Chapter 6
Imagining convivial multilingual literacies: Strategies in community-based education

Community-based initiatives outside of government-sponsored education institutions are common in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, with classes and workshops being held frequently in cultural centers, community libraries, and other civic spaces.[29] A common thread among the community-based or non-formal classes I observed was a focus on literacy and the writing of Isthmus Zapotec, as well as discourses about the value and longevity of Isthmus Zapotec literary traditions. One community-based initiative which exemplifies this is a workshop called *Camino de la Iguana* [Path of the Iguana] created and taught by poet and designer Natalia Toledo and historian, linguist, writer and translator Víctor Cata. Natalia and Víctor are respected and loved writers and cultural figures in their hometown of Juchitán, and have made names for themselves in academic and literary circles throughout Mexico and abroad. On a few occasions I attended events where they gave public readings in Juchitán of books they had written (Natalia) or translated (Víctor) and observed that there was an appreciative local audience, with admiring young people coming up afterwards to ask for a photo or an autograph. The idea for the *Camino de la Iguana* started, as Natalia and Víctor both joked on numerous occasions, because they felt that if they did not teach people to read Diidxazá there would be no one left to read the books that they and others were writing. As Víctor expressed in an interview, the aim of the workshop has been to "*darles a conocer la literatura, darles a conocer el alfabeto, que sepan que se puede escribir el idioma, que se puede crear en el idioma, que hay posibilidades para la lengua*" [getting them to know the literature, getting them to know the alphabet, that they know that you can write the language, that you can create in the language, that there are possibilities for the language] (Interview November 2014). Víctor and Natalia aimed to make the "possibilities" of the language available to all residents of the region through an accessible workshop. The workshop was designed to take place for two to three hours a day over a 2-week period and to be offered in different sites around the

29 A variety of individuals and groups have created courses of varying durations, such as linguist Vicente Marcial Cerqueda in Juchitán and retired teacher Antonio Ortíz in San Blas, who additionally developed his own textbooks, among others. Each initiative merits attention; unfortunately due to space I restrict myself here to a focus on the community education space I observed most extensively.

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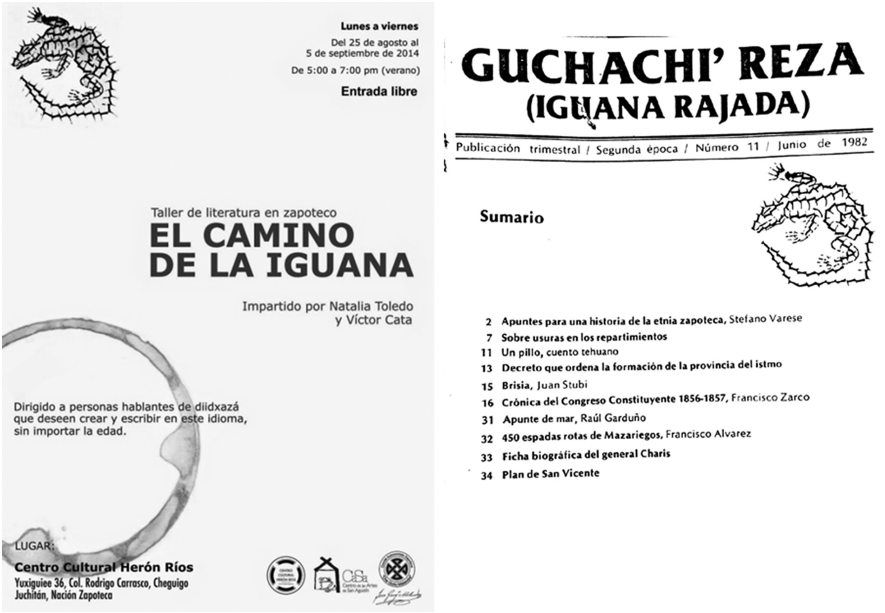

Figure 16: *Camino de la Iguana* poster 2014 (left); The Juchitán-based publication *Guchachi' Reza* 1982 (right).

region, including schools and cultural centers. They received funding from a non-profit arts foundation based in Oaxaca City, the *Centro para las Artes San Agustín* (CASA), which allowed them to offer the workshop free of charge and to provide materials and a snack for participants (see also chapter 7 for further discussion of CASA).

A poster promoting the *Camino de la Iguana* workshop (Figure 16, left), produced by the *Comité Melendre*, a Juchitán-based civic organization which hosted the workshop in their independent cultural center in 2014 (see also chapter 7 for more on the *Comité Melendre*), uses an image of an iguana taken from a 1982 publication of the Juchitán-based journal *Guchachi' Reza* (Figure 16, right), in conjunction with a simple modern font and the image of a coffee-stain left from a coffee cup. The iguana image links the workshop to the tradition of Diidxazá literature in the 20th century, while the modern style and coffee mark suggests intimacy and participation, with the poster becoming a page that the writer has just lifted their coffee cup from. In this way, the workshop is presented as both traditional and modern. This captures one of the defining features of the workshop and of how Natalia and Víctor define Diidxazá literacy as both traditional and contemporary, and as both local and international.

As writer-activists, Natalia and Víctor aim to *create* a certain kind of *person or identity*, that of Diidxazá readers and writers. The practices and politics of Indigenous language literacies make this a complicated endeavor, however. What it means to be literate in Diidxazá is not necessarily equivalent to what it means to be literate in Spanish, as these writer-activists are well aware. In this respect, this form of language activism necessitates imagining new ways of being, as much as, or more than resisting the inequalities entrenched in current ways of being (such as the inequalities which scholar-activists and education-activists work to reverse within existing education institutions). While the promotion of alphabetic literacy and the production of Diidxazá readers and writers is the explicit language activism strategy of the workshop, this is characterized by an orientation to both historical and contemporary references (a multi-directional *socio-historical orientation*), by explicit links to both local and international influences (transnational *location* references) and by an inclusive approach to *participation*. Additionally, the teachers engage in a delicate balancing act between promoting maximum use of Diidxazá and adapting to the language practices of students, aiming to avoid hardline purism while still increasing linguistic knowledge and use (a centralist *diversity orientation*).

In this chapter, I analyze the imaginary of Diidxazá literacy that was created by this community-based workshop, drawing on my observations of the workshop and insights gained through formal and informal conversations with the two teachers and a selection of participants. I begin with a discussion of the double-edged nature of literacy education and the potential of community-based education initiatives (6.1), and an overview of the heritage of literacy in the Isthmus in particular (6.2). Then, turning to the *Camino de la Iguana*, I outline the strategic ways in which the teachers pursue their participatory, multi-temporal and trans-local imaginary of literacy (6.3). By bridging history with the current context (6.3.1), and local genres with international genres (6.3.2), and above all through creation of a participatory convivial norm (6.3.3), these writer-activists have achieved many positive results. This community education space encourages participants to engage with a historical and contemporary literary community and to see themselves as authors, in addition to learning the alphabet. The imaginaries of Diidxazá literacy present among participants in the *Camino de la Iguana* illustrate that 'reading' Diidxazá means much more than decoding the phonemes represented in the popular alphabet. An imaginary of convivial multilingualism informs many of the language activism strategies in this workshop. I conclude with a discussion of the key characteristics of the activism strategies employed in this workshop, which may provide a positive example to other community-based education initiatives (6.4).

6.1 Indigenous literacies and community-based education

The potential impacts of writing-focused minority language activism are a topic of debate amongst minority language advocates. Writing is variously viewed as a form of emancipation, a form of repression, and a complex amalgam of the two. I provide a brief overview of these perspectives, with the ultimate aim of considering the potential negative impacts of literacy education, and the role that community-based education projects may play in mitigating them.

