

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: What Says Your Heart: Community, Learning, and Education in a Nahua Indigenous Village.

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The purpose of this thesis is to understand the experiences that Nahua children, in rural Mexico, have as they attend schools that are primarily influenced by formal Western education in relation to their own ways of learning and knowing. This research took place over the course of three months within a Nahua indigenous community. I completed fieldwork in both the local elementary school and within the community through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with children, parents, and teachers. What I found was that the ways in which the community constructed childhood, knowledge, and learning differed significantly in what they experienced within the classroom. This in turn effected the relationships that were built between the school and the community and the student's ability to succeed and have meaningful and supportive educational experiences. The experiences that they have are in turn effected by global, national, and local political and economic trends such as the implementation of neoliberalism, and its subsequent effect on educational policies for rural communities in Mexico. This ultimately leads to an education that is colonial in nature, despite efforts of including bilingual intercultural education programs, as the system seeks to colonize the bodies and minds of these students. Thus, it is my conclusion that both community and school must work together in order to create education programs that decolonize this process through the inclusion of programs that re-center their local language, culture, and learning practices.

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What Says Your Heart: Community, Learning, and Education in a Nahua Indigenous Village

by
Jessica Anderson

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Jessica Anderson, Author

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Introduction

My day is just beginning; it is around 7:00 am. My husband, Ian, who accompanied me in the field, is outside at the back of the house cooking our breakfast over an open flame. I am inside getting ready for school, a sheet of fabric covers the open door, and a morning breeze rustles it. I go out to the back to see how Ian is progressing with breakfast, cooking over an open flame has been a difficult to accomplish. I look out into the lush green jungle behind the house, banana, *mamey*, and allspice trees tower over us, laden with ripening fruit. Hens and their chicks rustle through the underbrush, scratching and pecking at the thickly covered ground. We are surrounded by trees, vines, and tropical plants. Vines creep out the sides of the house, clinging to the stones, finding their way into the cracks and into the doorways, as the jungle tries to reclaim the land. A dog wanders to the back of our house, drawn by the smell of cooking food, and it darts away as soon as it sees us. I see people through the trees, as they walk to and from their homes on the small dirt paths that wind past our house. The community is sprawled out throughout the jungle, these small paths connecting all of the homes. I can see some of the houses through the trees; some are made of concrete blocks and stones, like ours, while others are made of bamboo slats or wood. Many of them have packed dirt floors while some have concrete. As I head back inside I hear a child calling my name my name, "Yessi!" they say. I go to the door and peer out, Sabrina¹, a young girl from down the street, is walking past carrying a small pail of corn. "*Que haces?*" I ask as she walks by. "What are you doing?" She pauses momentary and raises the pail of corn. She is going to the Santiago's house up the street to use their electric corn grinder. The community is able to use it for a small fee, a peso for every kilo of masa. She waves and continues on her way. Other children, on similar errands run past me, they also yell my name as they pass. The home we are staying in is in *El Centro*, on one of the main roads in the town. The streets of *El Centro* are wide, paved, and steep with large rivets in them to give traction during the heavy rainstorms that flood the streets. They are heavy with foot traffic as the smaller paths feed onto the main roads.

Men, young and old, walk in groups down the road as they head to the *rancho* to work in the fields, cutting wood or planting and maintaining crops. The young men are dressed in jeans, t-shirts, and sandals and some wear baseball hats. The older men, *los abuelos*, wear the

¹ All names and identifying details of the people mentioned within this thesis have been changed, to the best of my ability, to maintain the confidentiality of those that I worked with.

local style of clothing, bright white pants and shirts made of thin cotton, sandals, and large cowboy hats. They all carry small satchels made of twine over their shoulders and machetes around their waists. As they pass, they say “*neo*”, “I go”, and I reply, “*wueno*”, “*it is well*”, and they continue. They talk and joke with each other in Nahuatl as they walk, passing other groups going in the opposite direction, each extending the same greeting and response. Women also walk past, some carry large baskets attached to a head strap with bananas, *mamey*, or other fruit to sell. Other women step out of the Bodega, a large store that sells bulk items such as corn and beans, next door to us, with 50-pound bags of dried corn precariously perched on their backs, attached to a strap that sits across their forehead, their small children toddling behind them. They wear the local style of clothing also, long white skirts with a colored layer underneath, a red woven belt and a white shirt with intricately embroidered designs, animals, and flowers across the chest, shoulders, and back. Some men and women stop to sit on the stoop of the house across the street, resting before they continue on their way. Some of the children emerge from the small paths that feed onto the main road, carrying their backpacks, and heading up the hill to the school. They walk with neighbors, cousins, siblings, a grandparent, or a parent. Once I start seeing the children head towards the school, I head inside to eat breakfast and finish getting ready.

Papalotlan² is a small Nahua indigenous community nestled in the mountainous region of Northern Puebla. The state of Puebla is located in East-Central Mexico, with the most Northern parts, such as the area where Papalotlan is located, reaching towards Veracruz and near the Gulf of Mexico. It is a community of approximately 200 families made up of primarily Nahua people. However, a short distance from here lie communities of Totonac people, some of whom have come to the community via marriage or other means. Additionally Papalotlan is a municipality of Quetzalan, the main, mestizo dominated and run, market town. Quetzalan serves as the area’s main hub as it hosts the weekly market for all surrounding villages to sell and buy produce, goods, and handicrafts as well as providing the infrastructure for tourism. The community was settled by families from a neighboring village of San Juan³ who held their lands in that area. Rather than traveling between San Juan and their lands, the families began building homes and establishing the community around the 1940s. The father of Miguel Santiago, one of

² Papalotlan is a pseudonym meaning the land of butterflies in Nahuatl.

³ This is a pseudonym

the research participants, remembers when he built his home there, the same home that he still lives in, now filled with his own grown children and grandchildren. When he built his home, there were no roads, and he was the only one in the area. The others were further out on their own pieces of land. They survived through subsistence farming, growing corn, beans, squash, and other crops to feed their families and to sell any surplus locally for small additional incomes. They also sold large quantities of crops such as coffee and allspice to larger markets. Today, roads, internet, television, sewage, shops, and many more houses dot the community. Additionally, the access that the community has to large pieces of their land no longer exists, and the ability for them to participate in subsistence farming has been significantly limited, as access to their lands has been diminished through political and economic control. This change has come because of disruptions in the regional, national, and global economies that have significantly affected the local livelihoods of the community members (Acosta Márquez 2014).

Between 1917 and 1991, agrarian reforms in Mexico resulted in the redistribution of Mexico's rural lands to ejidos (Hamilton 2002). Ejidos are groups of twenty persons or more who organize and work the land that has been taken from large estates following the Mexican Revolution (Hamilton 2002). However, these ejido lands manifested low productivity and political corruption as the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) utilized *caciques*, who were political strongmen that belonged to this party and governed rural communities mainly using violence and coercion (Villarreal 2002). The PRI had established control over indigenous communities in Puebla during the 1930's and 1950's, and as a result, the caciques derived legitimacy from the participation in the struggle for village lands (Villarreal 2002; Smith 2005). The caciques was able to establish rule over the communities by threatening violence to those in opposition and providing goods and favors for those who supported him (Villarreal 2002; Sánchez 1992). They also became the bridge between rural communities and the national political system making them the "economic middleman linking a capitalist national market with non-capitalist forms of agricultural production" (Villarreal 2002:480). Thus, the cacique was able to gain access to and maintain control over the lands of the indigenous populations throughout Puebla (Villarreal 2002; Sánchez 1992; Smith 2005). It was also during this time that the Mexican government, with the help of the control that the caciques had over the land and crop production, and the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations from the United States, implemented programs to reduce hunger and increase food production through utilizing genetically uniform

seed, the application of controlled irrigation, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides in order to produce higher yields (Gonzalez 2010). However, the result was that rural indigenous farmers lacked the resources to implement such procedures, and as the global agricultural output increased, the prices for crops plummeted creating an even more precarious situation for rural farmers (Gonzalez 2010). These new policies lead to farmers abandoning their lands and migrating to the cities and the United States (Gonzalez 2010). While the cacique power structure was challenged during the 1960's and 1970's, and was dismantled in many parts of Puebla (Smith 2005), in the rural areas, such as San Juan and Papalotlan, this system remained, and the caciques continued to have violent control over agricultural production and the land into the 1980s (Sánchez 1992).

By the 1980's, throughout Mexico, the ejidos were widely recognized as corrupt and inefficient and were restructured as a result (Hamilton 2002). However, this restructuring of the ejido lands cause agriculture in rural areas to be an increasingly risky and marginal undertaking (Hamilton 2002). This put Mexico on the path to adopting Western neoliberalism as it created the environment of reorienting the economy from state-centered to a free market system (McDonald 1999). Additionally, by 1992 the government allowed for the privatization and selling of ejido lands. While this was intended to boost agricultural and land markets through combining ejido plots in order to create high-input production, those who lived in rural communities could not produce competitively with large tracts of land. This resulted in many people in rural communities selling their land rights to invest in nonagricultural livelihoods (Hamilton 2002). It was also during this year that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, The United States, and Mexico was adopted, along with other neoliberal governmental and economic policies. This further impoverished Mexico's rural indigenous communities, devastated their local livelihoods, increased unemployment, and further accelerated migration to the United States (Gonzalez 2010). With the introduction of neoliberalism, NAFTA, and other global agricultural trade policies passed during this time, farmers in the United States and Europe were protected from high tax rates and were encouraged to overproduce, while it took away safety nets for rural agriculture and increased the already limited access that indigenous communities had to their lands (Gonzalez 2010). Additionally, as countries like the United States overproduced and exported large amounts of crops such as corn and beans below the cost of production, farmers in Mexico could not

compete. The price of coffee, worldwide, also dropped during this time, and in turn, devastated small communities such as Papalotlan as families lost a key source of income (Calo & Wise 2005).

These changes still effect the lives of people of Papalotlan today as the men go to work in fields that are not theirs. These men are going to work for 70-100 pesos a day as they care for crops such as corn, coffee, beans, avocados, allspice, and citrus fruits or cut tees for wood production. Additionally, women remain at home making handcrafts to sell at the market to tourists in Quetzalan, or they sell the small surplus of bananas or mamey that they were able to get off of the land that they still own, in order to supplement the family's incomes. As we can see from the history of land reform and current neoliberal forces, circumstances have been created where families are no longer able to perform subsistence farming as they once did. Now products such as corn or beans must be bought as families are unable to grow the amount needed, and these products are primarily imported form the United States. In Miguel's store, he buys large sacks of beans that they repackage and sell. I saw these imported items first hand as Miguel showed me the original packaging for these beans. This particular shipment of beans had come from a farm in North Dakota. As these changes have occurred, the local economy and livelihoods of the people of Papalotlan went from being controlled by regional, state, and national politics to being influenced and controlled by global political and economic policies. The influence of both past and current political and economic reform, regionally, nationally, and globally, while devastating to the local community, has created interesting circumstances in how the community is able to maintain their ways of life.

Research Questions

With all that has been discussed thus far, it is impossible to say that communities like Papalotlan have remained untouched by the violence, control, and the disenfranchisement of neoliberal policies. However, what has occurred within this region is a celebration of indigenous life, of their knowledges, rituals, and perspectives that have helped maintain many of their beliefs and practices in the face of overwhelming change (Becerra et al. 2015). There are programs that have been created to support local farmers and their agricultural practices, to build up the communities economically, and to recognize the importance of their knowledge and way of seeing the world (Becerra et al. 2015). However, such programs have had little reach, and have not yet made headway into the education system within this community. Thus,

it is in Papalotlan that I found not only this attempt to ensure the survival of the local practices and knowledge through these programs, but also direct influences of neoliberalism that seek to undercut those efforts. However, the neoliberal influences that undermined these efforts are much more than political or economic, and while these have significantly affected the livelihoods and economic prospects of this region and community, as described above, the remainder of this thesis will also take into account the effects of the neoliberal education policies within this community. Thus, I will show how the community is able to maintain their knowledge and way of life in the face of the attempts to change them.

The time that I spent in Papalotlan consisted of three months between June and September. As can be seen from the excerpt above, my husband and I lived in the community for the duration of this field research. We were provided with our own space for the time that we were there, and as a result we were directly involved with many of the families within the community. Additionally, time was spent within the local elementary school, *Benito Juarez Escuela Primaria*⁴. These two spaces became the focus for this project, as I sought to research the experiences of children, community members, and teachers. Before I left to do research in the community I had read about life in indigenous communities, about children, childhood, and learning. I also read about the Western education systems in areas with high populations of indigenous students, and the effects that this has on indigenous communities in many parts of the world. As I read, I became interested in the contradictions that existed between the lives that indigenous children lead and the experiences that they have within the school system. I wanted to be able to see first-hand the differences between what indigenous Nahua children of rural Mexico experience at home versus what occurs within the classroom, and to understand the experiences in relation to differences in learning practices. Thus, my research question became “*how do Nahua children experience formal Western education in relation to their local ways of knowing?*”

This general question is what I took with me to the field, as I sought to understand the lives that the children of the community lead, their roles, responsibilities, and integration into the community in order to compare and contrast what occurs in the classroom. I soon came to realize that this question was far too general and did not address the nuances of the challenges and negotiations that the children and the community members faced as they interacted with

⁴ Escuela Primaria is Spanish for elementary school, and Benito Juarez is a pseudonym for this school.

the education system. In order to understand the experiences of the children and the community I had to ask additional questions such as, *how is childhood constructed and what contributes to this construction of childhood? What are the challenges and contradictions that arise as a result of non-indigenous teachers teaching in an indigenous community? How is the community able to find respect and maintain their local knowledge and ways of knowing?* Lastly, in light of the turmoil that has been created within Mexico and its indigenous communities because of its history of colonization and now neoliberalism, I needed to be able to understand how this has shaped this community and their experiences. Therefore, I began to ask myself, *what is the effect of Mexico's history and neoliberalism on the experiences of children in the community and within the classroom?* Without coming to understand these past and current outside forces, it would have left a very incomplete picture and understanding of how the children of Papalotlan experienced Western education. Additionally, there was another aspect of my research experience that provided the means of informing these research questions. There was a saying on the wall of the cafeteria that had been painted while we were there by University students from Puebla. It read, "*Toni Kijtoua Mo Yolo*" "What says your heart". I was struck by the beauty and deep meaning of these words, but also the irony in the context in which they were used. What I had seen, and what I will show in this thesis, was that what was in their hearts was not a question that the school asked in reality, such as within the classrooms or in their curriculum, only in the imaginary. This saying brought into focus the questions I had developed before, during, and after my fieldwork. As I have reflected on this saying, it has helped to tie together the various aspects of the experiences that this community and children have as they seek for respect for what their hearts say. Thus, I had to adjust my research questions to encompass all of these various circumstances that provide the backdrop for life in the community, and in the process frame my research in such a way that included this into my theoretical perspective.

Theoretical & Methodological Perspectives

As both a theoretical and methodological approach, the theory and methods used throughout this study were a result of a grounded and inductive process. While I arrived in the community with a basic theoretical and methodological understanding of anthropology and of the topic that I was researching, I did not arrive in the community in search of proving or disproving a specific theory. Additionally, while I had particular methods in mind, I did not limit

myself to using them. It was key to understand the particulars of the community and how they constructed childhood before making this methodological decision. The purpose behind this approach was to allow the community to guide the research questions, theory, and the methods that I would use. Thus, as I gathered my data, became familiar with the community, saw what they considered to be important as it related to my main topic, and upon returning from the field and analyzing the data, I framed my research questions and my theoretical and methodological approaches in relation to this community and what I observed.

Theory

The theoretical perspectives that I utilized within this thesis aimed at understanding the intersections of childhood, learning, education, and neoliberalism as they relate to the experiences that Nahua children have within formal Western education. In order to understand these intersections I needed to explore theories concerning the construction of childhood, learning and pedagogy, bilingual intercultural education, and the colonization and decolonization of bodies, minds, and learning. These different bodies of theory are tied together with theories on the role of neoliberalism within the lives of the community members through both the education and economic systems, and the role that these have on constructing and altering knowledge and understandings of childhood. Within the context of this thesis, neoliberalism is defined as an economic strategy, from the United States, to “pry open small economies and expose them to trade policies that play havoc with these nations’ present and future economic welfare” (Ong 2006:2). Other political and economic strategies have had similar results, and ultimately neoliberalism does not use notions that are inherently different from liberal democratic or even Marxist notions of capitalism (Puiggrós 1999). However, it is a “radicalized capitalist imperialism” (Ong 2006:2) that departs from the previous discourses, such as capitalism, which have “failed as strategies of social change” (Puiggrós 1999:15). While it is an economic strategy, once adopted, it bleeds into nearly every aspect of life through politics, education, health care, and so on. As we will see within this thesis, this is accomplished through its attempts to create social change through governing and regulating peoples conduct to be driven by the market and creating free individuals who are self-managed according to discipline, efficiency, and competitiveness (Ong 2006). As well as, altering people’s reliance on community and social connections, and specifically in terms of education, changing the conditions under which education is given through altering the roles that teachers and students play (Ong 2006;

Puiggrós 1999). Because of neoliberalism's powerful reach throughout the world it leaves countries and communities little option but to adopt its economic, political, and educational policies (Ong 2006). As a result, it has the ability to reach, dramatically influence, and change communities in a way that have never been seen before.

As theories of neoliberalism are explored, this thesis takes the stance of current educational policies within Mexico mirroring colonial efforts to assimilate the indigenous populations. Such processes contribute to the relationships that are built between the school and community as well as how the school constructs processes of knowledge production. As the education system of Mexico adopts neoliberal policies, it creates an environment where teachers are trained to legitimize one form of knowledge and way of knowing, one that is not that of the community. Thus, I utilize theories that discuss the effects of neoliberalism and education on communities like Papalotlan as well as the theoretical perspectives of Foucault and Bourdieu. While neither Foucault nor Bourdieu theorized about neoliberalism, their theories can be applied to these concepts in order to explain how neoliberal policies within the classroom continue to assimilate and colonize both the bodies and minds of students. As a counterpoint to this process of continued colonization, I also utilize theories from the growing literature base of decolonizing education in order to show how such colonizing processes and policies do not have to exist within education. Such theories regarding neoliberalism become the common thread throughout the thesis, tying together the literature and the data to provide a more complete understanding of the research questions above. The theoretical perspectives were informed by the experiences that I had within the community and the information provided to me by those who participated, as were the methods that I utilized.

Methods

The methods that I used to collect the information for this project consisted mainly of participant observation and semi-structured informal interviews with children, teachers, and community members. In terms of the participant observation, I participated in activities of everyday life, from performing chores, learning how to cook, to playing with the children as well as attending and participating in special events such as religious celebrations, funerals, and other social gatherings. In terms of the interviews done with the children and community members, there were 23 total, 12 with children and 11 with community members. The interviews with the children focused on their experiences within the classroom, how they were

able to use their knowledge that they bring from their own lives, how they could use what they learned in school at home, and the teaching and learning processes that they engage in. The community member interviews sought to establish an understanding of their perspective of the school and teachers, the meaning of education and knowledge, the effect of the school on life and learning within the community (advantages and disadvantages), and the learning and teaching processes that they engage in with their children. I utilized participant observation, within the classrooms on a rotating schedule, one class per day. Near the end of the fieldwork, instead of the rotating schedule, I spent one week in two of the classes. This provided me with an opportunity to see all of the teachers within their classroom, multiple times, and gave a broad perspective on the types of activities that teachers and students engage in on a daily basis. While this research took place during the summer, school was in session for two out of the three months that I was in the field, thus allowing for ample time to participate and observe within the classrooms, build relationships and rapport with the teachers, and to see the students within a context outside of their home or in the community. While doing my research within the school, I mainly observed classroom activities, but participated when requested. I completed nine interviews with the teachers and one with the director of the school. These interviews focused on their histories as teachers, the curriculum, learning, education, the challenges that they face as teachers and in the classroom, and their perceptions of the community and the communities perceptions of them. For a further discussion on how this was accomplished and a more detailed description of the methods used, see Chapter 1.

As I collected data through these processes of participant observation and interviews or conversations I made jottings, or small notes of things that were said or what I had seen, in a pocket notebook throughout the day. These small notes were usually made when I was able to briefly step away, during recess at school, between activities in the classroom, and after school. Outside of the school, I would take these jottings as I transitioned between families or as we moved from one activity or event to the next. My day was generally split between being in the school and being within the community. Thus, directly after school I would go home and write everything I could remember from school that day, the interactions, conversations, observations, etc. that I had heard and seen while utilizing my jottings to ensure recorded everything in my field notebooks. Then, after spending the remainder of the day in the homes of families in the community, and again taking other small notes, I would return home and write all

that I had experienced, seen, and heard before going to bed in order to start the next day fresh. Additionally, directly after completing an interview I would return home and write down all that I could remember, as they did not wish to be recorded, allowing very little time to lapse between when the interview was completed and when I wrote my notes, in a field notebook, of what was discussed.

Upon returning home, I then coded these field notes and interviews. Through coding, I created topics that were discussed by those that I worked with and what I observed (Bernard 2011). These topics included such things as, teacher and community interactions, use of language in classroom, use of culture in classroom, the meaning of education, the benefits of schooling, observational learning, participatory learning, play, etc. After I divided all of my field notes into categories, I then created themes. I created the themes through putting multiple codes of a similar topic together, to identify what the community felt to be the most important topics through what they discussed and what I observed the most frequently (Bernard 2011). These themes then became my chapters as I created the theoretical framework around this data. Thus, creating the means for my theory to be grounded within the community and what they found to be important in terms of community, learning, and education.

Research Participants

Before I provide an outline of this thesis, I would like to take a moment to discuss the children, community members, and teachers that I worked with, who without their help and willingness to take my husband and I in, this project would not have been possible. The director of the school, Fernando, was my original contact within the community. He provided me with the support needed to perform fieldwork in the school and helped me with establishing contacts within the community. The family that he first introduced me to was the Santiago family, namely Miguel, who served on the parent's committee at the school. Miguel and his wife Luciana, have three children. Their oldest daughter, Xochit, is 11 years old, their middle child, Itzel, also a girl is eight years old, and their youngest, a boy, Santi, is three years old. Sabrina, age 12, the girl from the beginning of the chapter, is Miguel's niece, but was frequently at their home helping the family. Because of Miguel's connection with the school, he became one of our main contacts and introduced us to many other community members. The Santiago family saw it as their responsibility to take care of my husband and I, for ensuring that we were comfortable, and that we had everything that we needed to live in the community over three

months. In order to help repay them for their assistance, we often worked with them helping with meals, gathering firewood, caring for Santi, performing daily chores, etc. Because of the nature of our relationship with the Santiago family, many of their stories are told throughout these chapters, and while I focus on many of the experiences that I had with them, they were echoed by other experiences and conversations that I had with other people in the community.

