

# The word and drawing: an experience with children of the jungle

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## Abstract

This work is aimed at trying to explain the shift from oral to written in the Chiapas jungle communities . First we must not forget that each group is different : the background of the children, the expectations of parents, the communities culture-as well as have respect for the language spoken in the place. Another important objective is to understand the process of literacy acquisition with a group of children belonging to an preliterate community in the Lacandon Jungle, and how they managed to use the drawing as a tool to take the first steps towards writing, as well as a form of motivation to read and reading comprehension. In Chiapas there is a long tradition of drawing as a means to communicate and as a means of expression. It is a common practice everywhere, with ritual relevance, as art, or as a transmission of collective memory. Drawing is the starting point with which children can express their emotions , fantasies and realities to the outside world by using signs as words.

*Keywords: Drawing, reading, writing , Lacandon Jungle , kids*

## Introduction

All children naturally learn the language of their parents, but reading and writing are skills which need instruction, practice and motivation. The transmission of technical literacy in Chiapas has been aimed at Spanish-speaking children in urban cultures and there has not found a better way to transmit it to children who speak other languages or who live "in the field" , ie , immersed in other socio-cultural conditions .

The illiterate children of some forest communities , face the problem of literacy acquisition from their preliterate communities , without the presence of letters. The distance from urban centers and the lack of schools does not create a suitable environment for the access to the written word.

We believe that , to start the transition from oral to written , each community is different which is why you have to take into account the prior knowledge of the children and the community culture with their traditions and customs . Among the activities to initiate and motivate children to literacy , drawings have been taken as an introductory step towards facilitating and mastering writing, accompanied by an enjoyment of the process.

## Orality and literacy

The two most common ways to convey a message are orally and written, which are part of two different worlds but related by the aim that they evoke: communication. All human groups base their social relations basically through speaking. Today there are many rural communities with no or very little contact with writing. In farming communities they do not feel the need for written signs to perform socialization and to survive. An example of this is that only 78 of the 3,000 living languages have a system of writing and literature.

Human communication is to share codes with the individual and the group. In order to make it possible to understand the message the signals need to be recognized by the sender and the recipient. The common form is verbal communication.

The reason for the existence of a written language is to transmit remote communication in time and space, as well as to retain an experience, tell stories or share important documents. Factors that influenced the possibility of the development of writing were the socioeconomic conditions of the societies, the capacity for abstraction, and finally the knowledge of the spoken language. The socio-cultural needs of each group affect the use or non-use of writing.

We have created two basic writing systems: ideographic and phonemic. Ideographic scripts are characterized as representational systems to differentiate the meanings of concepts.

In alphabetic systems, coding systems convert sound units in graphic units, based on auditory discrimination achieved visual discrimination, alphabetic scripts are systems of representation of significant ideas. There does not exist perfect calligraphic systems where there corresponds a graphic sign and sound, since visual resources are limiting.

If writing is conceived as a code of transcription, learning is considered the acquisition of art. If writing is conceived as a system of representation, learning becomes the ownership of a new object of knowledge, a conceptual learning (Ferreiro, 2002: 17).

Emilia Ferreiro conducted studies that recognize a variety of modes of representation that precede the alphabetical representation of language. Urban children draw two types of figures, sticks and balls, which translate as numbers and letters. That is, corresponding to the

sound pattern of a release and syllabic script . This means that children have the ability to invent original constructions with their own logic for organizing created signs ( Ferreiro , 2002 : 18) .

The distinction between figurative and non-figurative drawing, between drawing and writing , is of fundamental importance . When the child draws they are located in the space of the iconic : the forms of graphics do not reproduce the form of the objects, no do the special ordering reproduce the shape of the objects. ( Ferreiro , 2002 : 19) .

The appropriation of the written tradition generates a possibility of the liberation from speaking to expand the horizon, to enrich the world and give dimension and meaning on the ephemeral nature of the spoken word in order to give continuity to the memory .

The existence of a tradition of writing in a group allows the acquisition of reading and writing which is, in a way, more natural for children. You have to understand written language as an object for social use: in other words in the urban environment where scriptures are everywhere - propaganda, television ... - reading is second nature- but not in the farm communities because the use of reading is practically nil. A child growing up in a community that does not attach importance to the signs of writing will have more difficulty learning to read and write than children who are surrounded by written words.

Knowledge acquisition starts from childbirth. The child begins to perceive the world around her and pay attention to record in her memory her immediate surroundings through perception.

The world of early childhood experiences such as taste, see , hear, touch , and smell develops and is interpreted by children before they are expressed in symbols such as words. Language acquisition begins early in the family. The conception of the meaning of a word as a unit does not exist in isolation but as an idea that is embedded in a social setting.

In order to achieve the best results in the development of children's literacy in rural communities, it is necessary to rethink education within the processes of thought and communication of an oral culture. The concepts of children from their perspective must be

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<sup>2</sup>“¿Qué me quieres?” (Traducción de Carmen de la Mora).

included in order to intervene in the process of teaching-learning. It is important to consider that the practices that have been implemented are by literate adults who can not shake the idea of writing, therefore they are not always suitable .

