
by

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Teaching Mexican Children “English” to Foster Multilingual, Multiliteracies, and Intercultural Practices

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Abstract

This dissertation documents a critical-ethnographic-action-research (CEAR) project conducted in two elementary schools in Oaxaca, Mexico, with the collaboration of one language teacher educator and ten language student teachers. The two schools have a diverse student body composed of mestizo children and children from different Indigenous groups. The CEAR Project challenged historical and societal ideologies that position Indigenous children as deficient learners and their translinguaging and multiliteracies practices as inappropriate for schools. The CEAR Project was also a response to a world phenomenon that associates English with “development” and economic success and Indigenous and “minoritized” languages with backwardness marginalization.

The CEAR Project’s purpose was to use the student teachers’ English language praxicum in order to: (a) develop elementary school teaching expertise, (b) co-construct affirming identities among all the participants, (c) foster multilingual, multiliteracies, and intercultural
practices, and (d) dialogue with the children in order to change pejorative ideologies that regard certain languages, literacies, and cultures as better than others. The Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy developed by Cummins (in press) and critical pedagogies theory (Freire, 1970; Norton & Toohey, 2004) informed the CEAR Project and the data collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and children’s work samples.

Using narrative, photos, and videos, this dissertation presents the migratory lives, the families, and the language and literacy practices of 50 children, and their views regarding the English language and Indigenous languages and peoples. It portrays the vivid critical moments and changes that occurred in the praxicum as the children became teachers and linguists. Through the construction of identity texts and the translanguaging and multiliteracies practices that the student teachers and the children engaged in, stories emerge that portray them as the intelligent, creative, and genuine individuals that they really are. This dissertation also documents how the children’s complex lives challenged constructs such as “family” and “Indigenous,” and the new Mexican educational policy that brings English into public elementary schools using a generic English software. It is concluded that every policy, theory, social construct, pedagogy, and curriculum should be challenged on a daily basis if we are truly to serve the ever-evolving diverse classrooms of today.
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Dedication

In memory of Che-Che, my dad and Dr. Naty.

To Belem, *como siempre y para siempre*. 

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Chapter One:
The CEAR Project

Benito

Benito sits on the highest chair in the classroom, so that he can reach the table. His clean khaki pants, white shirt and blue vest, and well-groomed hair show he is ready for school. His twelve-year-old round face shows a lot of innocence, yet a lot of determination as he is writing his introductory letter:

My name is Benito and I was born in a small town which is called San José Piedras negras Santo domingo De Morelos Pochutla and I like a horse and a dog. Wherever I go the dog follows me even when I am riding my horse. I like learning English to talk with any friend and to become a teacher.

Even though Benito’s letter speaks of his home town, he is now living in the city of Oaxaca.

Benito tells me that his father is still in his hometown married to another woman and that his mom is in the United States. Three months ago, Benito moved to the city to live with a family he did not know. His

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1 The names of children, host teachers, schools and their locations are all pseudonyms, except when children wished me to use their real first name. The place of origin of parents and children are real, but this in no way compromises their anonymity since they no longer reside in their place of origin. The student teachers asked me to use their real names.

2 All the data were collected in Spanish. Hence, all the data presented in English here are in my translation. I will not include the original version in Spanish in order to save space. I have attempted to preserve the original language (punctuation “mistakes,” omitted words, etc.) as much as possible. In order to keep the flow of the narrative, I will not add the phrase “my translation” next to the data. I will only add the word “my translation” next to citations originally in Spanish.
brother and his sister live with this family, too. They live there because their mother worked with that family when she was young. Benito is in charge of cleaning the whole house. His fifteen-year-old sister does the cooking, and his thirteen-year-old brother works with the señores at the pharmacy they own. Benito and his siblings are not allowed to speak Zapotec in this house: “The señora scolds us. We are talking, and then she goes to scold, ‘tell me what you are saying’, she says.” Benito also works at the pharmacy after school. “Sundays is our free day. We get $20 pesos each ($2 Can) on Sundays, and we use the money to buy tamales at the market. During the week, I receive three pesos (30 cents Can) a day, but I do not eat a thing here in school. I buy tazos (pogs) instead,” he tells me while he giggles and shows me a bunch of tazos he pulls out from the pocket of his pants. Benito is aware that we will be teaching him English later in the year. “My teacher says that the kids who speak un idioma (an Indigenous language) will learn fast.” “Yes, you will be a hot shot, among the smartest ones in class because you will know English, Zapotec, and Spanish,” I reply. Benito smiles.

I am using the English names for the Indigenous languages approved in the Indigenous Languages Catalogue produced by INALI (National Institute of Indigenous Languages of Mexico). It needs to be understood that there are many different varieties of Zapotec. Some are close, while others are quite distinct. Hence, the best way to refer to Indigenous languages is according to the town where they are spoken. In the case of Benito, he speaks Zapotec from San José Piedras Negras, Pochutla.

I capitalize the term Indigenous since it is a racial and cultural marker of Indigenous peoples’ identities (J. Julián Caballero, personal communication, July 2009).
Sofía

“Sofía, you are the one who speaks Zapotec, right? The one who is teaching Zapotec to Eliza? She mentioned your name,” I tell Sofía the first time I speak with her. “Jessica,” she corrects me. “Oh, yeah, you are right, Jessica, not Eliza,” I shamefully reply. “Wow, you are already a teacher. You are teaching Jessica.” Sofía then goes on to tell me that everybody in her family comes from San Francisco Ozolotepec, Miahuatlán and speaks Zapotec. “Hey, that is wonderful Sofía; I would love to learn Zapotec.” “You do not know, right?” she asks me. “No, I don’t know how to speak Zapotec, only Spanish, and English. I am an English teacher, but I would love to learn how to speak Zapotec and Mixtec. Are there any other students who speak Zapotec in your classroom?” “Yes, there are two other students from my hometown.” “Do you speak Zapotec among each other?” “No, we are ashamed.”

“Hello, Sofía. How are you?” I ask Sofía next time I see her in class. Sofía simply says “Hi” without looking at me. She then goes to sit in the smartest students’ row. She is in fact on the very top of Maestro Manuel’s list, which goes from the highest to the lowest grades. Her braided hair falls on her worn-out blue sweater. Her brown eyes focus on the paper as she colors the red tulip, which will serve as background for her introductory letter:
My name is Sofía. I like to learn, pronounce and write well English and I would like to teach you my Indigenous language and I would like you to teach us English, participate in class. I live here in Colonia Resurgimiento, I live with my older brother and I like to come to class. I do not like to miss any class nor arrive late to class, I do want not to miss the class that my teacher teaches us, and I like to learn more about English, math, natural sciences and Spanish and I like to go to the computers and I like it when they have tolerance with us.

Laura

Laura is a student teacher in the Facultad de Idiomas de la Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca (Faculty of Languages of the University of Oaxaca, FI-UABJO henceforth) in her final year of the B. A. Program in Teaching English. Her black curly hair and black thick-rim eyeglasses frame the smile she wears every day. Everybody in class thinks and says she is sweet. In fact, I insisted on calling her Dulce (“sweet” in Spanish) when we first started working on the critical-ethnographic-action-research-project (CEAR Project, henceforth). Laura immigrated to the city of Oaxaca with her family when she was six. She is the youngest in her family. Many of her siblings are in the United States.
In part, this is one of the reasons she chose this major: “My siblings in el Norte [United States] tell me ‘Learn English, so you can come over here. You will get a good job.’ I would like to go, but then mom goes ‘You are the youngest one and the only one here.’”

Laura hides her nervousness behind her constant giggles. During the first interview she tells me about her teaching praxicum that will begin later that day: “I have never taught. This is why I am like this (she laughs), very nervous. I do not know how to present myself, what to tell. I am thinking what if I need more time or if I have a lot of time left? What would the kids’ reactions be?” Laura decided to teach first, before Hugo and Chucho, the two other student teachers who will also teach in the same class. “I’d better go first, so that I can be free soon. I also think the first classes can be very interesting.” Laura decided to join the CEAR Project because she was interested about how bilingual Indigenous students’ would learn English.

I think it would be interesting to know how a child, I mean one who already has an Indigenous language, can learn another, and as Benito said that a child who speaks an Indigenous language can quickly learn another language (Laura giggles). Like this with English; it is interesting; I would like to know if this is true or not.
Mario

My name is Mario. I was called simply “Mario” by some children in the CEAR Project. Others called me “Maestro Mario,” “Profe Mario,” and one called me “handsome,” after I joked with them in one of the classes by giving them an example of the verb “to be”: “Mario is handsome.” I was also called “Teacher” or “Profe Mario” by my student teachers. I will tell you only this about me now. As we move forward, I will tell you more about me, my life experiences, my beliefs, my subjectivities, my positionings, my assumed responsibilities, my ignorance, and my hopes.

The CEAR Project was conducted in two elementary schools in Oaxaca, Mexico, with the collaboration of ten student teachers. Its purpose was to use the teaching of English as an excuse to foster multilingual and intercultural practices, develop teaching expertise, and co-construct affirming identities among all the participants. I began the CEAR Project with the idea that it would be a good opportunity for me, the participating student teachers, and the host teachers to further develop our teaching praxis in order to teach children in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. However, it was my students and me that learned! We learned from the children: from their shyness, their wild behavior, their texts, and above all, their diverse life stories that went beyond culture and language. Life stories have been absent in the literature, especially in applied linguistics focusing on children (see Denos, Toohey, Neilson, & Waterstone, 2009, for a recent exception, and Santa Ana, 2004, for a collection of essays, novels, and poems by 30 authors who once were language minority students). Without asking children directly, children are placed in categories that relate to gender, age, “ethnic/cultural”
background, linguistic proficiency, and many other categories as if they have no lived experiences, no agency or no power. The stories presented here are an attempt to create a place for children’s voices to be heard, in the hope that there will people out there willing to listen. My own stories, those of the ten participating student teachers, and most importantly those of the 93 participating children in the CEAR Project are about shaping practice and developing theory in applied linguistics, bilingual education, and education in general; the second use of theory which Davies (2008) refers to as follows:

The first [role of theory in applied linguistics] is the scientific use: This use requires a testable model which, following Popper (1934/1959), is falsifiable. Empirical observation and evidence are emphasised, the purpose being to generalise about natural phenomena so as to predict future behaviour of those phenomena. The second use of theory is the narrative sense in which a story is told. What narrative does is help us make sense of our world. Narrative, writes Bruner (1990), is “one of the most ubiquitous and powerful discourse forms in human communication” (p. 77). It has had an impact on philosophy, literature, cultural studies, anthropology, and the social sciences. (p. 297)

Pennycook (2007) and Smith (1999) have also warned us about the impact that narrative or travelers’ tales have had on the way people are constructed as the Other (the Orient, Indigenous peoples, 5 women, “non-native speakers,” and children among others):

One of the lasting effects of ELT [English Language Teaching] under colonialism was the production of images of English and of its learners. Simply put, the point here is that English, like Britain [and the United States currently], its empire and institutions, was massively promoted as the finest and greatest medium of arts, politics, trade, and religion. At the same time, the learners of English were subjected to the imaginings of Orientalism, with its exoticized, static, and derided ‘Others.’ (Pennycook, 2007, p. 18)

The significance of travelers’ tales and adventurers’ adventures is that they represented the Other to a general audience back in Europe which became fixed in the milieu of cultural ideas. Images of “cannibal” chief, the “red” Indian, the “witch” doctor, or the “tattooed and shrunken” head, and stories which told of savagery and primitivism, generated further interest, and therefore further

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5 I will be using the term Indigenous peoples, and not people, to avoid treating Indigenous peoples as a homogenous group. The “s” in peoples represents the diversity in Indigenous groups. Each cultural group has its own language and cultural practices and its own world vision (Bartolomé, 2003).
opportunities, to represent the Other again. (Smith, 1999, p. 8, quotation marks in original)

Narrative and travelers’ tales have convincingly depicted “Indigenous peoples” as savages, under-formally-educated, and as unintelligent people in need of education, then it is narrative that may start to change these perceptions. It is my intention to use narrative to argue that Indigenous children’s life stories have much to teach us when we are developing curricula, teaching preparation programs, and teaching on a daily basis. Sit back and relax then. Let me, my student teachers, and our children tell you our stories.

Statement of the Problem

I am standing next to my Mom. We are surrounded by hundreds of people gathered in Oaxaca’s Zócalo. Tourists sitting in the cafes around the plaza have Bartomolé Carrasco’s homily as background noise. This bishop, influenced by liberation theology, is trying to make us aware of the social injustices in Oaxaca. “Our commitment should be to fight with and for the poor among the poor: our Indigenous brothers and sisters” (Oaxaca, Mexico; March, 1987).

I am walking with an upper-class man with gray hair who owns a saw mill. He is the father of my boss. He asks me, “Do you study besides being a night guard at UABJO?” “Yes. I am finishing up high-school, and I am also learning English at the Language Center.” “That is excellent. English will be extremely important now that Mexico is about to sign the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). We will have more
opportunities now, if we speak English, of course” (Oaxaca, Mexico; May, 1991).

I take a break from reading George Yule’s book *The Study of Language*, the assigned reading for my first course in my B.A. program in TESL at FI-UABJO. I start watching the Televisa news report, the only TV station controlled by the Mexican government. The news reporter is saying “Mexico’s great historic day with NAFTA taking effect is smeared by a bunch of rebels in Chiapas, who call themselves ‘Zapatistas’” (Oaxaca, Mexico, January 1st, 1994).

I read that Francisco Labastida, the defeated presidential candidate in 2000, has claimed on a TV spot that one of the first things he would do when he becomes president is to make sure that “all children learn English and computers at school... Mexican children cannot be left [behind (no pun intended)] without learning the language that is moving the whole world” (Correa & Acosta, 2000, my translation) (Oaxaca, Mexico, March, 2000).

I log on to YouTube, and I watch Mexican children running and playing in a school patio. Their brown faces, worn-out uniforms, and brick classrooms depict a middle-low socio-economic public school. The narrator of the Internet video, created by the Mexican Secretary of Public Education
and uploaded to YouTube by Adelante Enciclomedia (Go Enciclomedia), a “civil-not-for-profit” organization, begins with,

*Education in Mexico faces great challenges, and in different occasions, very serious difficulties to overcome these challenges. One of these challenges is the need for our children to learn English in order for them to better communicate in a context of global integration. So far our children have been lacking something indispensable: their teachers’ knowledge of the English language, so their teachers can teach them [this language]. Today, we are breaking this limit, thanks to Inglés Enciclomedia: A system, so that any teacher can teach English to their students without having to speak this language.”* (SEP / ILCE, 2007, my translation; watch the whole video at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoVruqiWTr0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoVruqiWTr0)). (Toronto, Canada, October, 2008)

The CEAR Project is historically, socioculturally, politically, and ideologically framed by my personal experiences. Indigenous peoples were part of my life in my early teenage years when I participated in church and community projects that were based on the philosophy of liberation theology. For now, I will simply define “Indigenous”, according to the Mexican constitution which grants Indigenous peoples’ rights, as people who descend from one of the pre-Columbian groups, speak a pre-Columbian language, and/or identify strongly with their home community where one of these languages is still spoken (in Chapter 8, a whole section will be devoted to the analysis of the construct “Indigenous” from the children’s perspective).

“English,” or *gringos* (English speaking peoples), the Beatles, and the dollars sent by my brother who was a permanent resident in the United States, I’d better say, started being part my life in my late teenage years. Indigenous peoples’ realities and the things that “English” implied were separate entities, however. Indigenous peoples’ realities were put on hold in my life while I naively pursued the “English native-speaker mirage.” I even forgot that I was living in the most
linguistically diverse state of Mexico, where more than 60 Indigenous languages have survived discrimination.

It is now in the CEAR Project that Indigenous peoples and “English” and its effects come together. This project is a response to a world phenomenon in which the presence of a “thing” — so-called English — is usually associated with development and economic success (Pennycook, 2006) vis-à-vis Indigenous and “minoritized” languages struggling to survive. In the CEAR Project however, the emphasis was neither on languages, which Makoni and Pennycook (2006) claim are Western “inventions,” nor on language preservation, which treats languages as organisms which can be “pickled in formaldehyde” (Holm, 2006, p. 10). The CEAR Project’s emphasis is on people (the speakers, the readers, the writers, and the culturers), on their lives, struggles, and desires, and on how they language—how they engage in “language practices” or languaging in Shohamy’s (2006) terms, in order to construct their dreams and affirming identities.

In their desire to compete economically with other nations, many Asian countries (Butler, 2004; Kanno, 2007; Shin, 2007), European countries (Etxeberría-Sagastume, 2006; Helot, 2008), and Middle-Eastern countries (Atay & Kurt, 2006) have started teaching English in elementary schools. Other Latin American countries such as Colombia (de Mejía & Montes Rodríguez, 2008) and Argentina (Tocalli-Beller, 2007) have also developed language planning projects to introduce English in elementary schools. In Mexico, such is the urgency of the Mexican government to bring English into the classrooms that a generic English program was created in 2007 to teach this language in all public fifth and sixth grade elementary classrooms through “Enciclomedia”, an interactive smart board. This policy and software claim that any teacher, with or without knowledge of the English language, will be able to teach it. This world phenomenon has raised many challenges to the English language teaching profession at all levels
(Cameron, 2003). Although there has been research about specific strategies to teach children English as a foreign language (Atay & Kurt, 2006; Bourke, 2006; Peñate Cabrera & Bazo Martínez, 2001), and many articles and books with suggestions as to how to teach this language to children (Brumfit, 1991; Cameron, 2001; Ghosn, 2002; Kirsch, 2008; Reilly & Ward, 1997; Scott & Ytreberg, 1998; Vale & Feunteun, 1995), this research and literature have not problematized the role of English in children’s lives, especially students with Indigenous backgrounds.

In Oaxaca, Mexico, where the CEAR Project took place, Indigenous children are struggling in the current education system. Their literacy and language development in Spanish is reported to be in a critical state in Mexican urban settings (Schmelkes, 2003). This is only true however, if high-stakes testing and monolingual and monoglossic beliefs, “which assume that legitimate linguistic practices are only those enacted by monolinguals” (García, 2009, p. 115), are considered the norm. Indigenous children are not seen as emergent bilinguals, children who may be developing their Indigenous language and the Spanish language either successively or concurrently (García, Kleifgen & Falchi, 2008), rather they are seen as children with “broken, deficient” Spanish. Indigenous peoples’ multiliteracies—literacies that go beyond print, include different modes such as images and sounds, are in one or multiple languages, and have different meanings and values (López-Gopar, 2007a) — and translanguaging practices—“multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds” (García, 2009, p. 45, emphasis in original) are not considered appropriate or valued in schools. Mexican teachers’ lack of second language education preparation, along with five hundred years of discrimination and Spanish monolingualism, monoglossic and myopic language and literacy practices, have contributed to the current situation of Indigenous children in schools. Indigenous children have the lowest level of alphabetic literacy in Spanish and the highest dropout rates.
They are experiencing first language loss and becoming “anonymous bilingual” children in urban settings (López Gopar, Stakhnevich, León García, & Morales Santiago, 2006). They also need to cope with discrimination from mestizo\(^6\) children and society.

Oaxacan Indigenous children are growing up in a culturally and linguistically diverse society where English, Spanish, and numerous Indigenous languages are part of Oaxacan people’s language practices. As in many parts of the world, English has become a major language in Oaxaca (Clemente & Higgins, 2008). The presence of English is quite evident; English speaking tourists visiting and living in Oaxaca; U.S. product labels and owner’s manuals coming into Oaxacan homes; music and movies being played in movie theaters, schools, and houses; English phrases being displayed in advertisements, on t-shirts, and even on tear-gas bombs whose labels and instructions are in English (Sayer, 2007). Indigenous children deal with English on a daily basis. However, little is known about the way they perceive English, and whether they want to add this language to their linguistic repertoire and for what purpose.

Children’s lived experiences have been absent in the “teaching children English as a foreign language” literature. It is as if their life stories, problems, and desires were irrelevant to language curriculum development, teacher preparation programs, and language teaching practice itself.

It has also been argued that English teaching can be a double-edged sword; in other words, it can reproduce and unsettle power relations. “The teaching of English, like any other pedagogical act, can reinforce existing inequalities in a society, but it can also help to expose these inequalities, and more important, help students explore alternative possibilities for themselves and their societies” (Pierce, 1989, p. 407). In order to attempt to “teach” English in a

\(^6\) The term *mestizo* refers to the result of a mixture between Spanish and Indigenous peoples. I will use this term *mestizo* to refer to people who are Spanish monolingual speakers and who do not identify themselves as Indigenous. The dichotomy Indigenous versus *mestizo* is problematic and both terms are quite complex (Barabas, 1999b); hence, I will discuss both terms more thoroughly later on. In Central and South America, the term *ladino* is used to refer to *mestizo* people (López, 2006).
local and critical way, the CEAR Project was conducted in two low-socio-economic status (SES) elementary schools, where Indigenous children from different ethnic groups and mestizo children are integrated. This project utilized the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy developed by Cummins (in press) and critical pedagogies and language learning (Norton & Toohey, 2004) as its theoretical framework. The Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy aims to design theoretically sound, empirically proven, and locally relevant teaching strategies in order to develop students’ language and literacy expertise and affirming identities. Critical pedagogies in language teaching seek social justice through language teaching and learning. The main goal of the CEAR Project was not to bring English into these schools *per se*, but to promote the existing multilingualism and interculturalism inherent in Indigenous children and co-construct affirming identities among the participating children, student teachers, and myself.

The main purpose of this dissertation is to document the CEAR Project, which consisted of three main phases: (a) the “initiation” of language student teachers into the teaching of English to children through an undergraduate university course I taught entitled “Teaching English to Children” (TEC henceforth) and the concurrent critical-ethnographic analysis of the four classrooms where the student teachers would conduct their teaching “praxicum:” (b) the actual student teachers’ praxicum or “intervention;” and (c) the on-going analysis of the praxicum and its impact on children’s views (ideologies) of multilingualism.

I am using the construct of “praxicum” from the concept of “praxis” proposed by Freire (1970) while connecting it to the concept of student teachers’ “practicum.” According to Freire

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7 In the literature, the terms “language views”, “language attitudes” and “language ideologies” are often conflated. McCarty, Romero and Zepeda (2006), distinguish “language attitudes” from “language ideologies” due to “explicit acknowledgement of power relations with the latter term [tied to the] notion of the person and social group … Thus, language ideology connotes ideas and attitudes about language that are inescapably infused with relations of power” (p. 109). I use the term “language ideology” as interpreted by McCarty *et al.* (2006) adding that those power relations are reinforced or challenged in sociocultural “glocal” contexts.
In teacher preparation programs, the word practicum is typically used to refer to student teachers’ application of theory and knowledge acquired in their teaching preparation program to their classroom practice. Johnson (2006) refers to this phenomenon as the “theory/practice dichotomy” (p. 240). This is a technical view of teaching in which student teachers are consumers and applicators of theories (McLaren, 2003). In my view of praxicum, student teachers are considered individuals who can create theories before, while, and after they teach (practice). In this scenario, theory and practice engage in a dialogical encounter where practice informs theory and theory informs practice in an ongoing process (Cummins, 2000b; Johnson 2006). Student teachers are hence action researchers from day one in their placement classrooms. In addition, I use the term praxicum to underscore how student teachers’ praxicum is connected to the historical and sociopolitical milieu where teachers teach and learn from students while working towards their own professional development, their students’ literacy and language development, and the co-construction of egalitarian societies. Student teachers’ praxicum is constrained by the context, but can also serve as a starting point to change that context.

Another layer of my use of the term praxicum comes from Pennycook (2004) who has used the term praxicum to refer to the moment in which student teachers “develop the continuous reflexive integration of thought, desire, and action” (p. 335). Even though I include Pennycook’s definition of praxicum with my use of the term, I take praxicum to another level since his use seems to remain at the individual level. In the CEAR project, the student teachers conducted their praxicum in pairs or trios which allowed them to play different roles such as, being leading teachers, teacher assistants, observers, and researchers. Moreover, these pairs and trios were connected to a larger group of ten student teachers and myself, as the teacher educator. Hence, the moments in which we, the student teachers and I, developed the continuous reflexive
integration of thought, desire, and action was heteroglossic and intertextual (Bakhtin, 1981; Blommaert, 2005). In other words, those moments occurred when our multiple voices engaged in the dialogue we established among ourselves, with the host teachers, the principals of the schools, and the children, and when we appropriated each other’s utterances and those we encountered in the literature and made connections between the texts we were creating in the praxicum (e.g., the syllabus and lesson plans, teaching materials, identity texts, and so forth). Our dialogue was multidirectional and acknowledged the power relations in place in the praxicum (e.g., my role as the student teachers’ action research supervisor and the power that the principals and host teachers had to give us access to their classrooms) while attempting to level the field for all our voices to be heard, valued, and respected.

Having developed the construct of praxicum, the CEAR Project’s purpose was to use the student teachers’ English language praxicum in order to: (a) develop student teachers’ and my own expertise in working with elementary school children from diverse backgrounds; (b) co-construct affirming identities among all the participants, (c) foster multilingual, multiliteracies, and intercultural practices, and (d) dialogue with the children in order to change pejorative ideologies that regard certain languages, literacies, and cultures as better than others.

A critical-ethnographic-action-research methodology framework was adopted for the CEAR Project. Critical ethnography was the most appropriate approach to listen to children’s voices, to learn about their lives and their views about language, schooling, and society (Maguire, 2005), and to “dialogue” with them. Crookes’ (1993) “second kind” action research or critical or emancipatory action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) is urgently needed in applied linguistics and education in general in order to question the values of schools where students may add or lose language(s). Kemmis (1993) illustrates this kind of action research as follows:

Critical or emancipatory action research is always connected to social action: it always understands itself as a concrete and practical expression of the aspiration
to change the social (or educational) world for the better through improving shared social practices, our shared understandings of these social practices, and the shared situations in which these practices are carried out. (n. p.)

Critical action research is in a way imagining and working towards more just institutions and societies. “The age-old debate about the role of researchers is whether we should state only what is, or also suggest and study what ought to be” (García, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Torres-Guzmán 2006, p. 11). It was our intention in this CEAR Project to do the latter.

**Research Questions**

The CEAR Project attempted to answer the following research questions:

1) Who are the children in diverse urban schools in Oaxaca?
   a. What are their language views (ideologies) concerning English and Indigenous languages and peoples before the praxicum?
   b. What are their languaging or translanguaging practices in the classroom and at school before the praxicum?

2) What are the “Indigenous” and “mestizo” children’s
   a. multiliteracies and translanguaging practices during the praxicum?
   b. language views (ideologies) concerning English and Indigenous languages and peoples during and after the praxicum?

3) What, if any, is the impact of this praxicum on the co-construction of affirming identities of Indigenous and mestizo children?

4) Who are the student teachers and what issues do they face as future English teachers in Oaxaca?
   a. How is our (student teachers’ and my own) expertise in working with elementary school children from diverse backgrounds co-constructed?
5) What are the implications of this project for educational policies and for planning the teaching of English to children in Mexico and in other contexts with Indigenous and minoritized populations?

**Rationale**

There are different experiences in my personal life and my career that have brought me to the CEAR Project. This project contributes to the body of research that and to educators who seek social justice for all Indigenous and other minority children. In this section, I will briefly describe the rationale for the CEAR Project.

I started my career in Mexico as an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher interested in children's linguistic development. At that time I was interested in children's linguistic development. While pursuing a master's degree in Canada I became interested in ESL literacy development. I then moved into the bilingual education realm working as a bilingual teacher in the United States and later in Mexico. My interest in bilingual education focused then on two languages: English and Spanish. However, two experiences changed my life and opened a whole area of study for me, rediscovering and appreciating the culturally and linguistically diverse environment of Mexico, but realizing that Indigenous children have been ignored, silenced, and assimilated under the “Mexican” umbrella. I also came to understand that English can have racist, classist and discriminatory effects depending on how it is taught.

The first experience occurred while I was living in Oregon, United States. Juan, a “Mexican” newly-arrived immigrant child, was dragged into my classroom by the principal, and for two straight weeks he cried. Everybody, including me, wondered what was wrong with him. Juan was lucky to be in a school district where bilingual education was in place; I believed that he and I shared “the same culture and language.” After my putting up with this crying child who refused to speak, the parents were brought in, so they could explain his “strange” behavior. In
that meeting, not only did we learn that Juan had moved to the United States “involuntarily” (Ogbu, 1992), but that he and I did not share the same language and culture. Juan spoke Tarasco, an Indigenous language spoken in Michoacán, and had been learning Spanish as a second language in Mexico (see López-Gopar, 2007b for a more complete story of Juan). Many people who migrate to the United States come from Indigenous communities where mostly Indigenous languages are spoken (Cohen, 2004; Stephen, 2002, 2007); nevertheless, it is assumed that all Mexicans speak Spanish. Montemayor (2000) has noted that “there are Zapotec communities in the city of Los Angeles [where people] speak only Zapotec and English, not Zapotec, Spanish and English. Their mother tongue is Zapotec and their language for work has gone from Spanish to English” (p. 103, my translation). In other words, many people in Mexico grow up speaking an Indigenous language, and then learn Spanish to find jobs in the larger cities; hence, Spanish is their language for work.

The second experience, which changed my mindset, took place in Oaxaca, Mexico, while I was teaching English at a private bilingual elementary school located in a low-socio-economic-status (SES) neighborhood. This private school had moved its location to where land prices were cheaper. It shared this community with a low SES public elementary school. The majority of students at the private school came from upper SES and formally-educated families. Alfredo, one of my students, came from a family of professional parents who considered English to be a must-have for their son's education. Most parents and school personnel thought I was a good English teacher since I used every opportunity I had to interact with my students in English. For instance, I would use English while I was playing soccer with them or while we were preparing for a social or community event like a parade. One time while participating in the parade that commemorated the Mexican Revolution, I started giving my students instructions in Spanish, so that people in the community and the public school students participating with us could
understand as well (English is not taught in most public elementary schools in Mexico). Alfredo and my other students started yelling, “Teacher in English. Yes, in English, para que vean que sabemos (so they see that we know English).”

After reflecting on this experience, I realized I had never discussed issues of bilingualism with my students. Was I creating English/Spanish bilingual people who wanted to use their bilingualism to separate from the Spanish monolingual speakers and Indigenous children as well? Would public elementary school students feel the same way if they learnt English? How would bilingual Indigenous peoples feel/act when they added English to their repertoire? English is already being taught in Mexico through various private institutions and pilot projects at the elementary school level, especially in the northern states (SEP, 2002; Terborg, García Landa, & Moore, 2007), and will increase its presence, according to Mexico’s educational plans. Will multilingualism (Spanish/Indigenous language/English) bring equity and social justice for all students in Oaxaca? These questions arising from my personal and professional experiences and additional reasons, as found in the literature, have brought me to the CEAR Project.

Technological and global changes and the beginning of the new millennium inspired different positions regarding literacy and language teaching. Au and Raphael (2000) stated that “Our student population will be even more diverse than it is today, the need for critical literacy will grow exponentially, and the interconnections among language, culture, and literacy will become stronger” (p. 170). In the last few years, Mexico has gone through major changes regarding education as well. At the federal level, it was finally acknowledged that we live in a culturally and linguistically diverse society. The political and educational discourse now emphasizes an intercultural and bilingual approach which sees diversity as enrichment, rather than an assimilationist approach that views diversity as a problem to solve or a disease to cure (Hidalgo, 2006). Along with Aguilar Nery (2004), I argue that the intercultural and bilingual
education reforms need to go beyond the legislative and educational discourse; they have to be lived in classrooms where all peoples’ language and literacies should be valued and built upon. It is in classrooms where theory meets practice, and practice informs theory (Cummins, 2000b). In Mexico, schools have been places where Indigenous languages, literacies, and their ways of knowing have been delegitimized (Maldonado Alvarado, 2002). It is in schools, then, where these languages, literacies and ways of knowing, and their speakers and re-creators of knowledge, most importantly, have to be re-validated and respected. Hence, teacher preparation programs and courses with intercultural and social justice agendas are essential both in Oaxaca and in many places around the world where students from diverse backgrounds meet (Au, 2006; Cisneros Paz, 2000; Julian Caballero, 2000, 2002; López & Wolfang, 1999; Mena & Ruiz, 2000; Zimmerman, 1999).

In order to meet Indigenous students' needs, education must become an interdisciplinary endeavor. López and Wolfang (1999) claim that it has been mainly linguists and anthropologists who have been involved in Indigenous education. They urge educators to become involved in order to find adequate pedagogies that respond to Indigenous students' needs. This call must also include pre-service teachers. We usually hear that “children are the hope of tomorrow;” this is also true for pre-service teachers. Au and Raphael (2000) echo this need: “We see the need for research on pre-service programs that emphasize issues of diversity and prepare teachers to promote literacy [and language] learning of students of diverse backgrounds” (p. 185). Byrd Clark (2008) focusing on language teaching issues argues that it is essential to work with teachers in diverse classrooms and cities, since teachers’ voices have a great impact on students’ appropriation of and investment in languages and on their identities. The CEAR Project was intended, then, to create an acoustic space, shaped by global and local socio-cultural, political and linguistic histories in the making, where my own, student teachers’ and children’s voices
resonate — a space in which dialogue leads to deeper understanding of how to create and re-create more egalitarian global and local societies where all voices are acknowledged, respected, and validated.

**Overview of the CEAR Project and the Dissertation**

The CEAR Project was carried out in two different elementary schools during the 2007-2008 academic year. These two schools have a culturally and linguistically diverse student body. At Horizons School (the semi-urban school), we collaborated with two sixth grade classrooms. At Downtown School, we collaborated with a sixth and a fifth grade classroom. In the proposal stage, I had planned to recruit four student teachers from the TEC course. However, ten student teachers wanted to participate. I included them all because all of them were engaged and willing to share their teaching praxicum time.

From August to December 2007, I taught the elective course. Concurrently, I interviewed the two principals, the four participating host teachers and all of the 93 children in the four classrooms. I also conducted three formal naturalistic classroom observations in each of these classrooms. At the end of the elective course, I started collaborating with the ten student teachers in weekly meetings, so that they could get to know the schools, teachers, and children through the analysis of the interviews, my narrative of the classrooms observations, and my interaction with the children during recess. All the analysis provided us with essential information to prepare the praxicum.

In February 2008, the student teachers conducted three formal naturalistic classrooms observations in the classes in which they would carry out their praxicum. I interviewed all the student teachers before they began their praxicum. From the end of February to the end of June 2008, the student teachers conducted their praxicum in these four classrooms. The number of hours taught varied in all the classes because of cancellations for different reasons. On average,
the student teachers taught a total of 35 hours. At Horizons School, the classes were taught on Thursdays and Fridays from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. At Downtown School, the classes were taught from 1:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

I conducted three participant classroom observations with each of the student teachers during their praxicum. In the middle of the praxicum, I interviewed all of the host teachers and children for a second time. I had planned to conduct a third interview with all of the children, but I was unable to do this because of different 24-hour teacher strikes and end-of-the-year preparations that the school had to do. During the praxicum, the student teachers and I continued having weekly meetings to debrief and to support each other. In total, we held 27 meetings throughout the CEAR Project and endless informal conversations. I interviewed all the student teachers once more at the end of the project.

This dissertation will report the findings of two of the 6th grade classes, one from each school. Student teachers, Claudia and Betty, taught in Maestro Manuel’s class of 31 students at Horizons school. Laura, Hugo and Chucho taught in Maestro Carlos’ class at Downtown School. There were 20 students in this class. However, one of the students moved to another state in December, leaving 19 students. The hardest part of writing this dissertation was to decide on which classes to choose and on which children to focus because all children had unique lives, and we learned so much from them all. I will focus mainly on the five student teachers that taught in the two classes that are the focus of this dissertation, but the other five student teachers’ (Eliza, Miriam, Pepe, Cueto, and Juan) voices will also appear because they were part of the weekly meetings.

This dissertation is organized into nine chapters. Chapter two succinctly provides “the gap” in the research and the description of the two theoretical frameworks I used: the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy, and Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning.
These frameworks allowed me to be a researcher, a teacher-educator, and an advocate, as we worked through the CEAR Project. Chapter three contextualizes the lives of all the participants in the CEAR Project from a historical, sociocultural, and ideological perspective. It discusses Indigenous peoples and languages in Mexico in general and in Oaxaca. It addresses issues of migration and the presence of Indigenous peoples in the city of Oaxaca. It also analyzes the presence of “English” in Mexico and Oaxaca, the role of FI-UABJO, and the adaptation of the TEC course. Chapter four describes the methodology used, focusing on the description of critical ethnography and action-research, and the merge of these two methodologies in the CEAR Project. It also provides a description of the collection and analysis of the data.

Chapter five through seven focus on the findings of the CEAR Project. Chapter five focuses on the lives of the student teachers and their various research interests in the CEAR Project. It also discusses our identity struggles as being positioned as fresas and malinchistas (snobbish people and traitors), and incompetent non-native speakers. Chapter six presents the analysis of the two schools from my perspective and the principal’s and school teachers’ input. It provides a macro perspective of the makeup of the class focusing on different aspects of the children’s backgrounds such as their migratory and working lives. Through ethnographic narratives, the chapter also presents the lives of the children, their language and family practices, and their views of Indigenous languages and English. Chapter seven focuses on the actual praxicum. It documents student teachers’ attempts to create opportunities where students could display their intelligence and the critical moments of their praxicum. It provides examples of the students’ identity texts and episodes of the praxicum. It also focuses on multiliteracies and translanguaging practices during the praxicum.

Chapter eight presents the teachings of Mexican children: their definitions of the “Indigenous” construct, the uncritical components of our CEAR Project, and our narrow view of
diversity. This chapter also describes the new Mexican educational policy regarding the inclusion of English language through *Inglés Enciclomedia*. In this chapter, *Inglés Enciclomedia* is heavily criticized because its contents do not speak to the realities of children who are from low-SES backgrounds, and do not have access to digital technologies, the populations that the program claims to be most beneficial for. Chapters nine summarizes the knowledge we gained in the CEAR Project, presents our limitations and constrains, and discusses future CEAR Projects that will enable Mexican children’s voices to reach greater audiences.
Chapter Two:
Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Typically, the purpose of a literature review is to examine what is already known about the subject matter and identify the “gap” in the research. I will briefly fulfill this purpose at the beginning of this section and then move into the theoretical framework that is the basis of the CEAR Project. In the next chapter, I will review the literature once more in order to help the reader to fully understand the Mexican context.

The Gap in the Research

Intercultural bilingual education has proven successful in different parts of the world (see Cummins, 2000b, 2001, and García, 2009, for reviews of bilingual education in North America and other parts of the world; Hamel, 2000, 2008a, in Mexico; López, 2006, and López & Sichra, 2008, in Bolivia and Guatemala). In a nutshell, these programs demonstrate that additive bilingual programs, which value and maintain students’ first language and culture, have proven to be more successful than submersion, pull-out, and transition programs. However, in today’s urban classrooms, linguistic diversity has posed another “challenge” to the educational field: there are more than “two” languages in the classroom; there are many languages, many cultures, many religious beliefs, many family structures, and many other diverse features. In some countries and educational systems, diversity is viewed as an asset, at least at the level of political speeches or curriculum planning; most often, however, it is regarded as a problem, especially in societies and schools where monoglossic, monolingual, and monocutultural ideologies prevail (García, 2009).

Most research in urban diverse classrooms has taken place in Canadian, U.S., and European classrooms. Under the supervision of Margaret Early, Jim Cummins, and John
Willinsky (2004), several collaborative case studies have been conducted and documented in British Columbia and Ontario, Canada. These case studies showed that “minority” students’ languages, cultures, and identities could be brought into diverse classrooms to enhance, rather than to impede, the development of the “majority” language, literacy, and curriculum, and the fostering of students’ language(s) (see some case studies at www.multiliteracies.ca and others in Chen & Morin, 2005; Cummins, Bismilla, Cohen, Giampapa, & Leoni, 2005: Cummins et al., 2005). On similar lines, Schecter and Cummins (2003) and Cummins, Chow, Schecter, Yeager et al. (2006) have engaged in school-community-university collaborative action research projects in order to value and build upon community resources thorough multilingual and multicultural approaches to learning. In addition, Toohey (1996, 1998, 2001) has documented ethnographically the lives of children from minority language backgrounds. Toohey argues that these students’ language and literacy development is constrained by issues of power, social stratification, and access. Many times they are seen as deficient learners and taught using deficit models, which in turn blocks their access to communities of practice in the classrooms and thus hinders their literacy and language development. In the United States, Schwarzer, Haywood, and Lorenze (2003) have worked with diverse classrooms in Texas trying to break away from misconceptions that society and teachers have developed.

One misconception is that there is nothing monolingual teachers can offer to diverse classrooms. This form of resignation is tied to fixed labels that categorize immigrant and minority children as deficient learners in need of fixing. García, Kleifgen, and Falchi (2008) argue that children in diverse classrooms must be seen as emergent bilinguals in order to break away from deficit models. Teachers can instead regard children as “agentive and flexible language learners” (Laman & Sluys, 2008), in order that they may show the translingual literate intelligence developed in their migratory and diverse lives (Schiller, 1996; Sluys & Labbo,
In France, Hélot (2008a, 2008b) and Hélot and Young (2006) have worked longitudinally with teachers to raise awareness of the numerous languages present in homes but not acknowledged, valued, and built upon in schools. With language awareness projects, in which parents are invited to make presentations about their language and culture in classrooms, ignored and minoritized languages, and most importantly their speakers, are now active participants.

In Mexico, most research with Indigenous students has been conducted in rural communities or “bilingually homogenous” settings (Mena, Muñoz & Ruiz, 2000; Ogulnick, 2006; Paccioto, 2004). Hamel, Brumm, Carrillo Avelar, Loncon, Nieto et al. (2004) have worked with teachers in bilingual settings in Michoacán, finding that Indigenous students in additive bilingual programs develop high levels of print literacy in both their Indigenous language and Spanish, while the opposite is true for Indigenous children in submersion programs. In Oaxaca, numerous studies have also looked at issues of language policy, teacher preparation, development of writing systems, and official textbook production for Indigenous students in rural settings (see IEEPO, 2000, and Meyer, Maldonado, Carina & García, 2004, for a collection of studies in this state). Few other studies conducted in urban Mexican settings have looked at schools or places where Spanish and another Indigenous language group come together (see, for example, Czarny Krischkautzky, 2007; Podesta Siri, 2004; Rebolledo Recendiz, 2006). There are no studies in urban settings where multiple Indigenous language speakers come together. The CEAR Project begins to fill this gap.

My main interest was in what we — I as a teacher-educator and my students as English student teachers — could do to develop intercultural and additive multilingual strategies in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms in urban settings. It is in such classrooms, which are becoming the norm due to global changes, that Indigenous students can gain, maintain, or lose their pride. It is in these classrooms that mainstream teachers and students can start
appreciating, respecting, and valuing the “other” (Luke, 2003). Finally, it is in these classrooms that the transfer from multilingual and intercultural education rhetoric to lived realities can take place.

In order to fill the gap in the research and co-create classrooms where multilingual and intercultural practices are valued and promoted, I adopted the “Conditions for Promotion of Literacy Engagement and the Development of Literacy Expertise” or “the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy” developed by Cummins (in press) as the theoretical framework for the CEAR Project. In addition, I adopted notions of critical pedagogies in language teaching (Pennycook, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2004). The Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy was grounded in urban Canadian classrooms, where students from diverse linguistic backgrounds are developing language(s) and literacies. Hence, this framework speaks directly to Oaxacan urban diverse classrooms where students from multiple linguistic backgrounds also meet. Critical pedagogies in language teaching seek social justice through language teaching and learning, bringing a critical eye to the teaching of English in Oaxaca, Mexico. In this section, I will discuss these two theories, integrating other researchers’ views to complement the two perspectives.

Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy

Cummins (in press) organized the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy (Table 1) according to five major sections stated as questions: a) to what extent does the school become a site of empowerment for students and communities?; b) to what extent does the school promote access to multiple texts in home, community, and school?;

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8 Jim Cummins presented the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy during his graduate course “Seminar on Second Language and Literacy Education” that I attended at OISE in 2006. Cummins allowed me to use his class handout to present it. Cummins (in press) provides a more detailed description of the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy.
Table 1.

*Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy Developed by Cummins (in press).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions for Promotion of Literacy Engagement and Development of Literacy Expertise (Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy) Developed by Jim Cummins</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1) To what extent does the school become a site of empowerment for students and communities?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- School leaders promote respect for and high expectations in relation to students’ cultural, linguistic, and intellectual resources and actively seek to use these resources in the instructional program;</td>
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<td>- School leaders establish strong parental and community participation as a priority;</td>
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<td>- School leaders establish a climate where student voice is heard and students share in the ownership of the school as a learning organization;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- School leaders establish a collaborative ethos among school staff and work to support teachers in developing the knowledge base to teach diverse learners effectively;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- School leaders recruit staff with the cultural/linguistic expertise and sensitivity to connect with students and community;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- School leaders initiate a language policy process within the school that articulates belief systems about language and literacy development and directions for attaining articulated goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2) To what extent does the school promote access to multiple texts in home, community, and school?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Medium:</strong> Electronic, Print-based, Live;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- <strong>Modality:</strong> Aural, Oral, Sign, Visual, Written; (in all cases “modality” can be either multimodal or unimodal)</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Variety:</strong> Standard Variety, Group-specific variety;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- <strong>Genre:</strong> Expository text, Fiction, Poetry, Music, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3) To what extent does the school promote access to, socialization into, and identification with learning communities focused on literacy?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Enables participation in social networks organized around the comprehension, creation, and critical discussion of texts;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Encourages and provides opportunities for students to engage in comprehending texts;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Encourages and provides opportunities for students to create texts.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4) To what extent do students engage in forms of learning that promote literacy development?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- <strong>Cognitive Processing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Relate pre-existing knowledge to content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Integrate facts with conceptual structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Actively control, self-regulate, and develop metacognitive awareness of the learning process</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Language Processing</strong></td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Focus on language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Focus on use</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Comprehensible input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Critical literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Language forms and genres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Intersections of language and power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Generate new knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Create literature and art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Act on social realities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity Investment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Experience positive affect associated with text engagement and creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Experience reinforcement and expansion of identity through text creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5) To what extent do teachers enable forms of learning that promote student empowerment and literacy development?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Scaffold access to textual meanings;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Make explicit the linguistic structure of subject matter;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Demystify linguistic and social codes of language use;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Scaffold the production of identity texts;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Orchestrates classroom interactions that construct linguistic and cultural diversity as a resource for learning;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Ensure student access to multiple texts and literate communities of practice;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Engage parents and community members in partnerships related to literacy; and</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| - Orchestrates learning opportunities that maximize opportunities for both cognitive engagement and identity investment in literate activities.
c) to what extent does the school promote access to, socialization into, and identification with learning communities focused on literacy?; d) to what extent do students engage in forms of learning that promote literacy development?; and e) to what extent do teachers enable forms of learning that promote student empowerment and literacy development? Cummins (in press) claims that theoretical categories within the framework all extend in two ways: they link with the empirical and theoretical literature on literacy development on the one hand, but they are also grounded in concrete classroom practice, and their raison d’être is to engage in sustained dialogue with that practice.

The first question— to what extent does the school become a site of empowerment for students and communities? — focuses specifically on the roles that school leaders (administrators) play. School leaders may see diversity as something they need to fix or something they need to embrace. For instance, if a student comes to school speaking a different language and some English, administrators and school personnel may regard that student in two distinct ways: as someone deficient because of her lack of English skills or as someone with a rich linguistic background having another language plus a little bit of English. Depending on the school climate, parents can be regarded as a resource, as partners in education, or as another burden for the school; that is, as other persons in need of “education” (in the literature review section, I will address how Indigenous parents and grandparents have been alienated from schools because they are considered “illiterate,” in the narrow sense of the word). Finally, school leaders set the tone for faculty members either to collaborate or to work in isolation. In some Canadian and U.S. schools, content teachers do not see themselves as language teachers. From their perspective, that is the job of the ESL teacher. Some ESL teachers also see themselves as language teachers only, focusing only on linguistic aspects. In Oaxaca, there are clear divides between “mainstream teachers,” “Indigenous teachers,” and “language teachers”. Mainstream
teachers assume that all their students are Spanish-speaking and that it is the job of the Indigenous teachers to teach Indigenous children. Language teachers are English teachers and have nothing to do with either mainstream or Indigenous teachers. Cummins (in press) encourages collaboration, stating that ideal school leaders:

- promote respect for and high expectations in relation to students’ cultural, linguistic, and intellectual resources and actively seek to use these resources in the instructional program;
- establish strong parental and community participation as a priority;
- establish a climate where student voice is heard and students share in the ownership of the school as a learning organization;
- establish a collaborative ethos among school staff and work to support teachers in developing the knowledge base to teach diverse learners effectively;
- recruit staff with the cultural/linguistic expertise and sensitivity to connect with students and community; [and]
- initiate a language policy process within the school that articulates belief systems about language and literacy development and directions for attaining articulated goals.

The second question in the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy — to what extent does the school promote access to multiple texts in home, community and school? — refers to the great variety of literacies that students engage in. In this regard, it is important to analyze the notion of text. Typically, text has usually referred to printed words on paper. In other words, a drawing or a song is not considered text. However, with the development of digital technologies, people started realizing that texts are not confined to the written word or print (Kress, 2000b; 2003). Using the notion of multiliteracies developed by the New London Group (1996), the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy expands notions of text. In this case, text can be in electronic, live or print versions. They can also be aural, oral, signed, or visual; they can be written in one, two or multiple languages. Texts do not have to comply with the so-called “standard” variety of a language, which tends to be discriminatory. In other words, texts can reflect the translanguaging practices of emergent bilingual/multilingual people. Also, different
genres are acceptable; these new notions of texts open up possibilities to bring texts that have traditionally been excluded from schools. For instance, in Mexico many people do not consider themselves readers because comics, short stories with pictures, and stories and legends told by grandmothers have not been considered “good literature” or even “literature” (Garrido, 2004; López Gopar, 2006). In the literature review section, I will elaborate more on these new notions of text and argue that multilingual and multimodal texts have been in place for centuries in Mexico and that the notion of multiliteracies can go beyond the computer screen. Cummins (in press) summarizes the features of literacies as follows:

<table>
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<th>Medium:</th>
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<tr>
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The third question in the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy — to what extent does the school promote access to, socialization into, and identification with learning communities focused on literacy? — reminds teachers that literacy learning is not a solitary pursuit. In schools, students tend to work on texts in isolation. This is problematic because texts can be more critically analyzed when people bring different perspectives to the creation of meaning. The individualistic ideology of capitalism, which is infused in schools and society, results in the belief that the creation of texts belongs to one person only. In Cohen and Leoni's (2006) case study, three students collaborated to create a bilingual multimodal text that reflected the experience of an Urdu-speaking student who immigrated to Canada. The girls not only shared their linguistic resources and developed linguistic and literacy skills, but also invested their identities in these texts. This example clearly demonstrates the connection between multiliteracies and socialization/identification. In other words, in this classroom students were
given the opportunity to participate in a community (such as the trio above) where they were allowed to discuss texts critically and then given the space to create their own texts. Montemayor (2000), who has conducted research on literary pieces produced by Indigenous writers in Mexico, claims that “fiction” is not a genre in these cultures. Indigenous peoples claim that nobody can make a story out of nowhere; all stories are collectively created through the experiences and narrations that have taken place through generations. This notion applies to all texts, including this dissertation. Thus, this very piece I have composed is not my “original” work; it is the ideas of the people I cite, the experiences I have had while interacting with my students, the discussions I have engaged in with professors, colleagues, classmates, and so forth. It is an inter-community text or heteroglossic and intertextual in Bakhtin’s (1981) terms.

Cummins (in press) summarizes this question by stating that literacy in learning communities enables participation in social networks organized around the comprehension, creation, and critical discussion of texts; encourages and provides opportunities for students to engage in comprehending texts; and encourages and provides opportunities for students to create texts.

The fourth question — to what extent do students engage in forms of learning that promote literacy development? — deals with three components of literacy learning: cognitive processing, language processing, and identity investment. Cummins (in press) summarizes the three forms of literacy learning as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Processing</th>
<th>Language Processing</th>
<th>Identity Investment</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Relate pre-existing knowledge to content</td>
<td><strong>Focus on meaning</strong></td>
<td>- Experience positive affect associated with text engagement and creation</td>
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<td>- Integrate facts with conceptual structures</td>
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<td>- Experience reinforcement and expansion of identity through text creation</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Actively control, self-regulate, and develop metacognitive awareness of the learning process</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Language forms and genres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Intersections of language and power</td>
<td><strong>Focus on use</strong></td>
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</table>


- Generate new knowledge
- Create literature and art
- Act on social realities

Based on the seminal work of Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) *How People Learn*, the cognitive processing component emphasizes the role of background knowledge, its integration with new knowledge, and the metacognitive awareness of the learning process. For instance, many teachers see low-income Mexican immigrant students as lacking “schema” or background knowledge, and are unable to assist students in the integration of facts with conceptual structures consequently. These teachers’ beliefs are based on the fact that these students may never have been to a museum or a zoo, may have limited experiences with books, or may not know the dominant language. The teachers of these students forget, or simply choose to ignore, that many of these children have equally complex knowledge and experiences: they know how to deal with the border patrol, how to take care of a younger sibling while their mom and dad hold two jobs, how to pick strawberries in the fields, and so on. By simply ignoring the “schema” that these children do possess, teachers ignore one of the core concepts of cognitive psychology: building on student background knowledge (Bransford et al., 2000). It is also essential to help students actively control and self-regulate their own learning focusing on metacognitive strategies in order for them to generate their own new knowledge and not to simply wait for the teacher to give it to them. Failure to tap students’ background knowledge and to help them make connections and be metacognitively aware may impact negatively on students’ cognitive engagement, language development, and identity investment.

Building on the “Development of Academic Expertise” framework developed by Cummins (2001), cognitive engagement and the two other components (language processing and identity investment) place the teacher/student interaction in the center. Teachers’ and students’ cognitive engagement and identity investment are directly connected and negotiated through
language. From this interaction, students develop language and literacy, and construct affirming identities. Regarding language processing, Cummins (2001) argues that in order for students to develop language and use it critically to fulfill their own purposes, challenge coercive power relations, and negotiate affirming identities, teachers and students must focus on language meaning, language awareness, and language use (see Cummins 2001, for a more detailed explanation of this framework). While Cummins (2001) recognizes that comprehensible input is necessary in language development, he also acknowledges that critical literacy is essential if students are to unveil how language intersects with power. Delpit (1988) has argued that it is through constant observation of language use that children can find out how certain genres of power work. Once children know how these genres work, they can use language more strategically to generate new knowledge, create literature, and act on social realities.

Regarding identity investment, Cummins (2001) argues that the negotiation of identities is usually forgotten in the educational equation even though it has been widely proven to be an essential factor (Denos et al., 2009; McCarty, 2002; Norton, 1995, 2000). Basing her work on feminist and post-structural theories, Norton (1995, 2000) sees identities are multiple and dynamic, as a site of struggle, and as changing over time. Moving away from essentialist conceptions of identity, Hall (1996) and Denos et al. (2009) stress the fact that identities are situated, subject to a radical historicization, unfinished and in process, and that people exert their agency in discursive practices to construct affirming identities or reject imposed identities that position them in certain ways (e.g., being a ESL student or a so-called non-native speaker in need of fixing or being a student who does not meet school expectations).

Blommaert (2005) reminds us that identities are not “individual” creations or performances; they are created in dialogical processes. He starts his discussion of identity by defining it as “who and what you are” (p. 203). He elaborates,
The “who and what you are” is dependent on context, occasion, and purpose, and it almost invariably involves a semiotic process of representation . . . people do not have an identity, but . . . identities are constructed in practices that produce, enact, or perform identity . . . and in order for an identity to be established, it has to be recognised by others. (pp. 203-205, quotations marks and emphasis in original)

In similar lines, Cummins (2001) argues that teachers’ and students identities are constantly negotiated in classrooms interactions. For affirming identities to be established, both teachers and students must recognize each other’s affirming identities. Cummins (2001) also states that there is a reciprocal relationship between cognitive engagement and identity investment:

The more students learn, the more their academic self-concept grows, and the more academically engaged they become. However, students will be reluctant to invest their identities in the learning process if they feel their teachers do not like them, respect them, and appreciate their experiences and talents. In the past, students from marginalized social groups have seldom felt this sense of affirmation and respect for language and culture from their teachers. Consequently their intellectual and personal talents rarely found expression in the classroom. (p. 124)

One of the ways students feel that their talents and identities are recognized, valued, respected, and affirmed in classrooms is through the creation of students’ own texts, their own stories. It is in these texts that students invest their identities, and thus they become protagonists. Ada and Campoy’s (2004) book Authors in the Classroom gives excellent examples of texts created by both teachers and students, which reflect the struggles, emotions, and dreams of their authors (visit also the Multiliteracies Project website http://www.multiliteracies.ca to see examples of “identity texts” created by students in Canada). These texts, which can be written, visual, multimodal, signed or spoken, are created by the students, and represent and reflect their identities to them and to a wider audience (Cummins, 2004). López (2006), who has worked extensively with Indigenous educators and leaders in Bolivia and Guatemala to develop a very
successful Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) model, concludes: “Whereas for governmental decision-makers IBE positively influences learning outcomes, for Indigenous organizations and Indigenous leaders, the most important contribution of IBE is related to the development of self-esteem and to the construction of social and personal Indigenous identities” (p. 251). Decades of Indigenous struggles in these two countries directly support Cummins’ (2001) argument and the “Development of Academic Expertise” framework, which is about both maximum cognitive engagement and maximum identity investment.

The last question— to what extent do teachers enable forms of learning that promote student empowerment and literacy development? — encourages teachers to expand their roles. With the adoption of the “student-centered approach” and the conceptualization of the teacher as a “facilitator,” many teachers have neglected the important role they play in the classroom (Freire & Macedo, 1999). This question emphasizes the need to scaffold students’ learning. Teachers must work with students to demystify language and make linguistic structures explicit. Teachers should be key players in students’ creation of texts. If students are writing a poem, for instance, teachers can provide samples of different poems or, more powerfully, their very own poems. Teachers can then organize classroom structures so that, for example, students or teachers play the editor or the audience that provides feedback. Finally, this question acknowledges that it is also teachers who can create welcoming environments where parents' knowledge and identities are valued. The role of teachers is extremely important. However, teachers cannot be saviors and power providers. Power is constructed and shared through collaborative relations among teachers, students, parents, and extended family members.

Cummins (in press) states that successful teachers:

- scaffold access to textual meanings;
- make explicit the linguistic structure of subject matter;
- demystify linguistic and social codes of language use;
- scaffold the production of identity texts;
orchestrate classroom interactions that construct linguistic and cultural diversity as a resource for learning;

ensure student access to multiple texts and literate communities of practice;

engage parents and community members in partnerships related to literacy; and

orchestrate learning opportunities that maximize opportunities for both cognitive engagement and identity investment in literate activities.

The Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy derived both from the existing literature relating to literacy development and diversity in education on the one hand and Canadian teachers’ and researchers’ observations of literacy practices in Canadian diverse classrooms on the other (Cummins, in press). This framework was appropriate for the context of the CEAR Project, especially because it is explicitly oriented towards educational change with respect to how the school positions itself in relation to diverse students and communities such as the case of Indigenous students in Oaxacan urban classrooms. Critical pedagogies and language learning, which also have educational change and social equity as their goals, complements the theoretical framework of the CEAR Project.

**Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy has been associated with the work and ideas of several authors in Europe and in North and South America (see Kincheloe, 2005 and Wink, 2005 for a detailed description of these authors and schools). Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, has been the most influential practitioner and is considered by many the father of critical pedagogy. What can language educators interested in critical pedagogy learn from Freire? The first lesson is that critical pedagogy is not a method. It is a state of mind, a way of teaching that sees in each and every student the potential to learn, but, most importantly, the potential to teach something. Using her daughter’s words at a conference in Seattle, Ada (1998) said that “the only way to do [critical pedagogy] is to deeply, deeply believe in the learner” (as cited in Wink, 2005, p. 108). In
other words, critical pedagogy requires teachers and students working together to change their lives and transform the world into a better place.

Using Marxism as his starting point, Freire (1970) worked on the notions of oppressor and oppressed from the perspective of social classes. This dichotomy was particularly relevant to the Brazilian communities where Freire collaborated with peasants and working-class people. Weiler (1991), a feminist educator, rightly criticized Freire and pointed out that class distinction is not the only example of the dichotomy of the oppressor and oppressed and that we can be oppressed in certain situations and still be oppressors in others. For instance, a man can be oppressed at his job, but he may come home being a macho, beat his wife, quickly morphing into an oppressor. Therefore, constant reexamination of our daily practices is needed to ensure that we are critical of ourselves and that our behavior does not have a detrimental, oppressive effect on the lives of others. Nonetheless, Weiler (1991) also states that feminist pedagogy and critical pedagogy are quite similar:

Both feminist pedagogy as it is usually defined and Freirian pedagogy rest upon visions of social transformation; underlying both are certain common assumptions concerning oppression, consciousness, and historical change. Both pedagogies assert the existence of oppression in people's material conditions of existence and as a part of consciousness; both rest on a view of consciousness as more than a sum of dominating discourses, but as containing within it a critical capacity -- what Antonio Gramsci called “good sense”; and both thus see human beings as subjects and actors in history and hold a strong commitment to justice and a vision of a better world and of the potential for liberation. (p.450)

In order to emphasize the aspect of transformation and social justice inherent in critical pedagogy, several authors have “reinvented” critical pedagogy as Freire (1994) suggested, naming it “a pedagogy of love” (Darder, 2002), “transformative education” (Ada & Campoy, 2004), "transformative pedagogy” (Cummins, 2000b), and “revolutionary pedagogies” (McLaren, 2003; Trifonas, 2000). The concept of dialogue is central to all these pedagogies.
Freire (1970) noticed that in traditional education, learners were regarded as empty vessels in which teachers could deposit knowledge; therefore the term “banking education.” The teacher was the active one while the student waited to be filled with facts or truths. The learner played a passive role. Freire believed that students were treated like objects and that it was important for them to become subjects to be part of a dialogical action with the teacher, the antithesis of banking education. The teacher and students would then construct knowledge together and learn from each other as they move towards liberation from discriminatory positions (e.g. being a “failing” student).

Freire (1998) states that there are certain requirements for such a dialogue to take place. Dialogue cannot occur if some people (teachers) place themselves above others (students), believing they are the owners of truth. Dialogue, Freire adds, requires “an intense faith in humankind, faith in the power to make and remake, to create and recreate, faith in their vocation to be more fully human” (p. 71). Furthermore, he asserts that “without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education” (pp. 73-74). However, it is important to recognize that “dialogue” has been used and manipulated by different groups such as politicians, corporations and diplomats (López Gopar et al., 2006). Burbules (2000) argues that it would be naïve to believe that in every dialogue, participants see each other as equal and worthy of being listened to. He also criticized Freire because his take on dialogue was too idealistic and unproblematized. Burbules (2000) argues that:

The crucial shift is [to go] from a prescriptive model of dialogue as a neutral communicative process, a procedure in which all participants are treated equally, concerned only with the search for knowledge, understanding, and perhaps agreement, to dialogue as a situated practice, one implicated by the particulars of who, when, where, and how the dialogue takes place. (p. 261)

In the next chapter, I will provide a historical contextualization of the dialogue that took place in the CEAR Project.
The concept of voice is an intrinsic part of the dialogue proposed by critical pedagogy. Taking Giroux’s work as a starting point, McLaren (2003) states that voice “refers to the multifaceted and interlocking set of meanings through which students and teachers actively engage in dialogue with one another” (p. 245). He argues that critical and affirming pedagogy has to be constructed around the stories that people tell, the ways in which students and teachers author meaning, and the possibilities that underlie the experiences that share their voices. It is around the concept of voice that a theory of both teaching and learning can take place. (p. 245, emphasis in original)

Blommaert (2005) problematizes the construct of voice and argues that having voice is contingent to people’s discursive means in specific contexts, difference and inequality, conditions of power, and other people’s acknowledgement and take up of one’s voice. In other words, it is naïve to assume that simply because one writes or speaks their “voice”—one’s beliefs, opinions, and/or arguments, people will actually listen or grant us voice. Hence, in Freire’s dialogical action model both the teacher and students must believe in each other and grant each other voice.

Kamler (2001) emphasizes that a person does not have a unitary and fixed voice. In similar lines and using Bakhtin’s (1981) construct of intertextuality, Blommaert (2005) argues that “whenever we speak we produce the words of others, we constantly cite and re-cite expressions, and recycle meanings that are already available. Thus every utterance has a history of (ab)use, interpretation, and evaluation, and this history sticks to the utterance” (p. 46, parenthesis in original). McLaren (2003) adds that “the concept of voice as a ‘critique’ of existing social relations of production must not be subsumed by the idea of voice as a rhetorical trope. Voice must always imply the notion of collective agency as political praxis” (p. 247, quotation marks in original).
Focusing on dialogical action (exchange of people’s voices) as praxis, Macedo (1997) and Freire and Macedo (1999) respond to the teacher who has interpreted his or her role in the dialogical model as being a facilitator who is there to converse with students, rather than being a teacher. Freire argues that he considered himself a teacher and always a teacher (Freire & Macedo, 1999). In other words, teachers should not give up “teaching” or co-constructing knowledge with their students. “Facts” should be presented as someone's particular perspective and not as the absolute truth. It is also the teacher's job to help students make connections between their lives and the new knowledge. In doing this, teachers will help students not only to construct new knowledge, but also to engage in their own learning, which consequently may help students construct a more powerful identity. Freire and Macedo (1999) emphasize that dialogue should be always grounded in praxis (action + reflection) working towards the transformation of the world into a better place. Dialogue without aiming to transform is simply sterile conversation.

Some educators who have adopted Freire's dialogical action suffer from the savior complex, naively hoping to deliver liberation to their students, thus instantly empowering them. This notion is highly problematic, as empowerment should not come from the teacher to the student. Indeed, this false interpretation of empowerment, no matter how well-intentioned the teacher may be, propagates further oppression and takes away agency from the students, again making them into passive recipients of whatever their “superiors” have to offer them. Cummins (2001) defines empowerment as the collaborative creation of power, “where power is created in the relationship and shared among participants” (p. 16), as opposed to coercive relations of power which refer “to the exercise of power by a dominant group (or individual or country) to the detriment of a subordinated group (or individual or country)” (p. 14). In the CEAR Project, we adopted this notion of empowerment since it builds on students’ and teachers’ identities and
confidence to resist, overcome and transform oppressive situations such as the one in which many Mexican Indigenous students find themselves. We also tied the principles of critical pedagogy to the roles we play as “English teachers” in Oaxaca starting our discussions based on the work of many language researchers, teacher educators, and teachers who have brought a critical eye to their research and practice.

**Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning**

The field of applied linguistics has been concerned mainly with language teaching aspects such as how to teach phonology, syntax, and lexicon. Due to the rapid spread of English, most research conducted in this field has focused on how people learn English as a second/foreign language. Learning a foreign/second language has been seen as a “good thing”; language teachers are helping people to communicate with others around the world (Crookes & Lehner, 1998). In the mid eighties, researchers such as Auerbach (1986) began to challenge these beliefs. Auerbach argued that language teachers were not neutrally helping people to communicate; immigrants in the United States were being taught how to follow orders in low-paying jobs. Applied linguists began to realize that if the area remained “neutral,” language teachers would be creating what Phillipson (1992) calls *linguistic imperialism*. Applied linguists, especially those teaching English, needed to be critical in order to help “people” and not multinational companies, which prefer one global language in order to have a global market. “English is not so much a language as a discursive field: English *is* neoliberalism, English *is* globalization, English *is* human capital… Something called English is mobilized by English language industries with particular language effects (Pennycook, 2006, p. 112, emphasis in original). Canagarajah’s (1999) seminal work, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*, brought hope to the field of applied linguistics arguing that students and teachers are not passive recipients of linguistic imperialist views or the detrimental effects of the English
language, they resist and find ways to counteract these effects and use the language to fulfill their own purposes.

Pennycook (2001) coined the term “critical applied linguistics.” He argued that language teachers must continually examine their research and teaching practices if they are to connect English teaching to “questions of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, identity, politics, ideology, and discourse” (p. 10). Norton’s (2000) work has also been influential in the applied linguistics field. She has argued that students invest their identities when learning a second/foreign language. English language learners continually negotiate their identities to seek access to communities of practice, which tend to be dominated by so-called “native speakers.” Norton and Toohey (2004), in *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning*, bring together language educators who problematize the givens of teaching English as a neutral language. It is worth noticing the plural form of the word pedagogies. Norton and Toohey (2004) insist that there should not be a single critical language pedagogy. Every language educator should develop her own according to her context and students.

In Mexico, the notion of critical pedagogies is extremely important. “*Pobre México, tan lejos de Dios y tan cerca de los Estados Unidos*” (Poor Mexico, so far from God, yet so close to the United States) is a common phrase in Mexico. Even at the beginning of the nineteenth century, government officials and intellectuals were concerned with the threat that English posed to the Mexican national language and sovereignty (Zavala, 1996). Nonetheless, English has made its way into Mexico through the media, English Schools, and multinational corporations, which are part of the North American “Free” Trade Agreement (López Gopar et al., 2006). The fact that English is in Mexico and will probably stay and share the grounds with Spanish and Indigenous languages raises many questions. What is our role as English teachers then? Are we traitors to the Mexican Republic? Is English a threat or a weapon in Indigenous people's mouths?
Are we being “used” by multinational corporations? What should our role be when English makes its way to public elementary schools? Are we going to remain language teachers who teach the “neutral” language in the so-called communicative textbooks published by U.S. and British companies? Are we going to teach content? If so, what content? What vocabulary? Will children use it to buy french fries at McDonald’s or to order pizzas from Pizza Hut? By teaching English, are we teaching students to be consumers in a market economy or can English help them to become the next president of a multilingual company? The critical pedagogy we developed in the CEAR Project attempted to constantly address the aforementioned and many other questions.

Pennycook (2006) has warned us about the “many myths about English as a ‘marvelous tongue’” (p. 100, quotation marks in original) and “the collusionary, delusionary and exclusionary effects of English” (p. 101). In respect to the collusionary effect, Pennycook argues that “English colludes with multiple domains of globalization, from popular culture to unpopular politics, from international capital to local transaction, from ostensible diplomacy to purported peace-keeping, from religious proselytizing to secular resistance” (p. 101-102). Regarding the delusionary effect, he claims that there are many myths about how English will improve peoples’ lives. My boss’s father’s statement — “English will be extremely important now that Mexico is about to sign the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). We will have more opportunities now, if we speak English, of course.” — is evidence of the delusionary effect. Mexico’s small businesses, including his, have gone bankrupt because of the unfair-trade NAFTA really imposes. In respect to the exclusionary effect, Pennycook states, “While English opens doors to some, it is simultaneously a barrier to learning, development and employment for others, and thus keeps out far more than it lets in” (p. 103). This is the case in Mexico, where NAFTA is for extremely rich Mexicans and not for most small businesses; English is for the
rich, who can afford private schools, and not for the poor. The delusionary effect and liberal arguments for access have driven the Mexican government to bring English, and the many things English may be or turn into, to public elementary schools. Mexican children, including Indigenous students, are confronted with those effects. Pennycook (2006) concludes, “…if we are concerned about the relation between English and lesser used languages [and their speakers, I must add], the way forward may be not so much in terms of language policies to support other languages over English but rather in terms of opposing language ideologies that construct English in particular ways” (pp. 111-112). English is not something “good” or “bad” in itself. It is our teaching practices that may move towards one or the other. Hence, the CEAR Project was about creating spaces and practices in which this “thing” called English may work in favor of Indigenous and mestizo children’s ways of knowing, culturing, languaging, and living and not against them. In other words, in the CEAR Project, English was an excuse to foster Indigenous peoples’ languages and literacies and a medium by which their voices may reach a larger audience.
Chapter Three:
Contextualization

The purpose of this section is to frame, in an interdisciplinary fashion, our lives as participants in the CEAR Project, and our multiliteracies and translanguaging practices in two urban contexts in the city of Oaxaca, Mexico, from historical, social, cultural, and ideological perspectives. The literature examines Indigenous intercultural and multilingual education in Mexico in three distinct contexts. Much of the research looks at issues regarding Indigenous education in Mexico from a historical perspective, highlighting certain discriminatory and exclusive views of literacy and Indigenous languages. A second set of studies focuses on Indigenous peoples in Oaxaca and in particular their migration to urban settings. A third group of researchers address the role of English in Mexican elementary classrooms and federal education policy vis-à-vis struggling Indigenous languages.

Indigenous Education in Mexico (Five Hundred Years of Oppression, Assimilation, and Resistance)

For five hundred years, Indigenous people have been discriminated against and persuaded to believe that they need to abandon their languages and cultures if they want to succeed in Mexican society. Lastra (2001), who has worked extensively with speakers of two major Indigenous languages in Mexico, Nahuatl and Otomi, concludes that “language policy in Mexico can be summarized as a tendency to unify the country linguistically and make native languages disappear” (p. 160). In spite of assimilation attempts and the loss of more than one hundred
Indigenous languages, more than six-million\(^9\) Indigenous people with 68 languages have resisted assimilation and survived (INALI, 2008; INEGI, 2006).

Maldonado Alvarado (2002) argues that Indigenous peoples have resisted three different conquests. The first was the invasion by Spanish *conquistadores* and subsequent genocide, beginning in 1521. The second conquest, in the nineteenth century, was led by liberal thinkers who claimed that in order for everybody to be “equal” in the new independent Mexico, Indigenous peoples needed to become Mexican. The third conquest, in the twentieth century, was perpetrated by ideologist agents who wanted to “educate” Indigenous peoples (in schools). This section will examine the three conquests chronologically, concluding with Indigenous organizations and their achievements in the new millennium.

*The Pre-Conquest, Indigenous Languages, and Writing Systems*

Before the Spanish *conquistadores* invaded America, the Mexican territory was inhabited by different civilizations which had their own languages and cultures. By the fifteenth century, the most powerful groups had imposed their hegemony, establishing two main *linguae francae*: Nahuatl and Mayan, with Nahuatl being the most powerful (Heath, 1972; Maynez, 2003; Montemayor, 1997, 2000). Even though the Aztec Empire reached Central America, the Nahuatl language never replaced the 100+ Indigenous languages spoken throughout Mexico and Central America (Cifuentes, 1998). The linguistic richness in Mexico was so vast that there were, and still are, 20 family languages (Summer Institute of Linguistics, 2008). A family language is defined as follows:

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\(^9\) Even though this is the “official” number, it is rather low since more surveys have failed to capture the complexities of Indigenous peoples and their languages (see Barabas & Bartolomé, 1999b for detailed criticisms of the census and their discrepancies). It can be inferred that the numbers of both Indigenous peoples and languages are much higher. Depending on the linguistic criteria used, for instance, the number of languages in Oaxaca alone can reach up to 100 (Díaz Courder, 2003). Méndez (2006) calls this statistical ethnocide.
A family is a group of languages that easily can be shown to be genetically related when the basic evidence is examined. For example, the Romance family includes Rumanian, Italian, Spanish, French, Catalan and Portuguese (and all of the regional variants of these languages, e.g., Florentine, Milanese, Sicilian). (Summer Institute of Linguistics, 2008, emphasis and parenthesis in original)

Multilingualism was very much in place when the Spanish people conquered Mexico. Also, similar writing systems that could be understood by the different groups, even if they did not speak the same language, had been developed (Cifuentes, 1998; Jiménez & Smith, 2008).

The writing systems, developed by the Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Aztecs, and Mayans, are represented in what are generically called codices (see León-Portilla, 2003, for a more thorough discussion and examples). These colorful, multimodal texts were recorded on amate, paper made out of cotton or animal skin (Cifuentes, 1998). Codices combined pictorial representation (direct depiction by images) with a numerical and calendrical system, logograms or images (which conveyed a word or idea), and phonetic representation of individual syllables or roots of words. The possibilities of phonetic expression were expanded by the use of homonyms or “tone puns.” (Restall, Sousa, & Terraciano, 2005, p. 11, parenthesis and quotations marks in original)

Codices and current multimodal texts share similar characteristics. Codices could be read by people who did not share the same language, as in the case of Aztecs and Mixtecs, who spoke Nahuatl and Mixtec, respectively. This could be done because these texts were independent from the oral versions of the languages and because the peoples shared a broad cultural base. In a similar way, certain current trademark logos, computer icons, traffic lights, and signs can be read by people who speak different languages. Reading codices was similar to reading multimedia texts and web pages nowadays. Cifuentes (1998) argues that the reading of codices was notably different from the decoding process of alphabetic writing systems, which are linear and usually read from left to right and top to bottom. The interpretation of the codices, on the other hand, could follow different directions depending on the material support offered by the codices. Hence, the reconstruction of different meanings depended on the direction of the reading. There was not just a single interpretation of the graphics,
either, but the background knowledge of the reader [could result in different interpretations]. (p. 167, my translation)

In other words, the codices had two basic components: the “visual” recorded on the codices themselves and the “oral” provided by the reader. Similarly, Jewitt and Kress (2003) argue that children's reading paths are changing in interesting ways. As in non-linear website designs, children's meaning making follows different paths simultaneously. They may start at the bottom of the page. They may later be attracted to something on the left or on the right and move there. Studies recently conducted in Australia support this argument (Hill, 2005; Walsh, 2006).

**The First Conquest**

In 1492, Christopher Columbus stumbled into America in his search for a faster route to the Indies. Hence, when he arrived in the Caribbean, he called the inhabitants “Indians.” In 1521, Mexico was conquered by Spain. Most historians agree that Mexico was conquered by three weapons: the sword, the pandemics, such as smallpox which killed almost 80% of the population, and the cross (Díaz-Courder, 2003). During colonial times, Indigenous languages were not threatened. Even though Indigenous languages started experiencing language shift in urban centers, they were still flourishing in rural towns (Cifuentes, 1998). This was especially the case since many towns were isolated in remote mountain areas.

During colonial times, the Spanish people debated whether or not Spanish needed to be taught to Indigenous groups. The friars or Catholic missionaries believed that the “Indians” would not be able to understand the catechism fully in Spanish. Hence, they decided to learn the Indigenous languages. Some friars and priests even used Indigenous people’s own writing systems to teach Christian values (see Cifuentes, 1998, for examples). Nonetheless, the
Spaniards believed that Christianity could not be fully explained using such “underdeveloped” writing systems. Spanish friars or priests therefore transcribed Indigenous languages into alphabetic scripts, from a Eurocentric perspective which sees writing as the “record” or “representation” of speech (see Menezes de Souza 2003, 2006 for a thorough discussion on Eurocentric views of writing). The motive behind this was to civilize the “savages” and show them the way to heaven. Some Indigenous people, who played the role of sextons, helpers in the church, or notaries, became more involved in the church and learned the new alphabetic system, combining it with their old Indigenous writing system. These Indigenous peoples became bilingual and multiliterate. They would use pictorial writing combined with print in both Spanish and Indigenous languages. Robertson (1994), who has studied the codices extensively, sees this as a “fusion whereby Spanish [texts] and native traditions [texts] meet and create a new synthesis” (p. 34). The Codice Florentino and the Codice Mendozino are perfect examples of these new texts (see León-Portilla, 2003, for examples). Unfortunately, the Spanish destroyed most of the codices, and print soon replaced most Indigenous texts. Spanish alphabetic literacy became the code every Mexican needed to learn. It was in many ways an imposition. However, most Indigenous people remained alphabetically “illiterate.”

Different social and racial classes emerged during colonial times. Hierarchically, there were first the “pure” Spanish people, those born in Spain. Second, there were the criollos, or children of Spanish people born in Mexico. Third, there were the mestizos, who were a mixture of Spanish and Indigenous peoples. Fourth, there were the Indigenous peoples and some black

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10 It must be acknowledged, however, that Indigenous peoples did not fully adopt Christianity. Each Indigenous group adapted it to fit into their previous religious framework, developing in this way their own religious beliefs (Cruz Lorenzo, 2003) and world vision (Bartolomé, 2003).

11 Jiménez & Smith (2008) present examples of contemporary Mexican uses of written language as examples of continuity with Mesoamerican writing practices. I have also argued elsewhere that Indigenous peoples still design codices on their ceramics and clothing; hence, I have called these examples walking codices (López-Gopar, 2007a).
people who were brought to Mexico as slaves. Black peoples and Indigenous peoples were at the bottom of the hierarchy and considered ignorant and in need of education (Montemayor 1997, 2000).

**The Second Conquest by Liberal Thinkers**

During the fight for independence in the nineteenth century led by the *criollos*, who were not allowed to govern because they were not pure Spanish, it was the Indigenous peoples who fought the war. According to Van Young (2001), while the *criollos* fought for independence, Indigenous peoples fought for autonomy in order to preserve their culture and way of life. Mexico became independent from Spain in 1821.

Once Mexico became independent, governments tried to unite the nation through the use of Spanish as a national tongue and to eliminate the term “Indian” along with the many distinctions it brought to the country’s cultural life. According to this approach to equality and nationalism, there were no longer Indians in Mexico, only Mexicans: “National solidarity should be based on the same language, the same religion, the same laws and political norms and on the same social habits for all Mexican citizens” (Heath, 1972, p. 261, my translation). From this period on, it was mandatory for Indigenous people to learn the national language, its literacy, and its values, reflecting an assimilationist policy and social perspective that negates diversity (Hamel 2000, 2001). This perspective has been so strongly held that “neither Vicente Guerrero nor Benito Juárez—Indian themselves [and presidents of Mexico in the nineteenth century]—favored the life of the linguistic minorities among a Spanish-speaking nation” (Garza Cuarón, 1997, p. 8, my translation). Benito Juárez, the most famous president in Mexican history and Zapotec child born in Oaxaca, even repressed an Indigenous movement similar to that of the Zapatistas today (see Montemayor, 2000). “The emphasis on national culture, on the unified
homogenous nation, [served] as a fantastic instrument of social oppression” (Blommaert, 1995, p. 15).

Barabas, Bartolomé, and Maldonado (2003) argue that the situation got worse for Indigenous people after the Independence fight and all through the nineteenth century because of the liberal ideology developed by the *criollos* (see López, 2006, on similar situations in Central and South America). Many Indigenous peoples lost their land. There was a more profound “penetration of white and *mestizo* peoples in Indian towns” (Maldonado Alvarado, 2002, p. 97, my translation), something that had not happened to the same extent in the colonial period. Highly influential educators supported this new Mexico. Justo Sierra, the founder of the National University of Mexico, and José Vasconcelos, one of the most famous Mexican writers and thinkers born in Oaxaca, supported the “one nation, one language” policy as well (Garza Cuarón, 1997; Heath, 1972; Maynez, 2003). José Vasconcelos' famous statement, “*Por mi raza, hablará mi espíritu*” (On behalf of my race, my spirit will speak) should read instead “*Por mi raza [mestiza], hablará mi espíritu*” (On behalf of my [mestizo] race, my spirit will speak), since he rejected Indigenous peoples’ languages.

Bonfil Batalla (1996) claims that liberals were creating this “imaginary” Mexico, trying to erase the *Mexico Profundo*, which carries the Mesoamerican worldview: “The new groups in power, first the *criollos* and later the *mestizos*, never renounced the westernization plan [or] the imaginary Mexico” (p. xvi). Bonfil Batalla (1996) captures the liberal thinking that permeated in all areas in a statement made by Manuel Gamio (Gamio was the first professional Mexican anthropologist and is considered the father of *indigenismo*, Indigenous studies):

In order to incorporate the Indian, let us not try to Europeanize him all at once. To the contrary, let us Indianize ourselves a little, to present him our civilization, diluted in his. In this way he will not find our civilization exotic, cruel, bitter, and incomprehensible. Of course, one should not carry closeness with the Indian to ridiculous extremes (Gamio, 1960, p. 96, first published in 1916). (p. 116-117)
The Third Conquest by Ideologist Agents and Schools

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the quest to find the best way to “educate” Indigenous people began. Only 1% of the Indigenous population was alphabetically “literate” (Nolasco, 1997). In order to teach Spanish and literacy to Indigenous peoples, the federal government needed to “control” rural teachers. To this end, they decided to centralize the education system. In Mexico City, “experts,” usually mestizos, would make decisions as to what was best for the different states. Street (2003) regards this position as the “autonomous” model of literacy,

introducing literacy to poor, ‘illiterate’ people, villages, urban youth etc. will have the effect of enhancing their cognitive skills, improving their economic prospects, making them better citizens, regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their ‘illiteracy’ in the first place. (p. 77, quotation in original)

However, the federal government did not have the funds or personnel to do achieve this objective (Heath, 1972). In the few schools that could be established, the Spanish language was the norm: “…children…were prohibited to speak their native language, they had to speak Spanish, and if teachers happened to be bilingual… they would be sent to other schools far away [from their communities], so that they would not be tempted to utilize their dialect in class” (Nolasco, 1997, p. 206, my translation).

In the late 1930s, a group of anthropologists supported the benefits of “bilingual education” and followed the philosophy of little nations, later to be adopted by the Soviet Union. They believed that in order for Indigenous peoples to learn the Mexican values, they needed to be educated in their native language. This was similar to what the friars had done in teaching Christianity. Moreover, with religion in mind, in 1935 William Cameron Townsend founded the Instituto Lingüístico de Verano [Summer Institute of Linguistics], whose main interest was to translate the Bible into the Indigenous languages. Maynez (2003) claims that even though this was a proselytizing project, much of our knowledge about Indigenous languages is owed to the
efforts of the institute (see http://www.sil.org/mexico/23e-Lenguas.htm for information related to Indigenous languages in Mexico).

In 1940, the first *Congreso Indigenista Interamericano* established the principle that every human being had the right to be educated in their mother tongue, which was later adopted by UNESCO. In order to follow this principle, in 1948, the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista*, which included anthropologists, linguists, and politicians, was created. Its main objective was to help Indigenous groups to “progress,” so that they could be part of the nation (Acevedo Conde, 1997). A decade later, one of the strategies they used was to train *promotores culturales* (cultural promoters). These were Indigenous teenagers or young individuals who had completed elementary or middle school. They would be trained for one to six months and then sent back to their communities to teach. Even though their academic preparation was very limited, Cisneros Paz (2000) argues that they connected better with the students than university graduate monolingual teachers. However, Nolasco (1997) claims, some *promotores culturales* prepared by protestant pastors returned to their communities with certain paternalistic and religious ideologies that rejected the communities’ traditions. They also came back convinced that Spanish language and literacy was the end goal; in other words, the Indigenous language was simply to be “used” in a transitional model (Hamel, 2000) that would lead to Spanish, and consequently, progress and civilization.

In Mexico, the autonomous model of literacy has been alienating. Molina Cruz (2000), a *promotor cultural*, powerfully exemplifies this alienation:

> The alphabet and school turned out to be instruments of cultural perpetuation, the stigma of illiteracy hurt our parents and grandparents when, because of not knowing how to read and write or how to speak Spanish, they were considered ignorant, people without culture, and even worse, in our Indigenous mother tongue they were called “bene tont”, term only used for the inept, the retarded, the crazy [people]; “bene tont” equals illiterate. “bene” means person or man and “tont” means fool, a word we borrowed from Spanish [*tonto*]. (p. 405, my translation)
This experience is shocking. Not only have the Spanish language and alphabet been hegemonic, but they have also provided the words that stigmatize Indigenous groups as inferior. Maldonado Alvarado (2002) also states that “illiteracy is not an Indigenous illness, and hence, Indigenous people do not have the imperative necessity to cure it, and even less with a type of medicine which is not theirs (schools), which, like good western medications, has side effects” (p. 159, my translation). It is not surprising then that many Indigenous peoples have either rejected school with its literacy or have encouraged their children to forget their Indigenous language and learn Spanish, so that they are not called 'bene tont' and do not suffer as they have (Julián Caballero, 2002).

In the 1960s and 70s, bilingual education was advocated by anthropologists who supported “unity in diversity.” Decentralization of the education system was promising, assuming that the local states would know what to do. Heath (1972) concluded: “bilingualism—the acquisition of Spanish for special functions and the conservation of Indigenous languages for identification among the group—will be the policy of success in many Indigenous regions” (p. 269). In 1978, the Dirección General de Educación Indígena (DGEI, General Department of Indigenous Education) was created at the federal level and then handed over to the individual states in 1992. Indigenous education is a subsystem of elementary education. Hence, there are currently mainstream and Indigenous elementary schools controlled by the different states. However, elementary schooling is still based on a common curriculum for all students in the country, even Indigenous children. Textbooks, designed at the federal level, are written with monolingual Spanish speaking children in mind and are simply translated into the different Indigenous languages that have an alphabetic writing system. Hamel (2008a) argues that these translated textbooks may be helpful in developing literacy in the L1, but are inadequate for bilingual education and the teaching of Spanish as a second language.
Before moving on to the current situation of Indigenous peoples, I will use Maldonado Alvarado’s (2002) words to summarize the three conquests Indigenous peoples have endured:

Indigenous towns have been penetrated and isolated fundamentally through institutions. In most communities we can find that their sceneries are marked by the presence of a church, the mayor’s office and a school. Hiding their real mission of intervention and dominance, these three institutions attempted to humanly meet the “needs” that the invaders saw in Indigenous peoples in different moments: 1) once they were considered people—without faith, morals, and [full of] superstitions however— the church would save them from their lowliness and would help them find salvation through the imposition of Catholicism; 2) since they were considered defeated and without an appropriate organizational structure, they were congregated into “towns”, they were organized in Republics, and had the municipality imposed as a government structure; 3) being people without culture, they were provided with indoctrination and more recently with schools. (p. 161, my translation, quotation marks in original)

**Indigenous Intercultural Education in the New Millennium**

Notwithstanding the three conquests Indigenous peoples have gone through and the neoliberal agenda Mexico fully adopted in the 1990s with the signing of NAFTA, Indigenous peoples have continued to struggle and resist. Many of the *promotores culturales* who continued their education have written powerfully about their struggles, the discrimination they have received from “mainstream” teachers and their willingness to maintain and promote their culture and language (see, for example, Julián Caballero, 2000, 2002; Molina Cruz, 2000). In addition, many Indigenous organizations have been formed in different states of Mexico and in the United States (see Hernández-Díaz, 2001, for a description of organizations in Oaxaca and elsewhere). Oaxaca has certainly been one of the most active states with Indigenous organizations developing since the 1970s. One of the most important organizations is the *Coalición de Maestros y Promotores Indígenas de Oaxaca (CMPIO)* (Hernández-Díaz, 2001; Maldonado Alvarado, 2002; see their blog at [http://cmpio.blogspot.com/](http://cmpio.blogspot.com/)). Since 1974, teachers and *promotores culturales* from different Indigenous groups in this organization have been fighting alongside their Indigenous communities. Along with the hard work of organizations like CMPIO,
Hamel (2008b) has identified three important innovations that have benefited Indigenous peoples in Mexico:

1. The democratization process of the past 20 years and the Zapatista insurgence in Chiapas in 1994. This movement made the world aware that Mexico is not only a touristic and peaceful country, but also one that discriminates and marginalizes Indigenous peoples on a daily basis.
2. Indigenous peoples have started to voice their concerns and play a more active role in political and educational arenas (see Meyer et al., 2004 and Ogulnick, 2006 for examples).
3. Social and language politics concerning Indigenous peoples are now discussed at the federal level, with a focus on legal, collective rights, and intercultural nation-states matters. (p. 306)

In the last few years, Mexico has gone through major changes in Indigenous education, reflecting long-overdue acknowledgement of its cultural and linguistic diversity. The current prevailing political discourse emphasizes interculturalism and bilingualism and represents diversity as enrichment rather than as a problem to solve or a disease to cure (Hamel, 2000). Two major federal organizations were created in 2001 and 2003 to enact these shifts towards intercultural, multilingual policies: the General Coordination of Intercultural and Bilingual Education (http://eib.sep.gob.mx) and the National Institute of Indigenous Languages (http://www.inali.gob.mx). They were created to ensure the applicability of the “Law of Indigenous Peoples’ Linguistic Rights,” approved in 2003. The main objectives of these organizations are to promote Indigenous languages, to ensure the success of Indigenous people, and to foster support among the rest of the Mexican population to enhance the value of these languages and cultures. As laudable as these government initiatives are, with Aguilar Nery (2004), I would argue that intercultural and bilingual education reforms need to go beyond legislative and educational discourse to impact life in classrooms. School leaders and teachers are the ones who can start implementing intercultural and multilingual education in schools.

It has been several decades since Indigenous bilingual education has been in place, at least on paper. However, there are still ambivalent feelings regarding intercultural bilingual
education. Indigenous and “mainstream” teachers, parents, the general public, and intellectuals hold different assumptions that range from monoculturalism and rejection of Indigenous languages and cultures (assimilation) to interculturalism that acknowledges diversity and seeks equity (Acevedo Conde, 1997; Hamel, 2000; López & Wolfang, 1999; Olmos Roa & Rosell Becerril, 2001; Zavala, 1996). Ferreiro (1997) discusses some of these notions:

The more disseminated vision regarding individuals whose mother tongue is not a “prestigious language” is a vision full of prejudices… and “suspicions”:

a) regarding the bilingual person, who is tied to the temptations or involuntary falls into “code switching” (something which threatens the “purity” of each language);

b) regarding the bilingual person, because he/she does not possess both languages at the same level of perfection (search of the perfect bilingualism);

c) regarding the intellectual consequences of working with two languages (as if these languages used more space in the brain). (pp. 293-294, quotations marks in original, my translation)

Suspicion and assumptions regarding low status languages are prevalent not only in Mexico. In some states in the United States, bilingual education has been attacked and banned (Cummins, 2000b). In Canada, where tens of different languages are spoken on school grounds, there are similar attitudes. Cummins et al. (2005) list some of the assumptions that must be challenged:

1. Provision of ESL support is the job of the ESL teacher.
2. “Literacy” refers only to English literacy.
3. The cultural knowledge and L1 linguistic abilities that bilingual/ESL students bring to school have little instruction relevance.
4. Culturally and linguistically diverse parents, whose English may be quite limited, do not have the language skills to contribute to their children’s literacy development. (p. 23)

These common sense notions are not casual, but causal. Five-hundred years of colonialism and post-colonialism have instilled the belief that certain languages, cultures, ideologies are better than others. It is at this stage in Mexican and global history that the CEAR Project took place. My, the children’s and the student teachers’ lives have been surrounded by the ideologies developed during the three conquests and disseminated through the different institutions. However, we have not been passive recipients. We have adopted, struggled with or
rejected these ideologies at different moments in our lives. We are also Oaxacans, which adds another layer to our contexts. Let us now take a closer at Indigenous peoples in Oaxaca and their migration patterns to urban setting such as Oaxaca City and its surrounding communities.

**Indigenous Peoples in Oaxaca**

The State of Oaxaca is located in the southern part of Mexico, close to Guatemala. Its ecological diversity and beauty, from cold high mountains to white sand beaches, juxtaposes with the poverty of its inhabitants. The latest Mexican census reported that Oaxaca was the poorest state. The minimum wage is $51.00 pesos ($4.40 Can) for an eight-hour day. Of Oaxaca’s 570 municipalities, 473 were reported to be very highly or highly marginalized. Seventy-three municipalities were medium levels of marginalization and only 24 had low levels (DIGEPO, 2002). Of the 164 municipalities whose population of Indigenous peoples is 80% or higher, 98 % are classified as very highly or highly marginalized (Hernández Díaz, 2007; Méndez, 2006).

The poverty level and marginalization of Indigenous people have their roots in Oaxaca’s history. Murphy and Stepick (1991), who have done research on the social inequalities in Oaxaca for over 20 years, summarize the historical periods that have contributed to Oaxaca’s current state of inequality; these parallel Maldonado Alvarado’s three conquests framework:

In the half millennium of the postcolonial era, there have been four periods of Oaxacan integration into the broader world: the early colonial period, the cochineal era of the late colonial period [first conquest], and the Porfiriato of the late nineteenth century [second conquest] and the contemporary period since 1950 [third conquest]. The first three represent efforts at the exploitative relationships that imposed new economic activities dedicated to enriching a non-local elite. Cynically, the same could be maintained for the last, the contemporary era, if one

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12 DIGEPO (2002) calculates marginalization based on four categories and their respective indicators: 1) education (illiteracy rates; people without having completed elementary education); 2) housing (homes with no running water; homes with no sewage services; homes with dirt floors; homes with no electricity; homes with some of these services); 3) income (people who make at least two minimum wages); and 4) density (communities with fewer than 5000 people).
asserts that increased government activities, even though ostensibly for all Oaxacan, primarily benefit the largely nonlocal government bureaucrats.” (p. 215)

Oaxaca has a population of 3,506,821 (INEGI, 2006). The population of 15 years of age and older is 2,264,935. Of these, 1,091,502 are Indigenous. According to the 2005 state census, 17% of this group has received no schooling and 20.6% have not completed elementary school. Only 20% go onto high school and higher education. In addition, approximately 20% earn the equivalent of two minimum wages or more. In sum, over two-million people in Oaxaca live under poverty conditions.

Oaxaca is the most culturally and linguistically diverse state in Mexico. The population is culturally diverse, with distinct ethnic groups such as the Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Chatinos, Triquis Mixes, and African Blacks, who have been recognized as an Indigenous ethnic group, to mention a few (see Barabas & Bartolomé, 1999a, for an extensive ethnographic description). In Oaxaca, one of every three people speaks an Indigenous language; however, Spanish is the de facto official language. The Indigenous population is 1,091,502.

However, Barabas (1999b) argues that this number is or should be much higher and that the exaggerated proportion of the so-called non-Indigenous (mestizo) population is the result of Indigenous identity loss and cultural elements tied to Indigenous languages: “speaking a “dialect” [pejorative term to refer to Indigenous languages] is considered a custom of Indians, associated with an inferior identity” (p. 164, my translation). Being a Oaxacan is equated with being an Indigenous and formally uneducated person in other states of Mexico. Hence, “many Indigenous peoples deny their ethnicity, language and culture” (López Hernández, 2002, p. 5, my translation). Despite linguistic and racist prejudices (Montes García, 2004) and thanks to Indigenous educators’ activism (Hernández Díaz, 2004), there are sixteen Indigenous languages officially recognized by the government (see a map of Oaxaca and its Indigenous languages at
However, there are many more languages spoken in the state of Oaxaca. The number depends much on the criteria selected to categorize these languages.¹³

Oaxaca is a “leading” state in constitutional rights for Indigenous people in Mexico. Dalton (2004) states that Heladio Ramírez López, governor of Oaxaca from 1986 to 1992, who publicly recognized himself as Indigenous, worked toward constitutional reforms approved on October 29, 1990. The reforms read as follows:

- [Oaxaca has] a pluri-ethnic composition based on the presence of the Indigenous peoples.
- The law will establish the norms, measures and procedures which will protect and preserve the cultural estate of the ethnic groups and will promote the development of specific forms of Indigenous communities’ social organization.
- The law will punish cultural looting in the State.
- The law will establish the procedures which warrant Indigenous peoples’ effective access to the judicial protection that the State offers to all its inhabitants. In trials in which Indigenous peoples may take part, the authorities will make sure that, in ideal conditions, the prosecutors and judges speak the Indigenous language, or, if this is not the case, they will have a bilingual interpreter; and [the authorities will also] consider, within the current legal framework, [Indigenous peoples’] conditions, practices and customs, during the [trial] process and the sentence pronouncement.
- In conflicts of communal or municipal land boundaries, the State will promote conciliation and agreement for a definite solution, with the participation of traditional authorities from the ethnic region. (Dalton, 2004, p. 253, my translation)

Dalton (2004) argues that the Federal government wanted to “test” these reforms to get Mexican people’s reactions and make the same reforms at the federal level in response to international pressure, such as the signing of the International Labor Agreement. In Oaxaca, Indigenous peoples have legal rights. However, these rights have not positively impacted Indigenous peoples’ lives since Indigenous people have not directly demanded these rights.

¹³ Indigenous languages are quite distinct from Spanish (Summer Institute of Linguistics, 2008). Interestingly, they are similar to Asian languages. For instance, the Mixtec languages are toned languages similar to Mandarin or Cantonese. Also, the Triqui language sentence structure is subject-object-verb similar to the Japanese language.
(Maldonado, 2003). Hence, the reforms have not had a positive impact on their general well-being or on their formal education.

Indigenous peoples in Oaxaca are educationally disadvantaged when compared to the rest of the Mexican population. 88.7% of Indigenous children between 6 and 14 years of age are enrolled in schools. This is 5% lower than the national average. The alphabetic illiteracy rate among Indigenous students at 15 years of age is more than triple the national rate (31.7% and 8.4% respectively). In addition, their level of schooling is 4.5 years lower than the national average. The total population of Indigenous children in elementary schools is 219,341. 143,002 Indigenous children are served by the Indigenous education strand, 73,651 are in the mainstream strand, and 2,668 are in CONAFE, which stands for National Council for Education Promotion (INEGI, 2006). Indigenous elementary schools are usually located in poor and marginalized areas. There is little financial support for materials and the facilities are deficient (Montes García, 2007).

Teachers who belong to the Indigenous education strand are usually discriminated against by teachers in the mainstream strand. Mainstream teachers make fun of Indigenous teachers because of their “non-standard” Spanish, their Indigenous background, and low levels of formal education (Mena & Ruiz, 2000; Montes García, 2007). For this reason, many Indigenous teachers usually pursue higher education in order to move to the mainstream educational strand. The ones less educated remain in the Indigenous strand and are seen as the “ugly ducklings” (Montes García, 2007). Indeed, more than 50% of the 10,440 teachers who work in the Indigenous education strand have only a high-school diploma. Their pedagogical preparation ranges from one to six months (Mena & Ruiz, 2000). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that many teachers who have attained university degrees stay in the Indigenous
strand because of their commitment to Indigenous children’s education. Such is the case of many teachers who belong to the *Coalición de Maestros y Promotores Indígenas de Oaxaca* (CMPIO).

It is important to acknowledge that many Indigenous teachers working in rural areas are making enormous efforts to provide culturally appropriate and responsive education that respects and promotes diversity and multilingualism. Through CMPIO, Indigenous teachers have developed ongoing professional development initiatives, established intercultural bilingual programs, prepared bilingual materials in different Indigenous languages and Spanish, and most recently established language nests in several communities, based on the Maori model in New Zealand (L. Meyer, personal communication, December 2008). In 2007, CMPIO and other Indigenous organizations hosted the 2nd *Congreso Nacional de Educación Indígena e Intercultural* in Oaxaca. Based on the dialogue at the congress, it was officially declared that Indigenous peoples have been completely abandoned by the State, which provides an educational system that does not favor Indigenous peoples’ languages and cultures, and Indigenous children’s cognitive and creative development. In fact, they claim, it does the opposite. They are particularly concerned about the discrimination and exclusion suffered by Indigenous people who have had to move to the City of Oaxaca, other larger cities, or agricultural sites in Mexico or the United States (see the full declaration at [http://difusioncongreso.blogspot.com/2007/10/declaracin-del-2-congreso-nacional-de.html](http://difusioncongreso.blogspot.com/2007/10/declaracin-del-2-congreso-nacional-de.html)).

Even though migration has been part of Indigenous peoples’ histories, it became a more prominent phenomenon in the last half of the twentieth century. They are no longer only in isolated towns. Many Indigenous peoples have moved to urban centers challenging educators in urban centers who have mainly dealt with *mestizo* and Spanish-only speaking students. Hence, it was important for us in the CEAR project to understand Indigenous peoples’ migration process and their presence in urban centers.
**Oaxacan Indigenous Peoples’ Migration**

Oaxaca has one of the highest migration rates in Mexico (Pimienta Lastra & Vera Bolaños, 2005). Valencia Rojas (2000) states that 75% of the municipalities in Oaxaca have migration problems and that many of them are places with a high number of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples’ migration has been both national, to different cities within Oaxaca and to other states, and international, mainly to the United States (see Stephen, 2007, for an ethnographic account of transborder lives of Indigenous peoples; see also Huizar Murillo & Cerda, 2002, for migration destinations in the United States).

Several migration experts and Indigenous researchers have proposed theories to explain the migration phenomenon. Rubio, Millán and Gutierrez (2000) claim that migration in Oaxaca is due to the capitalism that has taken over the State of Oaxaca’s local and popular economy. Ruiz García (2002a, 2002b) identifies five possible causes: a) demographic explosion, b) unemployment, c) discrimination, d) inhospitable, arid, and unproductive lands, caused by irrational exploitation of natural resources by mestizos and criollos (Rubio et al., 2000), and e) violence (see Lewin, 1999, for a history of violence in the Triqui region). Lewin and Guzman (2003) and Acevedo Conde (2007a, 2007b) state that Indigenous migration began in the 1960’s due to demographic growth and urban industrialization. Pérez-Ruiz (2002), who has focused on the Indigenous presence in the cities—something she considered overlooked by Indigenous studies—claims that Indigenous peoples’ presence in cities is due to at least three causes:

a) because many cities were built on prehispanic cities and towns keeping many times exclusive zones for this type of population, which are now traditional barrios, some of which have speakers of Indigenous languages; b) because cities’ growth has taken place over surrounding rural areas, many of them with Indigenous population; and c) because rural peoples’ migration to the cities, which include Indigenous peoples, has been a permanent process in the history [of Mexico], which has increased from the late seventies until now. (p. 295, my translation)
Cohen (2004) views migration patterns through a broader lens, bringing the decisions that take place in households to the forefront. Cohen uses a three-part, household-based approach (macroeconomic models, psychological model, and household model) and states: “To ignore the important role of the household is to misunderstand how rural Oaxacans create their social universe” (p. 23). For Cohen, macro causes and individual differences do have an impact on people’s decision to move or to stay; however, decisions taken in the heart of the families whether to stay or to go somewhere else are decisive. Barabas and Bartolomé (1999b) have also argued that for many Indigenous communities migration has turned into a new initiation ritual, which prepares children and young people for the contemporary world.

Due to such complex causes as we have just seen, by 1990 more than 400,000 Indigenous people from Oaxaca lived outside the state (Lewin & Guzmán, 2003). In 2000, the total number of Oaxacan people living in other states doubled, reaching 843,317. Interstate migration patterns show that most Oaxacans who have migrated reside in Mexico City (DF), Mexico State, Baja California Sur, Baja California, and Veracruz (see Pérez-Ruiz, 2002 for statistical information for each of these states). There has also been international migration. Acevedo Conde (2007a) states that according to official figures close to 200,000 Oaxacans live in the United States. Many of those are from Indigenous backgrounds. Zapotecs and Chatinos are found in Los Angeles, while Mixtecs live in the agricultural areas of San Diego County and in the Counties of Sonoma and Ventura, and the San Joaquin Valley. Stephen (2007) also reports the presence of Zapotecs, Mixtecs and Triquis in Oregon. Texas and New York State also have a high number of Indigenous peoples.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{14}}\text{It is worth noting that this number does not include the number of people that move to the city of Oaxaca from other parts of the state.}\]
It has been noted that the participation of women in migration has risen considerably, surpassing the number of male migrants, especially in the states closest to Oaxaca. The fact that 53% of Oaxacans living out of the state are women (Pérez Marcial, 2004) emphasizes that migration has become a family decision and the importance of women’s roles in the new places of residence. By working outside the home, women have balanced the unequal gender relations within marriage (Maeir, 2000) and have become an indispensable source of income in the economy of the family (Méndez Morales, 2000). They have also maintained their community links by participating in their home communities whenever they come back. Oehmichen (2000), who has focused particularly on Indigenous women in their new communities, argues that women establish diverse elements of self-identification with their language, attire and socialization.

Children have also been part of the migration phenomenon. Díaz Cruz (2004) reports that more than 370,000 children have migrated with their families and work as jornaleros (day laborers in agricultural fields), mainly in northern states of Mexico such as Sinaloa and Baja California. The formal education of these children is one of the greatest challenges for the Mexican education system (Domínguez Cruz, 2007; Ortíz Ortega, 2002). Many of these children are from Oaxaca and have Indigenous background, especially Mixtec, Zapotec, and Triqui. They are teased and called “Oaxaquitas” (a pejorative term referring to Oaxacan peoples), especially because they speak an Indigenous language. “Children grow up here and there in multicultural [settings, which are] many times aggressive and violent” (Pérez-Ruiz, 2002, p. 316, my translation). Stephen (2007) reports also discriminatory practices against Indigenous children by mestizo and Mexican-American people in the United States. Nonetheless, Oaxacan peoples and children are valued because of their hard work (Acevedo Conde, 2007b).
In spite of its many detrimental effects, migration is opening new spaces in the reproduction and re-creation of culture: “…migration has broadened the ambit of the traditional community and expanded the horizons of what is socially imaginable. For thousands of Indigenous migrants, the external… the modern have become daily factors in re-creating culture” (Lewin & Guzmán, 2003, p. 195, my translation). In the northern part of Mexico and in the United States, especially in California and Oregon, Indigenous peoples such as Zapotecs, Mixtecs, and Triquis have created interethnic organizations in order to re-create their Indigenous identity based on a shared Mesoamerican past “as a resource to resist their condition of vulnerability outside their communities of origin” (Velasco Ortiz, 2002, p. 13, my translation; see Hernández-Díaz, 2001, and Stephen, 2007, for more information about Indigenous organizations).

**Indigenous Peoples in the City of Oaxaca**

The city of Oaxaca and its surrounding municipalities sit on a place where three valleys meet; hence, this area is commonly known as the Valles Centrales. It is known world-wide because of its architecture, especially the impressive baroque-style churches built from green limestone by Indigenous workmen during the colonial era. The city is also known for the distinctive art pieces made by Indigenous Oaxacan artists in small towns around the city (see Hernández-Díaz, Zafra, Ortiz Blás & Hernández Gómez, 2001 for examples). The ruins of Monte Alban, proof of the Zapotec splendor, overlook the city as well (see Figure 1).
Figure 1. Monte Alban ruins overlook one of the three valleys of Oaxaca\textsuperscript{15}.

The metropolitan area of Oaxaca has also been the recipient of Indigenous migration. Indigenous peoples come to the city of Oaxaca for different reasons. Some Indigenous young people move to the city to pursue higher education. Clemente and Higgins (2008) documented the experiences of a Triqui student and a Chinanteco background student, and López Gopar et al. (2006) documented the lives of two female Mixtec students attending FI-UABJO. Other Indigenous peoples move to the city of Oaxaca in search of jobs in construction projects. Those who decide to move their whole family look for land in emergent neighborhoods around the city of Oaxaca. Maldonado Cruz (2004) argues that many families see this move as a springboard, which they can use to move to other cities and even to the United States later.

\textsuperscript{15} All photos and videos were taken by the author unless stated otherwise
Hernández Villalobos and Robles Félix (2006) have documented the growth of the 25 municipalities that compose the metropolitan area of Oaxaca. According to the last census, there are 574,750 people in the metropolitan area (INEGI, 2006). Hernández Villalobos and Robles Félix (2006) also claim that the metropolitan area density has grown seven times in the last thirty-five years. Due to this rapid growth, the metropolitan area suffers from water shortage, traffic problems, lack of educational and health services, and a low number of available jobs. The emergent neighborhoods around the city lack basic services such as running water, electricity, sewage, and paved roads.

A total of 43,249 Indigenous peoples live in all of the 25 municipalities. As mentioned earlier, this number is actually much higher, since censuses do not capture the complexities of Indigenous people’s self-identification. The City of Oaxaca has the highest concentration—a total of 20,109. Villa de Zachila and Santa Cruz Amilpas have registered the biggest growth of Indigenous peoples, with 12% and 12.3%, respectively. The Villa de Zachila municipality hosts over 2000 Indigenous peoples. It is in the city of Oaxaca that most Indigenous peoples reside, and in the Villa de Zachila, which hosts Indigenous newcomers, that the CEAR Project took place. It is here that Indigenous peoples interact with Spanish, Indigenous languages, and English.

“English” in Mexico

“English” is much more than a foreign language in Mexico. English is in many ways the object of the love-and-hate relationship that has developed historically with the United States. This relationship dates from the early nineteenth century, when not-so-friendly encounters took place along the border. Incidents at “the Alamo” in 1836 led to Santa Ana’s defeat in the battle of San Jacinto in the same year. Texas gained its independence from Mexico and became part of the United States in 1845. Mexico’s refusal to allow Texas to secede led to what is known as the
US-Mexican (or Mexican-American) war from 1846 to 1848. The most important consequence of these conflicts was that Mexico lost half of its territory (1.36 million km²) to the United States under the Guadalupe Treaty in exchange for US $15 million (equivalent to $313 million in 2006 US dollars). If one does the math, the United States paid Mexico 244 dollars per square kilometer. Anti-U.S. feeling has been strong in Mexico ever since.

The hate relationship started changing in the twentieth century with the Bracero program. Because of the shortage of workers during the Second World War, the United States authorized growers in California and other states to legally hire Mexican temporary workers to fill the gap. This provided cheap labor to the growers, who wished to continue hiring Mexican people even after the war had ended (see http://www.ufw.org/_page.php?menu=research&inc=history/03.html for more on the farm workers’ conditions in the United States and the movement that César Chávez led for farmer workers’ rights). The Bracero program ended in 1964.

In the 1980s, after Mexico had lived its ephemeral dream as a rich country with the money obtained from oil, a terrible crisis began. Mexico’s external debt grew dramatically (Bonfil Batalla, 1996). This crisis resulted in increased undocumented immigration to the United States. Mexican families survived on the “green bills” they received from their relatives in the United States. My older brother emigrated there in 1987. I still remember the one dollar bill he sent to each of us, the four younger siblings in the family. With the 1998 “election,” or the most outrageous electoral fraud in Mexico in my opinion, of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) and his neoliberal ideas, Mexico grew closer financially to the United States and signed the NAFTA agreement in 1992.

Because of the historical relationship between Mexico and the United States, government officials and intellectuals have been “concerned with the threat” that English poses to Mexico’s
national language and sovereignty (Heath, 1972; Zavala, 1996) and have defended the Spanish language from the English invasion. Most politicians, intellectuals, and indeed most people in Mexico hold ambivalent attitudes toward English (Francis & Ryan, 1998). On the one hand, technocrats like Salinas de Gortari and all the following Mexican presidents have moved Mexico closer to U.S. domination in their march to “raise” the economic standard of living in Mexico (Sierra & Padilla, 2003). On the other hand, there are nationalistic views: “vis-a-vis the US, Mexico’s neighbor, the Spanish heritage creates bonds of solidarity that help to resist the penetration of English and cultural aggression from the north” (Hamel, 1994, p. 292). Zavala (1996) has also argued that Spanish unites Latin America, versus the hegemonic English language. Nonetheless, many of the very same politicians and intellectuals who “stand against” U.S. hegemony send their children to private bilingual elementary schools, so that they can learn English from a young age (Sierra & Padilla, 2003). It is also worth mentioning that the most prestigious scholarships in Mexico require English and that federal university scholarships increase according to students’ TOEFL score (see the rules for Academic Excellence Awards at http://www.sems.gob.mx/Extranet/asp/Archivos/Reglas_de_operaci%C3%B3n_del_Prog._Nal._de_Becas_a_la_Excel_Acad%C3%A9mica_y_al_Aprov._Escolar.pdf).

English has been taught in public secondary schools in Mexico since 1974. The rhetoric against English has been so strong that the English subject in middle school is called “Lengua Adicional al Español” (Additional Language to Spanish) and not “English.” Middle school children take English as a subject three times a week. Terborg et al. (2007) state that in the 1970s and 1980s English instruction in middle schools consisted mainly of grammar exercises and vocabulary. With the 1993 educational reform, the communicative approach was adopted and the four skills were emphasized. In 2005, there was another educational reform focusing on middle schools called Reforma Integral de la Educación Secundaria (Integrative Reform of Middle
School Education). In this reform, it is stated that students are supposed to reach level A2 in the European Framework of Reference: “A2 Basic User–Waystage: Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment)” (Baetens Beardsmore, 2009, p. 200, italics in original). The new reform expects English secondary school teachers to have level B1 in the European Framework of Reference: “B1 Independent User – Threshold Level: Can understand the main point of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, and so on. Can deal with most spoken situations likely to arise whilst traveling in the area where the language is spoken” (ibid, pp. 200-201, italics in original).

Even though English as a foreign language does not start until junior high school in public schools, there are several initiatives in different Mexican states that are piloting English in elementary schools. The English program in public elementary schools in Coahuila, Mexico, was selected as the “innovative educational practice of the year” (see SEP, 2002). The state of Morelos has also been piloting an English program in elementary schools (Terborg et al., 2007). In addition, as briefly stated in one the vignettes in the introduction, the federal government has decided to bring the English language to all public 6th and 5th grade classrooms through Inglés Enciclomedia, which was to be launched in August, 2008 (Del Valle, 2008a). Enciclomedia is an information technology system that links the digitalized free textbooks published by the SEP [Public Education Secretariat] to different multimedia materials, such as still images, and audio and video files produced by government and educational organizations (watch a video in English with the description of Enciclomedia at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BmsVq99Vz8&feature=related). As innovative as this project may be, let us not forget that both free textbooks and Enciclomedia are produced by
government and may reflect the State position. The use of digital technology requires a stronger emphasis on critical literacies in order to identify whose ideologies are included and whose are excluded (Durrant & Green, 2000; Hagood, 2000; Luke, 2003). A whole section will be devoted to analyzing *Inglés Enciclomedia* vis-à-vis the realities that we found in the two schools.

The Mexican government is still working on the idea of bringing English to elementary and even kindergarten classrooms through the *Programa Nacional de Inglés en la Educación Básica*. Even though the SEP website does not offer any detailed information about the program, it has documented the meetings held in northern and southern Mexico about the program. A news bulletin that documents the meeting in which Oaxaca education officials participated reports as follows:

The English National Program in elementary schools has as a goal to align and articulate all the efforts made [in different states] to teach English in pre-school, elementary schools and middle schools; at the same time, [its goals are] to make sure that all students… interpret and produce a variety of oral and written texts, which may allow them to satisfy their communication needs, to develop strategies for learning and communication, and to develop positive awareness and values regarding other cultures. (SEP, 2008, my translation)

Several national news reporters have documented this initiative in more detail, focusing on the states that are piloting English language programs in elementary schools and on teacher preparation issues. Del Valle (2008a) reports that there are 21 states implementing English pilot projects. She also reports that the first program was in Nuevo León, the most industrialized state of Mexico, in 1993, providing English programs to 1320 schools. In total, pilot projects are serving 748,999 children, which represent 5.2% of the national population of elementary school children. She also states that *Inglés Enciclomedia* was being piloted in 134 schools, according to Felipe Bracho, who is in charge of the project and the person who initiated the *Enciclomedia* project. García Aura (2008) has looked at teacher preparation issues. According to García Aura, Mexico will have the necessary number of trained teachers (120,645) to cover the teaching of
English in elementary schools in the 700,000 public schools in the country by the year 2020. At the moment, she states that there are just over 5000 trained teachers, and that according to National English Program, this number of trained teachers will be incremented by 10% every year. If we take the number reported by the National English Program and add the 10% increment, then there will be 15,692 trained teachers in 2020. This is far fewer than the 120,645 stated above. There is an enormous discrepancy between the number required and reality of training capacity. It is worth noting the word “training,” which in many ways regards teacher as technicians who may simple follow the instructions created by curriculum developers or education experts.

In the CEAR Project, however, I did not want to “train” student teachers, but to collaboratively reflect with them on our praxicum in elementary schools in order for all of us to develop expertise in teaching “English” to Oaxacan children. Teacher preparation moves us into our next section, where I will examine the role of English in Oaxaca, the B.A. in TESL Program offered by FI-UABJO, where I am a faculty member, and the literature addressing best practices in the teaching of English to children. I will also describe the elective TEC course that I designed and taught in 2005 and its analysis, together with a description of the new, redesigned course I taught during the CEAR Project.

**English in Oaxaca and at FI-UABJO**

As we have seen, Oaxaca is the most linguistically and culturally diverse state of Mexico. Regrettably, many Mexicans from other states as well as Oaxacan city dwellers regard this multilingualism not as the state’s inherent richness but as a hindrance for Oaxacan development. In spite of the discrimination against Indigenous groups, the government and the tourism industry have used the colors, flavors, and traditions created by Indigenous peoples in an effort to make profit by attracting more tourists. Because of the many jobs that demand English, the
presence of tourists, and the common discourse that English is the global language, Oaxacan people want English for their children. English and computer classes are the main difference between private elementary schools and public elementary schools.

FI-UABJO opened in 1974 and provides language courses in English, French, Italian, Japanese, German, and most recently Zapotec, an Indigenous language. To respond to the increasing demand for English teachers in the state of Oaxaca, in 1992, FI-UABJO started offering the B.A. program in TESL from which I graduated in 1998. FL-UABJO also offers two master’s degree programs in applied linguistics, one focusing on Spanish and the other on English. In order to keep its programs up to date, FL-UABJO conducted an evaluation of its B.A. program in 2002. One of the results of this evaluation showed that more English instruction for young learners was requested by the general public.

FI-UABJO also noticed that many Oaxacan parents invest financially in their children’s English education. All over the state, there are many private English language schools and institutes offering English to children. Many private pre-schools and elementary schools use English classes to attract students as well. Due to this phenomenon, many FL-UABJO graduates get teaching jobs in private elementary school classrooms. Originally, the B.A. program did not offer a specific course to prepare student teachers for these jobs. To solve this problem, in March 2005, FL-UABJO asked me to develop and teach a course entitled “Teaching English to Children.” I taught the course to 25 students before taking leave in 2006 to work on my doctorate. In the fall of 2008, I came back to FL-UABJO to offer the course again as part of the CEAR Project. In the following section, I present a description of the first offering of the course, followed by a literature review I conducted to revise it, and a description of the new syllabus I used in 2008 as part of the CEAR Project.
Description of the “Teaching English to Children” Elective Course

I taught the 16-week course in the spring of 2005. The class met as a group on Mondays and Wednesdays for one and half hours. Two hours a week were devoted to independent work and individual meetings with the instructor as requested by the students. The course description used to advertise this course provides a succinct overview of the course:

This course is a practical introduction to the area of teaching children. During this course, students will be provided with the basic pedagogical and linguistic foundations necessary to work with young learners. During this class, students will have the opportunity to learn about the social, linguistic and intellectual development and characteristics of children at different ages viewed from different psychological and psycholinguistic perspectives. Moreover, students will be introduced to different classroom and behavior management techniques. More importantly, students will experience, first hand, different activities that should be used to develop language when teaching children, such as games, songs, storytelling (books), art and crafts, and role-play, to mention a few. Finally, this course will briefly discuss syllabus-design issues (Emphasis in original).

The course consisted of four units. The first three followed consecutively: 1) Development of children; 2) Principles of teaching children; and 3) Classroom and behavior management techniques. The fourth, “Language development through activities, lesson planning, and a brief introduction to syllabus design” was incorporated into every session. The class interactions consisted of lectures, whole group discussions, small group tasks, and debates, among other activities. Also, there were two guest speakers during the course. The first speaker presented the use of songs and the importance of using gestures while relating these to the curriculum. The second speaker discussed the development and implementation of thematic units. As part of the course, the class also visited a bilingual (Spanish/English) private elementary school for a half day. Finally, in few sessions, there were class discussions of issues relating to linguistic imperialism, Indigenous bilingual children, and the impact that English and materials may have on children’s perceptions of Spanish, Indigenous languages, and multilingualism.
For assessment purposes, student teachers were required to create three different portfolios or “books.” The first portfolio they needed to create was a song book including all the songs we had learned in class. They were to include any adaptations they could make to these songs. A CD of all songs was made and included in their song books. The second portfolio was an activity-game-story book. For this assignment, they needed to include something—a visual, a description, a photo or anything they could use—to remember the activities and/or games that we had used in class. Since a story was read to the teachers in every session, they were also required to include a short description of the stories with possible activities, language structures, and different topics they could address while using these stories. The third portfolio required was an ABC book about teaching English to children. The students began working on these portfolios at the beginning of the course. Their portfolios were reviewed twice, once in the middle and another time at the end of the course. Student teachers were constantly reminded that even though the books were used for assessment purposes, the ultimate goal was to use them as resources in their future classes.

This course reflected, in many ways, the trend of applied linguistics. I truly believed I was using state-of-the-art methodology by basing my teaching on my own experiences and the expertise of both U.S. and British authors in the few books we had at my university. Much of the emphasis was placed on how to teach English to children leaving the discussion why English is taught in a secondary place. Children were also viewed in a generic way as if they were the same all over the world. In many ways, I adopted the “official” line that all children come to school with the same needs and are able to respond to the same curriculum and teaching strategies in this course. After teaching this course, I had the opportunity to reflect on it through my research with two Indigenous student teachers (López Gopar et al., 2006) and my conversations with my doctoral peers, professors, and my fellow teacher educators in Mexico, who are also attempting
to grapple with critical pedagogies in Mexico (Clemente et al., 2006). I turn now to the changes I made to the TEC course.

Adaptation of the “Teaching English to Children” Elective Course

Since the TEC course was an essential component in the CEAR Project, it was necessary to evaluate it in light of the research and best practices in order to determine the knowledge base required to work with children, especially Indigenous, at the elementary level. Most importantly, however, it was to bring issues of critical pedagogies and language teaching and multiliteracies and translanguaging practices to the forefront. Let us begin with what the literature recommends as best practices.

The use of children’s literature and the creation of texts have been highly recommended (Ashworth and Wakefield, 2004; Cameron, 2001; Machura, 1991; Reilly and Ward, 1997). Ghosn (2002) addresses four good reasons to use children’s literature in the elementary language classroom. First, children’s literature provides a motivating, meaningful context for language learning. Second, it can contribute to language learning. Third, it can promote academic literacy and thinking skills. Fourth, it can function as a change agent, and build accepting interpersonal and intercultural attitudes.

Providing students with children’s literature is not enough to learn a foreign language. Books must be read by an animated teacher. Peñate Cabrera and Bazo Martínez (2001) analyzed the use of repetitions, comprehension checks, and gestures. They concluded that teachers need to use these three strategies in order to provide students with comprehensible input. Another essential aspect of using children’s books is to choose books that reflect children’s lives in a positive light (see Botelho, 2004, for an analysis of what to read and how to read children’s literature). The lack of culturally appropriate books makes the creating of books by the students and teachers essential. Research has revealed the power of the creation of books among
immigrant children in Canada (Cummins et al., 2005) and in the United States (Ada & Campoy, 2004). This is particularly important because the books created by students are directly related to students’ lives. See Cohen and Leoni’s (2006) article online to view examples of texts created by immigrant students.

Children learn a foreign language by using it in meaningful ways. Music and games have been highly recommended. Music is highly motivating for children. When children sing, they seem completely uninhibited. Murphey (1992) addresses several reasons why music and songs are important in language learning: it is easier to sing a language than to speak it; songs also appear to precede and aid the development of language in children; and most importantly, songs are relaxing. Similar to songs, games and engaging activities are typically recommended as appropriate strategies to use when teaching English to children (Khan, 1991; Reilly & Ward, 1997; Rixon, 1991). Games help children acquire language in an engaging way and develop social skills such as co-operating and working in groups.

Thematic units are recommended in syllabus design while working with children (Bourke, 2006; Brewster, 1991; Holderness, 1991; Cameron, 2001). The use of thematic units goes beyond the importance of teaching language in context. Three critical goals can be achieved through the use of thematic units. First of all, English is viewed as a “medium” of instruction, as a means to an end or as a lingua franca (Seidlhoder, 1999). Second, curriculum content can be taught during English time. This, of course, requires language teachers to have knowledge of the mainstream curriculum and to work collaboratively with content teachers. Finally, thematic units require student teachers to design their own materials for the units. Shameen (2007) supports the development of materials by teachers in Fiji, where English is taught at the elementary level. It is important to acknowledge that the development of materials raises the issue of the extra hours of work teachers need to put in. However, it is a way to stay away from the materials produced in
the so-called “inner circle” countries, which do not reflect “expanding circle” realities and can be heavily loaded with imperialistic views.

Several researchers have attempted to deal with the knowledge base required to teach children. Brumfit (1991) argues that teachers need the language and competence in primary teaching methodology. Cameron (2003) lists three aspects teachers of young learners need: “(a) an understanding of how children think and learn; (b) skills and knowledge in spoken English to conduct whole lessons orally, and to pick up children’s interests and use them for language teaching; and (c) to be equipped to teach initial literacy in English” (p. 111). Other researchers argue that patience (Brown 1994; Scott & Ytreberg, 1998), along with preparation (Wong & Wong, 1998), is a highly valued characteristic that teachers must possess. Vale and Feunteun (1995) also discuss the importance of teachers’ knowledge in establishing routines for children learning a foreign language, since teachers’ knowledge gives children confidence to use the target language in similar situations. The aforementioned researchers’ views address essential topics, but they do not cover all the intricacies of teaching children.

Curtain and Pesola (1994) analyzed the topic more thoroughly in a project which built on the experiences of successful language teachers in elementary schools in the United States. The project was a collaborative endeavor between the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the Center of Applied Linguistics. Among other outcomes, this project developed a list of thirteen competencies for the foreign language teacher:

1. An understanding of second language acquisition in childhood and its relation to first language development.
2. Knowledge of instruction methods appropriate to foreign language instruction in the elementary school.
3. Knowledge of instruction resources appropriate to foreign language instruction in the elementary school.
5. Ability to develop reading and writing skills in learners who are simultaneously acquiring literacy skills in their first language.
6. Ability to teach aspects of the target culture appropriate to the developmental needs in interests of students, including children’s to the target culture.
7. Knowledge of K-12 foreign language curriculum and the elementary curriculum, the relationships among the content areas, and ability to teach, integrate, or reinforce elementary school curriculum through or in a foreign language.
8. Knowledge of elementary school principles and practices, effective classroom management techniques, and the ability to apply such knowledge to create an effective and physical environment conducive to foreign language learning.
11. Knowledge of the history of foreign language education in the United States and the rationale for various program models in the elementary school.
12. Awareness of the need for personal and professional growth.
13. An understanding of the need for cooperation among foreign language teachers, other classroom teachers, counselors, school administrators, university personnel, and community members. (pp. 245-249)

One important aspect missing in this list is the need for language teachers to reflect on the impact that a foreign language may have on children and on other languages. We all know that “foreign” language teaching means “English” in most countries, and Mexico is not an exception. Not only are the effects of the foreign language left out of consideration, but so are teachers’ and children’s identities. Cummins (2001) has argued that identity is at the core of learning, but this is overlooked in this list. The omission is directly connected to the importance of material development and the creation of texts in the classroom, which should reflect and value teachers’ and children’s contexts, lives, and dreams in order to co-construct affirming identities. Finally, a monolingual and monoglossic approach drives this list, as nothing is mentioned about teachers and students’ possible bilingual/multilingual intelligence or multiliteracies and translanguaging practices.

The TEC course syllabus was adapted according to the information provided by the literature, typical concerns student teachers had, the historical and sociocultural presence of “English” in Mexico vis-à-vis Indigenous language, and most importantly according to the theoretical framework explained previously. The new course description read as follows:
This course is a “praxical” (critical theory and reflective practice) introduction to the area of teaching English to Mexican (Mestizo, Indigenous, Upper and Low Level SES, etc.) children. During this course, students will be introduced to the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy and critical pedagogies necessary to work with young learners (K-6). During this class, students will have the opportunity to learn about the social, linguistic and intellectual development and characteristics of children at different ages viewed from psycholinguistic, sociocultural and sociopolitical perspectives. To address syllabus design, language through content, and classroom management issues, students will be walked through two thematic units of study. Throughout this course, students will experience, first hand, different activities that are used to develop language when teaching children such as games, songs, storytelling (books), art and crafts, role-play, and most importantly, creating authors in the classroom. Issues on authentic assessment will be discussed. Most importantly, it will be emphasized throughout the course that English should be simply “an excuse” to value and foster the multilingualism and interculturalism present in Oaxaca. (Quotation marks and emphasis in original)

In contrast to the previous course I taught, discussions of the role of English in Mexico were brought to the forefront during the entire course. Students were encouraged to analyze critically textbooks and materials imported from English speaking countries and to develop their own materials. Throughout the course, English was seen as medium of instruction, as an addition and not as a replacement for Spanish or Indigenous languages. In other words, learning English was seen as an “excuse” to value and foster the multilingualism and interculturalism present in Oaxaca.

The structure of the course changed as well, focusing on thematic units. Thematic units and literacy development were built into the demonstrations of the different strategies (games, songs, children’s literature, etc). Instead of having unconnected games, stories and songs in every class, student teachers took part in two thematic units throughout the course. In other words, they learned a song, a story, a game in each class, connected to the thematic unit. Moreover, in different sessions, the class stopped and reflected on the incorporations of the different strategies into the unit. In addition, they discussed the development of literacy throughout the demonstrations. In order to reinforce the development of thematic units, the song
book and game book were replaced by a thematic unit that included all the different components (lesson plans, materials, and models of final projects). A unit that dealt with assessment issues was also included. Finally, students created two identity texts, one about themselves and another on someone important in their life, as part of the assessment component (see the entire syllabus in Appendix A).