Another family that we had the privilege close with was the Martinez family, Julius and his wife Feliz. Julius and Feliz also have three children, two boys and one daughter. Carlos is their oldest, he is 13 years old, Jazmine is nine years old, and Caesar is five years old. The relationship with the Martinez family occurred in much the same way as it did with the Santiago family. Julius, the president of the parent's committee, was also introduced to me through Fernando, and was influential in providing me with resources and introductions to other community members. In terms of the teachers of the school, I had the opportunity to become acquainted with 12 teachers. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, major changes occurred within the school during the time that I was there, between the end of one school year and the start of the next many of the teachers left. The teachers from the end of the school year were first grade: Maestra Ana, second grade (A)⁵: Maestra Zayra, second grade (B): Maestra Guadalupe, third grade: Maestra Natalia, fourth grade: Maestra Mica, fifth grade: Maestro Sergio, and sixth grade: Maestra Christiana. At the beginning of the new school year the teachers were, first grade: Maestro Jorge, second grade (A): Maestra Yaneth, second grade (B): Maestra Rosa, third grade: Maestra Mica, fourth grade: Maestra Ximena, fifth grade: Maestra Victoria, and sixth grade: Maestro Sergio. I will not be discussing their histories or how they came to be in Papalotlan in this section, but rather this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3. There were many more people and families that were integral in the success of this project, however those will be introduced as they occur within the body of this thesis.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1

For the first chapter I focus on the methodologies that were utilized in this project. This chapter begins with a discussion on the debates within the anthropology of childhood. These debates specifically address childhood as a social and historical construction, children as agents, and the use of children's voices in research. Each of these debates are addressed to discuss the

⁵ Due to the large number of students in the second grade, the school had two, second grade classes.

role that neoliberalism has played in the construction of children and childhood throughout the world through various institutions, such as education. These debates also contribute to the framework for my methodological and ethical considerations in doing fieldwork with Nahua children. The second and third sections of this chapter discuss specifically the methods that were used to study learning in the home and in the community and within the classroom, respectively. Research on these debates has spurred the creation of new methodologies in working with children. Thus, this chapter addresses these new methodologies and my decision in which were used and where were not, given the structure of the community and how childhood is understood. It also addresses the ethical concerns of doing research with Nahua children and how these were addressed and mitigated within my research.

Chapter 2

This chapter also addresses how childhood is a social and historical construction in order to discuss the ways in which neoliberalism has been exported to communities like Papalotlan through economic and educational policies and the changes that potentially occur to childhood and learning as a result. Thus, it looks at the connections between livelihoods, knowledges, learning practices, and childhood and how through changes caused by neoliberalism in one category can create a ripple effect and change the others as well. While the focus of the chapter is providing a discussion on the aspects of knowledge transmission and the learning process for this community, it also provides a space to address these connections. Each section of the chapter represents an aspect of the learning process, but also includes the potential changes to the livelihoods, knowledges, childhood, and the learning practices that have occurred as neoliberal economic and educational policies have been enacted within Mexico.

Chapter 3

This chapter explores the relationships formed between the students and the community members of Papalotlan and the teachers of the school. The chapter begins with a discussion of the role of the history of rural education in Mexico and the history of the Benito Juarez Escuela Primaria, and how these histories still effect the relationships between the community and the school. As a part of this history it looks at the introduction of neoliberalism within the education system, and how this has effected intercultural education within the community. This is followed by a discussion of how the teachers are trained as a result of the history of rural education and current neoliberal education policies, and how these, combined

with differences between indigenous and non-indigenous teachers, create challenges and tensions that the teachers and community must navigate. These challenge and tensions are brought to light as the community seeks to find respect and understanding for their own knowledges and ways of knowing from teachers that are not trained to do so.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 addresses the ways in which neoliberal policies within Mexico attempt to assimilate the students of the community to a way of understanding and being that is not of their own making. In order to do this, this chapter utilizes the theories of Foucault and Bourdieu to discuss the creation of docile bodies and the reproduction of a particular habitus and cultural capital through the education system in terms of what language and culture is represented in the classroom. This perspective has been covered extensively within bilingual intercultural education literature, but what most of the literature fails to discuss, and what this chapter seeks to address, is how the school colonizes processes of learning in addition to language and culture, and the effect that this has on the children of the community. It also addresses how the school, and the education system, could avoid these assimilationist models through utilizing decolonizing education perspectives and processes.

Chapter 1
Working with Nahua Children: Methodological and Ethical Considerations

Introduction

Today I am observing the 4th grade class with Maestra Ximena. It is Thursday, 8:00 am, the morning bell has just rung, and I am sitting in the far corner of the classroom with three boys. By 10:00am, the class has done a warm up activity (sorting words alphabetically) and a math lesson. Maestra Ximena follows the daily schedule that is posted behind her desk almost to the minute. The next lesson is under civics and ethics. They read three pages out of their textbooks and highlight what they think the most important parts of it are. After a few minutes, Maestra Ximena brings the class back together in order to discuss what they highlighted. Maestra Ximena asks the class, "What is this article about?" A girl on the other side of the room raises her hand and replies, "the rights of children." Maestra Ximena proceeds to ask what the rights of children are. The hands of the students shoot up into the air, waving frantically, as they anxiously await to be called on. She points to another girl in the class, "education," the girl says. Another boy says, "To play," which was followed by "to think," "to read." Maestra Julia writes on the board:

1. Salud (Health)
2. Educación (Education)
3. Jugar (Play)
4. Tener un hogar (To have a house)
5. Alimentación (Food)

As Maestra Ximena is writing the list one of the boys that I am sitting by, Antonio, raises his hand. He says, "We have the right to work." Maestra Ximena replied, "Do children have the right to work or only parents? Children don't work. They have the right to play." In response, Antonio added, "but our parents teach us how to work so that when we are adults we know how." She nodded and moved to the next part of the lesson.

This lesson, out of the 4th grade textbook, came as a result of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Created in 1989, this document addresses the rights of "the child," which include those written on the board by Maestra Ximena, as well as children being recognized as forming their own views, being able to express these views freely on matters that affect them (such as in research, legislation, education, etc.), and as a result seen as social actors (UN General Assembly 1989). However, within the academy, many have found significant flaws in how the UNCRC is conceptualized and thus implemented in the form of various local and global policies with groups around the world. As a result, this scene from

Maestra Ximena's classroom can be used to explain issues of how policy concerning children, creates a generalized childhood, which I will return to shortly. First, let me discuss, briefly, how anthropology has provided the necessary evidence and theoretical perspectives in order to create a dialogue on the diverse experiences and voices of children that is missing within how policy addresses childhood, agency, and voice (Tisdall & Punch 2012). While the "new social studies" of childhood (Christensen & Prout 2005) gains significance across disciplines within the social sciences, anthropology has a long history of research with children, and as a result has been at the forefront of childhood studies.

Beginning in the 1920's, namely with Margret Mead and her studies with Samoan adolescent girls in 1928, anthropologists were producing research on childhood. In this research, Mead was able to show that there is more than one form of childhood (Mead 1928). Between the 1920's and into the 1970's anthropologists continue to build on this foundation established by Mead and others within the field. These early studies in anthropology show children not as social actors, but rather as passive objects and helpless spectators continually assimilating and responding to the adult world through processes of socialization (Schildkrout 2002; Hardman 2001). Within research, children were also seen as the "object" in which to study instead of being co-producers of research (Graue & Walsh 1998; Barker & Weller 2003), to be talked about and their experiences discussed solely through the voices of parents, teachers, caregivers, or adults, and as props in the background (Christensen & Prout 2005). However, as the new social studies of childhood began to develop in the 1980's, anthropologists began to reconsider this idea of socialization and children as objects within research (Schildkrout 2002; Chin 2001; LeVine 2007). Rather than being "social becomings" (Qvortup 1994), where they are seen as being in the process of becoming adults (Jenks 1996; Schildkrout 2002; Christensen & Prout 2005), children are now seen as having agency and as "social beings" who are not only influenced by the social structures, just as adults are, but are also acting and reacting to these structures that affect their lives (Hardman 2001; Katz 2004; Schildkrout 2002; Bluebond-Langer & Korbin 2007).

While the view of children being agents is commonly held throughout anthropology, it is still contested in how policy related to children and childhood is implemented throughout the world. According to the UNCRC, children are allowed the position of having agency in making decisions about what affects them, however, the UNCRC also maintains keeping the best interests of "the child" in mind, regardless of the child's position as a social actor, allowing

“professional experts mandated by the UNCRC to intervene” (Tisdall & Punch 2012:254; James 2007). When children are given agency by institutional agents, and even within research, it is as though they had been denied agency beforehand and through providing agency, children are being saved from poor situations. However, children often don’t need to be given agency through policy or research because they are already agents within the spaces that they occupy. As a result, as agency is given to children through policies and institutions, this process is inherently ethnocentric and denies the reality of culture (Lancy 2012; Tisdall & Punch 2012). The process of giving children agency in order to change and align with what the institution perceives as their best interests, it is often stripping them of agency and freedom previously held (Lancy 2012; Hecht 1998). The difficulty in how to recognize children as agents within policy is a result of the difficulty in creating one form of childhood. Because childhood is constructed based on the society and period in time that it is occurring, it creates differences in the roles that children have within a society or community. These differences in how childhood is constructed is what makes it difficult to define what “the child” is, what that means, and how “the child” is an agent. Such a concept can only be defined within the bounds of that society or community (James 2007). However, there is a rhetoric of “the child” that has been created with the “Western child” in mind, and through globalization and neoliberalism it has been exported around the world through state institutions such as medicine and schooling, aid organizations, and local and global legislation (such as the UNCRC) (Bolin 2010; Schildkrout 2002; Hecht 1998; Stephens 1995; Kaufman et al. 2002). When I use the term “the West” or “Western” forms of childhood I am using it in order to discuss a specific institutional logic that is attached to it and therefore the concepts of childhood, children, and learning that it describes.

An institutional logic can be defined as the “socially constructed historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality” (Thornton & Ocasio 1999:101). Each institution, such as the state, education, and even childhood, has a central logic that regularizes behavior, produces and reproduces society, and is the site through which the state is produced (Fassin & Brown 2015; Friedland & Alford 1991; Thornton & Ocasio 1999). The Western institutional logic of the child is based on age, innocence, protection, independence, and children as consumers (Chin 2001; Tisdall & Punch 2012; Stephens 1995; Kaufman et al. 2002). This particular form of childhood has been taken

through institutions, both local and global, into areas where the forms of childhood are seen as deviant and “in need of civilization and development” (Stephens 1995:16). It is this process of exporting and the implementation of one form of childhood within these spaces that neoliberalism is able to reconfigure what childhood means within Papalotlan. This is done through attempting to change the roles of the children, what they know, and what they have access to within the community (see Chapter 2 for further discussion). The institutional logic of the Western child does not fit all contexts outside of Euro-America, but even the type of child that the West has created often does not work within its own context, even the “Western child” varies within that space. Although there is a variety of childhoods both inside and outside of Western contexts, within policy the logic is of the idealized child, the general child, the Western child. If we return to the scene from the beginning of this chapter, we can see how it can be used to explain the civilization of the child in Papalotlan, and how policy such as, the UNCRC generalizes the experience of childhood and creates issues of agency.

Antonio grew up helping and working since approximately age three. However, he is told that children do not work; children go to school and play, by the agent of the institution, Maestra Ximena. Childhood in Papalotlan (which is explored further in the following chapter), does not fit the institutional logic provided by the school and other institutions, and as a result, it must be changed and reshaped into the ideal, civilized and developed form of childhood (Stephens 1995). In this particular case, the goal is to save and protect the children of Papalotlan from working within their homes and communities, and preserve their innocence through play and attending school. This makes the only “appropriate” choices for children being play and education. When in reality, while the school believes it is providing the best choice for the children in the community, education is not a choice because attendance is not only mandated by the state, but families receive cash benefits if children attend school, through programs such as *Prospera*⁶, rather than helping in the home or in the community. Thus, the school is a “hollow right” (Lancy 2002) that children are given in order to not only conform the Western form of childhood, but also because the teachers see it as the means of rescuing them from the lives

⁶ *Prospera* is a government program, formed out of neoliberal ideas, established in Mexico in 1997 (originally called *Progres*a), that aims at alleviating extreme poverty in Mexico. It is a conditional cash transfer (CCT) program that provides cash directly to families based the conditions of their compliance with program requirements in nutrition, visits to health care centers to receive preventative care, and children’s attendance of school (Gil-Garcia 2015).

that their parents lead and providing them with more choices in the future. However, children within this community, outside of the classroom, have freedom to choose how they learn, when they learn, and what they do after school. Because of these differences in how childhood is constructed and the agency that children can have without the help of researchers or policy makers, it makes policies, such as the UNCRC, difficult to achieve in practice. Unlike policy, as anthropology creates new theoretical perspectives on conceptualizing childhood, it is creating space for multiple childhoods, not the universal child, but rather experiences and voices of children that are grounded within specific communities and lives (James 2007; Stephens 1995).

Including the voices of children within research and policy has become the focus of much of the child-centered research (James 2007). The UNCRC discusses that children should have the right to speak out in matters that concern them and express their wishes according to their age and maturity (UN General Assembly 1989). Just as people attempt to give agency when does not need to be given, the act of giving voice implies the same, that “children are somehow disabled or prevented from speaking out, and that, therefore, they need a helping hand” (James 2007:262). However, just as with what has been discussed previously, since childhood is socially constructed, children may already have voice within the spaces that they occupy, what is considered normal or acceptable for a child to have voice about is not universal, and the extent to which children feel comfortable voicing their perspective may not always be the same. Additionally we must consider the role that children’s voices play and how these are produced throughout the research process (for both policy makers and within the academy). As we work from a place within anthropology, where there is a multiplicity of childhoods, the voices of children that are collected through the research process must not be used to generalize the experience and perspective of “the child”, but rather recognize them as standpoints steeped in their own cultural context (James 2007). Therefore, the voices that are represented in this thesis, both child and adult, speak to the experience in this community, and while these experience may reflect similarities of childhood and experiences within formal Western education, some aspects may not (James 2007). The above issues of multiplicity of childhood, seeing children as social actors who have agency within the research process, and co-producing voice, have resulted in child centered research methods within anthropology.

Research with children is often structured as children being completely different from adults, children and adults being the same, or children and adults being similar, but children

having specific abilities and skills (Punch 2002). It is when children are different or similar to adults that child-centered methods emerge. These new methodological tools include diaries, photography, sentence completion and writing, drawing, workshops, child focus groups, stories, songs, and videos in addition to participant observation and interviews (Punch 2002; Baker & Weller 2003; Thomson 2007; Mitchell 2006; Johnson, Pfister, & Vindrola-Padros 2012; Epstein et al. 2008). As I worked with children and adults to study the learning process, I utilize participant observation within homes, the community, and classrooms as well as semi-structured interviews for all those that I worked with. In this chapter, I will discuss how I use these techniques during my own research process as I studied learning practices within the schools, homes, and community of Papalotlan, why I chose these methods, and the challenges that I faced, as a researcher in doing research with Nahua children. This will then be followed by a discussion on the ethics of doing research with children and how these were approached in relation to this community. As I discuss my methodological choices and the ethical challenges that I faced within the community, I will be using the above debates of childhood as a social and historical construction, children as agents, and utilizing children's voices in research as a means of framing my methodological and ethical considerations.

Methods for Home and Community

As I considered the methods to use for the project I had to consider the groups of people that I would be working with. Not only would I be working with Nahua children in trying to understand their experiences within the classroom and learning in their homes and community, but I would also be working with their family members as well as the teachers at the school. While the project could have only focused on the voices and experiences of children, I wanted to be able to achieve a "multivocal [and] multiperspective view" (Bluebond-Langer & Korbin 2007:242) of the learning experience inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, I used a multivocal perspective to avoid the voices of the children as being seen as the only authentic truth in the community (James 2007). As this goal required that I work with both children and adults, I had to reflect throughout the course of the research on whether my methods that I use in working with the children of the community would be the same or different from those that I use with the adults (Punch 2002; Thomson 2007). Because, if I decided to utilize different methods for the children that I worked with, would these techniques, designed for working with "the child", be appropriate in this community?

In reflecting on the first question posed, is doing research with children different than research with adults, the way in which childhood is constructed within the community lends itself to the use of the same methods for both adults and children. Within Papalotlan, children participate and are involved with adult roles; children do not occupy a separate space from adults, and are agents as they shape and produce knowledge during the learning process just as adults (Chamoux 2015). Therefore, through applying the same methods for both children and adults I was able to mirror, to some extent, how childhood was already constructed within the community without imposing any techniques that singled out children for their “childlike” skills. When I was considering applying child-centered methods to this project I found that they often reflect aspects of the ideal childhood in that they are products of a globalized and modernized childhood and the skills that required in performing the methods are taught in schools (i.e. drawing, journals, etc.). While they may be appropriate for some contexts, they did not work in this community. The use of such methods within contexts where such ideas have been imposed continues to support hegemonic ideas of what childhood and “the child” is which have been imposed through neoliberal state policies, international institutions, and the global market.

For instance, the child centered techniques that utilize cameras, video recording devices, cell phones, and/or other technology would not have been appropriate tools to utilize in collection data. These consumer items are not readily available within the community and are quite rare. As a result, requesting that a child (or adult) provide research data through taking pictures or recording video would not have been an appropriate or meaningful way of collecting data. While technology is becoming more and more readily available in the community, as small internet shops have opened, they are required to pay for the use of the computers, and these, and other forms of technology, are a commodity mainly used by the younger generation and those who can afford it. The use of such methods for this project would have continued to impose globalization and the use of technology within a community that doesn't use it.

Additionally, the child centered methods that include such tasks as drawing, journals, diaries, and sentence completion have been influenced through exposure to attending school. For instance, having children draw is a highly popular technique across disciplines within the new social studies of childhood (Mitchell 2006; Barker & Weller 2003). However, while nearly all children within the community have been exposed and participated in drawing, whether in school or from older siblings, it is another example of reproducing imposed institutions because

of the context in which children are taught to draw. Drawing was a very popular activity in the school, especially for the younger grades, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. Children were often provided with outlines of cars, flowers, and other objects to color in. Other times they were told what to draw, draw things that are dangerous where you live, draw the celebration of Papalotlan, draw your home, your dog, or draw a self-portrait, were all topics prompted by teachers. While the subject matter was often addressing aspects of their own lives, the children were frequently questioned about their drawings, why did you draw this? Why would you draw yourself this way? Why are there two suns, do you see two suns in the sky? How is that a dog? Thus through these processes, children are taught the appropriate way to draw and how drawings are to be accurately composed (Mitchell 2006). I didn't originally realize this as I sat in the classrooms, as I brought with me my own understanding of how objects are to be drawn and how drawings are to be composed. As I sat and watched the children draw pictures, they would often show me their drawing, twice I asked students, what is this? Pointing to something I found unrecognizable on their paper. Both times this occurred they stared at me, looked down at their paper, and then back at me. They did not explain to me what it was, but rather returned to their chair, erased what they had done, and attempted to remake it into what they thought was appropriate and recognizable. My intention in asking this question was not to criticize or point out flaws in their work, but was done because I did not understand what was drawn and to show curiosity and interest in what they were doing. It became apparent at this point, that if I wanted to better understand what they meant, that I should not try to interpret them and I would have to rephrase my questioning. As a result, I took to asking them to tell me about the drawings they created within the classroom. One day they were drawing the yearly celebration of the founding of the community, instead of questioning what they drew, I asked them to tell me about the time where they saw or experienced what they were drawing. This seemed to work as they told me stories of attending the celebration with their families and seeing the dances, some even participating. Therefore, I did not utilize drawings as a means of collecting data, in order to avoid perpetuating standards imposed by Western institutions and issues of interpretation (Mitchell 2006). The only times that I used them was when the teacher had instructed them to draw, and as I walked around the classroom, I asked them about the event or object they drew. I did not concern myself with the actual drawing itself or how it was composed, but the basic object, person, or event that it represented. I did this in order to gain a

better understanding of the children's lives through not relying on the actual picture but the experiences that the children expressed. Thus, I utilized their stories not the drawings themselves. If I had asked them to draw, for my own research, the process by which they were taught to draw, how pictures are constructed, and the components of them would have influenced their understanding of the activity (Mitchell 2006). The question then would be in producing a picture of the learning process, is this their understanding of it and how they see it? Or, is this how they see it through the way they have been taught to represent it on paper?

Similar issues are encountered with methods such as journals, diaries, and sentence completion activities as they perpetuate the emphasis on the status of literacy within the Western education system. Literacy in Spanish is the desired outcome for all school age children in Mexico (Hamel 2008; Lopez-Gopar 2007; Tinajero & Englander 2011). Because of this emphasis on Spanish literacy, the school often does not account for other knowledges that children and other community members have (Lopez-Gopar 2007). Additionally, writing is not the means by which knowledge is produced within Papalotlan. While acts of learning are usually achieved with little verbal instruction, experiences, stories, and histories are shared orally rather than written. Many of the children of the community are now literate in Spanish (very few people in the community are literate in Nahuatl) as a result of attending school, but many of their parents and grandparents are not literate. In order to respect the history of expressing life through spoken word and not to create divides between children and adults by asking children to produce data through means that their family members could not understand, I did not utilize methods that required literacy, and rather used the stories that both children and adults told through conversation and interviews. Stories can be considered a method to use in child-centered research, but within this project, I do not consider it solely child centered because it was utilized for both children and adults, for the reasons described above. While many of the child-centered research techniques were not appropriate to use within the context of this community because of the way that childhood is constructed within Papalotlan, the limited use of technology, and in the attempt to avoid methods that utilized knowledge from schooling, methods such as interviews and participant observation were successful. Not only did interviews allow me access to the stories and knowledges of children and adults, but also in conjunction with participant observation, they allowed me to explore agency and voice within the community.

While the process of doing interviews with children as a means of co-producing research, lends itself to the recognition of children as agents and social actors who have an important perspective on a topic, children, often outside of Western bourgeois societies, may in fact reject this agency, making it difficult to interview them (Lancy 2012). This often has to do with differences in the conceptualization of agency, and as Lancy describes differences between freedom and efficacy. According to Lancy, freedom is physical autonomy whereas efficacy, in terms of children, happens when someone older pays attention and responds to the child's needs and wishes, granting them the ability to express their opinions. As a result, their power is elevated from a very early age (2012). For Papalotlan, children were given significant amounts of freedom not only in their daily lives, but in the learning process as well. However, in terms of efficacy, they were given very little and had to achieve this form of agency through diligent efforts of learning little by little, as they grew and became more useful in the home and community (Lancy 2012). This does not mean that they were not cared for and loved, but were not usually asked their opinion. Because children were primarily given more freedom than efficacy, it influenced the information that I obtained through the interview process.

Learning and knowledge within the community is an embodied process that happen within the individual (Chamoux 2015), and as a result children are not provided with other's opinions and are rarely asked what their thoughts on the process are. Rather the children are to be observant, respectful, and helpful. I was having a conversation with Miguel's father about how children have changed since he was a child. As we were talking Itzel was asked to do something, she began to complain and cry, not wanting to, and questioning why she had to. As this happened Miguel's father told me "some children today, like Itzel, they question me or her parents when she is told something. Santi is not like that, he is a good child, he is helpful, and he respects us. When I was a child, we never did this, if we did we would be hit, told again, and then we did it, and never questioned again. Now, it is different." While some, like Itzel do sometimes question, many of the children continue to choose to maintain respect for adults and not provide opinions or question their elders. Because children are not to give their opinion or to question adults, it was difficult to elicit meaningful responses from them during interviews, because it was a process that was not familiar to them. Additionally, parents were often present during the interview process, which could have contributed to this phenomenon. While it was difficult, it was not impossible and the children often provided great insight into the learning

process. However, what became even more important were the informal conversations that I had with them, which proved significantly more effective in gaining insight into their experiences. This occurred while I was asking general questions as a learner through doing participant observation. This allowed them to tell stories and discuss their knowledge on various topics. Additionally, during these informal conversations the children often dictated the direction of the conversation, without any questions or promptings from me (see Bluebond-Langer 1980 and Hecht 1998 for more on this research method). This often resulted in their expressions of cultural knowledge and things that they saw as important within their lives. However, there is research that indicates that researchers must engineer creative means of doing interviews with children because they do not have the same attention span as adults, cannot sit for long periods, and have varying language abilities (Graue & Walsh 1998; Thomson 2007). Such views only reinforce perceived differences and lessened capabilities of “the child” to adults, when within contexts such as Papalotlan, it becomes more of a matter for considering how childhood is constructed in relation to agency and expressing opinions to adults, than it is about their ability to perform tasks.

