgling skills in the

Seminar.

6.4 Theme 3: *Mandaderos* & Community Leadership

Discussions of the concept of *mandadero* further assisted the Seminar in

the analysis of its internal organization (see Figure 10). *Mandadero* comes from

the verb *mandar,* "to send or to order." In the Seminar, participants often referred

to themselves as *mandaderos. Mandadero* is defined in the Seminar as a role in

which individuals are placed at the "service of community."

In the ethnographic literature, there is no specific reference to

"*mandadero.*" The closest term and discussion refers to the system of *cargos* that

is common throughout indigenous Mesoamerica (Dennis 1976; Kearney 1972).

Kearny (1972) describes a *cargo* as "an official position within the civil or

religious hierarchies of the *municipio* and its *agencia.*" These positions pertain to

three separate areas -- religious responsibilities, community governance, and

regulation of community lands. Kearny describes positions of *cargo* as an

"unavoidable consequence of living in the *municipio.*" The term *mandadero* refers

to individuals who may or may not hold positions of community *cargos* but who

are assigned certain community responsibilities and leadership roles.

Figure 10. *Mandaderos*
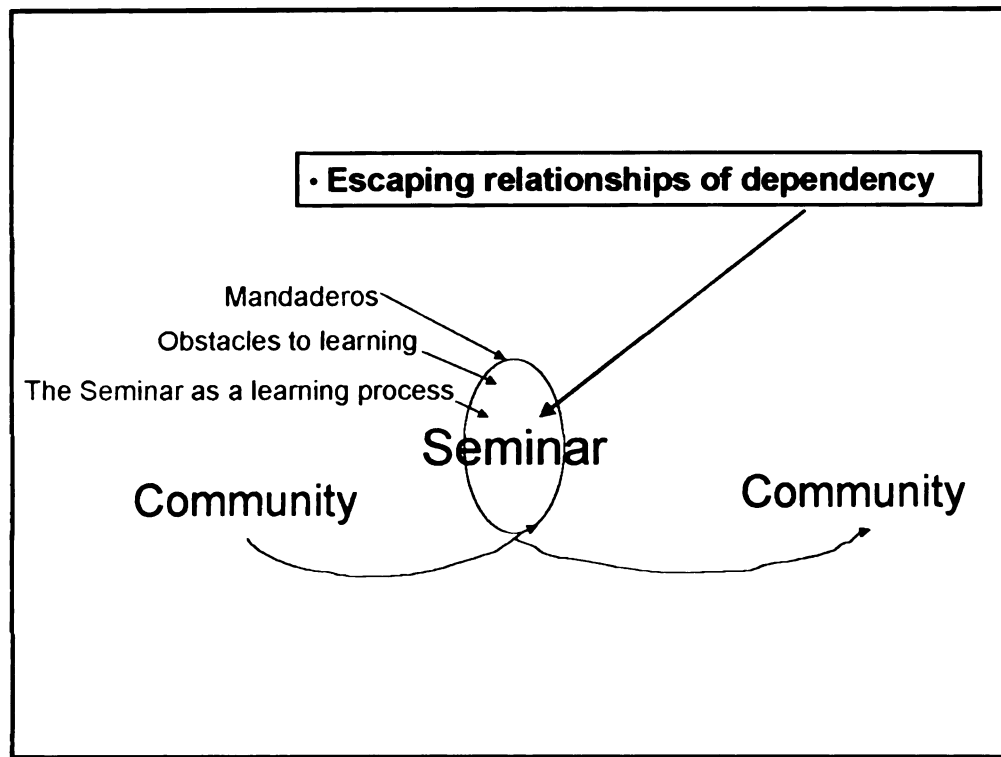
The role of *mandadero* and positions of *cargo*, while different, share some

similarities. First, individuals are obligated by custom to accept these positions.

Secondly, individuals who hold these positions feel some ambivalence towards

them. Thirdly, individuals in these positions feel "hemmed in" by community

"tradition," expectations and rules. Finally, if leaders either as *mandaderos* or in

positions of *cargo* violate the narrow strictures of "appropriate" leadership - if they

are too innovative, too individualistic, or too successful - they may be punished. A

person who identifies himself as a *mandadero* in the Seminar feels a certain

sense of responsibility towards his community and accepts the "consequences"

of being a community member. Yet, he is well aware of the limited authority that

is associated with these positions and how that limited authority inhibits his ability to act.

During a Seminar discussion, I asked for an explanation of the term *mandadero*. I was unclear about the complexities of a role that appeared to have both positive and negative connotations. The comments of participants illustrate the contradictory nature of the term and their own ambivalence about the role of *mandadero*:

"A mandadero is someone who is at the service of his community, someone who doesn't have solutions to the community's problems but must find them."

"It is someone who is either committed or stupid."

"Its someone who is a joke and screwed - he is ordered and he must obey."

"A mandadero has two sides, that of being a martyr and that of having power. There is a tension between service and power. There is a bad and good spirit to it, one can become ambitious."

"It's hard to talk about this. No one wants to say that he is in this for the power.[55] It's hard to accept this.... It's an easy explanation. What power are we gaining? I would put it another way, you can get eaten alive. Look at Samuel or Pablo.... We're masochistic. This pinche (damn) power - we can do without it."

As the above comments indicate, the concept of *mandadero* seems to contain two notions - <u>service</u> and <u>power</u>. The notion of service is associated with an attitude of humility, a willingness to complete the tasks assigned and a commitment to community. Service also appears closely related to a feeling of powerlessness or inability to control or direct, as in the case of Samuel or Pablo.

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[55] In this instance, power includes a strong element of personal gain.

The understanding of power in this instance may be constrained by ideas based on past exercises of power by local *caciques* and government officials. During the 1960s and 70s, several senior Seminar participants engaged in long, and often violent, struggles to destroy the power of the local *caciques*. Participants also recognized government officials' abuse of power - a constant reminder of the negative consequences of leaders who lacked a sense of responsibility and commitment. No one wanted to be associated with or to reproduce these forms of power in either their communities or in the Seminar.

Another form of power frequently spoken of in the Seminar was the power to *convocar* - to convoke -- yet only a few individuals in communities or groups actually "have" the power to call upon other community members to meet and engage in community activities. Community and Seminar members are willing to listen to individuals who have the power to convoke based on their demonstrated abilities, commitment, and past successes as leaders. However, this form of power is not common -- few individuals in communities are recognized to have the "power to convoke."

Despite the recognition of the power to convoke, Seminar members have not yet been able to resolve the issue of power and its seemingly discordant nature in the Seminar and in communities. Reflection and analysis on the dual nature of power and leadership in the Seminar was restrained, in part, by the all too familiar specter of destructive social divisions in communities. In communities, questioning of leadership often lead to intensified divisions,

violence, and even the destruction of communities. The Seminar was a collective with a cohesive identity that had allowed it to proceed successfully in its search for solutions to difficult land tenure and related socioeconomic conditions. Seminar participants appeared to be searching for a way to discuss internal leadership and relationships in a way that did not jeopardize this communal "we."

Discussion in the Seminar of leadership and power were not fully elaborated, in part, because of this recognition. Yet, discussions about *mandaderos* and its dual nature of service and power set the stage for both *campesinos* and academics to recognize that these ideas could be apply to themselves as leaders in the Seminar. The idea of "service to community" would encourage Seminar participants to think of themselves as members with responsibilities and commitment. The idea of power would later be drawn upon in discussion of relationship between academics and *campesinos*. The exploration of concepts of leadership and power continued under the themes "escaping relationships of dependency" and "the *tecnico* of the future."

6.5 Theme 5: Escaping Relationships of Dependency

The nature of leadership and power was further examined under the theme of "escaping relationships of dependency" - a key theme in Seminar discussions (see Figure 11).

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Figure 11. Escaping Relationships of Dependency
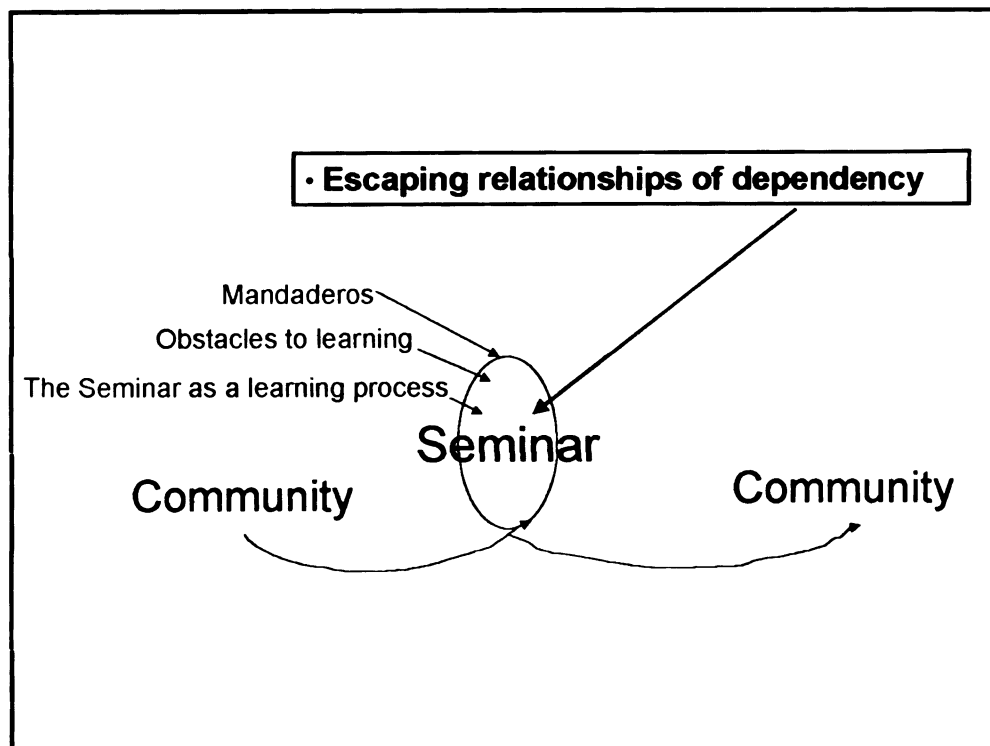
The notion of dependency usually refers to economic relationships. In the

Seminar, there was an economic component to the idea of dependency, but it

also included elements of cultural, political, and social domination. For example,

the government's attitude, behavior, and policies towards *campesinos* and

indigenous peoples were often viewed as ramifications of dependency.

Communities often told stories of how they had confronted this form of

dependency, taking advantage of government programs in ways the government

had not intended. Vignettes 10 & 11 represent different reactions to dependency

-- one where fundamental relationships do not change and the other where they

do change. Vignette 10 – the Case of San Mateo – presents an instance where

a community puts aside its animosities to fool the government. In this case, the

government served as the "enemy without," uniting a community suffering from

intense internal conflict. Vignette 11 - The Case of Cerro Niebla - presents an

instance in which a community recognizes its own rights and abilities to

challenge and change government healthcare workers' attitudes and actions.

Vignette 10. The Case of San Mateo

A new *comisariado* is elected in San Mateo. He begins to strategize how to weaken the power of the retiring *comisariado* and his group of supporters. His maneuvers do not produce the desired results quickly enough, so he prods his kin to kill the ex- *comisariado*. They attack the ex-*comisariado* in his home and stab him several times, but he does not die. The conflict between the two factions intensifies as each side conspires and strategizes how to overpower the other.

A government official arrives in San Mateo to announce a new subsidies program - each *campesino* family will receive money in exchange for planting five hectares of corn. The community members set aside their animosities and develop an elaborate scheme of swapping lands and moving boundaries to make it appear that virtually every family in the community has five hectares under cultivation. The desire to fool the "enemy" and obtain money temporarily overcomes the animosity between the two factions uniting them in a common cause.

The attack against the ex-*comisariado* in San Mateo, while an extreme

case, is not unique. The community's attempt to take advantage of government

subsidies and programs in ways the government does not intend is not

uncommon. However, the success of these efforts does not mean that

communities escape from what they term "relationships of dependency" -- neither

social nor economic relationships are changed.[56]

Vignette 11 addresses a problem that several communities share relating

to the behavior of governmental healthcare workers, especially those promoting

family planning. This case shows how a community began to strategize, how

they applied some of the lessons learned in Seminar discussions, and how they

began to change their relationships with government workers.

Vignette 11. The Case of Cerro Niebla

A rumor circulating in the community of Cerro Niebla accused government
healthcare workers of giving tetanus shots to women that contain hormones to
prevent pregnancy. A local nun told the people that the rumor was true. The
community was concerned and considered how to deal with the situation. They
also felt that healthcare workers were treating them poorly - they did not arrive on
the scheduled days, were rude, and often refused to sign forms necessary to
participate in governmental programs focusing on children's health. The
community representatives reported in the Seminar that healthcare workers
withheld their signatures unless the mother agreed to participate in family
planning efforts. When Jesús presented his *bitácora* about these issues, it struck
a chord with other community representatives who then recounted similar
experiences. The consensus in the Seminar was that communities did not have
to accept this type of treatment. Participants suggested to each other that they
could devise ways to counteract the negative behavior of government workers
through their respective community assemblies.

A year later, Jesús returned to the topic of healthcare workers and shared how
his community had dealt with the problems and the issue of family planning. "We
have to walk three hours to get to the clinic and the *medicos* treated us the same
way [often they do not show up.] We scold them and tell them they have to plan
their visits and tell the [community] authorities when they will be there. Then the
authorities can tell the people. Now, before they arrive we plan what we are
going to say and do because this is the life of the *pueblo* (people) [we are talking

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[56] See Scott (1986) for a description and analysis of "everyday forms of peasant resistance."

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about].... We speak in Zapotec [instead of Spanish] and translate for the nurses. We ask them, 'Why do you treat us like animals? We are human beings.' The administrator came and asked us, 'Why are you so confrontational?' We replied, 'You can not obligate us to use birth control, it is the decision of each couple.' We accept pap smears because it concerns the life of our women, but we plan the day before they come. We ask everyone to give his or her opinion [when we plan] because its different if only a few talk. [When only a few talk] it could appear that we are manipulating the people. This is how we have stopped the healthcare workers' poor behavior."

Communities are confronting government representatives, as in the case of Cerro Niebla, insisting that they be treated with respect. In choosing to speak in their native language, in asserting their rights to be treated as equals, and independently deciding on how to respond to outsiders, the people of Cerro Niebla recognized their own rights and act accordingly.

The case of Cerro Niebla became an example for other communities in the Seminar, contributing to the idea of community and individual agency. The events recounted in these vignettes occurred in communities, yet they were also drawn upon as lessons for the Seminar. These lessons were taken up by Seminar participants and fed into the Seminar's growing ability to reflect upon itself. However, the idea of escaping from relationships of dependency was not fully developed during these discussions, or was it immediately applied to the Seminar as an organization. The discussion continued under the theme "the *tecnico* of the future."

6.6 Theme 6: The *Tecnico* of the Future

The theme "the *tecnico* of the future" emerged during a discussion of

extension workers (see Figure 12). *Tecnicos* can either be governmental or non-

governmental technicians working in the countryside.

