Chapter 4
Connecting community and school spaces: Strategies in primary and secondary education
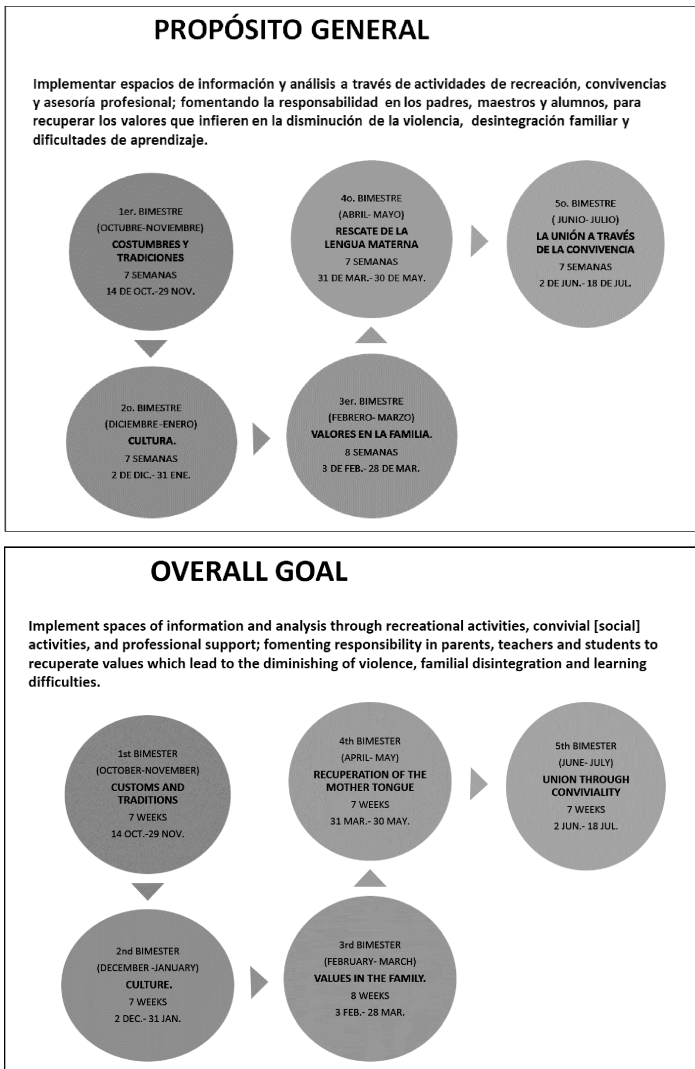

Figure 11: PowerPoint slide from primary school initiative; Original by Delia Ruíz Álvarez; English translation mine.

The above flow chart (Figure 11) represents a pedagogical project planned and implemented by a team of primary school teachers in an officially monolingual primary school in Juchitán between 2013 and 2014. The first image is the original slide from a PowerPoint by one of the teachers and project leaders, Delia Ruíz Álvarez, an experienced teacher from the Isthmus who was pursuing her Master's degree at the time of the project. The second image is a reproduction of the slide with an English translation. The aim of their project as noted in the chart was "*Recuperación de valores en la sociedad, asumiendo responsabilidades tanto padres, maestros y educandos para combatir la violencia, desintegración familiar y las dificultades en aprendizaje*" [Recuperation of values in society, taking responsibility among parents, teachers and learners in order to combat violence, family disintegration and learning difficulties]. In order to achieve this, the 'overall goal' included creating spaces and activities where students, teachers and parents would share information, analyze the challenges facing the community, and ultimately take responsibility for addressing some of these challenges. The flow chart shows the 5 thematic units of the project, each developed in 7–8 week periods and carried out sequentially over the course of a school-year. Each thematic unit had specific goals and activities designed to contribute to the overall goal. The thematic units the teachers chose were 'Customs and traditions', 'Culture', 'Values in the family', 'Recuperation of the mother tongue', and 'Union through conviviality', all topics that went beyond what the normal curriculum would have covered. The teachers in this school framed traditional language and culture as part of the solution to academic and social problems, and they chose to reach out to children's families in order to connect community practices and community knowledge with the school space in tangible ways. Their projects included having the students record their own radio broadcasts, create newspaper posters about local history, paint a mural of local customs on the school wall, participate in Diidxazá literacy classes, and participate in dancing and singing *Istmeño* music. In the teachers' imaginary of social change, all of these activities are relevant to the academic success of their students. For example, in describing the radio activity in a report about the project they stated that they aimed to: "*Impulsar una radio escolar donde los alumnos comenten diversos temas de interés sobre costumbres y tradiciones de la comunidad, participando y dando opiniones para formar alumnos críticos y rescatar valores*" [Foment a school radio where the students comment on various themes that are of interest in relation to community traditions and customs, participating and giving opinions in order to shape critical students and recuperate values]. These teachers viewed the exploration of themes related to local customs and traditions as a way to support quality education and encourage critical thinking.

The perspectives and priorities of this teaching team contrast with the approach to Indigenous languages (and cultures) that has historically been common in public schools in Mexico, and indeed in much of the world. Indigenous languages, traditions and values have not been viewed as resources for academic success in nation-state education systems, rather as problems to be overcome (Battiste 2013; Maldonado Alvarado 2002). As spaces of socialization with high social status, schools have had significant impacts on language ideologies and practices, leading to increased dominance of Spanish in the Isthmus, as discussed in chapter 2. The most common motivation mentioned in interviews and conversations for not speaking Diidxazá to children was the exclusion and punishment that previous generations experienced in schools and in society as speakers of Diidxazá. This was noted as more common in the past, but also something that carries on in some places in the present, and certainly in the recent past. A young woman in her early twenties was one of many people who described the legacy of school-based discrimination in an interview:

Ahí [en la escuela primaria] tenía varios compañeros que sí hablaban el zapoteco y para eso deben estar callados toda la clase porque no se les permitía hablar el zapoteco. Entonces se quedaban sin recreo si hablaban, una palabra y se quedaban; entonces ahí fue donde ya se fue perdiendo poco a poco y dice mi mamá que desde que ella estaba, cuando ella empezó ir a la primaria le hicieron lo mismo que ya prohibían desde ese entonces que aprendieran, que hablaran el zapoteco dentro del salón, dentro de la escuela más bien. Desde ahí ya como que ya se fue perdiendo.