In preliterate communities the level of literacy required to survive is limited primarily by poor access to reading, comprising only small written messages such as the labels of medicines and industrial products that arrive to their community. Writing, on the other hand , is used primarily to fill out forms and applications . The question is how to introduce literacy in rural environments not only as transcription but rather as the appropriation of a social object, how to explain that sticks and balls have meaning for letters or numbers in a way that children achieve a complete appropriation of writing and they internalize it .

## Drawing

Drawing is a natural human means of expression. It is considered an activity that can express and represent experiences, emotions and experiences. Drawing can be performed with only artistic intentions or for the purposes of communicating information. All cultural traditions have taken this activity for various functions: rituals , arts , entertainment and education.

Drawing lines is one of the most spontaneous activities of man , a means by which one's own reality is externalized , an interpretation of the inner or outer world in which we live. Since prehistoric times , when man began to draw on surfaces where its traces remained , there were created invaluable testimonies of their environment and activities that we would not have evidence otherwise.

Drawing is the task of organizing lines. Their continuity and distribution show the variation of shapes that represent understanding of spatial relationships ; the elements of language: line , shape , color and volume, together with their combinations or outside of a surface.

Drawing is a graphical language by which the child manages to convey how they feel and perceive the surrounding reality with elements that get their attention. The acquisition of this technique provides the ability to manually handle the tools of writing: using the pen on a paper surface relaxes the hand and arm to draw lines and

circles. In its own way, it also promotes activities that allow the child to develop his own imagination and sensitivity.

Barthes (quoted by De Alba, 2010 : 43 ) believes that drawing is a coded message that has connotations according to the time and space of the artist . The act of drawing is a codification because the drawing separates the importance from the meaning; the drawing does not reproduce all of the object and , contrary to the reality of a photograph, can change the interior of the object . Drawing requires learning- it is more connotation than denotation. It is a projection of the subject.

Communicative drawing is a still image ; a different registry of the oral discourse ; a graphic expression that communicates a message that goes beyond what can be described with words and may represent a part of a reality impregnated with intentions or emotions in a personal way to see the world.

## Communicative drawing in indigenous communities.

Among the indigenous communities of Chiapas there are groups that use pictures to convey a communicative or informative ritual idea, and also to record a memory. There are some publications on the importance of drawing among contemporary groups such as the Lacandon , the Tzotzil of San Andrés , the Tzeltales of Cancuc and craftswomen of the Chiapas highlands.

In 1905 in the Lacandon Jungle, Tozzer (1982 : 85 ) found ritual ceramics with representative figures on the vessels intended to make offerings of pozol (a cornmeal beverage), pumpkins and the drink baltsé. These kinds of containers were decorated by incisions. The well identified signs are related to the figure of the man showing bones and spine . Another recurring theme is the figure of a star. The Lacandon at that time did not remember or did not want to explain the meaning of the drawings. Years before, Theobert Maler (1901-1903) had described and sketched the petroglyphs found in the rocks of the cliff Petha : a snake with two heads, hands and human characters . These drawings are attributed to the god who lived there . The clothing of the Lacandon that Tozzer met had dots and broken circles painted over a white fabric , which meant rain and sky. The dome of

the heavens and the black of the black rain clouds were offerings to "Mensabak" The Rain Maker. They also painted goats on their clothes, and painted their body for ritual ceremonies.

Among the Lacandon ritual objects there were incense burners, consisting of a ceramic sculpture with a face on the mouth of the censer with painted sides marked with the names of the gods U'kãbah which indicate the sex of those who are dedicating the copal incense : male , red and black vertical stripes , female, cross hatched , as seen in weavings. Tozzer did not give them some hieroglyph meaning , and the Lacandons told him that the first ancient drawing was painted by a god.

Years later, in 1964 , Robert Bruce watched the Lacandon use something similar to glyphs to write the names of their gods for their ceremonial vessels. In Najá graphic representations were found in the censers- designs which corresponded as already noted by Tozzer , to the names of the gods that they were dedicated to. (Bruce, 1964: 137). Two different glyphs representing the sex of the gods : the male gods appear with alternating stripes of red and black ; the female goddesses are presented with cross stripes forming fabric .

Even up until 2012 the censers retain the same characteristics. Even though most of the Lacandon have converted to Protestantism and abandoned their old ritual life , they continue to manufacture the censers with vertical or crossed stripes with their respective colors. Some of the Lacandon drawings, on the other hand, represent lyrics of their songs that refer to their jungle world : animals, men, women, vegetation and homes.

In Los Altos de Chiapas, Piero Gorza conducted a study with Tzotzil children from San Andrés Larráinzar in order to interpret drawing as a source of information which indicate changes in the processes of perception and visual communication within cultures transiting between orality and writing. Drawing represent the mirror of identity and interprets the spaces of tradition. Readings about the drawings of the children in San Andrés were made at two different times , which identified that the first drawings in 1985 represented the town in way that they saw themselves and as they would like San Andrés to be like. Ten years later Gorza returned in 1995 . The graphic description of the children showed differences and similarities in the first representation of the community. The drawings described the area and the presence of animals and people. In the version of the area from 1985 writing was included, in a large part due to the influence of the school. ( Gorza , 1998).