It is important to mention that even though the TEC course was part of the CEAR Project, no data was collected during the course. Instead, I kept a journal of every class. The analysis of the course was done after the class had finished through my reflection and the perceptions about the TEC course of the ten student teachers participating in the CEAR Project. After the TEC course, the student teachers gave me access to their assignments, class notes, and final projects. They allowed me to analyze the identity texts that they had created in the course.

**Conclusion**

Oaxacan children, both “Indigenous” and “mestizo,” FL-UABJO student teachers, and my own life experiences are framed by the socio-cultural ideologies that have developed throughout Mexican and Oaxacan history. These ideologies resulted in our ancestors, and consequently ourselves, to be placed in inferior positions by colonial powers (Spain), the liberal thinkers (*criollos* and *mestizos*), and neoliberal power (the United States). Spain believed that we lacked language, literacy, culture, and even souls because our language(s), literacies and cultures were inferior. We, in turn, internalized these beliefs. The liberal thinkers attempted to erase our differences by creating an abstract Mexican. The new power, represented by the United States, is trying to make us believe that we lack the new markets and products to build the new modern or “imaginary Mexico” (Bonfil Batalla, 1996). As we have seen, English is part of the neoliberal package. Nonetheless, Mexicans are capable of understanding these imposing ideologies and
their underlying messages. We can use post-colonial and neoliberal tools such as English to tell a different story of who we are.

What follows is a description of the methodologies used to document the multiliteracies and translanguaging practices created in the CEAR Project in order to co-construct affirming identities and local stories about children living in the urban settings of Oaxaca.
Starting the TEC Course

I get off the bus and go into the stationery store to buy 25 sheets of paper of different colors for the first activity I plan to do. “I wonder what the student teachers are like. I hope I know some of them.” “It is 25 pesos ($2.20 Can.),” the woman from the stationery store interrupts my thoughts and reminds me how expensive things are in Oaxaca and how little money English teachers make. My fellow English teachers would have spent half of their hourly salary on just one activity. I cross Avenida Universidad and come into the university campus. It is been a year since I have been here. All my reading and writing to convince Jim, Normand, and María-José that my research project was grounded in theory, filled a gap in the research, and was doable are behind me. Busy students go by me on the long open corridor that takes me to FI-UABJO. The smell of tlayudas (big thick tortillas with lard, black bean paste, cheese, guacamole, and hot salsa) fills the air. I wish I could stop and have one for breakfast. How much I miss them!

I must continue, though; I have 20 students waiting for me; maybe two or three more. I leave the corridor and start crossing the basketball courts next to FI-UABJO. As I am about to enter classroom number 5, a group of students stop me. “We could not register for your course. It filled
up quickly. Do you think you can let us in?” “Sure, come on in,” I reply as I think this is the only course I will be teaching and the last opportunity for these students to take it. I come in, look up, and recognize some faces. That’s good! I start counting and there are over 40 students. There go my twenty sheets of color paper and my perfectly planned activity. I look at their young faces and hope that four of them would be willing to work with me after we finish the course, teaching in two schools with an Indigenous population. “Welcome to ‘Teaching English to Children,’” I say.

Horizons School: A Known School

Next morning, I cross the busy avenue that leads to Oaxaca’s airport. I stand there as taxis foraneos go by. I’d better decipher the name of the town written on the windshield quickly enough if I want to stop the right one. Here it comes, I think. “¿Me lleva a la Colonia Nueva?” “Sí,” the taxi driver confirms my destination. I am the only one in the taxi, but I am sure other people will join us later. I go by the Toyota car dealer on the right, and see the big yellow “M,” the golden angel of the Mormon temple, and the Sam’s Club sign on the left. How much things have changed in 30 years. When my family and I first moved to the outskirts of Oaxaca from our home town, it was all fields of forage crops, white egrets flying all overhead, and the city trash-dump, right next to the soccer fields where I used to play. Now it is the “Little United States” part of Oaxaca.
I realize that we have passed the airport and have come to a busy part of the highway where lots of police cars are parked on the side. Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, the famous governor who tried to kick the teachers out of the zócalo and created the six-month social conflict in Oaxaca in 2006, decided to move his office and the police headquarters to this area. His zócalo office is now a museum; he did not want to give tourists the “wrong” impression of Oaxaca with the daily demonstrations that took place in front of his zócalo office.

The bright phosphorescent paper signs that advertise “cheap” plots of land on the left tell me we are about to arrive at Colonia Nueva. The taxi leaves the highway making a left, and we come into the neighborhood. The road is paved, but all of the streets perpendicular to it are uneven dirt streets. The neighborhood has a brownish-grayish look from the rusted tin walls of most of the houses and some brick houses that are slowly being built. We meet a municipal garbage-recollecting truck, which explains why this road is paved: the city dump that was four blocks from where I grew up is here now, just three blocks up. I ask the taxi driver to drop me off “en la escuela, por favor.” “¿Cuál, ésta o la otra?” That is right; I now remember there are two: one mainstream school and the other from the Indigenous stream just half a block from each other. “La bilingüe, por favor.” As I leave the taxi, I get the smell of corn tortillas again. A woman
is preparing the lunch that many teachers will come out and eat during recess.

I come into the school and see the white concrete classrooms with a big sign that reads, “Escuela Primaria Federal Bilingüe… (Horizons School).” As I walk through the school patio that serves as a basketball court, I look to the left and see the three wooden classrooms some gringos built (the principal told me this when I was here last year), and two other unused brownish classrooms made of tin layers as well (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Horizons School (Photo by Hugo Cuadrado).](image)

“Buenos días, Maestro Pedro,” I greet the principal. “Buenos días, Maestro Mario. ¡Bienvenido!” He tells me that both Maestro Manuel and Maestro Rubén, the 6th grade teachers, are ready to work with us. However, they
need to get the parents and children together and make a communal
decision regarding the CEAR Project during an assembly. Everybody has to
agree, so it is an all-or-nothing type of decision. He assures me they will
grant us permission though. I am glad and relieved.

Downtown School: A New School

“Lo siento, Maestro Mario.” “No hay problema,” I tell the principal of
another school I had contacted a year ago. He has just told me his school
cannot host the CEAR Project. I am back to square one and in need of
another school in the downtown area with an Indigenous students’
population. I am fortunate that someone has just mentioned another
school with similar characteristics. I grab a city taxi to make sure I get
there before the school day finishes. It is not far from where I live, but
downtown traffic does not help.

We drive by colonial buildings that host the Oaxacan small
businesses that are still trying to compete with the multinational
corporations. We make a left and start driving on a cobblestone street
reminiscent of colonial times: “¿Aquí está bien?” “Sí, gracias.” I get off and
see a huge cream colored door with graffiti all over it. “Escuela Primaria
Urbana Vespertina… (Downtown School)” is written on the side wall. As I
come in, I see a big two-story building full of classrooms (see Figure 3).
The ones on the second floor are closed and the children’s voices come only
from the classrooms on the first floor. There is a huge courtyard and a basketball court on a higher level.

Figure 3. Downtown School.

I go into the principal’s office and meet Maestra Perla. I introduce myself and tell her about the CEAR Project. I leave her a short description and invite her to think about it. I leave a bit relieved that she has been so welcoming. I call her the next day, and she invites me to come the day after and talk to the teachers directly since they are a bit reluctant to participate.

The next day, I meet the teachers. I explain and try to present persuading arguments, so they will accept the project. Maestra Irma looks
rather serious and even unwelcoming. “We have school from 2:00 to 6:00, half an hour less than the morning shift. I am concerned that I may not have time to cover the entire syllabus,” Maestro Carlos, who is brand new to this school, provides an honest and convincing argument about adding a project to his class. I tell them I understand and tell them that the last thing I want to do is jeopardize their work and the children’s formal education.

I feel discouraged and worried about my prospects. They ask me to call next week, so that they can have a private meeting and discuss the pros and cons. I leave thinking that this school would have been perfect in many ways: I have seen Indigenous mothers waiting for their children; it would be close for my student teachers to come; and it is in the heart of downtown Oaxaca. This makes it a perfect urban example. I am certain that they have just told me, “No, thanks” in an indirect way. I go to different schools during that week, but they are not as “diverse” as I want them to be. I may not have any school if the parents at Horizons School reject the CEAR Project.

A week goes by and I have been granted permission at Horizons School. I call Maestra Perla at Downtown School to thank her for her support. “Hola, Maestro Mario, el Maestro Carlos y la Maestra Irma sí aceptaron,” she happily informs me. I am thrilled! She asks me to bring the
permission forms, so they can send them to each family. I hang up with a
big smile on my face. I have my two schools.

For the CEAR Project, I had expected to recruit four student teachers, but ten
volunteered. The ten student teachers and I held weekly meetings in different classrooms at FI-
UABJO, discussed things at FI-UABJO’s patio or in the FI-UABJO’s van during our trips to
Colonia Nueva. In the two schools, conversations with children and teachers took place in the
regular classrooms and unused classrooms so that we could talk privately. We also used the
patios and the basketball courts at times.

Critical Ethnography and Critical Action Research

The CEAR Project adopted tenets of critical ethnography and critical action research as
its methodological basis while creating a fusion: critical ethnographic action research. It is well
known that ethnography, which “refers both to a set of research methods and to the written report
of information obtained by these methods” (Toohey, 2008, p. 176), originated in anthropological
studies and that its values for education and other fields were later appreciated (Zaharlick, 1992).
Ethnography has been used in research projects on Indigenous education in the United States
(McCarty, 2002, 2005; McCarty et al., 2006), in Latin America (Hornberger, 1996; Levinson,
Sandoval-Flores, & Berteley-Busquets, 2007), and in Mexico (Hamel, 2006; Podesta Siri, 2000,
2004). It has also been used in language planning and practice projects (Hornberger & Johnson
2007), immigrant students’ education in Canadian classrooms (Toohey, 1996, 1998) and U.S.
classrooms (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). With respect to language education
projects, ethnography has been used in Canada (Norton, 2000; Han, 2007) and Mexico
(Clemente & Higgins, 2008) just to mention a few instances (see Toohey, 2008 for a review of
ethnographic studies in language education).
Focusing on Oaxaca, specifically, ethnographic research has shown that Oaxaca is not only the state with the highest Indigenous population, but also the one with the highest cultural plurality in Mexico. Barabas and Bartolomé (1999b), who have done extensive ethnographic research on Indigenous issues in the state of Oaxaca, argue that “ethnography is… one of the strategies, both analytical and reflexive, which allows us to get close to the local realities trying to understand its singularity which defines it… Ethnographic knowledge … [is] a basic component in the processes of intercultural dialogue” (p.16, my translation).

Ethnography has also been recommended for studies that involve children, especially if one wants to hear their voices and see them as subjects rather than objects of research (Grover, 2004). “Traditionally, childhood and children’s lives have been explored solely through the views and understandings of their adult caretakers who claim to speak for children. This rendered the child as object and excluded him/her from the research process” (Christensen & James, 2008, p. 2). Along similar lines, Milstein (2008) argues that western culture has seen children as helpless beings, in need of protection, and without a voice, resulting in children’s opinions on social and cultural life being ignored. In order to change this trend and to start listening to children, it is important to form long-term relationships of trust with them. This can be achieved through ethnographic research (Corsaro & Molinary, 2008). Maguire (2005) who has extensively conducted ethnographic studies with, and not on, children states, “Being an ethnographer…. I aim to see them engaged as social actors, to value their opinions and insights, and acknowledge their own capacity for self-reflexivity” (p.3).

In spite of the presence and importance of ethnographic research, the field of anthropology and its ethnographic research orientation have been challenged by Indigenous educators, who claim that it was anthropologists who started propagating tales of Indigenous peoples as savages with weird cultures and as peoples without culture and without souls even,
consequently positioning Indigenous peoples as the Other (Smith, 1999; Bonfil Batalla, 1996). Smith (1999) states that “it is surely difficult to discuss research methodology and Indigenous peoples together, in the same breath, without having an analysis of imperialism, without understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices” (p. 2). Hence, ethnography must be done critically if one does not want to perpetuate inequalities and colonial practices.

Critical ethnography is committed to social justice by carving out spaces for participants’ stories to be heard in order to expose practices that are socially unjust and to raise awareness with the hope that the ethnography itself will work towards resolving societal inequities and oppressive practices (Jordan & Yeomans, 1995). Higgins and Coen (2000) argue that their way of doing critical ethnography is through ethnographic praxis, by linking their research to issues of social justice and its objectives to the desires and concerns of those with whom they are working. Anderson (1989) describes the growth of critical ethnography as the result of dissatisfaction with other theories and methods in their ability to provide guidance in asking and answering fundamental social questions. While the basic tenets of ethnography remain the same in critical ethnography, the critical ethnographer seeks to delve deeper into the culture being studied and recognizes society as inequitably structured and seek to move beyond conventional ethnography and uncover why things are the way they are and what can be done for things to be otherwise (Simon & Dippo, 1986). In order not to simply ask what can be done in the situation of Indigenous children in Oaxaca and remain at the “pondering” stage, I decided to combine critical ethnography with critical action research in order to conduct mini-interventions—sharing our ideas with children during the interviews and informal conversations, and our main intervention—the praxicum, in order to carve spaces where all children’s voices are heard and respected.
When talking about action research, it is necessary to identify the “type” of action research one uses. Carr and Kemmis (1986) have distinguished between (a) "technical" action research, (b) practical action research, and (c) emancipatory or critical action research. Crookes (1993) called the first two action research of the first kind and the latter action research of the second kind. He argued that both types were valid in applied linguistics, but critical action research was urgently needed in order to question the values of schools where students were adding an additional language to their linguistic repertoire.

In the CEAR Project, we were not using action research of the first kind, which is typically used in applied linguistics (Wallace, 1998) and has “objectivity” as a main tenet. Burns (2005) explains that this type of action research was influenced by positivistic paradigms, leaving behind action research’s first social agenda. Action research started as a “socially motivated enquiry,” but the by the 1950s, “the climate of the fields de-emphasized the links to social justice…[and] in keeping with the more positivist era, the forms of AR [action research] that filtered into education emphasized the scientific and experimental, thus moving away from the progressive intentions of its earlier roots” (p. 58). For the CEAR Project, I adopted action research of the second kind, emancipatory or critical action research (Carr & Kemmis, 2005).

For Kemmis (1993) critical action research is critical

in the sense that it is about relentlessly trying to understand and improve the way things are in relation to how they could be better. But it is also critical in the sense that it is activist: it aims at creating a form of collaborative learning by doing . . . It aims to help people understand themselves as the agents, as well as the products, of history . . . [It] is also committed to spreading involvement and participation in the research process. (n. p.)

Weiner’s (2004) list of critical action research and feminist research is apt in describing the basic tenets of the critical-ethnographic-action-research I adopted. The CEAR Project is

- critical of positivist research paradigms concerning rationality, objectivity and truth;
- guided by values rooted in practice and lived experience;
- cognisant of historical and culturally embedded educational understanding and practices;
- cognisant of the need for schools and education generally to be more socially just and educationally inclusive;
- concerned that research should aim to be transformative and of value to society so that it ‘makes a difference’;
- praxis-orientated, collaborative, democratic and non-exploitative, organisationally and in terms of decision-making. (p. 639, quotation marks in original)

I came to the CEAR Project with the influence of a body of research that shows that Indigenous students, like immigrant students in large cities, are struggling in the educational systems (Cummins, 2000b; Gunderson, 2007; Schmelkes, 2003), discriminated against by mainstream students, seen as deficient by teachers (Rockwell, 2004; Molina Cruz, 2000), and ashamed of their language (López Gopar et al., 2006; López Hernández, 2002). In the CEAR Project and in collaboration with the participating student teachers, we wanted to engage children in dialogue in order to learn about their life stories, to expose unjust relationships, and to work towards multilingual and intercultural ideologies that view all peoples as equally intelligent and that value all peoples’ language, literacy, and cultural practices. We wanted to achieve this through our mini-interventions and the praxicum or main intervention.

In critical action research, interventions are the heart of research projects. Interventions are in many ways part of the praxis proposed by Freire (1970, 1998). Freire argues that reflection with no action is “blah.” Action without reflection is activism in the manipulative sense. Praxis requires reflection plus action. The work of Freire has inspired critical action research projects also known as collaborative or participatory action research (see McTaggart, 1997 and Reason & Bradbury, 2001 for examples of participatory action research projects). In our case, our interventions occurred throughout the CEAR Project in formal interviews, informal conversations, and in the classes during the praxicum. Being aware of post-modern theorists
criticisms towards researchers, who “felt compelled to intervene on behalf of their informants, or to use their ‘expert’ knowledge to attempt to improve conditions in their informants’ lives” (Toohey, 2008, p. 182, quotation marks in original), we nevertheless decided not to “bite our tongue,” so to speak: we praised children for their multilingual intelligence; we shared with Spanish monolingual children who commented that Indigenous children sounded “funny” or “weird” when speaking Spanish, that they themselves, when learning English, sounded funny, too; and we stated directly during the praxicum that even though we were “English” teachers, we were there to learn Indigenous languages, too. Our interViews (Kvale, 1996), with a capital “V”, our informal interaction and the praxicum were spaces where we shared our own views with children, so that they could consider them and adopt them or simply ignore or reject them. During the CEAR Project, critical ethnography and critical action research merged in our intentions. We wanted to go beyond unveiling a “reality” and to ask ourselves why or how certain situations should be changed and improved. Our overt agenda in this project was to promote the multilingualism and interculturalism that exists in Mexico.

Both critical action research and critical ethnographic studies are extremely important in research projects that look at people who are adding another language to their linguistic repertoire. In our case, we were also concerned about all the complexities of multilingualism or translanguaging practices. It is through language/translanguaging practices that children may lose face or gain pride. It is through language/translanguaging practices that children develop affirming identities, but it is also through language/translanguaging practices that students are placed in deficit models and develop shameful identities (Cummins, 2001). Hence, in our view, any research project that deals with losing/adding an additional language must have an educational, human, and political agenda, or in Labrie’s (2004) terms, language politics agenda that respects all individuals.
**Description of Data Collection**

The CEAR Project consisted of three stages. The first stage focused more on the critical ethnography of the two classrooms with my mini-interventions woven into the interviews. My interventions became *our* interventions as student teachers joined the CEAR Project in the second and third stage. The second stage included the analysis of the data collected in the first stage and the preparation of the praxicum. The third stage was the actual praxicum and the ongoing analysis of the data collected during the praxicum and follow-up interviews.

**First Stage**

From August to December 2007, I interviewed the two principals, the four participating host teachers, and all of the ninety three children in the four classrooms. I will only report on one teacher in each school and their respective class. All the interviews in this and the two other stages were semi-structured, containing questions about experience, opinion and values, feelings, and background (Patton, 2002). They were all conducted in Spanish. I also conducted three formal “naturalistic” classroom observations (Denzin, 1978) in each of the classrooms.

**Semi-structured interview with the principals.**

At the beginning of the CEAR Project and before I started interviewing the teachers and children, I conducted a one-hour semi-structured interview with each principal. The purpose of this interview was to learn more about the school, the community it serves, the teachers, and the vision each principal had created with the teachers. The main focus of this interview was to learn about the school’s current development regarding intercultural and bilingual education, availability of physical resources, parental involvement, teachers’ professional development, and Indigenous and *mestizo* children’s success and challenges. I audio-taped this interview and wrote
an entry in my journal focusing on salient topics during the interview (see Appendix B for interview protocol).

**Schools visits and classroom observations.**

I made numerous visits to the two schools during the first stage spending half and full days in the two schools. My visits had three main purposes. First, I tried to establish a relationship with the principal, teachers, students, and the janitor, who seemed to control a lot of what was happening in schools, especially at Downtown School. During some of these recesses, I had lunch with teachers and had informal conversations with them about the school, their classrooms, and the children. I also got to know the students during recess. I spent numerous recess periods where I informally interacted with students and played many *cascaritas* (soccer games) and basketball games with them. I also took photos of the schools’ public displays.

Second, during my visits I conducted three naturalistic classrooms observations regarding the multiliteracies practices and language(s) used in the classrooms. The classroom observations lasted for 2 hours and were audio-taped. I took a participant-observer’s role and interacted informally with the children sitting close to me. Third, after my school visits I explored the two neighborhoods in order to get a feeling for them and took photos of the public texts around the school.

**Semi-structured interviews with host teachers.**

I conducted one-hour semi-structured interview with the two host teachers: the one with Maestro Carlos at the end of September, and with Maestro Manuel in the middle of October. The purpose of this interview was to learn about their views on education and the recent reforms that introduce an intercultural approach. I intended to learn more about their views about multiliteracies and translanguaging practices in the classroom. It was also my intention to get their impressions on Indigenous children’s strengths and challenges. Finally, I wanted to gather
necessary background information about the teachers themselves, the schools, and the communities. These interviews were recorded and accompanied with my field notes (see Appendix C for interview protocol).

**Semi-structured interviews with all children.**

I conducted one semi-structured interview with each of the 50 children that I am reporting about (31 in Maestro Manuel’s class and 19 in Maestro Carlos’ class). These lasted about 30 minutes on average. The purpose of this interview was to learn about the children’s perspectives regarding the use of Indigenous languages and Spanish in the classroom, their experience learning in a second language as in the case of Indigenous children, and in the case of *mestizo* children their experience of having Indigenous children as classmates. I was also interested in their successes and challenges in school, and their personal background.

For this semi-structured interview, I designed a reading-a-book approach. In other words, students were read a story and the questions were woven into the read aloud. For this interview, I used the bilingual (English/Spanish) book *Family Pictures/Cuadros de Familia* by Carmen Lomas Garza, a Mexican-American author and illustrator. This book is particularly useful because it offers quite realistic pictures of family events. One of the pictures, for instance, shows a fair/market setting where people are selling and eating tacos, a woman selling bread, children running around, etc. Another picture shows a grandmother grabbing a chicken by the neck and swinging it around the air to kill it as the first step to making chicken soup. Another advantage of this book is that each picture is accompanied by simple narrative texts. Also, the book does not have to be read from beginning to the end. Each picture and text tells a different story that can stand alone. In general, three to five pictures were used for the interview. This type of interview approach is helpful because children tend to feel uncomfortable when being interviewed
individually and may get nervous, especially if they do not know the interviewer well. With this approach, the center of attention is the book itself and not the interview per se.

At the onset of the research, there were six general questions that would guide the interviews with the students. Some of the questions were: How long have you been living in this neighborhood? Where are your parents from? What languages does your family speak? What about you? Would you like to learn English? Why? In the course of my interaction with the children and the students taking the TEC course, the number of questions went up to fifteen. Questions were added to gather family and parental information (e.g., What do your parents do? What is their level of education? Whom do you live with at the moment?), and to find out about the activities children engaged in outside the school. Even though the teachers had reported that all students had a good command of Spanish to carry out the interview, many of the questions were repeated and/or reformulated to make sure they were comprehensible for the students. Moreover, the questions were asked in different orders depending on what course the reading/conversation was taking. Most important, as soon it was noticed that a specific question was uncomfortable for a child, the interview moved on to a different topic. All the interviews were audio-taped and accompanied with field notes (see Appendix D for interview protocol). All the interviews conducted in the first stage were transcribed in their entirety for the analysis.

Second Stage

From the beginning of January to the end of February, the second stage of the CEAR Project consisted mainly of the interviews with the ten student teachers, analysis of the data collected during the first stage, three classroom observations by the student teachers in their assigned classroom, preparation of the teacher praxicum, and one more interview with the host teachers.
**Interviews with the student teachers.**

I conducted a one-hour semi-structured interview with each student teacher. The purpose of this interview was to gather background information about their family, education, and reasons for joining the B.A. TESL Program. I also wanted to get their impressions of the TEC course and their teaching experience, if any. Most importantly, we talked about their interests in collaborating in the CEAR Project and working with children in diverse classrooms. It was my intention to learn about their impressions of the classes in which they would be conducting their praxicum (see Appendix E for interview protocol).

**Bi-weekly meetings with student teachers.**

In January and February, we held bi-weekly meetings. These meetings had various objectives: to analyze all the data that I had collected in the first stage in order to prepare the classes of the praxicum and for student teachers to start thinking of their individual research project for their B.A. graduating papers, to revisit the theoretical framework of the CEAR Project, and to prepare questions for the second interview with the host teachers. The meetings lasted 2 hours and were audio-taped. For the analysis of the all the interviews, each student teacher analyzed the principals’, teachers’ and five students’ interviews. We then came together and shared our analyses of emerging themes across the classrooms and students. We also came up with descriptive statistics about each class in order to have a global perspective of the different classes. I also shared with them my field notes of the classroom observations and informal interactions with the teachers and students during my visits. The data was always connected to the theoretical framework and the contextualization of the CEAR Project I had developed. More importantly, the data was always tied to our own personal experiences as Oaxacans, acknowledging the fact that “when thinking, we are irremediably rooted on our own culture” (Esteva, 2002, p. 9, my translation) and our own subjectivities. After analyzing the data,
we revisited the theoretical framework of the CEAR Project more closely vis-à-vis the lives of the students and schools. We all became aware of the interdisciplinary nature of the CEAR Project, of the fact that we were proposing something that was against Oaxacan societal “standards,” which value Spanish and English, now, but not Indigenous languages. Our purpose was to “teach” English in a critical manner to foster Indigenous languages and Spanish and to value the cultural, linguistic, and literary richness inherent in all Oaxacan peoples. We also reflected on the great responsibility that we needed to assume when intervening in children’s lives. Finally, as we learned more about the schools, we discussed classroom observation protocols and we jointly developed an interview protocol for their host teachers.

During the meetings, we also started planning the praxicum. At the beginning, I wanted to design with them a common thematic unit that we would teach across all the classrooms followed by another thematic unit of their choice. I soon realized that student teachers wanted to try out their own topics; thus, I let them teach whatever thematic unit they agreed upon among their pairs/trios. I was simply a consultant who provided ideas and guidance during the meetings. While preparing the praxicum, the pair/trios spent time working on their own and we would then reconvene as a whole group to share and give each other feedback. I provided student teachers with materials for their classes (construction paper, crayons, markers, scissors, etc.), a CD-player to share in the two schools, and access to all the materials (big books, children’s books, posters, audio-books, etc.) available at the bilingual library (BIBLOCA) that my family and I founded (see www.lerc.educ.ubc.ca/LERC/outreach/oaxaca/ENGLISH.ppt for more information on BIBLOCA).

Classroom observations conducted by the student teachers.

Before the praxicum started, student teachers conducted six hours of naturalistic classroom observations, including observations of recess periods. The observations were divided
into three or four sessions depending on the host teachers’ schedules. These classroom observations were also audio-taped and accompanied by the student teachers’ field notes. The observations had different purposes. First, student teachers started developing a rapport with their host teacher and their future students. Second, they learned about how the host teachers managed behavior issues, something many student teachers were concerned about. Third, they became familiar with the different topics students were studying just before the praxicum started. Fourth, they started zeroing in on aspects that they want to focus on individually (e.g., specific students, teacher techniques, uses of Indigenous languages, and Spanish in the classroom, etc.).

Second interview with the host teachers.

The second interview with the host teachers took place at the end of February and lasted for about 45 minutes. This interview was audio-taped and the student teachers participated in it. The main purpose of this interview was two-fold. First, we addressed questions that had emerged from our preliminary analysis of the data regarding the class in general and about specific students. For instance, at the Horizons School, Indigenous languages were evaluated as a subject on the report card. However, we were not sure about how this subject was evaluated. We also had questions about specific students, which aroused our interest, who were either succeeding or failing academically according to the report cards. Second, we asked host teachers for suggestions for the praxicum (e.g., which students needed more guidance or specific behavior plans). All the meetings and interviews in the second stage were transcribed in their entirety for analysis.

Third Stage

The third stage of the research lasted from the end of February to the end of July. During this stage, the student teachers conducted their praxicum in the two schools. I conducted three
formal naturalistic observations with each of the student teachers during their praxicum. We also participated in the schools’ events, such as Children’s Day, Mother’s Day and the students’ graduation celebration. We continued having weekly meetings with all the student teachers throughout the praxicum. I interviewed all the children for a second time. I had planned to interview all the children for a third time, but we ran out of time. We also conducted a debriefing session with the host teachers. Finally, I conducted another individual interview with each student teacher.

**Praxicum and classroom observations.**

From the end of February to the end of June 2008, the student teachers conducted their praxicum in their classrooms. The number of hours taught varied in all the classes because of cancellations for different reasons. On average, the student teachers taught a total of 35 hours. At the Horizons School, the classes were taught on Thursdays and Fridays from 11:00 to 12:30 during regular school hours. Claudia started teaching and Betty then finished the praxicum. At the Downtown School, the classes were taught from 1:30 to 2:30, half an hour before school officially started, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Laura started teaching, then Hugo, and Chucho finished the praxicum (I am only referring to the five aforementioned student teachers since I am only reporting about their two classes). When one of the student teachers was conducting his or her praxicum, the other(s) were playing mainly an observer role. They also served as teaching assistant and data collector. Most praxicum sessions were audio-taped by the student teachers who were not teaching. They also took photos and videos of the different sessions. All student teachers kept a journal during the praxicum. They were encouraged to write about their impressions regarding collaboration with their fellow student teachers, students' work, success and challenges, and any critical moments they encountered in this experience.
Student teachers collected all students’ work samples, the materials they used in their praxicum, and their lesson plans. All these materials were scanned into digital format.

I conducted three participant classroom observations with each of the student teachers during the praxicum. Neither the host teachers nor I observed in these classes for the first two weeks of the praxicum, so that student teachers had “complete” control of the classes and were regarded as “the teachers” by the students. In my previous praxicum supervision experiences, it had been noted by the student teachers that children would constantly resort to their regular teacher if he/she was present in the classroom, even if the student teachers were “in charge.” These classrooms observations had similar objectives (e.g., implementing multiliteracies and translanguaging practices in the classroom) and data collection procedures (e.g., field notes, photos, audio and video recording) to the observations I conducted in the fall with the host teachers. I also focused on specific aspects that the student teachers wanted me to focus on; for instance, Laura was interested in exploring how well certain strategies (e.g., games) recommended in the literature were working and how well she was implementing these strategies. Claudia was interested in children working in groups, so she asked me to pay particular attention to those interactions. I provided feedback, suggestions, and/or assistance only if requested by the student teachers during my observations. I would walk around the class to get a closer look at what was happening while children were working and interacted with students in their groups or individually without disturbing the flow of the class. I used a small digital camera to take photos of the class and short videos. No flash was used, so that children were not distracted by the camera. At the end of the praxicum, all the videos were transcribed for analysis. The praxicum classes were not transcribed in their entirety. Instead, a detailed summary of each class was created identifying the activity being implemented and the teacher’s and students’ roles. Critical segments of each class where issues of Indigenous languages were addressed (e.g.,
direct messages from the teachers regarding the importance of their use, children’s use of Indigenous languages, etc.) were highlighted in these summaries and later transcribed in their entirety.

**Weekly meetings.**

Throughout the praxicum, the student teachers and I met weekly. These sessions were audio-taped and later transcribed in their entirety. The purpose of these meetings was for student teachers to share their experiences, provide ideas, and ask and give support to each other. They were also an excellent opportunity to plan ahead and prepare/adapt their thematic units. During these meetings, we also watched and analyzed the different videos we had been collecting in the classes to highlight the critical moments we were encountering. Student teachers presented the logistic difficulties they were facing (e.g., some students arriving late to class in the Downtown School, storing their materials in the two schools, etc.), and we all brainstormed ideas for solving these emerging problems. In many respects, these debriefing sessions took the CEAR Project through “the self reflective spiral: a spiral of cycles of planning, acting (implementing plans), observing (systematically), reflecting… and then replanning, further implementation, observing and reflecting” characteristic of action research methodology (Cohen, Lawrence & Morrison, 2000, p. 229, emphasis and parentheses in original). During these meetings, we also brainstormed aspects that we wanted to discuss with children individually during the second interview. After having interviewed all the children and having conducted the debriefing sessions with the host teachers, we also started analyzing all the data. I took field notes and wrote an entry in my journal for each meeting.

**Second interview with all the children.**

For the second interview with the children, I also used the reading-a-book approach. This time, I selected the book by Jose Antonio Flores Farfán and Cleofas Ramírez Celestino entitled
Adivinanzas Mexicanas—See Tosaasaaniltsin, See Tosaasaaniltsin (Mexican Riddles). This book is unique in many ways. First, each riddle is written in five languages: Spanish, English, Catalan, and two varieties of the Indigenous language Nahuatl, one from Oapan and one from Tlaxcala. The riddles are not literal translations in each language but interpretations, so that they do not lose rhythm in any of the languages. Second, each riddle is accompanied by colorful illustrations on amate paper, the type of paper used for the codices. The illustration helps the reader guess the answer. Third, the riddles come from the Indigenous Nahuatl tradition depicting very realistic settings. One riddle that the children and I enjoyed was the following: “Timotlalia, tikkahkaawa, timihkatilia waan tikiilkaawa (Nahuatl from Tlaxcala). Maybe it will need a push! Grab your leaf, and hide behind a bush!” The answer to this riddle was “excrement.” The word excrement was interpreted as “El excremento” in Spanish, “L’excrement” in Catalan, which highlighted how languages may be similar, especially in academic terms. This term was also closely related in the two Nahuault languages “In Kwitlaatl” in Nahuatl from Tlaxcala, and “Kwitlaatl” in Nahuatl from Oapan. Fourth, Flores Farfán (2006) has engaged in Nahuatl language revitalization projects in different places by using multilingual children’s stories written in Nahuatl, Spanish, and other languages. He has used these texts as a catalyst for the discussion of Indigenous languages and knowledge with children and people in the community where he has conducted his research projects. Finally, the riddles, like the text used for the first interview, could stand alone. I read the riddle in Spanish and another language the children selected. I told them I was doing my best in reading Catalan and the two Nahuatl languages since I did not speak them. On average, four riddles were used with each child during the interview. The interviews were audio-taped, lasted around 30 minutes, and were conducted during the second part of the praxicum.

The purpose of this interview was to document children’s views regarding the praxicum in general. A set of questions gathered information about the activities used in the classes to
teach English and the difficulties they faced with the English language. Other questions focused on the use of Indigenous languages, the willingness or reluctance of some Indigenous children to participate, their views about multiple languages being used in the classes, and their parents’ and their own views of the inclusion of these languages. Other questions focused on the languages children wanted to learn and the reasons behind their choice. Two questions addressed what the “Indigenous” construct meant to them and whether or not they would self-identify as “Indigenous.” The interview also included questions regarding their diets, friends outside the school and any other information we had not collected during the first interview (see Appendix F for interview protocol). All the interviews were later transcribed in their entirety.

**Informal classroom observations by the host teachers and debriefing sessions.**

In the original plan of the CEAR Project, I expected that the host teachers would be much more involved in the praxicum by conducting classroom observations on an informal and formal basis, so that we could get their feedback. I also hoped that the host teachers would learn from the student teachers. However due to their busy schedules, this was not the case. In the case of Maestro Manuel, he observed the class a couple of times, because Claudia and Betty reported to him that two of the students were fighting after one class and also because two other students skipped school one time. It is important to mention that Maestro Manuel had a difficult year: his son was very ill with a brain tumor at the beginning of the CEAR Project. After his son’s miraculous recovery, his brand new truck was stolen. Unfortunately, he did not have insurance, so he lost it completely; the police had no news when I left. For these reasons, he missed several school days. Our praxicum gave him a window to catch up with all his planning, grading, and end-of-the-school-year preparations. Maestro Carlos was more active in taking part in the praxicum at Downtown School. He was interested in learning English himself. He would sometimes do his school work in the classroom while the student teachers were conducting their
classes. Close to the end of the praxicum, the student teachers and I held a debriefing session with each of the host teachers. We inquired about their views about the praxicum in general and whether they had noticed any changes in students’ perceptions of English and Indigenous languages. This session was audio-taped and transcribed in its entirety.

**Second interview with student teachers.**

After the praxicum, I conducted a second semi-structured interview with each student teacher. The interview was audio-taped, lasted for around an hour, and was later transcribed in its entirety. The main purpose of this interview was to document the student teachers’ experience during the CEAR Project. Some of the questions delved into the interaction of the whole group in the weekly meetings, in each pair/trio during the praxicum, and with the host teachers. I also inquired about the benefits and challenges of these interactions. We talked about the different roles they played as observers and researchers, teachers, and promoters of Indigenous languages and interculturalism, and the critical moments they encountered during the praxicum. I inquired about their impressions of the children’s reactions toward the whole CEAR Project. Finally, we talked about the impact the TEC course and the CEAR Project have had on their careers as teachers, possible graduate students and researchers, and citizens of Oaxaca (see Appendix G for interview protocol).

**Data Analysis and Narrative**

As presented in the previous section, the data analysis was conducted in a recursive and iterative manner throughout the three stages of the CEAR Project. The analysis was an inter-dialogic endeavor that I established among the ten student teachers, students from the FI-UABJO, and seven other participants. The process combined a constant zooming in (micro) and zooming out (macro) analysis of the data in order to learn about the students individually, the classes and schools in general, and how they were connected to historical, social, cultural and
political contexts (Blommaert, 2005; Duff, 2007; Pavlenko, 2007). The analysis was always connected to our own experiences as Oaxacans, the theoretical framework, and the literature reviewed. Our analysis was also connected to our desire to create spaces where all children’s ways of knowing, culturing, languaging, reading, and writing were valued by everyone. During the analysis stages, as encouraged by Pavlenko (2007), we continually reflected on our “conceptual lens…, theoretical assumptions, [and the subsequent modifications] of the nature of our assumptions… [in order not] to pretend that [our] categories are ‘emerging’ and [our] analysis is extemporaneous and objective” (p. 175, quotation marks in original). In other words, as Duff (2007) puts it:

“The intent is not for researchers to apologize for ‘contaminating’ research sites by their presence but to recognize that researchers are themselves participants or instruments as well as learners in projects, who should not pretend to be dispassionate, arms-length, impersonal, and invisible research agents.” (p. 978)

What follows is a brief description of our collaborative analysis and my subsequent “lonely” analysis while writing in Canada.

An important aspect of the analysis was the personal relationships we all developed in the CEAR Project. The participants were not “objects” of study; we were all people who developed collegial and amicable relationships. I got to know all the participants very well since I led all the meetings and conducted all the classroom observations and all the interviews with the teachers, student teachers, and children. I conducted more than 200 interviews in the CEAR Project. There were only a few interviews conducted by some of the student teachers. During the first interviews with the teachers and children, I took portrait photos of them so that we could put faces to the names while analyzing the classes and children’s lives in preparation for the praxicum. As I got to know the children, our field notes and analyses of the interviews were each connected to a specific child, to the person. During the second stage of the CEAR Project, we did
not have transcriptions yet, so we relied on the interview audio files to develop charts of the classes, which included categories such as “name, age, and place of birth,” “length of time in the community of schools,” “parents’ occupations and level of schooling,” “language(s) spoken by the family,” “language(s) spoken by the child,” and “domains of Indigenous language use,” among others. We quickly realized that the summary was helpful, but we were missing a lot of rich data. Hence, I provided more detailed information about the students with the help of my interview field notes, the photos, and the interview audio recordings, which were always readily available in our meetings. We started conducting personal analysis and developing personal relationships, most significantly, thorough this analysis.

The analysis was also enriched by the transcriptions of the interviews, the weekly meetings, and segments from the praxicum classes conducted by nine students from FI-UABJO. These were all senior students in the B.A. TESL Program. Students at FI-UABJO have to work for 480 hours as part of their servicio social in a public institution in order to graduate. The CEAR Project was approved as one of the research projects of FI-UABJO, so the students who transcribed their interviews got credit for their social service while working in the CEAR Project. The four students who worked with us at the beginning of the CEAR Project (Carmen, Iván, Marilú, and Miriam, who was both a student teacher in the project and a transcriber) transcribed all the first interviews with the children. Since they also got to know the children well, they would share their insights with us. Five other students (Carmen, Gabriela, José Alberto, José Manuel, and Magali) joined us during the third stage. All nine students then conducted the rest of the transcriptions and continued sharing their insights.

In order to bring other pairs of eyes to the analysis, five other students (Alejandra, Cecilia, Karla, Ofelia, and Raquel) from FI-UABJO, who wanted to have experience in research projects, joined us. They revisited our charts and listened to all the interviews of the students.
once more in order to develop descriptive statistical categories. We used a statistical software (SPSS) for this task. The categories were refined from the ones we had previously used. The data that could be sub-categorized was entered into SPSS (e.g., “age”—11, 12, 13 or 14+, “time in school”—1 or 2 years, 3 or 4 years, 5 or 6 years, “parents’ level of education”—no schooling, 1 to 3 year of elementary school, 4 to 6 year of elementary school, middle school, high school, university or higher). All of the information from the two interviews with the children was analyzed, coded, and entered into SPSS. The data that was not suitable for this type of numerical sub-category (e.g., parents’ and mother’s job, reasons for wanting to learn English) was entered into Excel files and later analyzed in search of broader categories, trying to identify patterns or tendencies (Merriam, 1998; Wolcott, 1994). The qualitative analysis of the second interview with the children, the debriefing sessions, and the praxicum continued to be conducted during the weekly meetings until the end of the project in July 2008.

During the summer, a detailed analysis of the classes was conducted. All the activities were documented and segments where teachers encouraged students to speak and/or learn Indigenous languages were identified and later transcribed. All the short videos (140+) were transcribed and analyzed. In addition, all the materials used by the teachers, their lesson plans, journal entries, and the students’ work samples were scanned or photographed. In essence, an audio-visual history of the classes was compiled.

In September 2008, I moved back to Toronto and added another layer to the analysis. While trying to conceptualize the structure of this dissertation, I revised the data with the assistance of seven more “participants.” The first participant was the new literature I was encountering, which provided me more insights into the data. The second participant was my wife, Belem, my new and “voluntary” research assistant. Belem is an experienced bilingual teacher. She was the second coder, rater, and reviewer/editor of the narrative I was developing.
During the fall, our little apartment was filled with the voices of the fifty children from the two classes I decided to focus on, the voices of the host teachers and the student teachers during the interviews, and our voices and laughter during our work sessions. Even though most of the transcriptions had been completed by then, I followed Pavlenko’s (2007) suggestion and listened to the audio while coding the transcriptions in order not miss details lost in the transcriptions: “subsequent analysis should be based on transcripts as well as on the original tapes, because non-verbal characteristics of speech are notoriously hard to capture on paper” (p. 173).

The third participant was Jim Cummins, my supervisor. I interacted with him in composing different abstracts of my dissertations in order for me to develop a “big picture” of the document and through our conversations while driving in snowy Toronto, on our way to participating schools in his research, to refine the details and make decisions about “what to tell” and “how to tell it.” Two other participants were Michael Higgins and Robert Leavitt, retired professors in Anthropology, and Education and Linguistics, respectively. Higgins has worked in the city of Oaxaca for more than thirty years, focusing his anthropological work on marginalized groups. He is now connecting cultural anthropology to applied linguistics through his work with Angeles Clemente, a professor at FI-UABJO. Leavitt has devoted his career to the support of First Nations education. He recently launched a Passamaquoddy-Maliseet dictionary, an Indigenous language spoken in Maine and in New Brunswick, Canada. Leavitt has been collaborating with teachers in Oaxaca working with Indigenous populations for more than fifteen years. Both Higgins and Leavitt provided insightful comments regarding my portrayal of Oaxaca as the context of my research and the whole structure of the document. The last two participants were Maria José Botelho and Normand Labrie, my committee members. Botelho focuses on critical literacies, the possibilities and challenges of multiliteracies pedagogies, and critical collaborative inquiry as professional learning. Labrie’s research focuses on linguistic pluralism.
in Canada and Europe. He is an expert in language politics and planning. Their expert comments have strengthened the interdisciplinary analysis of this dissertation.

Throughout the analysis of the CEAR Project, I adopted Cho and Trent’s (2006) “recursive, process-oriented view of validity.” They argued that “Transformational approaches [or Transformational validity] seeking ameliorative change can and should be combined, when deemed relevant by the researcher(s) and/or participants, with more traditional trustworthiness-like criteria [Transactional validity]” (p. 333). In this case, the analysis was an inter-dialogic and collaborative endeavor. “Triangulation,” usually regarded as a methodological technique to get to the “truth,” was used as a dialogic tool in order to listen to the voices of the participants/analysts at different times in the process. Similarly, member checking was not “‘technical (focus[ed] on accuracy, truth)’, [but] ‘ongoing (sustained over time, multiple researcher/informant contacts)’, and ‘reflexive (collaborative, open-ended, reflective, critical)’” (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 335, quotation marks and parentheses in original).

According to the qualitative tradition, the data analysis will report concrete and complex narratives. Bruner (1990, 2004) argues that we understand and judge the world and its people based on the hypotheses that we develop throughout our lives. According to Bruner, we develop these by two means: through logic and through stories. Through logic, for instance, one could erroneously conclude that if Indigenous children are failing in schools, they must not be very smart. And if Indigenous children in Oaxaca are not very smart, Indigenous children in other places may not be very smart, either. So-called scientific research findings, which attempt to generalize their findings to other contexts straightforwardly, fall into the logic category proposed by Bruner. Regarding stories, Bruner (1990) stresses “the ubiquitousness of narrative in the world of children (and the world of adults, for that matter) and of its functional importance in bringing children [and adults] into the culture” (p. 84, parenthesis in original). We then come to
understand and judge the world through our “cultural” eyes. In similar lines, Blommaert (2005) states,

[Narrative] has been overlooked as a format of knowledge production and reproduction because of its deep context-embeddedness, its often “irrational” or emotive key, and its connection to non-generalisable individual experience. Despite this neglect of narrative, it continues to be one of the most common and widespread modes of human communication” (p. 84, quotation marks in original).

Narrative constructions are political and transformative processes (Bruner, 1990; Kamler, 2001). Children, from a young age, learn that telling the right story can give them access to certain privileges. “As with narrative generally, ‘what happened’ is tailored to meet the conditions on ‘so what’” (Bruner, 1990, p. 86, quotation marks in original): the politics of narrative. Bruner (1990) states,

Telling the right story, putting her actions and goals in a legitimizing light, is just as important. Getting what you want very often means getting the right story… So, children too come to understand “everyday” narrative not only as a form of recounting but also as a form of rhetoric. (p. 86, quotation marks in original)

Political speeches are the perfect example of the politics of narrative. Not only are stories political, but they are also transformative processes. Utilizing feminist, poststructural and semiotic theories, Kamler (2001) argues that “It is through the processes of designing [stories] that writers produce new representations of reality and at the same time remake themselves—that is, reconstruct and renegotiate their identities” (p. 54). Cummins (2004) has also argued that students invest their identities in the creation of stories or texts. Texts then serve as mirrors in which affirmative identities are reflected back to the author.

Bruner (1990) argues that a narrative requires essential constituents in order to be effectively and persuasively told. He states,

Narrative requires … four crucial grammatical constituents if it is to be effectively carried out. It requires, first, a means for emphasizing human action or “agentivity”—action directed towards goals controlled by agents. It requires, secondly, that a sequential order be established and maintained—that events and states be ‘linearized’ in a standard way. Narrative, thirdly, also requires a
sensitivity to what is canonical and what violates canonicality in human interaction. Finally, narrative requires something approximately a narrator’s perspective: it cannot, in the jargon of narratology, be ‘voiceless.’” (p. 77)

It is my intention in this dissertation to construct effective stories that portray Indigenous children and student teachers as the intelligent, creative and genuine individuals that they really are. I will play the narrator role, trying to respect and give voice to the student teachers and the children as much as possible.

In the following three chapters, I will present the children’s and student teachers’ stories mainly through narratives and visual materials. I will use photos, student work samples, and student teachers’ materials and videos from the praxicum to portray vivid critical moments that took place during the CEAR Project and the changes that occurred. In the penultimate chapter, I will focus on the teachings of all children and the implications of these teachings and the main findings of the CEAR Project for the teaching of “English” in Mexico and elsewhere.
Chapter Five:

Los de la Banda (The Gang Members)

Figure 4. La banda.

I start this chapter, which is the beginning of the findings section of this dissertation, with the faces of some of the main participants in the CEAR Project: the student teachers (Figure 4). Stories, nowadays, are typically accompanied by photos, audio and video files, and moving icons. Kress (2000a, 2003) has demonstrated how the media, advertisement companies, and other means of communication have become multimodal, making their messages more persuasive and memorable. In spite of the multimodalities currently present in texts, academic texts have been dominated mainly by print, leaving behind other powerful modalities. Another reason for starting this section with our photo is to place the agents at the forefront. Most times “language,”
“literacy,” and “culture” are treated as abstract, depersonalized concepts, leaving the people, the agents, the (re)constructors of these concepts forgotten. The photo is a friendly reminder for the reader, and myself as the narrator, that this dissertation is about people and our stories. Moreover, our faces here represent the ownership that we all took in the CEAR Project. For us, it was much more that carrying out a “research” project. It was about interacting with one another and with the teachers and children, and about finding new ways to teach and learn. The presence of Belem, my wife, in this picture works to emphasize that as participants in the CEAR Project, we were inherently connected to, and shaped by, other people close to us.

Los de la banda (the gang members), as Pepe used to call us, did not come together randomly or fortuitously. Pepe is my nephew. He was aware of the CEAR Project as I was planning it, since we had had conversations during family gatherings; “Uncle, los de la banda want to work with you in your project. They are excited,” he would tell me even before I met them all. Cueto, Juan, Chucho, Hugo, and Laura were the ones who belonged to Pepe’s banda or clique. Pepe’s clique is not an unusual phenomenon at FI-UABJO. Clemente and Higgins (2008), who conducted a three-year ethnographic study there, used the different cliques they encountered at FI-UABJO as one of their units of analysis. They argue that students use these cliques as “safe houses” in order to perform affirming identities as English legitimate speakers.

Claudia’s involvement in the project also has its history. My brother Alex used to teach at FI-UABJO, and Claudia had been a student in one of Alex’s courses. The TEC course filled up quickly and Claudia could not get a spot. At Claudia’s request, Alex interceded on her behalf. “She is an excellent student; do you think you can accept her in your course?” Right from the beginning of the TEC course, Claudia approached me inquiring about the CEAR Project since she had heard about it from Alex as well.
Betty was connected to me, because she was conducting her social service at BIBLOCA, the bilingual library I started with my family. Eliza and Miriam were the ones who did not belong to Pepe’s clique and were not connected to me. They became interested in the project while taking the TEC course. It is important to mention that the invitation to participate in the CEAR Project was extended to all the students enrolled in the TEC course and that the ten final student teachers approached me with a genuine willingness to participate. Their interest was transformed into engagement and commitment throughout the CEAR Project, and la banda grew from six members to ten. It is important to acknowledge, however, that even though we grew to be a cohesive group, deeper relationships formed among the smaller teams. As we broke apart in four groups to work with the four classrooms, students formed pairs and trios with the people with whom they felt most comfortable: a) Pepe, Cueto, and Juan; b) Chucho, Hugo, and Laura; c) Claudia and Betty; and d) Miriam and Eliza. As previously stated, in this dissertation I will focus on the second and third groups, but the other student teachers’ voices will still be a part as this and the other chapters unfold.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the five student teachers who are the focus of the dissertation. In order to do so, I will use excerpts from the student teachers’ own identity texts that they created in the TEC course in combination with interview data, my weekly meeting journal entries, and my own perception of those student teachers. Before introducing each of the student teachers, I will address issues that student teachers from FI-UABJO and I have to deal with on a daily basis, and our resistance to the deficit positionings that both society at large and we ourselves adopt: “public university students,” “fresas y malinchistas,” and “non-native speakers.” Finally, I will present our co-created agenda and our reasons for participating in the CEAR Project.
Dealing with Our Own Desmadres (Issues)

*Nadie da lo que no tiene.* (Nobody gives what she does not have) Mexican Proverb

*Happiness is a perfume you cannot pour on others without getting a few drops on yourself.* (Og Mandino).

In the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy and critical pedagogies, the role of the teacher is essential in engaging students in constant liberating processes and assisting them in the development of expertise in language and literacy practices to help them access valuable resources. Cummins (2001) places the interaction between the teacher and student at the heart of pedagogy. In this section, I examine the “teacher,” not as an abstract concept, but as the person who (re)constructs the teacher persona and challenges positionings created in the Oaxacan and university contexts. Before addressing these positionings, I will provide a succinct historical contextualization of UABJO and FI-UABJO where these positionings are created.

UABJO was the first public university established in Oaxaca and regarded as one of the best universities of Latin American in the 1900s and beginning of the twentieth century (Dalton, 2004). In the 1970s, however, the university students and faculty engaged in a social revolt against the state government that resulted in the state governor’s resignation. Since then, the relationship between the Oaxaca state government and the university has been unstable, which has affected the university’s state funding. This in turn has impacted on the instruction that the university offers to its students (e.g., low salaries for their teachers, especially part-time teachers; large class-sizes; limited funding for research; fierce political fights among university administrators to control the limited funds that the university has access to; and constant strikes

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16 Most of my siblings have attended the UABJO since the 1970s. Three of my sisters have also worked for the UABJO since the 1980s and belong to the UABJO workers’ union since then. I completed my high school and university education at the UABJO and was part of the university workers’ union while I worked as a maintenance person and as a night guard during highschool and B.A. program. UABJO has been part of my family history, which has given me first-hand access to this evolving story.
called by the university workers’ union) (Martínez Vásquez, 2004). Since the 1980s, private universities have been proliferating in Oaxaca, offering a “more stable” setting but with fees up to twenty times higher than those of UABJO. The elite have opted to send their children to these private universities or to out-of-state universities. UABJO thus has become a place for low and middle SES students.

FI-UABJO has always belonged to UABJO since it opened in 1974. For many years, however, it was a center in which mostly “gringos” and foreigners offered language courses to university students and the general public. FI-UABJO was semi-independent from the university administration in that it generated its own funding. Up to the year 2000, FI-UABJO administrators did not engage much in university politics. In addition, FI-UABJO was located in the downtown area, away from the main campus, which gave it geographical independence. As previously stated, in 1991, FI-UABJO started its B.A. program in TESOL. Due to its limited infrastructure and low number of faculty members, the program accepted only a small group of students every year, forty to fifty students, as compared to faculties such as law, administration, and medicine, which accepted around four hundred students. Due to this highly selective process, university students from other faculties started regarding FI-UABJO as elitist and exclusive. The belief was/is that you have to be a very good student, have a palanca (leverage, i.e., connections to university administrators), or have the money to bribe someone in the administration to be accepted into the B.A. program. In fact, students do enter FI-UABJO by all of these means (see Clemente & Higgins, 2008, for a more detailed account of these views).

In 2002, FI-UABJO started growing in numbers. In 2005, it was moved to the main campus of the university and lost its geographic independence. The number of students FI-UABJO admitted increased for two main reasons: the demand for the TESOL B.A. program and the fact that FI-UABJO’s administrators engaged in UABJO politics, which forced them to
accept more students who had connections to the university administrators. Due to FI-UABJO’s move to the main campus, it is now seen as a more “legitimate” faculty by the main administration.

One of the core values of the TESOL B.A. program has been to accept students regardless of their level of English proficiency. In an evaluation conducted in 2008, one of the recommendations was to require applicants to have intermediate-level English proficiency in order that they be able to develop their English skills enough to easily obtain the 550 TOEFL score that the B.A. program has set as its goal. Both FI-UABJO administration and faculty agreed that we did not wish to have this pre-requisite; instead, we must continue to give opportunities to all Oaxacan students around the state. Typically, only students residing in the city who can attend FI-UABJO language courses and students who can afford English classes in private institutions develop their English skills to the intermediate level, in comparison to those students who live in small communities where no English instruction is offered or who do not have the financial means to access classes in the city. During the B.A. program, students have to develop both language proficiency and pedagogical knowledge in order to become English teachers. Unfortunately, having language proficiency carries more currency in our B.A. program, and our students tend to be haunted by the “English native-speaker ghost” and strive to become “legitimate speakers,” at the price of being labeled as *fresas* (snobbish people) and *malinchistas* (*traitors to the Mexican republic*) (Clemente & Higgins, 2008; López Gopar et al., 2006; Sayer, 2007).

In the CEAR Project, we had to deal with the identities that other people were trying to impose on us, resist them, and (re)create affirming identities. Negotiating our identities, we believed, was essential if we wanted to create affirming identities with the children participating
in the CEAR Project. We then had to deal with our (self-) positionings as “public students,” “fresas and malinchistas,” and “incompetent native speakers.”

Being part of UABJO has positioned us as being not serious or committed because we attend a public institution. In one of our meetings, I shared the following experience:

I was at a party with Belem at one of her friend’s house. It was on the Sunday right before I was going to start teaching here [at FI-UABJO]. I told Belem that we needed to leave early since I still had things to prepare for my classes. When she told her friend and her husband that we had to go, the husband said “Why do you worry about your classes, Mario? You will be teaching at UABJO.”

This person’s question and statement were heavily loaded with classist assumptions about UABJO teachers and students. I will venture a guess at his assumptions: First, no teacher at UABJO prepares lessons; they “wing it” whenever they show up. Second, students do not care about their education, so they often skip classes. Not only were the student teachers offended as well, but they also shared experiences they had had as UABJO students and comments they had heard from other people: “At UABJO, many teachers never show up.” “You can skip classes and that is OK, since you will pass somehow.” And we all remember the (in)famous phrase of Gabino Cué, the person who was running for state governor in 2004 and who had only been educated in private institutions, “La UABJO produce puros burros” (UABJO produces nothing but donkeys—stupid, unqualified people). Pérez Montaño (2008), who documented this phrase, claims that Gabino Cué, who will most likely run again for government in 2010, is trying to reconcile with UABJO and win its students’ votes by proposing an increment in UABJO’s federal funding.
Within UABJO, FI-UABJO has been labeled as both *fresa* and *malinchista*. In Mexico, the concept of *fresa* is associated with young people from the upper classes who wear brand-name clothes, attend private school or prestigious public schools, and drive a car, among other privileges. Typically, one can recognize someone who is regarded as *fresa* by a peculiar accent that resembles that of people in Mexico City and the northern states. Chucho mentioned that students from other faculties around the university and even professors perceive FI-UABJO students as *fresas*:

I still remember when I had an English teacher in high school… I asked him, ‘Is it difficult to be accepted at [FI-UABJO]?’ ‘Yes, it is very difficult to get in,’ he told me. And since [FI-UABJO] has been labeled as *fresa*, it is even harder.

Clemente and Higgins (2008) found that FI-UABJO is attended by working and middle class students: “The social histories of many of [FI-UABJO] students involve stories of them coming from first generation middle class families whose backgrounds are framed in terms of either urban working class or marginally ‘well-off,’ so to speak, rural households” (p. 44). They go on to argue that, “One of the ironies… is that within the university student world, the students at [FI-UABJO] are seen as *fresas*” (p. 45).

The student teachers in the CEAR Project argued that the *fresa* construct imposed on them was more connected to their speaking English and the relationships they established with *gringos* than to social class position. One the female participants in Clemente and Higgins’ (2008) ethnographic study of FI-UABJO clearly stated this connection:

Sometimes my friends make jokes about me, ‘Wow! You have to teach me some English! Or if they see me with a foreigner, ‘Wow! What’s going on with that *gringuito*?! …Also when we are walking in the street and there is a foreigner around, they push me to start a conversation with him. Yeah, it gives you a little bit of status. They also think that I am *fresa* because I am studying this, and also because, you know, sometimes in Spanish I use one or two words that are not common for them, then they also say that I use *fresa* words. (p. 89)
This student’s connection with *gringuitos* is a reflection of FI-UABJO students’ attempts to improve their English proficiency by interacting with native speakers of English. This is in turn connected to the *malinchista* construct. “*La Malinche* [is] the Indian woman who became the interpreter, guide, mistress, and confidante of [Hernán] Cortés during the time of conquest” (Cypess, 1991, p. 1, my italics). Even though *La Malinche* was documented in the *Códice* of Tlaxcala as the traitor of the Aztec empire, Cypess (1991) argues that little is known about this woman, whose voice was never documented in a patriarchal society. In Mexico, the term *malinchista* designates people who are close to or who adopt a foreign culture and language, while rejecting their own. As critical language educators in Mexico, we have reflected about the possibility of being *malinchistas* if our practice remains uncritical:

Second language acquisition and teaching (SLAT) theory and methods developed in the core are spreading Western-value laden “McCommunication” (Block, 2002) to the periphery, and in the process finishing the job started by Cortes’ *conquistadores* by destroying Mexico’s linguistic ecology. As a result, it could be said that English teachers in Mexico are the modern incarnation of *La Malinche.* To make things more complex, we need to keep in mind that the Mexico that we envision is a Mexico where linguistic and cultural diversity is valued. (Clemente et al., 2006, pp. 13-14)

The statement that “English teachers in Mexico are modern incarnation of La Malinche” resonated with the student teachers in the CEAR Project when we discussed this issue during the TEC course. In their written responses to the article that includes the previous quotation, several student teachers gave their opinion. Hugo commented connecting it to immigration and its effects on people.

I completely agree that nowadays English is a necessary tool for our development in life, but in Oaxaca the teaching of English [has] repercussions in the socio-
cultural ambits. As we know, Oaxaca is a state that is in poverty and in that way Oaxaca has a great number of poor people living in communities far away from the capital and where the supplies are really scarce and not all of them have access to those privileges.

In that way the people who are living in remote communities do not have enough money … can afford their daily expenses and that is why they are just waiting to save … enough money or learn a little bit of English to go to the United States in search of the “American Dream”. They do not matter about lose their culture, native language or even abandon their family, because they just want to make money and in that manner they will help their family to get out of the poverty.

In all towns of Oaxaca, exist a big rate of migration to the United States that is increasing every day and nobody can stop that because of the necessity of the people. Here is where the sentence “English teachers in Mexico are the modern incarnation of la Malinche” take place, because as future teachers we will help to increase this rate unexpectedly without wanting to do that. As future teacher we have to be aware of the problems that exist in communities of Oaxaca, we should have in mind that with the immigration of the people to United States the culture, languages and traditions of those towns will disappear soon (Original in English).

Claudia believes that it is in the hands of Mexican English teachers to get rid of the Malinche label and to adopt a more pro-active stance:

17 These responses were written originally in English. I am providing only lightly edited versions of these responses to ensure readability, but also to maintain student teachers’ own voices. I will write “Original in English” next to these phrases to differentiate them from my translations of most of the data.
I think that teachers [have] the responsibility to change the idea that we are the new malinches. Learn[ing] a language can be use for many things. It’s the way to see other ways to see the world and globalization is not the only reason [to] learn [English]. Of course we need to be careful and promote Mexican culture. That includes . . . teach[ing] critical students, we need to promote reading. We need to stop complaining about the past education or about the government and start to make a change in our schools. Even when I know that this is really difficult, I think that this can be done if we work hard to do it (Original in English).

Juan also highlighted the fact that it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of English in society, but without ignoring the importance of mother tongues in each place. Chucho connected his thoughts about La Malinche to U.S. domination over Mexico and reminded us that the Spanish language has also been hegemonic over Indigenous languages,

Teaching English in Oaxaca sounds like something very bad for many people here because lots of them think that English is a way that the United States is using to conquer us, to dominate us, that's why some people say that English teachers are the new Malinches… Some people who [have] a wrong idea about English and other languages, idea of domination and destruction [,] must have in consideration that we already had another language. The Spanish was a way of domination and it's a way to discriminat[e] . . . people who speak native languages (Original in English).

In the CEAR Project, we all shared Chucho’s view that people can use different languages, including English, to resist oppression and fight discrimination:
Many people who are discriminate[d] by people who speak Spanish use English and other languages to show their culture, so it's important to teach English to children in Oaxaca in order that they have more opportunities in this world, we have to learn and teach another languages but seeing as a way to show our culture to other people and feel proud about who we are and use English as a tool to improve our [lives] (Original in English).

In the CEAR Project we were also grappling with issues that position us as “incompetent non-native speakers.” Elsewhere, in López Gopar et al. (2006), I reflected about this issue and discussed, with another colleague and two of my students, my own journey in trying to get rid of the English native speaker ghost and the feeling of being superior if I had a good command of the English language:

[While living in the United States] even though [Mario’s] command of English grammar was good, and he was getting excellent grades in grammar courses, Mario felt that there was a constant reminder of him being an outsider, a Mexican with broken English. Losing his Mexican accent and sounding like a "native speaker" was his goal in order to be accepted by the mainstream group.

Upon his return to Oaxaca, Mario joined the Department of Languages [FI-UABJO] from which he had previously graduated. Many of his teachers and some of his classmates who also became faculty knew him, but the students did not. As a new teacher [at FI-UABJO], he [had] heard terrifying stories about the students being critical and suspicious of non-native speaking Mexican teachers like himself. The teachers’ professional knowledge was constantly monitored: any spelling mistakes, mispronunciation, or unknown words would constitute sufficient proof that the teacher was no good.

Upon entering his classes, Mario felt insecure and wanted his students to know him so that he could gain credibility. As he later explained, “I did not want my students to know me personally, rather subtly, I wanted them to know that I had lived in the States, that I had completed a diploma program, a master's degree in Canada and a teaching license program in the States, and that I had taught in both of these countries. That would certainly give me the right to speak (Norton, 1997) and prove my legitimacy.” Mario noted that this experience reminded him about something one of his American friends told him when Mario first arrived in Oregon to teach at a bilingual school: “I am glad John put that University of Oregon sticker on your car, so that people will know that you are educated and
not just any Mexican.” Although at the time Mario found that comment extremely insulting, he was doing exactly the same thing in his own classroom: “Not in words, but in actions I had told my students, ‘Listen, guys, I am not just any Mexican. I am a Mexican who has lived, worked and been educated in English speaking countries.’” This insight prompted Mario to critically ask himself what message he was sending to the students by trying to reposition himself as a “legitimate speaker” (Bourdieu, 1991). (pp. 93-94, emphasis in original)

During the TEC Course, I had the opportunity to share my own experience while fighting against the native speaker ghost, but trying to gain legitimacy at the same time. During the weekly meetings that we held in the CEAR Project, we continuously addressed this issue, connecting it to the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy, especially the section regarding school leaders’ and teachers’ language policies. The following excerpt from one of the meetings illustrates the blatant message a so-called native English teacher at FI-UABJO conveyed to a beginning student about her “incompetence” as an English speaker:

**Mario:** The other day, I was totally in shock and I did not know how to react and my reaction was to do nothing. There was a student who was negotiating her grade with one of the teachers; she went to ask him what her grade was and the teacher replied that she had gotten an eight or nine [in Oaxaca, grades go from five to ten, five means failing and ten is the highest]; I would be lying if I told you exactly what it was, but the thing is that the student had not obtained a ten. She told the teacher, “I thought that I could get a ten.” And the teacher replied, “when you speak English like me (some student teachers gasped), then you would get a ten. When you do not find anything in red in your assignment, then you will get a ten.” We are talking about a girl who is in second or third semester [just beginning in the B.A. program].