There [in primary school] I had several classmates that spoke Zapotec and because of that they have to be silent for the whole class because they weren't permitted to speak in Zapotec. So they stayed in without recess if they spoke, one word and they stayed; so that was where it went being lost bit by bit and my mom says that since she was there, when she began to go to primary school they did the same to her, that they already forbid back then that people would learn, would speak Zapotec inside the classroom, inside the school rather. From there already, like that's how it's been getting lost.

(Interview November 2013)

While a project like that of Delia Ruíz Álvarez and her fellow teachers was in many ways an exception to normal practices, going against the grain of public schooling, it was also supported by rhetorical and political currents within the state and national education systems which characterized the language ecology of Oaxacan schooling at that time. A state-wide initiative developed by the largest teachers union in Oaxaca (Section 22), the *Plan para la transformación de la educación en Oaxaca* [Plan for the transformation of education in Oaxaca, hereafter PTEO] seemed to be having not just rhetorical but also tangible effects. At the time of my study the teachers union was promoting the PTEO, a framework for school-initiated projects to bring local knowledge and traditions into the school and to

'transform' education at the local level. Although not all of the schools I visited were attempting to implement the PTEO, many of the schools were taking up this challenge in different ways. The project of Delia and her fellow teachers was recognized and supported by the PTEO policy. With the initiative of the local teaching team at the core, the project benefited from the opportunities opened through the active state-level support in the form of PTEO and the passive support for (or diminished resistance to) Indigenous languages in schools following their official recognition at the national level.

The social project of formal schooling creates countless communities of practice in individual schools, each an important site of negotiation and reproduction of language ideologies day to day. Formal education plays an undeniably central role in socialization, including the formation of language ideologies, norms and identity (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970; Levinson, Foley, and Holland 1996; Wortham 2005). Education has been a key domain in which linguistic hierarchies are created and reproduced, and correspondingly it is also a key domain for initiatives which seek to establish greater linguistic equality (Heller and Martin-Jones 2001). Additionally, it is a meeting ground of top-down policies and bottom-up politics. In this chapter I discuss the spaces of activism and potential change within formal education, as well as the legacy of exclusionary schooling which these efforts must work against. Like the domain of scholarship, there is a history of marginalization of Indigenous languages in formal education, however there are also numerous actors engaging in different forms of activism to change the way minoritized languages are represented in schools, and to connect community knowledge with schooling.

This chapter discusses education as a social project with special potential to create and/ or dismantle language-related inequalities. I provide an overview of the issue of language (in)equality in education (4.1) and discuss ways that language diversity is supported in education today (4.1.1). The context of schooling in the Isthmus is sketched out (4.2) followed by an analysis of the different approaches to language diversity manifested by teaching teams in several primary schools (4.2.1). I highlight several language activism strategies which I observed in primary and secondary schools (4.3); *connecting* the *spaces* of school and community, as well as *connecting* the *people* in these often separate spaces (4.3.1), and *representing* Isthmus Zapotec *communication practices* as part of formal schooling (4.3.2). I conclude with reflections on the characteristics of language activism in schooling (4.4).

4.1 Language (in)equality and education

Language use in formal education settings has patterns of form and function that are considerably narrower than those which exist across human language behavior in general. The varieties of language (standardized, national languages, often through written modes), the roles that interlocutors take up (expert teacher, novice student), and the kinds of turn taking exchanges that occur (initiation-response-feedback) provide a more or less rigid structure to the linguistic practices of participants (McHoul 1978; Dalton-Puffer 2007). Education typically aims to socialize participants into specific language practices and away from others, with the practices that are chosen generally being those that will privilege people already in positions of power (Bourdieu 1991). As such, formal education has often been a key means through which nation-states have attempted to govern and ultimately assimilate internal diversity, whether through overt means such as obligatory boarding schools for Indigenous children established in the Anglophone colonial countries (Canada, US, Australia; see McCarty 2013 for an overview in the US context) and elsewhere in the world, or more subtle forms of assimilation. In many contexts around the world this has meant that languages in use in a certain place have been excluded from the schools established in that place, because the schools orient towards linguistic practices that are in use in a center of national (or international) power, elsewhere (Heller and Martin-Jones 2001; Tollefson and Tsui 2004). Languages that are excluded from education are pushed down the linguistic hierarchy in their place of origin, becoming minoritized (May 2006) or displaced, and eventually may cease to be used.

Nationalist schooling has not only been detrimental through fostering language hierarchies, but more significantly it can create multiple forms of disadvantage for those who are erased by the school's language regime (Irvine and Gal 2000). Ivan Illich (1970) has argued that obligatory schooling as designed by a dominant social group is a key mechanism for creating and controlling social hierarchy in Latin America and in the world in general, as poorer classes with less access to formal education are "schooled in a sense of inferiority" (7) on the grounds of having restricted membership to the discourses and communities of formal schooling. Illich (1970, 1973) discussed the potential harms of certain forms of institutionalized education, characterized as inherently *manipulative*, in contrast to the potential benefits of "learning webs" characterized as inherently *convivial* (see also chapter 6). Rebolledo (2008), writing about education for Indigenous students in Mexico City, describes the "national monolingual educational model imposed on bilingual students" as characterized by "a series of conventional teaching patterns and the curricular rigidity of basic education: school has been designed for a culturally homogenous population, within which Indian characteristics do

not fit" (104). In the Oaxacan context, Maldonado Alvarado (2002) describes how formal education has been used as a site to erase Indigenous practices and perspectives; a colonial endeavor which Indigenous people have long resisted.

The exclusion of local language practices from formal education, and the adherence to a prescriptive, non-local speech norm is detrimental to children's acquisition of literacy and content material, as well as their social and psychological development (Thomas and Collier 1997; Cummins 2009). Conversely, inclusion of these languages can have positive effects on overall academic outcomes and identity development (Hornberger 1998, 2005; García 2009a; Blackledge and Creese 2010). Overt assimilation policies have fallen out of favor since the post-WWII human rights era, and policies that promote language diversity have increased in many parts of the world, as discussed in chapter 1. A variety of what might be called *pro-diversity* education approaches now exist, aiming to include diverse learners in formal education. Implementation and political support for such approaches is far from stable in many contexts however, as discussed in the context of Mexico and Oaxaca (see chapter 2) where so-called bilingual schools serve to transition students to monolingualism. Schools alone can neither eradicate Indigenous languages nor ensure their social acceptance (May and Aikman 2003; Hornberger 2008); however, education initiatives remain central to any project that seeks to create new potentialities for marginalized languages and peoples (Levinson et al. 1996: 19). The following section examines some of the different ways that education initiatives have sought to make space for diverse languages.