In addition to utilizing the informal conversations that I had with children in conjunction with formal interviews, as a means of understanding their voices, I utilized an additional method as a part of participant observation, as outlined by Marjorie Goodwin. Here she indicates that instead of only focusing the attention on the ethnographer/informant dialogue, the focus should be on the verbal interactions *between participants*, which would ultimately allow for us to “move towards an ‘anthropology of experience’ concentrating on how people themselves actually perform activities” (Goodwin 1990 as quoted in Hutchby 2005:67). Such a method became an excellent tool in “showing how social phenomena occur naturally in the social lives of children among other children” (Hutchby 2005:67). Because I was studying the learning process, both within and outside of the classroom, the interactions between children, family members, community members, and teachers became key in understanding their experiences. Since I was not a member of the community, I was not engaged in processes of teaching either in the home or in the classroom. As this was not something I could participate in, it became more about the interactions between people, than about the dialogue that I had with them. Hutchby frames this method in terms of the conversations that children have between each other, and the importance of understanding those conversations as a means of understanding

their experiences and the spaces that they occupy. As I participated within the spheres of home and the community, I was able to witness many instances of children learning from other children. However, Hutchby and Goodwin limit this method to understanding the social lives between children, when it can also be used to understand the social lives between children and adults. Children were not simply learning from other children, but adults were also a key aspect of this as well. If children are social actors within society, then this also includes their interactions between adults as well, and the voices that are produced through those interactions can be just as informative about their experiences as they are between children. As I have already mentioned, children learn primarily without the use of verbal instruction, and rely on the observation of siblings, family members, and community members as a means of learning and understanding their culture. They are therefore ultimately relying on non-verbal means of communicating ideas and concepts.

People have distinct ways of communicating through nonverbal means, and these reflect shared values and cultural histories (Burgoon et al. 2016). Nonverbal communication is crucial in people being able to understand each other, to express ideas, and can often express what verbal communication cannot (Burgoon et al. 2016). As a result, nonverbal communication is expression, gesture, and symbolic behavior that is intended to convey meaning or ideas (Burgoon et al. 2016). As girls and women make tortillas, their movements show the history of that knowledge; every movement is meaningful. I watched a group of women making tortillas, mothers and daughters working together. Each mother with different ways of making tortillas, and their daughters carrying similar habits while adding their own. Their mothers convey to them through their movements, without words, this knowledge. They embody what they know through their actions, their voices are written in their bodies, their experiences and knowledge come to life in their movements. As young children see and understand these movements, they attempt to replicate, the “words” their mothers’ bodies tell them. They are speaking to each other, exchanging knowledge and understanding back and forth, as they move throughout life. As a result, the “voices” of children and adults about the learning process were more than their spoken words, but included their actions and their relationships that they created through these processes. As a result, I believe that voice does not have to be so narrow as to mean the verbal exchanges either between the researcher and the participants, or between the participants, because in this case, with this project and within this community, non-verbal actions can carry

just as much weight as verbal. If we attempt to recognize the voices of children within our research, we must be willing to broaden this definition of voice into more than one construction, just as we have with childhood. By focusing on the movements, interactions, and conversations between children, it gave me a better understanding of how they experience their worlds and how they interpret and interact with what they see, beyond what they told me in conversation.

Methods within the Classroom

Working within the classroom, I utilized all of the same techniques, conversations, interviews, participant observation, and focusing on the interactions between children and between children and teachers. As I prepared my research proposal I anticipated being able to complete interviews with children during lunch or when they were not busy working on assignments during school. However, once I arrived I found that this would not be feasible. This was primarily because there was very little time during the school day where they were not occupied with a lesson or activity, and as I did not want to disrupt their learning, I could not find a time during class where an interview would be possible. Second, during lunch it is usually the only time that they have during the day to play freely with friends, it was also a short period of time, only half an hour. Because they are forced to sit and listen during class, I wanted them to be able to have that time free of sitting with me and answering questions. Instead, I focused on participant observation both during class time and during lunch. The ways in which I engaged in participant observation moved fluidly throughout the day as I moved from observer to participator depending on the situation. Within the classroom I was often placed in the corner, out of the way where I observed the interactions (both verbal and nonverbal) between the children and the children and the teachers. While it would have been ideal to take notes, as Caroline Frank and Lois Bird suggest in their guide to doing ethnographies within the classroom (1999), during this time, the act of me taking notes became such a distraction to the students, and the teachers, as they constantly wondered what I was doing, that it became unproductive. However, as I have mentioned, there were times that I was able to step away, during lunch for instance, and I would utilize this time to make small notes of things that I had observed.

Depending on the activity, I moved from observer to participator, as the teachers would allow, sometimes participating in a game or dance with the children. During lunch, I also took on the role of participator as I played tag, read stories, or talked with the children in order to build

rapport. Other techniques that I utilized during the time spent in the classroom, as suggested by Frank, was to create classroom maps in order to understand the space and the classroom culture that occurred there (Frank & Bird 1999). This helped to give insight into the learning environment that was created in terms of how space is arranged, who and what was represented on the walls (children's work, Nahua vs. mestizo cultural representations, histories that are told, perspective of the subjects that were taught, etc.), and classroom life as a whole (Frank & Bird 1999). Through participant observation within the classroom, I was able to identify patterns of behavior in how children interacted with each other and how they interacted with their teacher, as well as patterns in language, rules, activities, and schedules. An analysis of these patterns is addressed in the chapters that follow. The above sections show that, choosing certain methodologies over others required me to understand the context of the field, both within the home and the school. Additionally, so does the consideration of what ethical issues there may or may not be and how to handle them. As I did my research, I had to address ethical questions reflexively throughout the process of the research, not just at the beginning or at the end, but it is a continual process of looking at the context of each situation where an ethical issue might arise (Christensen & Prout 2002).

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations that I had to be aware of while doing research in this Nahua community, particularly with the children, were challenges of privacy and confidentiality, power relationships between researcher/participant and adult/child, and representing voice. Research within the new social studies of childhood indicate that part of the ethical considerations of doing interviews with children is maintaining privacy and confidentiality (Valentine 1999). Under these considerations, in order to protect children from any recourse in what they may reveal during an interview to their parents or guardian who is also present, children should be interviewed separately from other adults, and their responses during the interview kept confidential (Valentine 1999). However, what these fail to address are instances where it is not feasible to interview children separately and to do so being considered culturally inappropriate. The ideal child in the West is one that is separated from the spaces of adults and instead has spaces that are appropriate for them to occupy (i.e. classrooms, playrooms, individual bedrooms, etc.) (Bolin 2010; Schildkrout 2002). Additionally, Western children are taught to be independent individuals (Holmes 1998). Therefore, these ethical considerations with privacy and

confidentiality that surround working with children are created under the institutional logic of the protected, innocent, and independent child. However, within Papalotlan, such considerations do not carry the same weight, as this community does not have separate spaces for children and adults and the family and community is interdependent (Fernandez 2006, 2012). As a result, very little is ever hidden from children as they witness all aspects of life, and within such a small community there is very little that is not known by all members. Therefore, once arriving in the community, I realized that my ability to follow such regulations would not be appropriate and nearly impossible. It would have created further ethical problems had I asked to do interviews with children in private or that I attempt to keep who I was working with hidden. This could have ultimately created an environment of suspicion and a lack of trust not only between the children and their parents, but also between the community and me. As a result, it was often the case that children were interviewed within the presence of their parents and other adults or other children, and that nearly everyone in the community was aware of where I was and what I was doing at all times. However, this does not mean that I did not attempt to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of those that participated. While what children said during interviews could not be kept private from those present, I did not give that information to anyone else outside of that setting, nor did I openly disclose whom I did interviews with and what was said. Privacy as an ethical consideration was easy to balance, but power as an adult researcher was more difficult.

As a white middle-class researcher from the United States, I came into the community in a position of power, not only based on my social status and the color of my skin, but as a researcher I was able to decide what information I wanted, how it was going to be collected, what would ultimately happen to this information once I left the field site, and who I was going to represent in the final product and how. In addition, as I came from outside of the community, and even outside of the country, differences in language had the possibility of creating issues of power. I came to the community having learned Spanish within an academic setting, while for those within the community Spanish is not their first language, but rather their second or even third and often learned informally or through very few years of schooling. This difference in language could have placed me in a position of power, had it not been that Spanish was also my second language. While I had studied it at the university level, my Spanish ability was not academic but conversational. This allowed me to hold conversations and perform interviews

with those that I worked with, but did not place me above them in terms of my ability to speak Spanish. In most cases, while their first language was Nahuatl, their ability to speak Spanish was far beyond mine, helping to create balance within this power dynamic. In some cases, children were required to translate a question for their parent during an interview, but this in and of itself limited my power in my position as a researcher as I was unable to know passed between them at this time as they discussed my question. It also gave children power within this space, reversing my role as an “adult” (see below for a further discussion on this child/adult power relationship). In addition to language, my initial contact into the community being through the school and in working directly with children my position as not only a researcher but also an adult added additional layers to this power dynamic. First, because of the relationship that I had with the school and the subject that I was researching, many people within the community associated me with working for the school. Generally, this may not cause any pause for ethical considerations, but the formal Western education system in Mexico has a long history of domination within the indigenous communities, which still extends into relationships today, especially between mestizo teachers and the community (see Chapter 3 for further discussion). The school as an institution causes symbolic violence within the community as it not only has the power to legitimize language, culture, and knowledge, but in combination with programs such as *Prospera*, it limits the choices that the community has available to them. Because of this history and current neoliberal programs, the school and those who work there, or have connections to the school, have a lot of power within the community. As a result, I was frequently asked whom I knew and what my connection was with those who worked in the school. This was done in order to determine the relationship that I had with the school and the power that I had because of those connections. Because of this, some members within the community did not wish to talk freely about the school or the teachers. Therefore, throughout the duration of the study, the relationship that I had with the school as well as with the community, required a continuous balancing act in order to minimize the effects that my relationship with the school would have on those that I worked with. This was achieved through building rapport with community members first, outside of the school, and assuring those that did participate, that I did not work for the school and that I would maintain their privacy in what they told me. In addressing the other aspects of power that I had, such as my social position and

being an adult working with children, one of the main approaches that I utilized to minimize this through positing myself as a learner and helping families with work.

Researchers may be wary of the significance that participant observation can have when working with children because adults are not able to be full participants in children's social worlds as they can never be fully children again (Punch 2002). However, while this may be accurate, we can position ourselves within these social worlds in such a way that fosters learning and understanding from the perspective of children. While children are knowledge producers, they are also learners. Though I cannot become a child again, nor can I be a child in Papalotlan, I was able to take on the role of learner through participant observation. This required me to see myself as a learner and children as the knowledge producers (Mayall 2008). Positioning myself as a learner was ultimately an easy task as no amount of studying and reading about Nahua communities would have prepared me for the experience of doing research in Papalotlan. Not only had I never been to this area before, but also Spanish is not my first language and I do not speak Nahuatl. As a result, the community saw me as a naïve *gringa*, or *siuapil*, young girl in Nahuatl, who knew nothing of what they said when they spoke in Nahuatl and knew very little about living in that environment. As a result, they maintained power within the researcher and participant relationship because if it were not for them agreeing to be my guide, help me with my research, and ultimately survive; sitting here writing this would not have been possible. Because the community saw me as knowing very little, I was considered a quasi-child not only among the adults but among the children as well, who needed to be taught.

I say quasi-child because I occupied a liminal space where I was considered both a child and an adult, and neither at the same time, allowing me access to both the worlds of the children and the adults. While they often called me a child, I did not have to abide by the same rules as the children as I was able to freely ask questions of adults and participate in adult roles, but I was also allowed to occupy spaces with children with ease. On the other hand, children did not necessarily see me as another child, like their siblings or other children in the community, but neither did they treat me as an adult. In order to maintain this position, I did not act in any authoritative manner or provide any discipline in order to minimize my role as an adult (Holmes 1998). Because of my position, children frequently assisted me in explaining various cultural processes within both the community and the classroom as experts of their physical and social worlds. However, while children frequently saw me this way, it did not change the fact that I

was an adult, which became significant when doing other aspects of research. As I took on authoritative roles, as the researcher, children saw me as an adult, making interviews difficult at times to complete. My positionality within the community, due to both the lack of knowledge that I had of life in the community and as a quasi-child, helped to minimize the power relationship between me as a researcher and those that I worked with. Some researchers within the new social studies of childhood indicate, “unequal power relationship[s] need not be an obstacle to the research process. By acknowledging, rather than ignoring or trying to mask the different standpoints of the adult research and child informant, good conversations with children can be had” (James 2007:269; Mayall 2008). However, while I agree that unequal power relationships between children and adults do not need to be an obstacle within the research process, through attempts to “mask” my adulthood, the conversations that I did have with the children were better. This is not to say that I think that I fooled them into believing that I was actually a child, but rather by attempting as much as I could to reverse the relationship of teacher and learner, I was able to minimize some of the qualities that came as a result of being older. Regardless of how the power relationships of me as an adult researcher and those that I worked with were constructed, minimized, or addressed within research, I did not have complete power over the project because *all* of those that participated were engaged in the process in creating and producing data throughout the research process. As a result, the research process is not simply produced through the power of the researcher, but is a collaborative effort and balance of power between everyone involved.

During the duration of the research, as a means of returning the assistance and help that I was provided and again to minimize any power that I still had through the collection cultural knowledge, I assisted families with work as a process of reciprocal exchange. Helping each other is a key aspect of life in the community, as it is the means through which everyone is taken care of, and how family is defined (Fernandez 2006, 2012; Valle 2012; Velazquez 2012). By engaging in these networks of help and work, through making tortillas, collecting firewood, running errands, carrying produce on market days, etc., I was able to provide service in return for the knowledge that the community allowed me access. By giving back in this manner, I was not seen as being there to steal information, but as a surrogate member of families within the community. In addition, to participating in these reciprocal networks, I will be returning a

summary of my findings back to the community and school as a means of returning the knowledge that they provided me (see the Conclusion of this thesis for more information).

As I utilized methods of conversations, interviews, and participant observation in order to understand and co-produce voice with children, I had to consider, the role that the voices of the children in the community would play in the research project and what new insights could be provided from understanding the perspective of these children (James 2007). Addressing such questions would ensure that I was not simply seeking to understand and represent their voices for the sake of studying children or perpetuating harmful generalizations of “the child”, but rather because they are social actors who have deep understandings about the world around them and their experiences (James 2007). Since it is difficult for an adult to speak truthfully to the experience of a child, in order to understand the experiences that children in this community have within formal Western education, I had to be able to discuss this with the children themselves. Additionally, children provided a key perspective and insights into social systems of the community. As they occupied the peripheries of such systems, they provided a perspective that was not necessarily different, but a more complete picture, of the system and how such things are learned. Once the *why*, of including the perspective of children into my research model, the next question I had to address within this process was the *how*. This is not the literal how, in terms of methodologies that I discussed in the previous section, but how would I, ethically, represent the voices of the children that I worked with?

I believe that this is a question that as anthropologists, we often grapple with, whether we are working with children or adults. The populations that anthropologists work with tend to be marginalized and historically silenced. At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, it hasn't been until within the last few decades, with the new social studies of childhood and attempts at policy, that advocates for the voice and rights of the child (i.e. the UNCRC), that children's voices have become a major focal point within the discipline. However, I not only worked with children, but with an indigenous community, adding another facet to the identity of being marginalized and silenced. Therefore, how do I, the one transcribing, analyzing, and conceptualizing all that was collected, accurately represent their voices? Through my analysis and the process of writing, am I further silencing those I worked with (James 2007; Valentine 1999)? While within this thesis, I utilize the voices of children through examples of ethnographic scenes and quotations derived from interviews, I am the one

who chose these scenes and quotations and inserted them into this text “to illustrate an argument or underline a point of view” (James 2007:265). Additionally, throughout the process of doing interviews, the majority of those that I worked with did not allow the interviews to be recorded. As a result, the quotations that are provided within this text were not recorded word for word, but through processes of active listening, jotting notes throughout the day and directly after interviews. Through this process, I was able to maintain, for the most part, close to the exact words that were spoken. While they may not be word for word quotations, the extent to which I was able to remember what was said, I am comfortable in quoting them, and representing their voices in this way. Additionally, as an adult, I have been given control over the voices of the children that I worked with. While these things are true, it does not necessarily mean that through the process of representing children’s, and adult’s, voices within the text is silencing them. This is because there is no way for me to escape this process of recording, translating, and analyzing the voices of those I worked with, and therefore these voices “should be regarded as standpoints, places from which any analysis sets out, rather than definitive descriptions of empirical phenomena” (James 2007:269). Thus, while the voices, either verbal or nonverbal, of those that I worked with may be taken out of the context in which they occurred and placed within this text in order to speak of the experiences of the children and members of Papalotlan, it is through their voices that the analysis is able to take place and take shape. Just as research is not solely produced by the researcher, but is co-produced because of the collaboration between the researcher and those participating, voice is also co-produced in that voice can only be represented with the researcher and the participants working together in creating an understanding of their perspective (James 2007).

Conclusion

There is an idea of “the child” that has been exported around the world through varying state and international institutions as a result of neoliberal policies and globalization, and it stems for a Western institutional logic of what childhood and children should be. However, within this chapter I have discussed the ways in which this idea of the ideal child does not accurately represent all forms of childhood in the world, especially in Papalotlan. As a result, I had to be able to choose methods that accurately reflected the context of the community. I did not utilize methods that singled out children for childlike skills, used Western education based knowledge, such as drawings and journals, or techniques based in technology. Thus, I was able

to honor the context in which children are seen as knowledge producers who occupy spaces of adults, where knowledge is not written, and where technology is rarely used. The use of such methods allowed me to explore agency in what children were willing to tell me, as an adult, during interviews and learn to utilize other methods, such as storytelling and child-directed conversations. It also provided me with the space to understand voice in a new context, through looking at the knowledge and relationships that are created without the use of words, but through movement. As I explored these methods and learned what would work and what wouldn't within the community, I was also coming to understand the ethical challenges that I would face and how I would overcome these in the field. While privacy originally proved to be a significant barrier to overcome, it became easy as I adjusted what I expected to be able to keep secret between parents and children and the community. Power also proved insurmountable as I came with my own American background, a language barrier, connection to the school, and my positionality as an adult. However, through building rapport within the community and becoming a learner I was able to minimize the effects that such power had on this research, and come to understand truly, how research is co-produced. Additionally, I came to see how voice is created within research, as researcher and community working together. Finally, through this understanding, being able to overcome personally, the ethical challenge within anthropology of silencing those that we work with through the research process. Ultimately, the process of learning and navigating the methodological and ethical considerations in working with these Nahua children showed me the dangers in generalizing childhood and what could occur when such ideas are exported around the world. In the following chapter, I address further the challenges that Papalotlan faces as neoliberal policies, such as those found in the school, but also in relation to the economy, effect the form of childhood within this community. I explore this idea through looking more specifically at childhood in Papalotlan and the learning practices that result from the connection between livelihoods and childhood and how these have the potential to be altered by neoliberal policies.

Chapter 2
A Nahua Learning Process and the Construction of Childhood

Introduction

It's 6:00 am on a Tuesday. I arrive at the Santiago's home; they are just opening their *tienda* or small shop. "*Niguala*," "I come" I say in Nahuatl, standing in the doorway. Miguel's father calls out "*weuno*," "It is well," from behind the shelves. I enter the store, and head to the small set of stairs that connect the store to their home. Santi greets me at the top of the stairs, handing me a cup and asking to get him some coffee. Luciana is already at the stove building the fire and preparing corn for tortillas. Xochit and Itzel are putting the bedding away, rolling up mats and blankets and placing them in the corner of the room. Hens with their broods of chicks come in search of food; Xochit scatters corn kernels and rice on the floor. Their dog, Pingy, sneaks in, looking for tortillas or scraps of food from the night before, Itzel chases him out of the house. Xochit helps her mother with the food while Itzel gets Santi dressed. It's nearly 8:00 am and time for school. Itzel and Xochit scramble to finish getting ready, grabbing notebooks and pencils and stuffing them in their backpacks. I step outside to wait to walk to school with them, other children are running up the hill, trying to get to school before the bell rings, they smile or call out a greeting as they scurry pass. Some of them have left an hour or more before school starts, walking a couple of miles or more to get there. We are just outside the gates of the school when one of the *maestros* rings the bell. Xochit and Itzel run to their classes.

Once school is over, children pour into the streets, laughing and running around, though this time not because they are late, but because they are playing tag. They stop inside the *tiendas* to buy sweets and *paletas* (popsicles) to eat on their walk home. They use the last peso or two that remain from the money they were given to take to school in order to buy the snacks that women sell in the courtyard. Many of the children linger on stoops, talking with friends or trying to catch a glimpse of a TV in one of the few houses that have them. Once the children have returned to their homes, backpacks and notebooks put away, and they start sharing in the work of the home. They go and collect wood, buy tomatoes or beans for the evening meal, care for siblings, wash clothes, sweep, or feed the chickens and turkeys. However, it is not all work. They also play in the jungle, climbing trees, collecting leaves, flowers, twigs, unripe coffee beans, and kumquats, to make "medicines" and "foods". Others find limes, oranges, or passion fruits that have fallen and roll them down the steep streets, seeing how far

they can get it before it is stuck in the rivets, or they are collecting rocks and other natural materials to stack and build small structures. Some of the boys gather in front of the school and play soccer, using old soda bottles or rocks as goal posts. Boys of all ages play; even fathers join in the game, not in any particular role of coach or referee, but just another player on the team. It is more about having fun than it is about winning, and rarely are they upset for a missed goal or perceived foul. You can also find children in the library, some are reading books while others are talking or playing computer or card games with the young man who works there. The community is full of life; roosters crowing, dogs barking, the sound of wood being chopped, the rhythmic slap of masa as tortillas are made, the sound of laughter and conversation, the sounds of work, play, and community.

As was established in the previous chapter, childhood is not a universal concept, what it means to be a child is different in the United States than it is in Mexico. Even within Mexico, being a mestizo child from an urban area is a different construction of childhood than in a rural Nahua community. However, as was discussed in Chapter 1, the institutional logic of Western childhood is implemented in communities, like Papalotlan, through institutions such as medicine and education, aid organizations, and legislation. The Western form of childhood that was discussed in the previous chapter has its own social and historical roots. Childhood in the West has gone through a transition where children were once economically useful to being transformed into “economically ‘worthless’ but emotionally ‘priceless’” (Cunningham 2005; Zelizer 1985:3). Beginning in the 14th century, in Europe, the work of children was centered in the home and not in outside industry. As time went on, and industrialization was introduced, family dynamics began to change and parents and children began to work outside of the home in various industries. Therefore, while the family unit was no longer working as a whole, all family members were contributing with a working wage (Cunningham 2005). Since children had been involved in working for decades, by the time that industry was growing rapidly the sight of children working was commonplace, and they had specific roles and jobs within the work force (Cunningham 2005). Cunningham attributes the removal of children from the workforce as a direct result of the dangerous working conditions and the large number of child deaths within industry that was occurring in Europe, and then later in the United States. Additionally, children were removed from the workforce at the same time that they are removed from the streets, beginning with the invention of the automobile. Since the streets were once the children’s

playground a large number of children were killed after being hit by automobiles. Thus, they were no longer allowed to play or work on the street (Zelizer 1985). As children began to be removed from the street and placed into what were seen as appropriate spaces (homes and schools), definitions of the role of the child began to change. In addition to being removed from the street, as industry continued to succeed, incomes were on the rise and schooling became the means of creating a well-educated and skilled labor force (Cunningham 2005; Zelizer 1985). Now, families could afford to put (and keep) their children in school and at home. Subsequently, children lost their role as wage earners within the family, and as they lost their economic usefulness, they became seen as passive rather than active participants in the world (Zelizer 1985; Schildkrout 2002). Additionally, as new government policies were created through modernization, namely neoliberalism, children became seen again as economically useful as consumers of the global market (Apple 2006).

