

Teaching Our Own Babies: Teachers' Life Journeys into Community-Based Initial Education in Indigenous Oaxaca, Mexico

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Abstract

In an era when U.S. and Mexican teachers are valued more for their academic achievements than their community knowledge and local/ethnic identity (e.g. Teach for America, or its off-shoot, Teach for Mexico), this study provides partial results of a one-year (2011-2012) intensive professional development experience (called a *diplomado*) for 35 indigenous teachers of Initial Education who attend pregnant mothers and infants from birth to 3 years old in marginalized communities of Oaxaca, Mexico. The goal was to enrich these local teachers' background knowledge and equip them with research skills to investigate and honor the collectivized practices, original languages, values and governance structures (together known as *comunalidad*) of the rural indigenous communities where they teach. The intent was to generate an authentic, bilingual, and community-based approach to Initial Education - a groundbreaking alternative to the Mexican government's homogeneous approach. An analysis of their autobiographies indicated that these Oaxacan indigenous teachers faced a complex of internal and external challenges in this radical, regenerative work: they are young, female, mostly novice teachers, they lack professional preparation, and they have confronted racism throughout their own lives, especially and intensely in Mexican public schools. In the process of documenting communal life and early childhood socialization practices in rural communities where they teach, they confronted their own (often uneasy) biculturalism and bilingualism. "Communalizing" early education in indigenous Oaxaca involves reconstructing and revitalizing the indigenous identities and language use of children and teachers alike – a challenging, invaluable and achievable task.

Keywords

community education, indigenous education, alternative education, alternative teacher preparation, initial education, Oaxaca, *comunalidad*, teacher autobiographies, Pedagogical Movement, Mexico, early childhood education

“The importance of the first 3 years of life when children are so dependent on the family lies in the power of a social group to influence what is learned. Meanings and standards are

established by the culture, and ‘subtle interactional factors shape and socialize children to think and act like members of their own [cultural] groups’ ” (Hart & Risley, 1999, p. 11).

Introduction

In 2000, Roberta Wollons compiled a fascinating collection of 11 nation-state histories documenting the “global diffusion of an idea” – the kindergarten. “The kindergarten spread from the west,” she tells us, “producing a complex global discourse on the child, education, psychology, and a newly evolving science of child rearing and child development.” Still, “in each instance the kindergarten became a local institution, taking on an identity and function of its own in each national setting” (p.10).

Individual chapters in Wollons’ volume recount diverse national trajectories whereby the kindergarten model was “borrowed” internationally yet reimagined locally: from its origins in Friedrich Froebel’s 19th century Germany, to its use as a tool of forced Americanization of even the youngest immigrants in early 20th century U.S., to its conversion in Japan from the Christian kindergarten introduced by missionaries to an institution that reinforced Confucian values, to Vietnam’s mass kindergarten movement intended, first, to liberate women from the home, and then later “to teach the young anarchists to love their government, to love their family and country, and above all to be loyal to Ho Chi Minh” (p. 13). Throughout, Wollons’ message is clear: “All borrowing nations exerted powerful cultural and political agency over borrowed ideas” (p. 7), thereby illuminating “the immense power of local cultures to respond to and reformulate borrowed ideas” (p. 1).

Wollons does not include Mexico or any Latin American country in her collection, nor do her chapters investigate the efforts of minoritized local cultures in the featured nations to reformulate, or even reject, the education models borrowed internationally and imposed on them by their governments. For centuries the nation-states of the Americas have borrowed western models of schooling and imposed them

on diverse indigenous populations. These governments continue to wield their powerful cultural and political agency to “reform” and homogenize public schooling in Latin America today (Ornelas, 2004; Watson, 2007).

In 2009, Schmelkes detailed the situation of educational inequality endured by indigenous Mexico:

Approximately 10% of the Mexican population is indigenous, and some 10 million people speak one of 68 native languages. The indigenous population is probably much larger than the population that speaks a native language, as the number of local language speakers is decreasing rapidly. However, indigenous participation in the educational system does not reflect this percentage at any educational level...[I]t is estimated that only between 1% and 3% of higher education enrollment is indigenous...This is an indicator of educational inequality (p. 5-6).

Schmelkes (2009) went on to identify the demands, “both historical and more recent,” by indigenous peoples regarding national education systems. “The first and oldest demand” is to have access to bilingual and culturally pertinent education at all levels, including higher education. Second, indigenous peoples demand that national populations become knowledgeable about their cultures in order to value and appreciate the indigeneity within their borders. The final demand is that “indigenous peoples want to make decisions about their own educational systems, and demand the resources to plan, execute and evaluate them” (p. 8-9).

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Oaxacan Indigenous *Comunalidad*

In Oaxaca these educational demands illuminate facets of the more complex and foundational indigenous concept of *comunalidad*. According to Rendón (2002), *comunalidad* refers globally to the entire communal way of life of indigenous peoples. According to Maldonado (2012), community members are socialized into *comunalidad* through processes of continuous, profound civic formation in communal responsibility. *Comunalidad* is the foundation of indigenous life, identity and cultural resistance in Oaxaca, Maldonado (2002a; 2004) contends, and also is the basis for collective legal rights and future Indian liberation: “Recognition and respect for this collective character of their rights as peoples is today one of the principal demands of the indigenous movement” (Maldonado, 2002b, p. 53).

In 1995, in response to indigenous and teacher union pressure, *comunalidad* was written into the State Education Act as the fourth guiding principle of educational practice (Martínez Luna, 2009; 2010, p. 89). Still, despite its fundamental importance to indigenous existence and identity in Oaxaca and its presence in state law, *comunalidad* has had little impact on public education in the state.

Public Education and Teacher Professional Development in Oaxaca

Though supposedly decentralized from federal to state control in 1992, the Mexican public education system nevertheless retains expansive educational decision-making powers and standardizing curricular control at all school levels for the national Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in Mexico City, including teacher preparation and professional development (Martínez Vásquez, 2004, p.16-17).

Education policies in Mexico have traditionally sought to strip indigenous communities of their languages and cultures in order to assimilate them for purposes of nation-building and “the national good” (Arnaut, 1996; Meyer, 2008; Soberanes, 2003, 2010; Soberanes & Maldonado, 2002). Mexican public school teachers, even indigenous teachers, have been prepared practically and ideologically to enact their State-interpreted “civic responsibility” to assimilate indigenous children and communities into the so-called mainstream and to teach them the Spanish language (Soberanes, 2010). A major tool in this assimilationist goal has been the abandonment of any effective preparation of teachers to maintain, develop or revitalize indigenous languages or to develop and implement educational pedagogies in accord with the values and cultural practices of the *comunalidad* which structures and defines their local community life.