4.1.1 Pro-diversity education: From strict immersion to plurilingual repertoires

Pro-diversity education for Indigenous languages draws on a range of ideologies and takes many forms in practice. Immersion is viewed as the gold standard for endangered language education by scholars of language maintenance and revitalization, exemplified by language nests in New Zealand, Hawai'i, and in a growing number of Native communities in North America (Kipp 2000; McIvor 2005). As Grenoble and Whaley (2006) note, "While many would argue that full-immersion programs are the surest route to language revitalization and maintenance, few communities have the resources necessary to see them through" (50). Mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), as developed by PRAESA in South Africa (Alexander 2005; Plüddemann 2010) and additionally promoted by UNESCO (2003) and other transnational development organizations, prescribes sole use of a "mother tongue" (assumed to be the Indigenous language) for acquisition of literacy, eventually transferring to additional (national) languages

(Benson 2004; Skutnabb-Kangas 2009). Immersion and mother tongue educa-tion– while both designed to make spaces for minoritized languages and improve the quality of education for populations that have been marginalized by formal schooling– nonetheless draw on fairly essentializing notions of language and identity, such as fusing language with identity and place while overlooking that people may have multiple "mother tongues" or may develop language capacities in non-linear ways. In practice however, these classrooms may make space for multilingual practices such as translanguaging and recognition of multiple mother tongues despite their rhetoric of positive discrimination in favor of *one* minori-tized language. For example, Hawai'ian immersion schools instruct students in Japanese and English as additional languages, and incorporate various forms of visual and spatial expression and different learning styles[23]; Hawai'ian language and culture is thus a base for a wide-ranging and diverse curriculum, rather than being a rigid or limiting frame.

Dual immersion, content-based learning (CBL; or content and language inte-grated learning, CLIL), task-based learning (TBL) and other program models ori-enting to a multilingual norm, attempt to incorporate multiple languages into one classroom in a meaningful way (Riestenberg and Sherris 2018). To the extent that they do not prescribe a linear or hierarchical development trajectory (one language mastered before another can be introduced), they may be seen as adopting a more constructivist or flexible approach to language learning than immersion or MTB-MLE models. On the other hand they may also create forms of "separate bilingualism" (Blackledge and Creese 2010) through the common practice of keeping languages apart and upholding a nativist ideal of "parallel monolingualism" (Heller 1999) where learners strive to appear monolingual in each language of their repertoire (Flores and Baetens Beardsmore 2015). Transi-tional or "subtractive" bilingualism (Lambert 1975) that incorporates a minority language into schooling for the purpose of transitioning students towards im-proved competence in a dominant language is unlikely to change language practices or power structures, maintaining a monolingual hierarchy. This is the norm in the "bilingual" schools for Indigenous students in Mexico (Coronado Suzán 1992; Hamel 2008a; García and Velasco 2012). The incorporation of Indig-enous languages as subjects without using them as a medium of instruction at any time, which also occurs in some "bilingual Indigenous" schools in Mexico, is also unlikely to result in significant changes in language use. Teaching Indigenous

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23 As I observed in visits to several schools in 2011, see also http://www.hawaiipublic schools.org/TeachingAndLearning/StudentLearning/HawaiianEducation/Pages/Hawaiian-language-immersion-schools.aspx.

languages as subjects may create new communities of practice and increased awareness around issues of language prejudice and endangerment, however (Hornberger, De Korne, and Weinberg 2016).

Actual practices at the classroom level are not necessarily controlled by program types, and thus it is important to also consider the educational goals and ideologies of each program, and how they put them in practice (Hornberger 1991). Often teachers and/or directors have the ability to negotiate the program model or policies that they are asked to implement, developing their own norms and practices (Ricento and Hornberger 1996; Menken and García 2010). Promising practices in education for linguistically diverse students (and arguably all students, within a pluralist education paradigm) include providing culturally and linguistically relevant and sustaining education (Ladson-Billings 1995; Paris 2012) by recognizing the communicative resources that students bring with them. This requires acknowledging students' multimodal communicative repertoires (Cazden et al. 1996; Kress 2000; Rymes 2010, 2014), including non-alphabetic literacies (López Gopar 2007) and translanguaging practices (García 2009b). Rather than separating languages and communicative practices into categories, multilingual students benefit from incorporating receptive and productive, oral and written abilities, through flexible modalities ranging from simultaneous to successive use of different languages as they develop biliteracy (Hornberger 1989).

Educational communities of practice may foster pluralist language practices through locally-informed, flexible approaches to communication, or they may ultimately pressure students to use only certain standard varieties of socially privileged languages through adhering to top-down norms (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; Weber 2009; Blackledge and Creese 2010). In this respect it is not enough to have a seemingly pro-diversity society or school program, it is also important to interrogate the ideologies that influence language use in the day to day practices of the educational community. Pro-diversity education in practice has been critiqued as resulting in the commodification and essentialization of minoritized languages and cultures within a neo-liberal framework of sanitized multiculturalism (García 2005; Muehlmann 2008; Paris and Alim 2017). The ways that language diversity is approached in schools– often through pre-existing hierarchical, normative frameworks– may ultimately assimilate and render diverse human subjects governable, with impacts similar to those of monolingual norms (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Povinelli 2011). Additionally the promotion of language diversity in the form of marketable plurilingual skills may risk supporting "a commodification of language in service of transnational corporations" and a homogenizing neoliberal agenda (Flores 2013: 515). These concerns indicate the need to pay close attention to minoritized language use in education and the social relations that it creates.