Indigenous language educator-activists have cautioned that literacy education must be approached strategically and critically in order to avoid reinforcing language hierarchies which place Indigenous language speakers and non-written literacies at the bottom (Watahomigie and McCarty 1996; Zepeda 1995; Outakoski 2015). European-origin literacy practices remain prominent in formal education, privileging standard forms and limited registers of communication which are endorsed by an official authority (Weth and Juffermans 2018). This can serve to devalue the communication practices of languages without a tradition of writing, and has led to conflicts and debates in the creation of standard writing systems for Indigenous languages in many parts of the world (Hornberger 1993; Costa, De Korne, and Lane 2017; Limerick 2018; Schwartz 2018; De Korne and Weinberg 2021). A paradigm of literacy as 'autonomous' from locally-situated and negotiated meaning-making makes literacy appear neutral, and projects a deficit view of learners who do not produce the designated written standard (Street 1984).

The dominance of alphabetic literacy over other forms of meaning making has been critiqued in the context of Indigenous education in Mexico (López Gopar 2007). López Gopar points out that sophisticated local literacy practices, such as the numeric, aesthetic, and sociocultural literacy which is used in the production of traditional embroidered garments in Oaxaca, are typically overlooked and discounted. Maldonado Alvarado (2002) argues that writing-focused education intensifies colonial dominance in Oaxaca: "*La escritura abre espacios de sometimiento que aprovechan las sociedades dominadoras, y todos los 'analfabetas' dominados, independientemente de su 'ignorancia', conocen y sienten las caracteristicas de la dominación mediante lo escrito*" [Writing opens spaces of subjugation that dominating societies take advantage of, and all of the dominated 'illiterate' people, independently from their 'ignorance', know and feel the characteristics of domination through writing] (41). The predominance of education initiatives that focus on writing as a form of promoting Isthmus Zapotec use may thus be a threat, or at least a double-edged sword. If learners and speakers believe that they need to produce a standard written form to be a competent member of the speech community, yet

do not have access to sufficient educational opportunities to acquire this expertise, the promotion of alphabetic literacy as a language activism strategy could contribute to the further marginalization of some members of the community. Gal (2006) has called this a 'double stigma' that minoritized language speakers experience all too often; speakers of Diidxazá may face stigma in relation to their 'non-native' Spanish use, as well as in relation to their 'non-standard' or 'illiterate' Diidxazá use (see also 5.1).

On the other hand, the teaching of alphabetic literacy has also been shown to be a fundamental building block of social change and empowerment (Freire 1969, 1970). Research within the New Literacies paradigm has aimed to change the dominant perspective on literacy from autonomous reading and writing, to contextualized, and ideologically-informed meaning making (Street 1984; Cazden et al. 1996; Martin-Jones and Jones 2001). By focusing on multiliteracies, scholars in this field have argued for the need to recognize multilingualism and multimodal communication, as well as culturally-specific communication practices, as part of the literacies which learners may aim to acquire. In relation to Indigenous literacy practices, Hornberger (1996) discusses a "both/and" approach through which Indigenous educators must negotiate and integrate the many factors influencing language use, literacy and knowledge production, ultimately opening a "door of opportunity for the marginalized" (357). Language activists in Mexico and in Oaxaca have argued the potential benefits of writing and literature in Indigenous languages (Francis and Reyhner 2002; Aguilar Gil 2016; Lillehaugen 2016), and pointed out that Indigenous people have a long history of appropriating writing for their own purposes (Rockwell 2005; Pineda 2014). Jésus Salinas Pedraza, co-founder of the *Centro Editorial de Literatura Indígena* (Indigenous Literature Publishing Center, CELIAC) argues that "Indigenous languages must become written languages. [. . .] Lack of literacy is the most important factor in the deterioration and abandonment of indigenous languages. [. . .] The direct participation of native peoples is essential in development of their writing system and in development of their language in all forms of communication, including film, radio, television, and national newspapers" (Salinas Pedraza 1996: 172–173).

Like minoritized language education in general, as discussed in chapter 4, the promotion of minoritzed language literacy has both potential benefits and potential pitfalls. Even where language activists may aim to side-step this prickly issue, the presence of writing in many aspects of 21st century life makes it difficult to avoid, as Salinas Pedraza points out. Heeding the cautions of literacy education sceptics leads to important questions about how minoritized language literacy education is conceptualized and delivered. If it is shaped by patterns from standard European languages, and conventions from Eurocentric literary genres, it is unlikely to

support the 'spaces of otherwise' (Povinelli 2011) or culturally embedded learning (Henne-Ochoa et al. 2020) that minority language activists typically aim to create. Community-based education offers a more flexible space for imagining and implementing new pedagogies and social realities, however, with less influence from the bureaucracy and politics of formal education. In this regard, it may be an especially promising space for the consolidation of new literacy imaginaries.

Scholars and activists in Indigenous language reclamation and education in the Americas have long argued for the importance of community control or influence in education as a way of avoiding the colonial histories and power dynamics which nation-state education usually imposes (National Indian Brotherhood 1972; Cajete 1994; McCarty 2013). Reclaiming education in community contexts is an important contribution towards decolonizing education by shifting what forms of knowledge are valued, and how knowledge is conveyed across generations (Battiste 2013). In his critique of nation-state education, characterized as inherently *manipulative*, Illich (1970) argues that community-based learning is an ideal environment within which to pursue *convivial* learning. Illich's strongly anti-institutional stance on education resonates with social learning theories like the communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris and Alim 2017), which also grant community-based education initiatives great potential importance. In the Oaxacan context, forms of education that are rooted in community collaboration are often highlighted as the most successful (e.g. Meyer 2018). Rather than struggling to connect the school space to the community space, as some of the teacher-activists described in chapter 4, community-based educators may create their own contextually appropriate learning spaces embedded in the larger community space. There are numerous options for how they imagine and choose to fill this new space, however, as explored further below.

6.2 Isthmus Zapotec literacies

The Isthmus Zapotec community is known for its writers and musicians, both within and beyond the Isthmus. From the journal *Neza* [Path] produced by students and intellectuals in Mexico City in the 1930s (including scholar Andrés Henestrosa, see also chapter 3), to the journal *Guchachi' Reza* [Sliced Iguana] produced by artists and intellectuals in Juchitán from the 1970s through the 1990s (including scholar Victor de la Cruz), to current writers such as Natalia Toledo, Irma Pineda and Victor Terán, the Isthmus has been home to writers of different genres, many of whom have won praise nationally and internationally. Prior to the 2017 earthquake that caused considerable damage to the *Casa*

de la Cultura, numerous pillars in the courtyard of the *Casa de la Cultura* in Juchitán held plaques dedicated to local writers and scholars. One of the initiatives of the "*Gusisácanu Diidxazá do' stinu*" [Let's strengthen our good/ pure/ sacred Zapotec] campaign by the municipal government in 2016 was to compile a book of Diidxazá poetry for use in schools, where poetry declamation is often a yearly event and Diidxazá poems are popular. In this regard, writing and literature is not viewed as something imposed by national authorities or schools, but rather something that has been and continues to be an organic part of the Isthmus Zapotec community.