Since the so-called decentralization of basic education in Mexico and the creation in 1992 of the State Institute of Public Education of Oaxaca (IEEPO), which is somewhat comparable to a state public education department, indigenous young adults contracted to teach in so-called “bilingual” schools¹ have received minimal and inadequate formal teacher preparation. Given the high poverty and unemployment levels in Oaxaca, salaried teaching positions that prioritize indigenous bilingual candidates are politically contentious and rigorously competitive. Most successful candidates for these positions are graduates of Spanish-monolingual high schools who are contracted to immediately fill available teaching positions in indigenous schools, usually due to their tested proficiency (oral and written) in one of Oaxaca’s more than 50 original languages² or variants, and/or their political or family connections.

If teacher preparation is severely inadequate for indigenous basic education (the obligatory education offered in preschools, primaries, and middle schools), it is entirely absent for Initial Education, the level of educational attention focused on pregnant mothers and babies from birth through three years of age. In 1992, the same year the Mexican education system was “decentralized,” the basis for Initial Education was laid in Mexico with the establishment of the Program for Indigenous Initial Education (PREII) (Dirección General de Educación Indígena, 2009). Since that time, successive policy revisions focused on this schooling level have occurred, such as the reform in 2010, which produced curricular guidelines for Indigenous Initial Education (Dirección General de Educación Indígena, 2010). Despite new policies and curricular designs, teacher preparation for this level of schooling was largely ignored. Most new teachers contracted for Initial Education are hired on limited time contracts, which require that they take university courses to be rehired, but since no institution of higher education in Oaxaca, public or private, offers a program in Initial Education, they study something, anything, just to fulfill the academic requirement for the degree.

Far from prioritizing, encouraging, or even permitting the fundamental indigenous values of *comunalidad*, recent Mexican education reforms rigorously pursue an accelerating agenda of homogenization and standardization in the preparation and evaluation of Mexican teachers, as well as students, under the banner of global competitiveness and “increased opportunities for all.” A new system of teacher evaluation, adopted in 2011 by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) and the National Syndicate of Education Workers (SNTE), recently revised, will determine which teachers achieve promotions in status and increased incentives

and which are demoted in status, resulting in loss of incentives. Under the new system, the greatest weight is given to a teacher’s professional development (40%) and continued professionalization (40%), as ratified solely on national standardized tests, while the remaining 20 percent of a classroom teacher’s evaluation is to be based on her/his students’ academic achievement as measured by “objective measures” based on the official curriculum and syllabi (Martínez Carballo, 2014; Secretaría de Educación Pública and the Comisión Nacional SNTE, 2011). As I write these words, the newly created National Coordination for Professional Teaching Services is carrying out a massive standardized testing process (more than 190,000 registered test-takers as of May 2015), to competitively fill vacant teaching positions nationally in preschool through grade 9 based entirely on standardized test scores (Garduño, 2015). In addition, the new reforms propose to incorporate all Initial Education teachers into the preschool teacher ranks.

Significantly also in 2011, Teach for Mexico (TFM), patterned on Teach for America, surfaced as a new extra-official direction in “ideology and leadership” in rural education. TFM initiated its activities in 2013 by selecting the “100 best” of 1,400 applicants who were either recent university graduates or outstanding professionals no older than 29 with “profiles of excellence,” including stellar academic achievement records in diverse fields. After four weeks of intensive training, TFM places its “professionals” in schools in the most marginalized regions of several Mexican states to support instruction in English, technology, and/or other subjects. While Oaxaca did not sign on to receive TFM “professionals,” these minimally prepared “teachers” were placed in schools in marginalized, indigenous regions in Mexican states such as Chihuahua and Puebla. Their commitment to teach in these schools is

limited to only two years (information accessed from the Teach for Mexico website, www.ensenapormexico.org). Considering the vast educational inequality in access to higher education by Mexican indigenous students reported by Schmelkes (2009), it is highly unlikely that any of TFM's "100 Best" university graduates or young professionals who aspire to teach in rural Mexico and who are accepted to this alternative program will be indigenous, much less that they will be proficient speakers of an indigenous language.

Despite Mexico's signature on international declarations of indigenous political, linguistic and educational rights (e.g. the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the International Labour Organization's Convention 169, among others), neither the SEP's new teacher evaluation system nor Teach For Mexico's selection and training processes indicate that their rankings or "profiles of excellence" prioritize selecting, preparing, or rewarding teachers based on their rural life experiences, the depth of their local community knowledge, their competence in the original language of the students, or their commitment to "teach their own babies or students."

Tenaciously resisting homogenizing "education reforms" borrowed from the west, time and again pockets of indigenous populations in Mexico and across the Americas have reasserted their right to determine the values, priorities and practices by which their teachers will be prepared and their children will be schooled (Meyer & Maldonado, 2010). Collectively, their grassroots efforts witness to the truth of Wollons' finding of "the immense power of local cultures to respond to and reformulate" education models that either they themselves have chosen to borrow (e.g. Maori Language Nests adapted to Oaxaca from New Zealand, Meyer & Soberanes, 2009), or more

commonly, western models that have been imposed upon them.

This paper reports one such effort, organized by Plan Piloto-CMPIO³ in Oaxaca to recast western-style "teacher preparation" reforms to achieve local teacher education priorities. This was done not in isolation, but as part of a Pedagogical Movement⁴ to reconstruct bilingual (indigenous language/Spanish), intercultural education in Oaxaca according to the indigenous communal values, priorities and practices collectively referred to as *comunalidad*. Specifically, this study provides partial results of a one-year (2011-2012) intensive training experience (called a *diplomado*) for 35 indigenous teachers of Initial Education who were "teaching their own babies" in marginalized communities of Oaxaca, Mexico. In the *diplomado* they were guided to carry out an array of diverse research tasks in the communities where they teach, which they documented in portfolios of written and photographic evidence as their final *diplomado* product. The goal was to value these teachers' rural life experiences, enrich their background knowledge, and equip them with research skills to investigate and honor the collectivized practices, original languages, values and governance structures that constitute *comunalidad* in the rural indigenous communities where they teach. The outcome of this effort, it was hoped, would be the creation of an authentic, participatory, community-based approach to Initial Education for pregnant mothers, babies and toddlers up to 3 years old. If successful, this would be a ground-breaking alternative to the Mexican government's homogeneous Initial Education approach. Critically, too, this radical, communal approach would be carried out by "our own teachers, working within our communities, according to our values and practices of *comunalidad*, to teach our own babies."