Figure 12. *Tecnicos* & Experts of the Future
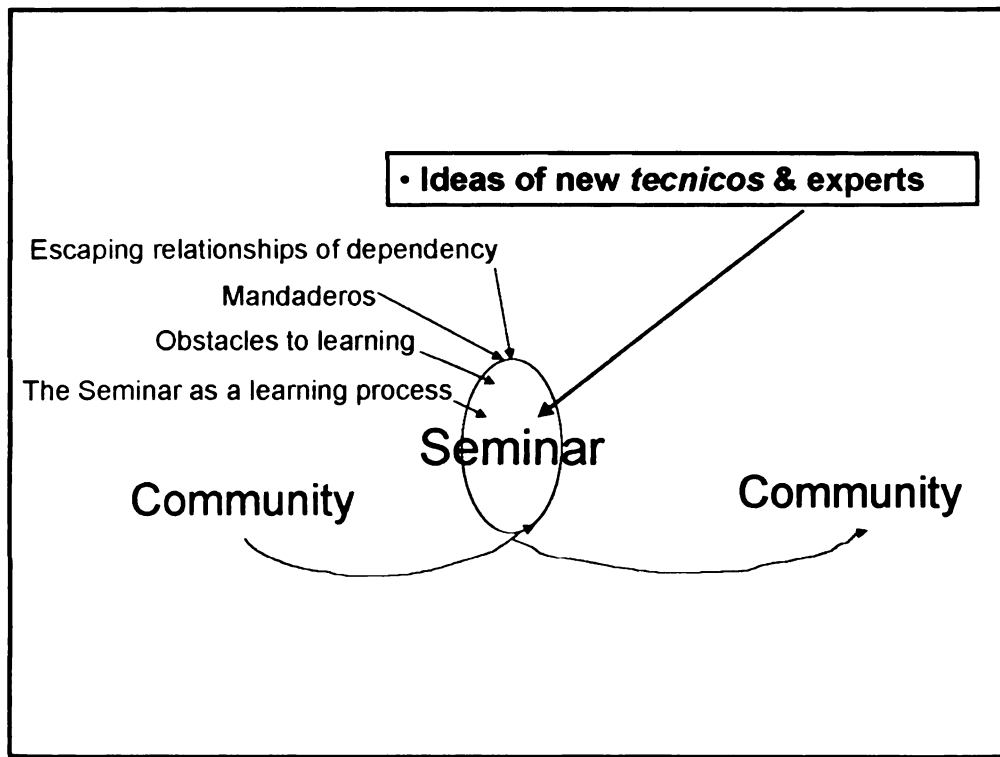
In the Seminar, the examination of this term was expanded to include

discussions about academics and other outsider experts.

Today's *tecnicos* follow a diffusion of technology approach based on a

development as modernization model. However, the rural projects and programs

implemented by the government can also be understood as an extension of its

political activities and, as such, are designed to secure and maintain the political

support of the peasantry (Fox 1994). The Seminar members discussed questions

relating to "*tecnicos* of the future," asking how these *tecnicos* would fit into a new

development process and explored what characteristics a new *tecnico* should

have.

The following comments express some of these ideas.

"*Tomorrow's tecnicos should wear the shirt of the campesino.*"

"*These new tecnicos should understand the community.*"

"*Tecnicos of the future should serve the people, not themselves.*"

"*The point of departure for these new tecnicos should be the knowledge of the people.*"

"*This new learning should be a mix of ways of knowing; a mix of the peoples' and the tecnico's knowledge.*"

I drew attention to the gendered nature of our discussion, pointing out that,

"*When we talk about these new tecnicos we have been saying 'they,' but what we are thinking is 'he'.... We should remember women when we talk about new tecnicos ...* [and] *take women into account.*"

This idea lead to a discussion in which it was pointed out that the Seminar had

not giving equal attention to the women's groups in the Seminar and had not

invited any women's groups engaged in land tenure struggles to join the

Seminar.

Later in the afternoon, the discussion moved to how communities, on their

own, have addressed the issue of inventing new "*tecnicos*" or experts by

collectively supporting students to attend universities. This usually entailed great

sacrifice by the community and the student's family. The communities paid for

part of the student's cost, but expected them to return home when they had completed their studies to dedicate themselves to the needs of the community. When these students returned home, the community expected them to serve their community in legal matters, especially those relating to land tenure issues.

In the Seminar, one community asked for and received matching funds so that two of its young people could go to law school. One of the Seminar participants suggested that students who were given this type of opportunity also be offered the chance to study with *campesinos* during the last year of their program. It was hoped that experiential rural education would help students retain their connectedness to community and increase their respect for local knowledge and for holders of that knowledge. When students leave home seeking higher education they often remain in urban areas and/or accept work with organizations or businesses that did not support the peasantry. If they return home, it is often with an attitude of superiority and/or denigration of their home community and culture. It was hoped that students sent to the University with the expectation of serving their communities and trained, in part, by *campesinos* would return as the kind of experts or *tecnicos* envisioned by Seminar participants.

The issue of expert as academics and their relationships to the people was also raised during another meeting, shortly after Pablo and Samuel returned from a conference in Queretero. The pair had accompanied two of the Seminar academics to represent the *campesino* perspective of the Seminar. When they

returned, Pablo questioned the relationship between academics and

campesinos: "It would be necessary to find people who could talk to us as

equals. If it is not a relationship of equals, *disconfianza* (distrust) enters." After

the conference in Queretero they asked: "What happens with our relationship

with these academics? They ask us a bunch of questions without telling us how

they are going to use the information. If it is really academics in a relationship of

equal to equal, this research would return to the same communities [it comes

from] maybe not right away, but at some point. Without this relationship, their

research will fail."

Participants began to ask each other where they could find this new

tecnico. No one seemed to have an answer. During the discussion, Tomás

reflected on different ways of learning, "We are born planting corn. We learn by

watching our parents. Mateo [a gifted *huesero* or bonesetter] is an example of

this way of learning." Mateo learned his trade through practice with an elderly

huesero from his community. Later Tomas suggests, "We are going to have to

invent a new *tecnico* - an empirical expert like Mateo." The discussions of new

tecnicos and other forms of experts brought into the open the idea of unequal

relationships between "experts" and local people. The characteristics of *new*

experts and leaders were slowly elaborated -- respect, humility, service, and an

appreciation for the knowledge of others. The *campesino* participants began to

recognize, both in theory and in practice, their own abilities to invent and control

"experts" for the betterment of communities. The idea of a new type of *tecnico*

contributed to the analysis of relationships with outsiders and added to a slowly emerging theme focusing on the future of both communities and the Seminar.

Despite the restrictive understanding of power and leadership in the Seminar and in communities, Seminar participants began analyzing their own (and each other's) skills as community leaders -- to help improve their theory and practice of leadership. A few participants began to explore and talk about the ideas of leadership among themselves outside the dialogue and discussions in the Seminar.

6.7 Theme 7: Envisioning the Future

"Envisioning the future" was a key concept that emerged in the Seminar enabling participants to address the future of their communities (see Figure 13). The first mention of envisioning the future appeared in Cerro Niebla with the words *chi iiza*. Both in Cerro Niebla and in the Seminar, the idea of envisioning the future helped communities raise their eyes from the immediate problems at hand to ask questions about why these problems existed and what changes could be made.

Participants felt, however, that they first had to understand what was wrong -- and what they should avoid – before they could find solutions. Identifying this problematic served as a wedge to open up spaces previously closed to examination. The following comments illustrate some of these ideas about understanding the problematic:

Figure 13. Envisioning the Future

• *Chi iiza* - envisioning the future

Escaping relationships of dependency

Mandaderos

Obstacles to learning

The Seminar as a learning process

Ideas of new *tecnicos* & experts

Seminar

Community   Community
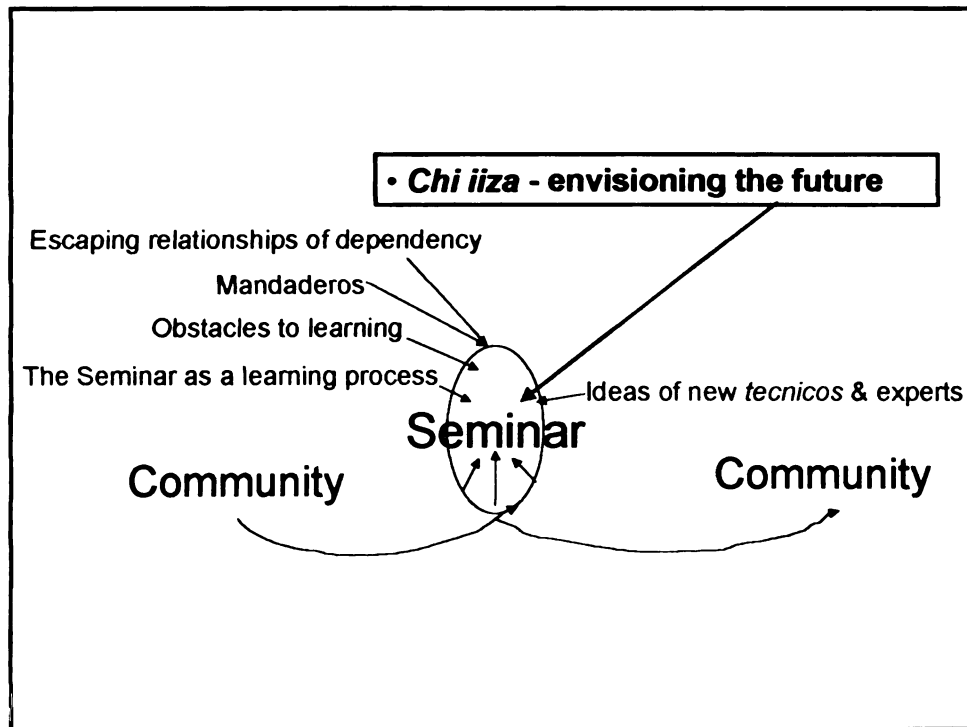
"[What is happening now] is like a disease. We have to ask what the causes are and why they are happening. Everything has a cause. Look at AIDS, it's a new disease that didn't exist before. Studies were done and now we understand how it's contacted, but it still can't be cured...."

"[We could say] our community was sick. We went to "doctor" Gonzales[57] to get a cure. He diagnosed the sickness and told us what to do.... We looked for other doctors and here [in the Seminar] we did our own diagnostic and the Seminar suggested what medicine to use...."

"But sometimes the patient doesn't want to take the medicine...."

"Or the medicine doesn't kill the bug. We had to ask why do we have this problem, what is its origin. We had to examine our history... We need to begin to understand how our community became sick...."

"...but the old medicine doesn't work."

[57] An agrarian reform official.

"Something called globalization has appeared and our old defenses no longer serve. We need an in-depth understand before we can move ahead."

The metaphors of illness, diagnosis and medicine were frequently used to talk about community problems and their solutions. Participants felt that they had to understand the history and origins of community problems before the problems could be solved. They also recognize that the "symptoms" they were experiencing related to something called globalization -- a disease they had not encountered before.

6.8 Theme 8: Regional Diagnostics

The need to contextualize community challenges led to the adoption of "regional diagnostics " (see Figure 14). A regional diagnostic was suggested by the coordinator as a means to identify problems and assess resources available to communities on a regional level. A form of regional diagnostics had been used several years yearly in the struggle for the land, but the concept was new to current participants. Once these resources were identified, they could be drawn upon for future community change efforts. The diagnostics could help participants recognize their own agency in building their future and establish a proactive stance towards change.

Figure 14. Regional Diagnostics

Escaping relationships of dependency

Mandaderos

Obstacles to learning

The Seminar as a learning process

• Regional Diagnostic

Chi iiza - envisioning the future

Ideas of new *tecnicos* & experts

Seminar

Community   Community
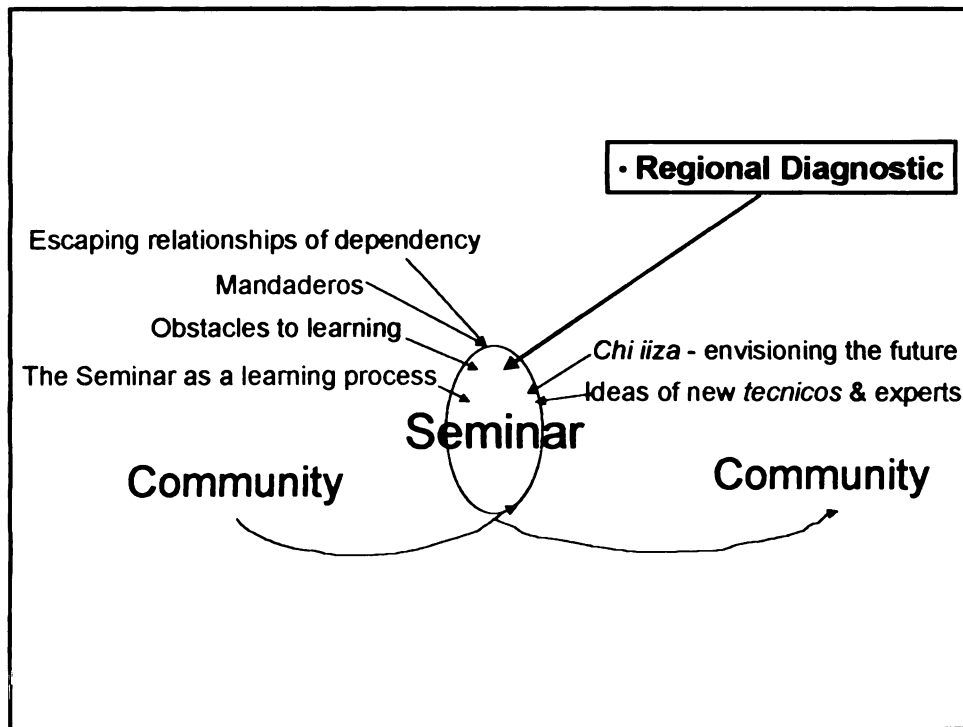
Initially, however, it seemed that the idea of regional diagnostics was foreign to the *campesino* participants. Over time, the meaning became clearer, although many seemed to remain skeptical as to the usefulness of the idea in helping communities resolve their problems. A few communities began to utilize regional diagnostics, but adapted them to suit their own needs. Pablo, from San Carlos, was the first to do a type of regional diagnostic. At the outset, in his usual

cautious manner, he said he was unclear about what it meant:

> We are different ethnic communities [here in the Seminar]. We are also here with different capacities, each participant contributing according to own their ability. *Maestros* (teachers) have their way of saying things, *campesinos* have their way. And in our community, we understand in our own way. We don't have a good understanding of what it means to do a diagnostic for the future - we only have a superficial idea. But we want our children to go to school, to eat well, to have decent clothes -- this is what a better life means to us.

Later in the day, Pablo added, "What is the way out? How can we ensure that our community is sustainable so we don't get lost in all the problems we have? We need a diagnostic. It is a plan -- a map to show us where to walk." He went back to his community and began a regional diagnostic, drawing upon his knowledge of transect walks – an activity with which he was familiar with based on an earlier experience with a local NGO. Pablo incorporated the idea of transect walks into the new idea of regional diagnostics. Several months later, he returned to the Seminar with an in-depth diagnostic that detailed the historic, political, and cultural characteristics of the Upper and Lower Mixe region. After several months, another community had completed a regional diagnostic, while other communities were beginning their own.

Regional diagnostics were developed with an eye to the future. This allowed communities to look differently at their histories, their locales, and the resources they contained. A focus on the future not only complemented the earlier problem-focused perspective of the Seminar and communities, but they also appeared to lend a more critical aspect to the Seminar's discussions. The

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idea of diagnostic would soon reappear in the Seminar, but this time the Seminar would be the "patient."