Isthmus Zapotec writers in the first half of the 20th century used a variety of orthographic norms to write Diidxazá. In 1956, the *alfabeto popular* or popular alphabet was produced by a round table of writers and invited linguists, an initiative spearheaded by Zapotec writer Máximo Valdivieso (Pickett 1993; La Sociedad Pro-Planeación del Istmo 1956). The popular alphabet follows Spanish orthography norms in several ways, while establishing a consistent way to represent the four consonants and two vowel phonations that are present in Diidxazá and not in Spanish (for detailed discussion of this writing norm see Pérez Báez, Cata, and Bueno Holle 2015). Although there was no official authority to recognize or promote this norm, it has been taken up by a majority of Isthmus Zapotec writers. As Víctor Cata recounts, the use of the popular alphabet was required by the journal *Guchachi Reza* while it was published under the leadership of Víctor de la Cruz, director of the *Casa de la Cultura* in Juchitán in the 1980s, an editorial choice which helped to disseminate this norm among readers and writers (Interview November 2014). The missionary organization SIL, through their representative Velma Pickett, participated in the 1956 round table and later published stories, a grammar, and a Spanish-Diidxazá dictionary using the popular alphabet (Pickett, Black, and Cerqueda 2001) (see also chapter 3). The establishment of the INALI in 2003 marked the first time that a nationally recognized authority of this kind existed in relation to Indigenous languages in Mexico. INALI has been active in developing and publishing orthographic norms. In 2007 the 1956 guide to the popular alphabet was reprinted and 20,000 copies were distributed by the INALI. INALI has also sponsored workshops aimed at revising the Isthmus Zapotec popular alphabet, in particular in relation to the representation of lexical tone, with the aim of publishing an officially endorsed orthography in the near future (De Korne 2017b).

The municipal government-sponsored "*Gusisácanu Diidxazá do' stinu*" campaign produced a poster to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the creation of the popular alphabet in 2016, which was distributed through their social media channels. Shown in Figure 17, the poster focuses on a pre-colonial Zapotec stone figure resting on cloud-like shapes, as well as reproducing an image of a Zapotec

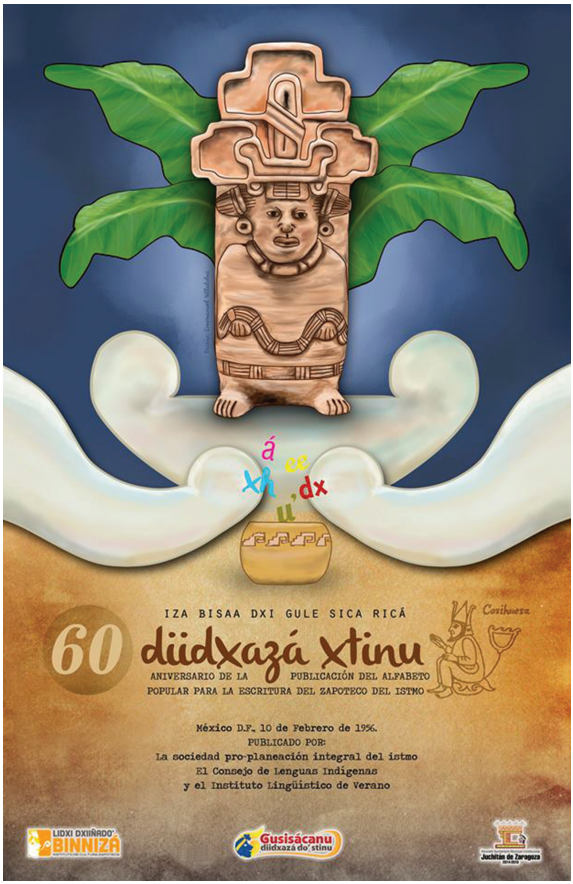

Figure 17: Poster commemorating the 60th anniversary of the creation of the popular alphabet (February 2016).

king (Cosihuesa). In the center of the poster several graphemes of the popular alphabet in diverse fonts and bright colors are emerging from (or falling into) a container decorated with the 'Greco' designs used in ancient Zapotec building sites, such as Mitla. This image thus links current Isthmus Zapotec writing to a history which extends far beyond the round table of 1956 to include the pre-colonial literacies of the Zapotec empire, and represents Zapotec writing as part of a longstanding cultural practice (see also chapter 2). The poster also includes part of the typeface that appeared in the original 1956 alphabet guide, which locates and dates the alphabet to Mexico City, 10 February 1956, and credits the publication to "*La Sociedad Pro-planeación integral del istmo* [The Society for

integral planning in the Isthmus], *El Consejo de Lenguas Indígenas* [The Council of Indigenous Languages], *y el Instituto Lingüístico de Verano* [and the Summer Institute of Linguistics]", in acknowledgement of the affiliations of the people who participated.

Perhaps the most often-cited reference in the literary heritage of the Isthmus is poet Gabriel López Chiñas (1911–1983), who wrote a poem called "*Didxazá*" first published in a 1971 collection (López Chiñas 1971) and reproduced countless times in journals and poetry collections. The poem begins "*Nacabe ma ché' didxazá*" [They say Diidxazá is going], and continues for two verses to describe that the language of the *Binnizá* [Zapotecs] is said to be dying, as *Binnizá* now begin to only speak Spanish. López Chiñas concludes with two verses addressed to the language itself, proclaiming that he/ she[30] is loved, has given him life, and that "*naa nanna zanitilu'/ dxí initi gubidxa ca*" [I know you will die/ the day the sun dies]. This last phrase has become a trope in discussions of Isthmus Zapotec; on numerous occasions people would be describing to me how Zapotec is getting lost, how children are not learning it– but– Chiñas said it will die the day that the sun dies, so who knows, maybe everything will turn out well (see examples in chapters 3.2.2 and 7). López Chiñas' grave is prominently marked in one of the main cemeteries of Juchitán, labeling him a "*Juchiteco* poet" and including the name of his famous poem.

Istmeños are generally aware of and proud of the heritage of Isthmus Zapotec writing and publishing, even those who are not involved in literature, teaching or other recognized 'cultural' activities, and who presumably do not follow the municipal government's social media channels. On numerous occasions when chatting with women selling in the market, after mentioning that I was learning Diidaxzá, they would tell me "There are books in Diidxazá", offering this as a resource to help me learn and as a point of pride. I also met people who told me that since you can write Diidxazá, it is a language, not a *dialecto*– although they themselves said that writing is hard, and they can't do it. Many people express respect for the people recognized as knowing how to write Isthmus Zapotec, and living Isthmus Zapotec literary icons frequently appear in public events. In contrast to the traditional framing of writing shown in Figure 21, current writers are often viewed as modern, mobile, and worldly, and are known to have travelled to present their work to audiences nationally and internationally. Natalia Toledo, for example, is the daughter of internationally-acclaimed painter Francisco Toledo (see also chapter 7), was

30 In the poem the Diidxazá language is addressed with the 2nd person human pronoun which does not distinguish male and female gender.

the first woman to win the Nezahualcóyotl prize for Indigenous literature in 2004, and has been invited to poetry festivals around the world. In 2019 she became the *Subsecretaria de Diversidad Cultural y Fomento a la Lectura* [Subsecretary of Cultural Diversity and Promotion of Reading], a high-profile position within the Mexican National Secretary of Culture. Víctor Cata, as introduced in chapter 1, has studied and worked in prestigious institutions in Mexico City, and has travelled and collaborated with international scholars, including Gabriela Pérez Báez at the Smithsonian Institution in the US. Another admired Juchitán poet and activist, Irma Pineda, has achieved wide recognition for her writing and social engagement, and was elected to serve on the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues from 2020–2022. Both the past and the present of Isthmus Zapotec literature is filled with high-achieving, charismatic role models.

Ironically, despite this recent and on-going heritage, writing has never been socialized in the general society. I heard mention of literacy programs that had been run in the past through religious and social development organizations, and unearthed several adult literacy workbooks in the SIL archive, however at present only a small minority of people have had any formal training in writing or reading Diidxazá. It is partially this gap – between a clear source of cultural pride and identity on the one hand, and the majority of the population who do not feel empowered to participate in it on the other – that motivated Natalia and Víctor to put their own writing aside for a while in order to teach. The following sections analyse their imaginaries and strategies of Diidxazá literacy as practiced in their workshop.