Development of the Diplomado

Plan Piloto-CMPIO's *Diplomado in Community-Based Indigenous Initial Education* was the first teacher preparation effort in Oaxaca focused specifically on Initial Education and officially recognized and accredited by the IEEPO. The commitment to develop this *diplomado* grew out of "our growing concern about the government's assimilationist approaches to working with babies and toddlers and their parents in indigenous communities" (Soberanes, 2010, p. 110):

Official approaches to the education of these very young children, which international funding agencies frequently encourage and support, focus on "re-training" indigenous parents, especially mothers, to abandon communal childbearing priorities and practices in order to adopt practices promoted by western theories of child development. Individualism and the acquisition of the Spanish language are unquestioned assumptions and priority outcomes of these assimilationist official programs.

The intention of the *diplomado* was to acknowledge western knowledge but to value, even prioritize, local wisdom and practices concerning child socialization and development. These communities suffer from high rates of migration and accelerated loss of their original languages; however, in many instances they maintain communal child socialization practices, as well as other practices vital to the continuation of their original cultures.

Goals of the Diplomado

The following goals were identified by the planning committee, composed of the Pedagogical Committee of Plan Piloto-CMPIO and trusted international, national and local advisors:

- To provide local teachers of indigenous Initial Education with basic professional preparation, so that they could develop an alternative strategy of Initial Education that would be culturally relevant to the indigenous communities of Oaxaca.
- To contribute to the preservation and strengthening of indigenous socialization practices, cultures and languages in Oaxaca.
- To create the conditions for children under three years old to receive educational opportunities in their communities that are culturally relevant and of high quality, based in the community's own values and assessments.

The *diplomado* lasted for 12 months, from July 2011 through July 2012, for a total of 200 hours. Throughout the year, the *diplomado* employed various formats: a) an intensive month of initial training in July 2011; b) observation and consultation visits by Plan Piloto-CMPIO Pedagogical Committee members to the communities of many of the course participants from September 2011 through May 2012; c) five intensive weekend sessions throughout the year in the capital city of Oaxaca; and, d) a final week of summation, reflection and closure in July 2012.

Participants

All *diplomado* participants were females, mostly in their 20s, though some more experienced Plan Piloto-CMPIO teachers of Initial Education participated. In the end, 35 teachers submitted the required final portfolio of tasks and were considered "completers." All the completers were indigenous, their seven ethnicities shown in Table 1. Their proficiency in their original or heritage language varied considerably, as will be discussed later in this paper.

Table 1
Ethnicity of *diplomado* participants

	Ethnicity	Number of Participants
1	Mixtec	15
2	Zapotec	7
3	Mixe	5
4	Chinantec	4
5	Triqui	2
6	Mazatec	1
7	Huave (Ikoots)	1
	TOTAL	35

Course Content

Major themes introduced during the intensive initial month of the course and expanded throughout the year defined the goals of the *diplomado*. These included: a) *comunalidad* and education in Oaxaca; b) articulation of Initial Education with later levels of schooling; c) theories of infant development, with a focus on rural, indigenous and communal contexts; d) research methodologies and their pedagogical applications; and, e) theory and pedagogy of communal Initial Education.

Final Portfolio of Tasks: “Harvest of the Diplomado”

The *diplomado* as an academic professional development experience was accredited by the Institute of Public Education of the State of Oaxaca (IEEPO). In order to evaluate participants’ achievement of the goals of the *diplomado* for accreditation purposes, and also to support Plan Piloto-CMPIO’s continued efforts to develop an alternative community-based approach to Initial Education, a final portfolio of tasks was devised in consultation with the advisors. The intent of the portfolio, which was named the “harvest of the *diplomado*” by the Pedagogical Committee, was

to display each participant’s understanding and accomplishment of research tasks important to their work in their community and to motivate reflection on their learnings.

Twenty-eight of the thirty-five completers (80%) gave permission for their portfolio tasks to be analyzed in detail, and many of their voices are heard in this study. In each case, the teacher’s indigenous ethnicity is identified; in all but one case, they asked that their real names be used along with their words. The one exception has been given a pseudonym. Analysis of each of the diverse tasks that comprise the portfolio is ongoing and is a shared responsibility of the *diplomado* advisors and the Pedagogical Committee. In this report, the analysis will focus on a general assessment of the extent to which the goals of the *diplomado* were successfully met and ways in which the family backgrounds, schooling experiences, and language competencies of the participants impacted their achievement of these goals. These findings are drawn primarily from an analysis of the teachers’ linguistic and educational autobiographies, an assignment described in more detail below. We consider these to be significant but partial findings of the *diplomado*, as other tasks in the teachers’ portfolios are still undergoing analysis⁵.

Preparation of the Teacher/Researchers and the Analysts

Before discussing the influence of the teachers’ personal and professional backgrounds on their achievement of the *diplomado* goals as analyzed through their personal autobiographies, it is important to provide a description of the preparation provided to these 28 teachers in the *diplomado* which enabled them to develop into researchers of communal life and community-based childrearing practices in the rural

indigenous communities where they teach. This is important, as most of these teachers had not completed higher education studies or any formal teacher education preparation.

In the *diplomado's* research module, the teachers were guided to document the life of their community through photographs and narratives of caretakers', toddlers', and their own spontaneous activities, through linguistic surveys and mapping exercises, and through biographies of the pregnancy, birth and early life of infants based on interviews with parents and grandparents. In each case, they were provided with sample research documents collected in communities similar to their own; the samples usually were presented to the group by the experienced teacher who had collected them. Then the samples were analyzed and reflected upon in small and large group sessions facilitated by *diplomado* advisors who were experienced qualitative researchers. In most cases, the emerging teacher/researchers left each *diplomado* session with protocols for conducting in their own community the research tasks that had been presented and analyzed in the *diplomado* session (e.g. photographs and their analysis; interviews; linguistic surveys).

The process of professional development described here was *cyclical and applied*; this means that after a preliminary orientation was provided for each research method during a *diplomado* session, usually accompanied by a sample of data collected using the method in an indigenous community similar to their own, the teachers returned to their communities to apply the method themselves. At the next *diplomado* gathering, we reflected in small groups and as a whole group on the documentation the teachers brought from their own communities, in order to refine the evidence and reflect on comments and suggestions of the participants and advisors.⁶

It is important to note that each portfolio included two letters confirming the legitimacy of

the teacher's investigative work, one written by the teacher's school supervisor and the other written by an authority of the community. These letters certified that the teacher's research documentation was recognized and approved in both of these critical arenas of her educational and community work.