The institutional logic of the Western child, a child who is a consumer and passive in their home and community lives, is carried and implemented by those who are agents of institutions (Fassin 2015). It is because of this that I use Western childhood to juxtapose Nahua childhood rather than mestizo. While I could compare the urban mestizo childhood to what is experienced in Papalotlan, it would still be the Western institutional logic that would be discussed. This institutional logic of childhood and learning that has been brought into this community, primarily through the school, does not match the experiences of Papalotlan children. This is because Nahua childhood has its own history and social construction that developed in its own right. Just as Western childhood has gone through societal and historical shifts over hundreds of years, “indigenous” childhood are not the same today as it was pre-conquest, but rather is a product of colonialism and the social currents that followed. Often, indigenous people and their knowledge, practices, etc. are seen as unchanging and stuck in the past (Battiste 2005; Urrieta 2013; Setalaphruk & Price 2007). Therefore, when I use the term indigenous childhood, I am not using it in order to talk about what it meant to be an indigenous child pre-conquest, but to talk about childhood today. I also utilize the term “post-colonial” childhood in order to address this change in history from pre-conquest, conquest, and then the shifts post-colonization. Instead of focusing on the historical shifts that have created what childhood in Papalotlan is today, I will be focusing on the current constructions of childhood (for more information on the historical development of childhood among indigenous groups in

Mexico, see Ardren & Huston 2006; De Lucia 2010; Joyce 2000; Soustelle 2002). Just as the institutional logic of childhood in the West is always changing depending on the social currents of the time, childhood in Nahua communities are also being redefined. These shifts in childhood come in part because of shifts in the livelihoods of their parents and the children themselves (Ohmagari & Berkes 1997; Chamoux 1986, 2010, 2015; Valle 2012; Katz 2004; Fernandez 2006; Velazquez 2012; Gonzalez 2013).

Livelihoods are connected to childhood because children in Nahua communities are observing and participating from very young ages in family and community work directly. They are not segregated to their own spaces within the community or the home, and as a result they are able to learn through helping and working with those around them (Fernandez 2006, 2012; Valle 2012; Velazquez 2012). As they engage within livelihoods and with those around them they are not only gaining the knowledge about that particular task, such as agricultural work, making tortillas, or any number of household chores, but they are creating a sense of understanding, of what it means to help and “how to live with people and respect people at home and in the community” (research participant, Juan Martinez). This sense of relatedness that is developed between the child and the people they engage in learning and life together extends beyond human interaction and into building a sense of relatedness with the animals and the environment that they encounter, which extends further into an understanding of the metaphysical and cosmological world (Barnhardt 2005; Bolin 2010; Simpson 2014). As was discussed in the introduction of this thesis, agricultural work is the main livelihood that people in the community engage in. Because of the long history in this region of agricultural work, their knowledge is rooted in the land that they have long inhabited (Barnhardt 2005; Simpson 2014; Battiste 2005; Valle 2012; Chamoux 2015; Fernandez 2006; Velazquez 2012). As knowledge is rooted in the livelihoods of the community, the learning process that is utilized in order to teach must allow for deep emersion into the spaces of learning and exposure to a wide variety of knowledge in order for livelihoods, knowledge, and community to survive (Barnhardt 2005; Chamoux 2015).

As children engage with, help, and work within the livelihoods of the home and community, it is also structuring the learning process that is found in Nahua communities. Since the learning process is made up observations, play, and participation, it comes as a result of observing and working alongside a life in motion. Because children are able to observe and

participate in nearly all aspects of their life, it creates an environment where the learning process relies on observation and participation (Chamoux 2015). As livelihood, knowledge, and learning processes converge, it creates a form of childhood that is unique in its own right, as unique as the community itself. Children are creating themselves through the lives that they observe and participate in, through the knowledge that they are able to embody, and through their own process. As a result, childhood in Papalotlan is one that reflects strong family relationships that are built on work and help, freedom in movement and imagination, and freedom to engage in the world around them at their own pace. Such a childhood is different from the childhood that has been constructed under the institutional logic of the West, where children are separated from the livelihoods of their parents and the community (Cunningham 2005; Zelizer 1985). This separation from home and community livelihood creates a different construction of childhood, the knowledge that children have, and the ways in which knowledge is transmitted.

This chapter seeks to explain and show the connections that exist between livelihood, knowledge, learning practices, and the construction of childhood within Papalotlan. I will begin with an explanation of how knowledge is produced within the community, which will then be followed by a discussion of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) (Lave & Wenger 1991) in order to introduce the learning process within this Nahua community. This learning process consists of observation, play and imitation, and participation. As I explain each aspect of this learning process, I will also indicate how shifts in livelihoods due to neoliberalism, modernization, and the exportation of the Western logic of childhood through institutions, has created possible rifts in not only the construction of childhood but the learning process as well.

Knowledge Transmission

The form of knowledge transmission that I found in Papalotlan, and can be seen in other Nahua communities, is a result of how the roles of student and teacher are defined, and how the community sees children in terms of their agency in the learning process. As these two things converge, we are presented with a type of knowledge transmission that is interdependent rather than from teacher to learner (Lancy 2010; Fernandez 2006; Velazquez 2012). When this occurs, children have freedom in how and when they learn, adults are only models of behavior (Chamoux 2015, 1986), and knowledge is transmitted through keen, direct observation and participation as parents, community members, and children are engaged in

livelihoods together (Urrieta 2013; Chamoux 1986, 2010, 2015; Valle 2012; Fernandez 2006; Katz 2004; Velazquez 2012). Before I go into more detail about the roles of children and adults and their agency, and the resulting form of knowledge transmission, let me explain what I mean by the transmission of knowledge.

Knowledge transmission is the transmission of cultural, linguistic, and social knowledge that is needed in order for children to learn how behave socially, and to ensure the continuation of the community (Fernandez 2006; Chamoux 2010; Barnhardt 2005). However, in using the term knowledge transmission, I do not mean knowledge being passed unidirectional from adult to child, but rather knowledge being transmitted through children and adults producing, exchanging, and engaging in knowledge as they move through life together (Katz 2004). In this sense, knowledge transmission, is not transmission in that each generation is “handing down a corpus of disembodied context-free information,” but rather that parents, other family members, and children create spaces and contexts within which the learners are able to “develop their own embodied skills of perception and action” (Ingold 2001:142). The creation of these contexts and spaces is key within the learning process and for the transmission of knowledge (Chamoux 1986). However, in order for these spaces to achieve the process of learning that I encountered within Papalotlan, the relationship between student and teacher must be interdependent and children need to be seen as having agency in the learning process. Let me explain further what this means.

It was Sunday afternoon, around two o'clock. Sunday is market day in Quetzalan, the day that the families from the surrounding villages go to either sell or buy items that are not found within the community. For Miguel, Sunday is the day to go buy the produce for the *tienda*. For the majority of the Sundays that my husband and I were in the community we accompanied him to the market, in order to help him carry his produce. However, this particular Sunday, we remained behind with his wife and children to help them in the home. I was sitting in their kitchen with their daughters when he arrived; Luciana and Santi were in the store. It is a small shop, one room. A long counter sits in the center of the room and plastic containers full of candy sit atop of it. There is a small walkway in front of the counter with crates of vegetables lining the wall on the other side. Behind the counter on tall shelves are packages of beans, rice, milk, oil, toilet paper, soap, toothpaste, and other toiletries and dry goods. When I heard him arrive, I went into the store just as he was unloading the crates of produce. He carried the crates

one by one from outside, sitting them on the floor of the *tienda* as my husband went to help him. Once all the crates had been brought inside, Miguel started transferring the new produce into the crates, still containing the last of the tomatoes, chilies, and lemons from the previous week. As he worked, Santi came and started to help. He picked up a bag of the produce and attempted to lift them into the crate, but being only three years old, he couldn't reach. His father took the bag from him, and emptied out the contents. Santi moved to the next crate, heads of cabbage. He took one of them out and began walking away with it in his hands. As I watched, I thought he was taking it back into the house and so did his parents. They said his name, indicating for him to stop what he was doing. Instead, he kept walking, without a word. Santi reached his destination, just behind the counter, where he sat the cabbage down and began pulling off the dead, discolored leaves. His father chuckled as he realized what Santi was doing, having forgotten that this needed to be done. Having finished peeling of the last of the leaves, he walked the cabbage to the appropriate crate, set it in, and continued this process with the remaining two heads. Once he finished, he moved on to what was still left to be unloaded, the watermelons. He tried to lift the crate, push it, and pull it in order to move it closer to the ones on the wall, but it was too heavy. When he couldn't move the crate, Santi decided to try to lift each individual watermelon. When his father realized what he was going to do, and fearing that Santi, in his attempt to lift the watermelon would in fact drop it, stopped him, and placed the watermelons in their appropriate crate. Having finished in helping his father, Santi scampered off to find one of his sisters.

I use this scene in order to explore the interdependent relationship of teacher and learner as well as the agency that Nahua children have as they learn. In Western society, the relationship of teacher and student is reinforced at a very early age (Lancy 2010). This relationship consists of parents structuring play, activities, interactions with other children, and even their child's imagination in order to ensure that their intelligence and optimum potential are realized (Lancy 2010). This is done through telling children *how* they are to play, *how* they are to learn, and *how* they should understand the world around them, often accompanied by verbal instructions and direct teaching (Lancy 2010). The endeavor to control and structure children's lives in this manner comes because of the emphasis being on teaching rather than learning (Valle 2012). However, in the example of Santi, it shows Santi's ability to perform a task without any direct teaching. Instead, the parents allowed him to help in what way that he could.

Here they created an opportunity for him to participate in family work, yet his participation was not required, nor were instructions on what to do or how to do the task given. The goal was for Santi to learn not for his parents to teach. Therefore, instruction is not coming in a single direction, from parent to child, but the relationship was interdependent as Santi depended on the creation of this context in his ability to acquire knowledge. Additionally his father depends on Santi learning how to do such tasks on his own so that as he grows, he will be able to take on more responsibility as his knowledge increases. As a result of learning rather than teaching being at the center of knowledge transmission in Nahua communities, children also have more freedom in their process of learning than their Western counterparts (Lancy 2012).

In this sense, children such as Santi, and others in Papalotlan, are given freedom as they acquire knowledge. The agency of children is a relatively new topic within the academy as well as among policy makers and aid organizations. However, the agency of children within post-colonial communities has long been a part of the conversation. For instance, in the above example of Santi, he was not asked to help his father but assisted because he wanted to. Such agency is crucial in the child's ability to acquire knowledge. This is because not only is the emphasis is on learning, but among the Nahua knowledge is seen as something that is embodied within a person, not something that is external. It is only through independent learning within an interdependent structure with those who are present, can one truly acquire the knowledge needed to survive (Chamoux 2015). Therefore, Santi had to act on his own accord within this process of helping and learning in order to truly engage with and understand the knowledge needed to help and work within the *tienda*. Thus, it is imperative that children are presented with these spaces and contexts so that they, along with their parents, other children, and community members, can engage with and exchange knowledge (Katz 2004). These spaces are not structured and predefined, but rather any time and any space, can result in a moment of learning (Chamoux 1986).

Once the context has been created, the role of the parent is not to insert knowledge into the child, but rather to show how to do something or be the model of behavior (Chamoux 1981). The role of the parent, adult, or other child, is simply to be present within that space in order to accompany, protect, care, provide any necessary assistance, and to encourage and promote observation and participation (Chamoux 2015). The creation of the space for Santi to help his father was not intentional, but became the means for Santi to learn and participate. The

role that his father played was one of previously providing a model of behavior and then assistance when Santi could no longer accomplish the task due to his size. Santi navigated this space independently as he attempted to learn for himself how to accomplish the tasks that he had often seen his father doing. As children observe and participate, they are engaging in an internal process of understanding, knowledge formation, and self-building as a result of a will and desire to understand, learn, and help when they are ready (Chamoux 2015; Arauz 2005; Bolin 2010; Urrieta 2013). Learning in their own time was an important aspect of the learning process for many of the adults and children.

Luciana told me in reference to her daughters, “sometimes they help, but not always...they help when they want to.” Additionally, another young mother told me, discussing her toddler, “I do various things, and she does them also. When I do things in the kitchen or when I wash my clothes she follows me and tells me ‘mama, how do you do this? I want to do it also, teach me,’ and we do those things.” Other children also told me that they usually weren’t required to help but they helped because they wanted to. This not only reflects the systems of help that frame childhood that are discussed later, but it shows the active choice that children make in creating spaces of learning with those around them based on their own will and desire to learn, when they are ready. This is because the responsibility of learning resides within the individual, and the adult is not the only one involved in the creation of a space or context of learning. The literature indicates that the role of the adult is to provide the context and space for learning to occur, this connection is not made to the child’s responsibility, but rather they are treated as separate entities. However, I do not see them as such. Does the space of learning exist if the child decides not to engage with it and acquire that knowledge at that time? If Santi has the freedom in how and when he helps Miguel in the store, as the literature indicates, then he also has the ability to create spaces of learning in conjunction with other adults and children. Therefore, if Santi had decided not to engage in helping his father that space of learning would have dissolved. Thus, children are doing more than learning, but they are working with adults and other children in the creation of their own learning environments. In the West, adults are generally considered to hold the role of teacher while children are the learners, but within Papalotlan, children often learned from other children, though I saw little difference in the ways in which children learned with other children and from how children learned with adults. Again, this is because learning is coming from within the individual and the emphasis is on learning

rather than teaching. Here children exchange knowledge between each other as they engage in play, work, and daily life together and as older children care for younger children in the family (Tassinari & Codonho 2015; Bolin 2010). As children and adults engage in livelihoods and knowledge together, they are participating in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991).

Legitimate Peripheral Participation

Communities of practice is a theory used by Lave and Wenger to describe learning as a social phenomenon and the cornerstone of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) (1991). Within a community of practice, learning is situated within social contexts, which results in the dynamic formation of knowledge through and in relation to those around us (1991). While all members of the community of practice engage through participation, the members are not involved at the same level, but their involvement varies depending on age, strength, and ability (Lave & Wenger 1991; Valle 2012; Fernandez 2006; Chamoux 2010). As a result, those that Lave and Wenger term as “new comers,” are seen as occupying peripheral spaces where they begin with lessened production, decreased risk, special assistance, observation, and supervision until they are able to gain more knowledge (1991). It is within these peripheries that new comers are both inside and outside the community of practice, which allows them to re-create and form their own identities and ways of understanding in relation to not only the knowledge that they are acquiring, but also those who are also within the community (1991). While new comers occupy the space at the periphery this does not mean that full members or masters are located within the center of the community, but rather all participants are potentially peripheral. While this may seem contradictory, it can be explained by the fact that “peripheral” is not a location contrasted to the center, but it signifies the fluidity of the learning process and the mobility for participants to move throughout the community of practice depending on the spaces that they occupy (Lave and Wenger 1991; Katz 2004). In this process of moving within the community of practice all members of the community are engaging in the process of producing and exchanging knowledge, much like the process of knowledge transmission that was discussed in the previous section. This overlap between knowledge transmission and LPP comes as a result of the spaces in which children are acquiring knowledge are also the spaces in which they are engaging in legitimate peripheral participation.

From the time that Nahua children are being carried in a shawl on their mother’s back they are observing life within the community. As they grow and continue to observe,

participate, and interact with the people and world around them, they are acquiring knowledge about their social, physical, and metaphysical environments. Very little of life in the community is hidden from their view, and as a result they observe and participate in the livelihoods of their families. However, it is more than just the lack of division in the spaces of children and adults that constitutes children's observation and participation in community and family livelihoods, but the concept of work and help within Nahua communities that allows for the integration of children into community and family livelihoods at very young ages (Fernandez 2012). The concept of work is centered on acts of helping family members as a part of a social network based on reciprocal exchanges and interdependence (Fernandez 2006, 2012; Valle 2012; Velazquez 2012). It is this idea of working together that creates and defines the community (Good 2005).

While children are involved in the livelihoods of adults through this concept of helping, they are not always involved at the same level as everyone else around them. This is because within this community, children learn *poco a poco*, little by little. When discussing the learning process parents would describe to me how children are provided with small tasks when they are young, carrying a few pieces of wood but nothing beyond their strength and not handling machetes, or helping to cook but only making tortillas when they are able to reach the *metat*⁷ and not using sharp knives. Once they grew taller, stronger, and gained more experience, they were given more responsibility, such as wielding a machete or making tortillas on the *metat*. For instance as I attended religious celebrations, funerals, graduations, fiestas, and social visits, children were always present, never not included. However, while they were there, they rarely were at the forefront of such activities, but in the background, watching and participating in little ways. I was not able to witness many religious rituals while I was there, whether this was because many did not occur during my stay in the community, or because I was too new that they did not feel comfortable revealing them to me. However, I was able to attend the religious rituals surrounding funeral rites as well as their local celebration of *Nuestro Padre Jesús*. In both of these instances, I was able to see how LPP functioned within the community as children observe what happens and were involved in the rituals. This progression helped them learn how to do the rituals and what they mean. I am going to use an example from the celebration of

⁷ The *metat* is ground stone used in the kitchen to grind grain or seeds, but is primarily used to grind corn for tortillas.

Nuestro Padre Jesús to explain this, but first I must discuss cargo systems, as these are key in understanding this celebration and children's participation in this aspect of community life.

Cargo systems can be found throughout Mesoamerica, and date back to the conquest (Dewalt 1975). They combine indigenous and Spanish practices and were developed as a response to the stress indigenous communities faced post-conquest as an adaptive strategy (Horstman & Kurtz 1979). Within the cargo system, there are two branches, civil and religious cargos. Within each one, there is a hierarchy of positions (Sanchez & Almeida 1992). Civil cargos refer to the political positions within the community, from the president to the community representatives, and all those in between (Sanchez & Almeida 1992). The religious cargos are responsible for the religious life of the populations and provide for the ceremonial and life cycles for the villages. The *mayordomias* (keepers of the saints), are part of this cargo system (this is the position in the cargo system that is described in the ethnographic example below). This particular position within the cargo system rotates yearly, but not every position rotates on a yearly basis, and is dependent on the position. The positions in the cargo system are voluntary, though there are strong social pressures to participate (Dewalt 1975). While it is voluntary, all adult men in the community are expected to serve in the hierarchy at some point. The positions within the cargo systems are unpaid, and some positions like the *mayordomias*, involve substantial expenditures for those that hold the position (Dewalt 1975). This is because the families are responsible to provide all the necessary items (such as candles, incense, flowers, food, and clothes for the saint), without any monetary reimbursement, though they are rewarded with prestige within the community (Dewalt 1975). Because of the expense associated with participating in the cargo system, the systems are often seen as a leveling mechanism for the community to ensure that one family is not accumulating more wealth than others (Dewalt 1975). In addition, one of the key components of the cargo system is that men hold the positions. While women do participate it is only in relation to a man's role in the position (Mathews 1985). As a result, the cargo system requires all male cargo participants be adults, at least 18 years old (Reyes 2005). Though, in the community of Papalotlan, and other Nahua communities, since marriage becomes a means of passing from child to adult (Chamoux 2015; Fernandez 2006), those who are participating in the cargos are married men. In addition, within the literature on cargo systems (Ortiz 2005; Reyes 2005; Sanchez & Almeida 1992; Dewalt 1975; Chick 1981; Friedlander 1981; Mathews 1985; Neurath 2000; Horstman & Kurtz 1979) because

only adults are able to participate, children are rarely mentioned. However, as I will show in the following example of the celebration for *Nuestro Padre Jesús*, children may not be participating directly in the cargo system, but the ways that they do participate is a means of learning about the cargo system and the rituals associated with this celebration.

During the celebration of *Nuestro Padre Jesús*, the Felix family had the responsibility of having the altar with the figure of the saint in their home for the year as the *mayordomia*. In addition, there were five other families within the community that provided the flowers once a month for the altar, as their part in the cargo system. They were the Santiago, Diego, Sanchez, Flores, and the Hernandez families. My husband and I attended the celebration as part of the Santiago family as we helped to serve plates of tortillas, rice, and *mole*⁸ to those in attendance. The celebration was in early August, and these families gathered to provide the celebration in honor of this saint's day. Preparations lasted nearly a week as they gathered to plan, make intricate flower decorations, and ensure that all was ready for the final celebration. Through all stages of the planning, preparation, and the actual celebration, children were present, though not directly involved, because of the regulations of the cargo. On the day of the celebration, groups of women made large vats of *mole* and rice and thousands of tortillas in a small outdoor kitchen of the Felix's house, as children played and sat in the kitchen watching and tending to other small children. Men lit rockets, as children chased them into the jungle, looking for what was left. Other children carried rice, *mole*, and tortillas up to the main house or filled pitchers of water and juice. *Voladores*⁹ danced in honor of god in front of the altar in the house and at the church. The celebration started mid-morning as a continuous stream of members from the community and family members of the *mayordomia* visited the house and paid their respects to the saint. That evening, the families burned incense, arranged vases of flowers, lit candles, and cleaned and dressed the figure of the saint in new clothes. More people arrived to join the

⁸ *Mole* is a Mexican dish that is made out of dried ancho chilies and is often served over chicken. Within this community, this dish is usually only served for special occasions such as graduations, funerals, fiestas, rituals, welcoming guests, etc.

⁹ The *Voladores* is a group of five male dancers. Every week on Sunday, during the market the *Voladores* climb to the top of a pole in the center of town, where four of them attach themselves to ropes and swing down the pole, the fifth member of the group stays at the top playing the flute and drums as he dances. After his dance, he too swings down to the ground. Previously, this only took place in once a year in November, but has since become a tourist attraction and occurs weekly. However, the ritual itself, according to my research participants, is done to honor god. In addition to climbing the pole weekly, the group also attends celebrations, such as the one described above.

procession. We lined up outside, the figure at the front, men, women, and children following. Women and children carried candles and vases of flowers as we walked up the hill to the church. Once we arrived, the figure was placed on the altar, and adults and children went and touched it, crossing themselves. We sat in the pews of the church and the priest talked as men offered shots of alcohol.

Here we can see the different levels at which children are involved within the celebration through being present within the space but engaging with it through either observation, play, or participation. As children grow older, as they observe and engage, they shape and are shaped by the knowledge that they gain as they learn *poco a poco*, as they move further into participation in family and community livelihoods. During this ceremony, children were involved in all aspects of this ceremony, though indirectly. Since they are not adults, they were not allowed to participate in key aspects of the ceremony, such as dressing or blessing the saint, arranging flowers, or preparing the food. As a result, they were kept at the peripheries of the event. However, while in the peripheries, they observed and participated through caring for children, delivering food, or carrying objects during the procession. Such participation though indirect, allowed those who were fully integrated into the positions of the celebration to carry out their roles. This created the required space for them to watch, participate, and engage with rituals first hand so that when it comes time for them to hold this position in the cargo when they are older, they will be able to transition from the peripheries of the ceremony into full participation as they had already been a part of it (Bolin 2010).

In this section, I have discussed the role of LPP as a means of children learning and the connections this has to Nahua constructions of childhood and livelihoods. However, legitimate peripheral learning is only one aspect, albeit a broad one, in what is constituted within indigenous learning practices. The ways in which Nahua children navigate their community of practice, and move inward from the peripheries, is through observations, play, and participation. While in the following sections I separate observation from play, and these from participation, the reader must keep in mind that these are all a part of the broader picture of what it means to be a child and learn within this community.