6.3 Imaginaries of literacy in the *Camino de la Iguana*

As residents of Juchitán, Natalia and Víctor were well aware of the prestige of the popular alphabet and Diidxazá literature, as well as the lack of learning opportunities. In response, their efforts focused on teaching the alphabet and the literary heritage in a way that would be accessible and attractive to a wider section of the Isthmus Zapotec community. Although the workshop was initially designed to assist speakers of Isthmus Zapotec in becoming comfortable with the popular alphabet, from the very first incarnation of the workshop in the *Casa de la Cultura* in Juchitán in January 2012 there were many people attending who did not identify as speakers, interested in learning how to speak as well as how to write. As a result, the two-week workshop has varied each time, depending on the ages and language abilities of the participants. Participants

have varying levels of speaking and listening comprehension. In 3 of the 10 iterations of the workshop that I observed between 2013 and 2015 there were almost no Isthmus Zapotec speakers among the participants; in 4 there were a mix, with non-speakers generally more numerous than speakers; and in 3 locations all or almost all of the participants were speakers. This was due to which geographic area the workshops were held in. The communicative repertoire of the participants impacted the teachers' practices, as they typically switched to Spanish if the participants could not produce Diidxazá.

The basic format of the workshop was the same in all locations, however. Activities in the workshop began with about one hour of "*lectoescritura*" [reading and writing], where Víctor taught and drilled the sounds and symbols of the popular alphabet, often including old vocabulary words as examples, relying on lots of dictation exercises and peer correction. He often taught the Zapotec vigesimal (base-twenty) number system as well, and had participants read texts or poems to practice pronunciation. Víctor's teaching involved lots of copying and dictation, aimed at providing students with the skills to write Diidxazá in Natalia's class, which was structured around students' writing projects. Natalia taught one hour of "*creación literaria*" [literary creation, creative writing], beginning with discussion of the current legal status of Indigenous languages in Mexico and some of the prominent literary icons of Isthmus Zapotec. She then guided participants through a series of exercises in which they produced writing (ideally in Zapotec) in a variety of "*universal*" [universal, international] genres, including surrealism, haiku, and autobiography, as well as genres identified as Zapotec, such as "*adivinanzas*" [riddles], tongue twisters, metaphors, and "*mentiras*" [humorous lies/jokes]. She coached participants in writing these genres, ideally in Diidxazá, although often in Spanish or a combination thereof. She also often taught some Zapotec lullabies and had participants sing. Sometimes a special guest was invited to attend for a day, often one of the young bilingual rappers from Juchitán (see chapter 7) or another Zapotec poet, who presented their poems or songs to the group. Each workshop concluded with a ceremony in which each participant was supposed to read something that they had written and receive a certificate, and in which there was usually some form of food and music. These ceremonies ranged from very formal to very casual, depending on the location of the workshop. Both teachers acknowledged that the two-week time span of the workshop is not sufficient for participants to become comfortable with the alphabet, but they hoped to spark enough interest so that some students will continue learning and writing in the future.

6.3.1 Our alphabet: Sharing sounds and symbols

Víctor's approach to teaching Zapotec literacy has transformed throughout the process of developing the *Camino de la Iguana*. He described how the first class he taught was like a linguistics lecture, which bored the children, adults and elders of Juchitán who were in attendance. He realized that he needed to present content in a more accessible way, and with different activities for different populations, in order to meet the goals of the workshop. These changes were driven by the desire to better achieve the underlying goals of the workshop, as referenced in the opening of this chapter, and stated here in his words in full:

> *El taller ha sufrido cambios, se ha ido adecuando a las condiciones, a las necesidades. Pero el objetivo primordial sigue, eso sí no se ha alterado, el de darles a conocer la literatura, darles a conocer el alfabeto, que sepan que se puede escribir el idioma, que se puede crear en el idioma, que hay posibilidades para la lengua. Eso sí mira. La forma es que ya cambió.*
>
> The workshop has gone through changes, it's been adapting itself to the conditions, to the needs. But the primordial objective continues, that yes, has not altered, that of getting them to know the literature, getting them to know the alphabet, that they know that you can write the language, that you can create in the language, that there are possibilities for the language. That yes, look. The form is what has changed. (Interview October 2014)

The teaching of the alphabet (and corresponding phonemes) was still pursued in a linguistically-informed way, but Víctor incorporated a lot of practice exercises and some peer work to help Spanish-literate students acquire the information with greater ease. Víctor teaches in a calm and unhurried way, taking time to explain the issues that his students find confusing or to tell a story that helps to explain the topic at hand. The following field notes describe a typical lesson:

> Víctor begins the first day of the workshop with an entirely adult audience in Tehuantepec by showing the Spanish alphabet, pointing out which letters are not used in Isthmus Zapotec. Then he turns to what I already know will be the main focus throughout the workshop: the 4 consonants and 10 vowels that are in Diidxazá but not in Spanish. He gives examples of words starting with each sound in the popular alphabet. It doesn't take long to come across an example of a word that the participants say in multiple ways: *guelaguidi* versus the more common *laguidi* (sandal), produced through a pattern of dropping [g] at the beginnings of some words, which many interpret as a kind of language decline. Victor tells the students that 'language always changes, don't fall into thinking about the "correct" and "incorrect"'.
>
> Then he dictates words in Diidxazá and has students write them in silence. Later he calls students to the board to write their answers, asking the group what they think of each answer, and if anyone has anything different. The group compares the different versions, with Víctor asking them how they would pronounce each version. When reading them

> back the students start to notice where the writing doesn't line up with the pronunciation of the word. Finally Víctor gives a correct version of each word, signaling correct words with a check and incorrect with a cross.
>
> Víctor then writes some minimal pairs on the board, asking if students know the definitions, and filling them in. One pair is *nisa* (water) and *niza* (ear of corn). Víctor tells a story about a carwash in Juchitán that has painted their name "*Niza yaa*" intending to mean "clean water", but actually meaning "clean ear of corn". Everyone laughs.
>
> (Field notes February 2014)

Much focus is given to the 4 consonants and 3 vowel phonations that are not found in Spanish,[31] learning to recognize them through presentation of minimal pairs and practicing them through dictation exercises. Since Spanish uses the graphemes <s> and <z> to refer to the same phoneme, /s/, this can be a particularly challenging for students, and they find examples like the story of "*Niza yaa*" to be amusing and instructive. As noticeable in the vignette of a typical lesson above, Víctor explicitly espouses a paradigm in which different versions of a word can be correct, however his classes simultaneously emphasize the importance of "correct" spelling, judged at the level of sound-symbol transparency. This approach– accepting the written representation of diverse pronunciations and regional dialects, while adhering to a normative phonemic inventory– can be called a "polynomic" (Marcellesi 1983) approach to literacy, which has been popular in the teaching of Corsican and Occitan in France, as well as other lesser-taught languages (Sallabank 2010). This non-standard approach to dialect is conscious and strategic on Víctor's part, as he encourages students from different parts of the region to adapt the popular alphabet to their dialect variant.