Each teacher's linguistic and educational autobiography was included in the portfolio to document their personal history and motivations for teaching. *Diplomado* participants were provided with a series of guiding questions, organized into topical sections: a) early childhood; b) school experiences; c) personal linguistic history; d) literacy experiences; e) professional preparation and development; f) family and professional life today; g) initial education pedagogy; h) collaboration with parents, the community, and education authorities; and, i) reflections. Participants were encouraged to write honestly about their personal experiences, but they were not required to answer all the questions on the protocol guide. Prior to writing their autobiography, participants read and reflected on several sample autobiographies written by Plan Piloto-CMPIO teachers. They also were given the opportunity in *diplomado* sessions to "talk" their autobiography in small groups. These teacher-researchers had no previous experience documenting their personal linguistic and educational autobiographies in writing. Many initially found this task intimidating, even painful. Still, many produced carefully crafted, multipage autobiographical documents, often accompanied by family photos, which led to deep personal and group reflections regarding the impact of their own life histories on their work with infants and with their communities.

Analysis of the Autobiographies

The author of this text, who has collaborated with Plan Piloto-CMPIO for more than 16 years

and who served as the advisor for the research module of the *diplomado*, engaged members of the Pedagogical Committee in the early analysis of the teachers' autobiographies. This collective analytic effort was done at the request of the Pedagogical Committee in order to develop their skills at analyzing qualitative research data. At all times we attempted to follow a cyclical analytic process similar to that of the *diplomado* teacher-researchers. Initially, the 28 portfolios were divided among the Pedagogical Committee members, each of whom was asked to do an initial analysis of three teachers' autobiographies, using the protocol of topical questions as a guide. The author of this study then compiled the separate analyses, producing a draft document (in Spanish) that was discussed in detail and revised where appropriate by the committee. In this discussion, committee members also asked questions to deepen their understanding of the qualitative analysis process itself. The author then finalized the draft document and asked that two leaders of Plan Piloto-CMPIO review the final Spanish version. Their suggestions were again incorporated. Since our intention was to initially publish this analysis in English, the author (the only English speaker among the committee members) translated the final version of the analysis into English and submitted it for publication⁷.

In a workshop in Oaxaca in December 2014, the results of this analysis were shared (in Spanish) with the teacher participants of the *diplomado* and other recently hired Initial Education teachers, as well as their educational supervisors. The Pedagogical Committee was eager to hear their reflections and suggestions, and as it turned out, to document their enthusiastic reception of this work. The cycle of research, reflection and action continues; that is, based on this recent feedback, Plan Piloto-CMPIO continues to renew and deepen its

commitment and its efforts to construct a transformed and community-based Initial Education practice. The public affirmation of this analysis by Initial Education teachers and supervisors in Fall 2014 has been added to the final version of this study to underscore the findings reported here.

Outcomes of the Diplomado

Goal One: Basic Professional Preparation

As stated earlier, the first goal of the *diplomado* was to provide the teachers with basic professional preparation for indigenous Initial Education, so that they could develop an alternative strategy of Initial Education that would be culturally relevant to the indigenous communities of Oaxaca. Basic professional preparation for these novice teachers was necessary for several reasons. As documented in reflections in their portfolios, some of the participants entered teaching solely out of necessity or "destiny," when their hopes for continued schooling in other professional fields were aborted for economic reasons or lack of job possibilities. Others began teaching by filling a temporary teaching vacancy. When they discovered that they enjoyed the work, they competed for a teaching position of their own.

Bilingual teaching positions in Oaxaca in 2012 when the teachers' autobiographies were submitted were hotly contested, requiring two examinations, one of content knowledge and the other of bilingual proficiency, plus an interview. Many of the participants, like Amadelia quoted here, wrote about the impact the bilingual test had on their own perceptions of their original language, and those of their family members.

This was the first time I sat for an examination of bilingualism. I didn't know how to write [the indigenous language] and I only spoke it a little. I couldn't carry on a good conversation.

This was when my parents realized the error they had made when they prohibited us from learning Zapotec. My dad helped me study and with the help of my grandparents I learned a little more Zapotec. When I sat for the exam again, I passed. (Amadelia, Zapotec)

Still other participants slipped into teaching through a controversial but teacher union protected policy: a retiring teacher could “bequeath” their teaching position to their child or relative, or even sell it to the highest bidder, regardless of the young replacement’s field of academic study or indigenous language skills (Agren, 2012).

In both of these cases, the participant entered the teaching field without professional preparation, “beginning from zero” as one said. Ester (Mixtec) acknowledged that when she began teaching Initial Education, “I didn’t even know what it was.” In many cases, they entered the teaching field because it provided secure employment, something quite rare in Oaxaca. They also came in with an unpredictable personal profile of background experiences, language competencies and commitments to teaching. If these young teachers were to contribute to a radical re-visioning of Initial Education based in *comunalidad*, it was felt that the *diplomado* must provide them with basic professional skills and competencies as tools in this innovative process of educational reconstruction.

Goal Two: Preserving and Strengthening the Original Culture and Language

The second goal of the *diplomado* involved preparing the teachers to actively contribute to the preservation and strengthening of indigenous socialization practices, cultures and languages in Oaxaca. This meant that teachers of Initial Education needed to be familiar with (or at least learn to respectfully investigate)

cultural expressions such as socialization practices, and also to be conversant in the local original language or variant, in order to foment both of these in their educational work. The question arose: what background experiences and “funds of knowledge” did the participants possess in either of these areas of cultural knowledge?

Early socialization in rural communities

The linguistic autobiographies indicate that these teachers’ lives did prepare them to comprehend life and education in rural communities. All had been born and, with rare exceptions, raised in Oaxaca’s indigenous communities, a somewhat surprising discovery given the years of poverty and out-migration these communities have experienced. Even though the participants’ language profiles varied, there were still surprising similarities in their schooling lives, including ridicule and shaming for their linguistic “incompetence” in either Spanish or the original language. The participants also were similar in what will be described as their “patchwork” of educational experiences as they bounced between schools affiliated with the “indigenous/bilingual” and “formal/official” school systems (see note 1).

Though all participants indicated that they grew up in poverty, there were noticeable differences between those who as children shouldered significant responsibilities at home, and those who did not. Birth order seems to have had some influence here.

Since I was a little older, I began to help with tasks in the kitchen, help my father a little in activities in the field. After a short time I began to take care of the sheep with my sisters before and after school...Within the family, I took care of my sisters when my parents were gone. I prepared the meal, washed clothes, made

tortillas, that is, I did all the tasks of the kitchen or the house. (María Luz, Zapotec)

Still, María Luz and a few others reported that these tasks did not feel onerous: “All the tasks I did I learned from my parents and my grandfather. They guided me with loving words because I was the first daughter of my parents and the first granddaughter of my grandfather.” (María Luz, Zapotec)

Others, however, were stoic about the strenuous demands placed upon them as children. At six years old, Galdina (Mixtec) and her sister were responsible to take care of the corn field and care for the goats; at nine years old, she took care of the cattle.