6.9 The Issues of Truth and Transparency

Seminar participants often approached a problem and its solution obliquely -- slowly moving from the periphery to related issues, backing off again, later returning to the core of the issue or waiting until it was revealed through questioning and discussions. Use of the Seminar's metaphors often allowed participants to broach subjects that could not be spoken of directly. This type of indirectness was understood by, and resolved through, the shared culture and language of the Seminar.

At times, however, sensitive issues were intentionally presented in unclear and obfuscating terms. I will not elaborate on these issues given their "sensitive" nature and issues of confidentiality. However, the Seminar participants reacted against this lack of transparency, declaring that this mode of communication inhibited Seminar members' ability to assist or suggest solutions.

Over dinner one evening, I asked Antonio, "When do people tell the truth in these situations?" He responded, "When there is no other option, when they are drowning." Yet, the Seminar members struggled to convince each other of the need for transparency or truth.

The following comments illustrate several of these points:

"Some things are not said in the Seminar for political reasons, when there is risk in telling the truth, or when people are afraid of appearing stupid. But we can not plan for the future if we do not speak the truth."

Pablo speaking of the community San Pedro, *"There are forces that don't allow the community to be open. What is this force? We need to understand it because it appears to be the core of the problem. [We understand that] sometimes people arrive at the Seminar and do not say everything. Some things are very sensitive and can't be talked about."*

"When a community elects a representative to the Seminar it is to solve problems by telling the truth. We come to the Seminar to say we've failed. If we can't say we've failed here, how can we fix the problem? .... It's a sickness that we have in communities and no one has the cure, but here in the Seminar we have to tell the truth."

"There are always things that are oculto (hidden) *- but here in the Seminar there is more confidence, more trust than in communities...."*

Despite these concerns, every member of the Seminar at one time or another could say that they were less than forthright when talking about sensitive issues. Yet, all members felt that a certain level of transparency was necessary in order to communicate effectively and assist communities in resolving the problems they faced. A consensus was arrived at to establish new procedure/s to overcome obstacles to communication created by this lack of truthfulness.

6.9.1 Theme 9: Saturday - the Day of Truth

In the May 1998 meeting, "Saturday - the day of truth" emerged from discussions about planning for the future (see Figure 15). There was general

Figure 15. Saturday - the Day of Truth
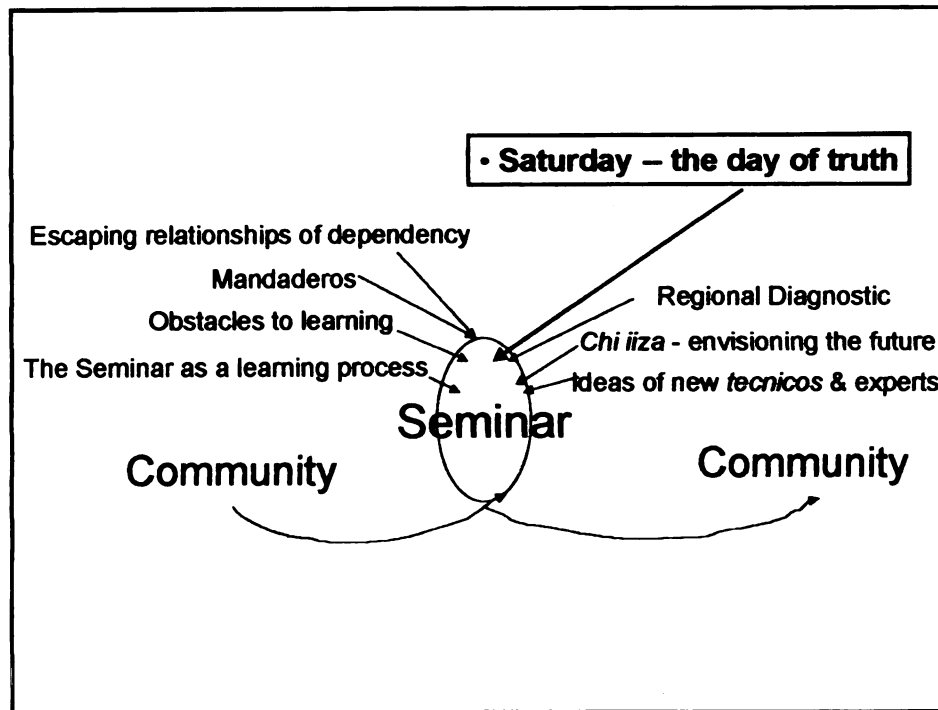
consensus that "we can not plan for the future without truth." One participant

referred to this truth as, "a light to show what should be encouraged and

strengthened and to illuminate what should not be done." When Saturday -- the

day of truth was implemented participants were invited to stay an extra day if

they wanted to talk about what they did not feel comfortable speaking of in the

larger group. Saturday became the day to "say the things that can not be said."

Saturday — the day of truth presented an opportunity where participants

could speak of things that they normally would not or could not raise, either in

their own communities or in the Seminar. This expanded openness allowed

Seminar participants to overcome several endemic barriers to communication --

fear of appearing foolish, fear of reprisals in their own communities, and fear of

persecution by "enemies." It also permitted an explicit recognition that the issues

that "could not be spoken of" where shared by the majority of participating

communities.

Gradually, however, Saturday as the day of truth disappeared and was

replaced by topics introduced by the coordinator or by issues introduced by

community representatives that appeared to have a certain urgency to them.

These topics included, but were not limited to, an immediate appearance in court,

the threat of violence in a community, or the urgent invitation to the Seminar to

attend a community assembly or meet with community officials.

The topics introduced by the Seminar's coordinator were based on his

vision and goals for communities and the Seminar. Smith (1997: 195) notes a

similar dynamics, commenting, "...outsiders, however well-intentioned

(consciously or not) can drive a process with their own ideas of what should

happen." These topics included questions such as: What is globalization? What

is free trade? Why has the price of corn fallen? While these questions appear

central to the discussion of envisioning the future and reinventing communities,

they displaced the original focus of Saturday as the day of truth. These questions

and other similar topics were presented without consensus as to how and when

they would be discussed. It seemed that the coordinator at times mistook

participants' silence as consent. Participants' response to these topics seemed to

be guided by a respect for the coordinator's intellectual authority and experience, culturally defined roles of leadership, and the intense need for advice from those who had access to the "outside world."

Despite the disappearance of Saturday as the day of truth, the recognition of the need for truth and transparency remained, as did a certain level of confidence to "say the things that could not be said." The idea of truth and transparency was absorbed in such a way that it served as a guide or reference for further interactions.

The incongruencies between the Seminar's internal organization and its dual goals of developing better community leaders and assisting communities' in creating a better future slowly came to the fore. Truth, with growing frequency, came to resemble truth as defined by Senge (1990), a "willingness to work out the ways we limit or deceive ourselves from seeing what is and continually challenge our theories of why things are the way they are." Seminar members began to question and examine the activities of the Seminar, how it carried out its activities, and how it understood itself.

6.10 Re-visioning the Seminar

With the introduction of Saturday – the day of truth, an openness began to emerge to discuss internal issues relating to the Seminar. The members began raising issues relating to participation. This did not happen all at once or did it always happen directly; discussions of these issues evolved over a period of

several months. Seminar participants began to ask, "What do we as the Seminar want to be and how can we achieve this vision?" Members then began to identify factors that inhibited the Seminar from achieving its full potential. Initial themes included a lack of participation, commitment, punctuality and a vision for the future. Later themes involved social relationships. These factors echoed themes shared with Seminar members and their communities, but now the object of reflection and analysis was the Seminar itself.

6.11 Theme 10: Lack of Participation

Lack of participation was understood by Seminar members against the backdrop of the "struggle for the land." The period of the struggle for the land was the high point of organization and participation in communities. The land was the life or death issue, uniting communities against the common "enemy" of the large landholders or *caciques*. Members judged their own participation in the Seminar on the standards established during that time period. Members also identified another element of participation, "false participation" motivated by the desire for monetary and other forms of benefits through government projects or programs. In the Seminar, levels of participation were higher when: 1) the issue under discussion was serious, i.e., impending violence; 2) there was general interest in the topic rather than a community-specific problem, i.e., medicinal plants or agricultural production; and/or 3) it was a problem that the majority of communities had experienced, i.e., the implementation of an *amparo*.

Figure 16. Lack of Participation
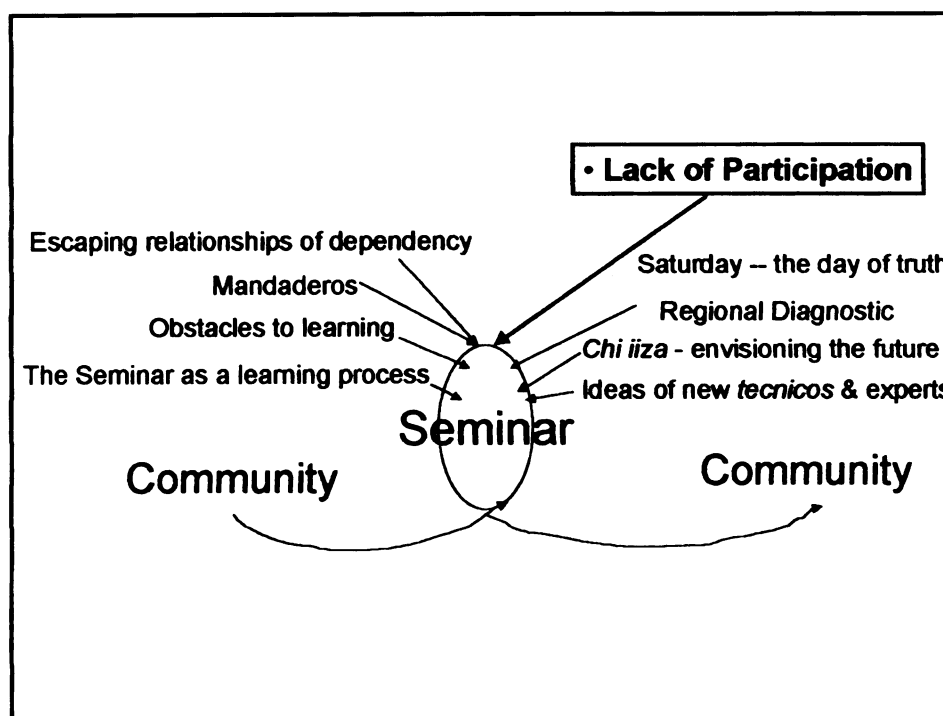
Levels of participation were lower when the academics and a few experienced community organizers dominated discussions, irrespective of whether issues were "serious," or interesting, or not. In these discussions, women and other less experienced members did not often participate or present their ideas.

It appeared that levels of participation in the Seminar were, at times, manifestations of broader Mexican social inequalities. Kaufman (1997: 153) notes that these "structural differences in participation apply to many categories of social hierarchy and oppression - relating to class, sex, color, age, religion, nationality, physical well being and sexual orientation. These categories are often intertwined and mutually determined." In Oaxaca, the categories of class,

ethnicity and gender appeared to be the most obvious factors limiting or increasing participation.

In the Seminar, "authority" based on these categories created forms of dependency on "experts" that were akin to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Members' participation appeared constrained because they were not experienced. Because of the lack of knowledge and experience, the members sought out knowledgeable and sympathetic individuals who could assist them. However, these same members were hesitant to challenge themselves or to recognize their own abilities, and they did not allow themselves to develop their own skills or confidently present their own knowledge in the presence of those identified as "leaders." While members encouraged each other to overcome self-imposed barriers to learning and leadership, these urgings were difficult to put into practice. Seminar participants struggled to find a way to deal with the different capacitates and ways of participating that were historically situated outcomes of the culture and structure of the larger society (Kaufman 1997).

Several suggestions were made during the course of discussions to rectify the propensity of some not to fulfill their obligations to participation in Seminar discussions. In communities, fines or *multas* were a common way of punishing community members who did not fulfill their community obligations. Members explained the different forms *multas* took — monetary fines, increased workloads, or even jail time. The Seminar participants consider this model of punishment to encourage "discipline" in participation.

Several months later, the idea of *multas* was raised again. An elder Mixe

man, who late became known as Don *Viejito*[58] because of his sense of humor,

had remained silent during most of the Seminar meetings he attended. When he

did speak it was in broken Spanish and it often appeared he had not understood

the topic under discussion. In April 1999, he broke his silence by telling a joke

during a discussion on the idea of punishment for tardiness: "In our community

we decided to impose a *multa* on those who stayed out past a certain time. An

individual in the assembly meeting suggested this and we agreed. The next night

this same man was drinking and stayed out past the time he had proposed. We

threw him in jail. His wife came to find him the next day and we had to laugh and

to tell her he was in jail. Sometimes the idea of *multas* backfires!" Amidst

laughter, an unspoken agreement was arrived at and the issue of *multas* was

resolved and not raised again.

As participants began to analysis the Seminar and contemplate how to

improve the organization, the topic of punctuality was also raised. People

habitually arrived late to Seminar meetings. During one meeting, we had agreed

to begin the next day at 9:00 a.m. *en punto* (on the dot). At the designated time,

only one participant (other than the academics and the group from Nayarit) had

arrived. As people began to trickle in, we addressed the topic of tardiness. The

discussion quickly expanded to include a number of topics, some related to

[58] A respectful, but affectionate term for "little old man."

tardiness and some not. Of these points, only the issue of punctuality was dealt

with. The following statements are excerpts from this discussion.

"We need discipline."

"Latecomers should be fined."

"I agree with this, but we are late at times because we stay at a place that is quite far from the Seminar."

"Another problem is that people say the same thing two or three times. The timekeeper should say you are repeating yourself."

"We are trying to figure out the best options we have. We've suggested punishment, but not everyone will feel the punishment. Some people go outside and appear not to have an interest in what is going on."

"That might be because people are repeating themselves or because people are tired and go out to sleep. These things are valid."

"We come from far away and use Thursday to travel. We suggest that we start later on Thursday."

"Also people have other commitments when they are here in Oaxaca."

"We can't get here until 6:00 p.m."

"We have to walk three hours to where we can catch a bus, but we can't always count on it. We could come a day early, but only if we don't have other commitments in the community."

"What time should we start next month?"

"We suggest 12:00 p.m."

There was a nodding of heads and a general consensus appeared to be

reached. The next meeting was to begin at noon instead of 8:00 a.m.

This discussion and consensus contrasted with other months' when the

academics set the time of the meetings. While this may seem relatively

unimportant, this open discussion and decision-making was a marked change for the "leadership" of the Seminar. This was one of the first indications of decisions for the Seminar being made by all Seminar participants together, instead of by a select few. In AR, the norm is that decisions are made by management and/or outside researchers. PAR, in contrast, encourages a more decentralized decision-making process – in theory, the larger group makes decisions. The Seminar, while espousing a PAR philosophy, at this time, resembled an AR approach in practice. The issue of punctuality was a "safe" issue to discuss and provided an unexpected vehicle for expanding decision-making and enlarging the learning in the Seminar.

6.12 Theme 11: The Ronda

This expansion continued when the *ronda* was implemented (see Figure 17). A *ronda* is nothing more than all members speaking in turn. After a *bitácora* was read in the Seminar, typically the presenter asked if anyone had any questions, comments, or if there was a need for further clarification. Those who wished to ask a question or make a comment raised their hands. The presenter then "gave the word" or recognized the speaker.