At the same time, as a historian and linguist, he tries to promote the use of Zapotec words that have been or are in the process of being replaced by Spanish, without imposing them in a purist way. He often teaches the traditional vigesimal number system, with the symbols that were previously used to represent different amounts in the pre-colonial Zapotec writing system. In explaining this base twenty number system and the symbols that were used to represent certain quantities in ancient carvings and texts, Víctor asks the students to convert and translate different sums and impresses upon them the sophistication of the system. While his classes aim to take into consideration the language abilities of the

31 Consonants are: dx /d3/, x /3/, xh /ʃ/, z /z/. The vowels are the same 5 vowels used in Spanish (a, e, i, o, u), but are produced in three possible phonations: simple (produced as modal vowels and represented as in Spanish or English); "*cortadas*", non-continuous/ final glottal stop (represented with an apostrophe following the letter); and "*quebradas*", laryngealized (represented with a double letter).

students, they also attempt to transmit vocabulary that is often new for students, even those who regularly use Zapotec in daily communication. When discussing his stance on the use of Spanish terms he commented:

> *Cuando está el nombre en zapoteco, no. Entonces sí. . .digo ¿por qué? si tenemos el nombre ¿por qué estás usando el préstamo? Cuando no lo tenemos pues ni modos no lo tenemos: manzana: manzana, pera: pera. Pero sí tenemos "aguacate". . ."yaxhu"*
>
> When the name in Zapotec is there, no. So yes. . . I say why if we have the name, why are you using the loan word? When we don't have it well, oh well, we don't have it: apple: apple, pear: pear. But we do have avocado. . ."*yaxhu*"
>
> (Interview October 2014)

Víctor explicitly aims to be inclusionary in his teaching of Diidxazá reading and writing and to avoid discouraging students, but he does not adopt an all-inclusive approach and continues to promote the kind of vocabulary and phonemic knowledge that he thinks is most important for students to have. He views an overly normative or pursit approach as a problem, as he discussed:

Víctor *No me gusta ser como muy normativo porque van a decir "es muy purista" o que me tomen como muy estricto. Hay veces escucho y no digo nada pero si puedo les digo pero----para no hacerlos sentir mal, namás para hablarles de la riqueza del idioma. Pero por lo regular me quedo callado.*

HDK *Sí . . . no creo que te he visto haciendo correcciones [dialectales o léxicos]. [. . .]*

Víctor *No lo hago, no . . . no me gusta porque si de por sí no habla y aparte les digo que no hablan bien . . . Pero van a hablar, mejor que hable, ya sobre la marcha ya aprende. Ahora sí, sobre la marcha aprende.*

Víctor I don't like to be like very normative because they will say "he's very purist" or they take me as really strict. There are times I listen and I don't say anything but if I can I say to them but--- not so as to make them feel bad, just to talk to them about the richness of the language. But for the most part I stay quiet.

HDK Yes . . . I don't think I've seen you making corrections [of dialect or word choice]. [. . .]

Víctor I don't do it, no I don't like it because if in fact someone doesn't speak and besides I tell them that they don't speak well . . . But they're going to speak, it's better that they speak, then learn along the way. Now yes, learn along the way.

(Interview October 2014)

Víctor was aware that many students have only limited motivation to learn, and that his actions may have repercussions on their future levels of interest.

Although Víctor recognized the risk of making his lessons overly technical and with an intimidating focus on accuracy, he also noted the importance of the linguistic analysis that he brings to his work, commenting:

> *Es distinto que tú hables un idioma, que tú analices tu propio idioma. [. . .] Y ahí es cuando te enfrentas realmente a tu idioma y tienes que explicarlo, no puedes decir de que "ah, pos nada más porque así lo ponemos." "No, explícamelo, explícame por qué primero." Eh comienzas con el verbo, luego el sujeto y luego el objeto. . . Entonces por supuesto que me sirvió mucho [mi formación lingüística]. [. . .] Cuando explico una palabra, ya sé cómo explicarlo sin que ellos se enreden, sin que ellos se aburran [. . .] Sí sé hacer un análisis, sé por qué la palabra está ahí, sé por qué cambia, y como siempre me gustó la semántica puedo hacer el análisis del camino de la palabra.*
>
> It's different that you speak a language, than that you analyze your own language. [. . .] And that is where you really face your language and you have to explain it, you can't say that "Ah well just because we put it like that." "No, explain it to me, explain to me why first." Eh you start with the verb, later the subject and later the object. . . So definitely [linguistic training] has been really useful to me. [. . .] When I explain a word, I know how to explain it without them getting tangled up, without them getting bored. [. . .] Yes I know how to do an analysis, I know why the word is there, I know why it changes and since I always liked semantics I can do the analysis of the path of the word.
>
> (Interview October 2014)

Students appreciate Víctor's ability to offer more insight into their questions and a structured approach to learning the writing system. Two young women who took classes with a speaker who did not have linguistic or pedagogical training and subsequently attended the *Camino de la Iguana*, told me in conversation that they were not willing to take more classes with the previous teacher but would love to study more with Víctor because he was able to explain complicated things in a simple way. Figure 18 below shows Víctor teaching independent pronouns and corresponding verb conjugations to a group of adult learners, following a framework that is familiar to those who have studied additional languages or linguistics in a formal way.

Students generally participate well in all of his activities, from dictation and reading aloud, to grading a neighbor's work and translating vocabulary. These pedagogic routines, while relying on the memorization and drills that are generally criticized by more holistic or constructivist approaches to literacy teaching, are very familiar to students who have come through the Mexican education system. When working in a context where all the participants are schooled in Spanish, these norms are hard, if not impossible, to resist. The literacy component of the *Camino de la Iguana* thus has echoes of formal education and linguistics-based teaching, while avoiding the exclusion and

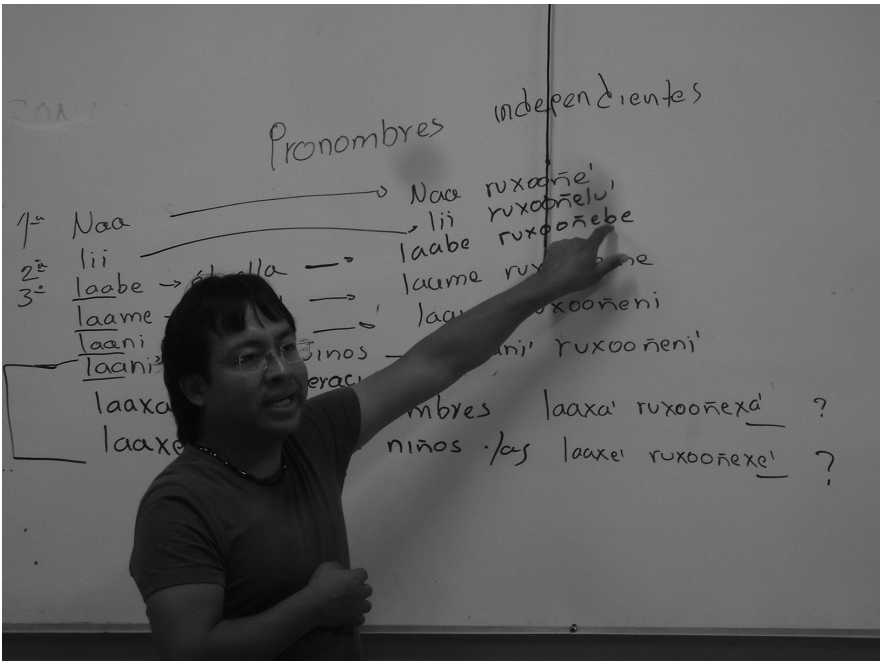

Figure 18: Víctor teaching in the *Camino de la Iguana* (photo February 2014).

shaming that these kinds of standards-focused education can produce, and additionally promoting dialect diversity.

6.3.2 We have a unique way to name the world: Diidxazá in the canon of universal literature

Natalia's goals for her students include familiarity with some of the Diidxazá literature that exists, although more of her time is spent coaxing them to produce and share their own writing, focusing on projects that bring to light their dreams, personal stories, and observations. Her passion for literature as a form of personal and cultural expression is apparent through her teaching. Natalia lectures charismatically and intensely, punctuated by sudden, deep laughter and moments of warm connection with her students. Throughout the workshop she combines projects that relate to a kind of literary production identified as "Zapotec", and projects related to literature identified as "universal" or international– although there is not a clear line drawn between the two in discourse nor in practice. In all their

writing, participants are encouraged to use at least some Zapotec, or to translate into Zapotec. The first project she assigns them is to write something (usually a poem) about a dream that they have had and bring it to class the next day. "If you don't remember your dream, ask your grandmother for one of hers, she probably has great ones" she joked on several occasions.