The work was hard because at times they treated us as if we were men, since we didn't have brothers who could help us... More than anything I learned to obey and I learned what would serve me in the future. (Galdina, Mixtec)

Several participants were sent to work outside their homes, doing housework in exchange for school tuition, room and board. Schoolwork was squeezed in at night, if it was accomplished at all. Many reported that they could not continue studying beyond high school due to financial difficulties.

Interestingly, other participants, often but not always the youngest in the family, had no specific early responsibilities. According to Gabriela (Mixtec), youngest of eight: “Most of the time I played with my siblings, who spoiled me.”

For Irma (Chinantec), the freedom to study left her with a tremendous appreciation and sense of responsibility to her family. When her father died suddenly when she was six years old, her mother “struggled untiringly” so that all her children could complete elementary school. Then her older siblings migrated to the city or worked

the family corn field to keep food in their mouths and to support Irma's continued studies:

I had to fulfill the dream of my father and my mother, the unconditional support of my siblings, who thanks to their prodding and efforts I was motivated, since they watched over my studies and supported me economically. They covered the costs of my schooling and went to the school to ask the teacher how I was doing. (Irma, Chinantec)

According to these young teachers, migration and the grinding poverty that motivates it have had devastating effects on *comunalidad* in many of their communities:

Communal life in my community isn't like it used to be, according to the elders, because there's no longer respect, not for the language, the traditional dress, the fiestas, among other things, due to migration that has been caused by the lack of work. (Rosa, Zapotec)

Given the pervasive poverty, it might be assumed that parents were largely unavailable and uninvolved in the school life of their children. In some cases this appears to be true. María Luz (Zapotec) reported that her parents never participated in any pedagogical activities, only going to the school “when there were meetings to hand out grades, or the school committees had to clean the school and bathe children who had lice.”

Still, the autobiographies contain many moving accounts of parental and family efforts to assure an educational future for their offspring. One account includes moving descriptive detail:

My parents told me that I had to learn to read and write. I saw my father with so much enthusiasm, just like me. He said

he wanted to see me some day be something more in life, since he was not able to complete his elementary education for lack of teachers. When I entered first grade, I didn't know how to hold a pencil or the crayons, or even draw a letter. With my teacher's help I learned to color, to sing, to write dittos, and the courageous effort of my father supported me so that I improved my letters. (Irma, Chinantec)

However, some family attempts to support schooling, though probably well-intentioned, instead were damaging to these teachers' early original language proficiency and their attitudes toward the language. Amadelia's father prohibited his children from speaking Zapotec and never used the language with them "since he had the idea that if we spoke Zapotec we would stutter when we spoke Spanish. I learned Zapotec with my companions at school but in the house I never said a single word."

Still, perhaps others, like Nancy (Ikoots), whose older sister did not support Nancy's original language use when she was sent to live with her in the city in order to study middle school, might now as an adult find the wisdom to weigh their personal life experiences with deeper understanding:

I had to go to the city to study, but that experience didn't remove me from the person I am, an Ikoots. I understand perfectly well my variant of the Ombeayüits language. I don't dress traditionally, I like modern things, but I'm not ashamed to wear my native dress on a traditional holiday, or to walk barefoot on the mounds of cultivated land, ... or to carry a basket of newly picked corn on my back, or to have my fingernails grimy from digging up sweet potatoes.

Language Proficiency

Though all of the *diplomado* participants had spent years living in rural indigenous communities, only 27 of the 35 completers identified an original language as their home language, their L1. Their original languages represent seven of Oaxaca's 16 ethnolinguistic groups and include the following:

Table 2
Original language of *diplomado* participants

	Original language spoken by participants	Total number of participants by original language
1	Mixtec	10
2	Zapotec	4
3	Mixe	5
4	Chinantec	4
5	Triqui	2
6	Mazatec	1
7	Huave (Ombeayüits)	1
	TOTAL	27

Only one of these participants said she was raised bilingually "from the cradle" (*desde la cuna*) in Mixtec and Spanish. Still, her early bilingualism was not a product of bilingual schooling: "The elementary school used more Spanish than original language because the teachers prohibited it."

The remaining eight participants reported that they were raised with Spanish as their dominant home language, generally with an indigenous language present to some degree in the home environment. In some cases, they now have acquired some conversational ability in their heritage language through their teaching work in communities.

Table 3

Heritage indigenous language of participants who were raised Spanish dominant

	Heritage indigenous language	Number of Participants
1	Mixtec	5
2	Zapotec	3

One defining difference between those who say they are proficient in their indigenous language and those who do not was the degree of transience at an early age. Vegonia (Mixtec) explained that the use of the original language has been diminishing in her family “for the simple need to leave the community to go elsewhere to work.” She described her life of constant movement, beginning when she was one year old when she moved from her community to Mexico City to live with her mother: “Logically the preschool was monolingual in Spanish.” She returned to her community when she entered second grade and spent two miserable years there.

When I arrived it was really hard because the children spoke only Mixtec. Plus I wore pants, and in the village the girls only wore dresses, so the boys said really gross things...I didn't understand Mixtec, so I had to learn it with the help of my grandma who spoke it well, though she was from another village.

At Vegonia's pleading, her mother sent her away to a boarding school for fourth grade, then in fifth and sixth grades she attended two different Spanish-only schools in different towns. Her high school years were in a Spanish monolingual school in a neighboring state. “As my years of schooling increased, I distanced myself more from the language and I liked it less.”

Language of Schooling

Transiency also impacted those who were raised in their own communities, though in other ways. In the early grades it was often the teachers, not the students, who were transient. Irma (Chinantec) recounts that each year of her elementary schooling, she was taught by a teacher new to her community. María Luz (Zapotec) speaks for many of the participants when she recounts her experience: “My teachers were indigenous but they spoke a different language than us, so they never spoke to me in my indigenous language, only Spanish.”⁸

It was not only linguistic misplacement of teachers or their transiency in the community that affected language use at school. In addition, teachers' negative attitudes toward their own original language and their suppression of it at school also affected the students. “The majority of the teachers were indigenous, but they were ashamed to speak their original language. I had teachers who did wear traditional dress, which I liked a lot. What I remember is that they only spoke to me in Spanish” (Ángela, Mixtec). Sofía's (Mixe) experience is perhaps especially graphic, as she was schooled entirely in her linguistic region by teachers from her ethnolinguistic group:

I went to elementary school in my community. The school was “bilingual,” my teachers were from the Mixe region, but even so they never spoke to us in Mixe. It was always Spanish. In sixth grade the teacher punished us for speaking Mixe in the classroom. Middle and high school were also in the Mixe region but all instruction was in Spanish. (Sofía, Mixe)

The participants' linguistic autobiographies are filled with accounts of pain, confusion, and alienation when these young teachers remembered how it felt to be silenced

and linguistically excluded and punished at school. María Luz's (Zapotec) experience stands for many:

They first took me to school when I was eight years old...On the first day of class I got up early, ate breakfast so I could get to school early, because I had to walk one and a half hours to get there. But after the first week I became very sad because all my classmates spoke Spanish. I didn't have anyone to talk with, no one wanted to hang out with me. They ignored me because I spoke Zapotec and I didn't understand Spanish...I spent all my time outside because I was afraid of my classmates. The teacher taught in Spanish and I didn't understand the lesson.