**Claudia:** Let me think who taught this class (in a “threatening” manner).

**Mario:** No, no (everybody laughs).
Juan: Turn off the recording, teacher, and tell us [who the teacher is] (Everybody laughs).

Mario: Honestly, I do not the name of the teacher [I had been a year and a half away and did not know all the names of the newly hired teachers]. For me, [what shocked me] was the fact that a person dictated “when you someday sound like me, you then would get a ten!” I would have never gotten a ten (Chuco chuckles).

Claudia: Those are the things that we should all know, everyone. Why? Because the students could complain; we should do it.

Mario: Now, to what extent does this experience sound too drastic and may get to all of us? “Hey, damn teacher!” Right? (Some laugh). It gets to all of us, but to what extent really simply our school has created, and we also create and recreate. . . the discrimination against each other, judging one another hard among peers to see who has the better English (Betty: Yes), who has a better accent, who does not make a mistake with the present tense. And that [knowing English] dictates in many ways who is the one who knows and who does not know. Or the classic [attitude], “No, I already held a scholarship or I have already been abroad” (everybody laughs).

Juan: It is important because, uh, we try to judge [English] based on one skill, right? English is not just about one skill; it is much more I believe.

Mario: It is interesting, there are a lot of people who are quiet, and if they are judged in this sense, and…

Juan: [That person] can master English being quiet.
Mario: Then, in this regard, to feel, to continuously judge ourselves as English teachers simply on the basis of our supposed proficiency and our accent and all is really [problematic]. It is incredible how these relations come about that a person, whom everyone makes her feel that she knows a lot, truly believes it and wears a…

Juan: A label.

Mario: Like a, I mean [a label that reads] “I do know English.” (Some chuckle) “I am not like you.” We could say, if you notice, that perhaps what this teacher did was rather evident; then, when it is too evident, like we sort of react, don’t we? But I think that what is more dangerous are the subtle things, I mean, like those things that happen down there, underneath things, and those things that we do not notice and that we see as normal, right? It is English, then, “I need to check your level of English,” “What your TOEFL score was”…

Eliza: But then, first of all, well, the teacher being [an] English [speaker] and all that has to do with all this, whereas I mean, it is fine that she [this teacher] is from abroad and that is very different to the way we are going to speak. Same thing with them if they learn Spanish, we [could say], “Ah, you speak in a very funny way and you do not speak well.” And now that you were telling us about this teacher, the same thing happened to one of our classmates that we all know, a teacher precisely [gave] her a low mark and she did complain. The teacher told her in a subtle way, your English is not very good.

Throughout the CEAR Project, we continued striving to create affirming identities about ourselves while recognizing that we are never “cured” completely, so to speak. However, we did not want be seen as irresponsible individuals, fresas and malinchista, and incompetent English
speakers. Our goal was to create multilingual and intercultural affirming identities for ourselves and for our future young students in order to resist the discrimination and inequality present in Oaxaca and work towards a more egalitarian society. In the next section, I will talk more about myself and the five student teachers through excerpts from the identity texts that we created.

**Our Identity Texts**

During the TEC course and the CEAR Project, we used identities texts as mediational tools to negotiate our identities. Ada and Campoy (2004) stress the importance of teachers’ creating their own identity texts should they want to connect with their students and create a inclusive and welcoming classroom environment where the teacher-student divide is overcome and where both parties are seen as real people. Cummins (2004) has also argued that identity texts are mirrors in which students’ and teachers’ identities are reflected in a positive light. In this section, I share excerpts from the identity texts that we created using PowerPoint and traditional book formats. I will also provide more personal information about Laura, Hugo, Chucho, Betty, and Claudia.

**Mario**

*La vida no es la que uno vivió, sino la que uno recuerda, y cómo la recuerda para contarla* (Life is not what one lived, but what one remembers and how one remembers it in order to tell it). Gabriel García Márquez

I have given you snapshots of my life in the previous chapters and will briefly present more information here. During the TEC course, I created my own identity text in order to achieve three objectives: a) to share with my students who I am and the identities I have
constructed for myself, b) to connect with them at a more personal level, and c) to provide a model for the identity texts they were to create.

My identity text was called “The Many Things I Am and Do.” Since I am a competent multilingual person, it was written in Spanish, English, and French. I also included different modalities in the use of photos, video, and sound. Figures 5 and 6 show pages of my identity text. My identity text included multilingual narrative of my childhood, my home nickname, “Chino” (curly-haired), my “religious” beliefs, my artistic abilities, my hobbies, my studies, my career, my life as a librarian, my personal life as a husband, and my commitment to Oaxacan peoples’ wellbeing, especially that of Indigenous peoples. While I presented my identity text, I emphasized that remembering, reflecting, reliving, and rephrasing were involved in constructing the text and that other memories needed to wait for another lens. I concluded by saying that it was in a way a performance, surrounded and shaped by an array of contextual factors.

Figure 5. Mario’s identity text sample page 1.
Laura

I told you about Laura in the introductory chapter. She joined the CEAR Project because of her interest in students who are already bilingual, and are adding another language. For her, “it was interesting to talk about different languages, give importance to each language, to each and every one; even the language that we speak is important, I think.” I will add more about Laura using her multimodal bilingual (English/Spanish) identity text as the basis of my narrative. I will also provide you with samples of her identity text.

Laura is sharing her identity text with her classmates. On the screen, there is a little girl sitting on a white chair in front of a tree. Her black
wavy hair contrasts with the whiteness of her clothes and the chair. “I am the youngest in the house, I am pampered, and the most cute daughter that my parents could have.” As she moves to the next slide, she continues, “I am the daughter of two great persons.” Laura is standing between her proud parents while holding her middle school diploma. She goes back in time to show how she dressed up as a little chick: “I am funny and I have always enjoyed the little things [in] life.” Laura has used her charm to participate in school events: “I am a model, and I am participant in many events.” Laura’s joyful personality has given her many friends: “I am the best friend for the people who believe in my friendship.”

Figure 7. Laura's identity text sample page 1.
Laura is certainly a good representative of the many FI-UABJO students willing to help (Figure 7). She has a positive outlook on things: “I am the admirer of the beautiful things that I can see.” Laura lets us into her personal life and reveals the admiration she feels for her mother (Figure 8). Laura is a proud aunt of many gorgeous nieces and nephews, some of whom are Mexicans and others who are Mexican-Americans: “I am the aunt of the most mischievous children of the world.” (Quotations originally in English)

I am the daughter of the most wonderful woman on earth. 
Soy la hija de la mujer más maravillosa en la tierra.

Figure 8. Laura’s identity text sample page 2.
Laura's family is comprised of both people and pets. Her favorite pet is no longer with her, however: “I was the owner of the most friendly and faithful cat of my life.” Laura has filled the void left by her loyal pet with a poodle dog, a couple of cats and a green parrot: “I am the owner of the funniest, [most] mischievous, and greatest animals on the planet. Are not they so beautiful?” Hugo is part of Laura’s life: “I am the happiest girlfriend because I have the best boyfriend in the world.” She signs her identity text with a beautiful smile: “And [thanks] to all these things I am who I am: Laura I. Montes Medina.” (Quotations originally in English)

*Hugo*

Victor Hugo Cuadrado Vásquez, Hugo, as he prefers we call him, is a gentle person. The caps he wears give him a boyish look, although he is three years older than most of his classmates. Hugo comes from a family of teachers: his mother is a retired teacher; his dad is an active elementary school principal; and his three older sisters are middle-school teachers working in different communities around Oaxaca. Hugo walks us through his “entire life through pictures that represent my childhood, my youth and my maturity” (Original in English). With shots from his childhood, Hugo portrays his connection to his family (Figure 9).

My family is very close-knit, when I was a baby my sisters used to take care of me. As family we used to visit some parks and
places to have fun, in the family all birthdays were celebrated in the same way with[out] any kind of distinction. (Original in English)

Figure 9. Hugo's identity text sample page 1.

Hugo has been connected to Indigenous peoples since he was little, when he lived with his parents in an Indigenous Zapotec community. My sister Janet and I, because we were young, were living there [in Cuatecas Altas], and I learned some words in [Indigenous] language... I studied kindergarten there and part of my elementary school... Well I always played with the kids there and in fact it was then that I learnt some words like
tortilla and others because I had a friend, a young friend... We used to play and he also taught me bad words... I socialized with them. I was learning a lot. In a way, I would get to the women’s homes, and [Mom] would say, “Ask her to sell you 10 pesos of tortillas...” And if the woman asked something, my mother would go, “What did she say?” We left when I was in fifth or sixth grade... It has been over 15 years and unfortunately I never came back to the community and forgot most of it.

Hugo’s family background brought him back to a major in teaching after attempting to pursue a major in computer programming for three years. His childhood experience made him aware of the marginalization suffered by Indigenous communities: “I always see that they are marginalized, the people who speak another language and that is why I wanted to get involved in [the CEAR Project].” He argues, “In an Indigenous school, one can speak an Indigenous language, the teacher, I mean, can also speak an Indigenous language and teach Spanish at the same time without replacing students’ language. It is very interesting because in our state, there are many, many languages.” Right from the beginning of the TEC course, Hugo argued that the topics regarding multilingualism, interculturalism, and critical pedagogy needed to be
covered throughout the whole TESOL program, which was not the case according to Hugo.

In Hugo’s identity text, his friends hold a very important place. Hugo’s friendly personality has attracted many friends at FI-UABJO. “Nowadays I am studying University. I have enjoyed my three years that I have been here. I have met new friends and I appreciate them. During university I have had nice experiences with them. I have had happiness, sadness, etc.” (Original in English)

Figure 10. Hugo’s identity text sample page 2.

Hugo has shared his love of wrestling (Figure 10) and music with his friends, “I love SKA music and when there is a performance I usually assist
with some friends to have fun” (Original in English). Not only has Hugo found friendship at FI-UABJO, he has also found love, “In University I met a really special person to me. Now, she is my girlfriend, and I think everybody knows her: Laura” (Original in English). Hugo joined the TESOL program because of his interest in English and teaching. He started taking English at a young age, when he was in sixth grade of elementary school. He also completed the English high-school program offered at FI-UABJO.

Hugo knew right from the beginning that he would become an English teacher and liked the idea. As in the case of Laura, during the CEAR Project, it will be the first time that he faces a whole class. “I am so looking forward to it,” he said.

Chucho

Fortino de Jesús, Chucho as I came to know him, gets off his motorcycle. He has just completed another thirty-minute ride from San Jacinto Chilateca, where he lives with his parents. I am always very happy to see him, because he travels over a dangerous hill where many people have suffered fatal accidents. It is the big brother in me. Chucho starts his identity text with a page that tells us much about his complex personality (Figure 11).
Chucho is indeed a charming boy. He is gentle yet critical, quiet yet articulate about his beliefs, and very proud of his upbringing: “I have received a lot of support from my parents. I am very thankful of the family I have because I feel their cariño (love) and their support” (Original in English)

Interestingly, like Laura and Hugo, he is the baby in the family (Figure 12). Chucho tells me about his first teacher, his hard-working mother.
When I was a young boy, I had problems with my tonsils. They had to operate in me when I was four years-old, so I could only attend kindergarten for one year. I had to spend a lot of time inside the house while I was recuperating... my mother was always paying attention to my learning; it was good for me. I was even more advanced than other children when I started attending kindergarten. I was an outstanding student throughout my basic education.

When Chucho was in middle school, he moved to the city. It was a tough change for him and had to learn fast: “There were older boys in my
middle school and they were into crazy things... They spoiled me rotten,”

Chucho says while he laughs. His long spiky hair accompanies his
philosophy in life, passed on by a cousin,

   Not everything is about studying and studying, because it gets
to a point that you are overwhelmed, and you won’t be able to
[accomplish] your goals that you set up... you have to echar
relajo (fool around) too, up to a certain extent, of course... It
has been my philosophy... to say when it is time to fool around,
let’s fool around, but when it is time to study, let’s echarle
ganas (work hard).

Chucho has grown up to be a very self-confident young man, as he portrays
himself in his identity text,

   Now I think, I am very intelligent, cute, nice and a great boy. I
have a lot of friends. I love to go school because I have gotten a
lot of knowledge and very good experiences from it. And I am
still getting them, isn’t fantastic? (Original in English)

   Chucho combines his studies with his passion for music and guitar
playing, “I love music, I think it is one of the greatest things in this world.
My favorite band is Metallica. Because I love music I am always listening
to it but also I play it. I love guitars and I am a guitar player” (Original
in English). Chucho chose the TESOL B.A. Program carefully after getting
away from his father’s intention of having him join the army as he had. Chucho had also considered majoring in communication or medicine, but he realized that getting a B.A. in communication would not give him financially stability and that he did not have the calling to become a doctor.

Chucho joined the TESOL program because he liked the laid back atmosphere of FI-UABJO and because he wanted to learn languages. At first, he was disappointed that the program focused on preparing teachers. However, and in spite of his lack of teaching experience, he started to realize that he could make a difference in people’s lives. Chucho joined the CEAR Project because he wanted to share the admiration that he felt for Indigenous children based on his own journey in becoming an English teacher.

It is a reality that in the state we are surrounded by Indigenous children and many times, as we have seen, they are underestimated or put down because they are Indigenous. Hence, I am motivated to say, no, because in our community and in our state, there are Indigenous children and opposed to what others think, [Indigenous children] are more intelligent than everybody; We, for example, we see simply see it; we are learning content, but we are also learning English. When I joined the B.A. program, I just remember taking an
English course in elementary school, but very basic, then when I joined the program, I did not know how to speak English and all that and little by little you begin to understand, to speak it and all that motivates you. Then, I believe that it has been difficult for us to learn content and learn English, then I see that, those kids struggle the same because they are also learning content and Spanish.

[The CEAR Project] is like a dream, isn’t it? But with this project we may find ways to make sure these children feel more comfortable... because many times, for example, teachers speak to them in Spanish and they do not worry about or they do not think about whether the child is understanding; they just talk to them and [may say] “I already taught you, if you did not understand, it was your problem”. For instance here [at FI-UABJO], we instead were told many times, “Oh, you did not understand; well, I am going to explain in Spanish so that you can understand.” However, they [Indigenous children] do not have that choice; they understand or they understand. Hence, in this regard, I think we can contribute with our grain of sand in this research project because they should be valued.
Betty

We are sitting in a big circle in a session of the TEC course. Some students are rubbing their hands, others are staring at the floor, and others pretend to be reading their identity texts; all avoiding making eye-contact with me. “Anybody would like to share their identity text with us?” It takes a very brave person to be the first to share. “I will do it, teacher,” Betty says while standing up to face the class. She begins, “Hi my name is Beatriz Adriana.” Betty decided to make her identity texts in a traditional book format and in three languages: Zapotec, Spanish, and English (Figures 13 and 14).

Figure 13. Betty’s identity text sample 1.
Betty is from Matías Romero, a community in the Isthmus region of the state. The majority of Zapotec speakers in Oaxaca are concentrated in the Isthmus. Betty tells us about her recent interest in Zapotec:

I have some friends who speak Zapotec and some others speak it and write it. They would speak to me in Zapotec all the time, but I never [learned it]. They would laugh and even told me [funny] things and picked on me [in Zapotec], and I was simply there. But lately, I hang out with them and they continue speaking [to me]. I became more interested since I took the TEC course and I pay more attention now. Before I would never pay attention. My friends are from Tehuantepec.
and Juchitán and they speak Zapotec among each other all the time.

Betty is going back two generations to come closer to her Zapotec roots:

None of my parents speak Zapotec. My mom tells me that my grandfather, her father, could understand and speak it sometimes. However, my grandfather had the typical belief that his children should not learn [Zapotec]. [He would tell my mother]: ‘people will make fun of you. No, you are going to learn Spanish.’ And then you lose [the language]; my mom used to ask my grandfather to teach her, but [he never did]…

My dad only understands some words, some numbers, one to five.

Betty is aware that her grandfather’s decision and her family’s lack of Zapotec are due to societal stigma and the role of schooling in this region:

I know a teacher. She teaches kindergarten in Juchitán. In fact, she was telling me that where she teaches, children speak no Spanish, only Zapotec. She speaks both Spanish and Zapotec because she is from Unión Hidalgo. But she was telling that they have to instill in children that when they start elementary
school, zero Zapotec, because they should not speak it. Honestly,
I had never reflected about this until I took the TEC course.

Betty is a very persistent student. She moved to Oaxaca City, away
from her family who had to move to Chiapas because of her dad’s job, to
join the TESOL B.A. program. She was not accepted the first time she
applied, so she stuck around patiently waiting for the next year’s round of
applications: “I was always attracted to English, even though I did not
know much English, only a few words.” Betty enjoys teaching English very
much. While taking the TEC course, Betty was doing her social service at
BIBLOCA, the multilingual library, teaching kindergarten and
elementary school children:

At BIBLOCA, I have learned, for instance, how to get to know
the kids, because day after day, one learns many things from
them... I am not afraid to be in front of a class anymore,
although with the experience that we are going to live [in the
CEAR Project], I am sure it will be a bit different because it is a
large class.

Betty joined the CEAR Project because of her love for teaching and the
guidance and collaboration she was hoping to find.
Claudia

Figure 15. Claudia in a traditional Tehuana dress from the Zapotec region of the Isthmus.

So far, I have been mainly using the interview data and the identity texts the student teachers created during the TEC course to talk about them. Claudia, however, chose not to create an identity text. During the session in the TEC course when the students were sharing their identity texts with their classmates, Claudia pulled me out of the classroom to tell me with teary eyes, “I did not do my assignment. I am sorry, but I do not feel comfortable to talk about myself and my family at this moment. I will accept any repercussion this may have on my grade.” “That is OK, Claudia. I understand and respect your decision. Do not worry about the grade. I hope things will get better,” I replied. She left the class for that day. Identity texts are certainly difficult to write. We are constantly (re)negotiating our identities or subjectivities while creating identity texts (Kamler, 2001). They are instances in our lives where we freeze our identity performances
hoping other people will (re)construct our “momentarily-frozen” identities in the same way.

What follows is an introduction to Claudia through a photo she later shared with me (Figure 15) the identity text she later created for the class she taught in the CEAR Project, the interview data, and my constant interactions with her.

Claudia placed the following sentence at the center of the identity text she created for her class: “I am intelligent” (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Claudia's identity text presented to her students.

Claudia is certainly a very intelligent young woman. That phrase, however, does not do full justice to Claudia. I must add that she is a critical, caring, responsible, and a hard-working person, too. Like Hugo,
Claudia is a bit older than her classmates. Her constant thought-provoking questions spring from a life full of rich experiences. Claudia tells us about herself and her family,

I have three siblings, two older sisters and a younger brother. I was born in Mexico City. I have practically lived all my life with my mom only. My parents left each other when I was six, and then we came to live in Oaxaca. My parents got back together six years later, and we moved back to Mexico City again. Six years later, they got divorced again and we moved to Chihuahua [a state in northern Mexico], where we lived in a farm for six years. We moved back to Mexico City again, where we lived for five years, and then moved to Oaxaca again to work at my mom’s restaurant.

When Claudia lived in Oaxaca as a little girl, her baby-sitter was an Indigenous woman.

When I was in elementary school, we used to live in a small room and my mom used to work all day . . . My mom tried to make sure that we always had someone to take care of us... We had a nana (Nanny) for about fifteen years. She was an Indigenous woman from Oaxaca. Her name was Francisca, and we called her Chica. She cooked the foods we liked, knew how we slept . . . She became our mom in many different ways.
Chica, in fact, spoke Zapotec, but she would never want to speak in Zapotec with us. She never did. The only time I saw her speaking Zapotec was one day when we went to her hometown and we saw how she used to live, what her family was like... It was there that I saw her speaking Zapotec, but she never spoke to us in Zapotec. She was a very serious woman and very humble.

During the constant changes in her family and her moving, Claudia has learned to cope with discrimination, developed an interdialectic accent (Chihuahan-Mexico City-Oaxacan mixture) and a richer view on things:

In Chihuahua, it was tough because after all I am chilanga [colloquial, and sometime pejorative, nickname to refer to people from Mexico City] and the concept of a chilango is quite complex in Mexico; isn’t it? Well then at the beginning, it was like alienation, ‘She is chilanga;” “She is stuck-up;” “She is fresa...” I have always had this belief, ‘It is not my problem; it is your problem.” After a while, well, I stopped having problems with that, well you acquire the accent and make friends. I think [living in different places and socializing with different people] has been very cool because it has given me the opportunity to take what I like about each place, be different,
and to have a different view because I have lived with very
different people.

When Claudia came to Oaxaca to work at her mother’s restaurant, her mother suggested that she start attending university again. Claudia had applied at UNAM, the public university in Mexico City, but was not accepted. She decided to enroll at a private university in a Business Administration major, but after one year, she could not afford the fees. She applied to FI-UABJO at the last minute since she did not know about the program, and serendipitously fulfilled her little girl’s dream: “My mom makes fun of me because she says, ‘When you were a little girl, you would say that you wanted to become an English teacher. When you played role-playing family scenes, you always wanted to be the teacher.’”

Claudia, like Betty, has taught for about four months at a private high-school that specializes in art. “I love it [teaching]! I really do.” Claudia joined the CEAR Project because she was interested in working with bilingual children. “I have experienced discrimination. I am sure these children do, too, in a tougher way. I also joined the project because I needed guidance, and working with a group of people sounded exciting and much more enriching.”
Our Identity Texts: So What?

Narratives must have two essential components. First, they must tell “what happened”; and second, they must fulfill the condition of the “so what” (Bruner, 1990). In other words, we do not simply tell stories to each other; there are always intentions behind those stories. The excerpts from identity texts and the narrative that I have presented in the previous section had three different intentions. First, the first purpose was to give voice to some of the agents in this narrative. By giving them voice, they become alive; they become subjects. According to Freire (1970), students are often treated as objects, as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge; he refers to this as “banking education.” Second, teachers can be treated as objects, too, as mediums through which grand knowledges or master narratives simply pass on to students. In other words, teachers can be seen as simple funnels put into these vessels. Therefore, I intended to de-objectify the teacher construct. Third, the creation of relationships, engagement, and affirming identities described in the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy and in the (re)creation of critical pedagogies (Norton & Toohey, 2004), is only possible if subjects, agents, or people are involved. These three intentions together constitute the most important “so what” of the previous section.

Breaking away from discriminatory representations about us, such as uncommitted public students and teachers, *fresas* and *malinchistas*, and incompetent native speakers, was another intention of our identity texts. All of us come from low-to-middle class working families. We have all attended public schools throughout our lives. All of our parents have made enormous sacrifices to provide us with higher education. We have learned that if we want to change the grand narratives that place us in deficit models, we need to start telling our own stories back as a way of resistance. It is only through this dialectical relationship between grand narratives and personal stories that change is possible. In order to “exorcise the [English] native speaker”
(Clemente & Higgins, 2008), our identity texts went from “standard English” to multilingual narratives. Our voices were no longer an imitation, always careful, full of prescriptions for how not to deviate from the dictated script. Our voices were heard in multiple languages or in combinations of these languages (translanguaging). We also used other modalities, such as photos, to portray where we come from and where we are going. Our voices told stories about how important our parents are, how intelligent we are, how much our family and friends care about us, how much we enjoy little things in life, and how committed and caring we are, among other things. We are now waiting for the affirming echo, for the reflection of the light we shed, to come back to us. And if they return distorted or diffused, we will be ready to tell our stories back one more time.

At the beginning of the CEAR Project we were all novice educators committed to social justice in Oaxaca. Laura, Hugo, and Chucho had no teaching experience, except working as tutors with individual students at FI-UABJO. Betty and Claudia had just started teaching. I was getting my feet wet as a teacher educator and as a researcher. Nonetheless, our lives were full of rich experiences and we were sincerely committed to engaging in a collaborative dialogue with children in order to develop language and literacy expertise so that we could all tell our stories to the world and (co)construct affirming identities as we moved through the process of always becoming/performing (Blommaert, 2005; Norton, 2000). In our attempt to make a difference, we tried hard not fall into the paternalistic, romanticizing, and structural trap, in which educators are the saviors, the empowerers, and students are always the victims in need of rescuing. We were lucky to have Claudia in the team, who constantly reminded us that discrimination is not fixed and a one-way road:

I have different roots; my grandparents spoke Zapotec and it is mixture: my maternal great-grand mother is Oaxacan and so were her parents, but my maternal
great-grand father was Spanish, he was son of Spanish people. In spite of the fact that my family came from different roots, I never experienced all these roots. I was always a city girl and I was always discriminated because of that, while moving around different states. I experienced discrimination from a different angle… discrimination can happen both ways. We should not treat [Indigenous] children as different… Diversity… could be more enriching if we can understand that that diversity allows children to be who they are… In other words, what makes them different is what makes them better.

Claudia’s remarks and the following story serve as the bridge between our lives and those of the children explored in the next chapter.

*Children’s Lives Matter to Us!*

We are sitting around the two big tables that we have pushed together so that we can face each other. Betty and Hugo are sick today, so there are nine of us at our fourth meeting. I have just finished telling everybody about the different times I ran into Alondra, one the students in the CEAR Project, who sells flowers at main street intersections. The encounters have all been awkward moments for both Alondra and me; Alondra even hid behind a light post once, so that I could not see her, and another time ran towards her mother to avoid me. Those encounters hit me and reminded me that the children in the CEAR Project were living complex lives. Guillermina, a student in Maestro Carlos’ class was another student who worked as a street vendor:
Mario: Who is analyzing Maestro Carlos’ class? I saw
Guillermina the other day, three days ago, on Friday.

Miriam: Friday?

Mario: Friday, yes, around 11:30 p.m. She was selling shawls at
the andador (main tourist street). She did not see me...

Guillermina is thirteen or fourteen years old, right? Fourteen I
think [Chucho starts checking the data we have]. Guillermina,
on top of carrying her shawls, was with a little girl who was
around five years old and who also had things to sell. Now you
tell me, she is...

Chucho: Twelve.

Mario: Guillermina is twelve? Well, it was 11:30 p.m. and she
was not only alone, but was also in charge of a...

Chucho: Her little sister.

Miriam: It is quite late, isn’t it? To be alone.

Laura: Where does Guillermina live? (Someone whispers an
answer).

Mario: The good thing is that we can say that Oaxaca is still a
safe place, right?

Miriam: At the least there is not much [crime].

Juan: Well around that area, but around the central (main
market) it is not.
... 

**Mario:** Now, there are also a lot of things that we need to consider; for example, many people could call this child exploitation, right? Supposedly, according to the Children Human Rights, a child should not work until she is sixteen years old. But in certain communities, in the Mixtec region for instance, if a child starts working at a young age, it is a way to teach the child values of responsibility, and fulfilling a supporting role in the family among other things.

**Claudia:** I also think that they acquire a different value of things. The fact that they know what it takes for two eggs to come home gives them a different value compare to the children who have not gone through that and that they don’t know what their parents do to bring them something to eat.

**Mario:** Now, it is also interesting to see it in the sense that these kids are not begging.

**Claudia:** That is right.

**Mario:** In other words, Guillermina and all, and Alondra are not begging; they are working.

**Claudia:** But how something that is not bad finally, working, can turn into something that kids are ashamed of; and the ones that have pushed them [to feel this way] is, us, society; I
mean, society thinks: ‘it is late, they are working, they are young.’ They are judged for something that it is not bad.

Mario: And not only are the children judged, but also their parents.

Claudia: Of course.

Pepe: Yes.

Mario: Because, we could start saying, “hey no!”

Claudia: How is that possible!

Mario: “If I were their…”

Pepe: “Their dad.”

Mario: “Their dad, I would not.”

Miriam: Also because of the type of job and the place, too.

Chucho: And the time.

Mario: The time, right? It is complex because, for instance, what do we think of los cerillitos [children who work in national grocery store companies bagging things for people]. Los cerillitos only receive tips from the customers and no payment from the companies.

Chucho: Oh, yeah.

Miriam: They are different.
Mario: Los cerillitos are also twelve, thirteen years old and they are more exploited by Soriana [a national grocery store in Oaxaca].

Claudia: But Profe, this also happens [inaudible]

Pepe: Because it is like a company, it seems that they are protected by the company.

Claudia: It seems that this [type of job] has been accepted by our society.

Mario: But the company does not give children ni su madre (a bloody thing); it does not give kids a thing.

Pepe: But somehow, when one comes into the building [the store], I mean, it seems they are protected. Being in the street or in inside a building, the context is different.

Claudia: Imagine, imagine, with lack of security, if someone asks the child to take their bags to their car and what if that person is evil and may...

Chuco: Abuse the child.

Laura: Aha.

Claudia: Abuse the child; for instance, we do not consider it [this type of job being risky] because of what you [Pepe] are exactly saying. This job seems to be so standard and established
that one does not see it as dangerous as being on the street, when it [bagging things] can also be dangerous.

Mario: Now, being selfish and going back to our research, it [working children] could be another interesting group to focus on.

Chucho: Yes.

Mario: Trying to learn more and trying to see this from different points of view.

Chucho: And that, for instance, to us who are language [teachers], is that in, does it matter to our field or would it be part of sociology?

Mario: Now, it is quite interesting what Chucho is saying, because we say, ‘well to me involved with languages, does it matter or not, since I am just an English teacher, right?’ But to a certain extent, if you notice, the interaction that we have with children is day after day and we are messing up with a moment in their lives. I think, personally, that it does matter to us.

Chucho: Yes, me too. I think it matters to us. My point is, for instance, in relation to our thesis [research projects], the topics that we are going to choose, a topic more related to sociology and that... (Mario: Yes, totally) would that be valid?
Mario: It would not only be valid, but it would also be a way to start opening the eyes of our field because our field has focused on, like if I go to a workshop, I go to learn about how to teach pronunciation, how to teach vocabulary; it is not that those workshops are not valid and useful to us, but in the moments when we are dealing with our students, we will be dealing with all those realities, [we should think about] how to adapt and take into account the need of our students in their historical context. Now, we are talking about Alondra and Guillermina, who will be in middle school soon; the English teacher will deal with them, one of us from FI-UABJO, and I do not know as to what extent middle school will be tough for them in respect to their working hours and pace of work. To what extent will they do their English homework or study English or as what extent they will say, “I am going to fail”?

Pepe: And even the support from their parents [is not a given], some have parents with them and others do not.

Chucho: Yes, because it is true, we can find many [research] topics, very, very interesting ones, the thing is that [they must be valid].

Mario: Yes, I think that in the thesis we could argue that the main idea is to say what these things have to do with me, as a
language teacher, and how I should respond to and how to adapt my practice or how I should adapt my topics, how I should be [interact], from a humane point of view, with my students... Then it’s got to do with English, and with all the subjects not only English, especially because when we do not honor or are not conscientious of what is happening. Well, things continue being the same; in other words, we accept things the way they are and we continue. Now, if you notice, for instance, how many of the books that you read about [language teaching] strategies talk about the students in this way, with all their desmadre [messiness] that they have behind? ... Nobody. They all talk about a language student, but a student that I do not know how they, researchers [publishing company consultants and textbook producers] imagine [or have in mind]. For instance, simply remember, how many of the readings we did [in the TEC Course] talked about these types of children. None. They all talked about whether children liked English, that children like animals and all that, but none of these readings talked about children who have to work, children whose parents are away and who have to live with a strange family; I mean, they do not talk about [these topics]. [Many authors and teachers may think], “These
topics, I’d better leave them alone and not address them. I’d better leave them to sociology, to anthropology, have them deal with them; I do not care, I am going to teach this prototype of child that exists in my head.”

In the next chapter, I will intend to personalize this abstract, prototype child by introducing the children in the CEAR Project and by presenting their complex lives, language practices, and views towards English and Indigenous peoples and their languages.
Chapter Six:
The Children

Figure 17. Downtown School class.

Figure 18. Horizons School class.
I begin this chapter with the faces of the main participants once again. Their faces, smiles, and complex lives reveal their lived identities and move them away from the abstract child. In Figure 17, you have probably recognized Chucho in the top left corner, Laura in the top right corner, Hugo in the bottom left corner and me in the bottom right corner. In the CEAR Project, we took the children’s decisions seriously and respectfully. If you are meeting them it is because they want you to do so. In the first picture, you see only eighteen children; one face is missing, Tania’s, because she said no, and we respected that. In the second picture, you can see Claudia and Betty at the top right corner and me again at the bottom left corner. I debated whether I needed to include myself again or not, and I concluded that I had to because I was deeply connected to both classes. You will find only thirty faces in the second collage (Figure 18). The face missing is Rubén’s, a very shy teenager who preferred that we not take his portrait. In this chapter, you will hear more about the children’s lives, their practices and beliefs regarding language use, additional languages and each other. Unfortunately, I will not be able to tell you about each and every one of them. However, some of them will speak to you on behalf of their peers. My promise is to continue telling you, and others, about each of them, so you can learn from them as much as we all did in the CEAR Project.

In this chapter, I will describe each class through a “Day at the School” narrative. Each narrative will include the principal’s and host teachers’ voices combined with our classrooms observations and field notes, and stories about children’s migration, their language practices, views of their own Indigenous languages, perceptions about English, and accounts of their actual working lives. The “so what” is two-fold: first, for you to know the children and the connections of their lives to theories and other research; and second, for us to tell you how these practices shaped our praxicum from beginning to end.
A Day at Horizons School

It is a chilly October Monday morning. The 430 students, who all live near the school, gather around the plaza saluting the Mexican flag exactly at 8:00 a.m. “Mexicanos al grito de guerra,” the voices of the children singing the Mexican anthem bounce off the classroom walls. “Bilingual School” reads a sign on one of those walls, but Spanish vibrates in the air and all around the school. Where are the Indigenous sounds hiding?

There are more than eleven Indigenous languages spoken in the school. Almost all the teachers speak an Indigenous language. There is one who resists. He speaks, but he is ashamed. That still happens . . . I speak Zapotec and I can understand my colleague’s type of Zapotec, but I cannot speak like she does.

The principals’ words resonate in my head. The loud trumpets and drums played by fifth graders say good-bye to the flag as it is escorted by six female sixth grade students. The principal receives the flag and takes it back to his office where it will sit until next Monday. It is in that small office that he meets with teachers to create the school vision, which attempts to preserve Indigenous languages and cultures. Regarding the school vision, the principal states:
A lot of families already are losing their culture, but many families want this type of service [bilingual school], because here we rescue, we are rescuing it... the culture, such as the dances, the stories, the legends... All of that in order to keep it and write it from Spanish to the mother tongue.

Maestro Manuel’s thirty-one students head to their classroom in a line of navy blue pants and skirts and white t-shirts. Some of these t-shirts have private-school logos on them, which means that they are second-hand donations. Maestro Manuel walks beside them. He has walked next to students for twenty-five years, eight as a substitute teacher because he did not “want to bribe anybody to get a position” and seventeen as a regular classroom teacher. “Slowly,” says Maestro Manuel to his students in Spanish. He says,

Unfortunately, I did not get any students who speak Mixtec like me this year... Now I only have Zapotec, Mixes... I have... that’s it... Ah, and one, how is it called, Cuicateco, I think, eight students in total. We cannot understand each other because that is not my language.

As children walk by me, I wonder who the eight students who speak an Indigenous language are. It is hard to tell, since Maestro Manuel mentioned that only some of them speak their language freely in class
when asked to do so, some no longer speak it, and others are ashamed. He elaborated:

Spanish is universal and it depends on their homes, too. If they do not talk, do not speak it, well it comes from there, from their homes and their families. Maybe all the family no longer speaks and when they suddenly want to speak it, well, they get ashamed because they say they are Indians, just like that, they say that we are Indians the ones who speak an Indigenous language.

As the children start coming into the classroom, I observe them, wondering who has reflected on Maestro Manuel's message that they should not be ashamed or believe racist comments about their Indigenous languages.

But no, we should not believe that, because it is our natural language, we the Mexicans, because this Spanish comes from Spain... We were conquered and from that many cultures have adopted certain beliefs... but our natural language, we don't speak it, we do not use it... We should not feel bad if they say we are Indians. On the contrary, we should rescue our natural languages.
The children finish coming into the classroom as I wait by the door. The shy ones look away and others smile back when I say “Buenos días.”

I sit on a small chair at the back of the classroom close to the Enciclopedia board. A student who is late comes in timidly; he has to greet everybody now. The whole class responds “Buenos días, compañero. Ya no llegues tarde; ¡flojo! (Good morning, classmate. Do not come late anymore. Lazy!).” The class is arranged in four rows, and a boy and a girl share a table with two chairs. There are sixteen boys and fifteen girls. The class starts with a math lesson on millimeters, centimeters, meters, kilometers, and so forth. Maestro Manuel creates a chart on the blackboard with these terms, their abbreviations and mathematical values. Children diligently copy everything from the board. The class then moves into applying these measurement units to mathematical problems. Maestro Manuel emphasizes process over product. I wonder how much children understand since the class is all in Spanish. Maestro Manuel has certainly mastered the mathematical jargon. One hour has gone by and the bell rings, even though it is not recess time. “We have to rehearse for the Revolution Day Parade,” a boy informs me. We come back from the rehearsal and Maestro Manuel finishes the math lesson two minutes before recess. The bell rings at 10:30 and the students bolt to the door.

The sun has warmed up the morning. As I walk to the patio, I see some children sitting on a couple of stairs eating lunch with their
mothers. That brings back memories of when my mom would bring lunch to my brothers and me. Some children gather around a few women who are selling different types of food and drinks on improvised food stands that will disappear after recess. All the children run freely and unsupervised. Maestro Manuel has gone to eat lunch across the street. Some children run around with a torta (sandwich) in one hand and trying to tag a friend with the other. The school’s main patio is a cafeteria, a basketball court, a soccer field, and a playground all at once.

I recognize Maestro Manuel’s children playing basketball, and I join them. I am happy my profession allows me to have these moments. “¡Tira, Hugo! ¡Tira! ¡Vientos!” (Shoot, Hugo. Shoot! Cool!) I say as Hugo scores. I stop playing when I realize that recess is almost over. The children continue playing until the very last second, of course. The bell rings again. Recess is over and I have not heard any Indigenous words. Perhaps they came and went quickly as two siblings in different grades met briefly or when a mother said good-bye and reminded her child to come home as soon as school was over.

We come into Maestro Manuel’s class again. The children sit and relax in their chairs and I try to regain my breath. It is time for the Indigenous language period. I think Maestro Manuel has kindly modified his lesson plan, so that I can see how he works with multiple Indigenous languages. He asks the students to get in groups. They test each other to see
if they remember the words they were learning. There seems to be an expert in each group. Maestro Manuel mentions that each group must designate two students who will come up to the board, write five or so words in Spanish and the Indigenous language they are studying, and pronounce them for everybody. I notice there is a group working on Mixe and others working on Zapotec, from the Sierra Sur. Two boys come to the board to write their lists of five words. “Hugo, make sure you write and pronounce them well, because other students know this language, too,” Maestro Manuel reminds one of the students. Hugo pronounces the words a few times while other students are busily and noisily working on their lists. Maestro Manuel and other students attempt to pronounce the words. Maestro Manuel asks the children if there are other types of Zapotec spoken in the class and reminds students that Zapotec is spoken at the Sierra Norte, in the Valleys, and in many other towns. Jessica, a mestizo, Spanish-speaking girl, who later told me that she was very interested in learning Indigenous languages, comes to the board with Sofia, the expert. They write the following list, which shows how Zapotec peoples have translanguaged:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Zapotec from the Sierra Sur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cruz [Cross]</td>
<td>Crus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plato [Plate]</td>
<td>Guian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escalera [Ladder]</td>
<td>Scaler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesa [Table]</td>
<td>Mes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frijol [Beans]</td>
<td>Mé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culebra [Snake]</td>
<td>Mal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maestro Manuel asks them to start pronouncing the words and says,

“Pay attention, eh, because we have to check that list, because you are transforming it into Spanish (referring to the words cross, ladder, and table).” Sofía pronounces “Guian.” Maestro Manuel asks children to copy the lists, so that they can later compare the different languages. He asks, “How do you say ‘escalera’ Jessica?” “Scaler,” she replies. “I do not think so.

Is that true (looking at Sofía), scaler?” Sofía nods. “Wouldn’t you have another word?” he insists. Sofía simply shakes her head. “Okay, continue.” Jessica and Sofía continue. They get to “snake” pronouncing it “Mal.”

Maestro Manuel challenges them again and says, “But I heard that in other towns they say ‘Bala.’” Hugo responds, “Yes, teacher, but there are other towns [people] who speak differently.” “There are many towns [people] that speak in a different way,” Sofía also argues. “There is variety, OK,” Maestro Manuel agrees. The class continues with different pairs presenting. Some children repeat the words and start translanguaging: “Yo quiero comer ‘gui’ (I want to eat ‘gui’ [gui means orange in Zapotec from the Sierra Sur]),” one student says. Now it is time for Silvia and another student to share their list in Mixe:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Mixe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gato (Cat)</td>
<td>Chita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perro (Dog)</td>
<td>Hukj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesa (Table)</td>
<td>Cahiaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silla (Chair)</td>
<td>Puuy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frijol (Beans)</td>
<td>Zá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estufa (Stove)</td>
<td>Estuf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maestro Manuel concludes the class by assigning ten sentences in both Spanish and an Indigenous language. The bell rings once more at 12:30, and a group of students start sweeping and mopping the classroom. It must be ready for the afternoon session that starts at 1:00. As I am leaving, I pat Hugo on the back and say, “You are a very smart kid. You speak two languages, and soon you will speak three.” His eyes light up proudly and he cuts a smile.

A Day at Downtown School

It is 1:55 p.m. It is hot! Most Oaxacans are finishing work and rushing home for the two-hour comida (main dinner) break. However, some Downtown School children have walked from their low-SES neighborhoods or from their patrones’ (bosses’) houses nearby to get to school. Others have travelled by bus from faraway towns, while still others have come from their parents’ improvised clothing stands at the nearby plazas. Downtown school is an escuela vespertina (afternoon school) in
the mainstream strand. “The difference between morning and afternoon schools is the SES level of the children,” Maestra Perla tells me; she has been part of this school for seventeen years, fifteen as the principal and two as a teacher. She adds,

There are seventy-six students in our school. Around fifty percent of those students are Indigenous or from an Indigenous background, mostly Triquis and a few from the Sierra Sur, who come to work as mocitos (live-in servants) in the houses around the school.

Some children are busily sweeping their classrooms. They must come a bit earlier on the days they have to clean the classroom as a school chore. Other children play tazos (pogs) on the floor, run around chasing each other, or simply wait by their classrooms until Señor Marcial, the janitor, rings the bell. Maestro Carlos uses his own “bell”: he whistles loudly to get all his students into the classroom to start the day. As the sixth grade students run to the classroom, I notice that some look older. I remember now that Maestro Carlos pointed this out to me: “There is a great variety in ages. Some are ten, eleven, while others are fifteen. The ones who are fifteen have other types of thoughts, while the younger ones are still awakening. It is a challenge.”

I sit at the back of the classroom, right next to the Enciclomedia white board, which is hardly used. Students are sitting in four rows: most
girls are sitting in pairs in the middle rows and boys on the sides. A couple of girls are sitting alone at the back. As I count them, I notice there are seventeen children present (six girls and eleven boys) and two absent, one boy and another girl. I wonder why. Would the absent children be the ones who work until late at night? “Most of our students are Triqui. You can see them selling. We even have children who fall asleep because they are selling stuff at night around the zócalo. They are still walking around until one or two in the morning.” Maestro Carlos also echoes Maestra Perla’s words,

The problem is that they work. It is difficult for a child to be at their one hundred percent paying attention. Thus, there are moments when it is necessary to change the activity, having a ‘relax,’ a song... I met with the parents and they are willing to support us. However, I know it is difficult. The mothers work; the fathers work. They can only see [each other] at night. It is tough!

With his twenty-seven years of teaching experience, however, Maestro Carlos thinks he will be successful during his first year in this school making use of the tools at his disposal, including Enciclomedia.

The class begins with a math lesson on the addition of fractions: \( \frac{5}{6} + \frac{2}{3} + \frac{1}{2} = ? \) One student comes to the board to solve the problem. While others do the operation in their notebooks, a couple of girls are throwing
pieces of paper back and forth. I soon realize that they are “hard copy instant messaging.” The student on the board has added the fractions: 5/6 + 4/6 + 3/6 = 12/6 = 2. Maestro Carlos points out that they are simply reviewing this, so that they can get move to fracciones equivalentes (equivalent fractions). The whole lesson is in Spanish. I am not surprised, since Maestra Perla has commented that only Spanish is used in class: “All the time it is in Spanish.” Maestro Carlos assigns six more additions and then has students correct each other’s results. He then calls on three boys and three girls to write their results on the board. The class moves on to the lesson on equivalent fractions. Maestro Carlos makes sure that students understand what equivalence is: “Which is cheaper, inviting your two sisters to the movies together or inviting them separately?” Students start working on the worksheet Maestro Carlos just gave them. Some students work with the person sitting next to them, and the two girls sitting alone continue working on their own. While they all work, I look around and notice that there are Halloween decorations on the walls. It is the end of October, and the Day of the Dead celebration is coming. Mexican schools in their attempt to follow one of its basic principles, being lay—non-religious, have started to adopt U.S. traditions to get away from “religious” practices. This is interesting because the Day of the Dead is a prehispanic tradition adopted and adapted by the Catholic Church. It has
been an hour already and Maestro Carlos has finished correcting the math exercises with the whole class.

Maestro Carlos then sits at his desk to correct students’ history homework. He asks students to bring their homework to him and realizes that only three students have done it. “Homework was due today. I said that you had one day to do it. I assigned it yesterday. What is your excuse? Mexicans have always a thousand excuses, don’t they?” Maestro Carlos’ scolding gets interrupted by Maestra Perla’s need to discuss a matter briefly with him: “Buenas tardes, niños.” “Buenas tardes, Maestra Perla;” children respond to her greeting while standing up as a sign of respect. After Maestra Perla leaves, Maestro Carlos asks students publicly and individually: “Did you do your homework?” Some students shake their heads and look away while others say, “I did it, but I forgot.” Others say the same thing. “Oh, Mexicans always have wonderful excuses: ‘my grandma died;’ ‘my aunt injured her eye brow and I took her to the hospital.’ I cannot believe it. Yesterday, only five did their homework.” Maestro Carlos continues preaching and reassigns the homework for the next day. He starts reviewing the history lesson on the fight for Mexican Independence by asking students questions. Even though he does not use any visual aids, his use of narrative keeps students attentive. Maestro Carlos wraps up the review of Mexican history as the recess bell rings.
Most of the sixth grade students run to the basketball court. Other students go to purchase food from a woman who sells sandwiches, soda and candy. One student sits on the tricycle of the ice-cream man. There are no mothers around, except Alvaro’s mother, who is at school most days.

I walk around among the students playing in the patio. I hear only Spanish and no Indigenous languages, not even Triqui. I try to stay close to the younger children as I remember Maestra Perla’s words,

Sometimes, Triqui students speak in their dialect, especially the younger children. The ones in first grade are not ashamed. The older ones, like in fourth grade, are ashamed. “What are you ashamed of, speaking your dialect, son? On the contrary, you should feel proud of speaking two languages,” I sometimes tell them. “I can no longer do it. I am forgetting it,” they reply to me. But, I know that they can still speak it.

However, Maestra Perla’s encouragement contradicts the school’s de-facto Spanish-only policy and “mestizo students’ indifference to Indigenous languages,” as she also points out.

I move to the basketball court and start playing basketball with Maestro Carlos’ students. The basketball game is accompanied by some students’, both girls’ and boys’, use of swear words in Spanish: “Ora, tú pendejo. Pásala. (Hey, you asshole. Pass it.)” The aggression remains at the verbal level most of the time. Most children have developed a sense of whom
to confront and whom to ignore. As Noé and I jump to get the ball, it hits
Monse on the head. “Sorry, Monse,” I say in English for some reason.

“Noé says it to her, too. Benito, who is also playing and witness
the incident, tells Noé: “Se dice ‘lo siento.’. Perdón, sólo se le pide a Dios!
(One should say ‘I am sorry.’ Forgiveness is asked only from God!). “Yo
hablo cómo se me dé mi pinche gana” (I speak as I fucking please), Noé
responds to Benito. Roberto throws the ball and we all run to the other side
of the court. We hear the bell and the game stops with the last score.

Students slowly move back to the classroom.

As we all sit, Maestro Carlos starts deciding with the students who
will take money they have collected to Amado’s family. Why give Amado’s
family money? I wonder and realize that Amado is the boy who is absent
today. As if reading my mind, Lupe leans over to me and says, “Amado’s
father just died and we all chipped in to help them.” The class is very
respectfully quiet. Maestro Carlos then moves the class to another subject,
natural science. He reads aloud about “Galapagos and the Natural
Selection Process” from the Natural Science textbook that all children
have. Students follow along and answer comprehension questions posed by
Maestro Carlos. He then has the students complete a conceptual map on the
natural selection process, focusing on one animal they can find in the
text.
Maestro Carlos brings the class together. He continues reading from the textbook, but some students get distracted while he is doing so, and he stops at different times to get everybody’s attention. Interestingly, as soon Maestro Carlos tells the students that he is going to tell them a real story, they are much more attentive. Since the textbook talks about animal domestication processes, and dogs are the perfect example, he tells them about his brother’s dog, Napoleon.

A woman asked my brother to borrow Napoleon for a couple of weeks to impregnate her dog. They groomed Napoleon and the whole show. They took him to this woman’s home and he stayed there for two weeks working hard (students laugh). Napoleon accomplished his task and was returned to my brother’s. But guess what? Napoleon cried and cried. He was very sad. He had fallen in love. Who says animals do not have feelings?

They move back to the lesson on mixing types of animals and plants. They start talking about how humans have produced different seedless plants and students start sharing their thoughts about other seedless plants. A male student makes a comment about some females not having seeds. Maestro Carlos seizes the opportunity to talk about human reproduction and challenge “machista” beliefs. He says that yes, in fact, some women cannot produce ova, which may be what the student referred to. “Many times women are blamed if they cannot have babies; however,
many times, too, men are the ones who are responsible if they have weak sperm.” He starts telling another real story about his friend and his wife who could not have babies and how Santa, his friend’s wife, was blamed and judged by the community for five years. The bell rings, but students do not get up. The story has not finished. Maestro Carlos continues,

After five years, they tested Santa and she was in fact very capable of having kids. They tested my friend, and he was the one who was sterile. Santa did not leave my friend or anything. Santa was a santa (saint). They later adopted two kids. Okay, you can go now.

The previous sections allow us to see similarities and differences between the schools and classes, and the language policies and practices of the two schools. Both schools were positioned in similar ways. Horizons School, being part of the Indigenous strand, was the school for the Indigenous, the “dialect” speakers, versus the mainstream school fifty meters away that was for the “non-Indigenous,” the “mestizo” children. Downtown School was part of the mainstream strand, but was an afternoon school; hence, it was the school for the Triquis, the poor, the older and the “problematic” children as opposed to the morning school for the middle-class, the Spanish-only speaking “normal” children. Both schools struggled with the (post) colonial historical heritage that has positioned Indigenous peoples and lower classes as the other (Bonfil Batalla, 1996; Bartolomé & Barabas, 1998). In both of these schools, the use of Indigenous language was not part of the public domain. The school assemblies, the flag ceremonies, the schools signs, and displays were all in the de facto official language: Spanish. There was not a
clear policy process within the schools that articulated belief systems about language, which is necessary if schools want to resist *de facto* language policies that promote certain language(s) at the exclusion of others (Cummins, in press; Labrie, 2004).

In both Maestro Manuel’s and Maestro Carlos’ classes, the instruction was completely in Spanish, except for the “Indigenous language” hour that Maestro Manuel set aside to meet the “Indigenous language” requirement of the Indigenous strand. Both classes used the same textbooks, as all Mexican schools do, and had *Enciclomedia* as part of the tools available. Both teachers made limited use of Enciclomedia. Hamel (2008a) has argued that the textbooks provided by the federal government may work for *mestizo* students, but are unsuitable for students who are learning Spanish as a second language. Maldonado Alvarado (2002) has also argued that schools, through generic materials, have been part of the third conquest by which the state attempts to homogenize the country and erase (post)colonial differences.

There were some differences between both schools that impacted on children’s views of Indigenous languages, as we will later see. While Maestro Manuel taught Indigenous language as a subject, this was not the case at Downtown School, where this subject was not required. Having Indigenous language(s) included as an official subject in the elementary school curriculum is one of the major accomplishments Indigenous educators have achieved. Even though it was only an hour, it helped the children in Horizons School be more receptive to Indigenous people’s practices. Horizons School has attempted to work towards the preservation of Indigenous languages at a deeper level; however, most teachers, according to Maestro Manuel, can do very little to promote Indigenous languages due to the presence of “too many” languages.

It has been argued that bilingualism (in Spanish and Indigenous languages) and interculturalism need to be promoted in the mainstream strand schools as well, if Mexico wants
become a more egalitarian society (Schemelkes, 2003, 2004). Teachers at Downtown School, however, had never received any professional development regarding bilingual and intercultural education. The federal government, in its rhetorical attempt to promote intercultural education for all Mexican children, has developed professional workshops for administrators, teachers, and teacher-aides, but this professional development has never reached Oaxacan mainstream teachers. Consequently, at Downtown School, there was no attempt to promote the use of Indigenous languages.

Another difference between the schools was their faculty background and the number of students, which impacted on the teachers’ job stability. At Horizons School most of the faculty was of Indigenous background, whereas at Downtown School all the teachers were mestizos. In addition, two of the teachers at Downtown School, one of them being Maestro Carlos, were from other states in Mexico. They were hired in the 1980s due to shortage of teachers in Oaxaca. In the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy, it is encouraged that “School leaders recruit staff with the cultural/linguistic expertise and sensitivity to connect with students and community” (Cummins, in press). In Oaxaca however, the principals cannot control the hiring of teachers. This process is controlled by the teacher’s union. Teachers, based on seniority and other pecking order ranking systems, can get a position of their choice. Most teachers at both schools were teachers with many years of teaching experience who had earned the privilege of being in a school in the city or close to the city. There was also great discrepancy in the number of students attending each school. Horizons School’s population is six times larger than that of Downtown School. Whereas the staff at Horizons School know that their positions in that school are guaranteed because of the large number of students, Downtown School teachers know that their positions may be cut if the school is closed due to low enrolment. Maestro Carlos, therefore, is on the lookout for an opening at another, more stable school.
So far I have presented a snapshot of the two schools and classes. Before moving into the sections where I focus on the children more specifically, it is important to acknowledge the children’s struggles while sharing their life stories with us. Right from the beginning of the CEAR Project, we realized that children were entrusting us with very personal, sometimes painful information. When I asked her about her dad’s occupation, one student from the Horizons School told me that her dad was in prison. During this interview I faced a dilemma: should I drop the topic and move to something else, or should I ask more now that the student has brought it up. If I ignore it, she might think that I do not care about her problem and her feelings. If I ask more, I might make her uncomfortable. During the interviews and all the informal conversations, I was attuned to students’ body language, so that I did not trespass and make children uncomfortable. In the previous case, I kept asking, since I saw that she wanted me to know about her dad. She told me that her father had been incarcerated because a man got accidentally shot while her dad and other friends were hunting. Her father was wrongly accused and was in the process of proving his innocence.

In one of our first meetings, while analyzing the student’s interviews, Pepe captured the nobility of the children’s efforts in telling us their stories:

**Pepe:** The kids are very noble. When I was listening to them, I knew they were being sincere, because in their answers there was a little bit of shame, and they would say, well my dad is a mason or he sells bread. That shame reflects that it was true; if they wanted to lie, they could have made something up. In that the children prove how noble they are… even when questions reach touchy feelings about their dads [and families, children responded] “I do not have a dad” or “My dad is an alcoholic and I only live with my mom.” And the children answered the question. How much courage they have!
**Mario:** What Pepe says is absolutely true. In other words, the kids at their twelve or so years of age [may think], ‘This crazy man comes to ask me about my life and I have to confess [my personal life] to him…’ As educators, we need to value this and acknowledge how privileged we are.

In the meeting where this dialogue took place, we discussed how certain occupations are not perceived as “professional” and do not hold much prestige in Oaxacan society. This in turn may result in shame in teenagers. As part of the first interview with the children, we inquired about their parents’ occupations, place of origin, language(s) spoken and level of education. Cueto emphasized the importance of this data based on his reading of the “Fresa Project” described in Cummins, Brown and Sayers (2006). In the Fresa Project, students engaged in a unit of study in which their parents were the experts, which led to students’ valuing of their parents’ knowledge and occupations as agricultural workers. In the CEAR project, we collected information about parents so that it could be incorporated into our thematic units. I am not reporting this information here, but suffice it to say that only a couple of parents in the two classes had university degrees, and most had so-called “unprofessional” jobs. It was our intention to emphasize the importance of all jobs and the immense knowledge and expertise inherent in all jobs.

In the next section, I share our privilege of getting to know the children at a very personal level. The reason I want to tell you the stories of these children is to let you know how intelligent and how brave they are, and how their lives drove our praxicum in the CEAR Project. Indigenous and minoritized children are often regarded as needy and are placed in deficit model categories by educators and the general public without knowing the children or having exchanged a single word with them. Listening to their stories offers a way to break away from these deficit models that in many ways dictate their success or failure in schools and in society at
large. Even though the stories presented here are divided according to emergent themes, these
themes are not mutually exclusive; they interconnect in many ways.

Migration to Colonia Nueva and Oaxaca City

Migration has always been part of Oaxaca’s history. However, the migration phenomenon
has increased in the last 50 years. Indigenous peoples have been on the move, crossing borders of
towns, states, and even countries in search of better living conditions for their families (Cohen,
2004; Lewin & Guzmán, 2003; Stephen, 2002). Many of the children at the Horizons and
Downtown schools have experienced migration and/or its effects. In the CEAR Project, it was
important to identify the place of origin of the children since it connected directly to Indigenous
peoples’ linguistic and cultural identity.

Horizons School Children’s Migration

Zenén sits on the floor taking the morning sun. It is hard on his eyes, but warm on his bare arms. He looks serious and quiet, but quickly
engages in conversation with me. “¿Cómo te llamas, míjo?” “Zenén,” he
gives me his name. “Yo soy Mario, Zenén. Nice to meet you.” He switches
hands to continue covering his eyes. He has probably taken the morning
sun at this very same place since he was in first grade. “Were you born
here, Zenén?” “No, in Baja California. My parents are from San Francisco
Ozolotepec. They were working there [in Baja]. They used to go to live
there. They were living there for a year. I was born there. And then they
moved home.” “To Ozolotepec?” I ask. “Yes, to San Francisco Ozolotepec.”
“And when did you come here?” “When I was in second grade... Since I
could not read or say Spanish well, mostly Zapotec, my dad put me in first grade again, and so 19, I will be 19 [years old] when I finish [high school]."

Horizons School is located in an emergent neighborhood where recent immigrants have settled with their families. The principal at Horizons School was very much aware that families had moved to this neighborhood in search of a better future,

Every social group, Indigenous group, looks for something better, better education for their children… They see how we work, how we serve their children; that is why there is a great demand here for our school… not so much the building, the place, but the type of education.

Of the children in Maestro Manuel’s class, only one parent was born in the city of Oaxaca. Six others were born in different states of Mexico, and the rest in small communities all over the state of Oaxaca. All the children were born to Oaxacan parents, except three: one was born to parents from Mexico City, another to parents from Chiapas, and the third from Veracruz. The places where children were born show the diverse backgrounds they have and the recentness of their migration to the city of Oaxaca (Figure 19). Out of the 31 children, only six of them (Jessica, Luz, Yeni M., Christopher, Anabel, and Fredy) were born in the city of Oaxaca. Four of the children (Zenén, Bella, Samuel, and Giovanni) were born in two different states. This reflects the migration patterns of Oaxacan people. Zenén, as we just saw, was born in Baja California while his Zapotec parents were working in that state. The San Quintin Valley, in Baja California, has been one of the places where many Indigenous families migrate in order to work as jornaleros (Díaz Cruz, 2004). Three other children were born in Mexico City.
Both Bella’s and Samuel’s parents were Oaxacans also. Bellas’s parents were from the Mixtec region and Samuel’s parents were from the Sierra Norte. Many people, in both of these regions of Oaxaca, have tended to migrate to Mexico City, other Mexican states and even the United States (Acevedo Conde, 2007b). In the case of Giovanni, it was his Oaxacan father who had migrated to Mexico City.

The other 21 children were born in different communities around the state of Oaxaca, especially from communities in the Sierra Sur (Sofía, Jaziel, Gaby, Eliza R., Hugo, Rubén, César, Federico, Everardo, and Olga), the Central Valleys (Abel, Angela, Erika, Jenny L., Enriqueta, Eugenio, Diego, Daniel and Carlos), and the Sierra Norte (Elisa G.) where Zapotec language is spoken (Barabas, 1999a). One of the 21 students was from the Mixe region, close to the Sierra Norte, where the Mixe language is spoken (Maldonado Alvarado & Cortés Márquez, 1999). People in these regions have been suffering socially and economically, and this has pushed them...
to migrate to different places. Their migration does not stop in Colonia Nueva. Many relatives of the children have gone to the United States.

Migration gets in the way of children’s formal education. In the case of Zenén, he had studied first grade in San Francisco with a teacher who spoke Zapotec. He was reading and writing in Zapotec, but his move to Colonia Nueva interrupted this development and added one extra year to his education, as Zenén pointed out. He is not the only one whose age shows this formal education interruption. Typically, children should be 11 or 12\textsuperscript{18} years old at the beginning of sixth grade. Only 11 children in Maestro Manuel’s class were 11 years old and seven students were 12 years old. Eleven students were 13 years old and two were actually 14 years old. In sum, almost half of the class had had an interruption in their formal schooling.

**Downtown School Children’s Migration**

Roberto’s khaki pants and white shirt are always accompanied with a smile. His constant giggles contrast with his well-built body. He is new to the City of Oaxaca. He has his moving date perfectly set in his mind: “12 de marzo [2007].” He left his parents behind in his Chatino hometown called Cieneguilla, in the Sierra Sur. He now works and lives with the woman with whom his 20-year-older brother lived until he finished secondary school. Because he moved in March, he could not resume his sixth grade class and had to start all over again in September. “How did you decide to come to the city?” I ask him. Roberto responds,

\textsuperscript{18} In Mexico, children must be six years old in order to be accepted in first grade. If they are five years and 11 months, they are usually accepted. However, if they are five years and nine or ten months old, they are asked to wait until the next academic year. Hence, the typical ages of sixth grade students are 11 and 12 years old.
One of my older brothers went to Cieneguilla and asked me if I wanted to come here. I was not sure if I wanted to come, but then the next day he told me: “Let’s go, because it is time.” The trucks were leaving to go to Juquila [a bigger town where buses leave for the city] and “Let’s go,” he says, and I had not even gotten my stuff ready.

“Really?” I ask surprised. “Yes, that’s what he told me. And here I am.”

Downtown School, located in the heart of the city, also has a migratory student population. Migration was evident in Downtown School not so much from the children’s birthplaces but from those of the parents. Only eight parents were born in the city of Oaxaca, two were born in different states of Mexico, and the remaining 26 were born in different small communities around the State of Oaxaca. Many of these parents were not as recent immigrants as the parents at Horizons School. Hence, they had been able to settle in the emerging neighborhoods close to the city (see Higgins 1974, 1983, and Higgins & Coen, 2000, for an anthropological description of the many conflicts these emerging neighborhoods went through in order to get official land ownership recognition and other basic services). Having parents who had lived in these neighborhoods for a good number of years, many of their children were born in Oaxaca City.

Although not as diverse as those of Horizon School students, the birthplaces of Downtown School children were a window into their complex lives (see Figure 20).
Figure 20. Downtown School children’s birthplaces.

Three children were born outside of Oaxaca. Tania was born in Veracruz to Oaxacan parents. Nayeli was born in Phoenix, Arizona to a Oaxacan mother and a Mexican-American father. Her mother was from a Central Valley community called Arrazola. Nayeli only lived in Phoenix for a couple of years and then moved back to Oaxaca with her mother while her dad stayed in the United States. Noé, similar to Zenén, was born in Baja California while his Triqui parents were working as jornaleros. Both Noé’s parents are originally from San Juan Copala, a Triqui community.

Seven children were born in different communities around the State of Oaxaca. Roberto and Alejandro (Roberto’s nephew actually) were born in Cieneguilla, Juquila, which is located in the Sierra Sur. In this part of the Sierra, the Chatino language is spoken. Benito was born in San José Piedras Negras, a community close to the coast of Oaxaca, where the Zapotec language is spoken. Edgar J., similar to Noé’s parents, was born in San Juan Copala. Lupe and Heber were
born in two Central Valley communities close the city of Oaxaca, San Pedro Ixtlahuaca and San Jacinto, respectively. Malena was born in Santa Lucía, Nochixtlán, located in the Mixtec region. The other nine children (Crisanto, Guillermina, Edgar Emilio, Jorge, Alvaro, Amado, Carmen, Monserrat, and Rosario) were born in the city of Oaxaca. Three of those nine children’s parents were born in the city as well and the rest were born in different communities in the state of Oaxaca. In the case of Guillermina, her parents were born in San Juan Copala similar to Noé’s and Edgar J.’s parents.

Like that of Horizons School parents and children, Indigenous Downtown School parents’ and children’s migration has been historical and caused by different factors. Noé, Guillermina and Edgar J. ethnolinguistic background is Triqui. Many Triqui families have been forced to move to other states in search of better jobs and more peaceful living conditions. The Triqui communities have had a violent history due to abusive relationships with mestizo people. There have also been violent land ownership conflicts due to the municipal government’s lack of understanding of the Triqui land ownership cultural traditions based on kinships (See Lewin, 1999 for a detailed anthropological perspective of the Triqui ethnolinguistic group).

Roberto and Alejandro come from communities where Chatino is spoken. Weak economies based on agriculture and land ownership conflicts started the migrant process of many Chatino peoples, who use the city of Oaxaca as a springboard for migration to the United States (See Hernández Díaz, 1999, for a thorough discussion on Chatino people). Benito comes from a Zapotec community in the Sierra Sur. As we saw in the previous section, Zapotecs have migrated to other places due to economic problems (Barabas, 1999a).