Observation

As children are involved in all aspects of life, they are learning everything from daily tasks to rituals and a sense of relatedness among all life, but it is not simply that children are

expected to first observe and then do, as if it were a set of systematic behaviors that progress to the accumulation of knowledge. Rather, they are “authentic coordinated practices” that encourage children to both observe and participate (Urrieta 2013:321). However, ultimately Nahua children start the learning process through observations until they are mature enough to begin participating (Urrieta 2013; Chamoux 1986, 2010, 2015; Valle 2012; Fernandez 2006; Velazquez 2012). As young children accompany families to work in the fields planting corn, gathering wood, attending ceremonies and rituals, whether in the shawl or sitting in the fields watching and playing, children are present within the spaces that adults work and practice, observing all that is happening around them (Chamoux 2015).

Similar to the spaces that are created in order to promote learning in general, spaces are also created in order to promote and encourage children to observe (Chamoux 2015). Within these spaces parents, children, and other adults provide tasks and opportunities in order to promote attention. I saw this happen frequently through my fieldwork. If there was spilt corn on the ground parents would ask young children, three or four years old, to pick up each kernel *uno por uno* or having slightly older children, seven or eight, making change for money, running errands, and caring for younger siblings or other children. In these examples, the tasks were there in order to teach them to observe and to pay attention to what was happening around them, to make sure that each kernel of corn was picked up, that they gave the correct amount of change, or that everyone was taken care of (Chamoux 2015). Activities that promoted observation were promoted because according to those I worked with, learning was first done through watching. In interviews that I did with the children and parents, I asked them what the learning process was. How do you learn to make tortillas or how do children learn to cut wood? In response children and adults alike would say, “First they watch what I do, how I use the machete.” “I observe my mother, how she grinds the *masa* for tortillas.” However, while children observe the instances where their father uses the machete to cut corn, or the process to make tortillas, it isn’t that this observation happens over night, but rather it is a result of observing and watching the motions of life over an extended period of time (Ohmagari & Berkes 1997; Bolin 2010; Chamoux 1986).

As children observed the adults and other children in the community and in the home, their observations were keen, long, and with intense concentration (Urrieta 2013). During these times, they sought and were responsible for understanding and participating in the society. For

example, I watched as Feliz and Jazmine worked together to prepare the meal for the day. Jazmine was in charge of blending the tomatoes for the soup. Feliz handed her the tomatoes, and Jazmine took them over to the blender, and started blending. Once she was finished, she took it to her mom to ensure she had done it correctly, and after inspecting it Feliz motioned for her to follow her back to the blender. Feliz started the blender again, as the Jazmine stood next to her watching the tomatoes whirl around in the container. Once they were the desired consistency, Feliz stopped the blender, swirled the contents, and pointed at it, indicating to Jazmine that this is what it should look like. This was all done with very little explanation, as Jazmine intently watched her mother's movements and the tomatoes in order to learn the appropriate way of doing the task. There is an expectation to watch and learn, with little need for direct teaching through giving verbal instructions (Arauz 2005; Ohmagari & Berkes 1997; Urrieta 2013; Valle 2013; Chamoux 1986, 2010, 2015). Some Children and parents both indicated that verbal instruction were a part of the learning process, through it was considered last, and some didn't discuss it. As such, it was never the main aspect of learning. Rather children were expected not to need the explanation or an outline of how to accomplish a task, but to watch. Julius, the father of the Martinez family, said to me, "here, children pay attention when they learn, but they have to be doing something, watching something. If people only talk, children don't pay attention, they fall asleep, they get distracted." Verbal instruction is often not needed because observation is such a powerful tool in the learning process. For instance boys who have grown up watching their mothers make tortillas, though never done it themselves, if they are ever required to, are able to accomplish the task because they have been watching for so many years (Chamoux 2015). Since knowledge can be acquired through prolonged observation with little instruction, children can be highly integrated into home and community life.

In the West, as children have been removed from home and community livelihoods and placed into schools, the emphasis on observational learning (and experiential learning) is lost and seen as accidental or unintentional (though it still occurs) (Gaskins 2011). However, in this community, because childhood is constructed through the networks of help and thus in relation to home and community livelihoods, as they observe these spaces they are gaining insight into the knowledge that is connected with those spaces. Therefore, it is here that we see livelihood, knowledge, and learning practices converging to create a specific construction of childhood

through knowledge. However, the form of childhood that is constructed within Nahua communities would not be the same without access to these spaces of home and community life (Ohmagari & Berkes 1997; Chamoux 1986, 2010, 2015; Valle 2012; Katz 2004; Fernandez 2006; Velazquez 2012). This can be seen in the differences in the construction of childhood between the West and that of Nahua communities. Without access to spaces of planting or harvest, of caring for children, of making food, of sewing, of rituals or ceremonies, etc., children would not be able to observe and gain the knowledge associated with engaging with that space. For instance, as children observe and participate in planting corn, they are learning more than the technical aspects associated with the act of planting, they are learning about life cycles, the earth, weather, the environment, and a sense of interrelatedness not only with those who they work along with, but animals, the environment, and the cosmos (Fernandez 2006; Valle 2012). Without access to observe such spaces, technical knowledge as well as non-technical knowledge has the potential to be lost as livelihoods are altered. In the introduction of this thesis, I discuss the ways in which neoliberalism and modernization have changed the community livelihoods through the need of migration, land reforms, governmental policies (such as NAFTA), and new technologies. It is under these conditions, as people migrate, lose access to land for subsistence agriculture, or are provided with new technologies, which children have the potential to be alienated from the spaces that they once had access to or at least more access too (Katz 2004). If children cannot go into the fields until they are much older to work with coffee plants or with the corn, because their fathers are now wage laborers or their families have migrated, they are losing access to these spaces and thus the knowledge that is associated with them (Gonzalez 2013). In addition, as school becomes mandatory the children are spending more time within the classroom rather than engaging in spaces of their homes and community. As a result, there is a potential decrease in the time that is spent in these spaces, leading to less time for them to observe and participate in home and community life (I will return to this point later in this chapter) (Katz 2004; Barnhart 2005; Ohmagari & Berkes 1997; Simpson 2014; Urrieta 2013; Tassinari & Codonho 2015; Bolin 2010; Schildkrout 2002; Chamoux 2015).

Observations are only one facet of post-colonial learning practices, but as children watch the world around them, they are also expected to do as well. As children watch all that happens within the home and community, they are recording and committing to memory all that they see (Chamoux 1986). Thus, they are able to gain a thorough understanding of their

world as they grow, which “facilitates a smooth transition from observer to participant” (Bolin 2010:109). While observation alone can create a thorough understanding of technical knowledge, such as a boy being able to make a tortilla simply by having watched and memorized the act, observation still requires one to act on what they saw in order to solidify and build upon it (Chamoux 2010). Thus, while these boys and men can produce a tortilla if the need arises, these tortillas are misshapen, too thick, and imperfect compared to those who have acted and built upon that knowledge. In addition, without the act of participation children would not be able to engage in the reciprocal help networks that are central to Nahua childhood. Feliz discussed with me this transition. She was discussing one of her sons and said, in relation to the learning process, “The children, they watch things, they learn. For example, my child, the things I do here, he wants to do also, everything, it doesn’t matter what.” In this example, this mother is discussing how her young child *wants* to help her with things, so he watches her in order to understand and to learn what she is doing and how she is doing it. It is the act of watching and memorizing and the expectation and desire to participate in shared work that propels children from observation into the participatory aspect of Nahua learning practices. Additionally, play and imitation become key in bringing together observation and participation.

Play and Imitation

Play and imitation combines what children see with what they participate in as it is often integrated into or utilizes aspects of work and ritual (Bolin 2010; Katz 2004 Ohmagari & Berkes 1997; Urrieta 2013; Gaskins 2011; Simpson 2013; Tassinari & Codonho 2015). For instance, I saw this occur as children played, they would gather various plants, tear, or crush them, in order to make “medicines,” or “food”, something they had seen other children and adults doing. Children would also take small pieces of masa out of a bowl or off the *metat* and play with it, forming it into different shapes, and imitating their mothers making tortillas. Once as I assisted the Martinez family sift coffee, Julius was shelling the coffee, and Feliz and Jazmine were sifting it. The little boy, Caesar, did not actively participate, but played nearby. As his sister stepped outside to sift out the shells, he followed her, taking an empty bowl, and imitated her movements, laughing and making a game out of it. In these examples, the object of play was not to make the correct medicine, make a tortilla, or actually sift coffee, but rather they were acts of play that imitated actual activities. However, while these children are imitating the movements of adults and other children, they are not re-acting what they see, but are actors themselves

(Katz 2004). It is through imitation that children are not only recreating or rehearsing what they see, but they are experimenting with social rules, roles, and meanings as they play with power, control, symbol, gesture, and routine (Katz 2004). Part of what makes such play possible is the children did not have prefabricated toys. As a result, toys and aspects of play are made from what is readily available such as leaves, bark, or masa. This not only allows for a “learning process that is more creative and profound,” but also provides the means to better understand the tasks that they are to master as they grow and participate in life more directly (Bolin 2010:62; Chamoux 2015).

While the children of Papalotlan have limited access to prefabricated toys, there are a few which include such toys as dolls, cars, trucks, and guns. However, if toys are not available they often create toys themselves or are provided with and seek out tools of work to play with. These are not tools that are dangerous, such as kitchen knives or machetes, but rather small bowls, cups, candles (unlit), etc. With the introduction of fabricated toys the children were not imitating and experimenting with power, symbols, or aspects of home and community that they observe, they were rather replicating violence that they had seen on TV. Therefore, rather than engaging in play that reinforced their learning in what they saw and experienced in their home and community lives, they are engaging in play that has little to do with their lived realities. While currently such prefabricated toys are rare in the community and only some families could afford them, or they were bought for them by other family members who lived in Puebla, this could become another factor that contributes to the alienation of children from the knowledge and livelihoods of their families. Many children still had the household items that are given to them or the toys that children themselves created. This still allowed them to reinterpret what they see, to experiment, and to play with meaning, in order to create their own interpretation and understanding of the world that they are a part of (Katz 2004). As they do this, they are engaging knowledge as they move further towards participating in more ways that are meaningful.

Participation

Parents and children indicated that the learning process included learning by doing. One father said, “Children learn by doing, by using their hands. They have to do it in order to learn it.” When I would ask a young girl, “how did you learn to make tortillas?” “Or how did you learn how to sew?” they would respond, I made them with *mi mama* or I worked with *mi abuelita*.

Children begin participation at a very young age, in order to engage in the reciprocal networks of help and as a means to become more mature and to feel pride in themselves and their knowledge (Chamoux 2015). It is difficult to pinpoint the exact age at which Nahua children begin to participate in home and community life as there is no predesigned timetable that directs children's actions or involvement in their family and community networks (Chamoux 2015; Bolin 2010). Some research on Nahua children indicate that children begin helping at age two (Fernandez 2006), other research indicates age five or later (Chamoux 2015). This difference in ages comes from differences in children and their own process of learning. Within Papalotlan, children were participating around age three, though the help that was provided was minimal, and lasted only a few minutes. As the children mature, they are given increased responsibility and have different expectations as they move from observation into participatory learning, as is the case within LPP. The Martinez family is a good example to show a progression within this system of learning. Caesar "helps" his mother or father by carrying in two or three sticks, or shelling a handful of beans. However, most of his time is spent observing, exploring, and playing rather than participating. Jazmine has more responsibility, she is frequently expected to care for Caesar, grind corn, help weigh beans and coffee, carry small bundles of wood, and other household chores. However, while Jazmine is both observing and participating, she still playing and exploring with Caesar and other children. Finally, Carlos, being the oldest is the one who is expected to participate the most with all tasks, such as planting, maintaining, and harvesting crops and carrying larger bundles of wood, etc. While he still observes, he is the most active in participation and is engaging in more complicated tasks than Caesar or Jazmine, and engaging in significantly less play than either of his siblings. Similar patterns of participation and the roles that children engage could be seen in the other families in the community.

The majority of recorded participant observations that I have in regards to experiential learning are based on children's participation in learning practical skills, mainly because these were the easiest for me to integrate. However, while I have many of these observations there is one in particular that stands out. I chose this particular instance because it illustrates the connection between observational and experiential learning as well as children sharing in the work of the home. One evening towards the end of my time in the community, I was with the Santiago family. Tonight, Sabrina was visiting. I was sitting in the corner of the room, watching the women prepare to eat. Luciana asked the girls, who would like to go and grind the corn.

Sabrina volunteered and disappeared around the corner. Xochit without being asked began putting small logs on the fire and stoking it so they could cook the tortillas. Itzel began cleaning the masa off the *metat* from earlier that day, as Santi played with sticks on the floor. By the time the fire was built and the *metat* was clean, Sabrina had returned with the masa. She set it on the table, and Itzel took it and placed it on the *metat*.

She slapped and smoothed some of it down, so that it was thinner on one end, something that her mother does. Over the past couple of weeks, Itzel had been showing growing interest in grinding the masa on the *metat*. A few days before, she put the masa on the *metat*, getting it ready for her mother. Today, however, she went further, smoothing it down, and then picking up the stoneroller used to grind.¹⁰ She placed the roller on the base, as she attempted to roll out the masa. Her movements were slow and clumsy though she was able to grind enough to make a small ball of masa for a tortilla. She continued this process, making a few more, on her second or third attempt her mother came around the corner, and seeing her attempts, she waited until she was finished with what she was working on, nudged her to the side, and took over. Itzel did not leave, but stood there watching her mother intently. Luciana has short quick movements, where the roller simply glides smoothly across the stone, producing ball after ball of masa. After she produced a few balls of dough, she picked one up and began making the tortilla, stepping away from the *metat*. As she stepped away, Itzel resumed her spot in front of it. Just as in the previous examples, little words were exchanged, but it was a matter of watching, doing, and learning. Itzel tried it again, with little improvement. Though her movements were slow and clumsy, and she didn't do it right every time, her mother did not deter her from trying and doing, but allowed her to continue, understanding that making mistakes were part of the process. From this example, we can see how children learn the practical knowledge of living in their environments through being involved in the work that needs to be done. Itzel had watched her mother prepare the corn, prepare the *metat*, roll out, and make tortillas since she was born. As she continued to grow, watch this process every day, multiple times a day, she would participate in little ways such as first playing with and becoming accustomed to the masa dough, then grinding the corn or cleaning the *metat*. Finally, when it came time to engage actively with the activity of making the tortilla, to learn through

¹⁰ This is not to say that she had never done this before while I was not there, but there was a difference in the days leading up to this instance in what she wanted or was willing to do.

participation, she was ready. However, this did not mean that she perfectly executed it on her first attempt or her second, but that she continued to watch and do, as she practiced and exercised the new knowledge she was gaining.

As I have mentioned, within this context of this Nahua community, learning is not a systematic processes, it is not observation, participation, and then success, but rather it is a combination of all of these at different levels. It is a combination of observation, participation, and practicing the knowledge that they learn (Setalaphruk & Price 2007). Just as observation and participation are key aspects of the learning process within indigenous communities, it is the continued use of this knowledge through practicing that allows children to master the tasks and improve their knowledge (Urrieta 2013). In the observation section I mention that children learn just by watching and memorizing years of behavior, events, and practices, and if needed they are able to replicate a task, having never practiced it before. However, what is produced is not similar in quality to that of someone who has practiced (Chamoux 1986), just like Itzel practicing to roll out tortillas, or boys and men making misshapen and imperfect tortillas. Though she had observed this every day from the time she a baby, she was not able to perfectly execute the movements. Therefore, while observational learning can provide one with enough knowledge to act, it is through practicing that they are able to master a given task. Because observational learning is so effective, the literature that relates specifically to Nahua communities (Chamoux 1986, 2010, 2015) does not place emphasis on the need of practice or learning through trial and error as the literature on other indigenous communities in Mexico and around the world. However, while the literature does not emphasize this, those that I worked with, found practice and learning through making mistakes as a key aspect of the learning process.

For instance, I was helping a Luciana make tortillas, and I was trying to flip one of them over, but the pan was too hot and the flames from the fire licked up around it. It hurt my fingers and I feared being burnt so I couldn't turn it. I started laughing at my inability to turn it due to the heat, and Luciana laughed with me, stepping in and easily turning it. She told me, "When I was little I was scared too, and it was difficult." When I asked her why it didn't scare her anymore, she replied, "Because I make tortillas every day now." Here she was telling me, if you keep making them, if you practice, you won't be scared anymore, you would be able to do it. Luciana wanted my husband to try, he attempted it once, but wasn't successful. Later, she asked

if he wanted to try again, he said no. In response she said, “How can you learn if you don’t practice?” I was talking to a boy named Diego, and he was telling me about how he helps his dad carry wood to the home. I asked him what happens when he was carrying wood or stacking it in the home and he makes a mistake. He replied, “sometimes I don’t stack the wood right. My mama makes me take it out again and redo it, until I get it right.” I was again helping the Martinez family sift coffee shells off the beans. Their oldest son, Carlos had been outside tossing the beans in the air to allow the breeze to catch the lighter pieces of shell. On his way back inside he stumbled on a rock and dropped the bowl on the ground. Luckily, not the entire bowl of beans fell, but a good portion of them did. His father, having witnessed what had happened, did not yell or reprimand, but calmly told the child to pick up the beans “*uno por uno*,” “one by one.” The child bent down and with the help of his sister, they picked up each bean and placed it in the bowl. In addition, just through conversation people would mention the importance of practice. Luciana was talking about Xochit’s homework and how she has to help her with it. She said, “I have to help Xochit with her homework, Miguel doesn’t like to. He says he doesn’t know how to do it anymore, but he just needs to practice. He says I have practiced it more.” From these examples, we can see that this community sees practice and correcting mistakes as a key part of being able to learn all that is required. Whether it is young children practicing knowledge, making mistakes, and then practicing it again, or adults reclaiming knowledge that fell out of practice, practice and mistakes is an inherent part of the learning process (Urrieta 2013; Ohmagari & Berkes 1997). However, in order for children to participate and practice they must have access to those spaces, just as they must in order to observe. Without being able to experience and participate in the knowledge that they are engaging in, they will not be able to take that observed knowledge to the next step in fully learning and understanding the process. While participation of children from a young age in home and community livelihoods is an aspect of the reciprocal networks, it also becomes the means for children to practice and participate, and for them to have complete access to the spaces that are required for them to learn. Just as when their ability to observe is lost, when they are not able to engage and participate, they have the potential to be alienated from that practical knowledge, and any knowledge that is associated with it.

The Altering of Livelihoods and Knowledge

The above shows the process that adults and children engage in as they learn and make meaning together within the community as a result of the connections between livelihoods, knowledge, and learning which frame the roles that children have in the learning process and their lives in the community. A core aspect to these connections and the learning process is the need for children to have access to specific spaces as a means of learning through combinations of observation, play, and participation. The lack of such spaces, what is available in those spaces (i.e. the toys that children play with), and the altering of access through limited time spent engaging with the knowledge located there, can affect how and what the children are learning. Within this community, neoliberal land reforms and economic policies have created an environment within this community and surrounding communities where children have limited access to spending time observing and participating in home and community livelihoods. For example, in terms of agricultural work, there are fewer opportunities for children from very young ages to observe and participate, as this is no longer how families obtain the majority of their food. As a result, children, mainly boys, don't begin observing and participating in the fields until much later, around age 12 or later. However, families still maintain small plots where they grow minimal portions of beans, corn, and squash but are often not enough to support a family. It is through these small plots that children are still able to engage in this livelihood, though on a much smaller scale. Therefore, while shifts in livelihoods due to neoliberalism and modernization have the ability to alienate indigenous children from the spaces that are required for them to observe and participate in their home and community lives, indigenous communities, including Papalotlan, are still able to maintain core aspects of their beliefs and practices, as they have been since the conquest.

Very briefly, during the conquest Europeans imposed new laws to govern aspects of the ancient Aztecs lives, such as language and religion, but the indigenous peoples often "made something quite different than what their conquerors had in mind; they subverted them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them" (de Certeau 1984: xiii). Through using the changes that were forced upon them for their own means, they were able to maintain core practices. Similarly, in the face of changes due to modernization and neoliberalism, which can be seen as forms of neocolonialism, the people of Papalotlan have been able to maintain their core concepts of learning, knowledge, and knowledge production even as they are presented with

changes in livelihoods and new learning practices and knowledge production through the formal Western education system. I cannot say that change has not occurred because of neoliberalism and modernization to the learning system and the knowledge that children have within Papalotlan, but it is difficult to state definitively the extent to which neoliberalism has created significant changes to the core of Papalotlan's learning system. As of the time of this research, children still had access to practical knowledge in the home, community, and through agricultural work (though reduced), as well as maintaining access to ritual and ceremony spaces. However, this could change over the next few years, and while change will occur and shifts in livelihoods, knowledge, learning practices, and childhood will happen, at what point is the change too much? Papalotlan may be currently maintaining many core knowledges and practices, but other indigenous communities in Mexico have suffered extensive culture and language loss as a result of the same neoliberal policies and processes of modernization (Gonzalez 2013). In addition to the shifts in livelihoods because of land reform and neoliberal economic policies, we also must consider the role that formal Western education and the institutional logic that it brings with it, has played within the community.

Similar to the debate on the role that neoliberalism has played in loss of knowledge and altering learning practices and childhood, there is a debate in the effects that formal Western education has had on these same practices. The culture loss that is created is a result of children spending time within the classroom rather than learning and participating within the spaces of home and community, spending time doing homework rather than helping, and the emphasis on finding jobs outside of the community (Barnhart 2005; Ohmagari & Berkes 1997; Simpson 2014; Urrieta 2013; Tassinari & Codonho 2015; Bolin 2010; Schildkrout 2002; Katz 2004). According to a few people that I worked with, they believed that education had in fact changed how children learn and the access to spaces that they have. This was seen in such comments as, "when my children are home, they do homework first, then they help me, school is the most important." Others indicated that, children "don't work as much now as they did when I was young, because they do homework." However, very few of them indicated this, and rather more often they responded, "the school has not changed how children learn, there is only one way to learn how to sweep or wash clothes." Additionally, the women would often tell me that they teach their own children the same way that their mothers, grandmothers, or aunts taught them. Thus, while, according to most that I worked with, this particular school system in this

community may not be changing the learning process or the knowledge that children have access to, it is but one part of a much larger system. It is therefore not the purpose of this chapter nor this thesis, to settle this debate of culture loss due to education, but rather to provide an example of how a community is maintaining their local teaching and learning practices as they face these challenges.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the learning process of Papalotlan through how they learn through processes of LPP as they observe, play and imitate, and participate in all aspects of life within the community. Through this, I have discussed the way that this community constructs childhood and how this is connected to the knowledge, livelihoods, and learning practices that they engage in. I have also shown the ways in which these have change or have the potential of being changed, as the result of globalization and neoliberalism. Additionally, I briefly point the role of education in reducing the access that children have to the spaces that they inhabit. However, for those that I worked with, rather than seeing the education system itself as something that was detrimental or creating any form of cultural loss or change, the majority of parents and children saw it as the means of creating opportunities for jobs, providing a better life through increased wealth, and the ability to access the consumer market. However, neoliberalism fails in preparing them to face the harsh reality of living within that system (Mills 2001). It promises wealth and access to the consumer market, and the notion of education as one of the means for achieving that, but the harsh reality is that while neoliberal globalization allows for luxury and abundance for some, those things are dependent on hard physical labor and the use of resources of a much larger population (Sutton 2007). Thus, it is in the remaining chapters of this thesis that I will explore the neoliberal policies that are interwoven into the fabric of the Benito Juarez Escuela Primaria, and how it is failing to fulfill its promises of success and equal opportunity through the relationships that are created between teachers and the community and failing to legitimize difference in local knowledge and learning practices within the classroom.