Indigenous women in Chiapas and Guatemala share codes through their textiles. Each drawing represents a word : seed, bird, red , star , walker , Santa Cruz , crown , clown , butterfly , Earth, dogleg, snake, flower, monkey, scorpion, fish , bow, spine , pumpkin, saint, tree, etc. These drawings are not just ornaments - each embroidery means a request for rain, or good bodings for life and health among others.

In indigenous textiles the image of the universe is woven with clarity , line by line , with the weavers own vision. The group is constituted by a variety of designs that identify the weavers community . All indigenous women retain a strong tradition of using the drawing through their weavings and clothing; there is a symbolism that can be understood , in other words read between communities which is represented as a textile language in order to communicate between groups through clothing of both men and women. For example , the Cosmo vision is embroidered as a diamond; the drawing that identifies the community of Magdalenas is a vulture. (Morris, 2009).

Marta Turok mentions the importance that women give the words embroidered on their huipils: “ When I die , woman, bury me with my party huipil; this way I shall take the words , our word , through the daughters of the real men ” ( Turok , 1987: 32). “ Like the Virgin taught our women how to make designs, how to write on cloth , they take the word, our word, to the children of Batzvinik , the real men ” ( Turok , 1987: 18).

On the other hand, in Cancuc Pedro Pitarc noted the importance of writing in relation to disease and death. For contemporary “Cancuqueros”, what produces death is allotted to the religious texts of the Protestants. These texts have been introduced orally to a body in order to make it sick. The disease is therefore a result of these words , the purpose of healing is to delete the words. Prayers serve to remove the disease. One of the most powerful therapeutic songs is of the jaguar, because on the skin of the jaguar it is written and drawn *stz'ibalchoj* , which means “ your Tiger writing” the disease is the power of the written word that is on the jaguar skin . According to Pitarch (2005 : 528 ) The powerful spirits can write, paint over bones. The *nahuales* of the House of Lightening are characterized as writing great books ( see Figure No. 1).



Figure 1. Drawing of snail.

## From drawing to writing

Any sign, if its intention is to communicate to others, becomes prewriting. The marks are conventionally understood elements that can be identified culturally. When these signs are organized, they are converted to graphics systems to record, and in some cases to represent, spoken language. Reading is the interpretation of this event. Writing is the same as representing sounds or ideas with traced symbols in various designs and paintings.

The word in the Zoque language to write is the same as to draw: *hoypa*. In many of the Mayan languages it means the same write as to draw. To mention some examples in Mayan languages, in Chol, to write: *ts'ijban*; writing: *ts'ijb*; drawing *ts'ijbal*; in Tzeltal from Copanagustla: *Zibal*, writing; *tsibabil* painted.

The existence of graffiti in ancient settlements is another evidence of the writing that was done by the Mayans even though they were uninitiated in writing (Coe and Kerr, 1998).

It is well known how the Maya wrote in glyphs on stone and paper, recording their history, rituals, religion and genealogies. Many of these documents disappeared at the hands of time and many others were destroyed in the Spanish conquest. However, some of these graphics survived to the present in monuments of stone, jade, bone, ceramic, and bark paper which is why we know a good part of the religion, astronomy and cosmology of the ancients.

In Chiapas the codices did not survive because, as Dolores Aramoni (1993 ) said , virtually all codices were written in Chiapas were destroyed during the colonial period. Bishop Núñez de la Vega was responsible for the disappearance of the vestiges of pre-Hispanic tradition of writing in the seventeenth century. Before colonization there was a close relationship between religion, the power of writing, and the teaching and learning that occurred among the upper classes as part of their control of knowledge . The privileged classes wrote and could read the codices. They were the sages of the nations that had managed to preserve the wisdom of the ancients through writing -booklets written in their own language ; codes and calendars made with painted figures ; explained with abbreviated characters and enigmatic figures; and drawings of names of places, animals and stars ( Aramoni , 1993).

There exists two letters written by Bishop Núñez de la Vega which talk about books or codices found in Chiapas that contained paintings with figures of animals, the indigenous language in which they were written , references to the information contained on sacred sites like caves and mountains, and ritual calendar dates cited by Carmen Leon and Mario Ruz in Diocesan Constitutions :

Books of divination , Letter to the Marquis of Vélez :

I've taken and collected over 30 books where the superstition of the Indians was exposed through art. It was deduced by the main teachers that I surrender these books with other papers that were written in their language invocations that call the Devil..... by one way or the other it was taught and communicated to those who understood and who were able to learn this art ...there is also even a notebook where they are painted figures of some animals: monkeys, toads and snakes which are assumed to be *naguales* for the children ... (León and Ruz, 1988 , 210 ) .