A crucial discussion of the situation in San Pedro began to change the dynamics of participation. As mentioned earlier, the problem in San Pedro centered on the *comisariado's* unwillingness to recognize the majority of the community's population as *ejiditarios*, thereby denying them the right to

participate in the community assembly. Each passing month seemed to increase

the possibility that this problem would be solved through violence. The Seminar

members decided to invite the *comisariado*, the new *gestión agraria* members,

and several other important community members to a Seminar meeting to

discuss the situation. The tension and threat of imminent violence in the

community compelled most of the Seminar members to participate in the

discussion. We felt that if we did not add our council to the debate, the

community might do something it would regret.

Figure 17. The Ronda
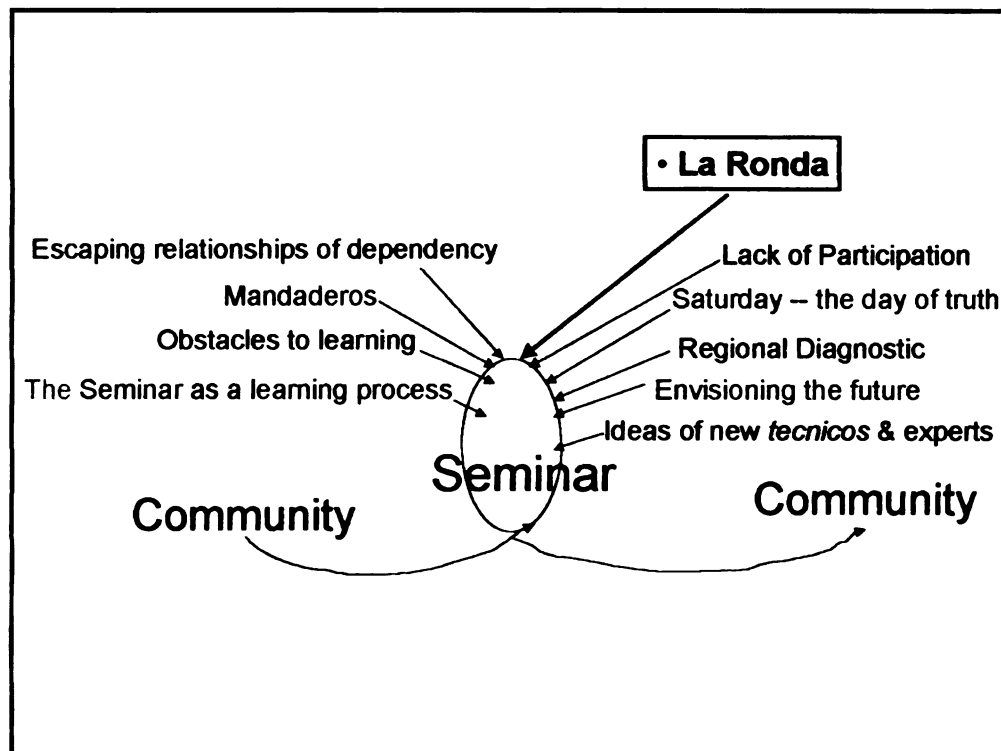
The meeting had a strong impact on both the community leaders and the Seminar participants. A feeling of moving forward permeated the Seminar as we later reflected upon the impact of the meeting on the leaders of San Pedro and the amount and quality of participation that had taken place in the Seminar. Virtually every member of the Seminar had contributed to the dialogue driven by their concern and commitment. The next month, participants decided to try and institutionalize the dynamics established during the discussion of San Pedro through a *ronda*.

The *ronda* was implemented after a *bitácora* was read. In a *ronda*, the "word" passes to the individual sitting next to him or her, giving each person the opportunity to ask questions and give his or her opinion. While this is nothing novel, its introduction in the Seminar was a marked departure from the form of presentations of the past. In the past, only those who had something "important" to contribute spoke. The *ronda* set up conditions so that everyone, even the most reticent, could speak.

When the *ronda* was analyzed, members decided that the *bitácora* presenter could choose whether or not to use a *ronda* based on time constraints. But regardless of the choice, increasing numbers of participants entered into the dialogue. The *ronda* seemed to give confidence to those who had not spoken before. It also seemed to help the academics and more assertive community leaders to control their urge to dominate discussions.

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When the success of the *ronda* was evaluated the next month, everyone agreed that the level and quality of participation had increased. This, of course, did not mean that everyone participated equally. A few said that they did not understand, others said little or just agreed with the person who spoke before them. But, in general, the quality of the dialogue improved and the number and diversity of people participating increased substantially. The *ronda* set an implicit standard for the quality and quantity of speaking. It also established expectations legitimating the process, rather than the outcome, of speaking. People became less inhibited about feeling foolish, being afraid to speak, etc. The *ronda* removed a principle obstacle to speaking in the Seminar due to this inexperience and fear.

The requirement to speak implemented with the *ronda* impelled people to participate more as they seemed to internalize new ideas and norms of participation. In the February 1999 meeting, an older woman from San Carlos who had never spoken before entered the *ronda*. Her voice shook in her nervousness as she encouraged the *compañeras of* Tierra Piedras in their embroidery project, "Do not become disanimated my friends. It is good that you are learning…. There is a woman in Mexico City who buys clothes made in San Carlos. May be you can sell to her. Do not be discouraged." Later during the same meeting, other women from San Carlos joined the conversation as the discussion turned to access to and knowledge of agricultural markets. This was a topic typically reserved for men.

While discussion in the Seminar did not at this time revisit the concept of the logic of the *milpa*, the diversity that made up the Seminar multiplied and its potential to find new solutions appeared to increase. The space in the Seminar expanded to include everyone as active participants rather than devolve to its prior state where only the more experienced members spoke and other members appeared as recipients for the knowledge of others (Freire 1970, 1990).

6.13 Theme 12: The Transformation of the Seminar

The themes of the Seminar did not occur in a linear fashion. These themes did, however, reinforce each other and contribute to a movement towards an increasingly collaborative organization. Each theme contributed in its own way to a complex and emerging vision of the future for the Seminar. The final theme, the transformation of the Seminar, brought the idea of the future more sharply into focus (see Figure 18).

Figure 18. The Transformation of the Seminar
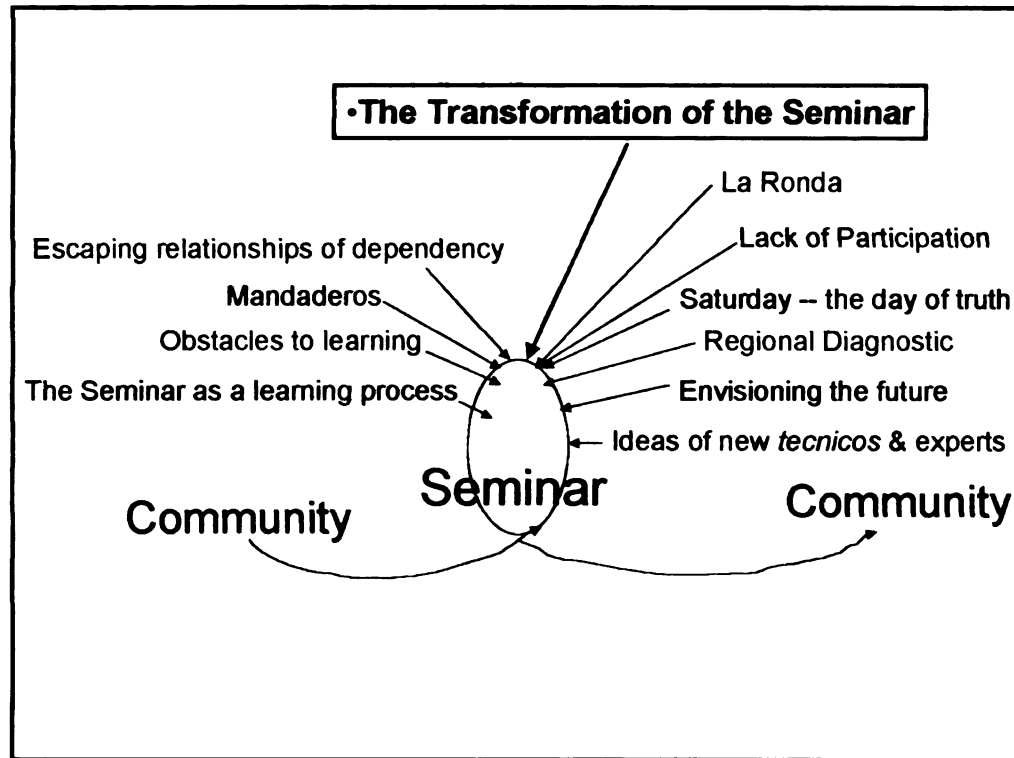
As Valle del Norte presented their *bitácora* in April 1999, Antonio raised the issue of work that had not been completed and why people had not done the things they had committed to. Antonio's final point was that this issue was "tied to the transformation of the Seminar." He suggested that we needed to "replant" the idea of change in the Seminar. "If we don't," he pointed out, "we would be starting with the tail instead of the *patas* (the feet)...."

The month prior, Antonio had suggested that we add topics to our agenda for the day. Previously the agenda consisted solely of cases, e.g., community and group issues. In April, at Antonio's suggestion, several participants listed

specific topics – completing pending work, discussion of an upcoming visit to Nayarit, Seminar hours, and how to discover new solutions. I suggested adding the theme, "the transformation of the Seminar." After a brief discussion, we all agreed that this was the central issue and other topics fell within this topic. The "transformation" of the Seminar was termed the *problamón* (the big problem.) We all recognized that this was a discussion that could not be dealt with in one meeting, but rather would be an ongoing and lengthy discussion.

Organizational transformation, according to Nevis et al. (1996), means to "fundamentally change organizational reality.... not only the practices, policies, behavior and structures but also the underlying mental models, meanings and consciousness of the people involved." Some of the Seminar participants seemed to understand the transformation of the Seminar in terms similar to those of Nevis -- raising structural issues, such as internal organization and practices -- and discussing ideas such as *mandaderos*, participation, and the future of the Seminar.

The discussion of the transformation of the Seminar began with a reaffirmation that the context of rural Mexico was changing and the recognition that the Seminar needed to "reinvent" itself:

> We are an organizational entity with an identity. We are leaders with responsibilities. The state of Oaxaca is becoming increasingly militarized, and economic and political problems are more serious. The Seminar needs to be more concrete and less a space where friends get together.

Given the importance of this meeting for the Seminar, it is expressed here

in the words of the Seminar participants. Because Seminar discussions tend to

be long, drawn out conversations interspersed with other topics, the full text of

this meeting is not shared. Rather, what follows are relevant excerpts from the

dialogue on the transformation of the Seminar:

Antonio, *"Donde vamos (where we are going) - it's a big question. We talk about what we've done well. Diana asks us what do we want to be. We ask ourselves despues de la tierra que (after the land what)? As a Seminar, we are asking the same thing. How do we get out of this mess? What are the mechanisms?... Together we must explore where the Seminar is going, we must look outside ourselves, broaden our vision."*

Cristian, *"The theme, the transformation of the Seminar, comes from some of us who see changes in the Seminar.... We could have this discussion among a few of us. But we are having it as an open discussion – as Julio said, we are all subjects of the Seminar.... Several of us have a perception -- a feeling that is not well defined. Earlier three or four of us got together to talk. We feel that we should find answers in the Seminar, something to take away with us.... We ask, 'Why are we here? Why do we continue to come to the Seminar?' Maybe I should use another word -- we should reconocer (acknowledge) what the Seminar has done in communities... We come for solutions.... We need to modify the Seminar, without losing the essence of what we are doing. We need a new structure... If we think of the Seminar as a cobija (blanket or cover), some have gotten left out in the cold.... Now that we have the land, we are confronting other things: globalization, economic problems, social phenomenon that are new broncas (quarrels) that we didn't have in the 1980s. The Seminar has to learn, has to respond... We all have to discuss these things."*

Manuel, *"From the beginning, the Seminar principally dealt with land issues, although our community didn't come here for reasons of land struggles... but others came because of the land. Those problems are not as serious as before. We need to look at the transformation of the Seminar. We all have to take part in the discussion of the transformation.... In our case, we feel as if we have reached a point and we do not know how to continue. The Seminar is like a school that teaches real life issues, not a school of theory, but a school of practice. It has a focus on answers for the difficult situation we are living.... We are living in a difficult situation where it is easy to lose the way. The Seminar should be a space for reflection and analysis over each of the problems*

presented... Our group is at a point where we want to present proposals for projects. There is a desire to move ahead, but none of us knows the path to follow....”

Antonio, *“We all feel these doubts. When we ask 'What do we want of the Seminar,' we are asking what do we want of ourselves -- because we are all the Seminar. Each of us is playing the role of mandadero. We have to find ways to communicate among ourselves and to understand each other. As we have said, sometimes the internal problems are more difficult than we can present. The Seminar can't find the solution. We have to ask what is going to be the level of participation of each of us. Not just of being here, but real participation -- to presenting problems, to breaking barriers that keep us from understanding each other. We might think, I presented that clearly, but perhaps that's not true. We have to look for a way to make it so. We have to break obstacles so there is understanding. Cristian said it clearly, there is a need for change. We need to ask what do we want to be.”*

Cristian, *“What is the human side of the Seminar? Perhaps it needs to be injected with new blood. We are all mandaderos here -- maybe we've come to the Seminar to get a breath of fresh air. It's possible that this is it. There are different levels of mandaderos.”* He motions towards Antonio, Juan, the coordinator and other experienced community leaders. *“...If we who are mandaderos present ourselves as apostles we can be easily crucified. But we have to figure out how to harness or use this part of our character. It is frightening. I feel that the Seminar, the space here is filled with telarañas.* [Literally, spider webs -- figuratively, ideas from the past.]

Sergio, *“We came here to confront land tenure problems, but now things have changed. It's like a boy who is now a man.... We need to look for new solutions. We are talking about leaders -- we need to be fructífero* (fruitful or productive.)”

During this part of the dialogue, several experienced community leaders and the anthropologist expressed their ideas. They each identified past accomplishments of the Seminar relating to land tenure issues. Communities had joined the Seminar because it offered a collective search for solutions to the complex problems relating land tenure issues. But now the problems facing communities were qualitatively different. Manuel described his community's

dilemma of arriving at a point where they no longer knew how to proceed. Antonio, Cristian, Manuel, and Sergio all agreed that times were changing and they agreed that the Seminar needed to change as well. Manuel drew attention to the idea that the Seminar was a school – a place for reflection and analysis. He then suggested that we reflect on the transformation of the Seminar. Antonio pointed out that we needed to break the barriers to understanding by finding ways to "communicate among ourselves."

The change or transformation of the Seminar needed to take place as a collective endeavor including all the members. Antonio proposed that we ask what we wanted to be as an organization. The others emphasized that we were all collectively the Seminar. Cristian said, "The Seminar has to learn how to respond." We had to ask, "What do we want of ourselves?" and "What is going to be our level of participation?" These questions implied that everyone needed to participate in this change because the Seminar was not just a few individuals, but it was an organization made up of all its members.

The idea of *mandadero* was also stressed – the idea that everyone in the Seminar was a *mandadero*, each with their own skills. Cristian asked us to "harness" that quality. Antonio raised an issue that had been mentioned in previous discussions – that of broadening our vision by looking outside of ourselves. Sergio called upon each of us to think about being successful leaders in these new times.