As in the case of Horizons School children, migration has affected Downtown School children’s formal schooling. Roberto, for instance, lost the half-year of sixth grade that he had attended in Cieneguilla. Noé had also missed some schooling due to his travels back to Baja
California and Sinaloa, northern states, to work as a jornalero. Six children in Maestro Carlos’ class were eleven years old and another six were twelve years old. Another three students were 13 and four others were 14 or older. Lupe was the oldest of the class at 16. In sum, eight out of 19 in Maestro Carlos’ class have had interrupted schooling.

A number of authors have argued that the migration phenomenon causes different social problems, including the loss of language, culture and identity (Acevedo Conde, 2007a; 2007b). Others have documented the many challenges migrant families face, ranging from financial problems, lack of housing and basic services, and discrimination suffered more acutely by Indigenous peoples, especially Oaxacan Indigenous peoples (Díaz Cruz, 2004; Pérez-Ruíz, 2002; Stephen, 2007). Lewin and Guzmán (2003) have argued, however, that migrant people are not passive recipients of discrimination and that they have found ways to resist discrimination through the formation of different civil organizations. They also argue that their migratory lives are initiation rituals for surviving in new intercultural settings and a reinvention of all of their practices as Indigenous peoples in urban centers. Children have played an important family role in the new places of residence.

**Working Children and Complex Families**

Most children in the CEAR Project collaborated with their families by working in different jobs. I decided to use the term “working children,” which according to James and James (2008) has a more positive connotation than “child laborer,” which is associated with child exploitation. Moreover, Julián Caballero (2002), a Mixtec Indigenous educator, has argued that in many Indigenous cultures children start working at a young age in order to develop values such as responsibility and independence. Pérez-Ruíz (2002) argues that migration to big cities changes the family roles dramatically as compared to rural settings, where there is more communal support through the extended family. Oehmichen (2000) notes that the financial need
faced by families forces women to start working outside the house. Young children also contribute to the family economy by looking after the younger children and doing the housework, working in the family business, helping the parents with their jobs, and/or by getting independent jobs. In the CEAR Project, the children who simply played before or after school were the exception: only six in Maestro Manuel’s class and five in Maestro Carlos’ class. The rest of the children held one or more of the aforementioned responsibilities.

*Working Children*

*It is 6:30 on a Friday morning. The sun is still hiding behind the Oaxacan hills. At different homes in downtown Oaxaca, Amado and Alex are waking up. Lupe will do the same around 7:00 and Noé a couple of hours later. In Colonia Nueva, Giovanni, Hugo and Sofía are also getting up, so they can be ready for school.*

*Amado wakes up and goes to the warm kitchen where his mother has been preparing tortillas since 5:00 a.m. The sweet smell of corn fills the air. Amado sips a cup of atole that his mother prepared simply using corn, water, sugar, and cinnamon. Amado will eat a tortilla with salt, and some cheese if there is any. “I eat whatever my mother gives me,” Amado says. “Hurry, up, mi jito. You will have to deliver the tortillas.” Amado goes to wash his hands and face. He comes back to pick up the tenate full of tortillas and embarks on his daily journey. He knows the neighborhood well, since he was born here. He goes from house to house delivering the*
tortillas. “Doña Chole, aquí están sus tortillas.” “Thanks, Amado. It is ten pesos, right?” “Yes, Doña Chole.” As Amado is leaving, Doña Chole reminds him, “Amado, do not forget that I have to go shopping today. Are you coming to help me?” “Yes, for sure,” Amado responds. “Cool, I will get another ten pesos (C$1), today,” he thinks.

Alex is still sleepy, but a lot of chores await him. Like Robert and Benito, he works as a mocito (young in-house servant) for a Oaxacan family. He puts on the huaraches he bought in Cieneguilla, his Chatino community, and goes out to the patio. He fills a bucket of water to water the plants. He puts his hands inside the bucket and then puts them on his face to fully wake up. The geranium is the last plant to water. Then Alex grabs the broom and begins sweeping the patio. His arms move quickly. As he is about to finish, he notices that the newspaper is still waiting at the front door. He picks it up and brings it in. He may have a peek at the sports section when the señor is finished with it. He starts sweeping all the rooms. He’d better do a good job, so the mopping is easier. He is getting hungry; he wants to finish, so he can go and prepare something to eat for breakfast. As he squeezes the last drop of water out of the mop and wipes his sweaty forehead, he thinks of his mother and father, who are in the United States. “Two more days until they call me. I wonder what they are doing
now.” “Aleeex!” The señora’s voice interrupts his thoughts and his roaring empty stomach.

Lupe is in charge of the house chores, especially today, because her mother is getting ready for their big day tomorrow. Lupe’s dad does not get involved much in the family business because of his alcohol problems. Most of her siblings are in the United States. Lupe also immigrated to this country, but came back to Mexico soon after, since she never got used to it and because her mother had stayed alone. On Saturdays, Lupe and her mother sell clothes at the Central de Abastos, the biggest market in Oaxaca. On this day, people from the many communities outside Oaxaca come to sell their produce and buy supplies, including clothes. “Saturday is a busy day for us. We get up very early because we live about one hour from the market. When we arrive at the market, we need to set up our stall and make sure everything is tidy, so we can sell more.”

It is 9:00 a.m. and Noé is slowly waking up. It was a long night after waiting until 3:00 a.m. for his 16-year-old brother who works at a restaurant, so that they could walk home together. Last night is still a blur in his sleepy eyes. He was working until 1:30 a.m. making tlayudas at a food stand near the zócalo. It is tough for Noé, but he has endured long
working shifts, especially when he was a jornalero in Baja California for eight months last year:

I went to Baja California to work on the chili, strawberry, and cucumber crops. I went there with all my family, except my brother who works at the restaurant. At the fields, you work from 6:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. You get paid depending on the boxes you fill up. If you fill up 150 boxes of strawberries, you get 1,500 pesos ($150 Canadian) a week. I sometimes fill up, with my younger brother who helps me because he cannot get a job, around 100 or 90 boxes, so I get around 900 or 1000 pesos a week. But chillies are different; you fill up buckets and they pay you 5 pesos (C50¢) per bucket. I sometimes fill up 25 buckets. Or if you prefer, they pay you 80 pesos ($8 Canadian) a day, no matter how many buckets you fill up. It is tough work.

It is 12:30 p.m and Horizons School students are wrapping up the week. Maestro Manuel assigns the homework for the weekend. A lot of children will have to use their time wisely, so they can combine schoolwork with their own jobs.

Giovanni finishes school and hurries home. He puts on his cap backwards, which goes well with his outgoing personality. His family moved to Oaxaca when he was three years old and his father was able to
afford a piece of land in Colonia Nueva four years ago. He gets home and continues in the school mode to finish his work. He has a break and helps his mother to sweep and wash the dishes while she prepares comida (the main meal). After comida, Giovanni gets ready to help his dad in his shop. Giovanni’s dad is a blacksmith. He makes metal windows, doors, and stairs, among other things. His father is a math expert since he already applies the measurement and angles Giovanni is now learning at school.

Hugo, like Giovanni, has had a migratory life. He was born in Oaxaca City, but ten days after his birth he moved to his parents’ Zapotec community, San Marcial Ozolotepec. They moved to Colonia Nueva six years later. Hugo is thirteen and is the “man” of his house. “My dad is working in the United States fixing roads, and I am the oldest child. I speak Zapotec, but my two younger siblings do not want to learn.” Hugo helps with the house chores, but works outside on the weekends.

I help my uncle. He is teaching me how to work in the field. He gives me 50 pesos ($5 Canadian) every day I go to work with him. Most times, I go on the weekends, but when I have time, I go there the whole week. I buy food and stuff with the money I earn. Other times I save it, because sometimes we need to buy materials for school.
Sofía is one of the Zapotec experts in Maestro Manuel’s class, as you have seen. She lives with her parents at her eldest brother’s house. Sofía is the youngest of five siblings. His father works selling spices such as oregano and cumin in different neighborhoods nearby. Her mother is a lavandera (washerwoman),

She washes other people’s clothes. I help her a little bit. I also take care of my nieces and nephews. When I am on holidays, I go to work with my sister in other peoples’ homes. I make tortillas there. I wash clothes, clean the table, and wash the dishes there. They pay me $35 pesos ($3.50) per day and they also give me $10 pesos ($1) for my bus fare.

Children’s working lives are a testament to their active participation in their families. At their young age, they already play an essential role in their families. The portrayal of their working lives should not be taken from a pitiful, “poor children” perspective. They are young individuals who are developing values that will prepare them for their new urban and intercultural lives. As Claudia once said, what makes them “different” from “helpless” children is what makes them better. In learning about their parents’ and their own occupations, we learned about the complex ways of knowing they are developing at a young age. In the CEAR Project, the challenge for us was how to make use of these ways of knowing and the children’s “shameful, unprofessional” occupations and turn them into something we could value and use in the classroom. From their stories above, you have most likely inferred that the children were also living in complex family settings and engaging in family practices that go beyond those of the
stereotypical “western” nuclear family. I will explore these family settings in the following section with Benito, Roberto and Alex from Downtown School and Jessica from Horizons School.

**Complex Families**

The working lives of the children are directly connected to and/or embedded in family practices. James and James (2008) suggest that we keep two things in mind when thinking of “families.” First, they argue that the concept of family is both obvious and elusive, since families are different around the world and since family members do not stay and live together throughout their lives; hence, “the sharing of the same household space is not necessarily helpful in thinking about what the family ‘is’” (p. 57, italics and quotation marks in original). Second, they claim that sociologists are now moving away from the reification of the family “as a fixed social entity… [and that one should] think of in terms of ‘doing’ family life, rather than in terms of ‘being in’ a family” (p. 59 italics and quotation marks in original).

The notion of doing family became clear in the CEAR Project. Certainly, the lives of Benito, Roberto, and Alex were the most obvious cases of children doing family in different ways. These three children lived in households away from their communities and their parents. In the case of Benito, his mother was working in the United States and his father had remarried and was living in his community of origin. After his parents’ divorce and his mother’s departure, Benito had grown up with his maternal grandparents before moving to the city. Benito was now sharing the same household with his older sister and brother. In Roberto’s case, his parents were in Cieneguilla and some of his siblings were also there or in the United States. Alex’s parents were both in the United States. Even though Alex and Roberto were related, they had no opportunities to get together, due to their busy weeks; they could only be together at school and at church when they attended Sunday school.
These three children stayed connected with their families through telephone conversations with their parents, usually on weekends. They were also developing relationships in their new households: Roberto with the woman, a retired teacher, with whom he was living and also with this woman’s sister for whom Roberto started working later on. Alex started bonding with the older son in the household. He was a medical doctor who would engage Alex in conversation and who helped him set up the laptop computer that his parents sent him from the United States later in the year. Benito spent time with the señores while he worked with them at the pharmacy after school. These three children were doing family even though they were separated from their nuclear families. They all mentioned that they were developing their Spanish language skills and their knowledge at school, so that they could pursue different goals, such as going the United States and being able to contribute to their family even more.

These three children were not the only ones who were doing family in unusual ways; so were other children, such as Jessica at Horizons School. For Jessica, it was not easy to “differ” from the mainstream view of a “standard” family. Also, it was her responses that made me aware that my interview questions were positioning these children in stereotypical family structures.

Jessica is a very bright student. She is one of the most articulate students in Maestro Manuel’s class. Her oral presentations about pregnancy and other topics difficult for some students were full of insightful comments at her 13 years of age. Jessica is also very much interested in learning the Zapotec that her parents could not acquire in their respective Zapotec communities. We are reading a page of the book Family Pictures that portrays a scene at a fair:
Mario: Everybody is buying and eating tacos. Look! Do you see?
And everybody is there and there are many families there,
aren’t there?

Jessica: Uhm.

Mario: Do you live with your family?

Jessica: Yes.

Jessica tells me where her current house is located, and I continue]

Mario: Are you from Oaxaca?

Jessica: Yes.

Mario: Which part?

Jessica: I was born in, well, before we used to live in Colonia A.
A., which is close to Santa Lucia.

Mario: So you were born there?

Jessica: Uhm. I was born in my house.

Mario: Oh! What about your parents, are they also from Santa
Lucia or where are they from?

Jessica: Uh, my parents are from, my dad is from a town called
Rio Dulce and my mother is from San Andrés el Alto.

Mario: And, and there [in San Andrés el Alto] do people speak
an Indigenous language?

Jessica: Uhm.
Mario: Yes, eh. What about in Río Dulce?

Jessica: Zapotec.

Mario: And what is the name of your mother’s language?

Jessica: In San Andrés el Alto, the same.

Mario: Zapotec. Is it the same Zapotec or is it different?

Jessica: My dad’s [Zapotec] is a bit different

Mario: Do you speak Zapotec?

Jessica: Well, I am trying to speak this year, since fifth grade, because they [teachers] asked us to learn an Indigenous language.

Mario: Yes, it is a beautiful language.

Jessica: And this year, we are also learning.

Mario: You are learning, eh. And what are you learning, your mother’s or your father’s Zapotec?

Jessica: My dad’s.

Mario: Oh, your dad’s.

Jessica: My mom’s [quickly corrects].

Mario: Oh, your mom’s.

Jessica: Zapoteco del Sur.

Mario: From the south. And your dad’s Zapotec is from the north or what?
Jessica: No, the thing is that San Andrés [her mother’s town] is in another place, by San Pedro.

Jessica tells me about her siblings, two older siblings who are married, one older in middle school, and two younger ones and her moving around in different neighborhoods, including living with her grandmother for a while, until settling down on their own piece of land.

Mario: Have you been to your parents’ hometowns?

Jessica: Yes, only my mother’s. I just went there a couple of weeks ago.

Jessica goes on to tell me that some people in San Andrés el Alto speak Zapotec, but her mother did not learn how to speak it and that only her grandmother spoke Zapotec. Hence, I focus on the father.

Mario: Hey, and your dad, does he teach you any Zapotec?

Jessica: No, because my dad does not live with us.

Mario: Oh, he does not live with you.

Jessica: Uhm.

[I move back to the mother]

Mario: And your mom, did she study in her hometown?

Jessica: Uhm, but she only went up to second grade in elementary school.
**Mario**: And what about your dad’s [education] in Rio Dulce.

**Jessica**: Uhm. He went up to third grade.

[I move the conversation back to the occupations portrayed in the picture book]

**Mario**: This man plays [the violin]. The woman is frying tacos and the man is helping her. Do you know what your father does?

**Jessica**: Well, ah, uhm, uhm [shaking her head].

**Mario**: No?

**Jessica**: The thing is that, well, I have not met him, but my mother has photos of my mother and of them [Jessica’s mother and father] and through those photos I know him.

**Mario**: Ah, OK.

[We talk about her mother’s job as a cook at a family’s house. Jessica tells me how she also works selling balloons at one of parks in Oaxaca City to help her mother.]

Jessica’s story is revealing in several ways. First, my questions about “family” and “parents” were heavily loaded with stereotypical views about a family being comprised of parents, a mom and a dad, and their living together with their children. Second, Jessica saw the pictures in the book and interpreted my questions as something she needed to comply with. Hence, she told me what she thought I was expecting to hear. Third, even though I had been at the school for a couple of months, I was still a stranger in Jessica’s life, someone who all of a
sudden started probing into her personal life. Fourth, the whole interview was a journey in which my assumptions, and even lack of sensitivity, made me stick to my own agenda, gathering information about the children, which kept me from seeing that Jessica’s family did not fit my mold. In this journey, too, one could argue that Jessica ended up trusting me or simply having no choice but to answer my questions. I want to believe that it was the former, since Jessica was always very friendly to me and Claudia and Betty, and engaged in many conversations with us during the CEAR Project.

During the TEC course and at the beginning of the CEAR Project, I had emphasized the importance of starting the course with a unit about “Myself” (the teacher and students) and about “Our Family.” Throughout our analysis of the data we had collected in the first and second stage, we soon realized that “family” was a heavily loaded term. Hence, we decided to see families not as static entities, but as a practice that includes other people, “people whom students care about.” Hence our unit about “family” became a unit about “people I care about.” We would also make sure that if we taught vocabulary about “family,” it would go beyond the members of the nuclear family.

Benito’s, Roberto’s, Alex’s, and Jessica’s family practices move us to the next section. One of the main goals in the CEAR Project was the promotion of Indigenous peoples’ language practices and the construction of ideologies whereby language practices cause pride and not shame. In the literature on bilingual education, especially that about minoritized groups learning in the language of the dominant group (e.g., Mexican, Spanish-speaking children learning in the United States), authors (e.g., Ada & Campoy, 2004; Escamilla, 2002; Moll et al., 1992) usually recommend that teachers involve “parents” if they want to promote students’ first language. Benito, Roberto and Alex problematize this advice; we could not suggest to Alex that he go ask his dad or mother to teach him the words in Chatino that he cannot remember. Jessica’s parents’
not speaking or not ever learning Zapotec made us realize that the Indigenous heritage-
Indigenous language connection is not straightforward (see Blackledge & Creese, 2008, for more
on this complex connection). Hence, in the CEAR Project, we needed to analyze the language
practices that students engaged in.

**Indigenous Children’s Language Practices**

During the first and second stages of the CEAR project, it became apparent that children
who spoke both an Indigenous language and Spanish engaged in different language practices
from those who spoke only Spanish. This was noted by the Indigenous students themselves and
by the other students and teachers. In the case of Horizons School, the students who are bilingual
are Sofía, Zenén, and Rubén, who speak the same type of Zapotec, from San Francisco
Ozolotepec; Hugo, who speaks Zapotec from San Marcial Ozolotepec (these two types of
Zapotec are from the Sierra Sur and are similar, according to the children); Elisa G., who speaks
Zapotec from Quiatoni (Zapotec from the Sierra Norte, which is very different from Zapotec
from the Sierra Sur, according to Elisa G.); Samuel who speaks a little bit of Zapotec from the
Sierra Norte as well; and Silvia, who speaks Mixe. In the case of Downtown School,
Guillermina, Noé and Edgar J. speak Triqui from San Juan Copala, Alex and Roberto speak
Chatino from Cieneguilla, Juquila, and Benito speaks Zapotec from Piedras Negras, Pochutla
(Zapotec from the Sierra Sur). The following stories illustrate these children’s language
practices.

**The Language of Innocence**

*It is 5:55 p.m. and dusk is beginning to settle over the city. Women
wearing bright red huipiles (traditional dresses) are approaching
Downtown School. Their red huipiles keep them warm and seem to express*
the immense love they have for their children. The figures embroidered on their huipiles are silent, patiently waiting for people who can read beyond print to interpret their meanings of nature, death and life\textsuperscript{19}. It is 6:00 o’clock and Downtown School’s bell rings, announcing the end of another school day. Carmen is in sixth grade now and has studied in this school for several years. She speaks only Spanish, but she has learned to read the happiness and innocence practiced in the Triqui language. She tells me, 

There are young kids in the school and their mothers come to pick them up. I hear the women talking [in Triqui] with one another. I am sure they know each other. I can hear them while I am waiting for my friends, so we can walk home. I stay there and listen even though I don’t understand at all. Then their little kids come out and they run around their mothers and hug them. They are young kids; they are happy to see their mothers and start talking in Triqui.

Carmen’s words demonstrate that young children are happy to speak Triqui and that they and their mothers have a loving relationship. Carmen’s observations are similar to the ones made by Maestra Perla, who claimed that it is the young children who tend to speak Triqui more. As they get older, they start developing shame.

\textsuperscript{19} I have described the different meanings that the Triqui huipiles convey elsewhere (López-Gopar, 2007a).
The Language of Shame and Privacy

As children start growing up in the city and in Colonia Nueva, they develop another lens that allows them to read signs invisible to most people. Those signs float around in the air, are hung on school walls and projected on TV screens, travel in sounds waves or in people’s stares when Indigenous languages vibrate in the air; these signs carry the message, “Here we speak Spanish only.” These signs are not unique; many people make fun of people who speak other languages. Many children develop shame as they grow up in these contexts. At both Downtown School and Horizons School, children expressed this shame.

Guillermina was born in the city of Oaxaca twelve years ago to Triqui parents from San Juan Copala. She has grown up in a multilingual world. At home, she speaks Triqui with her parents. She also speaks Triqui, Spanish and a little bit of English while translating for her grandmother and/or mother at the improvised market Triqui people set up in the Labastida Park. A micro Triqui community is created from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. every day. The park is dressed in the red and other bright colors of the huipiles worn by the Triqui women and of the clothing they sell to tourists. At Downtown School, however, Guillermina hides her Triqui language practices. “Here in school, I do not speak Triqui. There are only three of us who speak it: Edgar J. and Noé and me.” Guillermina shakes her head to indicate they do not speak Triqui among themselves. “We feel shame, real shame,” she says as she stares at the floor. Guillermina remains quiet when I ask, “Why?” Noé answers the question for her. “I feel
ashamed,” he says with a nervous laugh. “Sometimes other kids make fun of us. They scream at the patio, ‘He is Triqui. He is Triqui.’ That is why I do not get along [with them] very well. I do not speak Triqui here at school, only with my mother, and my aunts. Sometimes they speak to me in Triqui and I reply in Spanish, too.” Alex, who speaks Chatino and recently moved to the City to work as a servant, also wrote in his letter, “I like to sing, to dance and to speak my language with another person, but what I do not like is when people make fun of my language.”

Rubén is a tall, shy, and gentle person. He came to Colonia Nueva twelve years ago when he was three years old. He is the youngest of the eight siblings in his family and looks after his mother because his dad has drinking problems:

Well, my dad does not work. He never listened. He drank and drank [alcohol] and even up to now he never listened. That is why he no longer lives with my mother. He lives on a separate piece of land, which is close to ours. My mother is not working at the moment because her leg hurts and one of her feet as well. Well, before my mother used to work. Once she left me with my eldest sister because she went to work at a textile factory in Sonora [a northern state of Mexico] for seven months. Now, I help my mom with our little store. We only sell beer. I sweep it
and make sure everything is OK. With my mom, I speak Zapotec and Spanish, but Zapotec most times at home. My mom also speaks *en idioma* [Zapotec] when we are on the streets and I reply in Zapotec.

Rubén is one of the “teachers” in Maestro Manuel’s Indigenous language sessions. “You are *de los meros, meros* (one of the best students),” I tell Rubén, and he humbly replies, “More or less. I teach Erika, Enriqueta, and Diego. I do not teach Hugo, because he knows already. Hugo’s Zapotec is a bit similar [to mine], but there are things that change. I understand some things [Hugo says], but not others.” When I ask him if he feels comfortable speaking Zapotec to Sofia and Zenén, who speak the same Zapotec, Rubén replies categorically,

*No! In Spanish, but not in Zapotec. Well, I do not know Sofia very well. Suddenly, she told me that she was my *paisana* (from the same town), but I did not know. I thought, “Could it be true?” But she says she is. She is speaking Spanish all day. Well, sometimes [I speak Zapotec] with Zenén only. I do not speak with girls. With Zenén I speak, but only a few times. In Spanish I speak to him mostly.*
Amado has attended Downtown School since he was in first grade. His elder siblings also attended this school. At Downtown School, Amado is following a family tradition, being the student with the highest grades. Amado fulfilled this expectation. He has even won competitions that enabled him to compete at the state level. Amado has grown up in a Spanish-only-speaking family, but has interacted with Triqui children throughout his schooling and observed one of the Triqui children’s language practices: “Here there are children who speak Triqui.” “When do you hear them speaking Triqui?” I ask. “When they say bad words. Who knows what they say in their language.” “And when do they say bad words?” I continue. “When they are fighting with other kids,” Amado quickly responds.

Lupe is the eldest student in Maestro Carlos’ class. She has attended Downtown School for four years now. She also tells me about similar language practices, “There is one student who speaks [an Indigenous language], but he only speaks when he wants to.” “When does he want to speak and with whom?” I ask. “He just, when he wants to say ‘fuck you’ to my classmate, he speaks [it], in his own way [language], but he does not say it in Spanish. He tells her, but in his own language.”
Even though none of the students reported this practice at Horizons School, Claudia and Betty documented an episode during their praxicum. Claudia tells us the story.

The other day, we were about to finish the day. Betty and I were busy packing everything when a student told us that Sofía and Hugo were arguing. We had noticed something before, but when I looked up, they were going at each other and saying things back and forth. I cannot understand Zapotec, but it does not take much to understand when people are that angry. I simply told them, “Hugo and Sofía, knock it off.” They packed up their things and left. Of course, they were OK the next day.

**The Language of Fun**

Noé is just 13 years old and has had a lot of experiences, as we have seen. His spiky hair and growing mustache make him look older, however. He wears T-shirts underneath his white uniform shirt and enjoys flirting with girls. “I have a few girlfriends,” he told Laura and Hugo. Another thing he enjoys is playing soccer. It is in the soccer field, while everybody is busy chasing the ball and screaming at each other — “Pass it!” “Kick it hard!” — that Noé finds a space to use his Triqui at school. “Sometimes Edgar J. starts fooling around when we are playing soccer and he sometimes starts speaking [Triqui] to me. And I reply back [in Triqui]. Just to have fun” “What do the other kids say?” “Nothing, I am not sure if they notice.”
Not only do Indigenous students swear and fool around in their language, they also help their mothers and/or grandmothers, who have limited Spanish, as language brokers. Sofía, Guillermima, Noé, Zenén and Rubén translated things for their mothers often. For Sofía, Zenén, Rubén, Hugo, Elisa G. and Silvia at Horizons School and Benito, Roberto, Alejandro, Guillermima, Edgar J. and Noé at Downtown School, their Indigenous language was still part of their life. For other students at Horizons School, their, or their parents’ and grandparents’, Indigenous language was becoming a distant language, other people’s language.

**A Distant Language**

Federico is a very gentle boy. He smiles with his eyes. He was born in Tierra Blanca Loxicha, a small town close to Puerto Escondido [a beach town]. His whole family (mom, dad and six siblings, one older and four younger than Federico) left Tierra Blanca when he was seven years old. They settled down in Colonia Nueva. His dad is not with them now, because he is working as a mason in a construction project in the Sierra Norte. “My mom works, too. She works with bottles. She removes the lids and puts the bottles in bags.” “Like a recycling company?” I ask. “Aha,” Federico replies.

“What language do people speak in Loxicha, Federico?” I ask him. “People speak Zapotec. My dad does not speak it. The only who speaks it is my mom.” “Has she taught you [how to speak Zapotec]?” “No.” “She has not taught you?” “No, because here we, she does not speak the language from there [Loxicha]; Only Spanish we speak.” “Would you like her to teach
you?” “Yes, because there are things that one can say,” Federico pauses and
thinks, “things that can be reduced more in the Zapotec language.” “So
you have learnt some words?” Federico elaborates:

Well, a few... some animals, some fruits and things like that. My
mom sometimes helps me with my [Indigenous language]
homework [which is] finding out the parts of an animal in
both Spanish and the Indigenous language; sometimes writing
paragraphs, stories, legends, and things like that. My mom
sometimes helps me with these things.

“Excellent, you have the best teacher at home. What does she think
about this?” I ask. “Yes, [she thinks it is OK], because my teacher says that
the Indigenous language is the most important language.” “And what do
you think, Federico?” “It is fine. [I think Indigenous languages are
important] maybe because that is what everybody spoke before.” “Yes, our
ancestors, right? Hey, your mother is very intelligent. She speaks two
languages.” “Yes, Spanish and her language.” “Would you like to speak her
language?” I ask. “Yes, both, too.” “Why don’t you ask your mother to start
teaching you?” I insist again. “The thing is that she works every day,” says
Federico in a sad tone. “And she is almost never home. She always gets
home at night, only at night. She works from seven in the morning to seven
at night.”
For Federico, *his mother’s* Zapotec language is a language that people speak *there*; it is becoming a distant language. Federico is not alone in this process. Bella wants to learn *her* mother’s Zapotec. Her dad only speaks Spanish. Eliza R. does not speak at all, but both of her parents speak a little bit of Zapotec. Yenni M. understands her mother’s Zapotec, but replies in Spanish all the time. Her father never learned his mother’s Zapotec. César does not speak any Zapotec. His father understands Zapotec only a little bit, especially because his mother did not want César’s father to learn Zapotec, so that other people would not make fun of him. Angela understands only a little bit of her parents’ Mixtec. Olga, Jenny L. and Everardo understand a little bit of the Zapotec their parents speak. Olga and Jenny L. say that other children make fun of it, and Everardo laments not speaking Zapotec.

Federico’s story and the lives of all these students reveal that our fostering of Indigenous languages needs to be problematized and contextualized. I again was questioning Federico’s lack of Zapotec development without understanding how Federico’s family and language practices were constrained by his mother’s need to work for long hours and their new lives in Colonia Nueva. Federico’s family did not have the community support that exists in the rural communities. It is also important to remember that parents’ choices to continue with their Indigenous language practices are embedded in the history of the conquests endured by Indigenous peoples (Maldonado Alvarado, 2002). Miriam, one of the student teachers in the CEAR Project, also commented in one of our meetings about her husband’s experience as a young Triqui:

**Miriam:** I think it important to understand why parents decide not teach [their Indigenous language] to their children. For instance, my husband speaks Triqui [from Chicahuaxtla]. He knows about our work since I have been listening to children’s interviews at home. He was telling me that his dad got really angry
when other people spoke Triqui to him. He would tell him, “Son, I do not want other people to treat you bad or to discriminate against you because of your speaking of an Indigenous language”.

**Mario:** Of course. In those instances, we too, who are supposedly [advocating], “Hey, let’s promote Indigenous languages… We are in favor of multilingualism.”

We cannot leave all that behind, I mean, [parents’ arguments:] “I do not want to teach my Indigenous language to my child because I was beaten, discriminated against because of that. It is a past that I want to erase.” Parents want the best for their children, so, if that caused them shame, discrimination, struggle, it is something that they want to leave behind. So we need to be careful, and it has been 500 years, it has not been a year, it has been 500 years of history.

In this section, I have focused on children who were bilingual or whose parents and/or grandparents were or had been bilingual at certain times in their lives. In the CEAR Project, we wanted to foster the appreciation of all languages in the classroom. Hence, it is important to understand how children from “mestizo” or Spanish-only-speaking family backgrounds felt about Indigenous languages. I focus on these students in the next section.

**Mestizo Children and Indigenous Languages**

In Maestro Carlos’ class at Downtown School, there were 13 students who did not speak an Indigenous language and whose parents and grandparents were non-speakers as well. In the case of Maestro Manuel’s class at Horizons School, there were also 13 students. As part of the first interview we asked students if they were interested in learning an Indigenous language and for what reasons. In Maestro Carlos’ class, there were six students who wanted to learn an Indigenous language and seven who were simply not interested. In the case of Maestro Manuel’s
class, all of the students, except one, Enriqueta, were interested in learning an Indigenous language. At the beginning of this chapter, I emphasized the fact that in Maestro Manuel’s class Indigenous languages were part of the classroom as a subject of study, while in Maestro Carlos’ class this was not the case. In the following section, I present short accounts of children who were interested in adding an Indigenous language to their linguistic repertoire and of those who were not.

**Mestizo Children Accepting Indigenous Languages**

*Alvaro* is a student at Downtown School. Alvaro is the only student in the CEAR Project whose parents completed university degrees; his father is a lawyer and his mother is an accountant. Alvaro’s paternal grandparents, who are retired teachers, live with him, too. Alvaro was a very articulate child, whose mother, according to Maestro Carlos and other teachers, was overly protective of him. She would take him to school, be there at recess time and pick him up afterwards. Alvaro mentioned that he was interested in learning an Indigenous language: “I admire the cultures that are originally from Oaxaca. I would like to learn Nahuatl. I admire the handicrafts they make.” “Who tells you about Oaxacan cultures?” I ask. “My grandfather and my grandmother,” he replies and goes on, “I like the beautiful huipiles they make and all that.”

*Carmen*, as we saw previously, was very much attuned to Indigenous language practices. Even though she has not learnt any of the Indigenous
languages spoken at Downtown School, she remembers some things about Indigenous languages from her textbook:

I have learnt some things that are in textbooks, how to say chilli, how to say water, like that, tortilla, pineapple. The only one that I remember is that one [word] you say “aji,” but I do not remember what it means. I think chili or water. That’s it. Those words were in my textbook in fifth grade. I have heard how other people speak [their Indigenous language], but I have never been able to learn it; I have not tried, either. I would like to learn, because it will be nice to talk to others in their own language. If we go to the Sierra, well, it would be better to be able to speak.

Christopher is a student in Maestro Manuel’s class. He is the tallest student in class, especially because he is almost 14 years old. He wears a hat like the ones rappers wear. Whenever he has a chance, he wears black t-shirts with heavy metal prints on them. His cool rapper look contrasts with his gentle personality. He, like many students as we have seen, holds a job as a blacksmith. He is learning from his father. He tells us about his Zapotec language learning experience and his desire to continue: “I have learned some words from Sofia. There have been words that I have not
been able to pronounce. For example, mesa (table), you say mes. I would like to continue learning to be able to communicate with other people.”

Four other students (Heber, Lupe, Tania and Monserrat) at Downtown School were interested in learning an Indigenous language. Two of them mentioned that they wanted to learn Chatino and another mentioned Triqui, which are two of the languages spoken at the school. Alvaro and Carmen made reference to Nahuatl. Typically in the textbooks provided by the federal government, students study the history of pre-Columbian Mexico. The Nahuatl language spoken by the Aztecs is usually emphasized. Students learn words in Nahuatl that have become part of the Spanish lexicon, for instance the words chile (chili), elote (corn), chamaco (young child), zacate (grass) and other words that were Hispanicized such as chocolate and cacahuate (peanut) (see Lope Blanch, 1967, for more examples). The prominence given to the Nahuatl language is reflected in Alvaro’s choice of what language to learn and in Carmen’s comments. However, as I have argued elsewhere (López Gopar, 2007a), these topics are addressed as if Indigenous languages were in the distant past and trapped in the ruins and codices displayed in museums.

In the case of Horizons School, 11 other students (Luz, Jaziel, Gaby, Anabel, Abel, Fredy, Erika, Eugenio, Diego, Daniel, and Carlos) mentioned that they wanted to learn or continue learning an Indigenous language. Some of them were curious about Indigenous languages or simply wanted to learn them to be able to communicate with other people. A couple of students mentioned that the Zapotec language was beautiful and connected it to pride. The phrase “our ancestors’ language” resonated in Maestro Manuel’s thoughts about Indigenous languages. The homework regarding Indigenous languages connected these students to their other classmates and to other people in the community. Several students mentioned that they
would usually ask neighbors who speak an Indigenous language for assistance with their homework. This was reflected in students’ accepting feelings towards Indigenous languages.

**Mestizo Children Rejecting Indigenous Languages**

Not all students were interested in learning an Indigenous language. In the case of Maestro Manuel’s class, Enriqueta was the only student who specifically mentioned that she was not interested in learning an Indigenous language. In contrast, seven students at Downtown School mentioned the same lack of interest. The following two stories present these students’ views.

**Enriqueta is a quiet girl. She has studied at Horizons School since first grade. She was born in Atzompa, a famous community in the Oaxaca Valley known for its green pottery. Enriqueta is the youngest of six siblings. Nobody in Enriqueta’s family speaks an Indigenous language, although she is not sure about her grandparents. “Would you like to learn one [an Indigenous language]?” I ask her. Enriqueta shakes her head. “No?” I ask to confirm her answer. She shakes her head again. “Why not?” I ask, to which she simply replies, “Just because I do not really like it.”**

**Edgar Emilio is the youngest-looking child in Maestro Carlos’ class. Due to his looks and “more childish” behavior, Maestro Carlos calls him “el niño de tercero” (the child from third grade). Edgar Emilio was born in Oaxaca City and so were his parents. His father left him, along with his older sister and brother, when Emilio was three years old. They have never**
seen him again. His maternal grandfather has filled the void. Edgar Emilio’s mother supports her children by selling plastic ware and trinkets at different tianguis (moving markets) around the state. Edgar Emilio has been at Downtown School for four years now and has noticed that there are Indigenous language speakers in his class and at school.

There are students who speak [an Indigenous language], Edgar J., and another girl in fifth grade [Nati], students in first, third, and second grade. I know that they speak [Triqui] because sometimes I see their parents dressed in red, some women in red. That is why I saw that they speak another language. Ah, and there is another in our classroom [Guillermina]. They [Edgar J. and Guillermina] speak in their language sometimes, because they also speak Spanish. Nobody in my family knows another language. Well, my brother and sister know some English because they learnt at school.

“Would you like to learn Edgar J.’s language?” I ask, and Edgar Emilio shakes his head. “No, I do not like speaking ‘lengua’ [Indigenous language], and I do not what it means.”

Edgar Emilio was not the only one who was not interested in Indigenous languages. Nayeli, Crisanto, Jorge, Amado, Malena, and Rosario also expressed lack of interest, “simply” because they did not like Indigenous languages. Similar to Indigenous children’s who felt shame
about their own, or their parents’ indigenous languages, mestizo children, who were not interested in these languages, were aware about the Spanish dominance over indigenous languages. They had also read the Spanish hegemonic signs that tell them that Indigenous languages do not give people much cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991); on the contrary, they take it away from people and connect Indigenous peoples with lack of formal education, backwardness, “exoticism”, and poverty. Children’s lack of interest was, in many ways, not a personal choice, but a societal imposition that has been constructed in Mexico’s history of inequality and discrimination against Indigenous peoples (Bonfil Batalla, 1996; Molina Cruz, 2000; Murphey & Stepick, 1991).

In the first and second stages of the CEAR Project, we were also interested in learning about how students feel about learning English. I explore this topic in the next section.

**Children and English**

When I introduced the CEAR Project to the two schools, I presented it as a project whose main goal was to foster the multilingualism and interculturalism inherent in Oaxacan society and stated that English was also a means to this end. Principals and teachers usually presented us to the children and parents as the English teachers. In many ways, children perceived us as such. Interestingly, a couple of students asked me whether I was from the United States even though I had interacted with them entirely in Spanish throughout the first and second stages of the project. During the first interview, I asked children whether they wanted to learn English and for what purposes. All 50 students stated, “Yes.” They all wanted to learn English. In the following stories, I address the emergent themes regarding students’ eagerness to learn this language.
English and el Norte

The phrase “English and el Norte” (the United States) alludes to the collusionary aspect of the English presence in Mexico (Pennycook, 2006), the historical relationship between Mexico and the United States, and the migratory lives of millions of Mexican and Mexican-heritage people living in the United States (Lewin & Guzmán, 2003). Pennycook (2006) argues that English is connected to the domains of globalization and the movement of people and goods across borders. As I reported in the contextualization chapter, Mexican people have been migrating to the United States since the 1970s (Acevedo Conde, 2007a). For many people from all over the State of Oaxaca, migration to the United States has provided the financial means to buy a piece of land, build a house, and/or give education to their children (Cohen, 2004). However, a number of authors have documented the detrimental effects that migration to the United States has had on communities and family practices (Acevedo Conde, 2007b; Stephen, 2007). English and el Norte were present in students at both schools.

Silvia is the only Mixe language expert in Maestro Manuel’s class at Horizons School. Her long, straight hair, tender eyes and gentle personality give her a peaceful and peace-giving appearance. Silvia was born in a Mixe community and moved to Colonia Nueva when she was three years old. As with Jessica, I assumed that Silvia lived with and had both a mother and a father as part of her current life. She told me about her dad, who was from Tuxtepec and who had learnt some Mixe from her mother. As we started talking about fairs, she told me about her
interesting life, which was connected to English and the United States at different levels:

I have not been to many fairs, because my uncles are no longer here. They went to the United States and I used to go with them. They are my mother’s brothers, one is 19 and the other is 25 years old. They live one hour away from New York. I speak over the phone with them. They say it is nice there and that there are very tall buildings. My dad is over there, too. He has been there for five years. Actually, I do not know him. He left [for the United States] when I was five months old. And he looked for us [in my Mixe community], but he could not find us [Silvia’s family had moved to Colonia Nueva]. And we went to his hometown to look for him and we met my grandma there and she gave us his phone number. It has been two years since he started calling us. I would like to go to the United States because I want to learn English and I would like to know and see [places]. In case I go, and if I do not know how to speak English [it may be a problem]. Here, English would be useful for middle school. [There were gaps in Silvia’s stories that came together as she told us more about her life.]

I have two younger siblings, one sister and one baby brother. They cannot speak Mixe, because my grandma died and she
used to speak Mixe to my sister. My siblings are from a different father, though. I do not live with them. I now live with my grandfather, and my uncle’s wife. We live close to my mother’s. My grandfather is a mason. When my uncle was about to leave for the United States, a friend of his came to my grandpa’s house. He said that if I went to the United States, I would be able to learn English fast because I can speak Mixe, too, and my tongue will not get stuck. “I think the man is right,” I tell Silvia. “You are bilingual now and soon you will be multilingual;” I add.

Silvia’s family story is not atypical. Family dynamics change when family members, especially men or fathers, move to the United States. In my own experience living in the USA, I witnessed how some men found other partners in the United States and never came back to their families in Mexico. Although Silvia’s story is not complete in accounting for what happened in the case of her family, her father’s migration to the United States resulted in her mother’s moving to Colonia Nueva, marrying another man, and Silvia’s losing touch with her biological father. During the interview and in other informal conversations I had with Silvia, I could sense how happy she was to be in touch with her biological father and learned that he was planning to come to her elementary school graduation. Silvia is just one of the many students at Horizon School whose relatives are in the United States. Elisa G. is another case.
Elisa G. is originally from Macahuite, a small ranch, close to San Pedro Quiatoni, a Zapotec community in the Sierra Norte. Like Silvia, she is the expert in Zapotec from the Sierra Norte, since she is the only student who speaks that language. Her sparkly eyes accent her always cheerful personality. Her family (mom, dad, and three siblings, one older and two younger than Elisa G.) has had a migratory life in search of education:

First, I went to an albergue escolar from CONAFE\(^20\). But my parents pulled me out and we moved to San Pedro. We were there for two years. Then, we moved to San Antonio [a community in the city of Oaxaca] and I studied third and fourth grade there. We moved to Colonia Nueva two years ago.

My dad works at a restaurant in the United States. I do not know exactly where. He has not come back since he left. He is saving money. He calls us sometimes once a week. We also call him when we need money and he sends us money right away. I do not think I want to go to the United States. I want to learn English to speak more languages.

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\(^{20}\) *Albergues escolares indígenas* are boarding schools that serve small Indigenous communities with a low population coordinated by CONAFE (Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo – National Council for the Promotion of Education). *Albergues escolares indígenas* are usually located in central Indigenous communities. Children come to these schools and stay there from Monday to Friday and return to their homes on the weekends. Due to the lack of trained teachers, *albergues escolares indígenas* are run by students who have completed high school only. With very limited pedagogical preparation, these students teach at the *albergues escolares* for a year or two and then get scholarships to pursue university education after this experience. Heidi, one of my former students at FI-UABJO and one of the co-authors of López Gopar et al. 2006, was a teacher in *albergues escolares indígenas*. To learn more about *albergues escolares indígenas* and CONAFE, visit [www.conafe.gob.mx](http://www.conafe.gob.mx) and [http://galeon.com/cditampacan/pagprogramas.html](http://galeon.com/cditampacan/pagprogramas.html).
Silvia’s and Elisa G.’s cases were common at Horizons School. Their lives were connected to English and the United States. At least 18 students mentioned having close relatives (father, uncles and aunts, grandparents and cousins) in the United States. However, no student at Horizon School mentioned having their mother living in the United States. Maldonado Cruz (2004) argues that many Indigenous families have moved to emergent neighborhoods around small cities where land is still affordable. He also argues that the migration pattern has been for complete families to move to inner cities location such as Oaxaca City and for only fathers to move to the United States or other bigger cities in order to save money to build a house or start a business. The mothers are left behind with the responsibility of raising the children, and they even work on top of that. English and the United States create ambivalent feeling in children lives. On the one hand, their father’s dollars help their family to build a house and continue with their education. On the other hand, their relationship with their father becomes a once-a-week or twice-a-month telephone encounter. Only seven students mentioned that they would like to migrate to the United States.

The connection between English and el Norte was also present at Downtown School. Roberto, Alex, and Benito had worked as mocitos, as we have seen. In the case of Roberto, several of his brothers had gone to the United States and come back at different times. Benito’s mother was in the United States, as were both of Alex’s parents. Two other students had their father living in the United States: Nayeli, who was in fact Mexican-American, and Jorge, who said that he wanted to go the United States to work like his father. In the case of Noé’s father, he had been and returned to the United States a few times. Two other students, Lupe and Tania, had siblings in the United States. I will focus on Alex, who said that he would not want to migrate to the United States and on Roberto who claimed that he would.
Alex has two different personality traits. He seems like a happy boy during recess and enjoys playing soccer and basketball with his classmates. In class, however, he is quiet. He is still developing his Spanish language skills. Maestro Carlos claims that “a Alex se le lengua la traba” meaning that Alex still stumbles while speaking Spanish. However, Alex was able to carry out the interviews in Spanish very well. Both his parents were in the United States. He had also left his grandmother behind in Cieneguilla, and he said he missed her. When we talked about learning English in the first interview, Alex was rather quiet,

**Mario:** Would you like to learn English, Alex?

**Alex:** Yes.

**Mario:** Yes. Why would you like to learn English?

(Pause 5 seconds)

**Mario:** Why?

(Pause 6 seconds)

**Mario:** Do you think it would be good?

**Alex:** Yes.

I wondered to what extent Alex’s parents’ departure to the United States has affected his personal life. Alex does not have the desire to join his parents in the United States. He wants to stay in Oaxaca. The long pauses could reveal ambivalent feelings about English and the United States. On the one hand, he may have heard from mom and dad that it is a useful language to learn if one goes to work there. On the other hand, the United States is the place, the entity,
which creates a separation in his family. As the year progressed, I noticed that Alex was receiving clothes, tennis shoes and even a laptop computer from his parents in the United States. This could change Alex’s feelings toward English and the United States.

Roberto is a more self-confident boy than Alejandro. Roberto’s Spanish oral skills are much more developed that those of Alejandro. In his letter to Laura, Roberto stated that he moved to the city to learn more Spanish. Moreover, Maestro Carlos argues that Roberto is having an easier time than Alex because he is repeating the sixth grade. Roberto has also experienced migration issues, but in a different way. It was not his parents who went to the United States, but his brothers. Roberto tells us, “I would like to learn English because it is a pretty language.” “What do you think English may be useful for?” I ask Roberto. “I do not know,” he says and adds, “Maybe to go to el Norte. When I am 15 [years old], I would like to go there.”

Based on my own experience, I can relate to Roberto’s desire to go the United States. My brother would come home from the United States like a Santa Claus, with presents for everybody. He would take me and my siblings to eat pizza; a huge treat for us back then. In many ways, the dollars he used in order to get all those “unachievable things” gave him an omnipotent presence from our perspective, and positioned the United States as a place worth going to, and English as a language worth learning. Roberto mentioned that one of his brothers had lived in the United States for five years and that he was planning to go back again. It seems
that this “pretty” language was associated with his brother’s success from Roberto’s point of view as well. Students at Horizons School and Downtown School connected English not only to *el Norte*, but also to foreign and U.S. tourists, “*los gringos*.”

**English and los Gringos**

Historically, Oaxaca has always attracted foreigners as investors, tourists, linguists, missionaries, and/or volunteers (Murphy & Stepick, 1991). Its year-round, spring-like weather, ecological, cultural and linguistic diversity, and architectural beauty are among its main attractions. There are no exact statistics for how many foreigners reside in Oaxaca on a permanent or semi-permanent basis, but they are always part of Oaxaca’s downtown landscape. Children at both schools connected English with English-speaking foreigners; eight students at Downtown school and 16 students at Horizons School said that they wanted to use English to communicate with foreigners and/or establish relationships with them. The following two children’s stories illustrate this connection.

**Edgar J. is a Triqui student at Downtown School.** He was born in San Juan Copala and moved to the city when he was very young. He has attended this school since he was in first grade. He is the oldest boy in Maestro Carlos’ class. He is shy when interacting on a one-on-one basis, but rather extroverted when he is not the center of attention. Like Guillermina, Edgar J. works selling traditional clothing in Oaxaca’s historical downtown. Edgar J., like several other students at Downtown School, attends the Centro de Esperanza Infantil, which is a grassroots organization that supports Triqui and street children with food, health
services and school materials through padrinos (sponsors). Edgar J. has learnt some English at the Center, “There at the Centro de Esperanza, I have learnt some English. Los gringos teach us. I know how to say from one to ten.” “How much are the shawls you sell, Edgar J.?” I ask. “Twenty pesos,” he answers. “You have to learn more, otherwise you will sell them too cheap to tourists,” I joke. He smiles.

Edgar J.’s family has developed close personal relationships with an American woman. This woman came to all the school events in which Edgar J. participated. One of Edgar J.’s main reasons for learning English was to continue this relationship. In his letter to Laura, he wrote,

I am a very happy child and I want to learn English to speak with los gringos, so that I can communicate with them, so that I can take them to a place they do not know to tell them about that place.

Anabel is a very cheerful student in Maestro Manuel’s class at Horizons School. She is friendly and easy to talk to:

I am eleven years old, but I will be twelve in May 2008. I was born at a hospital in downtown [Oaxaca]. I have always lived in Colonia Nueva and attended this school since I was in first

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21 With the donations from padrinos, Centro de Esperanza Infantil provides financial support to children for education, health and nutrition purposes. It also provides a space for children to use, with a library and computers. With the help of volunteers, mostly foreigners, the Center also offers various courses for children. Visit http://www.oaxacastreetchildrengrassroots.org/ to learn more about this organization.
grade. My father is from Pochutla and my mother is from Cuicatlán. My father used to speak Zapotec when he was a child, but since he moved to the city, he already forgot. I would like to learn Zapotec because it is a beautiful language. It would be a privilege to speak it. I am living with my sister now to keep her company because my brother-in-law went to the United States and he asked my parents’ permission, so that I can keep my sister company. I go over to my parents’ every day, though.

I would like to learn English because my siblings know it a little bit and my brother who is in middle school knows a little and he shows off to me, and I would like to show off more, right? ‘I am smarter than you,’ you know. It would be important to learn English, for when los gringos come. You know, because they sometimes come and talk; they talk to the kids and kids do not understand. I would like to know how to talk to them, right? Los gringos came to our school. They built those classrooms, the wooden ones. I would like to talk to them.

Edgar J. and Anabel’s life experience is connected to English at different levels. Edgar deals with English-speaking tourists on a daily basis. These tourists’ dollars bring financial stability to his family. Moreover, since he was a little boy, English-speaking people have
supported his upbringing through *Centro de Esperanza Infantil*. He and his family have developed a personal relationship with a *gringa* as well. In the case of Anabel, the departure of this brother-in-law for the United States impacted her life directly. She lives in between two homes. *Los gringos* have also been part of her education by building some classrooms for her to study. Judging from Anabel’s extroverted personality, she must have had a lot to share with *los gringos* while they were building those classrooms. Anabel does not want her brother to make her feel that he knows more than she does. She wants to learn English before she goes to middle school and show her brother she can speak English, too. Anabel’s brother’s learning English in middle school moves us to our next section.

**English, Middle School, and Self-Improvement**

At both Horizons School and Downtown School, children connected English to middle school, and to self-improvement and better opportunities. When I presented the CEAR Project to both principals, I was willing to work with children who were in third grade and upwards to replicate the practice in Asia and many other countries where the teaching of English as a foreign language begins in third grade of elementary school (see McCloskey, Orr, & Dolitsky, 2006, for examples about different countries). Nevertheless, both principals emphatically requested that we worked with students in sixth grade, so that they could be ready for secondary school, where English is taught as a subject. Hence, we worked with the two sixth grade classes at Horizons School and with the sixth grade and fifth grade at Downtown School. In addition, the new school reform in Mexico is targeting to teach English to these two grades.

Besides connecting English with *el Norte* and *los gringos*, children connected English to secondary schools. Many children expressed the fact that if they learnt English with us, it would help them have an easier time in middle school. At Horizons School, Olga said, “I want to learn English because it will be useful in middle school, and it sounds nice, too.” Samuel also said, “I
want to be ready for middle school. I know they teach you English there.” At Downtown School, children expressed similar beliefs. Many children in the CEAR Project had older siblings who had attended or were attending middle school. As Anabel mentioned, older siblings come home and taught or showed off their English skills to their younger brothers and sisters. Edgar Emilio at Downtown School echoed this, displaying what he had learnt from his siblings,

My sister knows English and my brother, too (“Oh, they know a little bit,” I say).

No, my brother knows it all, and so does my sister. They learnt at school because they had English teachers there. I know a little bit, like how [to say] hola, escuela, and ojo. Ojo (eye) you say /eIge/. Hola (hello or hi) you say /helou/ or /hI/, and escuela you call it /eskulu/.

The last theme that emerged in children’s reasons why they wanted to learn English was self-improvement and new opportunities for jobs in the United States and in Mexico. In Oaxaca, English is typically connected to self-improvement. During the CEAR Project, we were aware of and documented the rhetoric used by private English institutes to advertise their English language courses. Two national institutes advertise, “Knowing English opens doors to better professional and job opportunities” (Harmon Hall, 2009, my translation) and “Our purpose is to make sure your life changes in a radical manner, by giving you the main tool for your professional and personal improvement: mastering English” (Inglés Individual, 2009). Another international institute advertises, “Domina otro idioma (Master another language). Get an upgrade. Sube de nivel” (Berlitz, 2009, English and Spanish in original). Pennycook (2006) argues that the rhetoric used to advertise English as the language to learn is connected to its delusionary and exclusionary effects. In the case of Oaxaca, all these schools were advertising English as way to “get an upgrade,” change people’s lives “radically,” and as the “main tool for improvement.” Of course, this upgrade requires financial investment, which most people in
Oaxaca cannot afford: the exclusionary effect of English. Concerning the delusionary effect, most jobs in Oaxaca that require some level of English do not offer much higher salaries compared to other jobs that do not require English. I pointed out before, for instance, that English teachers’ hourly salary is about 50 pesos ($5 Canadian). Nonetheless, students at both schools connected English to self-improvement and better job opportunities, based on their own realities and family experiences.

At Horizons School, children connected self-improvement in English to the United States. Luz, whose sister and cousin were working in the United States, said the following, “I would like to learn English, so when I go to the United States, I will know English. I want to learn English to work there. Superarme (Improve myself). I want to be a doctor.” Hugo echoed Luz’s comment:

I love English. I have asked my dad [who is working in the United States] to send me a book or a disc, so that I can learn. I want to self-improve and go over there, and you can find more and better jobs, right? I would like to go to the United States. In fact, I am planning on going when my dad comes back and I will go with him to work, to buy the things that we need.

Whereas students at Horizons School connected self-improvement and job opportunities to the United States, students at Downtown Schools connected English to opportunities in downtown Oaxaca. Crisanto said, “I would like to learn English because it gives you more opportunities. Most people know only English and do not know other languages. I would use English to get into schools and for jobs and all that.” Alvaro had similar views:

I like English. I would like to learn, but I know it is a bit difficult, but you also learn more and may get a better job. I would like to be like my dad, who knows
English, because sometimes customers from the United States come and all that, and my dad knows English and he knows how to translate.

Malena, whose brother was working as a hotel receptionist, also commented about better jobs, I like English. I would like to learn it to be able to, I mean, to be able to work at hotels. What they usually require at hotels is that, English. I would also like to learn to able to communicate with other people, with the foreigners.

Moreover, Noé, Guillermina and Edgar J. added that they use English to sell their products.

**Our Complex Responsibilities**

In this chapter, I have presented the realities we found in the two schools. At Horizons School, Indigenous languages were part of the classroom, at least for a one-hour period a week. At Downtown School, this was not the case. At both schools, an unwritten Spanish-only policy was in force. Most Indigenous children’s language practices were part of the private realm. Children expressed love, anger, and had fun in Indigenous languages privately. Speaking publicly brought shame to them. For some of them, Indigenous language practices were not part of their lives anymore, due to complex historical ideologies and their new migratory lives. At both schools all of the children’s families had experienced migration and its many consequences. These migratory lives created complex family structures in which most children played a key role as working members.

Children at both schools presented different patterns in their views about Indigenous languages and similar patterns in their views about English. At Horizons School, all children, except one, wished to learn Indigenous languages. At Downtown School however, there were seven students who were not interested in learning Indigenous languages. All children wished to learn English and connected this language to migration to the United States, *los gringos,*
secondary school and self-improvement. In the previous chapter, I also observed that Oaxacan people who speak English might be considered to be *fresas* and/or *malinchistas*. In our particular case as English teachers, we were perceived as such and as incompetent non-native speakers as well.

As we were to embark on the praxicum part of the CEAR Project, we were aware of this complex reality and that we needed to be responsible and reflective. We wanted to foster the multilingualism and interculturalism inherent in teaching English critically. We were also aware that our goal could be problematic. None of us knew how to speak an Indigenous language; they were part of our distant pasts. Also, parents had decided not to teach Indigenous language to their children due to historical ideologies that have positioned Indigenous peoples in deficit models. I conclude this chapter with a segment from one of our meetings after we had analyzed the data collected in the first stage of the CEAR Project and revised the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy and tenets of critical pedagogies and language learning in order to prepare our praxicum. We were discussing how discrimination and prejudice, but also dreams and possibilities might be created through our language practices.

**Mario:** Language carries things, fully entrenched, in very subtle ways. Our [Spanish] language carries many pejorative things and ideas and the English language that we are using might as well. At UABJO we are seen as *fresas*; we need to be careful because it may not be true, but the use that we are making of English might mean that English is spoken only by *fresas* and the upper classes that have money to afford a bilingual school. [We need to reflect about] people who start using English words to show off and about certain beliefs: “If you are not educated and you do not speak English you are a *naco* [pejorative term used to refer to people who are poor and “informally educated”]” and/or Indigenous
people”); “If you do not understand my English, go to Harmon Hall [an English school]; there your problem of being a naco will be solved” (student teachers laugh). Hence, we need to be careful when teaching English about the messages that we send. English is not just another language, and it is not going to be easy because English is here and there and already has cultural premises; children already identify English and connect it to certain things.

**Claudia:** That is why I was saying the other day that, in a way, we are going against everything that has already been established in our society… we cannot just tell children [English] is just another language.

**Miriam:** And we do not know Indigenous languages. If we spoke Zapotec, we could speak to them in Zapotec, and [children may think]: “Oh, the teacher speaks a language, an Indigenous language.” I mean, they could admire us and [they may think]: “I would also like to learn.” But if we speak in English, logically, they will say, “Hey, I want to learn English.” But what do we do to speak Zapotec [in the praxicum] if we do not know it? (Miriam giggles).

**Cueto:** We could take an intensive course before, a …

(We all laugh.)

**Cueto:** … day course.

**Claudia:** I am not as fast learner as you [Cueto]. You [can say that] because you are a walking dictionary.

**Mario:** I think we’d better drop it and look for another topic.

(We all laugh.)

**Claudia:** No, really, what I am saying is that we have a lot of work to do because there are a lot of structures in place. We are dragging a long tail from our cultural
heritage, which is established in society, and we are coming with such innovations, it is going to be complex.

**Mario:** And what is going to happen next?

**Eliza:** Like you said yesterday [Juan], we are simply showing a new way to see things, to do things. It is up to them [teachers and children], to see how they would take it and they will decide. It is our intention that matters.

**Chucho:** With our intention is enough.

(We all laugh.)

**Mario:** I think that what we have left is to try to be honest, right? To say and present our agenda open, wide open; this is what we want to do and well…

**Miriam:** And do not ask [about what we are doing].

(We all laugh.)

**Miriam:** Do not ask.

**Claudia:** We are not authorized to tell.

**Mario:** I think that we have to emphasize what our [introductory] letters say, that we are not just teaching English, but that our main goal is to foster multilingualism and teach content through English. However, at the same time I think it would be too naïve, rather foolish in our part, if we ignored all the weight that English has in Mexico. Bottom line, we should try to feel that we are intelligent [and proud Oaxacans] through English, and that we are there to learn from the children.
Chapter Seven:  
Praxicum and Change

The First Day of Praxicum at Horizons School

Claudia and Betty get off the FI-UABJO van. They carry a big box full of books, folders, paper, markers, crayons — and many different emotions. As they make their way through the children running around the basketball court, they go over their lesson plan for their first day. It will be Claudia’s turn for the first 15 sessions, and Betty will finish the praxicum. They have already jointly planned a complete thematic unit and will start on the second one soon. The first unit is on “Myself and the People I Care About” and the other will be on 6th grade content, which they will later decide on with Maestro Manuel. Little do they know they will only have time for the first unit.

Claudia begins by introducing herself and introducing Betty. The students jokingly go, “Oooh,” and someone says in English, “Oh, my God.”22 Maestro Manuel welcomes Claudia and Betty, asks his students to respect and follow Claudia’s and Betty’s directions as if they were his, and leaves the class. Claudia and Betty have officially begun their praxicum.

They ask students to write their names on a sheet of paper to be set on their tables. Once the students have done this, Claudia says, “We will teach

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22 Most of the time the student teachers and the children spoke in Spanish, which I have translated. To indicate the instances in which they spoke in English, I will write the word and/or sentences in bold to differentiate them from my translations.
you English and you will teach us maybe an Indigenous language, a bit more Spanish, or whatever you want to teach us.” All the children respond, “Si.” Claudia teaches the students the first word in English, “Listen.” She tells them that there will always be books on the desk (in English, in Spanish, and bilingual books—English/Spanish and Spanish/Zapotec from the Isthmus) for them to read when they finish an activity. Claudia introduces the classroom rules with David Shannon’s book David Goes to School, which she reads first in Spanish and then in English:

David’s teacher always said...

No, David!
No yelling.
No pushing.
No running in the halls.

Claudia finishes the book. She then tells the students that they will have rights and rules in the classroom and has them brainstorm some of these in small groups. The students come up with rules (e.g., do not fight in the classroom, pay attention in class, and raise your hand to participate or to ask something) and rights (e.g., to ask, to be respected, and to participate in class), which they report in Spanish and Claudia records in English and Spanish on a big piece of paper. She goes over the rules in both languages with the students.

Once the rules and rights have been set, Claudia, with Betty’s help, distributes folders for the students to start their class portfolio. The first thing students will include is a letter about things they like in general,
what they expect from the class, why they want to learn English, and anything else they may want to add. Betty and Claudia read their own letters, written in Spanish. Betty starts:

My name is Beatriz Adriana Lambert Gómez. I am a university student and will be an English teacher. I am from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. I live here in Oaxaca with my brother and my cousin. I like to draw. I like to play. I like to cook and meet many people. I love teaching and would like to learn an Indigenous language. That is something I would love to do, learn an Indigenous language. I hope that since I will be helping you learn English, you will help me learn an Indigenous language.

Claudia reads hers:

My name is Claudia. I am studying to become a teacher. I want to learn many languages: Zapotec, Mixtec, Chatino, French, and English. I have two sisters and one brother. My mother is a cook at a restaurant. I like to read and dance. I love tacos. I do not like it when people yell at me or tell me bad words. I hope to be a good teacher and learn a lot from my students.

The children write their own letters and place them in their folder.

Elisa G.’s letter in Spanish reads:
Hi. My name is Elisa G. and I like it very much having teachers like Claudia and Betti and I would like to know them more, I want you to know that I like puppies and that my favorite sport is basketball and I love to play it. I live with my mother and my siblings and I would like to learn English to teach it to others and I would like to finish all my studies. I like to read books about stories, legends, proverbs and myths and I hope I can teach you Zapotec and [that] you will teach English. I believe it is nice to speak English and other languages. And I would like to be a singer, that is all I can say. Also I have two friends who I love very much: Silvia and Gabriela.

Elisa G. Good-bye but not forever.

Claudia begins wrapping up the class with a poem in Spanish from the anthology *Días y Días de Poesía*, by Alma Flor Ada (1991):

*Ser Bilingüe (To be bilingual)*

*Te lo digo yo y no hay engaño:* (I am telling you and I am not lying!)

*Ser bilingüe es una dicha que nos dura todo el año.* (Being bilingual is a blessing that lasts us all year long)

After the poem, Claudia talks about bilingualism and multilingualism with the students:

I am bilingual in Spanish and English. Here many of you are bilingual, right? You speak Spanish and are learning another
language. (Some students say, “No”). Of course you are. I know that someone speaks Zapotec (“Zenén,” says a student). Who else? (“Rubén, Sofía,” others call out). Is there anyone else who speaks another language (“Mixe,” says Silvia). They are already bilingual. We all know Spanish and we will be learning English. Isn’t right, Sofía, that you will teach us [Zapotec]? Right, Zenén, you will teach us? We will learn Indigenous languages (students giggle). We will be also reading a lot of books, because we like reading a lot and we hope you will, too. If the books are only in English, we will try to understand them by looking at the pictures, like we did with “David.” OK, now, I know that tomorrow there are no classes, so we will see you next Thursday. I will teach one more word in English, “homework.” I want you to think of three phrases that you would like to learn how to say in English. They could be phrases about the classrooms or outside, too. For example, I would like to learn how to say, “How are you doing?” in Zapotec. Just any phrase.

Claudia goes over the words they have used in English today. Students say, “listen” “respect,” “rights,” and “good.” “That is true. I am always saying, ‘good,’ aren’t I?” says Claudia, thinking aloud.
Claudia and Betty collect all the folders and take the pieces of paper they taped off the walls. The posters have to come down, since another class from the afternoon school will use this classroom in the afternoon. Some students start cleaning the tables, sweeping and mopping the floor. Claudia and Betty say, “Good-bye, nos vemos la próxima semana” (we’ll see you next week). The children wave good-bye.

The First Day of Praxicum at Downtown School

Laura, Hugo, and Chucho knock on the big metal door. Señor Marcial, the school janitor, opens the door and lets them in. Laura is a bit more nervous. Even though the three of them will teach the first class, Laura will be in charge of the first 15 sessions, then Hugo, and finally Chucho. Laura and Hugo have their thematic units prepared. Laura wants to focus on “What I and Someone I Care about Can Do” and Hugo on “My Community.” Chucho is still deciding whether to teach a topic on history or a topic on “Math and Selling.” Maestro Carlos is already in the classroom and welcomes them.

Children start arriving little by little. This is the first day they have to arrive 30 minutes earlier. Almost everybody is here, so Laura starts the class by welcoming the students. While they are waiting for the others to arrive, she asks them to copy the classroom rules that she has written on a big piece of paper. Some of the rules, written in both English and Spanish, are “Be punctual,” “Be respectful,” “You must do your homework,” and “Be
quiet when someone else is participating.” By the time everybody has
finished copying the rules, all the students have arrived.