Letter Nunez de la Vega to Fray Juan de Malpartida :

"The instruments written in the indian language indicate that the Indians keep with great stealth four books of Tepanaguaste ( Copanaguastla ) and in some of them in a language that only the devil can understand and the Indians that lean and with some clauses in Hebrew - so that by singing they explain and gave news about places and sites of caves, mountains , hills etc., and so were going to practice their superstitions ... and have a booklet where, as in the calendar of the Church , are written their names and their effigies which they have recorded in different stones and enclosed in large vats made and placed in a cave where I removed them and burned them in Huehuetlán in public and general faith... (León and Ruz, 1988: 237)."

The last of the Mayan scribes were killed in the battle of Tayasal. These itzaes wrote hieroglyphics until 1697 when the city was conquered (Coe and Kerr, 1998 : 220). The Master singers of Yucatán, guardians of tradition , still wrote in 1782 the Chilam Balam, which included calendric glyphs of different classes.

## Indigenous communities and access to the written word

Excellent papers have been written on the history of literacy in indigenous Chiapas , however we will refer only to some of the ordinances on education of the colonial period, as well as a Chiapanecan pedagogical proposal from the nineteenth century and some comments on educational experiences in the twentieth century.

When the first religious arrived with the Spanish they tried to teach indigenous groups Latin letters with the intention of converting them to Christianity. Also there were several royal orders to establish schools, introduce teachers and promote the Spanish language in indigenous communities.

In order to teach the natives in the Captaincy General of Guatemala, several orders were given. They were mainly developed by the visitor Lara Mongrovejo in 1647 , who In this manner they would avoid interpreters who would trick them-above all with the Christian doctrine.

Ordinances that made the lawyer Antonio de Lara Mogrovejo, judge of the Audiencia of Guatemala , for the government of the provinces of Zapotitlan , Soconusco and Verapaz , 1647 .... that they learn the Christian doctrine in Spanish ..... and because it is highly desirable that the Indians know the Spanish language as mandated in many Royal groups also by the conveniences that it follows in the spiritual and temporal in order to forgive them the damages that they not seem to understand and ignore the great miseries and humiliations that they can ponder. (Carrasco, 1982: 191).

Some missionaries disagreed with teaching of Indians because they feared that the acquisition of the written word would lead back to idolatry. Religious understood how important it was reading the calendric books on learning the divinatory art and therefore in its

perpetuation, which they considered the danger inherent to literacy“ can have serious disadvantage that the Indians learn to read and write, usually in public schools, if not precisely those which are necessary for singers of the Church ...” (Carrasco, 1982: 196).

Regardless of the considerations against the danger of literacy , the Spanish government promoted the idea of founding schools so that both indigenous boys and girls could learn Castilian. Parish priests were instructed in the task and were granted payment as teachers for their services in the community where they taught .

In the village of San Francisco Panathel in November of 1643 these ordinances are true: giving faith , Gaspar de Armas :

Giving arguments as to why one should speak Castilian :  
because they have advantages in stores and treaties, because being the common language grows the results of their wealth and haciendas and also inconveniences are avoided in the administration of justice , by the ignorance of the language and avoid paying interpreters and the following producing laudable effects of friendship and kindness ... For the lack of understanding they are free the wrong and are punished the innocent as there has been malicious interpreters and that for a lack of understanding the language are not aware of the laws in their favor and the Spaniards treat them worse than slaves ... (Carrasco, 1982: 270) .

Since the nineteenth century the concern of independent governments was the assimilation of Indians into the national culture within the incorporative policy. Among the few who in the nineteenth century took into account the education of the Indians , is the Chiapas monk Victor Maria Flores who in 1841 wrote his “ Domestic Method for teaching and learning securely to read and write in 66 lessons with experienced with ignorant natives even in the Spanish language .”

In the early twentieth century, in 1902 , the government proposed the creation of regional indigenous schools . The construction of the first of the schools started in the county seat of Chamula. In 1912 it was again proposed to open more schools in rural communities, and donations were requested to build them and for illiterate adults .

It would be too numerous to mention the various attempts by federal and state governments to establish schools in rural areas in Chiapas after the revolution, which of these left their mark on

the indigenous population. In this space we refer to the presence of the government through the National Indigenous Institute and institutions such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics .

Among literacy experiences is the National Indigenous Institute, through the cultural promoters of the Tzeltal - Tzotzil Coordinator Center (1951 ) . Regarding the teachers and bilingual education advocates, there has been several notable works written and their influence continues in indigenous literacy programs.

A predominant situation that continues until today is the learning difficulties of the Tzeltal and Tzotzil groups that learn to read without understanding the reading. The Summer Institute of Linguistics wrote a report on the state of literacy in 1973.. The study consisted of investigating the levels of literacy using the parameters for the understanding of dialectal forms . They worked with Tzeltal variants from Oxchuc Chanal , Tenejapa , Ocosingo , Chilon , Bachajón, and Altamirano and in all of the cases the Spanish language. Among the results, it was indicated as to how many respondents had books in Spanish or in Tzeltal . Most of those who read in Spanish did not understand the content . Probably some of the Tzeltales had a Bible translated into Tzeltal . Since the 1940's Presbyterians assured that the indigenous learned to read in Sunday school with access to the Bible.