In other words, education may be a space that includes diverse language practices, *and/or* a space that restricts them. While there is an underlying argument in this study that the promotion of diverse, minoritized languages is desirable in education and society, I do not assume that *any* form of promotion is necessarily desirable, nor that all potentially homogenizing actions are undesirable.[24] This chapter attempts to deconstruct practices and ideologies in Zapotec education settings but also to reconstitute them, exploring ways that different actors are engaging in the pursuit of educational quality and equity (Makoni and Pennycook 2007). By observing an educational community of practice in action it is possible to understand what potentials they create or remove for their participants in relation to the socio-political context that they are embedded in, and thus look beyond the more transparent aspects of pro-diversity education models. The following sections examine approaches to language diversity in schooling in the Isthmus.

4.2 Language and schooling in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec

Legally, Isthmus Zapotec should no longer be forbidden in schools in today's era of multicultural tolerance. The national legal changes since the 1996 San Andrés accords, including the 2003 linguistic rights law and ratification of the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples give Isthmus Zapotec speakers the right to use their language in schools and other public spaces. At the state level, the teacher's union PTEO program also calls for inclusion of local language, culture and history in the mainstream school curriculum. Unfortunately these pluralist policies are far from being universal practices. In some cases I observed, formal schooling continued to perform the function of discouraging use of Zapotec. In other cases, I observed individual teachers and administrators who chose to promote Indigenous language use to some extent. The PTEO was mentioned much more frequently by the schools that I visited than the national and international policies, and did result in some changes in language practices in certain cases, as examined further below.

Schooling in the Isthmus includes preschool (3 years), primary school (6 years), and secondary school (3 years), after which some students choose to go on to study preparatory school or vocational colleges, as represented in the following Table 2.

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24 For example, I choose to group a wide array of languages together to talk about "minoritized languages"; in effect I am restricting a diverse reality through this grouping, but doing so allows for solidarity, enhanced visibility, and wider networks of support which all seem to me to be valuable.

Table 2: Formal education institutions available to students in the Isthmus and Indigenous language inclusion.

Level of schooling	Institution	Indigenous language inclusion
Preschool	Bilingual	Yes; flexible
	Monolingual	No
	Private	No
Primary school	Bilingual	Yes; Subject 1 hour per week
	Monolingual	No
	Private	No
Secondary school	Public	No
	Private	No
Preparatory	Public	No
	Alternative Public (BIC)	Yes; Potentially medium and subject of study

As indicated in the table, there are three main types of preschools and primary schools: public with monolingual mandate (often called *normal*, *general*, or *formal*), public with nominally bilingual mandate (called *bilingüe* or *indígena*), and private (some of which are 'bilingual' in Spanish and English, or identify with European methods such as Montessori). The public bilingual and monolingual schools are run by separate supervision offices, but have only slightly different curriculum (bilingual school curricula calls for one hour per week of Indigenous language teaching) and similar underlying aims. There is a long history of nominally bilingual education in Mexico, yet today's bilingual schools are universally judged to result in transition towards Spanish, rather than development of bilingualism or biliteracy (Hamel 2008b; Rebolledo 2010; García and Velasco 2012). My observations in the Isthmus are generally in line with what these scholars have described in other parts of the country, as discussed below in relation to formal education practices.

There is no bilingual secondary or preparatory school system, however state-level politics have created opportunities, and some actors have seized them, to teach Indigenous languages at these levels. The teacher's union, through the PTEO, created an *asignatura estatal* [state subject] in secondary schools, and gave teachers license to determine the content of this course. Some schools chose to teach local languages within this subject, as well as traditional arts, skills, and Oaxacan history. While most preparatory schools do not include

Indigenous languages in any way, a new form of preparatory designed for Indigenous communities in Oaxaca is expanding throughout the state, and has been established in two communities in the Isthmus. The program for the *Bachillerato Integral Comunitario* [Integral/ holistic community baccalaureate, BIC] was created in 2002, building on numerous alternative secondary school projects at the state level (Pérez Díaz 2008), and includes instruction of Indigenous languages 4 hours per week as well as encouragement to integrate Indigenous language into the broader program of studies. A BIC was founded in Álvaro Obregon around 2011, and another was founded in La Ventosa in the autumn of 2014.[25]

The majority of students in the Isthmus attend schools where Indigenous languages are not part of the curriculum, as the 'general' monolingual schools are more than twice as numerous as the 'Indigenous' bilingual schools. The ratio of schools does not equate perfectly with the ratio of students either, as all of the 'Indigenous bilingual' primary schools I visited were small and had fewer class groups than the 'general' schools. Parents can choose where they will try to enroll their children, and the bilingual schools are generally considered to be less prestigious than the 'general' schools. It is not uncommon for students to travel to another (usually wealthier) neighborhood for primary school, or neighboring towns for secondary or preparatory school. Students from La Ventosa often travel into Juchitán, while students from Juchitán often travel to the neighboring municipality of Espinal, and still others attend preparatory schools in the state capitol of Oaxaca. While not everyone attends preschool or preparatory school and beyond, 95.27% of children between the ages of 6 and 14 attend primary school in the Isthmus (Carpeta Regional Istmo: Información Estadística y Geográfica Básica 2012), which in the vast majority of cases means Spanish-only instruction.

The mandate of a school (bilingual or monolingual) does not always align with the characteristics of the participants in the school; the characteristics of the teachers, administrators and students vary considerably across the Isthmus Zapotec region. There are bilingual schools in areas where most children prefer to use Spanish; there are monolingual schools in areas where most children prefer to use Diidxazá; and a concern which emerged often was that not all teachers in bilingual schools speak the Indigenous language (or the variety of the Indigenous language) of the locality. Among the schools that I visited and the teachers that I interviewed, in the cases where Diidxazá-speaking teachers were working

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25 Additional education services that were not considered in this study are the *Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo* (National Council on Educational Support/ encouragement, CONAFE) that runs programs for students who have dropped out of public schools, and/ or live in remote regions, and the *Instituto Nacional para la Educación de Adultos* (National Institute for Adult Education, INEA) that conducts training for adults.

with Diidxazá-speaking students, and were motivated to develop Diidxazá abilities, teachers often expressed uncertainty with writing the language and with language pedagogy in general. Other teachers commented that they would be willing to teach Diidxazá, but that parents do not want their children to spend school time on this subject. While some teachers and directors expressed appreciation for local language and culture, others viewed Diidxazá as a problem which could hold their students back. The lingering influence of coloniality and prejudice towards Indigenous languages is evident in many schools in the Isthmus, both in discourse and in practice. One common thread among bilingual and monolingual schools was that all teachers agreed that fewer and fewer students arrive at school speaking Indigenous languages.