Hugo introduces the game “Number Basket.” He asks the students to
push the tables to the sides, so they can make a big circle with chairs in the
middle of the classroom. He numbers the students off, “one,” “two,” “one,”
“two.” All students sit down knowing their number. When Hugo calls out
“two,” the twos need to get up and find another chair. While they do that,
Laura takes one of the chairs and one of the students is left chairless. Hugo
explains that the chairless student will have to introduce himself, say his
age, and state why he wants to learn English. Edgar Emilio loses his chair
first, then Nayelli, Malena, and then Laura, the student teacher. Hugo
invites all the students to ask Laura questions. Hugo asks Laura to answer
in English. “¿Cómo se llama?” children ask, and Laura responds, “My
name is Laura.” “¿Cuántos años tiene?” asks another student using the
“usted” verb conjugation again, showing respect to Laura. “I am 22 years
old.” “¿Qué les va a enseñar a los niños?” Hugo asks Laura. “I am going to
teach you how to say all the great things you can do in English. We will
learn the personal and possessive pronouns in English.” Laura repeats this
in Spanish and makes sure the students understand what pronouns are.
Hugo uses this opportunity to introduce Chucho, who is observing the
game. Hugo tells the students, “Let’s have your other teacher introduce
himself in English, too.” Chucho begins without using his nickname, “My
name is Jesús. You can call me Chucho.” Benito quickly ventures to interpret Chucho’s first statement, “Dice que se llama Jesús.” “I am 21 years old. I am going to be your teacher at the end of the year” (the students giggle, clueless). Hugo helps them decipher Chucho’s statements.

The game continues. It is Amado’s turn. Hugo now asks in English, “What is your name?” “Amado,” he responds. “How old are you?” “Mhm?” he responds and some students giggle along with Amado. “¿Cuántos años tienes?” Hugo asks. “Eleven,” Amado responds, too. “Do you speak an Indigenous language?” Hugo asks, and Amado shakes his head. “Because we also, well, we want to learn other languages,” Hugo says, and he adds, “For instance, if someone speaks another language, we would like to learn [it]. Does anyone among those who have already introduced themselves speak another language?” Heber, who speaks only Spanish and likes to participate in class, says, “Zapoteco, Mixteco.” Laura adds, “Because we want to learn, too.” “Yes, we want to learn, too,” Chucho echoes. “Chatino, says Roberto,” calls out one student. “Oh, yes, you will be the teacher of Chatino,” Hugo responds, looking at Roberto. “Benito, what do you speak?” asks Hugo. “Zapoteco,” answers Benito. “Oh, yes, great, because we will also work with other languages,” Hugo tells him. “Guillermina, too,” says Edgar J. “Yes, Guillermina,” accuses Edgar Emilio. “Not me, him, Edgar J.,” says Guillermina giggling, blushing, and pointing her finger at Edgar J. “Both. They both do, teacher,” Benito calls out. “Do not feel ashamed,
because it is very cool speaking another [language]. Honestly, I do want to learn another language,” Hugo says.

Hugo continues with the activity, asking students to give their name and age, prompted by his questioning in English. He also has students say one of the classroom rules aloud and state whether or not they speak a language other than Spanish. Lupe, Nadia, and Jorge provide their information and say that they do not speak another language. Then it is Benito’s turn, then Roberto’s and Noé’s. Hugo states that they will be the Zapotec, Chatino and Triqui teachers, respectively, with the help of the others who speak the same language. It is Guillermina’s turn. Hugo asks her, “What is your name?” to which Guillermina responds with a full English sentence, “My name is Guillermina,” being the first who dares to try. Maestro Carlos, who had been sitting quietly at the back of the class says, “¡Quiubo!” meaning, “Look, you guys.” Hugo continues asking her, “How old are you?” and Guillermina replies in English once more “I am fine.” Hugo does not stop to clear up her misunderstanding but continues asking her, “Would you like to learn English?” “What?” Guillermina responds, not understanding the question this time, but having the appropriate word to say “I did not understand that.” “¿Quieres aprender inglés?” Hugo translates in Spanish for her. Guillermina becomes shy this time and other students respond for her “Yeah. Yeah.” Hugo makes sure everybody has been introduced.
Laura introduces another game, “Broken Phone Line.” This time, she has the students form two groups sitting in two different rows. Laura will whisper an English word to the student sitting at the front. This student will then whisper what she hears to student sitting next to her. All the students will do the same until the message reaches the last person, who has to say the message he received aloud. Students successfully communicate the words “horse” and “dog,” but the word “car” ends up being “cat” when it reaches the last person. Laura encourages other students to deliver a message to the first person with the English words she is sure they have learned on television or in the streets. Some English words that the students come up with are: “teacher,” “apple,” “thank you,” “[pizza] hut,” and “Spiderman.” Laura invites Noé to communicate a word in Triqui. Noé accepts and communicates the word “chraa” (tortilla), which students successfully transmit through their telephone line.

Chucho takes over to begin to wrap up the hour. He asks students if they know how to say “adiós” in English and the students quickly say, “Bye.” Another student says “Ciao.” “That is great. That is Italian,” Chucho says. He teaches them, “See you tomorrow.” Chucho concludes by telling the students that they did these activities to get to know each other and thanks them for their enthusiastic participation. He also reminds them that the rules were not meant to stay inside their notebooks but to be
followed in the classroom. He adds that they want everybody to participate and reiterates that Laura, Hugo, and he are also there to learn other languages. Laura, Hugo, and Chucho say, “Bye” and hand the class over to Maestro Carlos. They quickly gather up their stuff, including their poster with the rules. Everything has to come down for the morning class the next day. Laura, Hugo, and Chucho have faced their first class in their new teaching careers.

The first day of the praxicum in both classrooms shows the student teachers’ first attempts to create inclusive, although problematic, multilingual and intercultural language and education policies in their classrooms using their own teaching strategies. The problem resides in the existing language and educational policies that place Spanish and English as “better” languages than Indigenous languages that we were trying to challenge. For 12 years in children’s lives and for generations in the relatives’ lives, their Indigenous language(s) have caused them discrimination and shame. Hence, we were aware that we were walking a fine line between imposition and invitation, paternalism and collaboration, and empowerment—the savior complex—and collaboration. The praxicum implied constant reflection and openness toward students’ views and realities in order to work towards collaborative relations of power (Cummins, 2001) and in order not to simply impose our ideologies.

The description of the first day of praxicum in each of the classrooms shows the similar yet distinct roads that student teachers took to achieve the main goals of the CEAR Project. Even though all the student teachers had taken the TEC course and had participated in the analysis of the data in the first and second stages, the different routes Claudia and Betty, and Laura, Hugo, and Chucho were taking exemplify the agentive nature of the student teachers and their personal
appropriaition and modification of the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy, critical pedagogies, and best practices in teaching English to children. In other words, the student teachers were creating their “own” critical pedagogies (Norton & Toohey, 2004). The student teachers were aware that they were teaching in two different contexts—Horizons School, which overtly promoted Indigenous languages and cultures, and Downtown School, which had a de facto Spanish-only language policy—and that they would have to adjust the praxicum accordingly.

During the first class, Claudia and Betty focused more on group work and the use of children’s literature while trying to promote multilingual and intercultural practices. Claudia and Betty’s goals were trying to promote access to, socialization into, and identification with a learning communities focus on literacy (Cummins, in press). Moreover, the literacy practices that Claudia and Betty were using created an atmosphere in which literacy practices could be performed in a translanguaging fashion (García, 2009). In other words, even though this was an “English” class, students were encouraged to use their literacy skills in Spanish, and Claudia used her bilingual skills to transfer the rules the students came up with in Spanish into English as a way to scaffold their English language learning. In the case of the use of children’s literature, Claudia and Betty encouraged students to engage with texts in various languages and taught them implicitly that the knowledge they gain by reading a book in one language would transfer to other languages (Cummins, 2008). Claudia and Betty also encouraged children to make use of the multimodal structures of children’s stories (pictures and print) to gain access and create meaning in the new language they were just starting to learn.

Laura, Hugo, and Chucho utilized games and oral activities to accomplish similar objectives. Laura was particularly interested in researching the use of games in the classroom, since some authors argue that games help children acquire language in an engaging way and
develop social skills such as group collaboration (e.g., Khan, 1991; Reilly & Ward, 1997; Rixon, 1991). In their first class, Laura, Hugo, and Chucho decided to focus on oral language as a way to show students that English was already part of their linguistic repertoire. In the last part of the class, children displayed English vocabulary that they had picked up from movies, advertisements, and interactions with older siblings and *los gringos*. Laura, Hugo, and Chucho’s class was based on the most fundamental principle of learning: using students’ background knowledge (Bradsford et al., 2000; Cummins, 2001; Moll et al., 1992).

In spite of the different routes the student teachers were taking in their praxicums, they share similar ideologies that were enacted in their classrooms. In both classrooms they adopted multilingual policies, moving away from the English-only policies prevalent and encouraged in many countries around the world (see McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008, for examples of the use and teaching of English in different contexts). Due to the emergence of the direct method and the development of communicative language teaching approaches, monolingual and monoglossic beliefs have prevailed in the teaching of English as a foreign language and bilingual education programs (Cummins, 2008; García, 2009). All the student teachers realized that their own rich bilingualism could be used to teach English to the students while preserving Spanish and promoting Indigenous languages. They were not afraid of the stigma that “translation” and the use of students’ first language in the classroom impose on teachers. In both classrooms, student teachers moved between their role as teachers and their role as students (Freire & Macedo, 1999). On the one hand, they all believed that they had something to offer to children’s education: the English language and their developed level of awareness regarding Mexican history and the ideologies prevalent in the Oaxacan society. On the other hand, they were ready to learn from the students as well. They were in the classroom to learn other languages, to learn
from the students’ complex lives and family histories, and to develop and enhance their teaching professional praxis.

In addition to sharing similar ideologies, the student teachers adopted and adapted each other’s strategies. In a weekly meeting after the first class, Claudia and Betty shared the books they had used and the activities they had conducted in the first class with all the student teachers, including Juan:

Betty: We had the students write letters. It took us like 20 minutes. First, we just read our letters, but we did not paste them on the board or anything, because we did not want the children to copy ours.

Claudia: Yes, we also had them draw whatever they wished.

Betty: The kids wrote very interesting things. We learned more about them.

[Betty and Claudia read Sofía’s and Zenén’s letters. Zenén’s letter mentions that he loves playing soccer.]

Juan: I saw a book in BIBLOCA. It was a book about a teddy bear, I think, who was playing soccer, and the teddy bear ended up being the goalkeeper.

Claudia: That is [a] great [suggestion, Juan]. That is the common denominator among boys.

Betty: Yes.

Claudia: They all love soccer and basketball.

Mario: I think that this activity helped you a lot. It was a way to learn more about them without our questions guiding [the conversation].

Claudia: And [we learned] the things they like to do.

Hugo: [Did you assign it] like homework? I am sorry [for interrupting].

Mario: No, they did it as a class activity.
Claudia: Yes, it was an activity we did in class. We also gave them a folder, so they would not lose [all their work].

Juan: Now that you are mentioning about the letters and the folders, it would be good to do that with my students.

Mario: I agree. Folders are a good way to keep track of things [and develop a portfolio].

Laura: I will do the letters with my students. Can I have some folders, too?

Mario: Does everybody want to do the letters and folders?

Everybody: Yes.

Throughout the CEAR Project, the student teachers maintained this dialogue and continued sharing experiences, resources, and strategies. Claudia and Betty used games such as bingo. Laura, Hugo, and Chucho used children’s literature and songs as well.

In the next sections of this chapter, I will develop the different themes that emerged throughout the praxicum in the two classrooms. While addressing these themes, I will provide glimpses of the praxicum through narrative, photos, and videos. The emergent themes are (a) from shame to alphabetic literacy, (b) authentic syllabi and materials (identity texts), and (c) becoming the “other.” These themes are not mutually exclusive but interconnect in many ways.

From Shame to Alphabetic LiteracyDevelopers

Guillermina is sitting at her table copying the greetings phrases in English that Laura has just taught. “Twenty seconds left,” Laura calls out, and Guillermina hurries to finish. “OK, now we have learnt how to say ‘Good morning’ in English. It will be fantastic if we learn how to say it in other languages as well.” Guillermina does not make eye-contact.
Everybody knows she is the strongest Triqui speaker in the class and a very dedicated student. For this reason, Maestro Carlos has given her the nickname “La maestra (the teacher).” There is silence in the classroom.

“Come on. Anybody?” Laura asks again. “Guillermina,” calls out a student. Guillermina shakes her head and says, “Noé.” Noé gets caught by surprise, but quickly reacts, “No, not me. Edgar J.” Other students look towards the back of the classroom where Edgar J. is sitting, and with a nervous grin, Edgar J. says, “No, not me. La maestra.” Guillermina is on the spot again. She gets up and says, “Laura, I need to go to the bathroom” and leaves the classroom. “OK, we will leave Triqui for another class. What about another language? Chatino?” “Alejandro and Roberto,” calls out Amado. “Do you know how to say ‘buenos días’ in Chatino?” “No,” says Roberto. “Please, share with us, because I want to learn Chatino as well.” Roberto giggles and shakes his head again. Benito with his extroverted personality saves Laura’s awkward moment. “In Zapotec, we say ‘Ti la.’” “Ti la?” asks Laura. “Hmm. ‘Ti la,’” Benito repeats. “Great, Benito. Please, come to the board to write it.” Benito’s extrovertedness stops, and he shakes his head. “Come on, Benito, come on,” Laura encourages him in a sweet manner. Alvaro, who is sitting next to Benito, says, “Benito, don’t be shy.” Benito remains on his high chair, and Hugo takes the marker. “OK, I will do it.” He writes, “Ti la.” “Is this OK, Benito?” Benito approves with a nod.
“Please, copy this in your notebook. How do you pronounce it, Benito?” “Ti la” says Benito. “OK, let’s all say it, Ti la.”

Even though Claudia and Betty did not find as much resistance as Laura did at the beginning of the praxicum, they fought their own battles. In their classroom it was Sofía who was on the spot. Claudia recalled their experience during the debriefing session we held with Maestro Manuel:

**Mario:** Claudia, why don’t you share with us how children have reacted to the fact that you teach them vocabulary in English and then say, “Okay, let’s do it in Indigenous languages now.”

**Claudia:** Well, at the beginning they were more reluctant… to participate and to share even though they have had their class on Indigenous language [with Maestro Manuel] and many of them know [how to speak an Indigenous language]. When, for instance, we would ask someone to come to the front to speak an Indigenous language, everybody would say, “Sofía. She knows.” And Sofía was kind of shy. And later, she started cooperating a bit more. By then also, Hugo and Samuel [started participating] a bit more. Zenén as well.

**Maestro Manuel:** Yes, Zenén.

**Claudia:** Yes, Zenén got up the nerve to come write on the board. Silvia [too]; Rubén, [although] he is not the kind [of student] who likes to come to the board, he would tell the person sitting next to him, “It is like this.” Then, the person sitting next to him would say it aloud. Little by little they started feeling more

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23 I am providing the phonetic transcription of the Indigenous words. At this time, the children had not ventured to come up with their own proposals as to how Chatino, Triqui and Zapotec could be written using the Spanish alphabetic script. Later in this section, I will present the children’s proposals.
comfortable, I think, and they started participating with their Indigenous language and English as well.

At the beginning of the CEAR Project, we were aware that throughout Mexican history Indigenous peoples have been ideologically and even physically discriminated against because of their languages (Clemente & Higgins, 2008; Maldonado Alvarado, 2002; Nolasco, 1997). However, it had always been something distant to us. During the CEAR Project, we learnt about this discrimination from different people first hand and came to understand that children’s reluctance to participate had painful origins. Maestro Manuel told us of his experience:

I am happy when children learn something [in Indigenous language]. If they learn at least two or three words, it is good. Even if they learn ten words during the year, we are winning. I tell them that I had it rough. They deprived us from our language. In my case, it happened to me. They would not let us speak [our language]. “All children who speak an Indigenous language will go and bring five stones from the river, from the river to the school (inaudible).” Or we also had to bring sand. We had to go into the river early in the morning to fill buckets with sand and bring it to school. That’s what the teachers had us do if they heard us using our Indigenous language. It was a punishment and a big trauma, because, imagine, we would like to speak in our Indigenous language, but you find times when they tell you, “Shut up.” I was in first grade then.

Maestro Manuel’s experience occurred 40 years ago, but according to Zenén things have not changed much:

I prefer this school [Horizons School]. Here it is better, because here I speak Spanish and this school is better. The school [in my home town] was not good. They [teachers] did not teach many classes and they scolded children very badly.
They speak Spanish; sometimes they speak Zapotec, a little bit, because they do not understand it well. (“Why would they scold children?” I ask.) Because, just anything did, they would beat the kids. They would beat them with varas (rods or sticks). (Did you get beaten? I ask.) I did not study there much, only first grade. In first grade, I got scolded, but not much, because my teacher was from there, from Francisco; she used to live there and spoke Zapotec, and she did not scold me much, because I had a nice teacher, so she did not scold me much. The teachers that came from here [from Oaxaca City] scolded children more. My little brother got beaten on his hands with varas, here on his hands. Sometimes he would not go to school because he got scared.

Maestro Manuel’s and Zenén’s younger brother’s experiences are not atypical. Claudia’s family runs a family restaurant, in which they employ young women from different Indigenous communities. A young woman from the Mixe region shared experiences similar to the ones suffered by Maestro Manuel and Zenén’s younger brother.

In the CEAR Project, we were dealing not only with classes surrounded by a painful discriminatory history, but also with a school [Downtown School] where Indigenous languages were not part of the classroom at all. We were aware that we were rowing against the mainstream:

Mario: These kids are not used to their Indigenous languages being part of the classroom. It is as if [children might think], “What is going on? I have been told…”

Miriam: They are afraid, aren’t they?

Mario: Yes. “…For five years, ten years, not to speak [my Indigenous language].”
Pepe: That is right.

Mario: [They also may think.] “Nobody has ever asked me [to use/teach my Indigenous language] in the classroom and now you are asking me? What is going on?”

Miriam: They are ashamed. And also because there are others who do not speak [Indigenous languages].

Mario: Yes, yes, and also we are asking them to come to the board and write words on it. [Children may think] “I’d better shut up.”

(Student teachers laugh).

Class after class, the student teachers kept sending direct messages of their willingness to learn from the children, making sure that they respected children’s decision whether to participate or not. The following narratives and videos represent some of the occasions on which children first decided to participate and share their language with the rest of the class.

Change Begins

Claudia and Betty arrive at Horizons School. They have planned to work on vocabulary about family members and important people in children’s lives. Half of the class is sitting by the basketball court. “Hola, Maestra Betty. Hola, Maestra Claudia.” “Hola,” they respond. “What are you doing outside?” asks Claudia. “The thing is that our classmates are taking the Prueba ENLACE.”²⁴ And we do not have to take it. They [the state

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²⁴ The Prueba ENLACE is the standardized evaluation imposed by the federal government. ENLACE stands for “Evaluación Nacional del Logro Académico en Centros Escolares” (National Evaluation of Academic Achievement in School Centers). It is given to both public and private schools (visit http://www.enlace.sep.gob.mx/ for more information). It represents the Mexican government’s attempt to follow the school accountability discourse of the
school officials] sent a list of students who have to take it.” “Okay, I will teach only half of the class then, and the ones that I teach now will be the experts tomorrow. They will teach the ones that are not part of the class today, Okay?” “Yes, teacher,” César responds in English and the others giggle.

The class begins. Claudia is using one of the empty wooden classrooms the gringos built when the school was double its present size. In the previous class, Claudia taught the different family members the children brainstormed in English. Now, she quickly reviews them and focuses on the Indigenous languages. “Sofía, can you help us learn this in Indigenous language?” Sofía hesitates. “Come on, Sofi. We all want to learn Zapotec, too.” Sofía nods and Claudia hands her the marker (watch the video by clicking on Figure 21. Follow the link by pressing “Control + Click.” Videos can be played in high quality).

United States (see Treviño Villareal, 2006 for a detailed analysis of the problems regarding the use of standardized tests with Indigenous children).
Figure 21. Video of Sofía teaching how to say family members in Zapotec.

Claudia is standing in the middle of the classroom and decides to move to the side. In doing so, she leaves Sofía at the front of the class and gives her the role of the teacher. At the same time, she remains close enough to Sofía to learn how to pronounce the words in Zapotec. Sofía has taken a big leap. She agreed to participate as long as Claudia will help her teach. In the background, one can hear the voices of the first grade students through the classroom windows and the thin wooden walls. “[How do you say] brother [in Zapotec]?” asks Claudia. Sofía pronounces [san] and writes “psan” on the board. Claudia wants to make sure whether the [p] sound must be pronounced, so she leans over to learn from the expert.
Everardo, who understands a little bit of Zapotec, realizes that the pronunciation of the word brother in Zapotec, “psan,” is similar to the word, “san” (saint) in Spanish and “Sam”, in English. He makes an interesting sentence with this word, “Psam Bigote” (Sam Bigote, the Spanish name given to Yosemite Sam, the animated cartoon character from Looney Tunes). His joke is not picked up by Claudia or any student in the class. Claudia has learnt from the expert and has the students pronounce “paa” (father), “psan” (brother), then “psanllen” (cousin). Some students’ voices are heard as they repeat the words, especially Jessica’s. Other students are busily copying the words in their notebooks, as they know that they will be the experts the next day. Claudia continues helping Sofia and teaches “Maa” (mother). Yeni M. is slouching on her chair and seems not to be worried about her role as the expert the next day, or perhaps she is uninterested in Sofia’s teachings. Claudia is so focused on helping Sofia that she does not notice Yeni M.’s lack of interest. Sofia and Claudia get to the word “niece.” Sofia translanguages and writes “sobrin” (in Spanish, the word for niece is “sobrina”). The last word Sofia teaches is “till” (uncle). Claudia looks at the board and realizes that both the English words and the Zapotec words are in red. She approaches and asks me if I have another marker to show the languages in different colors.
Indigenous languages were part of Maestro Manuel’s class. Hence, we were expecting that his students would be more willing to participate than the children at Downtown School. However, it did not happen automatically; trust needed to be developed between Claudia and Betty and the children. After a few lessons, the children realized that Claudia and Betty had a genuine interest in their languages and in their experiences. “Little by little, I noticed that the children felt more relaxed with us,” Betty commented. “Ya agarraron confianza (they had developed trust), and they started participating more. What we discussed in the meetings regarding the literature was right. Working with children is about creating relationships and communities.” Betty was referring to the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy sections that deal with community of practices (Cummins, in press) and developing personal relations with students towards the construction of affirming identities (Cummins, 2001).

Claudia and Betty were able to develop a trusting relationship with Sofía to get her to share her Zapotec with them and her classmates. Sofía was most times on the spot when the class focused on sharing Indigenous languages. Even though she was shy, other children regarded her as the most proficient speaker of Zapotec since she had spent most of her elementary school years in her community. This was the first time that Sofía had shared her Zapotec in front of the whole class, and it occurred in a safe atmosphere. There were only half of the students in the class. She was also the only Zapotec speaker present. Everardo understood only a little bit. She was the expert. She still was shy and needed Claudia’s help, but she had taken a huge leap. Her experience in writing in Zapotec with Maestro Manuel showed in her confidence in writing the family members on the board. This was not the case in Maestro Carlos’ class, where students had had experience neither in using their Indigenous languages in the classroom nor in writing them with the Spanish alphabet.
Children as Alphabetic Literacy Developers

Laura arrives at school ready to work on family members with the children. She is happy because the students have shared some words in their Indigenous languages in previous classes. They shared how to say the days of the week in Zapotec, Triqui, and Chatino. They also shared with her and the whole class adjectives that they want to learn in English. Laura wants children to be able to talk about the skills that the important people in their lives have. Hence, she has decided to focus on family members today making sure that she includes “extended” family members, step-related relatives (e.g., stepfather), godparents, and neighbors.

Figure 22. Downtown School students' family members flash cards.
“Okay, today we will learn how to say mother, father, godmother, godfather and many other things. I want you to help me by drawing one of these people on the piece of paper I am going to give you.” Laura hands out the materials and students start working. They are very good artists. When they have finished, Laura tapes their work onto the board (Figure, 22).

Laura writes the vocabulary and translanguages as she teaches these words in English to help students understand. “Daughter,” Laura says. Some students repeat the word. “La daughter,” she repeats. “No le entiendo;” (I do not understand) says Amado in the back. “Daughter es hija” (Daughter is hija (in Spanish). “Ella es la daughter de estos dos (She is the daughter of these two),” explains Laura while pointing at the father and the mother flashcards. “Sí, la daughter,” says Amado in the back, understanding Laura’s explanation this time.

After teaching the family members in English, Laura decides to give it another try to encourage Roberto, Alex, Noé, Edgar J. and Guillermina to share their languages with her and the other students. Benito is absent today, so he will not save her this time. “Okay, let us give them a chance to come to the board to write the family members in other languages. Let’s see — Benito did not come. Noé, how do you say ‘dad’ in Triqui? Come on; let’s use the green marker for Triqui.” “And the black marker for Chatino,” says Tomás.
“Okay, Roberto, come on. The two of you come [Roberto and Alex], so you can help each other. Come on, both of you, come write it. Let’s see Noé and Edgar J. Here [is the marker]. Guille, please help your classmates” (watch the video of Noé, Edgar J. and Guillermina, Figure 23).

Figure 23. Video of children collaborating to write family members in Triqui.

As students gather in front of the board, Edgar J. grabs the marker. Alex and Roberto are also there, attempting to write family members in Chatino. Lupe and Heber, who speak neither Triqui nor Chatino, are watching this scene closely. Other students are watching it from their tables, while Hugo goes around helping students if they have questions.
Guillermina is not saying much at the beginning, but she is there. She did not go outside this time. Edgar J. finishes writing one of the family members and points to the picture of “niece.” “Niece, right? There is not [niece in Triqui]. I do not know how to say it,” says Noé. Noé moves to the left part of the board while he reads aloud “abuelito” (grandfather). Guillermina and Edgar J. are behind and call out “atachia” right after pronouncing “abuelito”. They all happily giggle, and Edgar J. starts recording “atachia” on the board. Both Noé and Guillermina are behind him, sounding the word out to assist him in the task. Edgar J. and Noé see the picture of a grandmother, and Edgar J. writes “anachia.” Edgar J. and Noé are not completely sure, however. Edgar J. looks back to get Guillermina’s help. Maestra Guillermina reads “Anachia,” and corrects it, “An ‘a’ is missing.” Laura is monitoring the whole process and attempts to pronounce the words with the help of the students.

Edgar J. moves on and focuses on the word “daughter.” While he writes it down, he spells it “Tania.” They all realize that he has written the name of another student in the class and laugh about it. Edgar J. points to the word “son,” and asks Noé. “And this one, Noé?” “It is the same [as daughter], right?” Laura interprets Noé’s question as he were referring to English and Spanish, in which there are words to differentiate between “daughter” and “son,” and she replies “No, this is ‘son’ and this is ‘daughter.’” Noé picks up Laura’s misunderstanding and explains that the
same word is used for “son” and “daughter” in Triqui. “Ah, you use the same word,” Laura concludes. Guillermina has been quiet, focusing on the word “taniaa.” She is not completely satisfied with Edgar J.’s attempt. It still reads like “Tania.” She pronounces it again, emphasizing the /h/ sound in the word. Edgar J. erases the word from the board. “It takes a ’j’ [the letter “j” represents the /h/ sound in Spanish]?” wonders Laura. Noé takes the marker and gives it a try. Guillermina, with her hands together, spells it out while Noé is writing the word: t, a, n, i. Noé stops and ponders. Guillermina is not sure either and moves a bit further away. It is a glottal stop in that word that is challenging the Triqui students. They settle with the letter “j,” since Laura agrees that she hears that sound. Edgar J. suggests adding another “a” at the end and putting an end to their struggle, “Another ‘a’ and that is it.” “Tanija,” they write at the end.

As we were attempting to promote Indigenous languages in the CEAR Project, we realized how complex this endeavor was. Not only were we asking children to teach us their Indigenous languages, we were asking them to become linguists at their young age. Alphabetic literacy development in Indigenous languages has been a highly contested issue. García et al. (2006) raise the following question in their book *Imagining Multilingual Schools*: “To what extent do the languages involved, especially the minority students’ mother tongue, need to be standardized, and also have written literature (as opposed to only orature, oral literature)?” (p. 25, parentheses in original). Nevertheless, they do not engage with this question and simply leave it as a complex issue:
Language revitalization efforts are often, although not always, accompanied by
the development of a written language and standardization . . . Questions of
standardization, and of inventing spaces for literacy in schools where there is no
corresponding community need for literacy, as in the case of some of the United
States Indigenous communities, are extremely complex. (pp. 25-26)

In Mexico since the 1930s, Indigenous languages alphabetic literacy has been developed
mainly by linguists of the Summer Institute of Linguistics with a proselytizing agenda (Maynez,
2003). Recently, however, Indigenous educators in Oaxaca have started developing alphabetic
literacy for their own languages in order to preserve them (see Hernández López, 2004, for a
description of the work of CEDELIO25). Lewin (2004), commenting on the work of CEDELIO,
invites Indigenous educators not to regard the lack of alphabetic literacy in Indigenous as a
deficiency. He argues that the lack of literacy should not bring cultural low self-esteem to
should be involved in the development of alphabetic literacy if the community members want
alphabetic literacy to be part of the community. In one of our weekly meetings, we discussed our
positions on this issue.

Mario: You have probably noticed that the children are playing [experimenting]
with their language, I mean, [they are trying different ways] to write it down.

Hugo: Aha.

Mario: Right? For instance, if we wanted to write English phonetically, because
that is what the children are doing, imagine that. How would you write, think it in
your head, “how are you?” in “Spanish.” What letters would you use?

(All student teachers comment and laugh. Some say “jau,” “j, a, u”)

Mario: “Jau”

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25 CEDELIO (Centro de Estudio y Desarrollo de las Lenguas Indígenas de Oaxaca- Center of Studies and
Development of the Indigenous Languages of Oaxaca) and “Academia de la Lengua Mixteca” (Mixtec Language
Academy) are two of the most important projects in trying to develop alphabetic literacy for Indigenous languages.
Everybody: “Jaguar.”

Mario: “‘A’, ‘r’, right?

Eliza: “Y” or double “l.”

Mario: How would you write “you.” “Yu” maybe?

Hugo: Aja.

Mario: For instance, [whether to use] “ll” or “y” [which make the same sound in Spanish] is tough, eh? What we just did requires a lot of discussion in order for us to agree.

Hugo: Aja.

Eliza: The first “j” could be “g.” too.

(Hugo comments on Benito dictating to Alvaro how to write a word in Zapotec. Alvaro had come to the board to write the word while Benito worked on it from his desk and dictated it to him.)

Hugo: Aja, the same thing happened with [the Zapotec word] “sagosh” (old). Benito was repeating it for Alvaro, but Benito was writing it down “sagosh.” He was writing it down [in his notebook]…

Laura: Yes, and he would erase it and then he would write it again.

Hugo: Yes, as he was pronouncing it. I think, well, I am not sure as to what extent it [Benito’s attempt] is okay or it is correctly written like this in Zapotec, but Benito was writing it down the way he says it.

Mario: What is interesting is that in this case, who dictates what is “correct”?

Hugo: Aja. I mean.

Mario: Right?
**Hugo:** Well, I do not know where we can find that, because there are no publications about how to write Zapotec, right? Or something like this.

**Mario:** What is interesting is that, for instance, there are several linguists who have tried to develop an alphabet [for Zapotec], right? The problem is that they try to place all the different varieties of the Zapotec language under the same one.

**Pepe:** As something standard.

**Mario:** Yes, as something standard. Then, [Indigenous people] say, “Well, I do not say it this way. I do not use this sound.”

**Hugo:** Aja.

**Mario:** It [using the Spanish alphabet] is difficult because they have tried to use it in the Mixtec language that has three tones. How do you write tones with the alphabet?

**Hugo:** Yes, it must be difficult.

**Mario:** But well, supposedly literacy is something social, as Vicki [Victoria Purcell-Gates, a literacy researcher who gave a presentation in Oaxaca] was saying, right? Creating a language is something social, like several people who come into agreement and give it the same meaning. Then, perhaps, what Benito wrote with “sagosh” is his proposal, right? And it is very valid, right? That is the way he hears it and this is how he represents it.

**Hugo:** Yes, I agree.

**Mario:** And if Benito convinced 20 people from his community, this could become…

**Hugo:** Part of the community.

**Mario:** Then, this could become the “correct” way to do it.
Hugo: Yes.

Pepe: And become popular and standard.

Mario: Exactly.

In the CEAR Project, we continuously reflected and reminded each other to view Indigenous children’s knowledge and alphabetic literacy development as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1991). Children were the expert linguists and we were there to learn from them. The following narrative and the video of Roberto, Alex, and Benito attempting to write the names of the fruits in Chatino and Zapotec illustrate this point (Figure, 24).

Figure 24. Video of Alex, Roberto and Benito writing the names of fruits in Chatino and in Zapotec (Video taken by Laura Montes).

Hugo asks the children to work in pairs to brainstorm about the different fruits that they can find in their communities. “Okay, what did
you come up with?” Hugo asks the students. He writes the students’ examples on the board: “naranja, uvas, plátano, sandía, and mango.”

Okay, let’s see if someone here knows how to say any of these fruits in English.” Carmen says, “plátano se dice banana, verdad?” “You are right, Carmen. Please write it on the board.” “Yo escribo orange,” says Heber and he writes “oranjie” on the board. Hugo applauds Carmen’s and Heber’s efforts. Hugo provides the English words that the students do not know.

“Okay, now, let’s learn some of these fruits in Chatino, Zapotec, and Triqui,” Hugo says while handing the markers to the students.

Alex quickly grabs the red marker and Roberto is there to help. “That is orange,” says Roberto in Spanish and begins dictating the word in Chatino to Alex “n, s…” However, Alex has his own theory and begins writing “nhw.” Roberto emphatically says, “It is not like that!” while taking the marker away from Alex. Laura, who is shooting the video, wonders what word they are trying to figure out and asks, “naranja?” Alex sees how his uncle, Roberto, erases his attempt and writes “nshwé.” Alex tries to get the marker back, but Roberto holds onto it. Roberto reads the word “grapes” and decides to skip it. He moves on to the word “watermelon,” and Alex whispers “sindiá.” Roberto writes it down. Laura repeats the word and points to the similarity to the Spanish word, sandía. “They are similar, aren’t they?” Roberto agrees and observes, “You just change the ‘i.’ Sindiá.” Roberto and Alex focus on the word “melon” and
discuss it in Chatino in a friendly manner, but they do not come up with a word for that fruit in their language. Benito, who had already written the word, “Sandi” realizes the similarity between the words for “watermelon” in Spanish and Chatino and points out that it is the same case in Zapotec: “Me, too... ‘Sandi.’” Laura points to the word “strawberry,” and Roberto states, “There is no [such thing in Chatino]. While this happens, Benito continues and writes, “Sis” (pineapple in Zapotec). Benito also notices that the word “mango” is similar to the word in Zapotec. He writes a comma after the “n” in “mango” to indicate that the word mango in Zapotec is “man.” “Just like that,” says Benito. Laura wants to learn how to pronounce it, and Benito provides a model by repeating it, “man,” several times.

In the CEAR Project, children proved to be linguists in the making. Student teachers valued and legitimized children’s inventions of alphabetic literacy. Along similar lines, Kalmar (2001), who worked with Mexican immigrants in the United States for a period of four years, describes how this group of adults developed “illegal alphabets” to help each other learn and write English “como de veras se oye” (p. 50) (in the way it really sounds), in order to communicate with los gringos. Panchito, a Tarascan fifteen-year-old who had just been in the United States for less than a week and spoke both Spanish and Tarasco, an Indigenous language from Michoacán, México, wanted to establish a friendship with a gringuita (an Anglo teenage girl). He wanted to ask her, “¿Dónde vives?” (Where do you live?). After having his friends’ English-speaking friends teach him how to say it orally, Panchito wrote “JUELLULIB” (p. 9), so
that he would not forget it. Panchito used the phrase successfully and taught his friends that they
could do the same to learn English for their own purposes and in their own ways. Kalmar (2001)
demonstrates that this group’s writing attempts closely resemble those of professional linguists’
first attempts at designing alphabetic literacy for unknown languages. Kalmar’s group produced
and distributed “El Diccionario Mojado” (The Wetback Dictionary), which included the standard
spellings of words and phrases, the way they really sound using Spanish letter values, and the
Spanish translations.

As the children shared their Indigenous languages, they were also teaching us about their
Indigenous worldview. In the case of Sofía, I venture to infer that her translanguaging of the
word “sobrin” reflects how the construct of “niece” may not be part of the Zapotec culture.
Interestingly enough, Noé also mentioned that they do not have “niece” in Triqui either. In
addition, Noé taught Laura that in the Triqui worldview, there is no distinction between daughter
and son. They use the same word, “Tanija.” At the beginning of this chapter, when Laura invited
Roberto to share how to say “Good morning” in Chatino, Roberto simply said, “I do not know,”
which at first we interpreted as a way for Roberto to avoid sharing and being on the spot. In the
second interview, however, Roberto mentioned that he had seen his sister that weekend and had
asked her how to say “good morning” in Chatino. His sister confirmed Roberto’s knowledge that
there is no such thing in Chatino. Roberto explained:

In Chatino, we say, ‘Is the food ready?’ when we arrive at someone else’s home.

And the person responds, “Yes, the food is ready,” even if the food is not ready.

Sometimes people stay to eat and other times they do not. But this is what we say.

I don’t remember what we say when we greet someone in the street.
Roberto taught us that the “silences” or the “I do not knows” of the children held hidden messages. It was unfortunate that the praxicum of the CEAR Project lasted for only a few months, as we were just starting to understand aspects of Indigenous peoples’ worldviews through children’s teachings of their languages (see Barabas & Bartolomé, 1999a, for a collection of ethnographic reports of Oaxaca Indigenous groups). Nevertheless, our validation or legitimization of Indigenous children’s knowledge encouraged Indigenous children to continue sharing their knowledge with their mestizo classmates.

**Children as Teachers**

Betty is teaching by herself today. Claudia is in Mexico City for the week because her mother is sick. Students have learned vocabulary about occupations, verbs relevant to these occupations, and other verbs relating to other activities children engage in. Today, she wants to teach students personal pronouns and the modal verb “can,” so that students can start putting sentences together. For Betty, making sure that all children feel that they can contribute to the class is essential. She wants students to feel that they can be teachers, too. She asks for two volunteers, a boy and a girl. “Okay, I need your help. I need two teachers, a boy and a girl, who will help us review the words that we have learned.”

Several students raise their hands, but Betty notices that Anabel’s and Giovanni’s hands came up first. Besides, they have not had a chance to be the teachers. “Okay, Anabel and Giovanni, please, come to the front. Here are the materials that you all created. Please, I want you to review
the verbs that we learned last week because we are going to use them today.” Giovanni and Anabel divide the flash cards in two equal parts and begin their role as the teachers (watch the video of Giovanni and Anabel’s teaching in Figure 25).

Figure 25. Video of Anabel and Giovanni reviewing verbs in English.

Both Anabel and Giovanni have an extroverted personality. They have no problems facing the whole class. Anabel begins with an authoritative statement, “Hey, pay attention!” Her statement is followed by a chuckle, conveying to the students that she is just performing as a teacher, but that she is still part of them. She raises the flash card and continues, “How do you say jugar?” Students answer her teacher’s question,
saying in chorus, “**play.**” Anabel, as good teachers do, praises her students’ responses, “Very good.” Anabel and all the students giggle over Anabel’s good personification of a teacher. It is Giovanni’s turn. He says, “How do you say _hablar?_ Students quickly respond, “**speak,**” some pronouncing it “standardly” while others pronounce it as if following the Spanish graphophonetics system. Anabel asks, “How do you say _ayudar?_” Students answer, “**help.**” Anabel does another teacher performance and says, “Say it louder, so you can learn.” She gets laughter out of the students. Giovanni asks, “How do you say _escribir?_” Only one student says, “**write.**” Betty notices this and says, “Everybody, ‘**write.**’” Students repeat, “**write.**” Anabel and Giovanni follow the same pattern with “wash,” “study,” “drive,” and “work.” Betty encourages all the students to pronounce the verb “work” carefully, since she notices that some students are still struggling to pronounce it.

At Downtown School, Hugo is wrapping up his thematic unit on “My Community.” He distributes big pieces of paper on which students will create a multilingual and multimodal mural about a community. The students quickly gather in three groups. They break the rows of chairs and get their tables together. “Okay, here is what you are going to do. First, I want you to talk about the community you want to create. You will have to give it a name.” Alex says, “San Juan Quiahije” using the name of the most
important town near his hometown. “That is fine with me,” says Hugo, “but you have to convince the other members of your team, Alex.” Chucho and Laura help Hugo distribute the crayons and markers among the three groups. “Okay, think of the things you want to include in your community. They can be anything you want. Go crazy. Then, you will draw a picture and write a sentence about your picture. For example, you can say, ‘There is a pink river in my community.’ Okay?” “Whatever we want to write?” asks Edgar Emilio. “Yes, whatever you want. If you cannot think of anything, come to see me, and I will give you a crazy sentence. One last thing, your sentences have to be in at least three different languages. So help each other.” Students get to work enthusiastically.

Some children are into graffiti, so they find this activity engaging. Heber decides to include ten houses in the community they are creating. “What are you doing, Heber?” asks Laura, who is going around the tables. “I am going to write my sentence in Chatino as well.” “Excellent, let Roberto help you” (Watch the video of Roberto helping Heber, Figure 26).
Roberto is busy finishing his own work. He loves playing basketball. Hence, he has drawn a basketball court in the community they are creating. Laura intercedes for Heber and requests Roberto’s assistance. “How do you say ‘there are ten houses in the town’ [in Chatino]?” Laura asks Roberto. Roberto thinks a moment while repeating half of the sentence aloud. Roberto says the sentence in Chatino, but Heber cannot fully understand it. “How?” he asks. Amado, who is part of the team and is watching the whole scene, pushes a notebook towards Roberto and says, “You’d better write for him, dude.” Roberto is so focused on sounding out
and spelling the word for Heber that he does not listen to Amado’s suggestion. Amado notices that Roberto is dictating “there is” from a sentence he has already written and catches Heber’s misspelling. “Erase it. It is wrong,” says Amado, taking Roberto’s sentence as the correct form. Heber follows Amado’s command and colors over the first letter with his marker. Roberto continues spelling the letters diligently for Heber, but it is taking too long according to Amado’s standard. “Write it for him,” he suggests to Roberto again, now adding a pencil to the notebook he provided before. Roberto accepts Amado’s suggestion and says to Heber, “Like this, look. I will write it for you.” As Roberto is attempting to come up with the sentence in Chatino, he checks the original sentence with Heber. “What does it say again?” Amado and Heber instantly reply, “There are ten houses in the town.” While Roberto starts writing, “Ui tii aá,” Amado is trying to sound it out. Roberto finishes the sentence, “Ui tii aá cchi.” Laura tries to read the sentence, but she is not sure how to pronounce the double cc. Roberto pronounces the word “cchi” once more for Laura. She asks Roberto, “Is that how you say in Chatino, ‘There are ten houses in the town’? Please, repeat it.” Roberto helps Laura, Amado and Heber pronounce the sentence by enunciating and pausing after every word. Laura then says to Heber, “Look, Heber. Copy it like this.”
At both Horizons School and Downtown School, the student teachers gained students’ trust as they interacted with them and made them feel that they could be experts in different areas and in different ways. The Indigenous children especially were able to tell that student teachers had a genuine interest in their lives and in their languages. The student teachers regarded children’s linguistic and literacy practices as legitimate. The student teachers’ classrooms brought the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy to life. They were doing critical pedagogy by believing deeply in the children and learning from them. Children were teachers and not merely receptacles to be filled with knowledge. In addition, their lives drove the curriculum, and their artistic skills produced the necessary materials, as we will see in the next section.

**Authentic Syllabi and Materials (Identity Texts)**

Claudia is wrapping up another day at Horizons School. She wants the children to talk about their family members and the types of jobs they do. “Do you guys remember that I told you that my mom works as a cook at a restaurant?” “Yes,” children respond. Claudia tells them about her mom’s job:

Let me tell you. My mom is amazing and a very intelligent person. She knows a lot about math because she cooks for a lot of people. She has to calculate how many tomatoes, how much meat, and all the ingredients she needs. Also, when she goes to the market, she checks the prices to save money. I am sure your family members and the people you care about are very intelligent, too. Okay, first let’s make a list of the people you
care about and then another list of the types of jobs they do.

Also, if you work, too, we will add your job to the list.

Students work on the two lists and Claudia records them on the board. “My mother works as a housewife,” says Gaby. “That is a lot of work; right Gaby? Housewives work as cooks, babysitters, nurses, psychologists, washerwomen and in many other jobs.” Gaby nods in agreement. “My mom is a housewife and a merchant; she sells atole [a corn-based drink],” says Luz. “Mine sells tostadas and tlaluydas” says Yeni M. “Yeni M., you are making me hungry,” says Betty. “Okay, let’s see. We have 18 mothers who work as housewives, eight who sell different things, two who wash clothes, and two who work at restaurants, like my mom, and a maid. Anyone else?” “My mother is a packer,” says Federico. “Oh, yes, I remember your mentioning that, Federico. At the recycling plant, right?” Federico nods.

“Okay, what about your father, stepfather, grandpa, what do you have for that?” “My dad is a “maestro albañil (master mason),” says Bella. “My father is a blacksmith,” says Christopher, and Giovanni calls out, “Mine, too.” “Great,” says Claudia. “Masons and blacksmiths know a lot of math and calculations; don’t they? Otherwise, houses and windows will fall down or look crooked.” The children giggle. “My dad is a plumber and an electrician,” says Carlos. “Okay, let’s review our list. We have two merchants, nine masons, two plumbers, two electricians, two blacksmiths, three who work at restaurants, a gardener, a security guard, one who digs
wells, a painter, a taxi driver, a brick-maker, and a factory worker. We have other occupations, but we do not know what those are, because the people are working in the United States. If we put your parents together, they could make great things, couldn’t they? Well, I need your help, now. I want you to learn these occupations in English, but I do not have materials to teach you, so you are going to help me.”

The children get together in groups and start working on the materials (Figure 27). Children are engaged and making sure that the materials they are creating are beautiful and colorful. With Claudia’s and Betty’s help, they make their material bilingual in English and Spanish. Some of the materials become trilingual, too. All the children are skillful material designers (Figure 28).

Figure 27. Collage of Horizons School children developing authentic materials.
At Downtown School, Laura, Hugo, and Chucho also had the children create their own materials. Laura had them create materials to be used when she taught vocabulary focused on family members and important people in children’s lives. Hugo, who focused on “My Community,” had the children brainstorm the different animals that could be found in their communities and had them create materials (Figure 29).

Chucho who focused on “Selling and Buying” also had the children brainstorm the different objects they could buy in the zócalo and in their neighborhoods (Figure 30). “I really wanted the children to learn vocabulary that they would encounter in their daily lives. They came up with elote (corn on the cob), papas fritas (french fries), sandía (watermelon), and many other things,” Chucho reported in the second interview.
Figure 29. Collage of Downtown children creating materials.

Figure 30. Collage of Downtown students' materials.
Maestro Carlos noticed the enthusiasm that children had when they were using and creating meaningful materials. He shared the following with us in the debriefing session we held with him:

Los muchachos (these guys, referring to Laura, Hugo, and Chucho) have motivated the group with regard to attractive material. It is like starting in first grade of elementary school; this would be the first grade of English. Hence, it is motivating that they bring colorful materials and that the children create them, too. This has helped [the children] a lot, too, because they just see the colors and they remember that they are called green, red, yellow, [and] blue. Now they can say “the girl has blue eyes.” (Maestro Carlos says this jokingly. I add, “Yes, Noé is quite interested in these topics.”) In addition, the animals, the little pigs [and] the little hens [the children created are motivating] also, because most children are from rural communities and they want to say what things exist in their community. For instance, Benito [mentioned] that there are bananas, guajolotes (turkeys), [and] deer [in his community], and the kids from the city get interested because they are learning more. This is why the ones from the urban milieu are interested and the ones from the rural milieu want to share.

During the CEAR Project, the creating of materials with the input and help of the children was essential. McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008) argue that

An . . . issue that is evident in a good deal of ELT [English Language Teaching] materials is a discourse of Othering in which those from Western Inner Circle are portrayed as having modern and desirable behavior while those from other cultures, who exhibit other ways of doings things, are seen as backward and lacking. (p. 184)

In order to avoid this Othering discourse, student teachers’ syllabi were shaped by the children’s complex lives. For instance, when it came to family members, student teachers realized that they
needed to include vocabulary that went beyond the nuclear family, especially due to the migratory trajectories of the families. Stephen (2005) found that *el compadrazgo*, the relationship established when families choose godparents for their children, was a way for parents to secure future possibilities for their children. Maldonado Alvarado (2002) also argues that this phenomenon becomes important when Indigenous families move out their communities and lose the support of the extended family. For urban parents, their *compadres*, the godparents of their children, become the extended family. Hence, the words “padrino” (godfather) and “madrina” (godmother) were part of the vocabulary the student teachers included in their syllabi. Regarding the inclusion of the jobs that both parents and teachers held, it was important to validate these jobs and skills. The introduction of the modal verb “can,” (at a later time) in connection with the skills of children and parents, brought a sense of pride to the children and their parents.

Another important aspect of having the children create the materials to be used in class is related to the economy of Oaxaca. For instance, the two schools where the CEAR Project took place did not have a photocopy machine. They did not provide extra materials for the teachers to use. The teachers were provided with textbooks, and that was it. The same thing happens with English teachers in Oaxaca. Even in private schools, they are usually provided with textbooks only, and no extra materials. If teachers want to use any other materials, they need to purchase them with their own money. The low salaries they earn usually make this impossible. Even printing color materials is expensive for teachers who make 50 pesos an hour ($5 C). If you print a color photo at an Internet café, they usually charge 5 pesos per page. Having the children create their own materials was an excellent way to save money and have their knowledge and lives validated. Besides, it was a way for students to display their art skills and engage in their learning. The same thing occurred when children produced their identity texts. I present these in the following section.
Identity Texts

The products of students’ creative work or performances . . . are termed *identity texts* in so far as students invest their identity in these texts . . . that then hold a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light. When students share identity texts with multiple audiences (peers, teachers, parents, grandparents, sister classes, the media, etc.) they are likely to receive positive feedback and affirmation of self in interaction with these audiences . . . When this kind of expression [and interaction are] enabled, children come to see themselves as intelligent, imaginative and talented. (Cummins, 2006, p. 60 & 64, italics in original)

One of the main of goals of the CEAR Project was the co-creation of our and the children’s affirming identities. We wanted to feel proud of our culture, ways of knowing, and rich bilingualism, and we wanted children to perceive us in this way. In turn, we also wanted all children to feel proud and see themselves and their loved ones as intelligent, talented, and creative. Throughout the CEAR Project, we engaged in a dialogical relationship among ourselves and with the children. It was in this relationship that we co-created affirming identities for one another. During the praxicum, the children invested their identities in the different texts and materials that they created. The student teachers, and the children themselves, were the audience that valued children’s creations and validated their linguistic and literacy practices. What follows are examples of some of the identity texts that children created.

Laura has created a big book with all the children’s identity texts. The children wrote about the things they and another important person in their life can do. They also illustrated their identity texts and wrote them bilingually, multilingually, and/or translanguagingly. She has the class arranged in a big circle. She wants the children to read their own texts for everybody else. Children are both excited and nervous. Nobody wants to go first. “Come on, I will help you. What about if I read the English part and you read it in Spanish or Zapotec, or
in whatever language you choose.” Some children rub their hands and others do not make eye contact. Laura knows someone who can break the ice, “Benito, do you want to go first? Please!” Benito accepts the challenge (watch the video of Benito’s participation, Figure 31).

Figure 31. Video of Benito reading his identity text in Zapotec (video taken by Hugo Cuadrado).

All the students’ eyes are on Benito. Amado and Alvaro, who are sitting next to Benito, are looking at his identity text. Laura will read it in English and Spanish, and Benito will read it in Zapotec. Laura begins, “My name is Benito. Ahora, ¿cómo se dice en Zapoteco? (Now, how do you say it in Zapotec).” “Leen nag Benit,” responds Benito adjusting his name to fit the Zapotec language. Nayelli, who is sitting between Carmen and
Malena, bends over to listen to Benito’s performance. She is rubbing her hands nervously and listens with awe. Laura continues reading in English first and then in Spanish. She then has Benito say it in Zapotec. “I can read,” reads Laura from Benito’s identity text. Benito is able to provide the Zapotec version for all the sentences Laura reads, except for the sentence “I can sing.” He shakes his head to tell Laura that he does not know how to say this in Zapotec. Nayelli laughs nervously. Benito does know how to say “I can swim” and “I can jump.” Alvaro, who is listening attentively, picks up the Zapotec pattern for the structure, “I can” and says, “It is the same, isn’t it?” Laura praises Benito’s effort, “Very good, [Benito].” She is proud of Benito’s multilingualism and his courage. She encourages the other students, “You see. It is very easy to read it.” Benito’s audience sends him rays of positive light as they say, “¡Órale!” (Cool!). After Benito, all the students participate (see Alex’s and Edgar Emilio’s identity texts, Figure 32).
Laura encouraged children to write whatever they wanted even if they did not know all the words in English. Part of Carmen’s identity text shows how she translanguaged in order to be able to communicate her abilities:

*I can cook* muy bien (very well). *I can wash* mi ropa (my clothes). *I can run.* *I can sell* cosas (things). *I can fix* canciones (songs, [In Spanish, the verb ‘componer’ means both ‘to fix’ and ‘to compose/write” a song]). *I can work* de vendedora (as a salesperson). *I am good* deportista (sportsperson). *I am young. I can play soccer. I am eleven years old.*
At Horizons School, Betty and Claudia are wrapping up the praxicum. A lot of sessions have been cancelled, due to the teachers’ union strikes and negotiations with the government. Today, all classes have been cancelled because teachers are attending a union meeting. With the approval of Maestro Manuel and Maestro Pedro (the principal), Betty and Claudia have the group for the whole day, from 8:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Betty and Claudia will be able to conclude their thematic unit on “Myself and People I Care About.” From 8:00 to 10:00 the children work on their identity texts, one about themselves and another about a special person in their lives. They are using all the vocabulary and language structures they have learned from Betty and Claudia. They are also helping each other to make their texts bilingual and/or multilingual. It is almost 10:00. I help Claudia make tortas (sandwiches) for the children. Betty continues helping the students with the questions they have.

It is 11:00. Our lunch and recess breaks are over. Students are excited and nervous about sharing their identity texts with everybody. They know that I will be videotaping their performances, which adds another layer of anxiety. They are happy to hear, however, that I will share their performances with other people, so they can see how smart and talented they are. They will choose one to present first and if there is time left, they will present their second identity text. Federico decides to go first. He wants to tell us about his brother, Jaime (Watch the video, Figure 33).
The students sit up as Federico is about to begin. He will read in two languages throughout his entire presentation in order to display his bilingualism. He begins, “My brother is Jaime. Mi hermano es Jaime.” Federico decides to translanguage in his next sentence since he does not want his lack of knowledge of an English word to stop him from telling us about his brother, “He is ‘travieso’ (mischievous).” Federico uses quotation marks around the word “travieso” to indicate his translanguageing. Federico’s calm presentation keeps everybody attentive. He continues, “He is obedient.” Federico reads next sentence, “He is funny,” and he self-corrects his pronunciation of the word “funny.” Federico keeps reading, “He is cool.”
He is my brother.” Federico reads fluently in both languages. He then displays his knowledge of the grammatical structure using the modal verb, “can.” “He can run.” Federico self-corrects his pronunciation once more. Federico pronounces his next sentence, “He is Oaxaqueño” as an English-speaking person would pronounce it, emphasizing the “x”. Federico switches back to his Spanish domain and reads “El es oaxaqueño.” Federico switches languages again and reads, “He can help.” He finishes by stating proudly about his brother, “He is handsome.” Federico looks at the camera and fills it with a great smile. Claudia cuts a very proud smile, too, and tells him, “Very good.” The class applauds.

Figure 34. Identity texts of Anabel, Enriqueta, Bella, Giovanni, and Everardo.

After Federico’s presentation, many students decide to display their talents. The classroom is filled with the sounds of different languages,
English, Spanish, Zapotec, and Mixe. On the tables are identity texts waiting to be read (Figure 34). It is Elisa G.’s turn. Elisa G. mentioned that she wants to be a singer, both in her introductory letter and in the second interview. This is a good test for the stage fright. She will tell us about herself in three languages: English, Spanish, and Zapotec de Quiatoni, located in the Sierra Norte (watch the video, Figure 35).

![Figure 35. Video of Elisa G. reading her identity text in three languages.](image)

Elisa G. begins, “I am cool.” She continues in Spanish, “Yo soy buena onda.” And she translanguages with Zapotec and Spanish “Na nak buena onda.” Elisa moves her arms back and forth and giggles nervously as she
tells us about her aspiration for the future, which she brings closer by using the present tense, “I am singer. Yo soy cantante. Na nak cantant.” This time Elisa decided to make “cantant” fit into her Zapotec languaging. It is a word that she wants to make her own. Elisa G. continues, “I am girl.” Elisa G. is fluent in Zapotec and Spanish. For her, her beginning knowledge of English does not make her multilingual. She says, “I am bilingual.” As I am recording, I shake my head in disagreement. She is multilingual and she is performing accordingly. Elisa G. uses another structure to tell us how she helps at home, “I can clean.” She comes to a sentence that will make her chuckle in disbelief, “I can speak English.” Her next sentence is indisputable, and she reads confidently, “I am beautiful.” And she finishes, “I am Elisa G.” She and Claudia both smile proudly.

The creation of and presentation of identity texts are spaces where the children negotiated their identities. The children rejected identities that position them as unintelligent people in need of fixing. Kamler (2001) argues that it is in these spaces where change begins at a local and personal level, “writing the personal has the power to transform both the writer’s subjectivities and the text produced” (p. 35). She argues that we need to see writing and the creating of texts beyond “extravagant claims and discourses of writing as ‘therapy’ or ‘empowerment,’ where the writer’s voice is seen to be the mechanism for changing the person and the world—for the attainment of universal, abstract goals of liberation and social transformation” (p. 36) and calls for “a notion of transformation that is more modest, more semiotic, more textual—and for a critical pedagogy that creates distance, a theorized space to analyze texts of personal experience.
as discursively produced and therefore changeable” (p. 36). The student teachers and children in the CEAR Project were not changing the world, they were using multilingual and translingual, and multimodal discourses to (re)create identities that were affirmed, respected, and validated in the classrooms in the CEAR Project. As new identities emerged in both classes, the children started seeing each other as people worthy of speaking (Norton, 1997, 2000) and started adopting and performing like the Other (Luke, 2003; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008).

**Becoming the “Other”**

Chucho gets off his motorcycle to begin another session at Downtown School. Chucho believes that learning another language is taking a “piece” of the other language speakers and making that piece your own, part of you. Chucho interacts with students while they wait for Señor Marcial to open the school door for them. Chucho sees how students are taking words from each other and making those words their own. There is more interaction now among the students at Downtown School, and they are learning words in private places away from the teachers. Chucho hears boys using the word, “dái /daI/” while they crack up. Chucho does not want to be left out and approaches Edgar Emilio, who was laughing, too. “What does that word mean?” asks Chucho. “It means pito” (colloquial word for “penis”) in Triqui,” says Edgar Emilio. “Is that right?” Chucho says while he cuts a smile and shakes his head. Edgar continues sharing with Chucho, “Roberto taught me that in Chatino, [for penis] you say “isná.” “Really?” says Chucho. “Yes, the other day el Chino (Jorge’s nickname) told
me, ‘Come dai.’ (Eat penis, come means “eat” in Spanish). That’s why I told him, ‘coma dai tu sister’ (have your sister eat penis). Edgar Emilio translanguaged in three languages: ‘coma’ is a word in Spanish, ‘dai’ in Triqui, ‘tu’ in Spanish, and ‘sister’ in English. Chucho cannot help it and cuts another smile. Señor Marcial opens the door at 1:30 p.m., not a minute earlier, and lets them in. “Okay, let’s go. Today we are going to learn more numbers,” says Chucho, and the children run to the class.

During the first stage of the CEAR Project, we were interested in finding what mestizo or Spanish-only speaking children felt about learning Indigenous languages. In the previous chapter, I presented the case of Edgar Emilio and five other students (Amado, Crisanto, Jorge, Malena, and Nayelli) at Downtown School who said that they would not like to learn Indigenous languages. In the case of Horizons School, only one student, Enriqueta, said that she would not like to learn an Indigenous language. During the second interview, all of these students said that they liked the idea of Indigenous languages being used in the classroom and that they wanted to learn them. In this section, I will present the pre and post perceptions of four of these students, three from Downtown School, and Enriqueta from Horizons School. I will also include a video of the students’ interactions. After this, I will present the overall pre and post findings of the two classes regarding the learning of Indigenous languages.

During the first interview, Amado, Edgar Emilio and Nayelli said that they would not like to learn an Indigenous language. Throughout the praxicum, however, we started noticing attitudinal changes in these students and others who had mentioned that they were not interested in Indigenous languages. Their responses changed during the second interview as well. Let’s focus on Amado first by reviewing my conversation with him during the first interview:
**Mario:** Amado, would you like to learn Triqui?

**Amado:** Eh?

**Mario:** Would you like to learn Triqui?

[Amado shakes his head]

**Mario:** No, eh. You would not like to. Why, *mijo*?

**Amado:** I do not know.

During the praxisum, we could see how interested Amado became in learning Indigenous languages from his classmates. Previously in this chapter, we could see how interested Amado was while Roberto was helping Heber write a sentence in Chatino (Figure 26). In addition, he was very attentive while Benito was reading his identity text (Figure 31) and expressed admiration when Benito performed in Zapotec. In the mural that students created at the end of Hugo’s thematic unit, Amado decided to write his contribution to the mural, “There are nine dark blue churches in the park,” in the five languages of the classroom: Chatino, Triqui, Zapotec, Spanish, and English (Figure 36). In order for Amado to accomplish this multilingual goal, he relied on the help of his multilingual friends.
Figure 36. Amado writes in five languages.

The changes in Amado’s perceptions that we noticed were confirmed by Amado in the second interview:

**Mario:** I have noticed that Indigenous languages are used and taught during the English class. Do you like this?

**Amado:** Yes. I like it because I would like to learn to speak another language.

**Mario:** Which one?

**Amado:** Any of them. All of them.

**Mario:** Why would you like to learn them?

**Amado:** I do not know. They are very interesting.
Like Amado, Edgar Emilio developed a more receptive attitude towards Indigenous languages and, most significantly, towards their speakers. During the first interview, Edgar Emilio said the following:

**Mario:** Edgar Emilio, would you like to learn Edgar J.’s [and Guillermina’s and Noé’s] language?

**Edgar Emilio:** [Edgar Emilio shakes his head] “No, I do not like speaking “lengua” [Indigenous language].

Edgar Emilio was very much engaged in learning English and other languages. In the following video, we can see how he became interested in learning Triqui and started becoming an alphabetic literacy developer for this language as well (Figure 37).

*Figure 37. Video of Edgar Emilio engaged in learning Triqui.*
Guillermina, Lupe, Edgar Emilio, Nayelli, Carmen and Malena are practicing sentences for their final mural. They are helping each other write their sentences in three languages. Nayelli, who wishes to write, “There are two red butterflies on the flower,” asks Guillermina for help in saying this sentence in Triqui. Guillermina, who is not sure about a word, calls out for Noé’s help. “Noé, how do you say mariposa (butterfly) [in Triqui]?” Heber teases Guillermina saying, “Butterfly means ‘Guillermina.’” After Heber’s joke, Noé calls out, “I do not remember anymore.” Guillermina ignores the joke and focuses on helping Malena, who requests her help with a sentence. Carmen waits for Guillermina to finish helping Malena and appeals for Guillermina’s help, “How do you say fish, Guille?” “Shcuaa,” replies Guillermina. Carmen immediately asks, “How do you write it?” Edgar Emilio, who is following the conversation, responds to Carmen’s request and attempts to write fish in Triqui. “Like this. Look,” he tells Carmen. As he attempts to come up with the written version, he sounds out the word a couple of times. Carmen is focused on Guillermina’s attempts and so is Emilio, who wants to verify his hypothesis. “Ah, I just missed an a — ‘schuaa,’” he says rather proudly about the closeness of his version to that of Maestra Guillermina. Students continue working on their tasks. Carmen asks for Guillermina’s help again, “[How do you say] green in Triquí?” Guillermina is still thinking about the previous word and asks “Fish?” “No, green,” Carmen states once more.
“Semarrea,” says Guillermina, and Carmen repeats the word. This time Carmen attempts to come up with her own version while sounding out the word.

Not only was Edgar Emilio engaged in the classrooms activities, he also verbalized his changing views regarding learning Indigenous language. In the second interview, he said,

**Edgar Emilio:** Our teachers teach us words in English, and then they put them in other languages, in Chatino, Triqui and Zapotec.

**Mario:** What do you think of that?

**Edgar Emilio:** [It is] fine.

**Mario:** Have you liked it?

**Edgar Emilio:** Because we learn other languages (while nodding).

**Mario:** Would you like to learn any of the languages you are using in class, like Triqui?

**Edgar Emilio:** Yes.

**Mario:** What about Chatino?

**Edgar Emilio:** No, the ones that I like the most are Zapotec and Triqui.

**Mario:** Why do you like those?

**Edgar Emilio:** Because they help me learn them.

Like Amado and Edgar Emilio, Nayelli was always engaged in the classroom activities and also changed her views. She also connected her interest in learning Indigenous languages to her Indigenous friends. During the first interview, Nayelli mentioned the following:
**Mario**: Nayelli, would you like to learn English?

**Nayelli**: Yes, I would like to. I like learning English very much, because it sounds beautiful to say those words.

**Mario**: In San Pedro [the town where you live now, you mentioned that], people speak Indigenous languages. Would you like to learn any of those languages?

**Nayelli**: No. I do not like them.

During the praxicum, Nayelli was keen in learning English and other languages. While Benito was sharing his identity text (Figure 31), Nayelli looked excited and interested. She even looked nervous while Benito was presenting, as if she was feeling what Benito was feeling. During the second interview, she told us about learning Triqui and Chatino from her friends:

**Nayelli**: Some of my friends teach us some times. They teach me things about Chatino. The teachers asked others to do [teach/speak] Triqui, too.