Only two of the *diplomado* participants described schooling experiences above preschool in which their original language and, even more rarely, their community and its cultural practices, influenced the curriculum as sources of knowledge and pride.

Without exception, the participants experienced Spanish monolingual immersion in middle and high school, often in a town distant from home, and in schools where the original language was neither tolerated nor respected. For those who had actually experienced the use of their original language in the elementary school, "everything changed."

Everything changed when I entered middle school because one of the rules of that school was that Mixtec could not be spoken inside or outside the classroom, because they said it was disrespectful with the justification that that language was offensive to others...But it was complicated to prohibit 150 students from expressing themselves in their language. (Norma, Mixtec)

However difficult it may have been for schools to actually implement restrictive and punitive regulations against the use of the original language, it is clear that many schools tried. Punishments for using the original language at school included fines, pejorative name-calling, threats to lower grade point averages, and physical punishment, such as hitting the hands repeatedly with a rod. Those students who weren't confident to participate in Spanish went silent: "I couldn't speak Spanish because I was ashamed to pronounce it weirdly since I only began to practice Spanish at age 13" (Nancy, Ikoots).

It must be recognized that those participants who were limited indigenous language speakers also report being ridiculed and shamed by their classmates and relatives who spoke the original language proficiently. This was the case of Vegonia (Mixtec), described earlier, who returned to her community from Mexico City wearing pants and speaking no Mixtec. Her age-mates, especially the boys, ridiculed her mercilessly. Other Spanish monolinguals reported similar experiences of ridicule from original language speakers.

Books and Home Literacy Events

Despite differences in their original language proficiency, the participants' early experiences with books and literacy events at home were consistent and sobering. In most cases there were no books in their homes other than Spanish language textbooks issued by the schools. One or two fathers, we were told, read stories aloud in Spanish to these participants when they were children, and several mothers, fathers, or other relatives were skilled oral storytellers, like Ángela's grandparents, who "sparked my imagination with diverse stories, in Spanish and Mixtec." Over and over again, participants echoed Gabriela's (Mixtec)

comment: “No one ever read me a story in my indigenous language.”

Surprisingly, four of these teachers report that they now are able to read and write their original language, despite never having been taught to do so at school, usually because they learned these literacy skills from supervisors in their local school zone. In most cases, they only use original language literacy in their teaching work. Still, if their use of original language literacy with their students could be further supported by other institutions in the community, such as the church, the likely impact seems clear from Norma’s (Mixtec) account:

I learned Mixtec in school and at church, because in those two institutions we translated texts into Mixtec. I was taught the Mixtec alphabet in elementary school. At church they had me translate biblical texts and prayers because the mass was given in original language, that’s where I developed reading and writing. I learned to write and to pray in Mixtec, and also they sent us out to investigate and interview older persons and I learned more with them.

At least two consequences surface from the lack of early literacy events in the teachers’ lives, as revealed in their portfolios:

a) Very few of these teachers today describe themselves as having “the reading habit” in any language. The teachers speak of having some books at home, mainly in Spanish (“and a few in English”), but they tend to add, “I don’t really like to read.”

b) It is not clear whether the teachers are in the practice of reading aloud to the young children in their care, even their own children, in either Spanish or the original language. Very few refer to reading aloud in the indigenous language to their children or students. Only one

teacher (Ángela, Mixtec) explicitly referred to having “about 20 children’s books,” and to teaching writing in Mixtec to her students and her young son. María Luz (Zapotec) mentioned that, while she has no books in Zapotec, she makes use of a few materials in that language that she herself has made.

It seems that the absence in these teachers’ lives of stimulating early reading experiences in either language has resulted in their lack as adults of the habit of reading for pleasure. Perhaps even more concerning is that this pattern of “not liking to read” may be passed on to new generations. Fortunately, the *diplomado* opened the teachers’ eyes to possibilities for early literacy as part of “teaching our own babies.”

Language Use/ Language Loss

Even those *diplomado* participants who are proficient in their original language reported significant language loss, or at least a shift to a preference for Spanish, in their communities, especially among young children. In most cases, this shift to Spanish is also happening in their own families.

Language use in some cases was still a mark of community membership:

I speak Mixe with my family, relatives, and with my fellow Mixes from the community where I teach. I now read and write in Spanish and Mixe. In my family we still conserve the Mixe language as a first language, which makes me very proud. (Sofía, Mixe)

Yet even Sofía admitted the language loss in her own family, and her contribution to it:

When I had my children I wasn’t yet teaching. I committed the error of

speaking to my children in Spanish at home. For this reason, my children learned to speak Spanish because I heard it was better that one's children learn to speak Spanish. Fortunately, thanks to my work, I realized that this was a mistake. Now I speak to my children in Mixe, and they are learning Mixe. (Sofia, Mixe)

In community after community, the teachers reported the observable loss of the indigenous language from one generation to the next. Communities like Norma's (Mixtec) that were monolingual 20 years ago when these teachers were young, are now stratified by language use:

Today in my community I mainly communicate in Mixtec. In my family things haven't changed much, I only speak about 10% in Spanish, only when it becomes necessary. With young people of my age and older adults I use Mixtec. But with children, I only communicate in my original language with some of them because the majority no longer speaks it. (Norma, Mixtec)

The teachers said they tried to bring awareness of the language loss among the community's children into their work with mothers. However, the dominance and status of the Spanish language in schools at all levels, and even in so-called "bilingual" schools, provided mothers in some communities with a powerful counter-argument. According to Hildeberta (Triqui):

They don't give recuperating the indigenous language much importance, since the other school institutions aren't bilingual and they only use Spanish. This is why the mothers prefer that their

children speak Spanish well, and if they understand the original language, that's sufficient.