Schools are part of wider trends, as many of the teachers and directors I met and interviewed impressed upon me. The preferences of parents, the curricula sent from the national level, and programs promoted by the state-level teacher's union influence what they are able and choose to do. For example, in autumn of 2013 public schools in Oaxaca opened almost two months late on October 14th due to teachers' protests against the federal Education Reform of 2013. One of the points of contention with the reform was the system of standardized testing being promoted by the federal government, both for students, and most controversially, for teachers. A national standardized test of students, ENLACE, was in place from 2006–2009 in a sample of schools, but the Section 22 teacher's union succeeded in getting Oaxaca exempt from this testing system on the argument that it was not appropriate to their diverse student population.[26] Despite critiques, the test continued in the rest of the country, having been redesigned and renamed PLANEA (Anzures Tapia 2015). With the weakening of the teacher's union through the restructuring of the *Instituto Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca* (Oaxacan State Education Institute, IEEPO[27]) in August 2015, the revised PLANEA exams have been applied in Oaxaca. In the 2017 and 2018 rounds of testing the results of Oaxaca were not included in the final report because the participation of Oaxacan schools was not sufficient, although it had gone up considerably from the 2015 tests (INEE 2018). Teachers I spoke with in the Isthmus generally did not seem concerned about their students' performance on standardized tests when asked directly, and rarely brought the subject up as a topic of concern spontaneously. This stood out to me because they were much less pressured by testing of their students than teachers I have met in other multilingual contexts; this may change if standardized exams begin to loom larger in schools in the Isthmus, however.

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26 http://www.enlace.sep.gob.mx/ba/
27 http://www.ieepo.oaxaca.gob.mx

Another recent reform in the Mexican curriculum was the inclusion of an "additional language" to be studied in the monolingual primary school curriculum. I met one teacher who interpreted this as an opportunity to teach a local language to her students, but in general it was viewed as a policy in favor of increased English teaching, a subject which many teachers in the Isthmus were not equipped to teach.

At the local level, each municipality appoints a *Regidor(a) de educación* (Education councilperson) as a liaison between the local government and the schools. Unlike the teachers and directors of schools, the local government liaison is appointed for three years only, limiting the degree of influence that they might have. During the first years of my research (2013–2015), the *regidor* in Juchitán was not active in promoting Isthmus Zapotec in education, although the municipal government provided support for a public campaign and some outreach activities which promoted intergenerational use of Diidxazá (the *Gusisácanu Diidxazá do' stiinu* [Let's strengthen our pure/ good Zapotec campaign]). In the following three-year period (2016–2018) the municipal government supported a project to test primary school children and subsequently provide literacy workshops and a small scholarship to those who were evaluated as speaking Diidxazá, collaborating with the public schools in doing so (*Diidxazá xtinu* [Our Zapotec] project). Whether or not resources were directed to Indigenous language promotion, and what kind of promotion activities were undertaken thus changed from one political term to another.

The earthquakes of September 2017 had significant impacts on the schools in the Isthmus, as many were damaged and others delayed re-opening in order to increase pressure on the government to rebuild damaged buildings. Schools cut the number of teaching hours dramatically, often rotating classes through one or two undamaged rooms while waiting for the rest of the building to be reconstructed. Prior to the earthquakes which also brought the local economy to a halt, poverty and related concerns about students' home environments were mentioned by several teachers as an important factor impacting negatively on school life. Following the earthquakes, many acknowledged the trauma caused by these events in all sectors of the population, making it difficult to return to normal activities and studies. Although schools were less active in the post-earthquake period, numerous civil society organizations attempted to fill some of the gap, offering workshops for children (as mentioned in chapter 2, see also chapter 6 and 7).

Despite the contextual instabilities which have characterized formal schooling in the Isthmus, schools remain an important site for socializing children into representations of their community languages, and of what it means to be an educated person more generally. Within the 'bilingual' school system, students do have the right to one hour per week of instruction in the local language, however

the fact that many teachers were not pedagogically prepared to teach this area and some parents resist its inclusion in the curricula meant that Indigenous languages were generally not viewed as a resource which could benefit learners in the future. In all of the formal education sites that I observed or learned about through interviews, Spanish was the primary language of oral and written communication, and efforts to use Isthmus Zapotec, where present, were a relatively small part of academic activities. The trend to devalue the local language was common, but there were also some notable exceptions. I now turn to several of the positive ways which educator-activists have promoted Diidxazá in schools.

4.3 Language activism in education in the Isthmus

Although initially I was told, and later observed, that Isthmus Zapotec was largely excluded from schools, throughout my study I continued to hear about individual teachers and schools who were using Indigenous languages in some way, in many cases due to their motivation, rather than the mandate or established curriculum of their school. The practices may have been limited and somewhat isolated, but there were numerous attempts to promote Indigenous language use in formal education spaces underway in the Isthmus which were not necessarily recognized nor lauded beyond the limited space of the classroom or the school. A common strategy among the teacher-activists I met was that of *connecting* their *classroom space* with the *home and community spaces* of their students. Teacher-activists were also engaged in changing the common deficit representations of Zapotec in schools and were providing an alternative representation of Indigenous languages as resources and rights, to varying degrees. By *representing* Isthmus Zapotec *communication practices* as a legitimate part of the school context, they helped to counter the long-standing exclusion of Indigenous languages from public schools. Here I discuss several initiatives which exemplify these strategies that I observed more broadly.