**Mario**: What do you think about this?

**Nayelli**: Good, because it sounds beautiful to listen to other languages, you see?

**Mario**: Yes, it sounds nice. You guys are learning some, aren’t you?

**Nayelli**: Yes.

**Mario**: What would you like to learn?

**Nayelli**: Triqui and Chatino.

As in the cases of the students at Downtown School, we witnessed changes in the perception of the only student who mentioned that she was not interested in learning Indigenous language at Horizons School. During the first interview, Enriqueta simply stated that she did not like learning Indigenous languages. “Just because.” During the praxicum, Enriqueta looked as
engaged as other students. In the video where Sofía is teaching Zapotec words (Figure 21), Enriqueta is one of the students who is diligently copying and repeating the words. During the second interview, Enriqueta stated the following:

**Mario:** I have noticed that during the English class, Maestra Claudia and Maestra Betty invite children to say, for instance, words in Indigenous languages. What do you think of that?

**Enriqueta:** [It is] fine.

**Mario:** Do you like it when they do that?

**Enriqueta:** Yes, because in that way we learn more.

. . . .

**Mario:** Would you like to learn an Indigenous language?

**Enriqueta:** [While nodding] Well, Zapotec because . . . there are people who cannot speak Spanish and there are people who speak Zapotec.

**Mario:** Aha, and then?

**Enriqueta:** That is it.

**Mario:** Then, would you like to communicate with them?

**Enriqueta:** Yes.

So far we have focused on individual students, especially on those who changed their perception between the first and the second interview; that is, before and close to the end of the praxicum. It could be argued that there is room for change. In other words, children who stated no to Indigenous languages could change their perception. However, we could also see changes in the classes as a whole. During the first interview, I would ask children if they wanted to learn an Indigenous language in a general sense. I would then ask them if they were interested in a
specific Indigenous language. In Maestro Manuel’s class, there were 31 students and 19 in Maestro Carlos’ class. Some students reported two languages whereas others did not mention any. Table 2 summarizes the findings.

**Table 2.**

*Number of Mestizo Children Who Wished to Learn an Indigenous Language before the Praxicum*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous Languages Children Wished to Learn</th>
<th>Number of Horizons School Children</th>
<th>Number of Downtown School Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any Indigenous Language</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatino</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixe</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixtec</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahuatl</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triqui</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zapotec</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In both schools, the number of students who mentioned that they would like to learn “any Indigenous language” was high, 12 at Horizons School and 14 at Downtown School. Children were interested, but not in a personal way. This was especially the case at Downtown School. Only four students mentioned a specific language. Out of those three languages, two were related to the languages spoken in that class: Chatino and Triqui. Zapotec, the language spoken by Benito, was not mentioned. At Horizons School where Indigenous languages were part of the school, children connected their choices to the languages most of their classmates spoke. In Maestro Manuel’s class, there were different types of Zapotec and one person who spoke Mixe.
Maestro Manuel spoke Mixtec. Sixteen students wanted to learn Zapotec, two students Mixe, and one student Mixtec.

During the second interview, I asked the same question to see whether or not children’s perceptions had changed. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Number of Mestizo Children Who Wished to Learn an Indigenous Language Close to the End of the Praxicum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous Languages Children Wished to Learn</th>
<th>Number of Horizons School Children</th>
<th>Number of Downtown School Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chatino</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixe</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixtec</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahuatl</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triqui</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zapotec</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were major differences between the choices of the children regarding the Indigenous languages they wished to learn before and close to the end of the praxicum. First, during the second interview, no student responded “any language,” as compared to a total of 26 children who said this during the first interview. In other words, for 26 children Indigenous languages went from being a generic concept to being something that had a name. They were no longer “Indigenous languages”; they were the languages spoken by their classmates. This is evident in the children’s responses. At Downtown School, Chatino had only been mentioned a couple of times during the first interview. Either only a couple of children knew about it or only those two children were interested. Close to the end of the the praxicum, however, nine children...
stated that they wanted to learn Chatino, the language of Roberto and Alejandro: the language of their friends. The number of children who wished to learn Triqui and Zapotec increased from one to six and from zero to seven, respectively. Students wanted to learn the languages of Guillermina, Noé, and Edgar J., and the language of Benito. Alvaro, who had mentioned that he wanted to learn Nahuatl during the first interview, kept his choice, but added Zapotec to his list. It is worth noting that nobody mentioned Mixe or Mixtec since nobody in the class spoke any of these languages. In the case of Horizons School, there are also noticeable changes. Mixe, the language of Silvia, went from being a choice of only two children to being selected by nine children. The language spoken by Maestro Modesto gained three children, going from one to four. Zapotec also increased, from 16 to 20. No students at Horizons School mentioned Triqui and Chatino, since nobody spoke any of these languages in the class. Nahuatl was not spoken in either of the schools.

During the CEAR Project, we interpreted the engagement of all the children and their changing views regarding Indigenous languages and their speakers as signs of lived multilingualism and interculturalism. The CEAR Project went beyond the Mexican federal government’s constitutional amendment that positions Indigenous languages as national languages and the intercultural education plan proposed by the ministry of education (Hamel, 2008a, 2008b). The praxicum was about children becoming friends, helping each other, and appropriating each other’s words to fool around, to create imagined communities, and to tell about themselves to the world through their identity texts. Similar to the findings of the CEAR Project, Hélot (2008a) and Young and Hélot (2006) have reported that “mainstream/monolingual” children start regarding “other” languages as interesting when they are introduced to them through meaningful activities such as having parents or children present their language and culture in the classroom.
It is essential to emphasize that in the case of the CEAR Project and the Language Awareness project conducted by Hélot and Young (2006), the human aspect is the *sine qua non* of the promotion of languages and interculturalism. In other words, the promotion and preservation of Indigenous languages, minoritized languages, and even modern foreign languages cannot be accomplished simply by developing and enforcing language policy and planning for the incorporation of these languages in the educational system. The promotion of languages and interculturalism is about the speakers of these languages and how they are positioned in the different societies. The other essential components are social justice and equality. Once mainstream and monolingual children start regarding the “Other” as people “worthy of speaking” (Bourdieu, 1991; Norton, 1997, 2000), they will want to be like them and share what they have. In order for this to happen, all speakers must be at the same level. Dialogue and reciprocal sharing cannot occur when one person (one group, or a society) is above the other. When this is the case, there is only extortion, and not dialogical sharing (see Valdes, 1997 for a criticism of dual language programs in the United States). It is our hope that the changing views of children in the CEAR Project will encourage other educators to develop similar projects, or new critical pedagogies, in order to reach more Oaxacan children, and other children in Mexico and around the world. We are positive that children’s multilingual and intercultural perspectives will lead to societies where all Oaxacans, Indigenous peoples, and minoritized children are respected, valued, and treated equally.
Chapter Eight:
The Teachings of Mexican Children and Inglés Enciclomedia

Throughout the CEAR Project, the children taught us significant lessons about fostering multilingualism and interculturalism. They taught us that monolingual teachers can successfully promote multilingualism and interculturalism. We saw that this happens when teachers commit themselves to the project, are willing to take the time to develop bonds of trust with their students, and create personal relationships through which the identities of both teachers and students are negotiated. Teachers must constantly convey overt messages that encourage children to feel that their life stories and expertise have an important place in the classroom. In addition, teachers must step down from the “teacher pedestal” and allow children to be teachers, experts, and material developers.

The children also taught us that their life stories do not fit traditional social constructs of family. Most pedagogical approaches, even critical pedagogy (Ada & Campoy, 2004; Quintero, 2007), would argue that starting with a thematic unit on “family” or “family histories” would be appropriate in order to make the learning meaningful and reinforce the school-home connection. After learning more about these children’s life histories, we discovered that approaching the concept of family as a nuclear and “happy” community would be inappropriate for these children. Many of them experience family life in different ways—some working as live-in servants in city homes far from their families, others by selling things in the street, others taking care of their younger siblings while their father is in the United States and their mother is working long shifts, and still others by being there for their mother to protect her from their alcoholic father.
In relation to languages, children showed us that the social construct of language as a fixed entity is highly problematic. The CEAR Project began with the assumption that the schools where we conducted this research were linguistically diverse. This was the case, but linguistic diversity was not simply the presence of multiple separate languages. Children showed us how they translanguaged and moved in, out, and between languages to perform as multilingual speakers. They also (trans)languaged in private places to show love to their mothers, to fool around, to insult others, and to help their parents. They taught us that their Indigenous language(s) had brought them shame and that we needed to respect their parents and/or them if they did not want to use their Indigenous language in public. In addition, the children taught us that dichotomies (e.g., monolingual versus bilingual, first language versus second language) could not capture the nature of their linguistic repertoire. In other words, not all children were either “monolingual” or “bilingual.” Some had a high level of Spanish and little or no knowledge of their parents’ Indigenous language(s). Other children were fluent in their Indigenous language and were developing Spanish, especially at the academic level. Still others were developing language(s) simultaneously or sequentially.

These are not the only lessons we learned from these children. The main purpose of this chapter is to focus on three other important lessons/themes that emerged from our research. The first theme addresses the construct of “Indigenous” from the children’s perspective. The second theme presents the most painful lesson we learned from Naty, a student in Maestra Irma’s class. Even though Maestra Irma’s class has not been the focus of this dissertation, I have decided to tell Naty’s story as a way of reminding us that critical research/pedagogy must go beyond rhetorical arguments and be grounded in the actual lives of the children. The third theme in the chapter addresses issues relating to the implementation of Inglés Enciclomedia, the program that will bring English to all fifth and sixth grade public classrooms in Mexico.
Indigenous: What Is That?

It is May 10th, Mother’s Day. We are all rather nervous. We were invited to participate with two presentations in the talent show prepared for the mothers at Downtown School. We are lucky that Pepe is quite a dancer; he will perform with a group of students from FI-UABJO. For the other number, we have decided to sing a song in three languages. The song, *El Feo* (The Ugly Man), is originally in Zapotec from the Isthmus and in Spanish. With the help of Belem, we added lyrics in English to make it trilingual. While we are singing in front of all the mothers, children giggle on the background (Figure 38).

![Figure 38. Our performance of El Feo on Mother’s Day at Downtown School.](image-url)
The audience is a combination of colors, but the bright red huipiles the Triqui mothers are wearing stand out. After the show, we meet some of the students’ family members. Alex’s, Roberto’s and Benito’s families are not here. However, we get to meet Benito’s older brother. He has been in Oaxaca City for three years. “Hey, Benito, your brother can help you with the words you do not remember in Zapotec,” Chucho tells Benito. “He does not remember anymore,” Benito quickly replies. Will Benito also forget his Zapotec as he spends more time in the city away from his family and his community? Does/will he self-identify as Indigenous?

The Rector of UABJO launched this Friday morning [October 20th, 2006] the Program “Unidad de Apoyo a Estudiantes Indígenas” (Center of Support for Indigenous Students). This program has the support of the Ford Foundation and the National Association of Universities and Post-Secondary Educational Institutions (ANUIES, acronym in Spanish). Its objective is to support university students from Indigenous backgrounds academically and to generate strategies to achieve equality among university students (UABJO, 2006, my translation).

International Graduate Scholarships Program for Indigenous [Peoples] (Ford Foundation)

This program . . . is directed to support Indigenous students around the country who are interested in pursuing a master’s or doctoral program in Mexico or abroad . . . One of the basic requirements is:

To belong to an Indigenous group.

How do you determine the applicant’s Indigenous ascription? [One of the frequently asked questions]

Different elements in the application and in the interviews of the semi-finalist applicants are evaluated. Together, they allow us to determine the ethnic ascription of the applicant. Some elements taken into consideration are:

1. Self-identification. [The person] who does not self-identify as Indigenous is not eligible for one of our scholarships.
2. Proficiency or knowledge in the Indigenous language by the applicant and/or their parents
3. Place of birth.
In Mexico, the recently modified Article 2 of its constitution defines Indigenous groups as those who descend from the groups who inhabited the actual territory at the beginning of colonization and who preserve their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions or part of those [institutions] . . . Consciousness of their Indigenous identity must be a fundamental criterion . . . (Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2007, my translation)

Many people in Mexico who are descendants of the original inhabitants prefer not to be identified as Indigenous because, throughout history, this designation has labeled them as ignorant, uneducated, and uncivilized (López Gopar, Stakhnevich, León Garcia, & Morales Santiago, 2006). With recent reforms, however, Indigenous people have gained some linguistic and legal rights (see http://www.inali.gob.mx/ for more information). To acknowledge these rights, I use the term Indigenous, being aware of its problematic notions, to refer to people in Mexico who descend from one of the pre-Columbian groups, speak a pre-Columbian language, strongly identify with their home community where one of these languages is still spoken, or all three. (López-Gopar, 2007a, p. 160)

The previous narrative and the three quotations open the door to one of the most important lessons we learned from the children in the CEAR Project. When we started the CEAR Project, we classified them as Indigenous and as mestizo. However, we were making our decision based mainly on their language proficiency. We had fallen into the trap that sees ethnolinguistic identity as “stable, uncontroversial, and intuitively correct . . . an identity expressed through belonging to a particular language community and articulated in statements such as . . . ‘I am British [ergo I speak English]’ (Blommaert, 2005, p. 215 quotations marks, brackets, and italics in original). Soon we realized that the children’s linguistic histories went beyond these simple designations. We noticed that some children were fluent in their Indigenous language, others had receptive skills only and were experiencing language shift towards Spanish, and others simply had never had an Indigenous language as part of their linguistic repertoire. In
the case of the Spanish-only speaking children, some would have both or one of their parents who speak an Indigenous language at a certain level.

In addition, to the linguistic diversity, we had to add place of origin and community identification to our classification. “Technically, ethnolinguistic identity is a complex notion . . . An ethnolinguistic identity would emerge at the confluence of a sense of belonging to a language community (‘speakers of X’) and a sense of belonging to an ‘ethnic’ community” (Blommaert, 2005, p. 214, quotation marks and parantheses in original; see May, 2001 for a detailed discussion). Most children, especially at Horizons School, had been born in an Indigenous community and had moved to Colonia Nueva at different times in their lives. Other children, at Downtown School, had recently arrived in the city, while others had been born in the city to parents who had migrated from Indigenous and mestizo communities. Hence, identification became a complex task, and we always felt uncomfortable with classifying students as Indigenous or mestizo since we were not sure about their own sense of belonging to an Indigenous group and the recognition of their classmates. Besides, we aligned with feminist and post-structural theorists that regard identity as multiple and dynamic, as a site of struggle and changing over time, and as situated unfinished dialogic processes subject to historicization and the recognition of others (Blommaert, 2005; Hall, 1996; Norton, 1995, 2000).

Even though the distinction between Indigenous and mestizo is complex, it is important to analyze it, since it is used by governmental, educational, and social institutions as their “politics of exclusion” (Hall, 1996, p. 2). In the CEAR Project, we paid particular attention to organizations such as the Program “Center of Support for Indigenous Students” at UABJO, scholarship programs, and human rights organizations and legal institutions that target Indigenous peoples. These institutions differentiate Indigenous from mestizo based mainly on language proficiency, while others consider place of origin, community recognition, and self-
identification as most important. We were concerned about the children in the CEAR Project, especially because they had moved away from their Indigenous communities. Due to their migratory lives, some of them had started losing the language, and possibly the recognition from their communities, and consequently their self-identification. We tackled this differentiation in one of our meetings and realized that it was a complex issue connected to equality and affirmative action:

**Mario:** One the topics we started talking about during the last meeting and that I think that we need to discuss further is how one determines what Indigenous is, or who is Indigenous and who is not. Supposedly, if you consider yourself Indigenous, [this] can open doors... to different scholarships and all that. [The question is what we should do] during the second interview: [Do] we need to push the kids if they tell us that they are not Indigenous [and tell them], “Hey, you know [being Indigenous] can offer this, but cannot offer that.” Should we say to them, “Hey, say that you are Indigenous in certain things or circumstances, but not in others.” How can we assume a responsibility stance and face the consequences that they are going to suffer…

**Claudia:** Of course.

**Mario:** At the end?

[Pause seven seconds]

**Claudia:** I told you [Mario] when we were taking the “Teaching English to Children” course; one time I commented that I perhaps could be labelled as a “city girl.” I have grown up in the city [of Oaxaca] since I was six years old and lived in [Mexico City] for many years. My point is that I once tried to apply for a scholarship and I went to the Center [of Support for Indigenous Students at
UABJO]. The first question they asked me when I inquired about the courses, there was a Mixe language course that I was interested in, was, “Are you Indigenous?” I said, “I do not know whether I have to answer yes or no to you. What do you mean if I am Indigenous or not?” And the young man replies, “Do you speak an Indigenous language?” And I said, “No.” “Then, you are not Indigenous,” [the young man told me]. I stared at him, with my typical stare that I use with people that get on my nerves. (Some student teachers chuckle) I stared at him thinking, “You are an asshole. Really.” I stared at him with the intention of proving to him that he was a complete idiot. He stares at me and tells me, “Look, what happens is that here the idea is to help…” I told him then, “If I am not Indigenous, I do not have the right to come to you, to take a class?” [He told me,] “No, no, of course you can. You can register.” I registered for the course on Mixe, but they could not accept [the fact] that I was in there with them . . . Later on, I went to check the requirements for an international scholarship, and this other woman asked me, “Are you Indigenous?” I thought, “Damn it” (we all chuckle). This woman told me, “The thing is that if you are Indigenous the grant covers 98% and if you are not Indigenous, your grant covers …

**Pepe:** 2 % (joking).

**Claudia:** Between 68% and 80%. Imagine that: in the United States if you receive 98% in comparison to 68%, it is a big difference in cash. I told the woman, “No, I am not Indigenous,” and she responds, “Well, your process will take two years.” I said, “Thank you, but in two years, I do not know where I will be.” I took my documents and left. Then, it is not fair. It is not fair not to have that condition
[being Indigenous] in order to have access. I mean, I think they are making a mistake.

**Pepe:** But, [we need to think] as well how many doors we have closed to them, too.

**Claudia:** But we would enter [in another argument]. I do not think it is fair. It is like if we said, well, after the war by Hitler and all, the Jews have the right to do all kinds of things in Germany because they were mistreated. No, I am sorry, but no . . . I mean, I understand your position, [Pepe], and I agree. I understand that many doors are closed for them. I understand that they are people who may not have anything to eat and all that. I respect that and I understand. But, I do not think that their condition [being Indigenous] only should determine all what happens. I mean, we are in search of a world of equality. I mean [we should] prove [to children], yes your condition may affect you, but from your condition you can be [anything you want to be] in any situation, and at any level. At least, this is the world that I expect for children. I want them to know that no matter whether you are rich, poor, or more or less, you can achieve anything you want, exactly the same that any other child under the same circumstances can. Am I making myself clear?

**Pepe:** [The thing] is that you think that way, but how many people think like you do? That is the point.

**Mario:** It is very interesting because, for instance, in the United States, they approved a law that is called “Affirmative Action.” What this law states is that it supposedly gives opportunities to the minority groups. This is exactly what we are seeing here, whether you are [or you are not Indigenous]. [Affirmative action
says], If you are Latin, if you are that, if you have been screwed up all the time, okay, we will pull you in . . . Then, I understand Claudia’s point and Pepe’s point that sometimes these types of laws, like affirmative action, or that we simply offer [Indigenous peoples or minoritized groups] a scholarship [is not enough]. Yes, there has to be support and [we must acknowledge] that we have a five-century debt with them, but [we should accept] that simply offering them a scholarship is not the solution. It should not be that way. But we [also need to] think about the people who are even at a more disadvantaged position. According to the Constitution and the article that I wrote [quoted above], I took that definition of Indigenous to try to maintain their rights. In order to be Indigenous, you must fulfill one of three requirements. First, to be a descendant from one the pre-Columbian groups. Right there, it begins to be problematic because I, for instance, do not have fair skin, then I must be 80% or something Indigenous. I am not blond and do not have blue eyes [like some Spanish descendants]. Then I could make the case that certain percentage of me comes from an Indigenous group.

Second [requirement], to speak a pre-Columbian language, and third, to supposedly feel proud of belonging to an Indigenous group.

**Chucho:** I feel proud.

**Mario:** Hence, it becomes problematic. For instance, we should talk about the type of students that Juan wants to focus on [students who do not speak an Indigenous language, but one or both of whose parents do]. First, those kids, in one way or another, if they come from marriages where only the mom or only the dad speaks an Indigenous language [may have never learned the Indigenous
language], or if they [did], they lost their language. When they go to request a scholarship [or any other right]…

Pepe: They will be screwed.

Mario: [They may be asked], “Do you speak an Indigenous language?” Or what is Benito going to say [if he starts losing his language, as his brother is]? “Not anymore,” [Benito may say]. (Some student teachers chuckle.)

Betty: [He may say] “I used to.”

Pepe: [Or they may tell Benito] “Okay, beat it.”

Mario: Yes, beat it, [Benito]. I wonder if Benito will have the guts or the agency or the power that Claudia had, to say, “Hey, you son of a gun, you are telling me that I am not [Indigenous].” I mean, there are Indigenous people who are forced by the social and economic system to leave their community, like the case of Benito, the case of Roberto and Alex, and almost all of the children from Horizons School who have migrated [at a young age]. For instance, I do not know whether Sofía, who is currently totally bilingual, will maintain her bilingualism when she finishes middle school or high school. I am not sure . . . What is interesting is the “common sense” used by the people at the Center of Support for Indigenous Peoples . . . The first characteristic they focus on is language.

Eliza: What they care about is language and not other things.

In that meeting, we continued discussing how Indigenous peoples have been used as a token of multiculturalism in official governmental and educational events. We all agreed that it was essential to ask the children about their views on these issues. In order to give voice to children’s perspectives, we decided to ask them whether they were able to identify an Indigenous person, what characteristics this person had to have, and whether or not they would self-identify
as Indigenous and for what reason(s). In order to gather this information, we brainstormed how to approach the topic, since it could be awkward for the children. In the end, we decided to engage the children in the following line of questions. I would prompt the children, “There are some Indigenous people in this school/community, right?” Based on children’s response, which in almost all cases was affirmative, I would then ask, “How can you tell that they are Indigenous?” If children focused only on linguistic issues in their responses, (e.g., I can tell because I hear them speaking in their Indigenous language), I would ask a follow-up question, “What about if they are quiet and they are not speaking? Can you still tell whether or not they are Indigenous?” In order to address the self-identification question, I would present it in a hypothetical situation using official surveys as a starting point. “There are usually people who conduct surveys in this neighborhood. They usually ask you questions about your family, about your house, about your education, and many other things. For instance, if they asked you, ‘Do you consider yourself to be an Indigenous person?’ What would you respond? Why?”

In the following three sections, I will present the findings of this inquiry. First, I will talk about the children’s thoughts about what makes a person Indigenous, focusing on the two schools together. Then, I will focus on the children’s Indigenous self-identification in each school separately, since there were major differences between the two schools.

**Characteristics of Indigenous Peoples according to Children’s Perspectives**

I notice that people are Indigenous because of the way they dress, right? They still wear their long skirts, with flowers on them. They also wear braids. That used to be done in small towns and even until now, right? Also because I sometimes hear them speaking at the grocery stores with their relatives. When they go grocery shopping, they talk among them like that. Then I say, “This is an Indigenous language.” (Anabel, from Horizons School)
I sometimes notice that people are Indigenous because of the “dialect” they speak and also because of the way they dress because there are some who come from Chiapas and they wear a blouse that shines and their black skirt that is made of wool, I think. Also the Triqui wear wool skirts and their huipil. Mixtecs, too.

(Noé, from Downtown School)

In the two quotations above, Anabel and Noé provided the two most salient characteristics of Indigenous people according to the children. Both of them identified Indigenous people according to their language and their traditional attire. All the children in both schools, except Lupe and Benito from Downtown School, claimed that they were able to identify Indigenous people. The children from Horizons School came up with 56 responses, 1.8 responses per student on average. The children from Downtown School provided 31 responses, 1.6 per student on average. All these responses were categorized and are summarized in Table 4. The first four categories were present in both schools while the last three were present in one school but not in the other.

**Table 4.**

*Characteristics of Indigenous Peoples according to Children’s Perspectives*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous Peoples’ Characteristics</th>
<th>Horizons School</th>
<th>Downtown School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They speak an Indigenous language</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way they dress</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are quiet, humble, and poor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way they speak Spanish (funny)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin color and facial features</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
They come from a town 2 0
They attend a bilingual school 1 0

The children’s responses related to language were based on Indigenous peoples’ language *practices*. In other words, their comments regarding language did not focus on language as an abstract concept. Children’s perspectives were based on their witnessing of Indigenous peoples’ *use* of Indigenous language: their *dialecto* (dialect), their *lengua* (language). “I can tell they are Indigenous because they [my classmates] present different assignments in Indigenous language and they start speaking [in their language]. If they are quiet, I cannot tell whether a person is Indigenous or not,” stated Enriqueta from Horizons School. “I know they are Indigenous because you can always tell when they are speaking their language. Because when I am walking on the street, I see that they are talking things like ‘isnana’ from languages that I don’t understand. They speak ‘isnana,’ ‘iscua,’” reported Edgar Emilio from Downtown School using words that he had heard; he did not know the meaning of these words.

Carmen, from Downtown School, also reported how she has witnessed Triqui students acting as language brokers for their mothers and grandmothers. At Horizons School, Luz made similar comments, “I can tell they are Indigenous because sometimes they want to speak like that [in their Indigenous language]. For instance, the other day Sofía’s mother came to school and she spoke to Sofía in Zapotec. That is how I can tell [they are Indigenous], when I listen to them.” At Horizons School, 25 children mentioned that they could identify an Indigenous person based on Indigenous language practices. At Downtown School, 13 children said the same thing. In terms of Indigenous language preservation and maintenance, children’s responses are encouraging. As community, long-term ethnographers, children have captured those moments where Indigenous peoples use their language in public domains.
Regarding the second highest category “the way they dress”, both Anabel and Noé identified Indigenous peoples, especially women, based on their daily use of traditional clothing. Christopher, another student at Horizons School, echoed Anabel’s description. “I can tell they are Indigenous because of the way they dress. They wear a long flowery skirt and their braids with different colored ribbons. They also wear huaraches (traditional sandals).” Fourteen students made the same comment at Horizons School and 11 students at Downtown School. At the latter school, Crisanto stated, “I can tell they are Indigenous because of the way they dress. I have seen that some women wear very long red dresses that have stripes of different colors.” Oehmichen (2000) observes that Indigenous women preserve their traditional clothing in their new places of residence as a way of maintaining their cultural and community ties. In other words, their bright outfits are a reminder to men and children that they are still Indigenous, that they should be proud, and that they are still connected to their Indigenous community or group even if they are living far away from it.

The third category, which was more prevalent at Horizons School, was “They are quiet, humble, and poor.” Eight students at Horizons School and only one at Downtown School provided comments that fell in this category. At Horizons School, Gaby stated, “You can easily tell [they are Indigenous] because of the way they walk and the way they dress. They walk crouching and looking down as if they were humble.” Silvia also connected Indigenous people’s humbleness with their walking, “They walk differently from the people who are from here. They walk like this [Silvia looks down]. The people here walk straight up.” Eugenio also stated, “You can tell they are Indigenous because they are very quiet.” Sofia connected Indigenous people’s poverty to their place of origin and their recent arrival, “You can tell they just came from a small town. You can tell they are poor.” Later in the interview, when she self-identified as Indigenous,
she acknowledged her family’s poverty: “I do not want to think about what I want to be when I grow up. I am not sure if my parents will have the money to support me.”

Horizons School is located in an emergent semi-urban neighborhood close to the city of Oaxaca. Many Indigenous newcomers arrive in this neighborhood in search of cheaper land. They invest most of their saving in the land and in a house made of sheet metal (Maldonado Alvarado, 2002). They struggle financially in the first years of their arrival. Hence, the children at Horizons School, many of whom have lived through these conditions, connected Indigenous peoples to poverty and their being humble in a new community. Moreover, some Indigenous mothers come to school to bring lunch to their children every day. Based on the mothers’ humble appearance, the children at Horizons School connected their appearance to poverty. At Downtown School, on the other hand, quietness, humbleness and poverty were not identified as Indigenous people’s characteristics. Parents did not come to Downtown School to bring a snack to their children. It can be inferred that those children, whose parents are more established in their new place of residence, did not connect Indigenous peoples to poverty and humbleness because they were either too young or not yet born when their parents were in similar situations (see Higgins 1974, 1983, for descriptions of urbanism and poverty).

The fourth category, “the way they speak Spanish” was stated by six students at Horizons School and two students at Downtown School. When children provided statements such as “They speak Spanish in a funny way,” I would point out that sounding funny or speaking with an accent is part of becoming/being bilingual and that it may remain like that if people decide to keep their accent. For us in the CEAR Project, it was essential to challenge linguistic discriminatory ideologies, because Indigenous peoples are stereotypically portrayed as people who sound funny in the media. The best example of this stereotypical portrayal is the character of “La India María,” who first appeared in the 1970s on a Sunday musical program. This
character became so popular that around 20 movies were produced with her as the protagonist.
The first movie was called “Tonta, tonta, pero no tanto” (Fool, fool, but not so much). My
dialogue with Jessica from Horizons School speaks to how Indigenous peoples’ way of speaking
has been regarded as “funny”:

**Mario**: How do you know if a person is Indigenous?

**Jessica**: Well, for me, [I have noticed] when they speak like that; the
pronunciation is a bit weird when they speak Spanish. Like Sofía, you see? She
speaks a bit funny. That is how I notice.

... ...

**Mario**: It is interesting, right? Because, for instance, now that we are learning
English, there are words that are difficult to pronounce, right? And when we
pronounce them, we may sound a little bit weird, right?

**Jessica**: Aja.

**Mario**: Well then, for instance, when people speak an Indigenous language, they
are also learning Spanish. There are words in Spanish that might be a bit difficult
for them.

**Jessica**: Yes, difficult.

At Horizons School other students made similar comments. Everardo also pointed out
that Indigenous peoples sound a bit funny when they speak Spanish. Carlos pointed out that
Indigenous peoples have an accent when they speak Spanish. Erika regarded Indigenous peoples’
accents in Spanish as something peculiar: “Because when they are speaking [Spanish] like we
do, there is something especial in the way they speak Spanish. Because one can distinguish it.”

At Downtown School, Edgar Emilio and Carmen had also noticed that some Triqui mothers had
limited Spanish and that “they could not speak Spanish very well.” During the second interview
and throughout the praxicum, we emphasized that we needed to go beyond saying that people speak “not well” or “funny” and that multilingual and bilingual people speak languages in unique ways as they invest their identities in those languages.

The fifth category, “skin color and facial features” was mentioned only by the children at Downtown School. They said that Indigenous peoples looked more “morenito” (more dark-skinned) than other people. Amado even pointed out that, “They are morenito and their faces are longer, pointy.” These comments are interesting because most people in Oaxaca are morenito. Nevertheless, the city of Oaxaca also has inhabitants who are blond and fair-skinned, usually foreigners, and other fair-skinned people, Mexicans who descend more closely from Spanish people. Downtown School children’s comments regarding skin color may be connected to the fact that the Indigenous people whom they see and/or interact with are mostly Triquis. This Indigenous group does not usually intermarry with mestizos, other Indigenous groups, or foreigners (see Bautista Gómez, 2008, for a discussion about how in Triqui communities women are encouraged to marry Triqui men and not outsiders). For this reason, most Triqui people are more morenito than other Oaxacan people. Nevertheless, the Triqui children at Downtown School are growing up in an intercultural setting, and Triqui intracultural marriages may start changing. For instance, we witnessed how Noé was dating mestizo girls and how Guillermina started flirting with Roberto, the Chatino boy. “When cultures meet,” we commented and joked in one of our meetings.

The sixth category, “they come from a town” and the seventh category, “they attend a bilingual school” came up only at Horizons School. Only two students connected Indigenous students to small towns. This number is low because for most students at Horizons School it is a given that Indigenous peoples come from a small town, especially because of their own recent migration. This will be more evident in their self-identification as Indigenous peoples in the next
section. The last category connected to Horizons School as a bilingual school was pointed out by Jessica. She stated that many people in Colonia Nueva assume that if you attend Horizons School, it is because you are Indigenous, in comparison to the school half a block down, which is attended mainly by mestizo children.

In this section, I have focused on children’s perspectives regarding the “Indigenous” social construct. Children identified people’s performances (e.g. speaking an Indigenous language, wearing traditional clothing, and speaking Spanish in a funny way) and connected them to the indigenous construct they have developed in this particular time and location. In other words, people in their community could have been performing, or not, as Indigenous, but children recognized their identity as such: “identities are constructed in practices that produce, enact, or perform identity . . . and in order for an identity to be established, it has to be recognised by others [the children in this case]” (Blommaert, 2005, p205, italics in original).

In the following section, I will focus on children’s self-identification (or not) as indigenous people, in each school.

Children’s Self-Identification as Indigenous at Horizons School

In previous chapters, I have emphasized the fact that Horizons School belongs to the Indigenous strand. For this reason, Indigenous languages are part of the school curriculum as a subject that all students have to take. Moreover, most of the school staff are Indigenous or have Indigenous background from the principal’s point of view. The principal also stated that Indigenous cultures are promoted at this school. Maestro Manuel commented that he has had discussions with the children regarding Indigenous peoples, languages and cultures. Based on this background, one can see that the “Indigenous” construct was part of children’s schooling at Horizons School. In this section, I will present children’s self-identification as Indigenous people, dividing the class into three groups: (a) children who speak an Indigenous language; (b)
children who do not speak an Indigenous language, but whose parents, at least one, do so; and (c) children who do not speak an Indigenous language and whose parents also do not.

**Children who speak an Indigenous language.**

At Horizons School, there were seven children who spoke an Indigenous language: Zenén, Sofía, Rubén, and Hugo, who speak Zapotec from the Sierra Sur; Elisa G. and Samuel, who speak Zapotec from the Sierra Norte; and Silvia, who speaks Mixe. When asked whether or not they self-identified as Indigenous, all of these students responded affirmatively. All of them connected their self-identification to their Indigenous language. Some also challenged racist linguistic prejudice comments from other people. Silvia commented, “[I consider myself Indigenous] because it is not shame[ful] to speak an Indigenous language or to be from a small town.” Hugo also stated,

I consider myself Indigenous because my parents speak it [Indigenous language]; they speak it at home and we all understand it. My uncles, my cousins and I speak only the Indigenous language. (How do you feel about that, Hugo? I asked.) Well, I feel proud to know one more language . . . Some people make fun of everything, but sometimes they do not. We need [our Indigenous language] for some school assignments. (Why do people make fun? I asked). Because they say that [Indigenous peoples] are Indians, are poor, and all that. I think that is wrong, because here everybody who lives in Oaxaca is an Indian, right? They are poor. Nobody is rich, no less, no more.

Samuel and Sofía also connected their self-identification to their family language, and Ruben added his place of origin, “Because I am from another municipality, from a small town.” Elisa G. made sure that her self-identification as an Indigenous person was connected to her bilingualism: “[I consider myself Indigenous] because I speak an Indigenous language and I also
speak Spanish.” All of these children were aware that Indigenous people are sometimes discriminated against or made fun of because of their language. Nevertheless, they had appropriated Horizons School’s public discourse: It is okay to be Indigenous, and one should feel proud of it.

**Children who do not speak an Indigenous language, but whose parents do so.**

At Horizons School, there were nine children who could not speak an Indigenous language but one or both of whose parents did speak. Some of them could understand it only a little bit, while others had never had it. These students were Federico, Bella, Eliza R., Yenni M., César, Angela, Olga, Jenny L., and Everardo. All considered themselves Indigenous for three different reasons: their own place of origin, the place of origin and Indigenous language of their parents, and their Indigenous ancestors.

Regarding place of origin, Everardo, who was born in the Zapotec region of the Sierra Norte, commented, “Yes, I am Indigenous, because I am from another place. Yes, my parents, too. We are all [from another place].” Angela’s parents had moved from the Mixtec region to a mestizo community near Colonia Nueva. Angela was born in this new community. She connected her indigenousness to a small community, probably her parents’: “I am Indigenous because I was born in a pueblo (town).” Olga, who also connected her Indigenous identity to a small town, emphasized the fact that it is not easy to self-identify as an Indigenous person, since many people make fun of them: “I am Indigenous because I come from a small town. Sometimes I feel bad when people say ‘Indigenous’ [in a derogatory tone] and they also make fun [of us]. (Have you told them anything? I asked.) I tell them that they are also Indigenous because they come from a small town.” Olga is well aware that in Oaxaca “the term ‘de pueblo’ [someone or things from a small town] has become synonymous of exotic, weird, inexplicable behavior and low-level of [formal] education” (López Gopar et al., 2006, p. 97).
The children also self-identified as Indigenous because of their parents’ place of origin and Indigenous language, and their Indigenous ancestors. Bella, who was born in Mexico City, stated, “I am Indigenous because my parents were born in a town.” Yenni M. reported, “I consider myself Indigenous because I am the daughter of two generations of people from a town.” César connected his indigenousness to his family as well: “I would say that I am Indigenous because here almost all of us are Indigenous . . . and also because my mother is Indigenous from a town.” Jenny L., who hesitated whether or not to self-identify as Indigenous said, “No, well, yes, because my family does speak an Indigenous language. Well, my grandparents only.” Eliza R. also commented, “Yes, I am Indigenous because my grandparents are Indigenous.”

**Children who do not speak an Indigenous language and whose parents also do not.**

At Horizons School, there were 15 children who did not speak an Indigenous language and none of whose immediate relatives did, either. First I will focus on the eight students who mentioned that they would not consider themselves Indigenous and then on the seven students who said they would.

There were eight students who would not self-identify as Indigenous. Enriqueta, Abel, Eugenio, and Diego reported that they did not consider themselves Indigenous because they could not speak an Indigenous language. Gaby and Fredy, who placed themselves in the hypothetical situation of the surveys, stated the same. Gaby said, “I would tell them [the survey administrators] that I am not Indigenous, because what if they told me, ‘Let’s see, say something’ [in an Indigenous language].” Fredy commented, “No, I would say no, because I cannot lie to them and tell them that I can [speak an Indigenous language]. They may ask me [to speak] and I would not be able to answer.” Anabel stated that she does not consider herself Indigenous because she cannot speak an Indigenous language and because she does not wear
traditional clothing. I engaged Anabel in conversation about my belief that most people in Oaxaca were part Indigenous. Anabel disagreed with me and connected being Indigenous to socio-economic status. The following is our conversation:

**Mario:** It is interesting, because we are a bit Indigenous, right? Because sometimes we have relatives who are Indigenous, don’t you think?

**Anabel:** No, I say that the Indigenous are the people who dress like that and who do speak [an Indigenous language], I think. They *are* Indigenous, but like the rich people, they are not Indigenous.

**Mario:** Mm-hmm.

**Anabel:** They are not Indigenous, right?

**Mario:** Mm-hmm.

**Anabel:** They [rich people may say] ‘Those people. You are from the lower class.’

**Mario:** That is what rich people say?

**Anabel:** Yes.

Anabel’s critical insight added another layer to the complexity of the Indigenous construct. It was not a simple Indigenous-heritage or a linguistic connection; it was also connected to economic power and the typical portrayal of Indigenous peoples as poor people. Giovanni’s comment connects us to the next group, “Honestly, I would have to say that I am not Indigenous, because I cannot speak an Indigenous language. But I do want to learn.”

There were seven students who self-identified as Indigenous in spite of not having an immediate Indigenous language speaker in their family. Luz and Jaziel connected their self-identification to their place of birth and their Indigenous roots. Luz said, “I consider myself Indigenous because even if I do not speak an Indigenous language, I was born in a town and I
have roots. Almost all of us are Indigenous because we come from a town and grew up in a town.” Three other students, Erika, Daniel, and Carlos, self-identified as Indigenous because they were learning an Indigenous language at Horizons School. Daniel said, “I would say I am Indigenous because they already taught me one [Indigenous language].” Erika commented, “Yes, because I am going to learn [an Indigenous language], I think.” Carlos connected his self-identification to language learning and to equality, “I would say yes, because one will learn an Indigenous language one day and we are all the same.” Jessica and Christopher viewed themselves as Indigenous due to their interaction with Indigenous students at Horizons School at a more personal level. Jessica stated, “People tell me, ‘You are Indigenous because you go to the bilingual school.’ And I tell them, ‘Yes, I am.’” Christopher also reported, “[I self-identify as Indigenous] a bit because ando conviviendo [I share the same life] with them. I also share the same customs.”

At Horizons School, most children self-identified as Indigenous and resisted people’s discriminatory comments. Twenty-three out of 31 students self-identified as Indigenous peoples. The other eight students, who did not self-identify as Indigenous, viewed Indigenous peoples as people who engaged in different practices, but who were equal in comparison to the rest of the population and to them, The principal, Maestro Manuel, and all the Horizons School staff were fulfilling their goal as an intercultural school where Indigenous peoples are valued and respected. In the next section, I will focus on the contrasting situation at Downtown School.

**Children’s Self-Identification as Indigenous at Downtown School**

Downtown School is part of the mainstream strand in public elementary education in Mexico. In the mainstream strand, Mexican interculturalism and multilingualism is forgotten, set aside, and replaced by a monocultural, Spanish-only agenda. If Indigenous peoples and cultures exist in these schools, it is through textbooks that present them as part of Mexico’s distant
historical past. Or they are present through their brightly colored clothing (e.g., the red *huipiles* worn by Triqui women) which reminds *mestizo* teachers and students that Indigenous peoples are still part of Mexico’s reality. In the following two sections, I will present Downtown School children’s Indigenous self-identification divided into two groups: (a) the children who do not speak an Indigenous language and whose parents also do not; and (b) children who speak an Indigenous language.

**Children who do not speak an Indigenous language and whose parents also do not.**

At Downtown School, there were 13 children who spoke only Spanish. These children’s parents did not speak an Indigenous language, either. Five of these children stated that they did not self-identify as Indigenous, four were not sure about their self-identification, and four regarded themselves as Indigenous.

The five children who did not self-identify as Indigenous were Crisanto, Edgar Emilio, Tania, Monserrat and Rosario. The first three stated that they did not consider themselves Indigenous because they did not speak an Indigenous language. “No, because I do not speak any [Indigenous] language,” stated Edgar Emilio. Monserrat connected her non self-identification to her monolingualism and her clothing, “No, [I do not consider myself Indigenous] because we could say that they are different from me because they speak Spanish and their Indigenous language, but I can only speak Spanish, and they [Indigenous women] dress in one way and I dress in another way.” Rosario, who was not sure about her decision at first, focused on language and place of origin, “I am not sure. I guess not because I was not born in a town and I do not know how to speak an Indigenous language.”

There were four students who were not sure about their Indigenous self-identification. First, Lupe was not sure about what the word Indigenous meant. “To begin with, what does that word mean?” she asked me when I asked her whether there were Indigenous peoples in her
neighborhood. Carmen was not sure about her self-identification because of her place of birth: “Well, I would not know [what to say] because I was born here [in the city], but all my siblings were born there in Santa Lucía, in the Mixtec region. I would not know because my parents are from there, [too]. I would not know what to answer.” Alvaro believed that he was part Indigenous due to his *mestizo* identity:

Well, I do not consider myself either Indigenous or Spanish, right? Because I am half, I am *a mestizo*. I am not either Spanish or Indigenous, because on the one hand I do consider myself Indigenous, but on the other Spanish, because we do not know who our ancestors are. Why would I say that I am Spanish if I do not know who my grandfather was before my grandfather and before my grandfather and so on?

Nayelli was also unsure about her self-identification. At the beginning, she said that she would not consider herself Indigenous, but when I asked her why, she stated, “Well, I may consider myself Indigenous because I would speak the Triqui and Chatino languages, and Zapotec, too.” Nayelli is the perfect example of becoming the “Other” through language learning.

There were four students in this group who did self-identify as Indigenous. Heber and Jorge stated that they would consider themselves Indigenous because of their place of origin. Heber stated, “Yes, I would consider myself Indigenous because I was born in a town.” Amado connected his indigenousness to his heritage and included everybody: “I would consider myself Indigenous because we all proceed from Indigenous peoples.” Malena, Carmen’s sister, considered herself Indigenous because of her place of birth, Santa Lucía. However, Malena started problematizing the Indigenous concept that we were inquiring about. While we were talking about Guillermina, who spoke Triqui, Malena stated, “Well, [Guillermina and her cousins] are *not* Indigenous, but they speak another language. It sounds bad to call them
Indigenous, right?” Malena’s comment regarding the “bad” hidden in the Indigenous term connects us to the struggle faced by children who speak an Indigenous language in a city where monolingual and monocultural ideologies prevail.

**Children who speak an Indigenous language.**

At Downtown School, there were six students who spoke an Indigenous language: Benito speaks Zapotec from the Sierra Sur; Alex and Roberto speak Chatino; and Guillermina, Edgar J., and Noé speaks Triqui. For these students, the term Indigenous and their self-identification as such presented different problems. For Benito, the term Indigenous was simply unknown to him:

**Mario:** Benito, how do you know if a person is Indigenous?

**Benito:** (Pause 7 seconds). What is Indigenous or what [are you asking me]?

**Mario:** Mmm.

**Benito:** (Pause 3 seconds) What is Indigenous, you are saying? I do not know.

After I explained what the term Indigenous implied to Benito, he identified various classmates who spoke an Indigenous language. I asked him what he would say if someone asked him if he was Zapotec, and Benito instantly replied, “Yes, because I speak Zapotec.”

For Alex, Roberto, and Edgar J., my questions regarding their self-identification as Indigenous created an awkward situation. These three students were able to identify other people as Indigenous based on those people’s language and traditional clothing. Nevertheless, when I asked Alex whether or not he would self-identify as Indigenous, he replied, “I do not know.” For their answers regarding Indigenous self-identification, Roberto and Edgar J. opted to pause for a long time, (7 second pause) and (13 second pause) respectively. Those long pauses expressed racist and classist meanings regarding the term Indigenous, but Roberto and Edgar J. were not ready or were too shy to verbalize them (Noé will do this for us later on). However, when I asked Roberto and Edgar J. whether they would consider themselves Chatino and Triqui, they both
immediately replied affirmatively. They justified their self-identification as Chatino and Triqui because of their ability to speak those languages.

Guillermina’s self-identification was complex. Guillermina was able to identify Indigenous people because of their language and their traditional clothing, too. This is my dialogue with Guillermina regarding her Indigenous self-identification:

Mario: Hey, Guille, if someone asked you if you considered yourself Indigenous, what would you say?

Guillermina: Mmm, maybe yes.

Mario: Why?

Guillermina: (Pause 3 seconds). Just because.

Mario: What would that “maybe yes” mean?

Guillermina: Who knows, it depends on how they see you.

Mario: How?

Guillermina: It depends on how they listen to you; [it depends] if they have already listened to you speaking [an Indigenous language] and if nobody knows.

Guillermina’s Indigenous self-identification was not straightforward. She had the agency to decide whether or not she would present as or admit to be an Indigenous person. Her decision would depend on whether people perceived her as such. If people had heard her speaking Triqui, she would have no choice but to admit her indigenousness. However, if people did not know about her Indigenous language abilities, it would be her decision to present herself as such or not. If Guillermina felt that people saw her or Indigenous people in accepting or discriminatory ways, she would answer accordingly. When I asked her whether she would tell me, she simply replied, “Mmm” while nodding.
I interviewed these five students individually on the same day. I ran out of time to interview Noé, which gave me time to discuss these five children’s self-identification with the student teachers. The student teachers and I were able to reflect on these children’s not knowing of the term Indigenous in the case of Benito, their reluctance and resistance in the case of Alex, Roberto and Edgar J., and their strategic self-identification in the case of Guillermina. We inferred that the children had probably learned or heard various racist, classist, and/or linguistic prejudice meanings for the term. Claudia proposed the idea that perhaps discrimination against Indigenous people begins when they are labeled as such. Miriam pointed out that it would have been an awkward question for them, especially if they were asked to self-identify as Indigenous before the CEAR Project began, when they had not been involved in Indigenous children’s education. I also shared that I felt that I had probably insulted the children by asking them, ”Are you Indigenous?” and that they probably respected me too much to tell me, “Hey, you asshole, who are you calling Indigenous, me? I do not get along with you like that [in this disrespectful and insulting way].” During that meeting, I shared my eagerness to talk to Noé to find out more.

Noé was able to quickly provide characteristics about Indigenous people. He had met Indigenous people from different places in downtown Oaxaca, since he started working as a street vendor when he was 6 years old. Nevertheless, Noé also had difficulty with the Indigenous label that I was imposing on him with my questions. He elaborated on the discriminatory connotations the word Indigenous had in downtown Oaxaca and said that this word was even used by Indigenous peoples to insult each other:

Mario: If they asked you, “Do you consider yourself Indigenous?” What would you say?

Noé: (Pause 3 seconds) I do not know. (He chuckles nervously)
**Mario:** What do you think? (Pause 3 seconds) . . . Would you prefer if they asked you, “Are you Triqui?” (Pause 3 seconds). Have you heard that word before?

**Noé:** Which one? Indigenous?

**Mario:** Yes, Indigenous.

**Noé:** Well, yes, we, with our cousins and our classmates, we get along like that (Mario: Mmm). Before I did not know what Indigenous meant. They called me [Indigenous]. (Noé shakes his head in disapproval). I remember one time when I asked a teacher (at Noé’s previous school). I asked him what Indigenous was, and he told me that it was a person who speaks *idio. dialecto* (language, dialect). Since then, my classmates started calling me ‘Indigenous.’ (Mario: Mmm) They would call me, “*Pinche indígena*” (Damn Indigenous). Since then, I realized [what Indigenous meant]. I would tell them, “As if you did not speak dialect, too. You are also Indigenous.” I would tell them that.

**Mario:** Mmm. That means that your classmates, who used to call you this, also spoke an Indigenous language like Zapotec or Triqui.

**Noé:** (While nodding) Like Zena, Edgar J.’s brother, he keeps calling me “Indigenous” sometimes.

**Mario:** Ah, Edgar J.’s brother?

**Noé:** Mmm. And sometimes also my brother, Eliseo, who works at *La Casa del Mezcal* (a bar in downtown Oaxaca), he calls me Indigenous. “Hurry up, Indigenous,” he tells me sometimes. I just ignore him.

Noé unpacked the connotations of the term Indigenous for us in the CEAR Project. We had read about these discriminatory meanings. However, they were distant in a way. Noé brought them to our faces. Noé’s words teach us—and Mexican legislators and people in charge of the legal
system, human rights organizations, organizations that provide grants for “Indigenous,” and educational institutions that decide to adopt “affirmative action-type” policies—that Mexican children grow up in a society where the term Indigenous is complex and that our educational systems, laws, and policies need to treat the term Indigenous as the complex term that is, (re)constructed according to many socio-cultural factors and ideologies. We in the CEAR Project, learned that, at Downtown School especially, we had to demystify concepts such as “Indigenous” and “dialect” that placed Oaxacan people in “lower” positions. In other words, our praxicum had to go beyond language teaching and work towards unveiling deficit language ideologies hidden in concepts. We were aware, however, that even if we addressed these ideologies with the children, they would still be prevalent in Oaxacan society. Hence, the children at Downtown School had to develop the agency that Claudia and Hugo, at Horizons School, had, in order to resist and challenge the positions that Oaxacan people would continue imposing on them.

The children at Downtown School taught us that any construct such as Indigenous is problematic if not rooted in the socio-cultural and historical context where it is used. A student at Downtown School also taught us our most painful lesson in the CEAR Project.

Naty: Our Most Painful Lesson

Naty was a cheerful little girl. She was tall and skinny with long hair and sleepy eyes. She was one of just three girls amongst 12 active boys in Maestra Irma’s class. Naty would not let any of the boys pick on her; she would fight back. She quickly bonded with me and would jump on my back and call me, “Maestro Grandote” (Big Teacher). She was easy-going and
was not intimidated when the student teachers, Cueto, Hugo, Juan, and Pepe, and I interviewed her.

_Hola_, my name is Naty. I am ten years old. I have been coming to this school since I was in the first grade. I went to kindergarten at Centro de Esperanza Infantil. I live with my parents. I have five siblings, my sister who is 15, my brother 13, me, my brother 9, my sister 4, and the baby, who is 3 years old. I was born here in the city and my parents were born in San Juan Copala. Guillermina [who studies in Maestro Carlos’ class] is my cousin. I do not speak much Triqui, but I understand it. My parents speak to me in Triqui and I reply in Spanish. I am learning a little [bit of Triqui]. I [used to] go to fairs with my parents, to Coahuila [a northern state of Mexico] and many places because my parents sell traditional clothes there. They make them and sell them. My mother weaves and she spends two or three months making a huipil. I no longer go with my parents to fairs, because I am going to school. They go away, sometimes for a month, five months, or even a year. My older sister takes care of me when they are not here.

_Sometimes, my parents sell here [in Oaxaca City], too, at Jardín Labastida. I help my mother in the morning and after school. I help her sell things. When we are at the stand, she talks to me in Triqui and I reply in Spanish. When the gringos come, my mother can speak English [to them]. She has a book about English and when she has some free time, she_
studies it and that is how she knows some English. I am learning a bit from my mother because she knows it all, even French (“Wow! That is great. Your mother then knows Triqui, French, English and Spanish. She is very intelligent,” I say, and Naty smiles). I have learned many things [about English] from my mother. I would like to learn [more] English to help my parents learn how to speak [more] English, since my mother sometimes does not remember [how to say things in English]. I know a little bit of English. I tell the English [speaking] people, the gringos, how much things cost and whether the item is long, small, or hand-woven. (“Everything, eh. Well, you will be one of the teachers here,” I say, and Naty giggles. “How much is a chalina (a shawl)” I ask Naty in English). Twenty pesos (Naty replies in English). At Centro de Esperanzara Infantil I learned how to use computers and the [gringos] taught us English there. I did not go to the English classes, though. They are boring (Naty giggles, and I joke, “These guys (pointing at Pepe, Juan, Hugo, and Cueto) need to get their act together, so their classes are not boring”). I do not like the classes because children get too rowdy and yell [in class], then when they [gringo teachers] teach us things, they cannot say it in Spanish and they get stuck. They only speak English. I would also like to learn French, too, because I do not know anything now.

My parents studied up to fourth grade in elementary school. They say that where they lived, you could only go to fourth grade (“My parents as
“well”, I say. “My mother told me that she repeated fourth grade three times, so she could continue going to school”). My parents love us all very much. But the one that they love the most is me, me alone. My father buys me things and sometimes even gives me money. I like school very much. I like all the subjects. I would like to be a doctor. (“That is great Naty, so you can cure me when I am old,” I say).

I might make it to be an old man, but the saddest thing is, that Dr. Naty will be not there for me. Naty died during the spring break in 2008. Miriam and Eliza, the student teachers in Maestra Irma’s class, mentioned that Naty had not come to school during the week before spring break and that Maestra Irma had told them that she was sick. According to Maestra Irma, the doctor discovered that Naty had chronic anemia, which developed into leukemia within two weeks of his diagnosis.

In the CEAR Project, we discovered how “uncritical” our project was, especially because we were observing these children’s stories from our own “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1991). None of us were rich or came from the upper middle class. Actually, we all had grown up in low-middle SES homes. We knew we were dealing with low-SES schools and children, and thought we had designed interview questions that would allow us to learn “everything” there was to know about the children in order to teach empowering lessons. However, we forgot to ask the basic question that deals with our most basic need: food. Naty’s sudden death from chronic anemia in the middle of the praxicum was a slap in the face. We had assumed that because we had food on our table, the children did, too. Naty proved us wrong and made us realize how “uncritical” our pedagogy was.
During a weekly meeting, we discussed Naty’s case and connected it to other students’
and our own lives:

**Mario:** I still cannot believe it. Naty was such a confident girl. I still remember
when she told us “twenty pesos.” I feel so helpless . . . Here we are trying to teach
these kids and they have problems at different levels that we cannot even imagine.
I remember what Chucho said in one of the meetings, that the more we talked
about these kids, the more sociological it became. [Also at meeting] we wondered
whether we should ignore it or take it seriously… I feel so much pain and
helplessness that these things still occur in Mexico.

**Claudia:** Mexico has many resources, and I think people should not die of
hunger. People should not have to go through this. I cannot not imagine how
Natys’ parents are feeling, what the mother is thinking, how she needed to leave
her children behind in order to support them. There is no concept that explains
losing a child. If your mother dies, you are an orphan. If your husband dies, you
are a widow. But if your child dies, there is no name for that. It is against nature.

**Juan:** We should feed children at schools. Everything starts from malnutrition. If
children are sleepy and don’t have energy, how can they learn?

**Mario:** It is very easy to read about poverty . . . but when you have it right in your
face, it is then that you finally understand. It is easy to write and read about
children from low-SES, but it’s another thing to live it. Interestingly, the day
before I found out about Naty, I was talking to Laura about Alex and Roberto. I
noticed that they have white spots on their faces. One can see the difference
between them and the children who have their parents around, like Alvaro.
Laura: Even how they dress. Alvaro goes to school with his clothes perfectly ironed, and he mentioned that his parents are buying him a cell phone.

Mario: It is the same case with Benito and other kids at Horizons School. It hits me now… I was talking with Maestra Irma about Naty, and she emphasized the role of parents and that Naty’s mother had left them behind. But we are living in a system that forces parents to go elsewhere if there are no jobs here, to earn money. If they don’t do this, who will feed their children? Maestra Irma has strong opinions about this family, and I do not want to judge her. She told me, “You should have seen this family’s house, it looks like a castle, I mean they are building a big house.” I think we all, as parents, focus on certain things, right? I mean the fact that this family wanted to build a “castle” for their children; [it is because] they wanted to give their children the best.”

Claudia: I agree. I think that there are not many mothers who prefer to work away and abandon their children. I also lived in a family where my parents were divorced. When my mother decided to come to Oaxaca, I was 6 years old . . . We [my siblings and I] were very young, and my uncle took care of us when our mother went to work. Later, another young woman, Chica (the one I told you about during our first interview) took care of us. Chica must have been 15 or 16 years old at the time. And you commented on parents who have to leave their children to go to work. I lived like that. Later, my siblings and I had to take care of our younger brother. We were very fortunate that nothing happened to us. Now, I know how lucky I am, since other people have not had the same luck.

Juan: Yes, there is no better person to look after children than their parents. Even if people are nice, they are not going to take care of you in the same way that your
parents would. In the case of Benito [Alex and Roberto], these kids were brought to the city to be on their own, and even if they are in the homes of good people, they will always be strangers. It is not the same.

**Mario:** In this project, due to lack of time, I did not get involved with the parents. I came home and told Belem [my wife] about Naty, and she told me, “Go and visit her parents.” It was another slap in the face for me, I mean, they [Naty’s parents] do not even know who I am. They got the [permission] letter and that was it. How do we fall into these types of relationships? Parents do not even know us.

**Juan:** We did not foresee this, a situation like this.

**Mario:** Yes, but, I mean, how can schools become such impersonal [institutions], right? For instance, in small communities, everybody knows the teacher. Like Hugo’s experience in Cuatecas, everybody knew Hugo’s mother; there is this *relationship* where everybody knows everyone. But with urban kids, they come from different neighborhoods, and [life and schooling] becomes so impersonal [and decontextualized].

There was nothing we could do about Naty. We lost her and we felt terrible about it. The only thing we could do was to talk to the children about nutrition. We had no time to prepare a thematic unit about this, so we decided to inquire about their eating habits in the second interview: How many meals a day do they eat? What do they eat? With whom? We also started paying attention to the food items that were sold at school during recess. Not surprisingly, we found that some children were eating only two meals a day. Others ate junk food and/or were concerned about being “fat.” During the second interview, we emphasized the importance of eating the healthy foods present in Oaxacan cuisine. We noticed children were buying and eating
instant noodle soups served in styrofoam cups. We shared with the children how these containers, when hot water is added, release chemicals that are very unhealthy. We encouraged them to buy and eat *tamales, memelitas*, and other foods prepared with corn and beans. We also discussed this issue with the teachers and the principals, who agreed that it was important to encourage the women who sell food to children to focus on typical healthy food rather than to buy the new imported products such as instant noodle soup.

Children have complex lives and grow up in complex situations. We, as teachers, are helpless in many situations. However, we still have choices. Our teaching can still focus on irrelevant topics and content, or we can choose topics in which parents’ and children’s identities, their physical and material lives can be enhanced (see Harbert, 2009, for a collection of papers on “language and poverty”). We can continue hiding in post-structural, post-modern discourses that “problematize” people, poverty, and reality to the extent that the flesh-and-blood individual is lost in the rhetoric. Naty died. That is a fact. We wish we could change this fact with all our hearts. Her death, however, will always be a reminder to us to not to waste our time with irrelevant content and language syllabi that teach language just for the sake of it. English lessons will always be about “something” (e.g., vocabulary related to fast food). In Naty’s memory, we should try to make “that something” beneficial and relevant to all students (see Compton-Lilly, 2002 for a description of a school project on lead poisoning in the community).

Critical pedagogies must be grounded in students’ material lives. Apple (2000) reflects on the downfall of critical pedagogies, especially if they remain at the rhetorical level:

Much of the literature on “critical pedagogies” has been politically and theoretically important and has helped us make a number of gains. However, it too often has not been sufficiently connected to the ways in which the current movement toward what might best be called “conservative modernization” both has altered common sense and has transformed the material and ideological conditions surrounding schooling. It, thereby, sometimes becomes a form of what might best be called “romantic possibilitarian”... we need to make closer connections between our theoretical and critical discourses on the one hand and
the real transformations that are currently shifting educational policies and practices in fundamentally Rightist directions on the other. (p. 229, quotation marks and capital letter in original)

One of the recent Rightist educational policies in Mexico is the introduction of the English language in public elementary schools. This has been done without a critical analysis of the sociocultural and linguistic realities of Mexican children. In the next section, based on the lives of the children we studied, I will analyze Inglés Enciclomedia, the new English program that will be implemented in all Mexican public elementary school fifth and sixth grade classrooms.

Enciclomedia

Blommaert (2005) argues that it is fundamental to analyze the context when analyzing discourse. Materials and educational programs are types of discourse that have been historically, socially, and ideologically constructed. In Chapter 3, I presented the role of “English” in Mexico and the power relations that exists between Mexico and the United States. Before moving into the analysis of Inglés Enciclomedia, I will contextualize this program by presenting the Enciclomedia initiative first along with some of the controversies and scandals surrounding it.

In 2000, the people of Mexico elected Vincente Fox to be the new president. Fox defeated the PRI party, which had been in power for over 70 years. Many Mexicans believed that Fox would lead Mexico to become more democratic. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case. Fox directly intervened in the next electoral process and disappointed Mexicans with his “cutting-edge” projects (Reséndiz, 2006) that later became a “fiasco” (Del Valle, 2008c). One of those projects was Enciclomedia, which was launched in 2004. Prieto Hernández (2005), who worked as a consultant for this project defines it as follows:

Enciclomedia is an educational program with a national reach, whose objective is to improve the quality of public education at the elementary level through the introduction of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the
classroom. It uses as its basis digitalized free textbooks to enrich these [traditional textbooks] with multimedia materials [such as still images and audio and video files produced by government and educational organizations]. (p. 162, my translation)

Treviño Ronzón and Morales Landa (2006) rightly define Enciclomedia as “an informational, educational, and political program” (n.p., my translation and my emphasis). Fox and government officials advertised Enciclomedia as the policy that would “change” national basic education (Comunicación Social SEB, 2008b; La Crónica de Hoy, 2005) and would “close the gap for everyone” (Cavanagh, 2004, p. 13). During the planning stages, Mexico was supposed to invest 1 billion US dollars in this project (Cavanagh, 2004), but ended up spending 1.6 billion US dollars (Del Valle, 2008b). Due to the transition of political power in Mexico, the Mexican congress denied Fox the funding to continue with the project. However, he was able to obtain funding from other government institutions (e.g., Secretaría de Hacienda) (García, 2007) and continued with the program, not realizing that many schools around the country would not even have the proper classrooms to safeguard the equipment (Sánchez, 2007) or even electricity to be able to run the program (Matías, 2007). This is especially the case in many Indigenous communities in Oaxaca (Matías, 2007). Aviles and Vargas (2006), two reporters, mocked the validation report of Enciclomedia conducted by researchers from Harvard with their newspaper article entitled, “Descubre Harvard que Enciclomedia funciona mejor en escuelas con luz” (Harvard discovers that Enciclomedia works better in schools with electricity) (italics in original). Consequently, many academics and news reporters viewed this program as “elitist, costly, exclusive, and presidential” (Elizondo Huerta, Paredes Ochoa, & Prieto Hernández, 2006, p. 218, my translation).

When Fox finished his presidential term in 2006, the financial scandals regarding Enciclomedia continued. Some of these were related to the copyright that Felipe Bracho, the developer of Enciclomedia, claimed to own (Del Valle, 2007d; Michel, 2007), companies
connected to government officials that benefited from juicy contracts (Del Valle, 2007a), and unapproved expenditures and lack of transparency in the use of financial resources (Cámara de Diputados, 2008; Del Valle, 2007b, 2007c; García, 2007). Due to the Enciclomedia “fiasco” (Del Valle, 2008c), the government cancelled the Enciclomedia project that was scheduled to begin in middle schools and paid out a total of 1654 million pesos (127 million US dollars) in lawsuits due to unfulfilled contracts.

In spite of the political and financial controversies and scandals, Enciclomedia is still in use in most public elementary schools. Nevertheless, there have been few research studies focused on Enciclomedia. Of those, one study focused on Enciclomedia’s application from the teacher’s perspective (Sánchez Rosete, 2006), and a few other studies focused on distinct student populations, such as students with special needs (Puentes Jiménez, López Rodríguez, Ramos Campos, Mota Leyva & Villagómez Parra, 2007) and students in rural communities (Treviño Ronzón & Morales Landa, n.d.). Altamirano (2006) focused on Enciclomedia and cognition, and Hernández Luviano (2005) on the use of images as a pedagogical strategy. All these studies concluded that children may benefit from Enciclomedia as long as teachers use it as a pedagogical tool to enhance their teaching practice and just as a way to read the textbooks on the screen. In a more comprehensive study of Enciclomedia by the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales México (2008), it was concluded that

the infrastructure aspect has received much more attention . . . than the components related to the improvement of education . . . teacher preparation . . . focused populations’ [teachers’ and children’s] perceptions [of the program,] . . . and the impact of the program on teachers’ pedagogical practices and students’ learning. (pp. 109-110, my translation)

Mexico is not alone in the debates concerning the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). This is also a highly debated issue in the United States and Canada. Cummins (2000a) states:
Some see I[C]T as a new educational deity, a potential messiah set to rescue society from a moribund educational system, staffed by lethargic teachers . . . On the pews facing the altar of computer literacy we find a predictable group of believers: corporate leaders and politicians genuinely anxious to ensure that the educational system delivers the intellectual resources to fuel the engines of the “knowledge society”; other corporate and educational leaders, with lean and hungry looks, interested in using I[C]T as the lever to turn a profit on a privatized educational system; and many in the public, primarily from the middle classes and including many educators, who have been convinced that computer literacy is the key to their children’s social and economic advancement . . . Outside the temple of the faithful, however, a noisy crowd of activists and academics has gathered [to argue that] there is not a shred of empirical evidence that the massive investment in computer hardware and software has improved achievement levels (pp. 537-538). (See also Brown, Cummins & Sayer, in press, for different perspectives on this debate.)