Chapter 3
Searching For Respect: Community and Non-Nahua Teacher Relationships within a Neoliberal School System

Introduction

My husband and I arrive at the Benito Juarez Escuela Primaria around 9 am. When we step out of the taxi, I see the school to my right. The first thing I notice is a tall black fence that raises up around the school and the courtyard with a gate that remains locked when school is not in session. I can see that the courtyard was once a basketball court, traces of paint on the chipped and cracked concrete, and the once basketball hoops are now just wooden poles. At the moment, it is quiet and empty, except for a few parents who are standing near the gate talking, the children are currently in class. Later, the courtyard is filled with yelling and laughter as the older boys play two games of soccer simultaneously, the girls and younger boys play tag around the perimeter, sit and talk, or play other games. To the left of the courtyard there is a long building with four classrooms, and directly in front of the entrance is the main office. It is a large room with a small library, the books dusty and covered with cobwebs, some tables and chairs, two old computers, and a printer. The computer, printer, and some of the books were donated by an organization out of Puebla that supports rural schools, the rest of the books are provided by the government, and the community provides the other supplies. On one side of the office is another classroom and on the other is the cafeteria and the kitchen. Behind the office, there is another building with three more classrooms. The school is a faded salmon color, the paint chipping from the concrete walls, large cracks run along the walls of many of the classrooms. There is a mural outside of the cafeteria, with the name of the school along with a scene of butterflies, turtles, trees, plants, and other animals. I am taken around to the classrooms, and they are crowded with children, many of them with 25-35 students. Their desks and chairs have blue painted wood tops and seats, they are old and chipping as well, many have writing and names carved into them from the years of previous students. White boards hang at the front of the classrooms, and student work hangs on the walls, a year's worth of activities and projects that they have created. In the younger grades, 1st and 2nd, little pictures with Nahuatl words are strung from one end of the room to the other. Each room has large windows that have narrow metal bars and no glass, and they look out to the courtyard and into the jungle that lies beyond the school. The Benito Juarez Escuela Primaria is located in *El Centro* of the community, directly across the street from a preschool and a Catholic Church. All three building sit up on a hill,

surrounded by small homes and jungle. From the beginning I could see that, all roads of the community lead to this spot, the houses, *tiendas*, and people radiate from *El Centro*, from the school, making not only the literal center of the community, but in many ways it is a powerful symbolic center. It is a center in which teachers, students, and community members come together as they negotiate and struggle for respect and understanding. The school is a center of power, a powerful institution that legitimizes one form of knowledge, culture, and way of learning, through implementing the Western institutional logic that has been discussed in the previous chapters as well as the mestizo identity (Delpit 2006). Teachers are powerful actors within this institution, and the power that they have to legitimize knowledge and culture has the potential to create tensions between themselves, and the community. In this chapter, I will explain how the tensions that existed between the teachers and the community were heightened by differences in whether they were indigenous or non-indigenous teachers. First, let me use a scene from two classrooms in order to introduce this topic and to explore these tensions. The first scene, taken from my field notes, is from the classroom of Maestra Mica.

Maestra Mica teaches the 4th grade. She is an indigenous teacher of average height, slim, and has long wavy hair. She lives in another community, San Juan, which is nearby. She has been teaching in this community for nearly 34 years, but is retiring at the end of the coming school year. She is sad to go because, as she told me, “this community is my life.” She has taught many of the parents of the children that are currently sitting in her class, building a relationship with the community and students over the years. Maestra Mica is the teacher who initiated the bilingual intercultural program at the school (which will be discussed later). She was often described by the parents as being a difficult teacher because she expects a lot from her students in terms of success and working hard, but she was also well liked because she was seen as respecting their culture within her classroom and for teaching in Nahuatl. One day in late August, during the first week of school, I sat in the corner of the classroom next to her workstation; the class was at full capacity with 35 children. She enters the classroom “*kuali tonaltin*” “good morning!” she says to the class in Nahuatl. They reply with the same greeting. She starts the day by giving them a short activity, writing their names with molding clay, while she checked homework. After she was finished checking their homework and everyone had written their name out in the clay, she wrote on the board,

La Siembra

It is the time of planting. The men go to the field. They work by making furrows. The sun is shining brightly. The heat overwhelms. The men rest in the shade. They heat their food on a fire.

The sowers are happy.

They read the text together as a class, and then she read the text to them in Nahuatl. After they had finished reading it, they talked about *la siembra*, the planting. She asked her students to talk about a time when they had gone to the *rancho* to help with the planting with their parents. All of their hands shot up in the air, waving anxiously to be called on as they bobbed up and down in their seats trying to get Maestra Mica to call on them. She called on one of the girls in the class, Flor. Very excitedly, she started to talk about how she goes out to visit her dad and take him food with her brother and sister because her mom had to stay with her newborn brother. She continued, saying that sometimes she helps by staying home with her new brother so that her mom can go help her dad. A boy in the class, Jonathan, raised his hand and talked about when he went to help his mom and dad plant, describing how they made the rows and he planted the seeds. Many others participated, relating various experiences they had, had working in the fields, encounters with snakes, working in the heat, and the feel of the dirt on their hands as they worked. After everyone who wanted to shared their experiences, she had them copy the text and answer questions about it such as, what is the text about? What are the men doing? If you could ask the men a question, what would you ask them? Once they had time to answer these questions, they went through them as a class. The day was filled with other activities, games, dancing, and songs out in the courtyard. Near the end of the class, her husband came to visit. He is a Nahua author who visits her class to tell them stories in Nahuatl. While he talked, they were entranced and begged for another story after he finished. After his story, she explained their homework for that night which was to write about their own experience working *la siembra* and to draw a picture to accompany what they wrote. As she was giving the assignment, a girl in the class raised her hand. She asked, "Can we write the story in Nahuatl?" To which, Maestra Mica replied, "of course you can write in Nahuatl, it is our language. We should write and learn it." After three or four more students indicated that they would like to do the assignment in Nahuatl as well, she assigned the rest of the class to write the story in both Spanish and Nahuatl. No sooner had they finished copying the assignment than the bell rang and they were dismissed for the day. Many of the students stayed behind, giving her a

hug, a flower, drawing, or a note. Her students from last year waited at her door, and she greeted them with a hug as she said, “*mi amor*,” “my love.”

The second scene comes from Maestra Yaneth who is a 2nd grade teacher. She is one of the new teachers that came at the beginning of the new school year in August. She lives in one of the major towns of the region, equipped with banks, shopping centers, large markets, and other amenities. It is approximately a two-hour travel time by bus, to and from the school. She tells me that she is working at Benito Juarez just until she “can find a better job at one of the schools near [her] home, or the city,” but she says, “I like it here. It is pretty and quite.” The week I visit her classroom is the third week of school. She is still trying to get all of the parents to bring in the supplies she requires for the classroom and the students (liquid hand soap, toilet paper, 100 sheets of white paper, 50 sheets colored paper, different types of pencils, five notebooks, and folders). The first day that I was in her classroom, as school was starting, parents were bring in supplies and registration documents. One father brought in his sons notebooks, showing them to her to see if they were right. He had labeled one of the notebooks incorrectly, and she yelled at him saying, “Why did you do it this way? Can’t you see that I already labeled it? Why did you do it wrong? You wrote this wrong because you eat chiles and eggs!” He tried to explain, but she wouldn’t listen. Finally, he gave his son the notebooks, and left the classroom saying “neo” at the door. After the supplies had been dropped off and the parents left, she began the day with reading a story out of their literature textbook. After they read the story, she wrote some of the words from the story on the board, Libro, Gato, Color, Muchacha, and Rama. Their goal was to change one of the letters of each word to create a new word. They started out working individually in their notebooks, changing the words from those on the board. As they went to show them to her, she would get upset when they were wrong, and yell at them as she explained how to do it, asking why they didn’t understand, tossing their notebook back to them, and telling them to go fix it. As they continued to take up the wrong answers, she continued to grow more frustrated. She brought the class back together and the attempted to work on it as a group. The students would yell out answers, random words, “*Flor!*” “*Lapiz!*” “*Perro!*” “*Rojo!*” She yelled the instructions at them, telling them how to do it, slapping her palm on the board to emphasize her point.

Maestra Yaneth asked for volunteers to choose a letter to change, no one would participate, until finally one girl in the class agreed. She got her to change a latter, *rama* to *rana*,

and more students began to participate. As they continued to struggle with this activity, she asked them, “Do you not listen to me or not understand because I don’t explain it Nahuatl?” The class didn’t reply, but sat in silence looking down at their desks. The teacher continued,

You are accustomed to only speaking and thinking in Nahuatl all the time, but you have to learn Spanish. What will happen when you go to Puebla or Mexico City to work? They aren’t going to speak Nahuatl or want to learn it, you have to adapt to speaking and understanding Spanish! You also sit there, not listening, not paying attention. You are thinking about what you are going to eat, what you are going to do, about feeding your animals but you don’t have to think about these things at school, because you aren’t adults, you only need to pay attention and think about school. I yell because I want the best and most disciplined students in the school.

She told them to finish their assignments, and shortly after a parent came in to ask her a question. She said how frustrated she was about the language difference, attributing it to the reason why they were not listening, and reiterating this point to Maestra Mica later in the day as well. The rest of the day’s activities, math and science, were done out of their textbooks. As it grew closer to the end of the school day, she began to pack up her backpack, making sure she was ready to go before the bell rang. As the bell rang, she was already ushering the children out the door, and walking across the courtyard, out the gate to the *camioneta*¹¹ stop. She is known, as well as many of the other non-indigenous teachers at the school, as a “*mochila rápida*,” literally translating to “fast backpack,” indicating the urgency that they have for leaving the community after the school day has ended.

These two scenes show the contradictions that exist between the indigenous and non-indigenous teachers, and the social tensions that result. In these two examples we see how differently the relationships with the students and community members are created, how language and culture are handled by the teachers in the classroom, and what knowledge is utilized as a means of instruction in the classroom. It may be said that Maestra Mica has significantly more experience in the classroom and within the community, and this could account for much of the difference between the two classrooms. However, other ethnographic data, as well as literature, which I will cover in this chapter, indicates that many of these contradictions and tensions are a result of non-indigenous teachers teaching in indigenous communities. These contradictions between these two teachers show the challenging

¹¹ A *camioneta* is a part of the transportation system that takes people, for a small fee, from the surrounding communities into Quetzalan.

relationship that exists between the community and the teachers, a relationship that is made as they interact with each other and with the wider educational policies that effect both the teachers, the students, and the community members. The challenges can be explored through the neoliberal education reforms that have occurred in Mexico as they effect both the curriculum and how teachers are trained to work within the context of schools such as Benito Juarez. I will begin this discussion with a history of the school and the teachers as well as an overview of rural education in Mexico, and how the Benito Juarez Escuela Primaria is included within the history. As part of the history I will discuss the introduction of neoliberalism into Mexico's economy and then subsequently, into the education system, and how it has effected intercultural education within the community. I will then discuss how the teachers of the community were trained, and how this in combination with historical trends and the shift to intercultural education under neoliberalism, frames the relationships between the non-indigenous teachers and the community.

Historical Background and Influence

Ten years after Papalotlan was established, in 1950, the community wanted to start a school and sought out a teacher to help them. His name was Fernando Rodriguez, and he provided the support for the funding and resources needed for the school to begin. The original school was a small one-room structure made of boards and a ceiling. By 1956 the school, which the community built, was completed and the first teacher arrived in the community. Her name was Isabella Gonzalez Ortiz, and she was mestizo and did not speak Nahuatl. She taught all of the students in one class, regardless of age, because there were so few of them. Over the next few years, the community began to grow and more families settled in the area. As the community grew, the school needed more classrooms and teachers to support the growing population. According to one of the *abuelitos* of the community, as the school grew, they "wanted a nicer school, a better school for their children to learn in. A group talked to the government in Puebla to get a better school." It was at this point, in the early 1960's that the school, now with three classrooms, became a federally supported school, meaning that it was now run by the state and federal government. While it was a school that served an indigenous community, at the time, what are currently termed "indigenous schools", did not exist. As a result, it is not a school that fell under that type of education program, making it in the eyes of the government a federal school not an indigenous school, regardless of the ethnicity of the

children that attend it. According to the director of the school, Fernando, this ultimately meant that, the school was not required, and is still not required, to provide linguistic or cultural support for their students in the classrooms by having Nahuatl teachers. By 1974, the community was still growing, and the school expanded to the 1st-6th grades that it is now, and the majority of the teachers were still mestizo and did not speak Nahuatl.

By 1981 Maestra Mica started at the school, and nearly 10 years later, in the 1990's she, and the other indigenous teachers who predominately held the teaching positions at the school during the 1980's and into the 1990's, started the bilingual intercultural program at the school, in response to the government's call for and introduction of bilingual intercultural education programs. In a book written about this program it indicates that the program was started because of their ability as Nahuatl speakers to provide education in the children's native language and in relation to their cultural context, which had not been a significant goal for the school before this time (Acevedo 2005). Many of the teachers that I worked with in this project were there at the start of this program or had started in the community shortly after it began, and helped it become a reality. Maestras Ana, Christiana, and Mica were all there when the program was initiated. A few years later, in the late 1990's and early 2000's Maestra Zayra, Maestra Natalia, and Maestro Sergio began at the school. At the time, Maestra Zayra was one of the only non-indigenous teachers at the school. Ten years later, a teacher that I did not know left the school, and she was replaced by Maestra Guadalupe, another non-indigenous teacher.

Now, moving forward to the end of August 2015, the new school year is just beginning and Maestras Ana, Christiana, Zayra, Natalia, and Guadalupe are all leaving. Maestra Ana and Natalia are leaving as a result of the education reforms that the government has been implementing since 2013, part of which dictate that siblings cannot work in the same school due to increased restrictions on widespread nepotism (Bocking 2015; Dillingham & Pizarro 2016), Maestras Christiana and Zayra left to teach at schools closer to their homes, where they do not have to travel. Maestra Christiana transferred to another school in another indigenous community just West of Papalotlan where she lives, and Maestra Zayra went to teach in a school that is just above Quetzalan, closer to town and her home. Maestra Guadalupe also moved to teach in Quetzalan because there was an opening at one of the schools near her home, and just as Maestra Yaneth, she was only planning to stay at Benito Juarez until another opportunity arose. She had often spoke of not wanting to teach in a school that serves indigenous children

as a non-indigenous teacher because of the challenges that she faced in the classroom, such as not speaking Nahuatl. As a result, she transferred to a school that had fewer indigenous children in attendance.

By the end of the previous school year in July, five of the seven teachers were indigenous (Ana, Christiana, Natalia, Mica, and Sergio), but by the start of the new school year at the end of August, two (Mica and Sergio) of the seven teachers are indigenous and five were not (Jorge, Yaneth, Rosa, Ximena, and Victoria). After a history of nearly three decades of having predominately indigenous teachers teaching at this school, it has come to a point where this is no longer the case, where the teachers have little to no experience working in a community like Papalotlan, and they do not speak Nahuatl. As we will see throughout the remainder of this chapter, it is this shift in the history of the school, as it begins to take a similar path as when the school was started, that is creating many of the challenges and tensions that students and community members face as they interact and are involved with this powerful institution. However, this school and its history is a part of a much broader and systemic problem within education, specifically indigenous education in Mexico, and is a product of the country's education history.

Formal education of indigenous children is not something that was brought to Mexico during the conquest of the 16th century, but rather formal education institutions existed during the time of the Aztecs (Chamoux 2015; Sanchez 1971). These schools were reserved for the children of the Aztec nobles, and were religious and military schools (Sanchez 1971). However, what the Spanish did bring with them to Mexico during the conquest was Western education in the form of the Spanish language, Spanish literacy, and Catholicism (Hidalgo 1994), and with it the collapse of not only the Aztec empire, but also these previous education institutions. During the conquest, religious groups, mainly the Franciscans, began developing educational philosophies and practices for the indigenous peoples with whom they were coming into contact (Hamel 2008, Lopez-Gopar 2007, Hidalgo 1994). The Friars of these schools learned the native languages in order to communicate with the indigenous groups, they utilized indigenous instructional practices, and indigenous peoples became cultural brokers and assistant teachers (Hamel 2008; Hidalgo 1994). However, the main goal of the educational instruction was to convert the indigenous peoples to Catholicism (Hamel 2008; Hidalgo 1994). Additionally, these new schools did not serve the entirety of the indigenous populations that came under the

control of the Spanish, but rather only the upper class, the wealthy, nobles, and their children, were provided with Spanish education (Sanchez 1971). While instruction was originally done in the native languages, by 1550, the Spanish Crown was issuing mandates to eliminate native languages in favor of Spanish. It was during the latter part of the 16th century that the Crown was trying to enforce Castilianization among the indigenous people (Hamel 2008; Hidalgo 1994; Lopez-Gopar 2007). The basis of this process was to assimilate indigenous groups to Spanish culture and language in order to replace their local cultures and languages. This process also allowed the students access to Spanish knowledge, language, and the conqueror's perception of the indigenous people. This allowed them to be able to understand and use this knowledge for their own means of subverting and surviving during this period (Rabasa 2011; De Certeau 1984), much like what was discussed in Chapter 2.

This process to Castilianize the indigenous peoples continued into the 18th century, but proved impossible to follow. Due to the sheer number of speakers of Nahuatl, the Crown was forced to acknowledge Nahuatl as the national language of Mexico in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, while Spanish was to be promoted as the language of communication within state institutions (Hidalgo 1994; Hamel 2008). Part of this impossibility for indigenous peoples to learn Spanish was the segregated caste system created by the Crown, in order to keep the races apart. This did not allow indigenous populations access or opportunity to learn Spanish, as the Spanish Crown desired (Hamel 2008; Hidalgo 1994). By 1821, Mexico gained independence from Spain, and with this newfound independence, that leaders of the country attempted to negotiate what the new national identity of Mexico would mean and what language the country would identify with. Some vied for embracing the language and symbols of the indigenous peoples while others promoted the use of Spanish as the national language (Hidalgo 1994). However, language diversity was seen as a danger to the centralized power (Despaigne 2013), and ultimately Spanish became the national language of the country and the developing education system. By 1833, public schools were being established and were receiving some (though very little) government support (Sanchez 1971). However, these schools were concentrated in the cities and towns, and as a result, public education in the rural areas of Mexico received little to no attention (Sanchez 1971). For instance, in the city of Puebla, the first public school was established in 1879, but the establishment of schools did not reach into the rural areas, especially into the extreme northern areas of Quetzalan. Even with the growing

number of schools, the school system was seen by many as being inadequate to educate all of Mexico, when much of the population lived in rural areas that had no access to schools (Sanchez 1971). This ultimately became a key aspect of the Mexican Revolution, beginning in 1910, with the call, “*educar es redimir*” and “*educar es gobernar*,” “to educate is to redeem” and “to educate is to govern” (Sanchez 1971:64).

The Revolution occurred as an attempt to end the 30 plus years that Porfilio Diaz ruled the country as a dictator, and was founded in the needs and rights of the people (Sanchez 1971). Francisco Madero, Pascual Orozco, Pancho Villa, and Emiliano Zapata lead the revolution to redeem the people of Mexico from slavery, and in order to do this, “they first had to be redeemed from ignorance” (Sanchez 1971:64), and education became the means to that end. This revolution pushed Mexico into a series of military uprisings and a continuous civil war from 1910 to 1920. By the end of the Revolution, education in rural areas was still nearly nonexistent, but in 1921 with President Obregon, the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (SEP) was established with Jose Vasconcelos as the Secretary of this new organization (Sanchez 1971; Despaigne 2013). The goal of SEP was to improve education in the rural areas in order to redeem and educate the indigenous peoples who were seen as preventing Mexico from entering into modernity. Within the government, and throughout Mexico, indigenous populations were seen as backward and unintelligent, and therefore the goal became to Mexicanize the indigenous populations through utilizing bilingual education (Despaigne 2013). The thought was that, if indigenous peoples could learn Spanish, then they could be assimilated enough to “eradicate any harmful characteristics of indigenous cultures,” but still maintain the pre-Hispanic legacy (Despaigne 2013:118) through shaping the individual for the non-rural world, to integrate them into a national framework, national state, and its market (Vaughan 1997). However, while the goal of SEP and the new government were to educate the indigenous populations, and schools were being established within rural communities, they lacked trained teachers to provide the education (Sanchez 1971; Vaughan 1997).

By 1923, the government established cultural missions that set out to assist rural teachers in constructing school buildings, formulating daily programs, providing adult and community education, and improving health and sanitary conditions. This was done as a means of eradicating what they saw as harmful characteristics and creating again the sense of a unified Mexican nation through changing indigenous populations socially, economically, culturally, and

linguistically through education (Sanchez 1971; Vaughan 1997). By the 1930's while teachers were not academically trained, they became explicit political actors within the communities that they worked, which not only gave them power but also incited violence against them (Sanchez 1971; Vaughan 1997). As a result, the school became a "center for violent negotiations over power, culture, knowledge, and rights" (Vaughan 1997:7) as teachers, communities, and governments engaged in a fight for power. Within the northern region of Puebla, there were significant tensions between the government, teachers, the Catholic Church, and community as teachers gained political power that resulted in the murder and attacks of many teachers in Quetzalan and the surrounding communities during the 1930's – 1940's. These violent attacks on teachers was a result of new SEP policies that promoted agrarianism and were against local culture as they tried to "liberate people from their structural oppressors" that placed them in economic poverty (Vaughan 1997:121). In order to do this there was an influx of teachers, many of whom were not from the region, and in their attempts to "liberate" the communities through education, they had a difficult time differentiating what they saw as structural oppressors in combating poverty and the community's daily cultural practices of health, nutrition, systems of work, care of children and families, etc. This process ultimately led to the violent attacks and kidnapping of many teachers (Vaughan 1997). However, by 1940, Papalotlan was just being settled, and the Benito Juarez Escuela Primaria had not been established. This does not mean that tensions between the community and its first teacher who was non-indigenous and the subsequent teachers, did not exist, only that the physical violence did not occur within this particular school. While Benito Juarez lacked the violence of the surrounding area, there was still the attempt to change cultural practices and assimilate the indigenous children to a national Mexican identity (Acevedo 2005), which are still a part of the curriculum today. After the violence ended the education system remain relatively unchanged until the 1980's – 1990's. During this time, the new educational reforms were set into motion because of neoliberalism. These reforms were not isolated to Mexico, but occurred throughout Latin America, and directly affected, and continue to affect Papalotlan.

Neoliberal Education Reform

Starting in the 1970's in parts of South America (Puiggrós 1999) and moving into Mexico during the 1980's and into the 1990's neoliberalism creates significant economic reform which brought with it a "...proliferation of techniques to remake the social and citizen subject. Thus,

neoliberal logic requires populations to be free, self-managing, and self-enterprising individuals in different spheres of everyday life – health, education, bureaucracy, the professions, and so on” (Ong 2006:14). These ideas eventually make their way into the education system, and through this process, it re-conceptualizes the role of education and knowledge within the classroom. Neoliberal educational reforms occur not only in Mexico, but also throughout Latin America. They were created by groups of politicians, intellectuals, academics, and nongovernmental organization in the United States as well as international and national powers in response to the quality of the education system in the region, citing the failings of the system as issues of management (Lopez-Guerra & Chavez 2006). This comes as a result of the school system being conceptualized not as locations of knowledge or culture but rather as businesses where principals and school leaders are the CEO’s, teachers are businesspersons, and students the consumers of their products, something that has never been seen before (Apple 2006; Guerra & Chavez 2006; Mayo 2015). This logic organizes itself in relation to creating students to be consumers of the global market through emphasizing the individual, competition, self-regulation, merit, and entrepreneurship (Ward 2012; Mayo 2015; Eriksen 2006; Ong 2006).