4.3.1 Connecting school and community

In the opening of this chapter I introduced the teaching team of a monolingual primary school who worked throughout a school year to incorporate local and traditional practices into their regular school activities, including spoken and written use of Isthmus Zapotec. A delayed school schedule due to a labor strike that other schools had told me was preventing them from attempting any extra activities was not viewed as a barrier by this team. The school was located in an urban section of Juchitán, and the director informed me that 80% of the students spoke Isthmus

Zapotec, while the other 20% understood. The school's project received extra support from the teacher's union, as they framed it as an attempt to put the PTEO into practice by involving parents and undertaking school-run projects to meet local needs. I met them when they requested the *Camino de la Iguana* literacy workshop (described in detail in chapter 6) to come and work with their students; they heard about the workshop because one of their students was the niece of Natalia Toledo, the co-instructor of *Camino de la Iguana*. When I visited the school in May 2014 in the company of the *Camino de la Iguana* instructors, I observed a student-made poster with drawings and writing in both Zapotec and Spanish in one of the classrooms, which had been created prior to the beginning of the literacy workshop. Teachers informed me that they had hosted a Diidxazá book fair and invited students to bring in books they had at home, as well as bringing books from the libraries in Juchitán. During the workshop students engaged in writing poems, autobiographies, and other texts, as well as learning the basics of the popular alphabet and being further exposed to Isthmus Zapotec literature in several genres.

Delia, one of the lead teachers, told me that the project began as a way to improve the overall school environment, including students' motivation and parents' participation– not in pursuit of a language-related goal. With a gentle, graceful demeanor, Delia approaches difficult topics directly, pointing towards domestic violence and a toxic school environment as causes for poor learning in school. As a native of Comitancillo, a smaller town in the Isthmus, Delia had been surprised by the challenges she faced when teaching in semi-urban Juchitán. Although she had not focused on Diidxazá as an asset for teaching before, she found that it was important in reaching out to her students' families and attemting to change the atmosphere in the school. This is also clear in the project overview represented in Figure 11, with the ultimate goal to "lead to the diminishing of violence, familial disintegration and learning difficulties." The school director, who had worked in the school for 23 years, reinforced this in an interview, noting that their main motivation was to respond to the violence and lack of participation that they felt were increasing in the school. The pro-active inclusion of the local language emerged as part of their response to these concerns.

In an interview the director and I were talking about the amount of students who spoke Isthmus Zapotec, but when I then asked about changes in the school over time the most salient changes for the director were not linguistic:

HDK   *Y . . . ¿en esos años ha visto cambios en la escuela o en el alumnado?*

Director *Pues mire, realmente usted sabe cómo está la situación en el país, ¿no? En cuanto a la violencia y las drogas y todo eso. Y sí se ha notado porque . . . hay niños que acá vienen y pues ya platican--- el año pasado egresó de aquí un niño que dice: yo me gano cien pesos si vendo tres bolsitas. [. . .] ¿Qué esperanza*

tenemos en esos niñitos que ahorita ven a sus papás que están haciendo eso? El alcoholismo sobre todo, nos afecta bastante acá.

HDK *¿Y eso no era tanto así antes?*

Director *No, antes no estaba así, no. Antes había una bandita pero hasta allá al fondo. No, ahorita, ahorita como a dos cuadras hay bandas. [. . .] Ese es el detalle de esta sociedad. Pero pues aquí vamos construyendo y tratando de reforzar los valores de la familia. De hecho, nuestro proyecto tiene--- está fundamentado en el rescate de los valores de la familia para, para tener un poco más, ir rescatando--- en base a los valores, rescatar todo lo bueno que tenía nuestra sociedad antes, ¿no? Aquel "buenos días". Aquí en México en la cultura zapoteca eso era. [Saludas] "Buenos días", sea tu tío, no sea tu tío, sea tu abuelo, "buenos días".*

HDK And . . . in those years have you seen changes in the school or the student body?

Director Well look, really you know how the situation in the country is, right? In terms of the violence, and the drugs, and all that. And yes it's been noticed because . . . there are children who come here and well already talk--- Last year a boy left here who said: I earn one hundred pesos if I sell three little bags. [. . .] What hope do we have for these little children that now see their parents that are doing that? Alcoholism especially affects us a lot here.

HDK And that wasn't so much like that before?

Director No, before it wasn't like that, no. Before there was a little gang but over there at the bottom/ end. No, now, now like within two blocks there are gangs. [. . .] That is the detail of this society. But here we're building and trying to reinforce family values. Actually our project has– it's based in saving family values in order, in order to have a bit more, go saving– based on values, save all the good that our society had before, right? That "Good day". Here in Mexico in the Zapotec culture that's how it was. [You greet] "Good day" be it your uncle or not your uncle, be it your grandfather, "good day". (Interview July 2014)

This director was one of many educators who commented on their concerns for the economic and social well-being of their students. For some educators this observation was linked to the need to focus on Spanish and core subjects so that students would advance within the education system, leaving no time for local language within school hours. This orientation in many ways served to create a barrier (perhaps viewed as a protective buffer) between the school space and the community space. This director and teaching team, however, took a contrasting approach by seeking to break down barriers with the community and invite parents into the school on a more active basis in order to foster "family values". Referring to the practice of greeting people in the street with "*Buenos días*" or another appropriate greeting, the director expressed a

view of traditional behaviors as more respectful, with tight-knit family interactions. In line with this goal, parents were involved in numerous aspects of the project, including helping students produce texts and radio programs, and painting a mural.

The director commented that the goal of recuperating values was intertwined with that of recuperating language. Their activities were designed "*para rescatar un poquito más. Porque sí, sí se, se ha ido perdiendo bastante la lengua. Y los valores, le digo. Que fue el punto central, ¿no? Pero [recuperar valores] a través de, a través del rescate de las costumbres, las tradiciones, la cultura y la lengua*" [in order to recuperate a bit more. Because yes, yes the language has been getting lost considerably. And the values, I tell you. Which was the central point, right. But [recuperate values] through the, through the recuperation of customs, traditions, culture and language] (Interview July 2014). Isthmus Zapotec education was included in their project as part of a broader program seeking to achieve positive social interactions. In the project goals (shown in Figure 11) educational units on family values, local language, and *convivencia* (conviviality or positive coexistence/ social activities) all make up part of the strategic actions towards their social goals. In this case an extensive amount of Isthmus Zapotec teaching and use as a resource resulted from a project aimed at better serving the population of an urbanizing neighborhood. The teachers developed strategic connections between families and the school space through a convivial or participatory dynamic which they, and the parents and students I interacted with, experienced to be rewarding and to improve the environment in the school. As Delia observed, "*vimos ese resultado de integración, de comunicación . . . porque . . . padres que no conocíamos pues ya los fuimos conociendo, ¿no? . . . Vimos resultados en el hecho de que padres que no se interesaban se fueron interesando*" [we saw that result of integration, of communication . . . because . . . parents that we didn't know, well we started to get to know them, right? . . . We saw results in the fact that parents that weren't interested became interested] (Interview September 2014).