The projects vary from one location to another due to the age of the students, and various scheduling issues that slow down or speed up the workshop. In the workshops that I observed, the main projects following the dream assignment were a surrealist poem, an autobiographical piece (with an example of a poem by Venezuelan poet Luis Brito for inspiration), writing based on a childhood photo, "*guendarusiguii*" (the art of lying, with examples collected and published by Juchitán writer Macario Matus for inspiration), and writing or translating a haiku (often with Zapotec onomatopoeias and/or metaphors, using examples of haikus by Japanese poet Matsuo Basho and Juchitán writer Victor Terán for inspiration). Sometimes Natalia also asks participants to do an interview with someone from their town, and frequently incorporates tongue twisters, old-fashioned games and Zapotec songs, in particular lullabies. In one workshop where all the participants were children, she brought in black and white images by her father, Isthmus painter Francisco Toledo, and had the children color them in and write a story about the image. In another workshop where many of the participants did not speak Isthmus Zapotec she assigned lists of words to be learned.

Participants were always encouraged to write their assignments in Diidxazá– with help if needed– although they were not prevented from writing in Spanish or translanguaging, and both were very frequent practices. Most important was for them to write and be willing to read what they wrote out loud to the rest of the group. A typical lesson is described in the following vignette.

> Natalia is teaching the workshop with adult learners. On the white board at the front she has written "*Bigú- polvo, pedaceria, añicos*" [Turtle [in Zapotec]- powder/ dust, pieces, fragments [in Spanish]], after telling an Isthmus Zapotec legend recorded by *Istmeño* scholar Andrés Henestrosa about how the turtle got a broken shell, resulting in its mosaic shell today (Henestrosa 2009 [1929]). She launches from this story into an explanation of a writing exercise called the "*cadáver exquisito*" [exquisite corpse] where each person will contribute a random phrase and these fragments are then assembled together to make a surrealist poem. She gives a brief description of the era of French surrealism in the 1920s and mentions several French poets associated with this movement, including forerunner Lautréamont. She aligns with their philosophy that "*La poesía debe estar hecha por todos*" [Poetry should be made by all], which she writes on the board.
>
> (Field notes February 2014)

By combining Isthmus Zapotec literature with French surrealism, Natalia draws a clear bridge between local and global literary traditions. Additionally, she prioritizes

the students' participation through accessible exercises like the exquisite corpse, and welcoming writing in any combination of languages.

One of the resources Natalia often brought to the workshop was a recent reprint of the 1578 dictionary of Zapotec compiled by Fray Juán de Córdova. Natalia told students that the 1578 dictionary holds many archaic words, but that they can find subtle and beautiful things there, and it is still the largest dictionary of Zapotec to date. Natalia attempts to inspire interest in the intricacies of the language among her students with examples like the onomatopoeia in the 1578 dictionary, most of which are no longer in use (such as the sound pain makes when it walks through the body). She reiterates again and again that being bilingual or multilingual is a source of pride, that Diidxazá lends itself well to creative expression, and that Zapotecs have their own forms of expression that are just as valid as those of other people and places. In an interview she commented:

Natalia *Es complejo porque es una manera de pensar. No, no puedes enseñar palabritas--- claro, ese es el inicio, ¿no? Pero por ejemplo, cuando yo pongo este . . . esto, ¿no? de las metáforas. Estábamos viendo el otro día, entonces yo les dije que algunas metáforas que existen naturalmente en el zapoteco. Cómo cuando dices que: ay, fui a la marcha de ayer y te--- y alguien te dice: ¿y hubo mucha gente? Dices: "binni biri", gente hormiga. O sea, había mucha gente como hormiga, ¿no? Eso es un pensamiento, si yo lo digo en D.F. nadie va a saber qué estoy diciendo. Si yo lo digo aquí [. . .] a estos niños de esta escuela no tienen la menor idea. Entonces esas expresiones se mueren, como se murieron las onomatopeyas de cómo camina el dolor en el cuerpo. Imagínate que un antepasado mío tuvo--- o esa cabeza que representa a una cultura, tuvo la posibilidad y la maravilla de escuchar su cuerpo.*

HDK *Ujum.*

Natalia *Esas sutilezas del idioma se han perdido y . . . sigue habiendo y existiendo onomatopeyas, pero lo que nosotros hacemos mucho en el taller es también preguntarnos y preguntarles: ¿qué les parecen estas cosas?, ¿cómo lo ven?, ¿no? Porque la literatura es eso, es ese . . . tú sabes que detrás de un libro hay una persona, y esa persona se hizo preguntas y registró muchas cosas de su tiempo. Entonces el lenguaje somos nosotros, el lenguaje somos las personas. Yo me hice persona en zapoteco, el zapoteco a mí me hizo una persona.*

Natalia It's complicated because it's a way of thinking. You can't teach just little words--- clearly, that is the start, right. But for example when I put um . . . this, right, the metaphors. We were looking [at that] the other day, so I told them some metaphors that exist naturally in Zapotec. Like when you say that "oh, I went to the march yesterday" and you– and someone says to you "and were there a lot of people?" You say "*binni biri*" people ant. Like, there were a lot of people like ants, right. That is a thought, if I say it in Mexico City no one will know what I'm saying.

> If I say it here [. . .] to these kids in this school they don't have the least idea. So those expressions die, like the onomatopoeias about how pain walks through the body died. Imagine that one of my ancestors had– or that head that represents a culture, had the possibility and the wonder to listen to their body.

HDK Uhum.

Natalia Those subtleties of the language have been getting lost and . . . there still are and exist onomatopoeias, but what we do a lot in the workshop is also ask ourselves and ask them: What do you think of these things? How do you see them, right? Because literature is that, it's that . . . you know that behind a book there is a person, and that person asked themselves questions and documented many things of their time. So the language is us, we people are the language. I made myself a person in Zapotec, Zapotec made me a person.

(Interview November 2014)

Her goal is not to teach skills, but to foster an attitude of pride and a "way of thinking" that is critical and engaged. She has drawn great inspiration, identity and opportunity from Diidxazá and encourages others to do likewise. Natalia often comments that it is because of Diidxazá that she and Víctor have left the Isthmus, received grants and prizes, and travelled around the world. She tells participants to keep writing, to follow whatever dreams and aspirations they have. For example, when teaching in a secondary school in a rural community outside of Juchitán where many students do not continue to study beyond secondary level, she hung up a poster on the otherwise bare wall for an annual writing competition for Zapotec writers (of all varieties), supported by the *Centro para las Artes San Augustín* (CASA), the same foundation that supports the *Camino de la Iguana* workshops (see also chapter 7). Using the poster, she talked about opportunities like this to encourage students to keep writing, and to submit the work that they do to try for prizes.

Figure 19 shows Natalia teaching to a captive young adult audience in Tehuantepec. On the whiteboard she has written two possible ways to discuss poetry in Isthmus Zapotec; *diidxa guie'* glossed as *palabra flor* [word flower] and *diidxa do'* glossed as *palabra sagrada* [sacred word]. With characteristic passion, she discusses poetry as an entrance into a unique way of naming and talking about the world. She is a vocal supporter of other forms of artistic expression, including traditional music, cuisine, hip-hop and graffiti, and often teaches wearing *huipils* or *bidaani* (blouses) that use traditional embroidery styles (also shown in Figure 19).

While Víctor may talk non-confrontationally about "the richness of the language" in order to motivate people, Natalia is more direct about her concerns and frustration with the current state of Zapotec use (or lack thereof).

Figure 19: Natalia teaching in the *Camino de la Iguana* (photo February 2014).