Aguirre Beltrán (quoted by De la Fuente, 1964 ) states that , in the intercultural situation where indigenous communities transit, formal education must be innovative -adapting to the culture of the community, knowing the reality that each space so that there is no discontinuity between formal education learned at home with formal education , so that school means a cultural renewal for the indigenous child ; children are required to learn two cultures , rhythms of work, work schedule , and work distribution .

Bruce highlights three points on indigenous literacy that are common to all groups : the first is the difficulty in understanding the concept of phonemic writing, the second the lack of motivation, lack of third books written in his way of speaking Spanish or lack of knowledge of the standard Spanish .

The Lacandons found it easier to understand the ideographic writing, and almost none of them considered writing was of some use. Some began to understand the importance of writing and reading, such as Bor Lacandon who was interested in reading the contents of medicines or to be able write a list in order to buy goods.

Also, Young Chan Kin wanted to forever remember the songs of his father. Little by little they were gradually being forgotten and this motivated him to learn to write. Antonio, Lacandon of Naha, had a notebook from the SIL that a missionary had given him some time back with which he learned to draw his name in Lacandon as well as a few more words, but never caught on to the principals of the relationship with calligraphic writing (Bruce, 1976 : 10-12).

Bruce began by teaching them to read and write in Spanish used by the Lacandon, a remote dialect of the standard found in books. These Lacandon showed trouble understanding the concept of writing related to sounds and in the process that the writer could memorize, recognize and reproduce some letters and short words. But they could not make the relationship between the written symbol and sounds that they represented- this does not could be overcome, the separation of the words seemed impossible.

The teacher Joseph Weber, throughout his life as a teacher on the coast and in the highlands of Chiapas in 1970, recognized the difficulties that the indigenous have being literate and adapted his famous bridge method and applied it in indigenous languages in his Memorandum on indigenous adult literacy. The bridge method raises the need to build on the sounds of language.

Weber proposed as an initial phase of learning the interpretation of drawings and followed by the learning of symbols. He also wrote a book entitled *Reading Drawings*. This method of teaching reading and writing was done using different types of associations: acoustic, visual, tactile and intellectual basis of sensory experience by drawing on the sounds. The basis of his theory of drawing consists in orientation, distribution, helps in fantasy, calculates, sets, teaches, explains, symbolizes, orders, illustrates, encourages, suggests, plans, simplifies, and takes apart the whole.

The basic features of the bridge method are the following steps: 1.Sensitize children in their language phonetically, analyze children's oral language and not their writing which is an arbitrary product; 2.Take apart the sentences into their individual elements: words-phonemes, and discard the simultaneity in the introduction of letters; 3.Transform auditory elements into visual elements such as reminders, provide natural bridges between phonemes and letters; 4.Simplify reminders, get the child involved in an organic way with the letters; 5.Put together the letters; 6.Mecanize reading and literacy. One advantage, says Weber, is that this method " contributes greatly

to ease tensions between indigenous and *Ladinos* by automatically directing a greater understanding between Spanish speaking and monolingual people" (Weber, 1972: 7).

The first phase is to ensure that the illiterate interpret drawings and understand symbols, " their minds, after many years of inertia , will be prepared step by step to be more receptive , more awake and restless regarding learning" (Weber, 1972: 6) .

Images and suggestive drawings helps to discover the natural wonders of the environment and relate them with the corresponding voices – the auditory representations.

The bridge method invented graphic shapes that resemble or suggest in some way that phonic elements contact the phoneme and the letter : for example , viper , " ssss " ; owl, " uuuu " , and the image of the animal's bodies suggest the sign ( Nivón , 1994 : 345 ) .

## Tzeltal communities in the Lacandon Jungle

The Chum Cerro La Laguna community is located on the edge of the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve, populated by groups from the highlands for nearly 35 years.

The importance of the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve lies in it being one of the few regions of Mexico where the tropical rainforest with the greatest floristic diversity in the country is preserved. It consists of various high evergreen forest ecosystems , Medium evergreen forest , pine-oak lowland and aquatic vegetation . It was declared a reserve in 1978 , which means that existing human settlements were declared irregular , with frequent evictions of communities.

In the high forest species like *mahogany* , *ramon* , *tight sapote* , *jobo* and *cochimbo* are found, among many other varieties of trees. As for the animals that exist in the region there are jaguars , pumas , tapirs , bats , parrots , crocodiles , monkeys, among many other species.

The reserve is divided into three zones with different levels of protection and human use. No one is allowed into the core of the reserve.

In the area of restrictive use research and ecotourism are allowed. Here dwells the Lacandon ethnic group, which live on subsistence

agriculture without destroying the environment , as well as most recently ecotourism. Tzeltal and Chol communities are located within the area of sustainable use.

This region is Laguna Miramar , considered the purest water reserves across the country . It is also has a hydraulic network of major rivers like the Lacantún the Jataté and Lacanjá .

## Migration and colonization

The Chum Cerro Tzeltal Indians migrated to the forest in the late 60s due to the poor quality of their land in the highlands of Chiapas, and especially for the lack of water . The intense colonization of the forest began in 1954 , and by 1990 there were over 200 human settlements.