Their initiative was further enabled by the support of the PTEO at the state level, and by other local activists such as the facilitators of the *Camino de la Iguana*. They were able to draw on local and regional resources in resisting the deficit representations of local language and culture. The achievement of this teaching team was crucially dependent on the support of the school's director and the members of the team, however, and was not common among the schools that I visited. This was made especially apparent by the experience of Delia, who moved and started working at a larger (and more prestigious) primary school in 2016. When we met in 2018 on one of my shorter visits to the Isthmus, she told me that she was not able to enlist support for the kinds of extra pedagogical efforts that she had helped to spearhead in her previous school. The disruption and reconstruction process of the

2017 earthquake played a role, but the crucial factor was lack of support from the school team. In the face of this disappointment, she had begun volunteering with a community-based organization that promoted literacy and reading in the towns around the Isthmus. She reflected with resigned regret on the many barriers to implementing innovative projects in the public schools, and for the time being was happier to work with other like-minded volunteers outside of the school.

The need for a flexible repertoire of activism strategies is clear in such a context. The strategy of connecting school and community spaces was supported and made possible by the constellation of people and resources in one school, but was prohibited by the conditions of another school nearby. Delia adapted to these conditions, and took up a new strategy of sharing resources and representing literacy as a positive thing outside of school. Community-based education initiatives are common strategies among activists in the Isthmus, as examined further in chapters 6 and 7.

4.3.2 Representing Diidxazá as a part of formal education

Another strategy that I observed in several schools was the representation of Indigenous languages as legitimate to be used and/ or studied in formal education. Like the teaching team discussed above, another teacher in a monolingual primary school in a northern, Spanish-dominant neighborhood of Juchitán also used the state-level PTEO policy as a justification for Isthmus Zapotec use in her classroom. I met María Isabel García Rasgado when she attended the *Camino de la Iguana* in November of 2013 in Union Hidalgo, where she lives. Nearing 30 years of teaching, she remained enthusiastic and emotional when talking about her students, and her efforts to provide them with a high-quality education and pride in their identity as *Istmeños*. She often wore traditional embroidered blouses when teaching, and had engaged in a range of pedagogical projects and excursions with her students over the years. She invited me to visit her class in Juchitán, saying that she wanted her students to see that someone from far away was interested in their language, so that they might become more interested. None of her 5th grade students were conversant in Isthmus Zapotec, although several understood and spoke some. In her classroom there were several posters relating to the pre-colonial history of Mexico and one sign in Spanish and Zapotec "*Rincon Baduhuiini*" [Children's corner]. Her class was conducted in Spanish, but with more discussion of local culture, history and language than what would typically appear in the curriculum. Her students seemed to react positively to this. On my first visit to her class several students had written or drawn cards welcoming me. One student wrote "*Se un poco zapoteco y un poco de ingles pero mis tatarabuelos, mis*

bisabuelos, mis abuelos mis tios y primos como mis padres hablan la lengua ma-terna que es el zapoteco" [I know a little Zapotec and a little English but my great-great-grandparents, my great-grandparents, my grandparents my aunts and uncles and cousins and also my parents speak the mother language which is Zapotec]. María Isabel and her students did not see Isthmus Zapotec as some-thing to be avoided, nor did they seem to worry that it might cause them to speak poor Spanish– although they all spoke comfortable Spanish already.

María Isabel had taught her class Zapotec songs, which she had them sing for me, and again in front of the whole school when it was their class's turn to present in the weekly "*homenaje*" flag ceremony in January 2014. I attended the flag cere-mony, where she made some comments about the PTEO policy to valorize local cul-ture and language, followed by readings by the students in Spanish, and a song in Spanish and Zapotec. Then one student read part of a story in Isthmus Zapotec about a lively iguana, while another read the corresponding Spanish translation, and other students distributed copies of this story to all of the teachers in the school, so that they could look at it with their classes. When I spoke with María Isabel afterwards, she explained that the boy who read in Isthmus Zapotec spoke the most Isthmus Zapotec, although he struggled with some other academic areas, and so she was pleased to have him show off his strengths in this way. I agreed that he had seemed confident on stage. She also commented that her fellow teachers were supportive of her efforts, although what she did was limited to her classroom rather than being a school-wide project. In this case, use of Isthmus Zapotec– largely, but not entirely in symbolic ways– was pursued by a motivated individual who viewed it as an enriching but under-appreciated part of her students' back-grounds, and this use received a degree of support from her colleagues.

A group of teachers from a secondary school in southern Juchitán also worked to incorporate local language into their regular curriculum. I met them in April of 2014 when they attended the event that I co-organized with colleagues at the UABJO (see also 3.2.2, 3.2.3, chapter 5), where they told me that they were taking advantage of the *asignatura estatal* [State subject] slot in the curriculum to develop a plan to teach Isthmus Zapotec literacy with their students. This subject was a required topic for secondary school students, but teachers had free reign to decide what to teach in it. I had heard several other secondary school representatives say they wanted to use this subjet to include Zapotec language, but were unsure how to go about this. The April 2014 event included workshops and talks on teaching Indigenous languages, and thus they had requested time off to attend it, and I was delighted to hear that they appreciated the event. I visited them in their school the following November, and they described their efforts to teach traditional handi-crafts, as well as Zapotec reading and writing. They were motivated by the need to create lessons to fill the new class slot in the curriculum, and the fact that most of

their students spoke Isthmus Zapotec and responded positively to the classes. They were also motivated by personal interests in promoting Zapotec bilingualism and literacy. They showed me various learning materials that their students had made, including a memory game with images and labels for common objects in the Isthmus, including *xigagueta* [painted gourd container]; *yuze'* [cattle]; and *guchachi'* [iguana], as shown in Figure 12. They were pleased when I offered to give them some Isthmus Zapotec texts for students to read. They were also interested in bringing the *Camino de la Iguana* to work with their students and expand their literacy abilities. School communities like this one are clearly representing Zapotec as a resource, part of local heritage, and something that is worth learning about.

Figure 12: Pedagogical materials created by secondary school students (photo November 2014).