She described some of her interactions with students from a well-respected monolingual primary school in a wealthy section of Juchitán:

Natalia *Les dije: ¿por qué dicen que son la mejor escuela de Juchitán si no hablan zapoteco? Estaban así [expresión de sorpresa]. Les digo: "sí, ustedes saben que---" ay, empecé . . . les dije cosas, ¿no? Este, les dije: "de ustedes depende que este idioma se siga hablando. Qué responsabilidad tan grande, yo no la voy a tener porque yo sí lo hablo. Pero ustedes no lo hablan, se va a morir." Y así.*

HDK *¿Cómo respondieron?*

Natalia *"¡No, no se va a morir porque dice An--- este, Gabriel López Chiñas que no se va a morir!" [risas]. Les digo: "sí, pero ese es un poema muy bello. Pero el sol es más fuerte que nosotros, entonces sí tenemos que hacer algo. Imagínense, hace unos años se hablaba tantos, ¿no? tantos hablantes. Ahorita ya hay poquitos, treinta y cinco mil de este pueblo tan grande . . . y ya--- entonces, ¿qué vamos a hacer?, ¿le van a echar ganas o, o nos vamos todos y cerramos la puerta?" "No, no, no." Y así pero ya--- pero les tiene que meter la cosa esta, ¿no? el gusto [. . .]*

[risas] "A ver pinches chamacos, piensen que tienen una manera de nombrar única el mundo, y ustedes le están dando la espalda."

Natalia I said to them "Why do you say that you're the best school in Juchitán if you don't speak Zapotec?" They were like this [shocked expression]. I said to them "Yes, you know that–" oh I started . . . I said things to them, right? Um I said to them "It depends on you whether this language continues to be spoken. What a big responsibility, I won't have it because I do speak it. But you don't speak it, it will die." Like that.

HDK How did they respond?

Natalia "No, it won't die because--- um, Gabriel López Chiñas says that it won't die!" [laughs]. I say to them "Yes, but that is a really beautiful poem. But the sun is stronger than us, so yes we have to do something. Imagine, a few years ago lots spoke, right, lots of speakers. Now there are already few, 35 thousand of this really big city . . . and now---so, what are we going to do? Are we going to make an effort or, or we're all going to go and close the door?" "No, no, no." And like that but---but you have to give them something that, right, the appreciation/ enjoyment. [. . .]

[laughs] "Let's see you darn kids, just to think that you have a unique way to name the world, and you're turning your back on it!"

(Interview November 2014)

Talking about the "death" of the language was not a dominant theme in the workshops, but was occasionally introduced in particular by Natalia to motivate participants. Natalia makes her interaction with these young students sound harsh as she retells it, although her personal interactions with participants, especially children, were always warm and playful, even when teasing or discipline was involved. The passion that Natalia and Víctor have for Diidxazá– as a way of being and communicating, and as a linguistic artifact– is clear, and they attempt to pass it on to the participants in whatever way they can.

Although Natalia loosely structures her teaching around recognized literary genres, she in no way views "*creación literaria*" as a series of skills that she can transmit, nor as something autonomous from the dynamics of life in the Isthmus. Speaking about her own experiences and desires as a writer, she said:

Natalia *Pero por supuesto, que como tú eres un poeta indígena, todo se vuelve político.*

HDK *¿Ah, sí?*

Natalia *Porque eres una minoría yo creo. [. . .] No es que tú escribas sobre la política, sino que también pienso yo que ser poeta es una postura ante la vida, porque tú celebras la palabra. Otros están haciendo las grandes cosas, los poetas no. Los poetas están escribiendo palabras, son como esos loquitos que están haciendo versos, están en otro mundo. Y haciendo un mundo más habitable tal vez . . . porque el horror que acompaña a la vida a veces no--- es como dice Raúl Zurita, ¿no? Si . . . si fuéramos felices no existiría la música, no existiría la literatura. Pero como no hemos sido felices tenemos que agarrar de aquí para cantar, para decir, para este--- mirar una belleza. Algo así que te provoque humanidad, que es lo que nos falta ahorita.*

Natalia But definitely, since you're an Indigenous poet, everything becomes political.

HDK Oh yes?

Natalia Because you're a minority I think. [. . .] It's not that you write about politics, rather that also I think that being a poet is an orientation towards life, because you celebrate the word. Others are making big things, not the poets. The poets are writing words, are like those crazies that are making verses, they are in another world. And making a world that is more habitable maybe . . . because the horror that accompanies life sometimes doesn't– It's like Raúl Zurita says, right. If . . . if we were happy there wouldn't be music, there wouldn't be literature. But since we haven't been happy we have to grab from here to sing, to say, to um--- look at something beautiful. Something like that that provokes humanity in you, which is what we're missing now. (Interview November 2014)

Referring indirectly to the disadvantaged condition of Indigenous people under the Mexican government, and the social-political turmoil of life in the Isthmus, Natalia sees writing– especially writing as an Indigenous Zapotec person– as a needed response and a way to imagine a more humane world.

6.3.3 *Convivencia* in the *Camino de la Iguana*

A significant way in which the *Camino de la Iguana* broke from typical formal education practices was in the social and playful atmosphere of the workshop. For most workshops Natalia and Víctor provided a snack and drink to the participants each day, taking time to eat and drink together in between the lessons or at the end. The food was usually a local snack and "*agua fresca*" (fresh beverage of fruit or rice and water), prepared by Natalia's sister-in-law and served on the leaves of almond trees, a traditional practice that has now largely given way to styrofoam, but which Natalia and Víctor intentionally promoted. Discussion before and after the workshops often turned to local politics, or what festival was coming up next. On one occasion Natalia and Víctor delayed the start of the workshop to join in an impromptu game of basketball, which the primary school participants had asked them to play in. Neither of them had arrived prepared for this, but they kicked off their shoes and played barefoot with great gusto, much to the students' delight. As participants got to know Víctor and Natalia they become increasingly friendly, and by the end of the workshop there were always many pictures taken and emotional goodbyes exchanged. Each workshop was concluded with a ceremony and celebration, or *convivio*, usually involving food and reading some of the

works the participants had written. Figure 20 shows Natalia and Víctor laughing with participants at the start of the closing *convivio* for the workshop held at the Comité Melendre's Cultural Center in August-September 2014. During this workshop they taught in the courtyard behind the Center, with mainly children and a few older adults participating. For the closing ceremony the participants arrived dressed in traditional formal clothing and with festive spirits.

Figure 20: Natalia and Víctor during a closing *convivio* (photo September 2014).

Despite their position as local celebrities and their expert status in the workshop, Natalia and Víctor fostered a convivial education environment through collaborative activities and their personal humor which was often present. This was not

coincidental, but relates to their wider vision of how Zapotec can be promoted. As Natalia commented:

> *Estamos hablando el idioma y yo de verdad que obviamente lo que está en los libros es muy importante, pero lo que está, la gente está hablando ahorita zapoteco, esos son los que están salvando el idioma. No en un aula. O sea, algo estamos haciendo porque estamos enseñando, ¿no? "Miren, hay escritores, hay esto, hay lo otro, vamos a jugar. Estos son los juegos zapotecas, aquí hay recetas de cocina, esta es nuestra comida, esto somos nosotros todo el tiempo." Los números, el cuerpo, todo lo que vemos ahí [en el taller], jugamos. Pero realmente los que pueden hacer algo son la--- es la gente que está en casa sentada con sus nietos, con sus hijos, con sus. . . Esos son los que salvan el idioma.*
>
> We're speaking the language and I, honestly, obviously what is in books is very important, but the people that are speaking Zapotec now, those are the ones that are saving the language. Not in a classroom. Well, we're doing something because we're teaching, right? "Look, there are writers, there's this, there's that, let's play. These are the Zapotec games, here are cooking recipes, this is our food, this is who we are all the time." The numbers, the body, all that we look at there [in the workshop], we play. But really those that can do something are the--- it's the people that are at home seated with their grandkids, with their kids, with their. . . Those are the ones who save the language.
>
> (Interview November 2014)

Although they were not reproducing these natural interactions in the workshop, they created an environment somewhere between school and home. During the workshop both Natalia and Víctor regularly gave away books that they have written, and occasionally other books that they were able to get copies of, so that participants would have something to read after the workshop ended. In addition to sharing books and the dictionary, they frequently encouraged participants to consult the "living dictionaries" of their families. In this way they oriented towards the more open and inclusive side on the scale of participation, and created something like the convivial 'learning webs' that Illich (1970) advocated for.