According to the SEP website, Article 3 of the constitution states that, education should be “secular, free, and democratic. It shall contribute to individuals’ comprehensive development, encourage their skill development and increase awareness of nationality and sovereignty” (SEP 2015). Additionally, the current education program objectives outline that education should train students to make a greater contribution to national development, balance the formation of citizen values, support democratic and intercultural coexistence, and rear individuals with a higher conscience of their social responsibility, who participate in the labor market in a productive and competitive way (SEP 2015). These objectives make no distinction between goals for indigenous children or non-indigenous children, but are the same throughout all of Mexico, regardless of location. Since this is what SEP has outlined for education within Mexico, this is the context in which teachers are trained and the goals that they are to achieve within their classrooms. Thus, they are adequately prepared, in the eyes of SEP, to teach within an indigenous community because the goals are the same throughout the country. However, on the ground, within the classroom and within the community, it is this way of understanding, and this way of training, that is contributing to the tensions between the teachers that are not indigenous and the community. As a result, the goals of neoliberal

education restructured what is taught and how teachers are trained to teach (Ward 2012). In the previous chapter, we saw how neoliberalism is restructuring knowledge in the home through limiting the access that children have to working in *el rancho* through economic and land reforms that come as a direct result of neoliberalism. Additionally, we see this same process reflected within the classroom through these neoliberal education reforms that dissolve the need for training teachers to teach from and in relation to cultural differences and the knowledge that communities have (Ward 2012). Thus, regardless of whether a teacher is indigenous or non-indigenous, their training has been to correct difference and enhance diversity. I will address this point more fully in relation to Papalotlan and experiences of the children and teachers within the classroom shortly, as it becomes key in understanding the relationship between the teachers and the community, but first I must discuss how cultural knowledge and ultimately difference is interpreted within the neoliberal school system as it relates to intercultural education.

As neoliberalism was taking hold of the economy and education within Latin America, there was a shift in how education in Mexico was discussed in general, but more specifically for indigenous communities. Before the 1990's, education in Mexico was described as bilingual and bicultural education (Hamel 2008; Despaigne 2013; Hidalgo 1994). However, by the 1990's, the term changed from *bicultural* to *intercultural* education. The reason for what would seem like a minimal change in the wording was that *bi* indicated two distinctly separate worlds and cultures, which the Mexican government saw as unfitting for the nation (Hamel 2008; Hidalgo 1994). The replacement of "*bi*" for "*inter*" was done in order to show the "recognition, knowledge, and integration of both cultures in a pluralistic enrichment perspective" (Hamel 2008:318). This would imply equal participation of all of Mexico's various ethnic groups within the economic, cultural, and political processes of the country (Tinajero & Englander 2011). This change also indicates that indigenous children are not the only ones receiving such education, but that all school children would receive education that showed tolerance toward indigenous peoples and their knowledge as a means of promoting diversity (Hamel 2008; Schmelkes 2006).

Intercultural education "recognizes and pays attention to cultural and linguistic diversity; promotes respect for differences; and tries to facilitate national unity through strengthening of local, regional, and national identities as well as the development of attitudes and practices that facilitate the search for liberty and justice for all" (Tinajero & Englander

2011:170). However, while it is recognizing the plurality of ethnicities, languages, and cultures throughout Mexico, it is not recognizing the difference between such peoples because difference and unity cannot coexist. Diversity within neoliberal ideology is tolerable as long as it is within the boundaries of what is considered normal by the state, and anything that lies outside of this is considered different, such as varying knowledges, learning practices, and cultural practices, and therefore undesirable (Eriksen 2006; Ong 2006; Grillo 2007). Ultimately within intercultural education, with an emphasis on the multicultural aspects of Mexico, the diversity that is celebrated is the folktales, arts, crafts, clothing, dances, etc. rather than all other aspects of cultural identity such as political structures, gender roles, knowledge systems, systems of care, labor and work, kinship systems, ideas of health and hygiene etc. This is because diversity celebrates cultural aspects that are aesthetically pleasing and are politically and morally acceptable by the culture of power (Eriksen 2006). Everything outside of this is considered backward and different as well as aspects that weaken the social solidarity of the country rather than enriching the overarching national culture (Eriksen 2006). I often saw this within each classroom, and within the school as a whole, as students were given opportunities to wear their local styles of dress¹², dance their local dances and sing local songs¹³, but as was discussed in Chapter 1, notions of help and work that define families are replaced by ideas of the roles that “the child” should have. Diversity allows for the school, and the country, to celebrate Mexico’s pre-Hispanic past, with the aspects that allow it to continue to participate within modernity and its citizens to access the global market, as a way of maintaining a national Mexican identity. The effects of neoliberalism, however, go beyond the curriculum that students encounter and effect the relationships that teachers and community build. For instance, while I used Maestra Mica as the example of a classroom that successfully used the language and culture of her students and successfully built a strong community relationship, her classroom did not remain untouched by the effects of neoliberal reform through what and how she is supposed to teach. However, her ability to integrate the local culture, knowledge, and language into her classroom is what allowed her to build strong community relationships. Maestra

¹² The boy’s clothes are simple, white pants and a white shirt with *huaraches*, sandals. The girls wear long white skirts, red embroidered belts, as well as beautifully made white shirts with colorfully hand-stitched panels across the chest, back, and shoulders that have flower, animals, or geometric designs, called *huipils*.

¹³ *Xochipitzahuatl*, meaning thin flower, is both a style of song and dance of the Nahua peoples. This style of song and dance was taught and performed during class and at major school events, such as graduation.

Yaneth, however, was not as successful, in either case. As a result, what I found at Benito Juarez was, when neoliberal educational reforms are joined together with teachers who are non-indigenous, it brings into stark contrast the tensions and difficulties that non-indigenous teachers face because of their training and the relationships that they form with the community.

Intercultural Education and the Effects on Teacher/Community Relationships

The Benito Juarez Primary School has its own intercultural education program that was developed around 1995, shortly after the neoliberal educational reforms and the switch to intercultural education took place. In a text written about this program it points to the early history of the school, with the teachers who did not speak Nahuatl, and the damage that this caused the students and their ability to learn (Acrevedo 2005). Because of the history of the school, prior to the 1980's, with the majority of non-indigenous teachers, the program mainly focuses on the importance of using Nahuatl in the classroom and teaching the children of the community how to read and write their language as well as Spanish. This program when it was developed, and for nearly 20 years after, provided a strong connection to the linguistic and cultural heritage of the community as teachers taught in Nahuatl, utilized local culture and knowledge of agriculture and local art traditions, and invited families and community members to participate and become involved in the development of activities and the program as a whole (Acrevedo 2005). This program reflected the attempts of the region to celebrate and preserve aspects of the local culture and to support the local community (Becerra et al. 2015), and to this day the community appreciates this program and their attempt to provide education that is respectful of their community. Before the new teachers arrived at the school, all but one of the families that I talked to liked that the school taught in Nahuatl and celebrated their culture through such things as allowing the children to wear their style of clothing and perform their dances during celebrations. However, this program was created under neoliberalism, and as a result, it does not go beyond celebrating cultural aspects such as dress, dance, song, or food. The program does not address difference or the systemic inequality that communities such as Papalotlan face (Gorski 2008). Additionally, over the years, those involved with the implementation of this program began to leave the school.

Those who left were replaced by Zayra and Guadalupe, both teachers who did not speak Nahuatl. In addition, one year before I entered the field, the director of the school under which this program was approved and created left the school, and the director who replaced him was

mestizo. This new director while he often agreed with the Nahua teachers in providing education in Nahuatl, he told me in one of our conversations, “the language that we speak [Spanish], it is not a barrier, on the contrary, it is something where they can strengthen their learning...some of the teachers who do not speak Nahuatl, they don’t speak the language but the children learn.” Additionally, the director saw little difference between the children of Papalotlan and those from urban centers, other than their participation in local dances and festivals throughout the school year. He said,

In an indigenous area, the children are the same as all children in Mexico, in the world. They have the same conditions to learn, it is not to be made into indigenous groups or urban groups, they have the same characteristics, we all have the same constitution, and we do not have to create difference. All children have the same conditions to acquire learning. Their culture or the culture of the region has very little influence, maybe in each grade when they dance for a festival...but this effect is very little.

As new teachers and a new director, all of whom were not Nahua nor did they speak the language, were introduced into the school, Maestra Mica told me, in relation to the intercultural education program, “The problem now is that this is going to disappear...Today it is here, but tomorrow it may be no longer. Some of the teachers who were the founders of this project left the school, and the teachers who have come have no vision for what an indigenous community is.” As this has occurred, as new teachers who have no vision and no understanding of this community, come to Benito Juarez Escuela Primaria, there is a lack of understanding of what the difference between Nahua and non- Nahua populations are, and the school is not only contradicting the efforts of the region to preserve and enhance local indigenous cultures, but it is also at risk of repeating history and of losing the respect and support of the community with the introduction of the non-indigenous teachers. While not being Nahua or not being able to speak Nahua does not automatically qualify a teacher to have conflicts and tension within the community through being seen as not being respectful, understanding, or willing to utilize local knowledge within the classroom, within this school this was the case with the majority of the teachers that I worked with, and the tensions that emerged was a result of the way teacher training is understood and implemented within intercultural education.

In terms of training, the teachers of the school all indicated during their interviews that they had attended schools to become teachers (such as Universities or pedagogical schools) where they learned how to plan lessons, control a class, use materials, and educational theories

from Paulo Freire and Maria Montessori. However, while they all attend school, they also said that they didn't learn very much at these schools, but the real learning came in the classroom. As an aspect of the schools that they attended, the teachers also discussed the practical portion of their education, where they were sent to be student teachers. All the teachers said this is where they learned the most about how to be a teacher, by practicing it. When I asked Ana how she learned to become a teacher she told me, "with practice, with practice." However, even though the teachers went through the schooling and practiced within schools, they still did not believe that they had the tools and knowledge that they needed to be successful. Natalia expressed it this way, "I studied to be a teacher in school, but they didn't teach me how to be a teacher, I learned but it was over years and experiences." Additionally, Zayra told me that, "working is when it is a reality, learning the experiences that you have daily with your children." While there is no match for real life experiences and learning from your mistakes, we can see that in general the teachers do not feel prepared when they entered a classroom for their student teaching, composed of entirely mestizo children, for which they are trained to teach (Tinajero & Englander 2011; Navarro & Verdisco 2000; Tatto 1999). While the teachers did not feel prepared to teach in general, the non-indigenous teaches also described to me how they were not prepared to teach within an indigenous community. When discussing the training that they received, none of the teachers indicated that they had received training that was specific to how to work with indigenous children. On the contrary, teachers are trained in Western teaching methods that are focused on styles of teaching that are centered on the teacher and not the student (Despaigne 2013; Ball 2004). Even the training that is received for bilingual/intercultural education programs is designed based on Western visions of what bilingual and intercultural education should be in relation to the neoliberal standards of celebrating diversity and minimizing the difference of students and communities (Despaigne 2013; Busquets 2015). Maestra Yaneth even admitted to me that, she "should not be teaching in this school. This school should be an indigenous school."

Teacher training does not end after they begin work in a school, but as a part of the new teacher reforms that were put into place in 2013, teachers are expected to attend extensive trainings and complete certifications yearly (Navarro & Verdisco 2000). Some of these trainings for the teachers in Papalotlan took place over the summer in Quetzalan while others were throughout the year. According to the teachers that I worked with these courses were there to

teach them how to better manage a classroom, how to be better teachers, and to provide intercultural education as designed by SEP. Additionally, the teachers receive training at the beginning of every school year, and upon arriving within the community. At Benito Juarez, the new teachers, as well as the remaining two, convened for the week before school started to be assigned their classes and to complete the necessary training provided by SEP. During these training sessions, they discussed the role of education, their roles as teachers, their overall goals for their classrooms and for the school, and how they were to achieve these throughout the next school year. Maestra Mica and Maestra Sergio both emphasized the use of Nahuatl within the classroom throughout the week, as the non-indigenous teachers repeated their mantra of “We don’t speak any Nahuatl.” Outside of speaking or not speaking Nahuatl, one of the goals that is outlined by SEP that was discussed during a training session, was that teachers should “adapt and include planning specific learning activities that consider the context and the diversity of the group in order to have the same opportunities in advancing the learning process 100% of the time” (quoted from a print out of the summary of the teacher trainings). However, beyond mentioning this government regulation and providing one example of how this may be achieved, the director did not provide any further training for his new teachers on the context of the community, the children, their culture, or learning practices.

For SEP, and the school, these three separate trainings that the teachers receive in how to be teachers and in intercultural education is adequate, as they train teachers to meet the objectives as outlined above, but these trainings did not actually prepare teachers to provide support for their students. As a result teachers “negotiate boundaries of teaching depending on their initial teaching credentials, their need to work and the possibility for more work, their understanding of what a teacher...was to do” (Robert 2015:67). In SEP’s attempt to keep teachers in line with their objectives for education, and to ensure that students are succeeding according to those objectives they have created reforms that regulate these boundaries that teachers must negotiate. Not only are teachers expected to accumulate credentials and certificates, beyond those that they initially have, but also their employment and wage depends on the ability of their students to succeed within this education system based on yearly evaluations (Lopez-Guerra & Chavez 2006; Bocking 2015; Dillingham & Pizarro 2016; Loyo 2002; Hecock 2014). Therefore, not only do they have their own understandings of what teachers should do based on the training that they received, but also they are held to these standards by

the government, with little room to negotiate. However, the teachers also must negotiate these boundaries with the community and their vision of education. This ultimately creates a difficult position for the teachers as they attempt to balance their training, regulations, and community expectations. At the end of Chapter 2, I briefly discuss that both the teachers and the community see education as a means for the children of the community to be able to get jobs that are outside of *el rancho*. While the teachers and community share this idea, those that I worked with, within the community, also wanted education to be done in such a way that understood of their context, culture, and language and that was respectful to their knowledge and the way they live. With the training that teachers have received in providing education, specifically intercultural education, their understanding of the how education should be provided could differ, and in the case of the Benito Juarez Escuela Primaria, does differ, from the understanding of the community. This difference leads to a lack of support for the children and the community. This lack of support creates boundaries that the non-indigenous teachers and community must negotiate, that come because of their own understanding of what a teacher should do and their role in the classroom. These understandings have been influenced by their past work experiences, their training, and teacher regulations outlined by SEP and as we have seen, and will continue to see, contradict what the community wants within the classroom.

I would like to return to the example at the beginning of the chapter with Maestra Yaneth in order to explain how the training described above has influenced her role as a teacher in this community and the relationship that she was starting to build. Maestra Yaneth had gone to school for four years to be a teacher at a university in the city of Puebla. After graduating, she worked in a city with a very small indigenous population for six years until she arrived in Papalotlan. While she attended school and was trained in intercultural education before arriving in Papalotlan, she did not understand the context of the community. Rather her training and work experiences were in the context of urban and semi-urban centers and the educational objectives that she had learned and been required to work from were provided by SEP. Working in a semi-urban school, the school that was much larger and well-funded by the government. She had the supplies that she wanted, access to computers, and money to spend on bringing in supplies. However, within Papalotlan, Ana told me, “the government doesn’t support the schools...it is terrible...there is no money, there is no support.” Because of this, the teachers were required to either pay out of pocket for the supplies or demand that the community pay to

provide supplies for their classrooms. Thus, Maestra Yaneth, as well as the other new teachers, required a long list of materials from the families as well as a monthly payment of 10 pesos to pay to make copies of pages out of a manual that they had each used when they taught in the city. Additionally, I watched as parents interacted with her, and they frequently left her classroom frustrated and muttering about how they had been treated and the lack of support that she gave them as their children's teacher. The way that she acted towards the community and the children and the lack of support that she was able to provide within her classroom in terms of language and culture was not restricted to her classroom, but occurred within each of the classrooms with the new teachers.

Maestro Jorge was assigned to teach 1st grade. Of all of the grades, the 1st grade classroom had the least number of students who could fluently speak Spanish. Since Maestro Jorge did not speak any Nahuatl, his class often struggled to understand his instructions. As a result, he would get increasingly frustrated throughout the day when the students did not remain on task or did not follow directions. Throughout the day, he often gave up on the students who spoke little Spanish, letting them do whatever they wished, while focusing his attention on those that did understand him. Another example comes from the classroom of Maestra Rosa, who when I attended her class she held her parent's meeting. In this meeting, she discussed what she expected out of her students and out of the parents. She began the meeting by telling the parents that, "you need to pay attention to your children, how can you help them if you don't pay attention to them." She continued to instruct them on how to care for their children, telling them, "you must feed your children. You should not send them to school without breakfast or a snack. You wouldn't go out into the fields without food, so don't send your children to school without it either." If a parent made a comment in defense of one of these comments, she would disregard them, and reiterate her point. Additionally, as parents asked questions, she would often close her eyes, sigh, and then answer them, as if it were an inconvenience to her. As I watched, I could feel the tension in the room building, as the children who worked on an assignment got restless, the parents got increasingly frustrated with how they were being treated, until finally, the meeting ended, and the parents hurriedly left the classroom. As my visits to these classes were occurring, in other classrooms in the school, two additional instances occurred, that contributed to the tension that was building between the new teachers and the community members.

The 4th and 5th grade teachers, Maestra Victoria and Maestra Ximena held meetings with their classes during the second week of school, something each teacher does at the beginning of the school year to discuss expectations of their class and what is required. In this meeting both teachers addressed their desire for the children to be no longer allowed to wear their local style of clothing and regular clothes, but to replace them with the state uniform that is used at other schools throughout the state of Puebla. Students were expected to have one official state uniform, through it is not required that it be worn regularly, but now the teachers wanted it to be worn daily. This would require parents to purchase more uniforms for their children, an expectation that was not seen as economically feasible by parents. Additionally, about ten Quetzal headdresses¹⁴ hung in Maestra Victoria's classroom on the back wall. Upon coming to the school, she demanded that the parents committee move them from her classroom into storage. These cultural symbols were replaced with pictures of cartoon characters that adorned her classroom. It is these instances, (the lack of respect shown to the parents, the amount of materials required by the new teachers, the call for changes to the clothing, changes to the material items of the classroom, and the overall lack of understanding of the context of the community, culture, and language) that spurred conversations within the community and action at the hands of the parents committee.

One evening, on the same day that Maestras Victoria and Ximena had held their meeting, we had finished eating and were sitting in the kitchen around a small plastic table in the Santiago's home. It was I, my husband, Luciana and Miguel, her sister, Luz, and Luz's husband Eduardo. Luciana and Luz had been talking casually about their day when I noticed that they had changed subject and were talking about the new teachers. Luz was relying a conversation she had had with their other sister Bety, from earlier that day. Luz had seen Bety at the school after they had both attended a parent's meeting. Luz's daughter is in Sergio's class and Bety's daughter is in Victoria's class. After their meetings had finished, they had talked and Bety had told Luz about the new uniform requirements that the new teachers were trying to enforce. Bety was upset at the prospect of not only her child not being able to wear their local styles anymore, something that they take pride in, but that she would have to purchase multiple new uniforms. As Luz related this interaction to Luciana, she said, "they don't understand the

¹⁴ The headdresses were worn by students during celebrations to represent the colorful feathers of the Quetzal bird that is native to that region, and has been celebrated by Nahua people since before the conquest (Kandt 1972).

culture here, they are trying to change it, but they don't understand the families." Eduardo followed up her comment by saying, "they are here to give classes not to question or change what the parents want." Luciana added, "They are from the city, they don't understand the culture here. We are going to have a lot of problems with them." Miguel agreed, shaking his head and adding, "*Este feo, este feo.*" "It is ugly, it is ugly."

Instances such as these result from the minimal training and understanding of the community, differences in expectations between the teachers and the community, and how teachers navigate these boundaries and their interactions with community members, which create the conflict and tension between the non-indigenous teachers and the families. Since the teachers are so heavily regulated by SEP in terms of training, what they are required to teach, and how they are required to teach it, we cannot hold the teachers solely responsible for the tensions and conflicts that they encounter as they interact with the community (Dillingham & Gonzalez-Pizarro 2016). Additionally, as Ana said, the government provides very little support to the rural schools and the teachers lack resources to assist them in representing culture and language within the classroom (Tinajero & Englander 2011). However, recall that at the beginning of the chapter I addressed the fact that the school is a powerful institution, and the teachers are powerful actors within that institution, and while teachers are not responsible for the actions of the educational leaders and the implementation of neoliberal reform into the education system, as we have seen, they still have power in how they build relationships with their students and within the community. Thus, as teachers attempt to make changes to the school through mandating monthly payments, requiring long lists of materials, changing the uniform, failing to utilize local knowledge and culture, etc. it would appear that the community would have little power or control over what occurs within the classroom in relation to what they want out of the education that their children receive. However, the community does see itself as being able to help balance this relationship with the teachers and the power of the institution through the cargo system.

Recall from Chapter 2 the religious cargo system that is utilized during celebrations such as the Saint's Day for *Nuestro Padre Jesus*. This religious/ritual cargo is used to oversee the ritual/religious aspects of the community (Sanchez & Almeida 1992). I briefly mentioned in the description of cargo systems that they are also used within non-religious areas of the community such as political and civic responsibilities, and the parents committee at the school is

a part of this cargo system. This committee is comprised of a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer as well as additional people who lend support and assistance. In total, ten community members serve on this committee. Much like the religious cargo positions, the school committee positions rotate yearly, outside of the presidency that rotates every two years. At the beginning of each year a parent's meeting is held to choose that year's committee members. While the position is volunteer based, the community votes on, based on those who volunteered, who will fill the positions. This is primarily done in order to ensure that someone the community trusts and who is seen as responsible fills the positions. Ultimately the parent's committee role is to, "represent the families, to find materials for the classroom, provide support, if there are problems with a teacher, if a teacher acts badly, [they] have the right to talk to the teacher, and if there is a problem with the school or if they need anything [they] help" (Julius, parent's committee president). Because the committee's role is to represent the community's voice in issues that concern the school, with the tensions that these new non-indigenous teachers brought with them, as we have discussed, the parent's committee stepped in to do what they could in maintaining the aspects of the local culture that the new teachers tried to strip from them.

During the conversation with Luciana and Luz, Miguel, who serves in one of the support roles on the committee, mentioned that the committee had met, in response to the complaints from the parents about the new teachers. The committee had decided that they were going to try to stop the teachers' behaviors and other changes such as the monthly payments. He also mentioned that they had already stopped the teachers from mandating that the uniform change and those other complaints were in the process of being addressed. While the community has small opportunities to create change within the school, they have little influence over the curriculum, how teachers are trained once they arrive in the classroom, and how their culture and language are represented within the classroom unless there were to be significant support from the school to allow for their participation in these sectors. When I discussed the role of the parents committee with director he said, "They represent the community, and we take important decisions to them, we remember them, and they help us to function better, but to have influence in what we do, no, they give their opinion." From the perspective of the school, the parents committee holds very little power in being able to make any significant changes and is merely there to provide insight or their opinion on issues. In addition to the lack of recognition

that they are given by the school itself, recently the parents have lost interest in participating in this committee and it has become very difficult to get volunteers to participate. When questioned about why people no longer want to participate within this system, I was told, "It takes too much time." Thus, they see it as, instead of spending time taking care of responsibilities at the school, they can be working or fulfilling their responsibilities at home. As a result, while they currently are involved the processes of the school, it remains to be seen how much longer this parents committee will remain intact. With the shift in teachers and the lessening of the intercultural and bilingual program at the school, it is difficult to know the extent to which they will be able to maintain the hold that they do have within this powerful institution. In neighboring communities such parents committees have all but ceased to exist, and it seems that this committee is on that trajectory, especially if the school continues to allow history to repeat itself and to let these conflicts between the teachers and the community to grow. Without the parents committee, who stands between the non-indigenous teachers and the parents to act as a balance in this struggle for power, respect, and recognition, and what will happen if there is no longer a system in place to question the actions of the teachers and the school? The community must continue to take action within the school as they search for respect of their culture, knowledge, and worldview within a system that trains teachers not to. Additionally, the teachers and community must work together in order to build relationships that are based in respect, regardless of ethnicity.