In a pastoral visit to the region of Miramar, Pablo Iribarren mentioned the organization of various communities and the problems faced by some of them. For example, the 18 families of Chum Cerro in 1988.

The first inhabitants of Cerro Chum asked the government to be established in the Santa Isabel ranch, which was owned by Jaime Bulnes, near the Rio Azul. The Agricultural Secretary relented because the owner had not paid taxes for 25 years . Some of these early families could not support the amount of flies and left the area .

In 1970 the Agricultural Secretary provisionally ceded the land to seven families from Ocosingo, Sitalá and Sabanilla During this time they had a temporary permit on the lands that they requested from the government in order to settle. However the resolution of the biosphere reserve was made with other 26 villages without legal ownership . Their main need was to have a radio in order to call a small plane when someone was sick ( Iribarren , 1988 : 3).

The inhabitants of Chum Cerro La Laguna are constantly threatened with eviction , as has been done with other forest communities, since they have failed to achieve recognition of their land. The villages have been persuaded by different means into leaving the area of the reserve. Government delegates once arrived and gathered in the church to ask them to leave the place. During this meeting a strong lightning bolt hit close by that made the government representative jump, and the people started clapping & shouting “ Long live the Holy Ray , another shot , another shot!” ( see figure no. 2 . ) .



Figure 2. irls playing

## Rural activities

The Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve imposes a number of conditions in order to plant crops and looks for ways that do not harm the environment.

In the zone of tolerance where communities are based, agriculture and livestock is allowed under certain rules . The National Commission of Natural Protected Areas ( CONANP) forces them to reduce their space for livestock and planting, and plant crops that do not harm the conservation of the forest. The land is divided by color : black and brown for the cultivation of corn and the red for livestock and timber.

The inhabitants of Cerro Chum are farmers , living by growing corn and beans. They have also planted sugar cane, coffee, cocoa and citrus. The land is equally good for rice and pineapple. They work collectively in terms of animal husbandry , agriculture on a family scale.

Since 1988 the family plots became collective . It became necessary to cut down more forest to pant cornfields and in order to feed the armed struggle. In 1994, coffee prices rose and they began to plant coffee trees. This coincided with the decline in sugar, so they abandoned the cultivation of sugarcane. They are now cultivating vanilla.

There is great honey production but they cannot easily market it due to a lack of roads, and are forced to sell to middlemen who collect

on the site but then do not pay them on time or nor at the established price . As for the breeding animals, they have horses, cows, and chickens. They also resort to collecting , hunting and fishing.

## Roadways

In this part of the jungle near Montes Azules , there are no roads , only footpaths for transportation. The situation of living in the boundaries of the reservation prevents the construction of highways that would connect the communities with the rest of the State. The nearest town is Comitán. The Tzeltales from Chum Cerro have to walk along a path , then take a bus in Nueva Esperanza on a dirt road with a combined time of 10 hours on the road during the dry season. To reach Ocosingo they walk two hours to Miramar lake then travel by boat to San Quentin or Zapata. From there they take a bus to Ocosingo, with a journey time of 12 hours. In order to market their goods, they have to go to intermediaries to avoid the long road to Comitán or Ocosingo.

For some time they benefited from a runway that allowed them to get the seriously ill evacuated by plane. However , now there are no flights since the last plane crashed in April of 2010 and no other pilots are encouraged to fly there since then . This airstrip was also used by the bishop during visits and for the program Opportunities . In order to give a local perspective on the value of money , we can look to an example from 2011 when a messenger on horseback charged 20 pesos to move 6 km on an unpaved road.

In 2011, the Federal Electricity Commission convinced the Chum Cerro and Benito Juárez communities to make a dirt road in order to bring in electricity. Every adult went to work on the road ,except for the Zapatistas. Vehicles were able to travel for a period of time, but in the rainy season the road became impassable again.

## Community organization

Community decisions are agreed at meetings where women also participate . The a'teletic is the main group consisting of presidents, catechists , aides, nurses and the commissary . They also have tunnel authorities ( deacons) . The a'teletic "are not the rulers but are ordered by the community."

The first major organization was supported by the Church in 1975, the *Quiptic ta cubesel* was shared by several communities of the jungle. Later in 1976 came the Peasant Struggle, and between these two groups formed the Union of Unions in 1980. Tensions began in the eighties in several communities in the forest because a non Catholic religious group was established called "of the Brother Galván," also called "the institutional," because they were allies of the government. For this reason the Quiptic organization lost some members" (ribarren, 1988: 5).

Through these organizations the Tzeltales of the jungle were seeking legalization of their land, which the government refused claiming that they were in the Biosphere Reserve, which to date has indefinite boundaries. This resulted that in 1984 they joined the EZLN movement that promoted their recruitment. Since 1988 they have received military training.

In 2003, two thirds of the community stopped fighting claiming they did not like the practice, but also feeling the prohibition of the Zapatistas of migrating to the United States. Since 2003 half of the Chum Cerro families stopped being Zapatistas, while the other half continues.