As this portion of the dialogue drew to a close, I suggested a *ronda*. I did so to expand the dialogue -- up until this point, only the leadership of the Seminar -- both academics and community leaders -- had engaged in the dialogue. Turning to a *ronda* was also a way of continuing the conversation on what appeared to be an important topic. Later, when I reflected on this portion of the meeting, I realized that -- by opening a space where more members could take part -- I was operating in the active logic of the *milpa*.

A *ronda* began.

Manolo, "*I often feel ashamed to speak and the words stay in my mouth -- but its time for everyone to speak. Those that are first can be last and those who are last can be first. Often those who are last have the best ideas.*"

Pablo, "*Many times, there are those with more preparation and others with less. We ask ourselves, why don't we all give our opinion? We are afraid that we will be ridiculed, or we feel like we don't know how. It costs us a lot to come here -- a place to stay, our food -- but we know that our community's problems drive us here.... When your cargo is over, people don't treat you the same any more[59]. We need to reflect. It's like we were a family here in the Seminar.... But if we don't have a document that says who we are, how can we complete our responsibilities?*"

Don Salomón, "*... Some say it's not your responsibility to solve the community's problems, that it's the responsibility of the [elected] representatives. But the main thing is to have support of the community.*"

Pablo, "*I have come to ask those who have the most knowledge to help me resolve the problems of my community.*"

Diana, "*...but this could be a new situation where there are no experts. It might be that there were experts before, during the struggle for the land. But now it*

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[59] Pablo is an ex-*comisirado* who is still involved in the Seminar even though he is no longer an elected community official. He has struggled between his own growing leadership skills and knowledge acquired, in part, through his participation in the Seminar and his community's unwillingness to accept his council.

seems that we are trying to follow an old way of doing things -- of looking to experts for answers -- even if they don't have them. These experts we ask try to respond and to help. But it might be time to rethink this idea of expert and maybe the idea of "enemy." The idea of enemy used to unite people, but now it may be a barrier to learning from others, to working with outsiders, and to finding solutions."

At that point, we broke for lunch and returned to addressing community

issues. On Saturday, the theme of the transformation of the Seminar was taken

up again.

Cristian, *"We need a certain structure to make us more responsible, a minimal and organic structure.... We have a space, a telephone, a computer -- to say these things belong to the Seminar is to say they belong to no one. I'm not saying this should be a hotel, but now it's as if they belong to some one else... The hardest part of all of this is re-structuring the Seminar... The Seminar should give answers to the questions each of us ask.... We all want to take something concrete home with us. The Seminar should plantearse (provide something.) There may be certain ingredients for what we are trying to do. We can decide how to put them together. But now we are asking, now that we have the land what are we going to do. I don't know the recipe, but perhaps we need to have a certain orientation.... We have to be more active, more preciso (precise, clear or useful), more participative.... We are entering a new phase. We say we are mandaderos, leaders -- we should take advantage of this... This business of scheduling this is secondary. We need to think of the Seminar as a creation of all of us....*

Later in the day, Cristian continues his thoughts,

"I'm going to speak clearly and make a proposal. We recognize that we have our good and bad parts, but those of us who are here are here because we want to be. What if the Seminar disappeared, what would we do? We who have this commitment would have to invent a space just like it, perhaps even with the same name.... Now we have a coordinator. Why don't we have a different structure that recognizes that we are all mandaderos?... If we establish a structure that identifies certain aspects of the internal organization relating to projects, to resources, where we establish a certain division of labor. Now there is particular division of labor. We who are mandaderos of our own groups ask why don't we share in the work more. We intend to help train everyone so they can be leaders... to have a more active role. We should have a workshop where

we can identify what we want, so we can participate more, so that we can all be a part of the body that is the Seminar".

Antonio, *".... We all want and understand that the Seminar needs to change how it functions. It is a necessity... Each of us could do a diagnostic of the Seminar -- how each of us sees it and what each of us thinks the Seminar is...."*

At this point, I again asked if we could return to a *ronda* so that those who

had not spoken be given the opportunity to express their opinions.

Pablo, *"My concern about this is the same as when we began -- what does it mean? I am beginning to understand that it means to make us more efficient -- better. It is difficult for me to understand, even though I have been here five years.... I have to ask, is everyone here comfortable with the theme -- the transformation of the Seminar? It's clear that there are some concerns. But there are some that have trouble perceiving the need for a transformation and for others, it seems very urgent... I am beginning to understand. It's very interesting. It's like the idea of Saturday the day of truth -- but that lasted only a short time and then disappeared. It's good that we are returning to this openness..."*

Juan, *"The problems now are economic, but the question is how do we resolve these problems. Here in the Seminar we don't have a lot of resources. We need to figure out how to take advantage of what we have."*

Don Salomón, *"We need to analyze what goes with what and what doesn't.... We have to look at both the good and the bad of the Seminar.... We need to figure out how to involve more people in identifying what the problems are. We have to ask, is it the fault of the Seminar if things don't work out or the fault of the representatives who don't take the suggestions of the Seminar? We need to know the truth of things.... No one here is the patron (boss) -- we are all equal, but some get their fellowships and stay because of their commitment, while others leave."*

Crisitan, *"I think Antonio's idea of doing a diagnostic of the Seminar is a good idea. We could present our views on the Seminar what we would propose."*

Julio, *"I asked for everyone's opinion on this, Diana tried to summarize the main ideas, Loretta asked for an example, Pablo asked what it was, the Triques don't understand. I could give an example of what we mean by transformation."*

Crisitan, *"I'd say that that's not a good idea. It's better if the results were everyone's own idea. "*

Antonio. *"We who are here today could begin something to start for next month on Friday or Saturday. Part of the transformation of the Seminar could be that everyone participates, not just those of us who stay for Saturday.... We can present our ideas about the transformation of the Seminar as they occur to us. Maybe we can find a remedy if we all work together to find it."*

Interestingly, it was the community organizers who pushed most strongly for change in the Seminar. They were also the most articulate and experienced *campesino* members of the organization. The less experienced members took a more restrained or conservative approach, seeking to lead the discussion to personal issues, pointing to individual faults and/or advocating a cautious and slow approach to organizational change. The various reactions to the idea of organizational transformation appeared to differ given an individual's experience, level of consciousness, and length of participation in the Seminar. Individual identify based on class, ethnicity, and gender coincided with calls for transformation or caution. In general, those who advocated structural change were *mestizo* leaders; indigenous leaders asked for a more cautious approach. Indigenous women consistently said they did not understand.

6.14 The Diagnostic of the Seminar

On Saturday, a general consensus was reached that everyone write a diagnostic of the Seminar and a proposal for the future. A dialogue ensued about what a diagnostic was and how a diagnostic of the Seminar could be done. Some participants were unclear of what they were being asked to do. The coordinator

wanted to present his idea on how he would do his diagnostic, but I suggested that even though his intentions were good, people would then spend their energy trying to figure out what the coordinator wanted rather than present their own ideas. Most participants agreed with me. The coordinator conceded and did not present his interpretation of a diagnostic of the Seminar, although he did try and slip in his idea in during a later conversation. I pointed out this out, teasing him that he was trying to escape. He agreed and again did not present his explanation of how to do a diagnostic.

This small exchange, and similar ones between the coordinator and community organizers, represented a change taking place in relationships of the Seminar as it moved to become a more collaborative organization. Participants began to find their own path, instead of allowing leaders of the Seminar to show them the way. The topic of internal relationships increasingly entered the formal discussions. These discussions may have made people uncomfortable or uneasy, but the shared commitment to the improvement of the Seminar and trust in fellow participants appeared to help members overcome these feelings.

By the May 1999 Seminar meeting, five of us had "done our homework" and were ready to present a diagnostic of and proposal for the Seminar. Four of us presented our diagnostic during the May meeting. The fifth participant was the coordinator. He was not able to present his work because of time constraints. He later told that me that he was never able to present his diagnostic because there were more "pressing issues" to deal with.

6.14.1 Don Salomón's Diagnostics[60]

Don Salomón volunteered to share his work first. Don Salomón's analysis raised issues of discipline and completing the work assigned by the Seminar, i.e. community histories, *bitácoras*, and regional diagnostics. Don Salomón suggested that each month we have a *mesa* or board that reviewed the Seminar and its activities. "It could help us deal with things like rules, who participates and who doesn't, and it could help us think about the Seminar." He suggested that, in order for the Seminar to be of value to the participants, each of us needed to "complete our work." He also suggested that the Seminar strengthen its interactions with communities and community assemblies. He concluded, "My proposal is that each of us review our own participation and ask ourselves, why am I in the Seminar? Why do I come here? What can I do so that the Seminar functions better? Don Salomón's emphasis on the connection with and communication between the Seminar and communities was a timely reminder of the reason for the Seminar existence. The Seminar in a way was "at the service" of communities. But this relationship was one in which both partners as collective actors needed to be open and responsive to each other.

In his diagnostic, Don Salomón counseled the Seminar to improve its existing methods of doing business. He suggested that *bitácoras* were important

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[60] Don Salomón's diagnostic was a remarkable accomplishment. When he joined the Seminar, he was barely literate. Motivated by his commitment to serve his community, he taught himself how to read and write, eventually completing a historic account of his community. His diagnostic was the latest evidence of his self-confidence and his self-educated abilities.

and should be completed conscientiously, community visits should be continued or increased, participants should earn their *becas* through participation, and work emanating from community issues should be completed. Don Salomón placed the responsibility of improving the Seminar on members as individuals. While he did not say that he was speaking primarily of the *campesino* members, this was implied in his presentation. Don Salomón seemed to accept the superiority of the leadership and that their participation did not need to be improved. While this is understandable given Don Salomón's unwavering respect for authority, it did not help the Seminar go beyond its existing theory or practice. Don Salomón did not directly address the difficult issues that had increasingly been raised or alluded to in Seminar meetings. These difficult questions, such as who was the Seminar and why did it now exist, did not feature in his diagnostic.

Many comments raised during the *ronda* that followed Don Salomón's presentation echoed the issues he had raised -- more and better participation, responsibility, and discipline. It appeared that the criticism on the quality of participation and responsibility was directed towards the peasant participants, not the leadership of the Seminar. Despite the criticisms that had been leveled against "experts" and *tecnicos* in a general sense, the informal leadership of the Seminar seemed immune to such reprimands.

During the *ronda*, Antonio suggested that we write the most important points of each diagnostic on the board. Don Salomón asked Juan to write them

down. This was a distinct departure from most months, when only the academics

wrote on the board.

6.14.2 The Diagnostic of Valle del Norte

Antonio presented his group's diagnostic. He began with an apology:

"Before we begin, we want to say that our diagnostic, as well as the what may be said as a result of our analysis of the Seminar may raise more questions than they answer.... We hope that some of the criticisms that we raise give us, as the Seminar, the opportunity to know ourselves or perhaps even become part of a project of the Seminar. We hope that all of this will result in a constructive discussion in which each of us can absorb that which might be hurtful. Some of our words might appear harsh. But it is part of the reality of looking for solutions together. We hope that we can all learn from our mistakes and improve on our successes. Having said this, we can now begin our diagnostic of the Seminar."

The diagnostic of Valle del Norte began with a review of the problems addressed

in the Seminar. Antonio them moved to a review of the quality of participation in

the Seminar. He called upon the Seminar to be more participative, but suggested

that each one of us say what were the barriers to our own participation. Antonio

suggested we search for better ways to communicate where we use words that

everyone could understand. He proposed that the Seminar was a place to create

theories that inform our actions. The member communities and groups put the

theory into practice. He concluded that if the Seminar had to change because of

the changing context that confronted us and we would have to do so in two

stages. The first stage would be to address the issue of our internal organization

including organizing our time, getting our work done, being punctual, and

everyone doing their part.

"We should act," Antonio said, *"as if we were a human body where the Seminar was the brain... that gives us the ideas, the theories. Each group would form the other parts of the body – the ones that put the ideas into practice. This is why it's important that we all participate actively in the meetings."*

In ending, he utilized a metaphor of a bus and its chauffeur to refer to the Seminar and the issue of leadership:

"The Seminar is not like a bus with a chauffeur who will take us to wherever we want to go. But, we can't just leave the responsibility in the hands of the chauffeur and not pay any attention to where we are going until we've gotten there."

Before the ronda began, the coordinator asked Antonio about the second stage he had mentioned. Antonio responded that he had not mentioned it because we had to deal with the first stage relating to the internal organization of the Seminar before we could move on to the second stage. Later during a break, Antonio commented to me that he had tried to be very discrete in his choice of metaphors so as not to make the coordinator feel that he was being singled out for criticism. But Antonio felt that he had failed.

The next day I spoke to the coordinator and conveyed my sense that he had seemed hurt by Antonio's remarks. He agreed that he had. I responded, "But, sometimes you are the chauffeur and that's ok. There are times when we need you to be the chauffeur. But we can't let you be the chauffeur all the time." The coordinator smiled and said with relief, "That's just what Sergio [the anthropologist] said."

A *ronda* followed Valle del Norte's presentation.

David, *"We've talked about the effect of government programs on our community. We have to take advantage of them, but also be aware of our own responsibilities. I like the idea of forming small groups to take advantage of government projects."*

Pablo, *"Many times we don't pay attention and there is a lot of repetition, maybe because people don't understand. We need to put more effort into understanding each other. Each of us is responsible for this."*

Maria, *"The same thing happens with our children* [being irresponsible]. *Each of us has responsibilities. We were told last month to come early, but people still arrived late. Some of us in our community are asking what we can do so people feel their responsibility so that our work advances. We would advance if there was a group that worked together, but it seems that there are those who don't understand this."*

Pablo, *"We come here to find solutions but without understanding that this is a space where we come to search <u>together</u> to find solutions…. The question is how to proceed."*

Silvia, *"The Seminar is very important and punctuality and participation are important, but my question is how."*

Carmen, *"It seems to me that we keep repeating things and never arrive at any conclusions."*

Julio, *"Perhaps our first problem is our own success, we have resolved land tenure problems. Our second problem is the resolution of our internal difficulties."*

Sergio, *"The problems we have are internal. But why? They are a reflection of our environment…."*

Gabriel, *"We have solved our agricultural problems or at least part of them. Now we should consider what type of productive or commercial projects we can come up with that could stimulate a process to move forward. If we don't, the land we struggled so hard to gain means nothing…. Projects can serve to unite us. We could say, we need to go to the Seminar for a project of our own, like how we can export our products or something like that."*

Diana, *"I like the idea of projects that Antonio talked about, but that was the second phase. The first phase was the internal issue, both in the Seminar and in communities...."*

Don Salomón, *"People seem to come to the Seminar so that other people will solve their problems. Like Antonio said, the Seminar is not a bus that someone else is driving. Antonio and I have come to the same conclusion. I also agree that we should take advantage of projects. We could appoint a commission to identify a project someone has or develop projects through the Seminar. This would also help us understand where we are going as an organization."*

Antonio reiterated, *"... We aren't ready to do projects until internal issues are resolved and we've thought about how and why projects will serve and benefit us. For example, we need to think about how we can form alliances with other communities, but this is part of the second phase. We can't do this until we've resolved the first phase.... We need to decide if we are all the Seminar or if it's only a few — one, two, or three of us.*

In their diagnostic, the group from Valle del Norte directly addressed the issue of organizational structure and leadership in the Seminar. Given the cultural difficulties in raising these issues, they used metaphors to approach the topic less directly. They suggested that the solution for the Seminar's internal problems lay in participation where both the *campesinos* and the leadership examine their own forms of engagement. In their own words, it appeared that they were suggesting the Seminar become a more self-reflexive organization through dialogue.