4.4 Summary: Characteristics of language activism in education

The presence and status of Indigenous languages in education has shifted over time, with an increasing number of policies at national and regional levels in favor

of multilingual education around the world at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries. Over twenty years ago language education scholar Teresa McCarty wrote in the US context that "the legal right for Indigenous language and culture maintenance appears to be won, yet the struggle continues [. . .] A stable but locally flexible system of educational delivery [. . .] still is urgently needed" (1997: 52–53). Nearly two decades after the official recognition of Indigenous languages in Mexico in 2003, the same might be said of the Mexican context. And yet as days and years pass by, and new generations grow up under the same discriminatory regimes, we continue to ask what exactly *is* needed to implement minority language rights or to achieve linguistic equality? The domain of schooling illustrates clearly that linguistic equality does not materialize through declarations and policies alone. In the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, as in many other places, educator-activists are engaging in a variety of creative strategies within the constraints of the institutional, political, economic, and socio-demographic realities in which they work. Certain actors in the chain of education politics may have special significance in efforts to expand "ideological and implementational spaces" for Indigenous language education (Hornberger 2002). Johnson (Johnson 2012; Johnson and Johnson 2015) refers to these key individuals as language policy arbiters, illustrating cases where an administrator or official was able to open up or close down space for bilingual education. This chapter has illustrated the importance of teachers as arbiters in educational language policy in the Isthmus.

Teachers like Maria Isabel García Rasgado and Delia Ruíz Álvarez make important contributions towards changing the negative representations of Diidxazá that have been inherited from decades of monolingual Spanish schooling. Activities such as reading Diidxazá literature during the official flag ceremony can have an important symbolic effect, as do similar events for poetry declamation in other schools. These events go beyond a positive representation of the language itself, to a representation of students who speak Diidxazá as people possessing knowledge, rather than as problems or as weak students as they are viewed in some cases. Educator-activists' strategies include the production of both events, such as a one-time presentation or workshop, and more long-lasting structures, such as a regular class in the curriculum. A sustained structure is more likely to support additive bilingualism (bilingualism and biliteracy in Zapotec and Spanish), while events may be helpful in shifting representations, but may have less influence on language competence. Nonetheless, one-time events in schools occur within the enduring structure of the school, such as the presentation occurring in the flag ceremony, itself an event which happens each week. In this way, the framework of the school lends weight and potentially prestige to the activism initiatives that occur within it, in contrast to some of the events organized by language activists in less formal spaces

(discussed further in chapters 6 and 7). Like scholar-activists, educator-activists can take advantage of their social role as knowledge-holders and legitimizers of others' (in this case young students') knowledge, which may give their activism initiatives added prestige and social meaning. At the same time, the structure of the school is far less flexible than some social spaces, and may only allow for limited or short initiatives as teachers change schools and new curricula appear, as illustrated by Delia's experience. The teacher-activists who I observed in the Isthmus were not acting entirely alone, but were often supported by a few key colleagues, and were dependent upon the good will of the director of the school. Weinberg (2021) has pointed out that in some contexts, language policy arbiters are not individuals, but rather a combination of two or more key actors. In this case, a motivated teacher and a director who approved of their efforts both appear to be necessary for greater inclusion of Indigenous langauge in school.

In contrast to scholar-activists, I did not observe educator-activists to focus on the creation of materials and resources. Educator-activists did often engage their students in the creation of different materials– from text to audio recordings and paintings– but the focus was on the students' participation as producers, not the resulting materials themselves. A more common strategy among educator-activists was to connect the space of the school with that of the community. Many teachers commented on the fact that they did not have pedagogical supports or training to include Indigenous languages in the curriculum, but collaborating with families and using children's connections with the community outside of the school was helpful in filling this void. This approach has been widely promoted in education scholarship, with well-known formulations such as the use of "community funds of knowledge" as the basis for learning (Moll et al. 1992), and developing "culturally relevant" (Ladson-Billings 1995) and "culturally sustaining" pedagogies (Paris and Alim 2017). This form of connection creates a convivial relationship, or in Illich's (1970) words a "learning web", among teachers, students, and the wider community. Table 3 illustrates some of the key activism strategies that I observed in primary and secondary schools in the Isthmus, including connecting school and community spaces, and respresenting Zapotec speakers as valuable and legitimate in the school space.

While the teachers who were engaging in activism or advocacy initiatives reported that both parents and students appreciated them (and I was also able to observe this on several occasions), several teachers in schools where advocacy was not occurring commented that the parents of the students do not want Indigenous languages to be taught there and have made this clear to teachers. Additionally, teachers within the same school may have different priorities, with some viewing inclusion of Zapotec as a resource, while some view it as taking time

Table 3: Key language activism strategies in primary and secondary schooling.

Actions →	Goals →	Examples
– Connecting	– People/ Identities – Spaces/ Structures	– Family and community members invited into the school space
– Representing	– People/ Identities – Communication practices – Spaces/ Structures	– Indigenous language speakers represented as knowledgeable – Indigenous languages represented as legitimate in school – School represented as a space where local knowledge is important
– Creating	– Resources	– Participatory creation of games, recordings, murals, etc.

away from subjects of greater importance. In these contexts, Diidxazá education could be experienced as an imposition. Harking back to Mayoli García's argument quoted in the beginning of this book; where Indigenous languages are concerned many education actors seem to agree that "we can't go back to the barbarity of before" and force people to study in or about a language that they do not want to use. At the same time, when it comes to Spanish and, in higher levels of education, English, there seems to be no concern as to whether all students and their families want these languages to be studied; they are simply an undisputable part of the system which youth are required to spend at least 6–12 years of their life participating in.

There are multiple imaginaries of positive social change among educators in the Isthmus – some of which include Isthmus Zapotec, and some of which do not. Educator-activists who pursue the inclusion of local language and a more convivial school environment have noted important benefits from this strategy, despite the contextual constraints that may limit their initiatives. Institutional factors of curricula, testing, and strikes may continue to exert pressure on the limited instruction time, in addition to contextual factors such as poverty, violence, and natural disasters. The education spaces that are created, often temporarily and precariously, through language activism in this context, are nonetheless spaces in which inclusive and convivial Indigenous language education is occurring, and where Diidxazá learners experience more equality and respect than in many other education environments.