The families that continue as Zapatistas do not receive government support, such as Opportunities or from the Conservation Program for Sustainable Development. The non-Zapatista mothers receive money from Opportunities for each child that goes to school.

Most Chum Cerro children born between 1994 and 2003, do not have birth certificates. The censuses of 2000 and 2010 could not be carried out by the Zapatistas opposition group.

For community places they have ample space for the church with its images of St. Thomas, the Virgin of Guadalupe and Christ. The houses are made of wood with thatched roofs or sheetmetal. Some are painted, some others also have drawings. There are stoves for cooking with firewood. They sleep on mats or in hammocks.

All of the residents of Chum Cerro are Catholic, and they mainly celebrate the holidays of All Saints Day, Santa Cruz, Guadalupe Day. The deacons preside over the ceremonies in Tzeltal. The religious festivals to pray for rain and weddings are very happy events. Everyone participates, and the events being with pilgrimages that include flags, music and fireworks from one side of the community to another

. Outside the church small dances are held where participants include children to the elderly .

Even when women participate in the meetings, tradition remains. Very little Spanish is spoken. They wear traditional clothes and only leave the community for health reasons.

In terms of services, they have electricity through solar panels. They also have a potable water system and latrines which were installed by a foreign foundation. Sometimes you can hear broadcasts from Guatemala . They also watch movies through videos.

## Education

In the last census of 1990 , Chum Cerro La Laguna had a total population of 113 people : 54 men , 59 women , of whom 51 were literate , and 41 illiterate ( over 5 years ) .

Chum Cerro children live in a completely oral community: public practices , decisions and agreements are made in assemblies. Private commercial practices, the transmission of knowledge to survive, are also all oral . In the jungle they resort to writing only for governmental issues. Adults still find it difficult to fill out a questionnaire. Under the circumstances of these isolated communities there are no public spaces where they can see letters, brochures or Bibles. The priests are the only ones who read and who retain community roles to apply for recognition of communal property . Currently , there is no school in Chum Cerro .

Before 1994 there was a government school . Following their integration into to the neo-Zapatista movement , they expelled the teachers. For this reason there is a generation of people between 1994 and 2003 who have not learned to read or write. Although some Zapatista villages began their own education system ,this was not the case in Chum Cerro .

Some of the parents of the children went to school and are literate . However, very few practice their literacy skills as they are mainly farmers and gatherers. Mothers are monolingual. According to the last census that was held in Chum Cerro in 1990 , there were 22 children aged 6-14 attending school and 6 who did not attend ; 29 people were monolingual and 59 bilingual ( over 5 years old ). The

ejidos population had 38 people , 6 of them with incomplete primary school, 2 fully educated (primary and secondary) , and 6 more with secondary education .

In Chum Cerro in 2011 there were 22 children aged 8 to 18 who could not read or write. Moreover, half of the children and some parents do not have birth certificates in order to get CONAFE- INEA involved in the formal education of the community.

The Chum Cerro neozapaitstas families have a teacher who occupies a portion of his time teaching because of his many activities . Only one parent sent two of their children to the New Sabanilla school , A Chol speaking town that is an hour walk from the community ( See Figure No. 3).



Figure 3. Drawing a jaguar.

## Literacy workshops

22 Chum Cerro children , (2010-2012 ) between 8 and 15 years old were started on literacy instruction . These children speak very little Spanish , and are accustomed to outdoor life , doing small tasks for the community, taking care of their siblings , and gathering wood. Almost none of them has left Chum Cerro . The girls wear their traditional dress , except one whose parents are interested in having their children learn more and sent two men of the family to study in New Sabanilla . Parents of the Zapatista families did not allow their children to come to take the literacy

workshop. The children, Zapatistas or not, are often friends and play together.

The most interested in the education of the children in the community is a volunteer, Alfonso Pinto, who studied until the second year of high school. He gave a space for conducting the workshops. He also agreed to be the instructor and since February 2010 brought the children every day. There are advantages of having an instructor in the community that your group knows and likes, and is not required to submit progress reports before the SEP, and can also be free to teach in their own way.

For the realization of the workshops, Alfonso Pinto had several volunteers who helped with the animation by giving drawing lessons, games, reading stories, looking at clippings, modeling, teaching letters and numbers, and so on.

In Chum Cerro children had never had paper or pencils, so literacy workshops were a privilege by practicing drawing, which was initiated by an expert in painting and sculpture. They were allowed to do free drawings, anything that was copied from reality, as are required in schools. Children showed surprising creativity in their abstract paintings.

One of the volunteers taught them to cut pictures from magazines and tell stories about what they saw to get them used to seeing images on paper. Children drew freely while writing some words related to their drawings. They drew their homes, environment, flowers, animals...they also drew people, particularly women with their very colorful traditional dresses. Many colors were used and unlike other children they did not use the entire length of the sheet of paper.

With help from the instructor they were asked to first narrate and then try to write stories to show how much they understood in writing. At the same time they read stories in Tzeltal and Spanish, and were asked to draw what they were listening to see if they understood the stories. From each of these illustrated works booklets were published for distribution among children.