The idea of a project was taken up and was beginning to be explored both as an economic endeavor and as a means to explore new forms of organizing. The words of Pablo came to mind when talking about the strategy of the *Grupo Nosotros*. Pablo explained that growing coffee was a "pretext" for organizing themselves. Projects could be a pretext for re-organizing the Seminar.

Antonio asked Pablo to summarize and write the main points of his

presentation and the *ronda* on the board. He wrote:

- Understand that we are all the Seminar (*autobus*)

- There are two stages: 1) internal problems 2) after the land what? (projects)

A new metaphor for social organization was entering the language of the

Seminar – the Seminar was imagined as a bus with a driver and passengers. If

we understood that we were <u>all</u> the Seminar, then we could <u>not</u> think of ourselves

as passive passengers waiting for the driver to deliver us to our destination. It

also meant that we must take an active role in deciding where we wanted to go

and in helping the bus arrive at its destination. It remains to be seen how these

themes will evolve.

We turned again to cases. Don *Viejito* gave his *bitácora*, presenting

several medicinal plants that they used in his community. Later in the day, we

returned to diagnostics.

6.14.3 Diana's Diagnostic

I was still struggling with how to express myself in a way that crossed the

immense gap that separated my world from the world of the Oaxacan

campesinos. The words I knew and the thoughts I expressed were often too

academic or too grounded in a "modern" Western world. I had decided to try to

show what I meant mostly in drawings. I had drawn a sketch of a traditional *milpa*

and a version of the Seminar as a social *milpa*. I had tried to make the members

identifiable by class, ethnicity, and gender. I began my diagnostic with how I had

come to understand the logic of the *milpa* and what it might looked like when

applied to the Seminar. During this portion of my presentation, I showed the two

drawings, explaining how the *milpa* logic had helped me understand the Seminar.

*"We've talked about the Seminar as if it was a social milpa. You could even say
that each participant was like a different kind of plant. But what makes us
different from plants in a milpa is that we each have different experiences,
distinct ways of talking and viewing the world. We could even say that we come
from different worlds. But instead of letting these differences divide us or cause
conflict, we look for ways to communicate.... Many of us speak different
languages and have different ways of understanding things, but we look for ways
to say things so that we can understand each other And when we are lucky and
we are able to understand each other, we come up with good ideas and solutions
to the problems that confront us."*

I talked about the Seminar as a "school" where we were teaching each

other to be *mandaderos* or leaders in our own communities. I also revisited the

ideas of service and power. We had talked about a power that could overwhelm

service. If that happened, a *mandadero* could become like a *cacique.* When

service overcame power, the *mandadero* might appear weak and ineffectual.

However, I suggested that there was another way to think of service and power.

We could think of them as if they were tools for different situations. A leader

needed to know when to draw upon one or the other, and when to keep them in

balance.

I then suggested that we could look at communities and the Seminar as if

they, too, had these forces. If they were not kept in balance, some groups or

individuals might not participate and others might dominate. Here, again, I suggested the trick was to have the right mix. Sergio raised the issue that some individuals had more experience or more education. He asked, "Don't they have the responsibility to share their knowledge with others?" I agree and said, "But the issue is not if knowledge and experienced is shared, but how it is shared.... If we recognize that we all have something to contribute and we all have something to learn, we can work at looking for the best mix or balance...." I returned to the concept of the logic of the *milpa*, adding the idea of communication. To my drawing, I added a line representing the ideal case of active communication, comparing it to an instance where communication was broken either through lack of or overly active participation.

I tried to tie the ideas of communication, participation, and leadership into the *milpa* logic. In my drawing, I struggled to make each participant recognizable -- the coordinator had his briefcase, a Triqui woman her traditional dress, a leader from Nayarit his sombrero, etc. Each participant or *mandadero* appeared with distinct characteristics based on ethnicity, gender and/or class. I hoped that by portraying participants as distinct individuals with unique skills, experiences, and knowledge, Seminar members would gain a more complex understanding of the challenges to – and the benefits of -- diverse participation. I hoped that these ideas would add to our array of metaphors and facilitate a more in-depth discussion associated with the difficult issues of internal organization.

It seemed that only Sergio and I understood and agreed with each other; the rest seemed puzzled. In spite, or perhaps because, of this puzzlement, a lengthy discussion ensued. We revisited the idea of the *amarre* social -- the social version of the logic of the *milpa*. Don Salomón noted that the idea of the *amarre* social was important both at the level of community and the level of the Seminar. He suggested that we had to have confidence in each other and we also needed to recognize our ability to participate. Don Salómon also suggested that we could have a *consejo* (council) each month that "revisited" the idea of the Seminar or helped us think about the Seminar. This suggestion was reminiscent of the "council of elders," a traditional form of leadership in communities. It appeared that Don Salomón was quietly suggesting an additional decision-making mechanism in the Seminar.

The coordinator commented that I had not made the connection between the changes in the Seminar and the *amarre* social. He suggested that I try to explain it again. He pointed out that there was a difference between plants and people, "people have the capacity to decide what to contribute and what to withhold.... Each of us has a different capacity.... Each of us can do something that others can't. If it wasn't that way we'd have a monoculture."

Pablo countered by saying that the example was clear to him, but that the "mix of plants do not think about the development of each other. We are different. We may each seek individual solutions, but if we unite we can find better

solutions. That is how working in the Seminar changes us." Carlos reflected on

the idea of *mandadero* and saw a general formula,

"We could generate a formula of 'how' so that we thought of everyone who comes here has the two parts [service and power] and we learn how to balance them. This implies time and effort. How can each of take this responsibility if we don't understand why we have this sense of service. I realize that I can't separate myself from service. If a leader doesn't know how to balance, he can fall on the side of power and can damage society. My question is how can we achieve this. We have both parts, service and power, in the same person -- the good and the bad."

David noted that when we were successful at solving our agrarian problems, we

were operating in as an *amarre* social. Now we seemed to lack discipline. He

asked, "Why don't we return to the *amarre* social again, without specific rules, but

by using a project as a pretext to bring us together?"

After Pablo's comments about service and power being good and bad, I

realized I had not been able to communicate my ideas fully. I tried to explain that

I had not meant service and power as good and bad. I wanted to suggest that we

could understand them as two necessary forces, but perhaps useful at different

times. But David's comments offered a possibility that could unite the ideas that

Antonio raised. The discussion continued until Samuel arrived. He added his

comments to the mix:

"From our point of view, it would be great if we could find a project based on the logic of the milpa. There is so much talk of modernizing. But there is uneasiness among our producers, it's hard to be successful producing now. We'd have to go slowly and look closely at how things are put together…. But we feel that if someone doesn't take the initiative as a mandadero no one will do anything. I suggest we continue talking about this…."

Samuel observations returned the conversation to the idea of projects through the Seminar. We then went back to discussing cases. The idea of the bus chauffeur was applied to the case of Tierra Piedra and the young women who want to sell embroidered dresses. It was pointed out that Don Salómon and his daughter were the only ones who are willing to take responsibility, the rest of the community were acting a passengers.

6.14.4 ODDDECO's Diagnostic

We turned to ODDDECO's diagnostic late Saturday morning. The ODDDECO members used several metaphors to present their diagnostic. They drew a parallel between a doctor's examining a patient and doing a diagnostic of the Seminar. Under the heading of participation, the group said that the Seminar was like a school where some students paid attention and others didn't. At times, this was because the material presented had nothing to do with "the reality" of the students. They then shifted focus to Seminar participants. Sometimes participants presented things that appear easy to resolve, but month after month, they make no progress in solving their problems. The group suggested that we return to more general topics such as globalization to help members understand the current situation they were facing. They also proposed that time be given to

the generation of projects. They reiterated the importance of the Seminar in

helping individual's develop and communities resolve their problems.

During the dialogue that followed ODDDECO's diagnostic, Antonio noted

that our diagnostics were concurring with, and complementing, each other.

Sergio identified two key issues that we all seemed to agree on -- the need for

change and a method to achieve that change:

"We are coming close to an agreement in our diagnostics from different points of view.... The next thing to do is to figure out how.... We seem to be in agreement that we have to figure out how to change....

A brief discussion followed with concrete suggestions on how the Seminar could

better meet the evolving interests and needs of groups and communities.

6.14.5 Sergio's Diagnostic

Sergio then presented his diagnostic as a more historic view, focusing on

the changes the Seminar had made over the last several years. He reviewed and

analyzed which communities had participated in the Seminar and what issues

they had raised. He pointed out that the methodology of the Seminar had

empowered individuals and created a collective identity. However, the Seminar

had not been able to apply to itself the same dynamic that it had employed to

empower individuals and communities. In fact, it seemed to have reproduced the

very hierarchical social structure that it opposed. He concluded saying:

"My proposal is that we depersonalize the way we look at ourselves and we judge ourselves in the same way that we have judged others so that we can see the Seminar more realistically. The Seminar should be revitalized with the same

objectivity that we have tried to maintain towards related processes. The Seminar should take its own 'medicine.'"

6.14.6 Summary of the Diagnostics

The presentation of diagnostics and proposals began to move the Seminar towards a reflective openness as members examined fundamental issues and envisioned what the Seminar could be. Don Salomón pointed to the achievements of the Seminar and each participant's responsibility to improve their own practice in the Seminar. By doing so, the Seminar would improve. The representatives of Valle del Norte advocated a more participative space, where all members took part in the decision-making and work of the Seminar. I suggested that the Seminar look at itself as a social *milpa* where no one dominated but, rather, communication occurred among equals. The ODDDECO group revisited some of the problems facing the Seminar, the need for truth, the difficulty in finding solutions, a need for understanding general problems facing communities, and the need to be more inclusive. Finally, Sergio suggested looking at the Seminar with the same criticality that we had employed towards communities. No consensus was reached; no agreements forged. But an expanding dialogue on the issues of internal social organization of the Seminar had emerged.

Together with this dialogue, peoples' behavior began to change. Leaders' right to dominate were being questioned. And -- all the while -- the leadership was not dominating the discussion or controlling the process as much as they

had previously. Slowly and hesitantly, women were beginning to participate more. A woman's initial words in the *ronda* seemed to mimic the representative of their community. But succeeding attempts became longer and more thoughtful. In addition, other participants were taking on the roles formally reserved for the leadership. The substance of each diagnostic contributed to the "transformation of the Seminar." Yet even more important than the ideas, reflections, and suggestions that each group or individual presented, was the very fact that all of this was taking place. This was, to my knowledge, the first time that an analysis and reflection of the organization had occurred with the participation of all members.

6.15 Community Case Studies Continue

While the diagnostics were being presented, the Seminar was carrying on its work as usual -- representatives presented their *bitácoras*, and problems continued to be analyzed. The community of San Carlos presented their *bitácora*, focusing on their group's application process of becoming a registered *sociedad* (civil association). After David gave the *bitácora* presentation, Pablo added some details. Pablo explained:

"*...We are trying to put into practice what we are talking about in the Seminar about transformations.... [As we do our application] we are trying to form our organization so that there is not one mandadero, but that everyone takes on his or her responsibilities.... [We are trying to create] a transformation where we all take part in the activities that we all benefit from.*"

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It seemed that despite various comments from the group about their lack of understand of the "transformation of the Seminar," the group was actually attempting to put the idea of transformation into practice.

Pablo's comments were buried in the details of the formal application process, and the discussion that followed focused on these details. Despite the lack of attention given to these specific comments, the idea of transformation was understood by the group from San Carlos, despite their words to the contrary. In addition, the idea was proving useful not only for the Seminar, but also for communities and groups in helping them rethink social relationships that had formerly appeared unquestioned.

6.16 Summary and Conclusions

This chapter details how the Seminar changed over time. This change began gradually, but gained momentum as various themes emerged and converged. These themes helped Seminar members look inward, to critically analyze the underlying assumptions of the organization. Members recognized that the Seminar was a "space" where learning occurred both at an individual and at an organizational level. This examination was done through dialogue in which members revealed their own thinking and were open to the thinking of other members. Members were able to reflect on both the process of learning and obstacles to that process within the Seminar. With these two basic concepts in place, the Seminar could begin to change as it learned about itself.

Obstacles to learning included two related issues – <u>community members'</u> <u>unwillingness or inability to learn from each other;</u> and, <u>the tendency of</u> <u>community members to be overly dependent on experts and their knowledge</u>. These themes underscored the lack of confidence and agency of community members, generally. The discussion of *comisirados'* inability to learn from each other had introduced the ideas of pride and ego and the notion of "enemy" as barriers to learning. Confronting Tierra Piedra *comisariado's* dependence on inept experts helped Seminar members recognize that "experts" did not have a monopoly on knowledge. In fact, participants saw that they could learn from each other if they recognized their own and their fellow community members' agency and abilities in the learning process. In addition, a focus on the internal functioning of communities highlighted obstacles to learning that resembled obstacles to learning in the Seminar.

The procedure of Saturday - the day of truth provided an opportunity to focus attention on these similarities. The Seminar began to acquire a dual focus: <u>seeking solutions to community problems</u> (outcome-based), and <u>reflecting on</u> <u>itself, its approach, and its vision of the future</u>. The foundational themes that had been established and applied to communities, together with a commitment to a degree of transparency and truth, resulted in a new level of self-reflexivity on the Seminar's process and internal organization. Furthermore, the language of metaphors expanded, enabling participants to speak of the internal dynamics of

the Seminar in ways that reduced the risk of personal insult and thereby internal conflict.

A qualitative and quantitative changed occurred in the Seminar. With the implementation of the *ronda*, the dialogue included the majority – not just the more confident and experienced members of the Seminar. Engaging in dialogue meant that participants where also more fully engaged in an iterative learning process of the Seminar. As they learned individually, participants were able to apply what they were learning to the learning process of the organization itself.

As the quality and quantity of participation increased, members began to recognize themselves as leaders who could contribute to the process of the Seminar. This also led members to examine the relationship between the leadership of the Seminar and other participants. Increasingly, they suggested that decisions for the Seminar be made by *all* Seminar participants.

At the same time, participants recognized that academics and experienced community leaders had specialized skills, knowledge, and experience. The participants felt there were times when those who "knew how to drive" should be the "chauffeurs." This did not mean that experienced individuals should dominate or control the process. However, the Seminar does not yet have a fully developed concept of a new leadership for the future. The theme of the new *tecnico* is available and can yet be drawn upon to further enrich participants' understanding of leadership and relationships in the Seminar.

Expanded participation increased the diversity of the Seminar and, thereby, it's potential to find solutions. However, the diversity of the Seminar is not yet fully recognized. The situated identities of its members are still partially subsumed in the dichotomy of *campesino* and academic. This dichotomy obscures the rich ethnic pluralism of the Seminar. Additionally, the gendered nature of the Seminar has only begun to be explored. There has not yet been a serious discussion on how to make the Seminar more gender-inclusive. The Seminar must apply the advice it gives to communities and recognize that it, too, is missing half of its community when women's participation is restricted. A notion of synergistic power resides in the logic of the *milpa.* Through dialogue, the Seminar participants have the means to draw upon this power, connect with each other and explore emergent ideas. However, in order to develop the *milpa* logic more fully, Seminar participants must re-examine their constructs of class, ethnicity, and gender and resulting social relationships in the Seminar.