The participants expressed sadness at the language loss they witness around them and the breakdown of communication that results between youth and elders in the family and community. But they were especially sad about the apathy of the younger generations regarding this shift to Spanish: "We've called them on this and told them that our original language is important, but like the majority of youth today they aren't interested" (Yesenia, Mixtec).

How well did the *diplomado* achieve its second goal of preparing these teachers to actively preserve and strengthen the indigenous socialization practices, cultures and languages of Oaxaca? The preservation and strengthening of linguistic and cultural practices of indigenous *comunalidad* rarely become apparent in the space of a few months or even a few years. What has been documented in this analysis is that these young indigenous teachers, with their complex biographies, are equipped with important rural life experiences and original language and culture competencies. Unlike the "profiles of excellence" prioritized by Mexican official and extra-official teacher reform efforts, these local indigenous teachers were welcomed in the *diplomado* as *potential, uniquely qualified* candidates of excellence for this alternative, community-based work of linguistic and cultural revitalization. The *diplomado* prioritized preparing them with qualitative research practices so that they could investigate and deepen their understanding of and respect for local practices of socialization and language use. How well they accomplished the desired outcomes of the *diplomado* will be seen in the years ahead, for based on past experience, teachers who "teach their own babies," unlike those recruited by Teach for Mexico,

overwhelmingly remain for years, even decades, in this teaching work.

Goal Three: Creating the Conditions for Quality, Culturally Relevant Learning Opportunities

The third goal of the *diplomado* was to create the conditions for children under three years old to receive educational opportunities in their communities that were culturally relevant and of high quality, based in the community's own values and assessments.

It would be impossible to summarize or generalize the *diplomado*'s impact on these 35 teachers as a group or cohort, or its success at achieving this final goal, or really any of its three transformative goals. Much still remains to be investigated and analyzed in the other tasks documented in the participants' portfolio materials. More importantly, the *diplomado*'s impact on these teacher-researchers' daily work would need to be assessed now and in the future in their communities. Only by observing them in the scenes of their local work would we be able to determine to what degree teachers with these complex "funds of knowledge" about community life, and linguistically complex and perhaps battered cultural identities, have been helped to re-vision Initial Education in the array of linguistically, culturally and economically diverse rural indigenous communities where they now teach.

We might rightly be skeptical that these young teachers, given the details of their biographies, are perceptive enough, experienced enough, daring enough or committed enough, to re-vision Initial Education in Oaxaca in ways that are truly "culturally relevant and of high quality," as the third goal intends. The participants' own educational histories are discouraging, replete with cultural rejection, linguistic silencing, and constant disparagement of their self-esteem and indigenous identities by

both indigenous and mestizo teachers and classmates, and even by their own family members. In the linguistic autobiographies, participant after participant reported that the instruction they received throughout their schooling, and the instruction that is etched in their memories and which provides them with teaching models, was textbook driven, repetitive, very traditional and involved only transmission of knowledge. As Ángela (Mixtec) wrote: "I was only accustomed to memorizing...I couldn't conceive of the idea of discovering my own knowledge." Another participant, speaking earlier for almost all the others, reported that she began her teaching career with no preparation or creative pedagogical insights, "beginning from zero." These would hardly qualify as "profiles of excellence" in the eyes of official educational reform proponents.

Yet there were two accounts of schooling experiences that provide clear alternatives, and hope. While these are not accounts of Initial Education, a schooling level that did not exist when these teachers were infants, these accounts nevertheless break out of the bounds of traditional normative instruction and provide a glimpse into culturally respectful participatory teaching/learning exchanges, where community stories, legends, knowledge about medicinal plants, soap-making and cultural practices are investigated and valued. These rare and hopeful educational experiences were shared and discussed extensively at *diplomado* sessions; the written version of one is reproduced here:

In fifth grade there was a teacher who didn't hit us, and who only bawled us out when it was necessary. He taught us and supported us as we solved math problems – division, multiplication, addition, subtraction, square roots, etc. - using problems, games, songs, and materials and objects from our region. In this grade

we had an encounter with the community in which the municipal authorities, education supervisors, parents, students, teachers, other adults participated. They explained to us events of the community, community knowledge about mathematics, how the folk art of the community is made, etc. This event was really interesting for us because we participated and collaborated with the people who took part in each activity. Months later we had another exchange of experiences with other communities nearby. Here we learned about new experiences of other children, other teachers. We could exchange products that we as students and parents had made. We could make friends and play with children from other communities, bring new learnings back to the classroom. (Irma, Chinantec)

This account, shared and reflected upon in the *diplomado*, gives hope for profound pedagogical re-visioning, for transformation. The seeds of radical change, however few and sparse, are present here, within this group of inexperienced, even formerly unwilling, Initial Education teachers. The *diplomado* made every attempt to nurture and cultivate these seeds of radical pedagogical change among this motley and questionably selective group of novice teachers. In the *diplomado*, participants were given the chance to tell their stories, hear others' stories, reflect on what they heard, carry out skilled tasks and investigations in their communities and in their own languages, share their discoveries and findings, support each other, critique each other, and also learn from the academic research literature. It was a process of *unlearning*, *relearning*, *discovering*, and also *constructing*, together with, and on behalf of, the communities.

The intense, indigenous, community-based professional development process described here was not easy; it contrasted with so much these emergent teacher-researchers had previously learned in their standardized schooling. They were challenged to rethink, reconsider, and un-learn so much. It was confusing, even confounding, and unquestionably painful at times. It turned these young teachers' schooled understandings of their world and community inside out and upside down. Who really possesses knowledge, and/or who simply has the power to impose a certain (academic) form of knowing on others? How is knowledge "imported" from elsewhere, both nationally and internationally? Could this "imported" knowledge be made appropriate, or even be profoundly transformed, by the knowledge and priorities of local communities? If so, how?

Ángela (Mixtec) summarized her jarring, transformative discoveries this way:

It has been quite hard to realize that our language is important, that it should be preserved, and that everything around us is knowledge, that though it appears to be simple, it is really profound. I didn't realize this until I became a teacher in indigenous communities. Now I'm in the process of trying to understand all this and put it into practice. I really understand very little and I still have so much to learn and to understand... I had the idea that the best stimulation was what children received in developed countries. I thought that's how a child learned and developed in a healthy manner. But now I'm trying to understand that everything that surrounds a child is learning, that it strengthens her/his development. (Ángela, Mixtec)

Conclusion

A final personal note: Across more than 16 years of close collaboration with Plan Piloto-CMPIO on various intense, radical, community-based professional development efforts with indigenous teachers, I have witnessed again and again Oaxaca's commitment to work with the teachers at hand, just these local teachers, the ones that show up for a workshop or *diplomado*, whomever they are and whatever their background and expertise. In our work, there is no "Teach-for-Oaxaca" to entice prestigious college graduates with "excellent academic profiles" to serve these rural schools (what indigenous languages would such teachers speak, and what communal values would they hold?). Instead, our work as professional developers has been to value these teachers precisely for who they are, for what they bring with them, especially their commitment to their rural communities, to understand their patchwork histories and to help them become the best bilingual, indigenous teachers they can be. And amazingly, in the end, not all of them but many, surprise, even astound us!