In Mexico, many government officials, educators, non-governmental organizations, and some of the general public have falsely believed that computers alone will do the job. In Mexico for instance, El Redondeo is an initiative sponsored by Fundación Televisa (the main television company in Mexico) and different businesses around the country. The Redondeo Program’s motto is “Más Computadoras, Mejor Educación” (More Computers, Better Education). In many schools, computers have become fancy, expensive electronic workbooks, where students prepare for high-stakes tests. Au and Raphael (2000) state that “the danger exists, especially in low-income schools, that computers will be more readily employed as high-tech workbooks to trace skills progress, with on screen multiple-choice tasks offering no more opportunities for communication and higher level thinking than traditional paper-pencil tasks . . . Worse still, it is possible to imagine cost-cutting experiments in which [digital] technology is used to replace . . .

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26 Visit http://www.fundaciontelevisa.org/compuredondeo/index.html to learn more about this program. In a nutshell, people are invited to donate their change by “rounding” their bills in different stores. Fundación Televisa and other organizations donate a peso for each peso collected. Schools then apply to this program to obtain computers for their students. Nevertheless, without attempting to editorialize, I must say that many people do not believe in this program, since it is a way for institutions to avoid paying taxes. Besides, a number of emails have been circulating denouncing the stores and businesses who report the money they collect from people as their own donations, which in turn lowers their taxes.
expert, human teachers” (p.180). For this reason, Cummins and Sayers (1995) argue that pedagogical discussions should precede discussions about computers and ICT.

Ramírez Romero (2006) concludes that more research is needed on the use of ICT and the ways that it is being incorporated into education. He also states that “it seems that there is more concern about ‘making things’ than about thinking about them and evaluating what has been done” (p. 63, my translation). In the next section, I will conduct a critical analysis of Inglés Enciclomedia as a first step toward evaluating what is being done in Mexico regarding the incorporation of English in public elementary schools.

**Inglés Enciclomedia**

“Inglés Enciclomedia was created especially to be implemented in the public elementary schools of Mexico, with the goal of including the English language as part of the curriculum” (ELLIS-SEP-ILCE, 2006, p.1, my translation). Inglés Enciclomedia “is designed in a way for teachers and students to learn together” (p. 1, my translation). In other words, according to the program, teachers do not need to know English in order to teach it. Inglés Enciclomedia makes use of ICT and has three basic components: an interactive program, a student workbook, and a teacher’s guide. The government of Mexico hired Pearson’s ELLIS (English Language Learning and Instruction System), a U.S. company, to design and produce Inglés Enciclomedia (ELLIS-SEP-ILCE, 2006). The software runs using Enciclomedia Version 2.0, which has been installed in most states. Oaxacan schools are still waiting for the installation of this version.

Inglés Enciclomedia is meant to be completed in one or two school years. The program is divided into two volumes. Each volume includes four units of study. Each unit has eight lessons: the first six include exercises, activities, and games; the seventh unit is a review; and the last one includes the evaluation of the unit. Each lesson includes communicative objectives, grammar and uses (functions), vocabulary, and dialogues. Up to this point, only Volume One has been printed
and distributed to the states. According to Avendaño Aquino, who is in charge of professional development in the Department of Technology in the state of Oaxaca, *Inglés Enciclomedia* Volume Two is ready for printing; however, there is no federal funding at the moment to do so, and the states will have to finance it themselves if they wish to use it (Avendaño Aquino, personal communication, January 2009).

The Subsecretaria de Educación Básica (2009) claims that *Inglés Enciclomedia* has been tested and perfected through pilot projects conducted in the academic year 2005-2006. They tested the program in different states around the country with the assistance of the Anglo-Mexican Foundation (see Subsecretaría de Educación Básica, 2009 for the number of schools, teachers, and students, and the states that were involved). Their results included the students’ average score in each unit. In the pilot studies’ presentation of the results there is no mention of the content of *English Enciclomedia*. It appears that the government officials and its supporters approve of it solely on its face value (Comunicación Social Gobierno de Tamaulipas, 2008; Comunicación Social SEB, 2008a; Gobierno del Estado de Quintana Roo, 2008; Manjarrez Vargas, 2008), without analyzing the contents of the program and the messages it may send to children and teachers. What follows is my analysis of *Inglés Enciclomedia*. I had full access to the student workbook and the teacher’s guide, and semi-full access to the software via the tutorial program downloadable from the Subsecretaría de Educación Básica (2009).

In this section, I will briefly describe the three basic components of *Inglés Enciclomedia*. The focus of my analysis will be on the overall program and software, the general pedagogical suggestions, and specifically Unit Two of Volume One. For this analysis, I rely on the work of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) and Kress (2000a, 2000b, 2003) in social semiotics and multimodalities. According to these authors, humans produce multimodal texts (e.g., visual, written, spoken). Texts, as I stated in Chapter 2, become complex signs. Kress (2000b) states that
“it is now no longer possible to understand language and its uses without understanding the effect of all modes of communication that are copresent in any text (p. 337). Kress (2003) also argues that text design is always an interested process where humans bring their own agenda to the creation of multimodal texts. My analysis will look at the different modalities present in *Inglés Enciclomedia* and infer the possible subtle intended and unintended interests of the producers of this program.

**Inglés Enciclomedia Interactive Software**

The English lessons are conducted through computers using a smart board. According to ELLIS-SEP-ILCE (2006), the software makes possible

- The students’ participation in each activity.
- The use of video, animations, games and songs.
- The use of a large number of attractive and dynamic materials.
- English language learning [that occurs] in an active and enjoyable way, stimulating the use of English in each class.
- The review of students’ homework and evaluation of each unit. (p. 3, my translation)

The software teaches “grammar, vocabulary, conversation, reading comprehension, listening, and pronunciation” (ELLIS-SEP-ILCE, 2006, p. 3) by following a four- or five-step sequence in each lesson: “Let’s Learn,” “Let’s Practice,” “Let’s Play,” and “Let’s Review” (p. 9). Some of the lessons include a “Let’s Sing” component.

The “Let’s Learn” section includes the following activities: (a) interactive animations; (b) videos, which can be played at normal or slow speed, with the transcription and translation of the dialogues; and (c) lists of vocabulary. The “Let’s Practice” section includes: (a) videos with multiple choice exercises; (b) listening activities, accompanied by images and fill-in the blank exercises; (c) listening activities with sentence-ordering exercises; (d) sorting-out activities; (e) keywords review; (f) connecting audio with images; (g) audio and video conversations with
multiple choice exercises; and (h) images with multiple choice exercises. The “Let’s Play” section includes six different types of games: (a) “Hot Shot,” in which students practice words while playing basketball; (b) “Bingo!”; (c) “Concentrate,” a memory card game; (d) “Snap,” a card game where students review vocabulary; (e) “Four in a Row,” where students practice words while playing a dots game; and (f) a “Right or Wrong” activity. The “Let’s Practice” section connects the games with activities in the workbook similar to the ones in the previous section. The “Let’s Sing” section includes songs for some of the lessons. ELLIS-SEP-ILCE (2006) state that “with the help of interactive tools and enjoyable activities, the learning of English becomes pleasant and fun” (p. 3, my translation).

The software of Inglés Enciclomedia looks appealing and appears to be grounded in “best practices” in teaching children. It provides colorful and interesting materials, games, songs, audio and video files with interactive controls. Children can even record their voices and compare them to those of so-called native speakers. It recycles the vocabulary through various entertaining activities. Nevertheless, the software has major shortcomings. Before presenting the general pedagogical suggestions, I will discuss two of them: the reinforcement of the “one nation, one language” ideology and the “native speaker” ideology.

The first problematic aspect is the two flags representing the English and the Spanish language that are displayed on most screens of the software. There is a U.S. flag for English and a Mexican flag for Spanish. Mexican teachers and students click on these flags to listen to instructions in English or Spanish. With every mouse click, Mexican teachers and students are maintaining the nation-state ideology, which is usually represented by a single (de facto) official language (May, 2001). First, the message sent is that English is spoken only in the United States. The software ignores the fact that English is spoken in other so-called inner circle countries (e.g., England, Canada, Australia) and, most important, in many outer circle countries (e.g., India,
Singapore, Ghana, Kenya, Jamaica) and in expanding circle countries (e.g., Mexico, Japan, Italy) (Kachru, 1985). The symbol of the U.S. flag representing the English language destroys the resistance put up by Mexican academics and leaders against the hegemony of the United States. As I previously discussed in Chapter 3, the teaching of English as a subject in middle schools is referred to as “Lengua Adicional al Español” (Language Additional to Spanish) and not “English.” However, ELLIS, with its inclusion of the U.S. flag on every screen of the program, reminds Mexican teachers and students that “English” means the United States.

The inclusion of the Mexican flag to represent the Spanish language also reinforces the nation-state ideology and the role of Spanish as the de facto official language of Mexico. Constitutionally, Spanish is simply one national language of equal rank with Indigenous languages and is not the official language as is generally believed (Hidalgo, 2006). As I discussed in Chapter 3, in 2003 Mexico constitutionally recognized all Indigenous languages as being national languages and affirmed that all languages have the same rights (López-Gopar & Caballero, 2007). It took Mexican Indigenous peoples and Mexican pro-Indigenous activists almost a century to achieve this recognition. ELLIS, ignorant of Mexican history and the social struggles of Indigenous peoples along with the compliance of the Mexican Public Education Secretariat, uses the Mexican flag to index Spanish. They reinforce the “one nation, one language” ideology, which first appeared following Mexico’s independence (Heath, 1972). The Mexican flag in Inglés Enciclomedia reminds us that the constitutional reforms are still only on paper and far from being enacted in the day-to-day reality of Mexican society.

Another problem with the software is the validation of the English native-speaker as the only possessor of the English language. McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008) argue that this is the tendency when teaching English as an international language. According to these two authors, curriculum developers choose to ignore the fact that so-called English native speakers from the
inner-circle countries are the minority. In other words, there are many more speakers of English in the outer and expanding circles than in the inner circle. In other words, so-called “non-native speakers” are the majority. However, materials never include voices of speakers who speak English as an additional language, as L2 or L3. In Inglés Enciclomedia Mexican teachers’ and students’ pronunciation is compared to that of a “native” speaker from an inner circle. Students are presented with only one of the many varieties of the English language. McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008) argue that

EIL [English as an International Language] curricula should include examples of the diversity of English varieties used today . . . which may enhance learners’ receptive skills in processing different varieties of English . . . and promote an awareness that English, as an international language, no longer belongs solely to speakers of the Inner Circle (p. 196).

Mexican teachers and children may always feel inadequate if their performance is always compared to that of a so-called native speaker.

Inglés Enciclomedia’s General Pedagogical Suggestions

The Teacher’s Guide lists 13 pedagogical suggestions for teachers. These are:

1. Encourage students to participate in class.
2. Look for methods which enable students to connect the words or sentences that they are learning in English to their daily lives. For instance, if they have already learned greetings, start your class with simple phrases such as “good morning” or “good afternoon”.
3. Make sure all students participate in class.
4. Ask them to listen and repeat the words five times while they are learning them.
5. Be aware of the role of corporal movements in the learning process.
6. Make sure students understand the new knowledge.
7. Do not spend too much time on a single activity.
8. Encourage students to practice the writing of words and sentences permanently.
9. Try to eliminate the use of Spanish during the class.
10. Involve students in all the activities as much as possible.
11. Motivate students to share their new knowledge of English language with their friends and family.
12. Help students to feel secure when speaking English, making sure that fear and shame are not promoted while making mistakes.

Most of the suggestions in the previous list are usually recommended when teaching languages to young learners. This list states that children should actively participate in class (Enright, 1991; Reilly & Ward, 1997) while having fun (Rixon, 1991). It encourages teachers to use corporal movements—Total Physical Response, proposed by Asher (1977), and to be aware that children have a short attention span (Brown, 1994). It instructs teachers to make sure that children understand the new knowledge—Krashen’s (1982) comprehensible input theory. It also encourages teachers to create a classroom atmosphere where students can feel safe when making mistakes (Scott & Ytreberg, 1998). Nevertheless, I find two suggestions highly problematic: “Look for methods which enable students to connect the words or sentences that they are learning in English to their daily lives” and “Try to eliminate the use of Spanish during the class.” I will address the former in the next section when I review Unit Two.

*Inglés Enciclomedia* suggests that teachers eliminate the use of Spanish. The use of the first language in the foreign language classrooms has been a contested issue (see Cummins, 2008 for a historical review of the issue). In communicative language classrooms, the use of students’ first language is ignored or regarded with suspicion. Teachers are encouraged to use it “judiciously” (Turnbull, 2001). García (2009) argues that the separation of languages is due to a monoglossic view of languages that has been prevalent in the second language education and bilingual education literature. In other words, languages are regarded as separate entities that must be kept apart. Cummins (2008) challenges the elimination of the use of students’ first language in the classroom based on two well accepted principles: “(a) the role of preexisting knowledge as a foundation for learning (Bransford et al., 2000); and (b) the interdependence of proficiency across languages (Cummins, 1981, 2001)” (p. 67). Students start learning a second
language using the schema that is encoded in their first language and the knowledge of one language transfers to the other language.

In the case of *Inglés Enciclomedia*, the suggestion to eliminate Spanish is problematic in three ways. First, it assumes that all children in Mexico speak Spanish. Once again, the creators of *Inglés Enciclomedia* ignore or choose to ignore the fact Mexico is a pluricultural and plurilingual society. This reinforces the hegemony of the Spanish language over the Indigenous national languages. Second, *Inglés Enciclomedia* is based on the idea that Mexican teachers with no knowledge of the English language will be able to teach it. If teachers do not know the English language and the program encourages those teachers not to use Spanish, what language are the teachers going to use to communicate with the students? Will the teachers be regarded as legitimate “teachers” when their voice is taken away from them and their intelligence is reduced to the English words, phrases, and/or sentences provided by *Inglés Enciclomedia*? Third, Mexican teachers and children could use their knowledge encoded in their first language (be it Spanish and/or an Indigenous language) to make connections and analyze the new vocabulary, grammatical structures and functions of the English language. Both Spanish and English share a lot of similarities since both languages have Latin as one of their roots, English especially at the academic level (Cummins, 2000b). Mexican teachers and children do have a lot to offer to each other when learning English. This is taken away from them if their first language is eliminated in the classroom.

**Inglés Enciclomedia’s Unit Two**

The first unit of *Inglés Enciclomedia* contains six main lessons: (a) Introduction to English; (b) Greetings and Numbers; (c) Countries; (d) School Subjects; (e) School Objects; and (f) Colors. Unit Two has six lessons: (a) Greetings and the Alphabet; (b) Family; (c) Physical Descriptions I; (d) Physical Descriptions II; (f) Occupations; and (f) Pets. I have decided to focus
on Unit Two because it introduces content that may or may not be grounded in the lives of Mexican children. I will focus on the lessons that teach about family and occupations. I will relate these to the lives of the children in the CEAR Project.

Lesson Two introduces seven family members, with pictures of each of them with a tree on the background. The family members introduced are grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, brother, sister, and “me.” On the next pages, two different families are presented: Juan’s family and Lupe’s family. Juan’s family includes a mother, a father and four siblings, who are presented as living under the same roof. Lupe’s family includes a mother, a father and three siblings, who are also together under the same roof. Interestingly, the pictures of all these family members portray people with brown skin and black hair, except for one sibling in each family, a girl with fair skin and blond hair in Juan’s family and a boy with fair skin and blond hair in Lupe’s family. The lesson concludes with an exercise where students have to write about their own family.

As demonstrated in previous chapters, the children in the CEAR project have complex families. Inglés Enciclomedia reinforces the construct of the nuclear family that lives together. The major problem of Inglés Enciclomedia is the restrictive content it provides to children. Teachers have no control whatsoever over the content of the English program. All children in Mexico will learn exactly the same thing, irrespective of their sociocultural context and their personal background. Every child in Mexico will learn how to say “grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, brother and sister.” There is no room for extended family members that might be important in the children’s lives. The software could have easily included a bilingual or multilingual dictionary as part of the software, where teachers and children could check other words that they might be interested in learning or that represent their current realities more closely. But this is not the case. The use of dictionaries is not mentioned in the pedagogical
suggestions, either. Teachers are simply technicians who will click on a mouse to learn/teach the words that someone behind a desk at ELLIS headquarters thought that all Mexican children should learn.

Lesson Five teaches children vocabulary that relates to occupations. It connects the vocabulary to the family members presented in Lesson Two. The occupations introduced are: artist, engineer, doctor, farmer, teacher, secretary, and taxi driver. Unlike Lesson Two, which introduced the vocabulary with cartoons, this lesson introduces the occupations with photos of “real” people. On the top right corner of the page, next to the word-bank containing the vocabulary, there is a photo of an engineer. The engineer is portrayed by a blond, fair-skinned, middle-aged man who is wearing glasses and a white dress shirt, a tie, and a black suit. He is holding a blueprint of a project and is giving instructions with his right hand. Next to him, there is a young black man who is wearing a casual blue shirt, jeans, and a red helmet. He is receiving the instructions from the engineer.

In the next set of photos, we find a doctor who is portrayed by an Asian-looking woman wearing a white gown. She is tending to an Asian-looking young girl who has hurt her arm. Next to the doctor, there is an Asian-looking man, who appears to be the girl’s father. The photo of the teacher is next to the doctor’s. The teacher is a light-skinned woman who has short black hair. She is wearing a preppy outfit: khaki pants, a white shirt with a blue vest on top. The children are raising their hands to answer a question. One of the hands is black, a second is brown, and a third is fair. The teacher is calling on the fair-skinned student. The photo of a secretary, who is beside the teacher, appears to be another Asian woman. She is wearing a brown blouse and glasses, and is working in front of a computer. In the last row of photos, we find a farmer, an artist, and a taxi driver. The farmer appears to be a middle-aged, fair-skinned man. He is wearing glasses, a cap, and a bright red t-shirt and is standing in the middle of a golden wheat field. There is a big truck
in the background. The “artist” is portrayed as a light-skinned, grayish-haired painter who is sketching a painting of what appears to be France’s Arc de Triomphe. In the last photo on the page, we see a taxi driver. The man appears to be Italian. He is wearing a brown casual shirt and a black hat. There is a button on his hat that reads “I ♥ NY.” He is sitting in his yellow taxicab, smiling happily.

The portrayals of these occupations are highly problematic. ELLIS is exporting the stereotypical racial, classist, and gendered practices prevalent in the United States and masked by the American Dream ideology into Mexico. The engineer is giving orders to a black man, who appears to his subordinate—his employee. The doctor, the teacher, and the secretary are portrayed by women. The doctor and teacher fit the profile of the caring person who works with children. In these three pictures, there are two Asian-looking women reinforcing the stereotypical view of successful Asian people who, with their hard work and determination, achieve prestigious occupations. In the last set of photos, the farmer and artist appear to be “Anglo.” The taxi driver, on the other hand, looks Italian. His portrayal of a happy man with an “unprofessional” job indexes the construct of the United States as the land of opportunity where immigrants find work, demonstrate effort, and live a happy life, the equation of the American Dream. None of these photos includes African-American or Mexican-American people in any of these roles. If the black man appeared, he was a construction worker and nothing else.

Not only do these photos and occupational roles reinforce stereotypes, they are also disconnected from the occupations of the parents in the CEAR Project, and of Mexicans in general. Only two parents in the CEAR Project had university-degree occupations: an accountant and a lawyer. Cesar’s, Zenén’s, and Noé’s parents work in agriculture as jornaleros. However, the picture of the farmer is far from the reality faced by these students’ families. The person in the picture represents the agricultural boss, who many times takes advantage of Indigenous
people, both in Mexico and in the United States (Díaz Cruz, 2004). The Triqui mothers in the CEAR Project are weaving artists, who create intricate patterns in their *huipiles*. However, the portrayal of an artist in *Inglés Enciclopedia* does not represent the Triqui mothers or any of the Mexican artists: the potters, sculptors, and weavers. Later in the lesson, children are asked to connect the occupations in this lesson to family members in order to introduce them to other people. Children in the CEAR Project would have a difficult time completing the exercise, especially because their family members do not fit any of these profiles. The major problem of *Inglés Enciclopedia* is its restrictive content that does not speak to the realities of the children in the CEAR Project, nor to those of millions of other children around Mexico.

If *Inglés Enciclopedia* wishes to be a truly cutting-edge project, it must be become a customizable program. In other words, the content of the program needs to speak to the reality of each school. Focusing on the two lessons we analyzed, the program could list several occupations and several family members that the teachers could select from, or have teachers create their own, locally appropriate lists, so that children would be able to connect them to their real lives or the imagined lives they want to work towards to. Children from across Mexico could contribute their drawings and their photos, so that the multimodalities in *Inglés Enciclopedia* are truly “Mexican” (see Figures 28 and 30 for a collage of materials created by the children of the CEAR Project).

*Inglés Enciclopedia* is not taking into consideration the English teachers graduating from the TESOL programs around Mexico (e.g., the ten student teachers in the CEAR Project). I am aware that preparing English teachers for every classroom in all public elementary schools in Mexico will require a good number of years (see Section 3 of Chapter 3). Meanwhile however, the ministry should hire expert English teachers to support non-English-speaking elementary school teachers. For instance, one English teacher could support an entire elementary school or
two, according to the size. In this way, the English teacher, the elementary school teacher, and *Inglés Enciclomedia* could work together to teach English in a responsive, intercultural, and plurilingual manner. It is essential for English teacher preparation programs to adopt an intercultural and plurilingual approach if expert English teachers are to support all Mexican children, especially those who have been discriminated against.

**Who Is Involved?**

I will conclude this chapter with a description of the cover of the Teacher’s Guide and Student Workbook of *Inglés Enciclomedia*. This cover raises many questions regarding the introduction of English to Mexico.

The cover presents an intriguing scene. The sun is a white circle, with no rays, in the middle of the sky. In the background, there is a building with a Red Cross sign and the word “Hospital” written on it. Tall grass borders one side of the road. There is also tall grass on the other side, along with a couple of tall pine trees. A signpost with two arrows points towards the “City” and the “River.” Three young children are riding an avalancha (a four-wheeled-ride-on board with a steering wheel). They are going so fast downhill that the avalancha is actually in the air. The older looking boy, who is steering the wheel, is frowning, with his eyes and mouth ajar, looking very determined to finish the ride. He is the only one with a helmet. There are sun rays bouncing off it. Behind him is a younger boy trying to hold onto his waist. His wide-open mouth and eyes show how scared he is. Behind the two boys, there is a little girl whose straight braids
are flying behind her because of the speed they are going. She is the only one who is smiling. Her body is in the air. She is hanging onto the younger boy’s shoulder with her right hand and pointing to the “river” sign with her left hand. The road that they are on, however, shows no direction and no final destination.

Who is the boy with the helmet? Is he one of the federal ministry of education officials who decided to bring English to Mexican elementary schools through Inglés Enciclopedia? Why is he the only one wearing a helmet? Isn’t he going too fast, with no direction or no destiny? Who is the scared young child? Is he one of the Mexican teachers who now face the fact that they will have to learn and teach this language by using a smart board? Why is he afraid? Is he afraid that he cannot even use a regular computer and that now he has to teach another language through it?

Who is the happy little girl? Is she one of the students, parents, or civilians who are thrilled that education in Mexico will “improve” now because we have the digital technology to learn content and the language of the world? How long will the little girl be able to hang onto the thrilling ride? Why is she pointing towards the river but being driven somewhere else? Is she going to let go and try to follow her own road or will she try to hang onto to the young boy? How is she going to feel if/when she falls off and hits the ground? Will she still be thrilled?
What are the trees? Are they the English language educators in Mexico who see that school officials make decisions too fast for them to have any input? Should they stand still or get their roots out of the ground in order to find out where the children on the avalancha are heading? Should they work with the girl, who may decide to let go and follow her own path or who may just simply fall off? What is the avalancha? Is it ELLIS, which designed Inglés Enciclomedia, a publishing company or an English private institute, which promises Mexicans that it will take them to a “better” land fast?

What is the sun? Is it the English language that promises to keep people warm and alive? But can’t the sun burn people as well? What does the city that is left behind represent? Is it the children’s cultures, languages, and ways of knowing that “must be abandoned” in order to reach language-, education- or “progress”-oriented goals? What does the hospital with its red cross represent? Is it the “critical” researchers, educators, and teachers who try to cure the world from the illnesses that the sun may cause? Should they stay in their hospital or university offices (ivory towers) and watch the children go too fast?

Or – should these experts come down to the ground and collaborate with the trees and children so the sun can warm them rather than burn them? Can the children stop, go back, and stay in their own city? Can they find other means of transportation to construct better futures for
themselves and others? Can the children create, with everybody's collaboration, their own avalancha to go wherever they want to go, at their own speed? I believe that they can. The student teachers and the children in the CEAR Project have proven that it is possible.
Chapter Nine:  
What Did You Just Tell Me? — So What?

The critical-ethnographic-action-research (CEAR) Project was conducted in two elementary schools in Oaxaca, Mexico, with the collaboration of a teacher educator and ten student teachers. The CEAR Project was also a response to a world phenomenon that associates English with “development” and economic success and Indigenous and “minoritized” languages with backwardness marginalization. The CEAR Project’s purpose was to use the student teachers’ English language praxicum in order to: (a) develop elementary school teaching expertise, (b) co-construct affirming identities among all the participants, (c) foster multilingual, multiliteracies, and intercultural practices, and (d) dialogue with the children in order to change pejorative ideologies that regard certain languages, literacies, and cultures as better than others.

The purpose of this dissertation was to document the CEAR Project, which consisted of three main phases: (a) the “initiation” of language student teachers into the teaching of English to children through the TEC course and the concurrent critical-ethnographic analysis of the classrooms where the student teachers would conduct their teaching praxicum; (b) the actual student teachers’ praxicum or “intervention”; and (c) the on-going analysis of the praxicum and its impact on children’s views or ideologies of multilingualism.

The Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy developed by Cummins (in press) and critical pedagogies theory (Freire, 1970; Norton & Toohey, 2004) informed the CEAR Project and the data collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and children’s work samples. A critical-ethnographic-action-research methodology framework was utilized in the CEAR Project. Critical ethnography was the most appropriate approach for listening to children’s voices and learning about their lives and their views about language, schooling and
In order not just to ask what can be done in the situation of Indigenous children in Oaxaca and remain at the “pondering” stage, critical ethnography and critical action research were combined in order to conduct mini-interventions—sharing our ideas with children during the interviews and informal conversations, and our main intervention—the praxicum—in order to carve out spaces where all children’s voices are heard and respected.

I came to the CEAR Project with the influence of a body of research that shows that Indigenous students, like immigrant students in large cities, are struggling in the educational systems (Cummins, 2000; Gunderson, 2007; Schmelkes, 2003), are discriminated against by mainstream people and seen as deficient by teachers (Maldonado Alvarado, 2002; Montes García, 2004; Rockwell, 2004; Stephen, 2007), and are ashamed of their Indigenous language and culture (Barabas & Bartolomé, 1999b; López Gopar et al., 2006; López Hernández, 2002). Adopting a critical-ethnographic-action-research approach allowed us, the student-teachers and myself, to bring our agenda to the forefront. We did not come just to “listen” to children. We came to share our views about multilingualism and admire children’s multilingual practices. We dialogued with children.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to construct and present effective stories that portray Indigenous children and student teachers as the intelligent, creative and genuine individuals that they really are. I have used narrative as a “story-tell” to convince people that children’s life stories have much to teach us as we are developing curricula, teacher preparation programs, and teaching in classrooms on a daily basis. I have also used photos, student work samples, and student teachers’ materials and videos from the praxicum to portray the vivid critical moments that took place during the CEAR Project, and the changes that occurred.
In this chapter, I will revisit the research questions to summarize the findings. I will address the limitations of the study and indicate directions for future research. Finally, I will call upon the voices of the student teachers to end this narrative.

**Research Questions and Findings**

1) Who are the children in diverse urban schools in Oaxaca?

   a. What are their language views (ideologies) concerning English and Indigenous languages and peoples before the praxicum?
   
   b. What are their languaging or translanguaging practices in the classroom and at school before the praxicum?

The children in diverse urban and semi-urban classrooms are first generation and second generation immigrants. They have moved to the city of Oaxaca from small Indigenous rural communities. Due to this migration, many of them have had their formal schooling interrupted and, in some cases, have lost their Indigenous language. They have also faced challenges, including financial problems, lack of housing and basic services, and discrimination. Nevertheless, these children’s challenging lives serve as initiation rituals (Barabas & Bartolomé, 1999b) for surviving in their new intercultural settings and for reinventing in urban settings of all of their practices as Indigenous peoples.

The children in the two schools selected for the CEAR Project grew up in families that go beyond the stereotypical nuclear family. In accordance with James and James’s (2008) argument that families are not fixed social entities, in the CEAR Project, we decided to see families in terms of family practices, which include other people, “people whom children care about.” From a young age, these children engage in family practices that require a great deal of responsibility and independence. Many of them are responsible for household chores, look after younger
siblings, help their parents with their jobs, and even work independently. Other students have family by being away from their families while working as live-in servants. These children break away the construct that places them as helpless individuals in need of protection. They are active members and contributors in their families and communities.

The children’s language views or ideologies concerning Indigenous languages are directly connected to their, or lack of, language practices in these languages. At a young age, the children used their Indigenous language to bond with their mothers. This language practice was captured by the principal, the teachers and many of the children. However, as children grow up in the city of Oaxaca and in Colonia Nueva, they develop another lens that allows them to read the subtle messages that dictate a Spanish-only *de facto* policy. They also start suffering from people’s making fun of their Indigenous language practices, which deviate from the norm. Consequently, many children develop shame as they grow up in these contexts.

As shame is co-constructed, Indigenous children’s language practices have become mostly private or take place only during the Indigenous language class period at Horizons School. Some children engage in Indigenous language practices to talk or simply to listen to their mothers or their relatives at home or in private moments in public places. Their Indigenous language practices become public only to resist discrimination and show deep feelings and solidarity with their families. Indigenous children use their Indigenous language to display anger towards *mestizo* children or other Indigenous children. They have fun in their language as they move (back and forth) between languages to pick on each other. They also help their mothers and/or grandmothers, who have limited Spanish, as language brokers.

For some children, who no longer speak an Indigenous language, their grandparents’ and/or their parents’ Indigenous language has become distant, but desired. This distance is connected to the historicity of the children’s relatives, some of whom have had to abandon their
Indigenous community, family, and language nests, have married a dominant-Spanish-language speaker, and/or have held long-day job shifts in their new urban settings, which prevent them from interacting and maintaining their children’s Indigenous languages. At Horizons School, Indigenous languages and cultures are promoted. For this reason, all children, except one, wished to learn an Indigenous language. For some of these children, however, their decision was at the abstract level before the praxicum. In other words, they wanted to learn a language, and not to adopt someone else’s language practices.

At Downtown School, the 13 children who did not speak an Indigenous language, and whose parents also did not, were divided between those who wished to learn an Indigenous language and those who did not. The ones who wanted to learn an Indigenous language saw their Indigenous language learning at an abstract level, too, and not connected to their classmates’ Indigenous language practices. There were others who were simply not interested in learning an Indigenous language, nor in their classmates’ Indigenous language practices.

In contrast to their divided views concerning the learning of Indigenous language, the 50 children analyzed in this dissertation wanted to learn English and connected this language to el Norte (the United States), foreign people, and middle schools, self improvement and job opportunities. At both schools, the children connected “English” with “el Norte” due to their relatives’, mostly male, migration to that country and its bittersweet effects on their families. This migratory process evokes the collusionary aspect of the English presence in Mexico (Pennycook, 2006) and the historical migratory relationship between Mexico and the United States (Lewin & Guzmán, 2003). The children also connected English to foreign people and their desire to communicate with them. Historically, Oaxaca has always attracted foreigners as investors, tourists, linguists, missionaries, and/or volunteers (Murphy & Stepick, 1991). For some children, the presence of English-speaking peoples in their lives has meant support for their
financial and educational situations. At Horizons School, a group of North Americans financed the construction of three classrooms. At Downtown School, some children received financial support from foreigners through the Centro de Esperanza Infantil. In addition, many children expressed the opinion that learning English would help them have an easier time in middle school. Some children had also appropriated the rhetoric used by private English institutes that promote English as the key to success. They connected English to better job opportunities in Mexico in the tourism industry and in the United States in jobs that require English.

2) What are the “Indigenous” and “mestizo” children’s
   a. multiliteracies and translanguaging practices during the praxicum?
   b. language views (ideologies) concerning English and Indigenous languages and peoples during and after the praxicum?

Regarding the first part of this research question, during the praxicum, children engaged in multiliteracies and translanguage practices in order to play roles as language teachers, alphabetic literacy developers, language material designers and authors of identity texts. Once student teachers had created a classroom environment where children would feel comfortable sharing their expertise, Indigenous children played the role as teachers in whole-class, group, and/or pair interactions. In both classes, some Spanish-only speaking children learned a little bit of one or two of the Indigenous languages present in the classroom, and some Indigenous language speaking children learned another Indigenous language. Moreover, they all became one another’s English teachers as they helped their classmates learn this language. In order for the learning of different languages to occur, children translanguage on a daily basis, moving in and across languages to make sure everybody understood and participated. They would speak in Spanish while working in pairs, turn around and ask for help in Triqui, Chatino, or Zapotec, in
order to write a sentence in English and in the Indigenous languages. Children not only translanguaged, they also engaged in multi(trans)literacies practices.

The Indigenous language speaking children, and later some Spanish-speaking children as well, became alphabetic literacy developers for Indigenous languages. In line with Lewin’s (2004) argument that lack of alphabetic literacy should not bring cultural low self-esteem to Indigenous peoples, and Molina Cruz’s (2000) argument that Indigenous children should play a key role in Indigenous language alphabetic literacy development, in the CEAR Project, we continuously reflected and reminded each other to view Indigenous children’s knowledge and alphabetic literacy development as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1991). The children were the expert linguists and we were there to learn from them. They proved to be linguists in the making and student teachers valued and legitimized their inventions of alphabetic literacy. They stretched their knowledge of the Spanish alphabetic system in order to capture tones, glottal stops and many other complex linguistic features present in the different Indigenous languages.

Throughout the praxicum, student teachers tapped into children’s fund of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) to connect the syllabus to their daily lives and profited from the children’s creativity in order to resist discourses of “Othering” (McKay and Bokhorst-Heng, 2008) present in the materials created elsewhere and to stretch the limited financial resources existing in Oaxacan classrooms. In both classrooms, the children created beautiful, colorful, and multimodal materials. With the help of the student teachers and the Indigenous children, the materials became multilingual. The host teachers noticed the children’s enthusiasm and their learning from each other during the creation of the materials. In order to avoid the Othering discourse, student teachers’ syllabi were shaped by the children’s complex lives. For instance, when it came to family members, student teachers included vocabulary that went beyond the nuclear family, especially reflecting the migratory trajectories of the families. Another important aspect of
having the children create the materials is related to the economy of Oaxaca. In the two schools where the CEAR Project took place, teachers did not have access to a photocopy machine or extra materials. If the teachers wanted to use any other materials, they needed to purchase them with their own money. The low salary they earn usually makes this impossible. Having the children create their own materials was an excellent way to save money and have their knowledge and lives validated. Children’s identity texts were also part of the multiliteracies and translanguaging practices that they engaged in. I will discuss their identity texts in responding to the next research question.

In regard to the second part of this research question (What are the “Indigenous” and “mestizo” children’s language views [ideologies] concerning English and Indigenous languages and peoples during and after the praxicum?), I am able to speak to the children’s views during the praxicum only, and not after, since we ran out of time to interview all the children for a third time after the praxicum (more on this in the limitations section). Regarding the English language, children continued having a receptive outlook towards English. Before we started the praxicum, all children were interested in learning this language for the different purposes stated in discussing the previous question. During the praxicum, children engaged in all the activities the student teachers prepared. Their identity texts demonstrated their emergent development in this language. Even though the CEAR Project’s main goal was not to teach the English language per se but to promote the multilingualism and interculturalism inherent in children’s lives, the children became emergent English speakers and were able to use this language to create affirming identities. The English language was the conduit for these identity texts to reach a greater audience beyond the classrooms walls, and possibly any place in the world through the publication of this dissertation and future publications regarding the lives of the children and student teachers in the CEAR Project.
In regard to the children’s views concerning Indigenous languages and peoples, we witnessed a slowly yet steadily growing openness to the sharing and learning of Indigenous languages, and the children’s emergent appropriation of Indigenous identities. In both classrooms, the children started sharing their Indigenous languages when they felt safe to do so, and when they realized that the student teachers had a genuine interest in their lives, languages, and cultures. In both classrooms, the student teachers were able to create a small community where different languages flew across the room publicly as children taught, helped, questioned, and teased each other. The public multilingualism display moved beyond the classroom walls, and children started sharing other, extra-curricular vocabulary to make fun of each other — and many other translanguaging practices that were undocumented, I am sure.

There were major differences between the choices of the children regarding the Indigenous languages they wished to learn before and close to the end of the praxicum. In both schools, there were a good number of students who were interested in learning an Indigenous language, but not in a personal way. Close to the end of the praxicum, the children did not want to learn “an Indigenous language,” they wanted to learn the language of *their classmates and their friends*. Other children, who had stated that they were not interested in Indigenous languages before the praxicum, stated an affirmative interest in these languages at the end of the praxicum, again the languages of their classmates and friends. Their interest was confirmed with their attitudinal changes and their engagement in their classmates’ sharing of their languages.

3) What, if any, is the impact of this praxicum on the co-construction of affirming identities of Indigenous and *mestizo* children?

One of the main goals of the CEAR Project was the negotiation (Cummins, 2001) of our and the children’s identities. The student teachers and I wanted to feel proud of our cultures,
ways of knowing, and rich bilingualism, and we wanted the children to perceive us in this way. In turn, we also wanted all the children to feel proud and see themselves and their loved ones as intelligent, talented, and creative. Throughout the CEAR Project, we engaged in a dialogical relationship among ourselves and with the children, who invested their identities in the texts and materials that they created. The videos and the children’s identity texts presented throughout the dissertation are testament to the impact the praxicum had on the children’s identities, and the identities of the student teachers, I must add.

At the beginning of the praxicum, the children were often too shy or embarrassed to participate. As the student teachers encouraged them on a daily basis and publicly stated their interest in learning from the students’ complex lives and language practices, the children became more confident to share their funds of knowledge and Indigenous languages. In the videos, we were able to capture the body language of the children and the exclamations from other students as children performed affirming identities. The children developed multimodal and multilingual identity texts that were presented publicly in the class, and now to a wider audience through this dissertation. In these performances, children demonstrated how much they were learning from each other’s language practices and identity texts. Their interactions with their classmates served as mirrors where their identities as intelligent, multilingual, talented individuals were reflected back to them (Cummins, 2006). In their identity texts, the children also engaged in translanguaging practices in order to represent their realities in the new, for some children, urban contexts and to imagine a future where they will perform identities as singers, doctors, teachers or whatever roles they found appealing.

During the CEAR Project, we interpreted children’s engagement in the construction of affirming identities and their changing views regarding Indigenous languages and their speakers as signs of lived multilingualism and interculturalism. If children wanted to learn from one
another, they were accepting one another as someone “worthy of speaking” (Bourdieu, 1991; Norton, 1997, 2000). This, in turn, created multiple dialogical relationships that affirmed all the students’ identities as teachers and learners. The praxicum was also about children becoming friends, helping each other, and appropriating each other’s words to create more egalitarian societies where all children’s ways of knowing and being in the world are respected and valued. I am positive that the impact of the CEAR Project will extend beyond the children’s lives as they enact multilingual and intercultural identities and perspectives that will lead to a society in which all Indigenous peoples, and minoritized children are respected, valued, and treated equally.

4) Who are the student teachers and what issues do they face as future English teachers in Oaxaca?

a. How is our (student teachers’ and my own) expertise in working with elementary school children from diverse backgrounds co-constructed?

*La Banda*, composed of ten student teachers, drove the CEAR Project, made the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy come to life, reinvented critical pedagogies, and with their ongoing reflections contributed immensely to the analysis of the data collected. The identity texts of Laura, Hugo, Chucho, Claudia and Betty were presented in this dissertation since the first three taught in Maestro Carlos’ class at Downtown School and the last two in Maestro Manuel’s class at Horizons School. These two classes were the focus of the dissertation. Consequently, and unfortunately, Miriam’s, Eliza’s, Pepe’s, Cueto’s and Juan’s life and classroom stories could not be told. Nevertheless, their voices and contributions still appeared here, as they participated in the debriefing sessions.

The five student teachers who were the focus of this dissertation contributed to the CEAR Project in many meaningful ways. Laura always brought happiness to the group with her
constant laughter. Her initial nervousness quickly turned into confidence as she came to regard herself as a legitimate language educator. Laura proved to herself and her partners that she was an excellent teacher who knew when to bring structure, flexibility or encouragement to the class. Hugo brought a teacher’s perspective to the CEAR project. With his life experience as the son and brother of school teachers and as a young boy who grew up in Indigenous communities, Hugo provided us with insights about the lives that many children had left behind in their rural communities. Chucho was the perfect example of how the student teachers in the CEAR Project connected their own experiences as emergent bilinguals having to learn both English and language pedagogy to Indigenous children’s struggles in schools. Chucho deeply cared for their local and Indigenous communities and always reminded us that languages and cultures are not inherently “good” or “bad”; it is what people do with those languages that needs to be analyzed on a daily basis in order to pursue equality at multiple levels. Claudia was the critical voice in our group. Having grown up in a variety of contexts and challenging situations from a young age, Claudia constantly reminded us that fixed dichotomies and categories needed to be challenged. She always made sure we did not view the children with paternalistic eyes. Betty, like Laura, brought laughter and a candid spirit to our group. Her dedication, persistence, and tenderness gave the children the confidence they needed to negotiate new identities in the classroom. I have also provided you with glimpses of my own ever-changing identities as I forged my path as a teacher educator and researcher, and most importantly as a learner. My life experiences and my dialogues with many, many people have shaped the narrator role I have played here.

Throughout the CEAR Project, we all attempted to negotiate affirming identities and to believe deeply that our lives were full of rich experiences and expertise, in order to resist deficit positions as “public university students,” “fresas y malinchistas,” and “incompetent non-native
speakers.” We resisted classist discrimination and imposed identities that labeled us as irresponsible, educationally uncommitted, and unqualified professionals. The student teachers demonstrated throughout the CEAR Project that they were committed not only to their professional development as language educators, but also to the reinvention of more egalitarian societies through their interactions with the children. We also resisted identities that placed us as snobbish (fresa) people and traitors (malinchantistas) to the Mexican Republic due to our closeness to the United States and its English language. Hence, we needed to continuously negotiate our “linguistic” and “national” identities in order to be active and accepted members in the various layers and circles of the Oaxacan society. If we wanted to exert our agency and be agents of change, we had to negotiate legitimate identities in order to have a voice. We also resisted global positions that attempted to place us “incompetent non-native speakers” of the English language (Clemente & Higgins, 2008; López Gopar et al., 2006; Sayer, 2007). In order to “exorcise the [English] native speaker” (Clemente & Higgins, 2008), our identity texts went from “standard English” to multilingual narratives. Our voices were no longer an imitation of a native speaker; we used multiple languages or combinations of these languages (translanguaging) and different modalities to analyze where we came from, where we are, and where we are going. Throughout the CEAR Project, we strived to negotiate affirming identities while recognizing that we will never be fully accepted and that we will always have to resist imposed classist, linguistic, and nationalist pejorative identities. The negotiation of our own identities, we believed, was essential if we wanted to create affirming identities with the children participating in the CEAR Project.

Our expertise in working with elementary school children from diverse backgrounds was developed through the dialogue we established and maintained throughout the CEAR Project. This dialogue took place in the weekly debriefing meetings, in our informal interactions en route to the schools, in informal conversations between classes at FI-UABJO and in the interviews I
conducted with the student teachers. We were aware that dialogue is always “situated” in the context of power relations and other social and interpersonal factors (Blommaert, 2005; Burbules, 2000). I represented the teacher educator, the one with the “expertise” and “experience” in the realm of teaching English to children, the facilitator of the meetings, and the supervisor of their research project. However, I was also Pepe’s uncle and quickly became a friend to all of the student teachers. As the CEAR Project progressed, the student teachers soon realized that I had as many questions as they did and that I was struggling as much as they were to know how things would unfold, and that we needed to build our multilingual and intercultural road together as we moved through the praxicum.

The student teachers became aware that their roles were as important as mine in the CEAR Project. The student teachers became the experts in their classes and insiders to the children’s practices during the praxicum. They were student teachers, praxicum supervisors, researchers, and friends at the same time. They also became each other’s tutors and critics as they shared their praxicum experiences. They realized that teaching English to children in a critical way that promotes multilingualism and interculturalism requires different strategies, depending on the teachers’ agency and the constraints found in the historical, cultural, economical and social contexts in which children grow up. Our expertise was constructed as we appropriated and reshaped the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy, critical pedagogies, and “best” practices in teaching English to children, and as we navigated in the two different contexts we were working in and through the conflicting ideologies present in the Oaxacan society. Given the children’s complex lives and ever-evolving contexts and the intricate and dialogical relationship between theory and practice (Cummins, 2000b), our expertise cannot and must never be a finished product, but rather an evolving process in which inclusive and collaborative power relationships are established in favor of all the actors involved.
5) What are the implications of this project for educational policies and for planning the teaching of English to children in Mexico and in other contexts with Indigenous and minoritized populations?

The implications of the CEAR Project for contexts in Mexico and elsewhere should be formulated not as prescriptive guidelines, but as the teachings that we learned from the children and from our interactions with them and among ourselves. These teachings can provide food for thought to researchers, policy makers, teacher educators, curriculum developers, material designers and publishing companies, and teachers as they reflect on their own contexts and develop their own best practices and critical pedagogies in favor of all students.

Throughout the CEAR Project, the children taught us significant lessons about fostering multilingualism and interculturalism, and developing critical pedagogies. They taught us that monolingual teachers can successfully promote multilingualism and interculturalism if they commit themselves to the project, are willing to take the time to develop bonds of trust with their students, and create personal relationships through which the affirming identities of both teachers and students are co-constructed. The children also taught us that their life stories do not fit traditional social constructs such as family. After learning more about their life histories, we discovered that approaching the concept of family as a nuclear and “happy” community would be inappropriate for these children.

In relation to languages, children showed us that the notion of language as a fixed entity is highly problematic. Children showed us how they translanguaged and moved in and out of and between languages to perform as multilingual speakers. In addition, they taught us that dichotomies (e.g., monolingual versus bilingual, first language versus second language) cannot capture the nature of their linguistic repertoire. Along similar lines, children taught us that the Indigenous versus mestizo categories that I brought to the CEAR Project were highly
problematic and that my, and later our, decision to categorize children in these ways was based mainly on their language proficiency. Soon we realized that the children’s linguistic histories and self-identifications went beyond these simple designations. The children appropriated, rejected and/or used their Indigenous identities according to the contexts in which they found themselves, the ideologies prevalent in these contexts, and the interactions in which Indigenous identity was being negotiated.

In addition, a student at Downtown School taught us, in a painful way with her death, that critical research/pedagogy must go beyond rhetorical arguments, be grounded in the actual lives of the children, and work towards the enhancement of parents’ and children’s identities and their physical and material lives (Apple, 2000). This student also taught us that unless we continuously reflect about our own ideologies and habitus (Bourdieu, 1991), we will continue seeing migrant children’s lives and worlds through our myopic lens and work towards what we think is best for them. Unless we realize that children are unique individuals who go about appropriating identities constrained by contextual factors, resisting imposed identities, and creating their own imagined futures, our pedagogies will be exclusive, limiting and constricting.

In the last section of the dissertation, I critically analyzed the Mexican federal educational policy that is introducing the English language in public elementary schools. Taken the CEAR Project children’s lives and realities as the footing of my analysis (Blommaert, 2005) and the work of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) and Kress (2000a, 2000b, 2003) in social semiotics and multimodalities as my theoretical lens, I argued that the development and implementation of this policy through the creation of Inglés Enciclomedia have been carried out without critical analysis of the sociocultural and linguistic realities of Mexican children. Ironically, Inglés Enciclomedia, the program created in a sociohistorical vacuum by a foreign company, encourages teachers to look for methods which enable students to connect their learning in English to their daily lives.
Even though the software of *Inglés Enciclomedia* looks appealing and appears to be grounded in “best practices” in teaching children, it is highly problematic in that it reinforces the Mexican nation-state ideology and world-wide ideologies concerning the learning and use of English. The Mexican nation-state ideology has maintained Spanish as the *de facto* official language and promoted a hegemonic relationship between Spanish and Indigenous languages. At the same time that *Inglés Enciclomedia* presents Spanish as Mexico’s language, it also pushes it out, encouraging teachers to eliminate the use of Spanish in the classroom. *Inglés Enciclomedia* also brings to the classroom world-wide ideologies that position so-called native speakers of English in the inner circles (Kachru, 1985) as the standard to which Mexican teachers and children have to measure up. It ignores the fact that many Indigenous peoples and other “minoritized” groups in outer and expanding circles have appropriated this language and shaped its linguistic structures to fit their worldviews.

With *Inglés Enciclomedia* Mexican teachers have no control whatsoever over the content of the English program. All children in Mexico will learn exactly the same thing, irrespective of their sociocultural context and their personal background. I argue here that if *Inglés Enciclomedia* wishes to be a cutting-edge project, it must become a customizable program. In other words, the content of the program needs to speak to the reality of each school and each child. In addition, the Mexican federal government has to look inwards and profit from the expertise of local teachers, like the ten student teachers in the CEAR Project, to design and implement English language and educational policies that work in favor of all Mexican children, especially those who have suffered discrimination throughout Mexican history. The major implication of the CEAR Project should be to move from the local to the global in order to negotiate identities, develop language, literacy and pedagogical expertise among all participants, and design more egalitarian societies.
Limitations and Future Research

During the CEAR Project, we faced a number of limitations. While we were analyzing the data collected before the praxicum, we recognized our lack of knowledge about Indigenous languages. We wished we could speak at least some of the Indigenous languages spoken by the children. Even though all the children were able to follow our line of questions during the interviews, we realized there were instances when our knowledge of their Indigenous language could have eased the pace of the interview. Nevertheless, we were able to use our lack of Indigenous language knowledge to everybody’s advantage. Children took on the role of the experts, and we were there to learn from them. The student teachers were also aware that their use of Spanish as a lingua franca needed to be accompanied by skillful scaffolding techniques in order to provide comprehensible input to all children.

Time was another limitation in the CEAR Project. I had originally planned for the praxicum to begin in January and finish in April. That would give us two more months (May and June) to observe the host teachers’ classes once or twice more in order to document any changes in children’s literacy and language practices in their regular classes. Moreover, I had planned to conduct a third interview with each of the children to capture more insights into their views regarding Indigenous languages and peoples after the praxicum. However, the praxicum did not start until the middle of February, at the teachers’ request, and it extended until the end of June due to class cancellations caused by teachers’ strikes.

Concerning time as well, the CEAR Project was too short to document fully the children’s evolving language and literacy practices and their adoption/rejection of ideologies about Indigenous languages and English. Regarding Indigenous language practices, it would be important to document these practices and ideologies as soon as Indigenous children begin their formal schooling or as soon as they arrive in the urban setting, and follow their development
throughout the children’s formal schooling. Regarding the inclusion of the English language in public elementary schools, it would be better to follow a group of students for four years: one year in fourth grade before they start taking English, one year in fifth grade and another in sixth grade, the two grades when English is/will be taught in public elementary schools, and one more year as they move to middle school, where English is taught as a subject.

Another limitation of the CEAR Project was the fact that all the data collection took place in the schools with the exclusion of parents’ perspectives. The children told us about their language and literacy practices outside their school. However, we did not have the opportunity to document these practices in the community, in the children’s homes and from their parents’ perspectives. Part of this limitation was due to our lack of human resources to collect data outside the schools. In my case, my whole day was taken up between the two schools. I spent most mornings at Horizons Schools and my afternoons at Downtown School. We held our weekly meetings in the afternoons. The student teachers were also busy with other school projects and could not engage in more data collection. For future CEAR Projects, it would be important to include other students from FI-UABJO or other faculties (e.g., sociology or anthropology) for these specific aspects omitted in this CEAR Project.

The final limitation of the CEAR Project I want to address is the limited participation of the host teachers. In the original plan of the CEAR Project, I expected that the host teachers would be much more involved in the praxicum by conducting informal and formal classroom observations, so that we could get their feedback. I also hoped that the host teachers would learn from the student teachers. However, due to their busy schedules, they were unable to participate. In future CEAR Projects, we need to be more creative to work around host teachers’ busy schedules. One possibility is to have student teachers or a substitute teacher, if financial support is available, take over the host teachers’ class for certain days throughout the school year, so they
can be more involved in the project. It is also important for the host teachers to feel that they are researchers in their classes in many ways and that the research enterprise is not something that only teacher educators and researchers do. In order for host teachers to feel valued as researchers, long-term relationships need to be created between universities and schools. The Teacher Action Research Group based at Simon Fraser University is a good example of a five-year collaborative research in multilingual elementary classrooms (Denos et al., 2009). Future CEAR Projects, as previously stated, must become long term research projects as well if we are to bring different players into the discussion of developing all children’s language and literacy expertise and the negotiation of affirming identities.

In the next and final section of this dissertation, I present the last piece of the narrative that illustrates how the CEAR project will remain present in all the participants’ lives.

**What Is Going to Happen?**

The ten student teachers and I are sitting around the two big tables we put together, so we can see each other. We are discussing the promotion of multilingualism, interculturalism and social equity in Oaxaca.

**Claudia:** We have to believe that it [the promotion] is possible. If we ourselves do not believe it, we are not going to make children believe; we are not going to make them feel or convey to them how important their contribution is and [how important] what we are trying to achieve with them [is]. They have to believe that their language is important at school, but outside in their life with everything else [as well]. For this to happen, we have to believe it, too.
Eliza: But, I have a question, well, independently of what we are trying to see and all that, what is going to happen later?

Mario: What is going to happen?

Eliza: Because, let’s say, the [CEAR] Project is finished. If children are [now] being put down because they use their language in class and [in the streets], what is going to happen when they get influenced [by us] and they may want to use their language in and outside their classroom? What is going to happen?

Mario: Does anybody want to answer that? Please. (Everybody laughs)

Claudia: I think it is something we cannot control. It is like lighting the flame of something, right? You do not know if it is going to be extinguished or if it is going to create a big fire. Hopefully, it will become a fire. Because the thing is that if perhaps one [child] speaks and [she gets] put down and remains quiet, then no more [fire]. But if she speaks and gets put down, and then another one speaks and then everybody, then someone has to give up. Then our intention, well in my case, is to say, “I won’t shut up because I do not want to. I like this and it works for me.” It would be good if we taught English in elementary schools, but I think we are far from that.
Mario: It would be wonderful if we could teach many things through English.

Claudia: Of course.

Mario: I think that the point is to promote multilingualism [and interculturalism] through English. And we do not know [what is going to happen], Eliza. I think that we have to think about this . . . and take it very seriously because we are messing with these types of things and [we do not know] what is going to happen. I mean, we are going to tell someone who feels uncomfortable using their language, “Hey, use your language and feel proud it.” And then, what if that person is put down because of this? (some chuckle) I mean, they are going to look for you, Eliza, for us, right?

Claudia: Yes, of course.

Mario: [They may say,] “Where are you? You told me that I should use it [my Indigenous language].” But, well, we have to try to be positive and think that it is like the butterfly effect, the chaos theory, right? That perhaps what we are doing now or what we are trying to do will have repercussions. Hopefully, they will be positive repercussions in 20 years or so. And honestly, I do believe that there are people who can change your life . . . I think we all remember the teacher who told us or
made us feel that we were the most intelligent [person] or that we were the experts. And that [remembering that teacher’s words] gives us the energy when we think that everything will be over. That is the push to continue and [the voice that] tells you, “You can do it.” But what is going to happen? We have to live with this. Maybe in 20 years, we can get together for beer, Eliza?

Eliza: Yes. (She giggles. We all laugh.)

Claudia: How old are you going to be in 20 years, Profe?

Mario: Well... (We all laugh).

Claudia: Isn’t the doctor going to forbid you to [drink beer]?

(We all laugh). Just kidding!

Mario: Well, you can come visit me at Rufino Tamayo [a home for the elderly in Oaxaca]. (We all laugh). You can put the beer in my serum. (We all laugh)

Claudia: Just kidding.

Eliza was completely right in her questioning of our intentions and their repercussions. She made us realize that we will never be able to know what is going to happen in our students’ lives after they leave our classrooms. We can, however, use the precious moments we have with them to listen to their voices, learn from them, and show our admiration to their ways of knowing, languaging, and culturing. I learned so much
from the teachers, student teachers and the children in the CEAR Project. I hope the stories I have presented in this dissertation will make you admire all of these actors, and your students, too. It is my hope that these stories will convince researchers, teacher educators, policy makers, and curriculum and materials developers that every single policy, theory, social construct, category, pedagogy, and curriculum should be revisited and challenged every day if we are truly to serve the ever-evolving, diverse classrooms of today.
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Appendix A:
“Teaching English to Children” Course Syllabus

Faculty of Languages of the UABJO
B.A. in Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language

ESP: Teaching English to Children

General Information:
System: Lic. Flexibilizada
Semester: Various
Schedule: To be determined
Instructor: Mtro. Mario E. López Gopar

Course Description:

This course is a “praxical” (critical theory and reflective practice) introduction to the area of teaching English to Mexican (Mestizo, Indigenous, Upper and Low SES, etc.) children. During this course, students will be introduced to the Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy and critical pedagogies necessary to work with young learners (K-6). During this class, students will have the opportunity to learn about the social, linguistic and intellectual development and characteristics of children at different ages viewed from psycholinguistic, sociocultural and sociopolitical perspectives. To address syllabus design, language through content, and classroom management issues, students will be walked through two thematic units of study. Throughout this course, students will experience, first hand, different activities that are used to develop language when teaching children such as games, songs, storytelling (books), art and crafts, role-play, and most importantly, creating authors in the classroom. Issues on authentic assessment will be discussed. Most importantly, it will be emphasized throughout the course that English should be simply “an excuse” to value and foster the multilingualism and interculturalism present in Oaxaca. (quotation marks and emphasis in original)

Units:
1. Contextual and Theoretical Framework
   1.1. Oaxacan Cultural and Linguistic Diversity
   1.2. English in Mexico
   1.3. Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy
   1.4. Critical Pedagogies and Language teaching
   (Unit 1 and 3 will be taught simultaneously)
2. Children Development and Generalities about teaching children
   2.1. Children Development
   2.1.1. Language development
   2.1.2. Social development
   2.1.3. Intellectual development
2.1.4. Multiliteracies Development
2.1.5. Characteristics of different ages (preschool, 5-7, 7-10, and 10-12)

2.2. Generalities about teaching children
2.2.1. Principles
2.2.2. Attention span
2.2.3. Sensory input
2.2.4. Authentic meaningful language
2.2.5. Comprehensible input (gesture/TPR, rephrasing, mother tongue, international and local English, classroom language)
2.2.6. The silent period?
2.2.7.

3. Thematic Unit: Myself, My Family and My Community
4. Thematic Unit: “Topic to be decided”

During these two units of study, syllabus design and authentic assessment will be discussed on a daily basis. In addition, the following topics will be demonstrated and critically analyzed:

- **Classroom and behavior management techniques**
  - Haves to’ in classroom management
  - Helping children feel secure
  - The physical surroundings
  - Group dynamics
  - Tips

- **Language development through activities, lesson planning and brief introduction to syllabus design**
  - Games
  - Songs
  - Story telling and creation of books
  - Role play
  - Art and crafts
  - Charts

**Methodology:**
The course will be student-centered; that is, the previous syllabus is simply a plan that will be adapted to the needs, interests and goals of the students. This class will include lectures, quizzes to identify needs and progress, presentation by the students, group discussions, pair discussions, etc. Students will also be expected to read independently at home and in groups. Most of the activities will be dynamic and interactive, so be prepared to actively participate in class.

**Evaluation:**
Students will receive a monthly grade based on three projects (the creation of two identity texts based and the development of a thematic unit and all its components (75%) and class participation (25%).

**Bibliography*: 


* More bibliography will be added as we progress through the course.
Appendix B:
Guiding Interview Questions for the Principals

1. How long have you served as the principal of the school?

2. What is the school mission and vision?

3. What is your role as a principal?

4. Could you describe the school faculty in terms of Indigenous and mainstream ratio and educational background?

5. At the federal level, Indigenous education has adopted an intercultural and bilingual education approach; in what way does your school share this approach?

6. In what ways has the state/federal department provided teachers with professional development regarding this approach?

7. In what ways can children benefit learning through different languages (Indigenous, Spanish, and English)? What are some potential problems or challenges?

8. What are the characteristics of the school student population?

9. What is the graduation rate? Are there any differences among different groups (e.g., boys vs girls, Indigenous vs mainstream, etc.)?

10. What are some successful stories this school has achieved?

11. What are some of the challenges this school population presents?

12. In what ways does the community participate (e.g. parents, older siblings, etc.) in the school?
Appendix C:
Guiding Interview Questions for the In-Service Subject Teachers

1. Where are you originally from?
2. What languages do you speak?
3. How many years have you been teaching in total? in this school?
4. What is your educational background?
5. What kind of in-service professional development have you received?
6. At the federal level, Indigenous education has adopted an intercultural and bilingual education approach; does your school share this approach?
7. Have you received any professional development regarding this approach?
8. What is the language(s) used in your classroom? In the school?
9. What are some successful stories this school has achieved?
10. What are some of the challenges this school population presents?
11. Do you think it would be a good idea for children learning through different languages (Indigenous, Spanish, and English)?
Appendix D:
Guiding Questions for the First Interview with the Children

1. What is your name?

2. How old are you?

3. Where were you born?

4. How long have you been living in this neighborhood?

5. Where do you prefer to live?

6. Where are your parents from?

7. With whom do you live now?

8. What do your parents do?

9. What is their level of education?

10. What languages does your family speak?

11. What languages do you speak?

12. Where do you speak (e.g. Zapotec)? with whom?

13. How do you feel when you speak (e.g. Zapotec)?

14. Would you like to learn your grandparents’ language?

15. In class, what language(s) is (are) used?

16. What do you enjoy about school? Why?

17. Are school lessons easy/difficult? Why?

18. Do you understand everything the teacher says?

19. What do you do when you are not at school?
20. Is it difficult-easy to do your homework? Why?

21. At what time do you do it? Does someone help you?

22. Would you like to learn English? Why?
Appendix E:
Guiding Questions for the First Interview with the Student Teachers

1. Could you please talk about your family background?

2. What is your educational background?

3. Why did you choose this B.A.?

4. What are your impressions of the TEC course?

5. Were there any new topics in the TEC course that you had not covered in the B.A. program? If so, what were they?

6. Why did you choose to do your practicum in a school with Indigenous and mestizo children?

7. You have had the opportunity to observe the in-service subject teacher’s class, have you learned something from that teacher that you would like to incorporate in your own praxicum?

8. Are there any things that you would like to do differently? If so, what are they?

9. Have you had any teaching experience? Please tell me about it.

10. How do you feel working as a team in the CEAR Project? Have you learnt from your classmates?
Appendix F:
Guiding Questions for the Second Interview with the Children

1. Do you like to have two teachers in your classroom? Why?

2. How do you feel about the English classes? Why?

3. What have you liked/disliked about the English classes?

4. How has your English class been different from your regular teacher’s class?

5. Is there something that you don’t like about your regular classes?

6. What do you think about Indigenous languages being used and taught during the English class?

7. At the beginning I noticed that you (name of a student) didn’t want to participate and now you (he/she) do (does), why?

8. I also noticed that at the beginning (name of a student) didn’t want to participate with his/her Indigenous language and she/he does now, why?

9. Have Indigenous languages been used during your regular classes? What do you think about it? Why have they used them for?

10. (For bilingual students) You already speak two languages, has this helped you to learn English?
    (For monolingual students) There are some students who speak two languages already, has this helped them to learn English?

11. Would you like to learn/speak other languages? Which languages?

12. What do your parents, siblings and friends think that you are learning English?

13. What do your parents, siblings and friends think that you are learning (or are using) Indigenous languages?
14. How do you know if a person is Indigenous?

15. What about you, do you consider yourself Indigenous? Why?

16. At what time do you eat? What do you have for breakfast, lunch and dinner? Where? With whom?

17. Who are your friends at school? Outside?

18. Any other questions that we didn’t ask in the first interview?
Appendix G:
Guiding Questions for the Second Interview with the Student Teachers

1. How have students responded to the classes in English? Did they enjoy them?

2. Was it helpful to observe the in-service teacher and analyze the information from the interviews?

3. Are there changes or critical (memorables) moments that you have witnessed in children’s attitudes towards learning in different languages and towards the speakers of these languages?

4. Has it been difficult for you and the students teaching/learning content through English?

5. Are there any particular aspects of the TEC course that have helped you with your practicum?

6. Are there any other topics that should be covered in the TEC course?

7. Tell me about your experience as an observer?

8. Tell me about your experience as a teacher? What did you learn from it?

9. What was the interaction/reflection like while working with a partner(s)? Would you recommend future student teachers to work with a partner during their praxicum?

10. How was the impact about this experience for you and your family?

11. How was the interaction with the in-service subject teacher?

12. How do you feel about promoting Indigenous languages without speaking them? Do you think it takes persistence?

13. One of the goals of the CEAR Project was to prepare you to teach children? In what ways has this goal been achieved?