CHAPTER 7

CRITICAL LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH: TOWARDS A SECOND GENERATION OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

In their classic article, Brown and Tandon (1983) argue that the "ideologies and political economies that underlie [action research and participatory action research] are fundamentally different." They contend that, "More exchange, challenge and cross-fertilization between the two is intellectually desirable – but ideologies and political economies of inquiry will continue to reproduce present differences and communication difficulties." In 1997, Brown (1997: 2) noted that the "Northern" (AR) and "Southern" (PAR) traditions of participatory research have "different, potentially complementary, strengths and weaknesses." However, the two traditions have still not taken full advantage of these differences to learn from each other.[61] In this chapter, I connect these differences by drawing upon the idea of learning organizations as developed within AR and elaborating it within an emancipatory framework of PR.

In this chapter, I trace the evolution of the Seminar towards a general model of a critical learning organization (CLO). I specifically focus on the issue of social relationships within the Seminar, elaborating ideas of power, leadership, and participation. The model of a critical learning organization originates from and is fed back to the Seminar through the ongoing *praxis* of this research.

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[61] There are a few notable exceptions, see Roobeck (1996) and Greenwood and Levin (1998).

Accordingly, the development of this model has a practical, as well as theoretical intent.

7.0 A Review of Organizational Change in the Seminar

An overarching organizational theme was presented in Chapter 6 in terms of the Seminar moving from an adaptive organization to a learning organization. Chapter 6 culminates with the Seminar reflecting on, and engaging in, preliminary efforts of "transforming" itself. This change was stimulated by the changing socioeconomic context in which the Seminar operates, by the growing empowerment of its members, and by the inclusion of new members with distinct perspectives and experiences.

The "transformation" of the Seminar was facilitated by several intermediate themes. Seminar members recognized that learning was occurring within the organization and that there were barriers to that learning. Members questioned old models of expertise and external intervention, and sought to create new models of engagement with outsiders. Seminar members recognized the need for transparency and truth in the Seminar in order to "move ahead." The space created by this relative transparency allowed members to problematize ideas of operational strategies and internal social organization. Finally, participants began to envision the Seminar of the future -- one that could respond to the changing external conditions and more fully recognize, validate, and mobilize the growing skills and confidence of its members.

Regional diagnostics were developed with an eye to the future. This allowed communities to look differently at their histories, their locales, and the resources they contained. A focus on the future not only complemented the earlier problem-focused perspective of the Seminar and communities, but also appeared to add a more critical voice to the Seminar's discussions. The idea of diagnostic reappeared in the Seminar, but this time with the Seminar as the "patient."

When Seminar members began to raise issues about internal social relationships, the Seminar moved beyond AR notions of a learning organization. In AR, fundamental questions of social relationships are not raised – in fact, they are conspicuous by their absence. If we reflect on the Seminar as it moves beyond a learning organization, we may revisit the AR literature as a point of departure from which to discuss a model of a critical learning organization within an emancipatory PR approach.

The literature on AR is replete with discussions and examples of "learning organizations." From an AR perspective, a learning organization is an organization that detects errors and corrects them in a way that involves the modification of its underlying norms, policies and objectives (Argyris and Schon 1978). Yet, learning organizations are constrained by the nature of the framework in which they are conceptualized. As Brown and Tandon (1983: 292-293) remind us, "Action research focuses on incremental problem solving and knowledge development within an accepted social consensus. It promotes social *reform*

within a client system." Accordingly, learning organizations tend to address problems framed by organizational authorities.

Learning organizations in AR may address issues relating to values and beliefs, but these are narrowly defined. They tend to take for granted the hierarchical relationships within organizations and the broader society in which they occur. These assumptions and foci can inhibit the elaboration of a learning organization from an emancipatory perspective. When this elaboration does occur, issues of power, leadership, and participation come to the fore, as do issues of social transformation.

7.1 A Critical Learning Organization

A critical learning organization (CLO) is one in which collective learning is critically reflexive - - the organization examines its underlying epistemological, methodological, and ideological assumptions, including assumptions about social hierarchy. This examination of internal organizational relationships is what distinguishes a critical learning organization from an AR learning organization. The Seminar had asked communities to examine social relationships in their own communities and in society at large. When the Seminar began to examine its own organizational structure through issues of power, leadership, and participation, it began to resemble an incipient critical learning organization.

For the Seminar, the process of becoming a CLO was approached cautiously. Questions relating to internal social relationships were, by their very

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nature, both personal and collective issues. In addition, the Seminar was situated in an environment that discouraged, if not punished, people who questioned their leadership. The tensions created by these discussions were at times openly recognized and, at times, suppressed. But all the while, the forces which drew people together -- common identities, shared problems, and mutual outside "enemies," combined with trust, caring and commitment -- overcame the centrifugal forces when these potentially divisive issues were raised. Baker et al. (1999: 18) suggest that, "When safety, mutual respect and trust are present, perhaps enough order is provided to allow for confrontation with differences to provoke new learning and discovery without disintegration into chaos." Such cohesive social bonds appeared to be essential for the Seminar to enter into these discussions and seem necessary for the formation and maintenance of a CLO.

In a CLO, issues of internal social relationships, including notions of power, leadership, and participation are problematized -- they become a focus of discussion and critical analysis in both theoretical and practical terms. In a CLO, power, leadership, and participation are understood to be interrelated phenomena and therefore are discussed and analyzed in conjunction with each other.

7.2 Power in a Critical Learning Organization

In general, the most common conceptualization of power is associated with domination, control, and authority. This concept of power is also referred to as *power-over* and pertains to the ability of one person or group to control the actions and beliefs of others (Starhawk 1987; Wartenberg 1990). This form of power is crucial in maintaining systems of inequality and injustice. When power is conceptualized solely in these terms, power may be viewed as a <u>negative</u> social force, not appropriate to be used as a means to initiate social change by the powerless.

This idea of power is tied to Kaufman's notion of differential participation (Kaufman 1997: 163) The concept of differential participation incorporates an explicit analysis of power, control, and domination into ideas of participation. From this perspective, power is the ability to control resources, including the ability to exploit differences within human relationships. These uneven capacities are rooted in the brute facts of sexism and inequality, but depend on internalized values about individual and group identities.

Power can also be associated with ideas of service, cooperation, and influence. Two such forms of power are elaborated by Starhawk (1987) -- *power-with* and *power-from-within*. *Power-with* is given to individuals by groups, organizations, or communities to which they belong. *Power-from-within* emanates

from connections with others, with oneself and with the environment. These two forms of power have a more positive connotation.

Power-with is a shared power found in relationships of equality. *Power-with* is not the power to command, but rather the power to suggest, to begin something and to see it happen. *Power-with* is revocable -- a group may accept a leader with this form of power or may withdraw its support at any time. Starhawk (1987: 11) describes, "*Power-with* is more subtle, more fluid and fragile than authority. It is dependent on personal responsibility, on our own creativity and daring, and on the willingness of others to respond." In other words, *power-with* is granted by a group rather than assumed through authority.

Power-from-within is found in the connections and bonds with other individuals and with the environment. Starhawk (1987: 9) describes *power-from-within* as "linked to the mysteries that awaken our deepest abilities and potentials." These two forms of power -- *power-with* and *power-from-within* -- can be drawn upon to bring about social change without reproducing relationships of domination and control.

A CLO reflects upon and analyzes power in its multiple forms and manifestations. It is not assumed that power itself is inherently good or bad. Rather, power is recognized to have the potential to be either a positive or negative social force depending upon the way that it is conceptualized and used. A CLO seeks to understand the historical and current political context of participation by both helping individuals to understand their internalized identities

and seeking to change norms of participation within the organization itself. In doing so, a space is opened in which more positive forms of power -- *power-with* and *power-from-within* -- can be analyzed and drawn upon.

In the Seminar, power is most frequently conceptualized as *power-over* -- as oppressive. The power to convoke in the Seminar is similar to *power-with*. However, this form of power is not often used and when evoked it is not usually recognized as power in the terms of the Seminar. *Power-from-within* is only latently present in the Seminar. Only when Seminar members recognize the need for transformational change, do they begin to draw on this latent power. Participants begin to connect to each other, to draw upon the strength of the group, and to mobilize the tremendous commitment of members to the organization and to each other. In the Seminar, Sergio began to conceptualize power as a positive force when he said, "There are no human relationships that cannot be understood as relationships of power. But power is so ambiguous, it's hard to grasp it positively, but there are relationships where power is positive, when it is distorted it becomes negative." However, Seminar participants are just beginning to explore more complex and positive ideas of power and the connection between power, and the way different individuals participate in the Seminar.

7.3 Leadership in a Critical Learning Organization

The leadership model of a CLO resembles that suggested by "responsive" leaders -- individuals who are open to the "needs of the group and individuals in it" (Starhawk 1987). This leadership is similar to that of Ghandi's when he said, "I am my people's leader. There go my people. I must follow" (Esteva and Suri 1998). It is similar to that of the *Zapatistas* who "command by obeying" (Esteva and Suri 1998). In the Seminar, leaders of this type are "at the service of community." This form of leadership is accompanied by or springs from *power with*, although it is not understood in these terms.

Leadership using *power-with* is based on influence. Influence determines who is listened to and whose ideas are adopted. Starhawk (1987: 269) explains,

> A group, as an entity with its own spirit and identity, needs a brain. It needs some people who are willing to look ahead, anticipate problems, suggest new directions, try out new solutions, keep track of information and decisions, who lead in the sense of stepping out in front and going first. Such leadership is a service to the group.

Starhawk recognizes a particular form of organizational structure that recognizes the need for individuals who are willing to lead by contributing their special skills and knowledge to the organization as a whole.

Individuals with experience, knowledge, skills and/or imagination are of value to the group and tend to be leaders of the type envisioned by Starhawk. This form of leadership combines power with responsibility and responsiveness - "If you have power, you are responsible for using it in a an empowering way. If

you have responsibility, you need power to meet it (Starhawk 1987: 270)." The leadership of the Seminar faces a difficult and often conflicting role. They are expected to lead -- suggest solutions, make contacts, take responsibility -- yet they may be criticized for doing the same. As Samuel told the Seminar when he was accused of stealing community funds, "the same people we serve throw stones at us." The boundaries of "good" leadership are narrow and shifting. In one context a leader can be praised for his successes and in another condemned for them.

There are several conflicting assumptions of "good" leadership in the Seminar. These assumptions appear to prohibit leaders from fulfilling their leadership potential both in the Seminar and in communities. According to these assumptions, a "good" leader is a strong leader -- one who directs, controls, and inspires loyalty. From a follower's perspective, this leader should have contacts, be self-confident, possess the ability to communicate his ideas, and maintain a clear sense of the future. On the other hand, a good leader should follow the wishes of the community, exhibit a humble desire to serve, and be willing to sacrifice himself. If a leader departs from this second group of assumptions, he may be punished. He may find that rumors are circulated attacking his character, he may be jailed, driven from the community, or even killed. Rules of "good" leadership," the threat of punishment, and lack of authority all combined to produce a situation that circumscribe leaders in their search for solutions to the "new problems" confronting communities and the Seminar.

The academics, who are selected for or who have taken on positions of leadership in the Seminar, have an additional burden. They are chosen for their skills, knowledge, contacts, status and/or experience. They also must be trustworthy and committed to the peasantry. However, these characteristics can be accompanied by pride, confidence, and status both <u>assumed by</u> the academics and <u>given by</u> peasant participants. This privileging could not exist without the peasant participants' willingness to give it and the academics willingness to accept it. Of course, the social status and political contacts of the academics were part of the reason these individuals were originally invited to join the peasantry in their struggles. The need for individuals with understandings and experiences that differ from those of the peasantry has not diminished, yet the accompanying privileging of these same individuals appears to be an obstacle to creating a co-learning environment and an impediment to finding innovative solutions.

As the Seminar explored issues of power and leadership, two parallel processes of empowerment began. Participants, as community leaders, started to see themselves as agents who had *power-with* in their communities (even though they did not recognized it in those terms), and Seminar participants saw glimmers of themselves as equal within the Seminar. The Seminar's goal to empower its members and improve community members' ability to be leaders slowly began to influence the organization's internal dynamics.

Social relationships within the Seminar have begun to change. However, more reflection and analysis remain to be done both on Mexican society at large and on the internal organization of the Seminar itself. The explicit theories of power in the Seminar do not appear to encompass a broad grasp of the positive forms of power, nor do they fully envision the potential for leadership in the Seminar or in communities. Starhawk (1987: 11) explains that, "In a culture based on domination, authority and *power-with* are often confused, and the boundaries can be fuzzy." Starhawk (1987: 13) goes on to explain that we may actually, "fear *power-with* because we do not recognize it as different from *power-over*." Also, people may "fear" *power with* because they feel they will have to change their ways as "leaders." This confusion and these feelings seem to occur both in the Seminar and in communities as individuals attempt to conceptualize appropriate models of leadership.

Reflecting upon a responsive model of leadership may help Seminar members overcome their own limited models in which leaders are either restricted in their abilities to lead and/or resented for their acts of leadership. Conceptualizing power as a positive force through the notions of *power-with* has the potential to broaden the Seminar members' understanding of "power" and "leadership" and thereby improve their leadership abilities, the future of the Seminar, and the viability of communities.

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7.4 Participation in a Critical Learning Organization

In a CLO, participation among equals forms an organizational horizon. Full participation becomes a goal -- a potential for interacting and sharing. Equality in this sense refers to people's understanding of their relationships to each other -- it suggests non-hierarchical or horizontal social relationships (Lummis 1995). Participation in a CLO means that the potential exists for each individual to contribute to the collective knowledge generation and change process according to his or her unique skills, abilities, interest, and level of confidence. In addition, less experienced members are given a place to practice participation in a non-judgmental and safe environment (Lave and Wenger 1991). As Rahnema (1995: 127) explains, participation means "to live and relate differently. It implies above all, the recovery of one's inner freedom, that is, to learn to listen and to share, free from any fear or predefined conclusion, belief or judgement." In a CLO, a space is created in which self-confidence is nurtured and individual and collective conscienctização is encouraged.

While participation in a CLO is understood to take place among equals, equality does not mean sameness or homogeneity.[62] Rather, the way people participate is conditioned by individual identities. Class, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, etc. contribute to the formation of a person's participation. For example, an indigenous woman will not participate the same as a mestizo male; a

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[62] For a discussion on participation and how various concepts of participation are put into practice see Greenwood and Levin (1998).

community activist trained in the struggle for the land but with little "schooling" will participate differently from a professional with years of formal education, who has little experience in rural life. A CLO recognizes, validates, and respects its members in their diverse equalities.

Accordingly, in a CLO, participation can not be forced or mandated. When participation is mandated, PAR efforts may, in practice, produce results opposite to its presumed emancipatory intent (Heeks 1999). To enforce or mandate "participation" is an example of power-over: the direct opposite of recognizing, validating, and respecting members in their diversity and complexity. In a CLO, participation is a means to share one's own knowledge and experience with others while at the same time, learning from them. Through practice, participants become more adept at participating while they become more knowledgeable about the problems at hand.