Visits to eight of the *diplomado* teachers in their communities in Fall 2014, and conversations with appreciative mothers and fathers about these teachers' work, displayed both the *diplomado*'s limitations and its successes. There was tremendous variety among the teacher-researchers' communities and increasing urbanization in several zones (which the *diplomado* inadequately addressed), as well as pedagogical challenges that perhaps universally still need to be addressed if these teachers are to meet the constantly evolving challenges of their work. Even so, their varied creative pedagogical efforts to value and promote indigenous knowledge, languages, and cultural practices in earliest infancy, in collaboration with the communities themselves, are remarkable and groundbreaking in Mexico,

especially given current federal education reform efforts.

If only official Mexico, as well as the United States, could glimpse the power that could be unleashed by valuing the complex and even painful biographies of the indigenous and other minoritized teachers who present themselves to the field of teaching. If only we could discover the difficult, critical, but deeply respectful professional development work necessary to enable teacher candidates such as these - or Native American or Hispanic or other local teachers-in-waiting, whatever their complex personal and educational histories - to become the critical, liberatory pedagogues their communities and our nations need and deserve. If only we would collaborate seriously with their communities to rigorously prepare - and then free - local, indigenous/minoritized teachers to "teach their own babies" in a quality education that is defined and supported by their community, to meet its, and our, present and future needs and priorities.

Author Note

The Diplomado in Community-Based Indigenous Initial Education, described and analyzed in this article, was planned and implemented by the Pedagogical Committee of Plan Piloto - CMPIO, with assistance from national and international collaborators. The *diplomado* as an officially-approved professional development experience could not have been devised or implemented without the participation of Plan Piloto-CMPIO, nor could the analysis in this article have been carried out or published without their participation and approval. I am deeply grateful for their many years of committed, community-based educational efforts in Oaxaca and for their invaluable collaboration with me across the last 16 years.

Notes

1. There are two subsystems of preschools and primaries in Oaxaca: the so-called “formal” or “official” schools which provide instruction solely through Spanish to students said to be Spanish speakers, and the “bilingual” or “indigenous” schools which supposedly use both an original language and Spanish to facilitate learning for indigenous students. The author’s experience is that this much-repeated description of the two school subsystems entirely misconstrues realities that are evident when observing in the schools, especially in rural contexts: a) Spanish speaking students and original language speaking students populate the schools of both subsystems; b) depending upon the linguistic competence of individual teachers, an original language may be used for limited purposes in “formal” schools to meet specific, immediate communication needs; c) “bilingual” teachers may not be assigned to a “bilingual” school in the region of their original language competence; d) it is very rare that systematic bilingual instruction is provided to any students in either school subsystem; and, e) due to inconsistent provision of schools of either subsystem within a given municipality or region, students regularly bounce from one subsystem to the other as they attend different levels of schooling, further impeding the possibility that they experience any continuous model of bilingual education across grades or schooling levels.

2. In Oaxaca, “original language” and “original peoples” are the preferred terms.

3. Plan Piloto-CMPIO, with more than 40 years of struggle alongside rural communities (since 1974), wears 3 “hats”: a) since 1978, it functions as a *jefatura de zonas de supervisión*, similar to a statewide school district, part of the system of Indigenous Education of the State Institute of Public Education of Oaxaca (IEEPO), with 1170 indigenous teachers in more than 450 rural

bilingual schools across the state; b) in 1982, it was recognized as a local of the powerful Section 22 of the National Syndicate of Education Workers (SNTE), and is a key player in the dissident National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE); and, c) in 1990, it was incorporated legally as a civic organization (A.C).

4. Initiated in 1995, the Pedagogical Movement is a broad-based and inclusive movement of children, parents, teachers, committed intellectuals, and community authorities and other community members, intended to focus on the construction of educational alternatives that respond to the necessities and conditions of the indigenous communities of Oaxaca. The Pedagogical Movement has been the core of Plan Piloto-CMPIO’s instructional work for two decades.

5. See Jiménez, J., Martínez, L., Mendoza, J., & Meyer, L. (in press) for an analysis of infants’ spontaneous activities in rural indigenous communities of Oaxaca, based on photographs and teacher-researcher narratives in the portfolios.

6. This process is familiar to those who do *action research*, a particular type of qualitative research very connected to the purposes of this *diplomado* and its participants’ needs. Action research (Stringer, 2004) seeks concrete changes in the practices of teachers, who reflect on and theorize about their own practices based on documentation that they themselves have collected in their community with community authorization. They begin by inquiring into the agendas and perspectives of the least powerful, and then expand the circle of inquiry to include all who are affected by the problem at hand. They share their reflections with others so that they can deepen their discoveries and seek clarity and understanding among all who form their research and analysis community. In this process, they participate in a continuous cycle of

reflection, theorizing and action, in order to resolve a social problem and transform their pedagogical practice to meet the needs of their community (p. 5).

7. The linguistic demands of this kind of binational publication process are considerable; elsewhere I have referred to them as “the language divide” (Meyer, 2010, p. 21-22). Plan Piloto-CMPIO is composed of skilled, experienced bilingual teachers (indigenous language/Spanish) who do not speak, read or write English. Their community-based work is important, even internationally groundbreaking, and deserves to be known to the wider English-speaking research world. With rare exceptions, articles published in English professional journals cannot have appeared in print previously in any other language. This means that Plan Piloto-CMPIO research articles, if they first appear in English, cannot have been published earlier in Spanish. For my Oaxacan co-authors, this means that if they are to reference their own work or share it with other researchers in Latin America, a publishable version in Spanish must somehow appear, if funds for such an additional publication can be generated. And if their manuscripts are first published in Spanish, which permits access for knowledge transmission among Oaxacan authors and other Latin American researchers, most English-focused international journals will refuse to publish their work in translation.

8. The phenomenon of “linguistic misplacement” (*desubicación lingüística*) is widespread among indigenous teachers in Oaxaca. According to Plan Piloto-CMPIO leadership, neither Oaxaca’s State Institute of Public Education (IEEPO) nor Section 22, the state affiliate of the National Syndicate of Education Workers, considers placement of teachers in their linguistic area to have greater or even equal priority to the traditional practice

of assigning teachers based on seniority and union participation.

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