Participants were often very receptive and appreciative of the workshop, and several took it multiple times or expressed desire to do so. At the closing of one workshop in a primary school, a young boy who spoke better Diidxazá than most of his classmates and had been the star student of the workshop presented them with a letter he had painstakingly written to them. They often received handmade gifts, cards and tokens of appreciation from participants. When asked what the most interesting part of the workshop was for her, a reserved woman in her 50s who participated with her adult daughter told me that it was the first time she had ever been asked to write something personal– at first she was certain that she had no stories worth telling and nothing to write, but was deeply impacted when she found that she did have things she wanted to express.

The impact of the *Camino de la Iguana* on participants was thus not limited to learning parts of the alphabet, or motivating use of Diidxazá, but also has empowered the personal expression of some participants.

Following the earthquakes of September 2017, both Natalia and Víctor were more involved in reconstruction efforts than in literacy education for a time. Natalia turned her home into an ad-hoc cultural center for children in her neighborhood, and began to sponsor a variety of workshops involving art, games, video production, and theater, among other topics, and to show films. Her primary goal was to give the children a chance to play and ease the stress and tension that came from the major earthquakes and countless smaller replicas which followed them. Víctor collaborated in coordinating community kitchens to provide meals to families whose homes were damaged. For both Natalia and Víctor, language activism is part of broader social engagement in the well-being of their community. While they are both interested in language as an object and discursive tool, it is the convivial social relations maintained through language that they prioritize as writer-activists.

6.4 Summary: Characteristics of community-based education activism

Community-based initiatives have the potential to imagine and enact different kinds of education spaces, hopefully avoiding the negative legacies of top-down colonial education (see chapter 4). 'Diidxazá literacy' as imagined and practiced by Víctor and Natalia is negotiated and collaborative, fostering appreciation of the literary heritage and opening the door for participants to take whatever they have gained and apply it towards their own goals and desires amidst the realities of their lives. Their initial desire to create readers of Zapotec adapted to the students that were present, many of whom had limited speaking competence. Rather than exclude this population, the teachers created new activities and adapted their teaching from context to context. The teachers hoped to give participants more confidence as bilingual or multilingual people and to encourage them to use their communicative repertoires more fully. In contrast to autonomous models of literacy that can leave learners feeling less powerful, literacy practices which provide learners the power to name their world and express their perspectives can help to reduce "literacy inequalities" (Street 2011). This positive appropriation and redefinition of literacy is apparent in the *Camino de la Iguana*. The central strategies of creating and legitimating readers and writers of a multi-dialectal and multilingual Diidxazá speech community are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5: Key language activism strategies in a community-based literacy workshop.

Actions →	Goals →	Examples
– Creating	– People/ Identities – Communication practices	– Diidxazá readers and writers – Reading and writing in Diidxazá
– Representing	– People/ Identities – Communication practices	– Speakers and learners of all levels represented as legitimate – Diidxazá represented as a global and literary language – Dialect diversity represented as legitimate – Syntretic language use/ multilingualism accepted
– Connecting	– People/ Identities – Resources	– Participants introduced to books, writers, and literacy resources

Natalia and Víctor knew that most participants will not master the alphabet and beginning learners will not become speakers as a result of the workshop, but they hoped that the experience of the workshop would spark the motivation or confidence necessary for them to speak, write, and work towards their own aspirations. Although Natalia and Víctor would sometimes joke that all Juchitán residents should be required to study Zapotec, they ultimately acknowledged that fostering personal appreciation is the only viable approach, and that requiring people to study the language will not be effective. They did not want to reproduce the kind of forced learning environments found in schooling, but rather to take advantage of the flexibility of community-based education to create their own norms. Whether or not participants acquired full knowledge of the phonemic inventory of Isthmus Zapotec was less significant than the attitude or ideology that they had towards the language. Awareness of the local literary heritage – as well as viewing that heritage as part of universal literature – was a central aim of the workshop. The knowledge that Víctor and Natalia have as experts from the local context gives them insight into local histories and resources, as well as the diversity within the Isthmus Zapotec community, all of which they used to make their workshop as appropriate as possible to each new group of students. Different dialects were specifically included, albeit within a standard writing norm that can echo mainstream education practices. Although this norm results in telling people that some of their writing attempts

are "incorrect", it also gives status and respect within a mainstream system dominated by standard language ideologies, and was evaluated positively by students who had been frustrated by less-normative Zapotec programs. Natalia and Víctor also offset the normative education practices that occured in the workshop with an over-arching convivial atmosphere in which participants became friends, talked, joked, sang and sometimes cried with them as they shared meaningful aspects of their lives. Participants evaluated this experience very positively, and many hoped to repeat it or to continue to learn more about Zapotec elsewhere.

Key characteristics of Natalia and Víctor's strategy to create Diidxazá writers and readers included the connection of the literary heritage to the contemporary context and the connection of local genres with international genres, bridging a local-historical orientation with an international-contemporary one. The inclusion of all learners through a convivial multilingual atmosphere and adaptation of the workshop to the needs of each student group illustrates Natalia and Víctor's commitment to encourage all residents of the region to identify as speakers and writers (at varying levels of expertise) of Zapotec. They viewed a purist orientation as a threat to learner participation, orienting mainly towards syncretic language practices, which they also modeled through their teaching. It is difficult to avoid orienting towards linguistic purism when teaching orthography, but through an explicit polynomic approach, and complementary writing activities where no correction was present, the teachers struck a good balance. Achieving a convivial learning environment in a multilingual context, as the *Camino de la Iguana* did, requires the democratic negotiation of communication practices and norms, where diverse voices are equally able to engage in self-definition. Arguments in favor of flexible (Blackledge and Creese 2010; Weber 2014; Heller 2007), heteroglossic, and dynamic (Cazden et al. 1996; García 2009a) multilingualism have been articulated in relation to these same concerns for improved participation and social justice in education in contexts around the world. The emphasis of these concepts often tends towards the resulting language forms (the fluid, flexible, heteroglossic languaging that is produced), however, rather than on the political processes through which communicative norms are negotiated. While there are many factors which supported the success of the *Camino de la Iguana*, I argue that the creation of a convivial multilingual approach to education in general, and literacy education in particular, was key to the positive outcomes of this activist endeavor.

For most participants, taking a workshop on writing Zapotec is a unique experience, standing out from the rest of their schooling; through a convivial atmosphere and the need to contribute their own voice, it became a meaningful experience for many in which they became part of a community of practice

which frames Diidxazá use and users in valued and inclusionary ways. By accepting learners of all levels as "legitimate peripheral participants" (Lave and Wenger 1991), the principal actors in this community of practice encouraged them to take up a shared repertoire as decoders, consumers and producers of Zapotec texts. This community of practice is also investing in a joint enterprise to establish a Diidxazá-as-resource ideology and a new social imaginary of what it means to be literate in Diidxazá. They represent literacy in Diidxazá as something that goes beyond decoding to include creating and sharing new meanings, as well as being aware of the histories and social context of contemporary Diidxazá communication practices. By legitimizing the agency of learners as well as speakers in contemporary acts of meaning-making, and reinforcing an awareness of the histories and humanity inherent in Diidxazá use, the *Camino de la Iguana* fostered conviviality at the heart of communication practices.