7.5 Conclusions

The idea of a CLO can be understood as an elaboration of the logic of the *milpa*. The metaphor of the *milpa* facilitates reflection and analysis of complex ideas relating to social relationships. Ideas of participation and diverse equality are subsumed within this logic. In the agroecological model of the traditional *milpa*, each plant contributes unique elements to the overall functioning and output of the system as a whole. Yet, at any given point in time different plants contribute in different ways. For example, in the spring and summer, beans'

ability to affix nitrogen supply corn with nutrients. The corn, as it grows, provides support for vining beans. In the spring, the squash flowers attract pollinating insects and its prickly leaves deter small marauding animals. Later in the season, the squash plants shade the soil, keeping it cool and reducing the growth of weeds, while preserving moisture. Over the growing season, the *milpa* with its diverse plantings, out produces most mono-cropped fields of modern agriculture while preserving the health of the environment.

Reflecting on the logic of the *milpa* allows us to understand situated individuals who can contribute to collective learning in organizations. This "logic" provides a rationale to overcome the barriers to communication due to power differentials relating to class, ethnicity, gender, etc. Once these boundaries are transcended, a "way of knowing" that is beyond the capacity of any one individual or any homogenous group is created. Reflection on the agroecological model of the *milpa* helps organizational members understand that each of them has something unique and valuable to contribute *in their own time*; each individual learns and contributes according to his or her growing abilities.

7.6 Summary

This study demonstrates that peasant and academic researchers can and do work together to identify and solve researchable problems through participatory forms of research. Peasant participants may often need to be encouraged to recognize and further develop their investigative skills broadly

defined. Outside researchers must enter collaborative research relationships with a strong dose of humility and the ability to see beyond their own "scientific" paradigm of research. The outside researcher's role is to contribute in appropriate ways that are guided by the interests and needs of his or her fellow non-professional research partners.

The Seminar represents a model for carrying out such research. This model can be seen as a second generation of PR – one that transcends the temporal, spatial, and conceptual boundaries of most PR activities. The Seminar overcomes constraints of time and space in the way it has organized itself as an ongoing organization that brings together individuals across local, national, and international arenas. Conceptually, the Seminar expands the idea of learning in PR to include the idea of a critical learning organization.

The Seminar participants have addressed and successfully resolved community problems relating to the struggle for the land over a number of years. The organization applied strategies of confrontation, negotiation, and obfuscation. They have sought alliances with individuals with power and authority. They used their enemies when they were able. However, problems being brought to the Seminar are changing. These problems go beyond possession of the land and its use; they concern the very economic and cultural survival of communities. Understandably, the methods and strategies devised to analyze and resolve the problems of the past do not seem to provide solutions for today's problems. In fact, the very nature of these new problems is unclear.

The Seminar arrived at an impasse – it reached the limits of its abilities to analyze problems brought before it and to generate solutions.

Following the *milpa* logic, the Seminar sought to expand its diversity -- new members with distinct experience and knowledge were invited and incorporated. These new members added different dimensions and new insights to the problem-solving capacity of the Seminar. These newcomers asked questions and raised issues that had not been raised before. These questions and issues did not supplant those of older members. Rather, they complemented and expanded the ongoing discussion.

Through a collective process, questions relating to social relationships in the Seminar began to emerge. Early questions centered on participation or the lack of participation. Issues of leadership and power were raised indirectly in discussions on new *tecnicos* and outside experts, and more directly during discussions on *mandaderos*. Members recognized the need for leadership and sought to imagine what ideal leaders and experts would look like. A new *tecnico* would "wear the shirt of the *campesinos*" and respect the people. A good leader would be at the service of community. The leadership that they began to imagine was one that could <u>not</u> reside in any one individual, but rather, was a fluid role that could be passed from one individual to another. However, members of the Seminar do not fully conceptualize new models of power, leadership, or participation. Seminar members have not resolved the apparent contradictions between the ideas of service and power or those between the need for "expert"

knowledge and empowerment of its less experienced members. Perhaps they never will. Yet, the Seminar has begun to reflect critically upon on itself in a dialogic fashion -- raising questions relating to social relationships in the organization.

The questions we asked of each other led us to reflect, analyze, and at times, to act. The focus of Seminar moved beyond a problem-focused orientation to one in which we began to examine individual and collective ideological, epistemological, and even ontological assumptions. Each member's unique viewpoint helped us, individually and collectively, to understand the Seminar in new ways and to envision a future that had not been envisioned before.

7.7 Contributions of this Research

This research makes several contributions at a theoretical, methodological and practical level. At a theoretical level, the inclusion of AD to PR adds a much-needed dimension to this emerging paradigm of research and development. Adding AD to the family of PR approaches makes visible those PR activities where there are *no* outside researchers present. AD proposes that PR does not need outside researchers for research to occur. Rather, local people have and will continue to carry out research and development activities in their own way and in their own time. Professional researchers and development specialists can only join with local people in these endeavors if they are willing

and able to recognize and fully appreciate them. This research provides some of the theoretical and practical tools to do so.

The elaboration of a CLO, while preliminary, expands both the theory and practice of PR. The ideological boundaries of AR and PAR -- a consensus theory of society and a conflict theory of society -- are overcome as a learning organization theory is transformed into a critical learning organization theory. The presentation of the Seminar as a critical learning organization provides an example to reflect upon and understand a specific form of organizational change. These two reflections, one occurring in the realm of theory the other in the realm of practice, are simultaneous and complementary. The emerging idea of a critical learning organization opens a space to further explore notions of power, leadership, and participation as they unfold in a dialogical fashion.

The addition of the concept "critical learning organization" to theory and practice of organizational learning will expand the ability of organizations to create more horizontal relationships within organizations and to be more inclusive of all members' interests and viewpoints. While the term "participation" is in vogue in the development literature, there have been few means available to address the unequal relationships that may pass as participation within organizations and communities. The Seminar as a CLO provides a powerful example to do so.

Within the realm of methodology, this research is an innovative response to the context within which it occurs. While the methodology of this research can

not be adopted as a whole, it can serve as a guide for other PR activities in other settings. For example, combining the reflection of PAR and that of a critical learning systems approach offers a more robust approach to reflection. Combining the *praxis* of AR and that of PAR offers a clearer articulation of *praxis* at an individual level. Explicating the use of bracketing as part of PR *praxis* illustrates a means to maintain subjective objectivity or strong objectivity (Harding 1991: 151). These methods await trial and further elaboration by other PR researchers.

On a practical level, the Seminar provides an example of how an organization can draw upon the diversity of its members. The logic of the *milpa* teaches us that different perspectives and experiences based on the situated identities of organizational members can become the source of creativity and innovation rather than conflict and divisions. This creativity and innovation has the potential to be much richer when a dialogue occurs between individuals and groups holding distinct ways of understanding the world. The lens each of us brings to this form of dialogue allows us to see from a different perspective and may serve to illuminate a greater "whole" than viewing "reality" through only one lens.

The Seminar also illustrates the essential role of trust and commitment when an organization engages in critical reflection on its internal social relationships and hierarchy. Mutual commitments and trust developed over time provide the glue that binds individuals and groups together when engaged in

critical reflection and dialogue. When trust and commitment do not exist within an organization, the obstacles to dialogue occurring across worldviews may disintegrate into power struggles in which the most powerful actors of the group impose their views.

Most importantly, this research contributed to the theory and practice of the Seminar itself. The intense participatory nature of this research means that this study, from its inception, contributed to the evolution of the Seminar. This influence occurred not only during my time in Oaxaca, but continued throughout the writing process. In a way, this document is a living document that continually fed into the process of the Seminar. This was done both through conversations with the coordinator and two post-research visits. After I returned home, the coordinator and I spoke by phone every month after the Seminar meetings. As I wrote and discussed my ideas with him, the ideas generated were returned to the Seminar contributing to further discussion and dialogue. In addition, I visited the Seminar twice during the writing process to share my thoughts. During the visit of September 1999, I shared the ideas of the Seminar as a learning organization. Participants easily recognized the Seminar in those terms. They did agree, however, that the Seminar had not achieved its full potential as a learning organization. I later returned to present a semi-final draft presenting the idea of the Seminar as a critical learning organization and the notions of power, leadership, and participation.

How my presence and participation affect the Seminar in other areas is harder to ascertain. At times, I felt that my contributions were neither understandable, nor understood. A phrase we used occasionally in the Seminar -- "speaking as if from Mars" -- applied to how I felt. This phrase was used when one of us -- usually an academic -- presented an idea that was incomprehensible to other participants. Yet, there were times when my contribution was obviously meaningful. I was openly praised after one particular engagement in the Seminar dialogue -- during the case of San Pedro when the Seminar members all felt compelled to participate due to the pending violence in the community. I had read an article in the local newspaper about the community that described the community as an "empty shell," save for women and children. The rest of the community, the article described, had left -- searching for opportunities in the U.S. or Mexico City. Earlier in the day, I had asked the commission from San Pedro if they had seen the article. One of them responded that he had seen it, and that his son was one of those who had left for the U.S. The son, however, was not happy away from home and soon returned.

In the Seminar, towards the end of the dialogue, it was my turn to speak. I began by saying I had read the article about San Pedro being an empty community -- a community of only women and children. But, I told them, I was puzzled -- the men in front of us were neither women nor children. (This comment was said in keeping with the humor of rural Oaxaca and elicited a good deal of laughter. It also got people's attention.) I then went on to say that one of

the commission members had told me about his son leaving, but returning. I thought about my first visit to Cerro Niebla when we had asked the community if they want to be a community of only old people and children or a vibrant community of old and young, men and women - a community that was alive and thinking of their future. I asked the men of San Pedro, "If you continue this struggle what will your children come home to? Do you want to be a community of only women and children or a community that is alive with a future..." Later in the afternoon, as we were all getting ready to return to our homes, Antonio told me, "*sacaste un diez* (you got a ten)" – the highest grade. My contribution in this instance was appropriate, understandable, and helped contributed to the critical reflection on the problems of San Pedro.

On a more general level, it appears that my presence has also made an impact. The coordinator told me that a new phrase has entered the language of the Seminar. Occasionally, during discussions a member will say, "as Diana said..." -- It seems that I have become a small part of the living history and language of the Seminar. And in this way, my participation continues, contributing to an ongoing dialogical process.

This "living" history has not been unidirectional. I have been profoundly changed through this research. I now have a renewed sense of community -- a sense of belonging to a communal "we." By this, I do not mean community in the narrow sense of being a member of the Seminar or my own neighborhood. Rather, this feeling of belonging is associated with a sense of belonging to a

larger humanity and an intensified sense of service to the global community to which we all belong. I have in some ways internalized the Seminar's model of learning and interacting. I am now exploring the applicability of this model to other arenas, in which I live and act.

7.8 Directions for Future Research

In research as rich as this, innumerable questions could have been explored. Given the participatory and experiential mature of this research, I chose to tackle only one -- focusing on the organizational development of the Seminar. Yet, as a participant in the Seminar, my involvement has not ended. A particularly intriguing area invites further involvement -- that of actually applying some of the ideas on enterprise development that the young women of the Seminar and I devised. We have begun to explore how traditional and modern textile design can be combined, produced, and marketed. The women are encouraged by the possibilities and women's groups from other communities are interested in joining. An additional avenue relates to exploring the idea of projects as a means to explore and solidify "sustainable" social relationships both in communities and in the Seminar.

On a more general level, this research presents one instance in which PAR and AR can learn for each other. More specifically, this research presents the Seminar as a combination of intrinsic and instrumental case study that leads us to re-examine the existing AR learning organization literature. This reflection

has led to an elaboration of the idea of second generation PR and a model for a CLO. This model is now available for testing in other distinct socio/cultural spaces.

Little attention has focused on the internal workings of organizations within an emancipatory perspective. This research has developed preliminary ideas about issues of power, leadership, and participation with in a "critical learning organizational." Future investigation could focus on the internal social relationships within CLOs and how they change over time through dialogue. Innumerable opportunities exist for other such activities.

This research has focused on one organizational response emerging form the Mexican peasantry. Additional research focusing on the responses of marginalized people to the impacts of globalization is needed. PR offers a unique means to understand and share the experience of these marginalized groups as they grapple with their changing worlds.

And, ultimately, a need exists for more researchers to humbly enter in to partnerships of equality with people around the world. These partnerships should not only collectively advance scholarship. But also better recognize, understand, and improve the conditions for the majority of the world's people.

7.9 Final Thoughts on this Research

This investigation occurred over a three-year period, yet visits to communities were relatively brief. A longer period of time in communities would have furthered my understanding of the problems confronting communities and how communities dealt with these problems without the assistance of the Seminar. Instead, I chose to spend my time focusing on the internal dynamics of the Seminar based on the needs and interests of the organization itself. In addition, I recognized that the presence of an outsider, no matter how well informed and skilled, has the potential for increasing divisions in communities. I chose to err on the side of caution.

Visits to governmental and non-governmental organizations working with peasant organizations were also limited during this research. Here again, I chose to err on the side of caution so as not to negatively impact the Seminar in its delicate relationships with government officials. Given that many NGOs and GOs have close working relationships in the area, I only met with representatives of NGOs that I felt would not jeopardize any of the Seminar's or its community members' activities.

An additional dilemma I faced in this research was related to one of the informal roles accorded to me by Seminar members towards the end of my stay in Oaxaca. Some of the Seminar members (the community activists) recognized me as a participant/outsider – one who could ask questions that no one else

could ask. This "privileged" position meant that I could raise issues relating to internal power relationships without violating the social norms of the Seminar or larger Oaxacan society. This questioning could not have taken place earlier in my relationship with the Seminar -- it required a degree of trust and respect that developed over time -- and it could not have happened until I had gained a more nuanced understanding of social dynamics in Oaxaca and in the Seminar.[63] This role, however, challenged my growing ability to engage in a particular element of *praxis* -- that is a critical reflection on my own participation. This critical reflection requires me to ask myself: What are my own ontological, epistemological, and ideological assumptions and how have they impacted my analysis of this research? This question is intrinsic to the methodology of this research. Yet, in a sense, I have come full circle in the spiral of *praxis* (Smith et al. 1997). I am still questioning what I know, how I know, and why I know it -- yet at a different level. Now the "object" of my reflection and analysis includes not only the Seminar and its processes -- it includes my own engagement in *praxis* as a member of the Seminar.

An additional challenge of this research has been documenting and interpreting this participatory experience with the Seminar. I have only partially captured the richness, complexity, and contradictions of the experience. Smith (1997: 196) explains this well, "Any framework will, by definition, simplify a given

[63] I engaged in a conscious exploration of these boundaries during my research. For example, I explored the boundaries of constructive criticism in a conversation with some Zapotec friends.

event or process.... A holistic model of PAR must capture *vivencia* [the lived experience of PAR], making room for the necessary dialectical tensions and conflicts. It will incorporate people as complex beings with differing motivations, individual capacities, and feelings; varying moments of joy and anguish; multiple relations to each other, and shared needs for community and common efforts." In attempting to do justice to the complexities of the Seminar, I have struggled with these issues. I have, in part, encountered the dilemma that Esteva (1994:1,12) so aptly describes when speaking of the endeavor his fellow indigenous Oaxacans are engaged in, "These initiatives are so new, in fact, that we have no words to express them in an articulate manner. Our formal categories are irrelevant or useless. Even our simple words, doors of our perceptions, are not accurate. That is my predicament.... I hope that by now it is also yours."

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