When they could tell and write some stories, they talked about their daily lives, the sowing of maize, the importance of eating, animals in the house: cats, chickens, ducks, dogs, sheep, cows, hunting, fishing, caves, trees, river, mountain, wild animals such as

rabbits who were always hungry and ready to invade the corn , the tiger and his power, deer, agouti , dove, buzzard , sparrow hawk , coyote, wild boar, and badgers, among others . Many of these tales are an interpretation by the children of magical realism .

Besides reading practices there were several volunteers who taught them how to add and subtract . One biology student taught them to make games from local materials: stones, seeds and even modeling in clay figures . In the summer of 2012 we had the support of two academics from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid , who spent a month in the community and made an assessment of the group.

From the beginning a small library was organized with: books in Spanish for different ages, with some written in Tzeltal , dictionaries in Spanish and Tzeltal , materials on nature and the environment , history, geography , readings about the Maya and others, all of the books were well illustrated b . (See Figure No. 4).

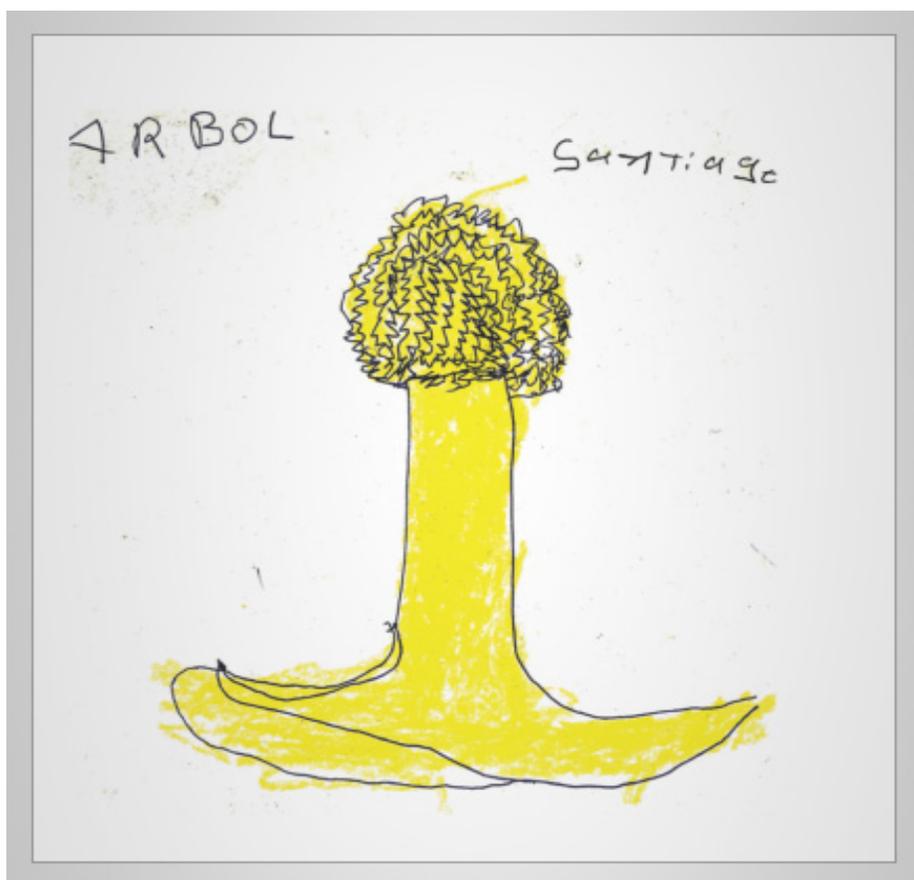


Figure 4. Drawing of a tree.

## Conclusions

The acquiring literacy skills for children in oral cultures , on order to be effective , need to take into account the knowledge of the group and the particularities of each community. We believe that in rural areas where children and teachers belong to different cultures , the process of transmission of literacy is more complex.

Among the obstacles that arise in learning to read and write and to encourage reading in oral communities are the lack of adequate space , lack of teaching materials and lack of motivation of families who belong to an oral culture where writing is not a basic element for survival.

Before the Chum Cerro Children could appropriate writing they had to start to learn how to view an image, to make drawings and encounter the difficulty of identifying the sounds of the language through the strokes of the letters, and later on seeing the letters together in order to form a word. What is most important is that Tzeltal children are required to learn to read and write primarily in Spanish , as there are very few texts in their native language and few teachers and techniques to convey writing Tzeltal .

Drawing with children Chum Cerro was the most appropriate tool to take the step from oral communication to writing. Through image came better communication with Tzeltal children, even with books written in Spanish . Through the drawing of lines there was the abstraction of calligraphic signs. The children of Chum Cerro achieved primarily the ability to communicate with drawings, without the intervention of the community language or nor the language of school instruction . Children freely expressed themselves about their world: their concerns and their likes. These 22 children of different ages and different levels of knowledge were able to learn the rudiments of reading and writing while they are waiting for some time in the near future to have a school and a classroom teacher .

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