Conclusion

Teachers occupy a difficult space within the school as they attempt to negotiate their own perspective with that of government regulations and the perspective of the community members of Papalotlan, especially when the teacher is non-indigenous. The relationships that are formed are a product of the history of the school, and the history of rural education in Mexico. As a part of Mexico's history of education, we find the attempts to assimilate indigenous communities through utilizing education, since the time of the conquest (Hamel 2008; Hidalgo 1994; Despaigne 2013). However, as can be seen with neoliberal education reforms, this still occurs, only now it is disguised under celebrating diversity, and this what teachers are trained to do and expected to succeed in. It is the history, these neoliberal policies, and the way that teachers are trained that directly affected the relationships that they build with the community that they work with. While teachers may have various boundaries to

negotiate, they are still the powerful agents in legitimizing one form of knowledge, one culture, and minimizing difference within their classrooms. However, what I found in Papalotlan was that while these neoliberal aspects of education are found within each classroom, regardless of ethnicity, what made the difference for the community was when a teacher came from a place of understanding and respect. It is here that the indigenous teachers had the advantage, where they were aware of the context of the community, understood their culture, and spoke their language. While Nahua teachers may go through their own processes of conforming to the mestizo identity, to get to where they are today, the indigenous teachers of Papalotlan remained connected to their heritage as Nahua people and tried to reflect that within their classrooms. Currently, this is being lost as I described above, not just among the teachers and who is represented, but also in the continued attempts to assimilate, to Mexicanize, and to create subjects, now to the global market. Recall that the goal of neoliberalism in education is to shape children into independent, self-reliant, and competitive labor subjects. While this chapter has touched on that aspect as it relates to how teachers are trained and the subsequent effect that it has on community relations, the following chapter will discuss how this is accomplished within the classroom and more specifically, how this is reflected in the learning practices that are used. This chapter will address the struggles that students face as a result of these attempts to assimilate, but also how they have been able to use it to their own advantage and how communities and schools can work together to reverse this harmful process.

Chapter 4

Limiting Power and Finding Balance: Resistance to Neoliberal Education Policies in Rural Mexico

Introduction

One year after returning from doing fieldwork in Papalotlan, as I write this thesis, teachers and students of Mexico protest in the streets of Oaxaca because of neoliberal education reforms. As teachers and students protested, the federal and state police attacked, leaving at least eight dead and the roads littered with charred remains of vehicles (Ahmed & Semple 2016; Dillingham & Pizarro 2016). These teachers and the community stand together to protest the government's attempt to gain increased control and power over the education system by undermining the teachers union through an increase in standardized testing for students and teachers, increased requirements for training and certifications, government control over hiring and firing of teachers, and an increased control over curriculum and pedagogy (Dillingham & Pizarro 2016). These reforms are yet another neoliberal government attack, this time on trade unions (Dillingham & Pizarro 2016). We saw in the previous chapters similar neoliberal attacks on local economies and access to knowledge that children have within the home and community. Now as the government seeks to gain more control over the school system by way of school unions they are creating tighter restrictions on teachers, which have led to tighter restrictions on curriculum and pedagogy within the classroom. As the government's grip on the education system continues to tighten, it leaves more room for a continued history of forced assimilation and less room for meaningful education for indigenous populations to occur.

It is Wednesday of the first week of the new school year, and I am sitting on a short wall at the end of the courtyard watching the children play games of tag and *fútbol*. Maestra Ximena comes and rings the bell, and the children scatter from the courtyard into their classrooms. Maestra Mica is standing outside talking with one of the children's parents, and she nods to the children and myself as we enter the classroom. Though the bell has rung, the children talk to each other in Nahuatl, laughing, running, and playing. Maestra Mica enters the classroom, greets them, and they find their seats. Two days before, on the first day of school, she told the class that they needed to bring to class with them molding clay. Itzel is in this class, and Tuesday night I went out with her and Luciana to find the clay. There are two *cibers* in the community. Cibers are small rooms that are a part of a family's house, that have computers with internet

that community members pay to use. They also have school supplies such as paper, poster board, markers, pencils, and clay. Since the Santiago's live in *El Centro* just down the hill from the school, each *ciber* is only a five to ten minute walk in either direction from their home. The first one we went to was out of the clay. After leaving the first *ciber*, we walked down the hill to the other one, but it was closed, the family wasn't home. We returned back to the Santiago's house empty handed and waited a while for the family to return. A few hours later, we walked back down to find that they were open and they did have clay. The next day in class, when Maestra Mica asked them to pull out their clay, the majority of the class took brand new packages of clay out of their backpacks, but others do not. Some of them simply forgot it at home, others forgot they needed it, and a few never got the opportunity to get it or the *ciber* was out. When Maestra Mica noticed that some of the children didn't have their clay she had them take out a piece of paper to write letters, words, and sentences. I watched a boy named Luis sit with his pencil and paper writing his name because he had not brought clay. He tapped his pencil on his desk, watching his desk partner Monserrat open up her package and begin to work with it. Noticing that Luis lacked the clay to participate, Monserrat broke off half of her clay and handed it to Luis. Luis smiled and started working the clay. Other children in the class did the same, but Maestra Mica had noticed who did and did not have their clay to begin with. Thus, when she saw that those who did not originally have clay now had some, she told them to give it back, and told those who had shared that they were not to share. Those that did not have clay were graded significantly lower than their classmates were, even after completing the activity, using pencil and paper.

While I used this same teacher and class as an example of the relationship that Maestra Mica was able to build through utilizing cultural knowledge and language within the classroom in the previous chapter, I use it now in order to show that regardless of this relationship she is able to build, the way that she teaches or the basic principles of her classroom are still subject to neoliberal educational policies that she is expected to mold her students to. Recall that neoliberalism within the education system emphasizes the individual entrepreneur, competition, and seeks to prepare students to access the global market. If we look at this example through the lens of neoliberalism, we can see how the school attempts to change its students based on a specific set of values that has been dictated by the Western institutional logic that we have discussed in the previous chapters. This scene shows the importance that

neoliberalism and the school places upon the values of the individual, individual success, and competition. However, what this ideology does not take into account, and by extension neither does the school, is the idea of sharing, community, and the reciprocal systems of care that they engage in on a daily basis. Even though the children were behaving based on their idea of community and caring for those around them, the school was telling these students that instead of being a part of a network or community, they are responsible for themselves and their own success, and that if there was inequality between those who brought clay and those who didn't in terms of who could participate or the grade that they got for that day, it was the responsibility of that individual child. Additionally, we see how classroom practices such as this also instill the idea of competition, of ensuring that your assignment is better than those around you, and that you should be reliant on yourself in order to achieve the best grade possible. In order to achieve an education system that creates consumers and workers in the labor and global markets, the education reforms and the subsequent teacher training that is effected by these reforms have to be able to dissolve the reliance on social relationships generated by state, society, and culture, and ensure that students achieve the values of independence, self-reliance, and so on, through their education (Ward 2012). It is this attempt to dissolve culture and to create a specific type of child and a national Mexican identity that this chapter will focus on.

In the first section, I will begin this discussion by applying the theories of Foucault on governmentality and the creation of the docile body through the institution followed by Bourdieu and his theories of the legitimization of one habitus and cultural capital within the classroom as a process of symbolic violence (Grenfell 2013; Harker 1984; Nash 1990). While the first section discusses the control and power that the Benito Juarez Escuela Primaria seeks to have through changing the students, the second section will explore how the community can resist this control through decolonizing education in terms of not only culture and language but also the learning practices that are used within the classrooms. The control over the bodies and minds of students that the education system seeks to have is not only tied into the protests in Oaxaca, but as I will try to reveal in this chapter is how this control is a part of the neoliberal educational policies that have shaped the experience of both teachers and children in Papalotlan. Since the previous chapter focused on the aspects of these reforms that deal with teacher training and the effects that it has on the relationships between the community members and the teachers, this chapter will focus on the curriculum and pedagogical control

that these neoliberal policies seek to have. The literature on intercultural education in Mexico discusses the consequences of neoliberalism on the education system. However, it is limited to only discussing language and cultural representations within the curriculum. Thus, in the second section I will show why decolonizing education programs are important for the success of the students, community, teachers, and the school itself. I will also show that through utilizing such methods, it challenges the colonizing control of the institution over the bodies and minds of the students as it creates a space where education is responsive and meaningful for all involved (Cajete 1999; Cajete & Pueblo 2010; Battiste 2013; Busquets et al. 2015c).

Colonizing Bodies and Minds

In Chapter 1 I discuss how within the curriculum and policies of the school is embedded a Western institutional logic, and how through the curriculum and policies, neoliberalism entered into the school and implemented this logic in order to attempt to change notions of “the child” and the role of “the child”. In Chapter 2, I discuss how neoliberalism through economic policies has the potential to change the access that the children of Papalotlan have to their local knowledge and learning practices. In the previous chapter, Chapter 3, I discuss how neoliberalism has affected the relationships that teachers of Benito Juarez are able to create with their students and the broader community through its influence in how intercultural education is understood and how teachers are trained to teach within this indigenous community. In this section, I will bring these various threads together, weaving them with the theories of Foucault and Bourdieu. This will be done to show how neoliberalism, its Western institutional logic, and the focus on the mestizo identity that was found within the classroom, attempts to govern, change, and conform the children of Papalotlan.

While Foucault never directly theorized about neoliberalism, his theories of governmentality and the institution producing docile bodies can both be used to explore the effect that neoliberalism has on this community and the change that it seeks to create. First, Foucault defines governmentality as the processes by which governments govern through “the array of knowledges and techniques that are concerned with the systematic and pragmatic guidance and regulation of everyday conduct” in the creation of subjects (Ong 2006:4; Davies & Bansel 2007). As the education system of Mexico is controlled by the government, and it is through education that the government “shapes, guides, or affects the conduct of people” (Gordon 1991:2) and creates docile bodies. In Foucault’s work, he explores the institution and its

many different forms in how it controls and defines the individual. For Foucault institutions are spaces in which discipline and punishment are used in order to achieve power over individuals, and are enacted through various means such as control over space, time, and regulation of behavior. It is within these institutions, such as the school, that according to a specific institutional logic, the individual becomes the object and target of power (Foucault 1977), where the “body is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, [and] becomes skillful” (1977:136). This control that the institution seeks to have, is through the creation of “docile bodies” that are “subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (1977:136) where in which “those in power can break down the individual, rearrange it, do what one wishes, and operates as one wishes with the techniques, speed, and the efficiency that one determines” (1977:182). Ultimately, the purpose of the school is to break students down and conform them to the logic of that institution. Recall in Chapter 3 the objectives of the Mexican education system, that through education students should be trained to make a greater contribution to national development, balance the formation of citizen values, support democratic and intercultural coexistence, and rear individuals with a higher conscience of their social responsibility, who participate in the labor market in productive and competitive ways (SEP 2015). It is easy to identify the influence of neoliberalism within these objectives, in the way it discusses participating in the market, being efficient, productive, and competitive while creating a sense of and a responsibility to a national Mexican (mestizo) identity. The mestizo identity, while it lays claims to the heritage of their pre-Hispanic past and celebrates music, dances, and arts of indigenous populations, or totes the desire for intercultural coexistence, it is often at the expense of assimilating indigenous populations (Morris 2001). As a result, the mestizo identity is often seen as the antithesis of indigenous populations (Morris 2001). As we have seen throughout this thesis, indigenous populations and their practices are seen as backward, ignorant, antiquated, poor, and their worldviews as inferior (Morris 2001; Lopez-Gopar 2007). Thus, the national Mexican identity is one that is modern, follows neoliberal values, and finds superiority of Western views of civilization and progress (Morris 2001), which are reflected in these objectives. Thus, belonging is dictated by embodying and performing life in such a way that conforms to Western views and mestizo identity. In order for the school to achieve the objectives of the education system, the school must enforce the control over time, space, and activities in order to produce students that conform to the national identity and embrace the

values of neoliberalism. However, in order for these objectives to be achieved it requires more than just creating a docile body because in order to accomplish creating students who are competitive, individualistic, consumers, and laborers, the school has to be able to change more than just their behaviors. They have to change their perceptions, understandings, and ways of seeing the world in order to personify the identity and knowledge that have been legitimized, and through this changing basic habits, or in Bourdieu's terms, their habitus.

According to Bourdieu, education is a means of providing a workforce that could respond to the economic needs of the modern world, much in the same way as Foucault theorizes the purpose of institutions in creating docile bodies for a labor force. However, in Bourdieu research, he focuses on culture as a critical element of looking at education (Grenfell et al. 2013). Bourdieu looked at how culture was constituted, what it contained, its presence and effects on the students, and how culture is reproduced through the education system (Grenfell et al. 2013; Harker 1984; Nash 1990). Bourdieu defines habitus, a concept originally used by Aristotle, as the "conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence...systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (1990:53). Thus, habitus is shared histories and culture that are embodied to such an extent that they influence the ways in which people act and react in various contexts through gestures, actions, posture, language, and ultimately, how they occupy social space as result of their habitus (Bourdieu 1990). A person's habitus is so engrained within who they are that it becomes almost second nature, a habit. Additionally, habitus is connected to the economic, cultural, and social capital a person has. Very briefly, economic capital is explicitly financial and refers to the wealth in terms of money of a person or group, cultural capital is the cultural knowledge gained from either social connections or education, and social capital refers to the social networks that people and groups build (Grenfell et al. 2013). Therefore, habitus is a result of the capital that they have gained through the community in which they were raised and the experiences that they have had. However, the school legitimizes one form of habitus and cultural capital of the group that controls the economic, social, and political resources (Delpit 2006; Harker 1984; Howard 2010; Yosso 2005). The cultural capital, the knowledge, and the habitus of the group in power are what are reproduced within the classroom through the interactions between students and teachers, rules and regulations, and the curriculum (Delpit 2006; Howard 2010; Yosso 2005; Nash 1990).

In the case of Papalotlan, it is not the community's habitus or cultural capital, nor is it that of the Nahuatl people or indigenous people of Mexico in general that is legitimized within the classroom; it is the urban mestizo cultural capital and way of knowing. While the intercultural education program allows teachers to utilize the cultural capital of the students, the mestizo cultural capital is still legitimized to such an extent that out of the 148 learning activities that I observed within the classroom throughout the time I was there, only 30 of them included Nahuatl or the cultural capital of the students. This mismatch between the children's lived experiences and what they encounter in the school is a means of maintaining the historic notion of incorporating indigenous people into national life through assimilating them to have a modern and urban habitus and cultural capital (Harker 1984; Busquets et al. 2015b). This process of creating docile bodies and the emphasis of a particular habitus and cultural capital within the school is a form of violence, symbolic violence (Topper 2001). Recall that the history of the region in which Papalotlan is located, was plagued with physical violence between the teachers and community members, during the 1940's. While the school itself did not experience this physical violence, the violence has continued through today as a process of assimilating and reshaping the children of the community through education to meet the neoliberal standards and to personify the mestizo identity. The remaining part of this section will be to show how the school has attempted to accomplish this process of symbolic violence.

According to Foucault, the docile body is created through correct forms of discipline, "meticulous control of the operation of the body" (Foucault 1977:134) which attempts to create a "policy of coercions that act upon the body in a calculated manipulation of its elements, gestures, and behavior" (1977:138). I saw these processes of calculated manipulations to control elements, gestures, and behavior within the school occur through the regulation of time, space, and activity, by the watchful eye of school administration and teachers (Foucault 1977; Jenks 1996). For now, I want to discuss how the Benito Juarez elementary school attempts to create docile bodies through regulation of space and activity, and will return to time later in this chapter as it becomes relevant in discussing differences in learning practices that the children encountered within the classroom. Each student in the classroom was given their own desk, chair, and supplies, and essentially, they are confined within those spaces, unless otherwise permitted. Within these spaces, their activity and behavior were regulated in order to achieve desired outcomes such as attentiveness, completion of assigned work, etc. The arrangement of

each classroom looked nearly identical, tables and chairs arranged in a linear fashion, facing the white board at the front of the classroom. Each student had their own desk and chair that they were to remain seated in at all times. The simple act of sitting was highly structured and each classroom had specific rules that were enforced to ensure that it was done. While observing each of the classrooms, I heard on numerous occasions the teachers chastise their students, saying "*siéntate bien*" "sit well". This was often accompanied by the teacher physically moving the child, shifting the head, moving the chair, or straightening their bodies into the "proper" form of sitting at the desk. The "proper" way to sit during class was the chair positioned facing the desk, not too far out, not too close, providing sufficient room to work. Feet were to be kept still, on the floor, not swinging or bouncing, hands occupied with work, not touching or disturbing other students or fiddling with any other object, heads forward, mouths quite, and eyes watching either the teacher or their work. Here their bodies were not only physically controlled by the teachers, but also by the rules of each classroom to control the classroom environment so that students were listening to the teacher and actively working on their assignments. Other rules aimed at controlling behaviors and emotions such as no yelling (which often extended to loud or excessive laughter), no running, no talking during work time, and no play (unless it was part of a structured assignment with the teachers' supervision). The only activities allowed within the classroom were those assigned by the teacher and as long as they followed specific guidelines and rules. However, the control that the school sought to have in order to conform students extends far beyond ensuring that they sit a certain way or that they are not running or playing, but as has been mentioned they are seeking to assimilate their habitus and cultural capital as well. Therefore, while what we have discussed thus far in the attempts of creating docile bodies also relate to aspects of habitus such as behaviors and gestures, I want to focus on the other aspects that make up habitus, especially as they relate to cultural capital.

These Nahua children have different knowledges, understandings, and perspectives and as a result, they are seen by the education system, and by many of the teachers of this school, as lacking what is needed not only to succeed within the classroom but within the work force as well. Using the example at the beginning of this chapter, I discussed how the school sees their current system of caring for others as undesirable and therefore lacking the necessary individualistic and competitive nature to succeed in the current market. I found such examples

within each of the classes that I attended, as teachers, regardless of ethnicity, attempted to replace cultural aspects that had been identified as being backward or undesirable to the mestizo identity. For instance, health and nutrition were topics that were often stressed by the teachers, and as a result, hygiene became a constant topic within the classroom. Many of the families live in material poverty, where their small homes are made of bamboo or concrete blocks and dirt floors. Animals, mainly chickens and turkeys, were often in the homes and living areas, where families eat and sleep. As a result the members of the community were seen, by the teachers, as dirty. However, while their standard of cleanliness may not mimic the sanitized version that has become mainstream within Western society, this does not mean that they do not have their own practices and understandings of maintaining a clean body and living area. These differences were not understood or seen by the teachers at the school. As a result, time was often taken out of the day to discuss cleanliness and personal hygiene.

One example comes from Maestra Zayra's classroom. On one of the days that I visited her room, they read a story out of their literature books. They read it as a class and took turns reading aloud. The story was about a boy who becomes ill with a stomach virus and falls asleep. As he sleeps, he dreams about two little green elves that come to him and tell him he is sick for two reasons: not washing his hands and not brushing his teeth. The elves explain the process of bacteria moving from our hands into our bodies when we don't wash our hands or the bacteria that builds up when we don't brush our teeth. This was followed by a description of how the bacteria, once in our system, effects our bodies and makes us sick, and concluding the only way not to get sick is to wash our hands and brush our teeth. After reading the book, Maestra Zayra discussed with the class the importance of washing their hands. She then proceeded to walk around the classroom and point out all of the children who had dirty hands, like the boy in the story, as well as the children with rotting teeth. She told them when they are to wash their hands (after playing, before and after eating, any time they are dirty), when to shower (daily), and when to brush their teeth (before and after every meal). This is an example of the blatant racism that these Nahua children face as the school teaches to a very specific ideal through topics such as hygiene and cleanliness, with little regard of local understandings of sickness, hygiene, or a consideration of what the community has access to. Many Nahua communities' ideas of cleanliness are centered on the *temazcal*, which is a location where community members, men, women, old, and young, go to clean themselves and others (Báez 2004). These

gatherings however are more than an act of cleanliness, but the *temazcal* has a long history dating back to the ancient Aztecs (Báez 2004). It is a ritual, which through the process of washing connects the people of the community to each other, to their environment with water and fire, and to the cosmos through ritual, as they care for others (Báez 2004). However, this is not recognized as a legitimate way of making oneself clean as it is not a shower in the Westernized sense. Therefore, there is the attempt to conform the students through these lessons to a different standard. While the teachers do utilize certain aspects of the culture, such as referencing coffee or corn during assignments instead of items they have little to no reference, as an attempt to include the knowledge that students bring with them to the classroom, they are still attempting to erase the aspects that lie outside of the mainstream and do not relate to cultural capital or the habitus of the education system.

Throughout this section, I have addressed the school's creation of docile bodies and the change of habitus and cultural capital as "attempts" to erase the aspects that have been deemed as backward and are not legitimized within the classroom. The reason for this is to show that this process is not unidirectional. Recall in Chapter 2, that the process of learning was not a unidirectional process where parents teach their children, but rather children were actively engaged in learning and creating knowledge within their homes and in the community. The same principle applies here. The children and their families are not just mindlessly shaped by the school into "celebrated automata" and "political puppets" (Foucault 1977), nor are they empty vessels to be filled with knowledge and understanding that is not theirs (Freire 1970). Rather, the children and the community are able to use this powerful institution for their own benefit, much as their ancestors did during the time of the conquest as has been discussed in previous chapters. Currently, the children and the community use what they learn from the school to be better able to work within the system through being able to understand and read paperwork, contracts, or other documents. I asked Luciana why it is important for the community that children attend school, and she said, "So they can help *los abuelitos* with registration and other paperwork." Additionally, I asked the children that I interviewed how they are able to use what they learned in school at home, Jazmine, a 3rd grader, told me "I am better at math now, I can help *mi mama* with counting and weighing when we sell beans and coffee at the market." Another boy, Braulio, said, "I can count the money when I sell or buy things and know if I have been given the right amount." As the community has become more involved with

the mestizo world in understanding the laws and policies that govern them, having to register and have papers as a citizen, gaining access to amenities (i.e. potable water, electricity, television), running a business, or operating within a cash economy, all require new skills to survive within this system, and right now, education provides those skills (Cajete & Pueblo 2010; Grenfell et al. 2013). As a result, the community has used the school for themselves and their children to learn what they need to survive, but also maintain their own habitus and their own cultural capital. I do not include this to suggest that the school, or any other neoliberal institution or policy, has not had an effect or has not changed the community in some way because that would be false. I include how the community is able to use aspects of what the school teaches in order to show that while the school attempts to create docile bodies and to change the cultural capital and habitus of the students, it is not a process that the community is passively engaged in, but they are actively resisting as they seek to maintain their knowledge and ways of knowing and survive within this dominant educational and political system. Even though the community is not passively remade, it does not detract from the fact that a system of symbolic violence is still a major aspect of how the school system functions within this community. It is more than just changing cultural knowledge and behaviors, but it extends to how knowledge is acquired within the home and community.

Above I mention how teachers include the basic cultural references for the students to include aspects of their daily life. According to the teachers this was done to help the students relate to the lessons better, but also because according to Maestra Ana, the community “is very poor, indigenous, and it is always difficult for the children to learn in these conditions because the curriculum is a lot, and they learn very little.” Along these same lines, Maestra Christiana said, “the curriculum in the textbooks are very high for the level that they are here, for an indigenous community, they speak an indigenous language, and the contents are very advanced, so it is difficult for the students to understand everything. So the teachers need to contextualize the contents.” Therefore, many of the teachers are not only including local knowledge within the classroom because it helps their students, but because without it they see their students as not capable of succeeding. However, here in lies the paradox of bilingual intercultural education that was discussed in the previous chapter. Recall that under neoliberalism intercultural education becomes a means to celebrate only certain aspects of a multicultural society while ignoring the aspects that are seen as undesirable. This is ultimately how the teachers of Benito

Juarez have decided what knowledge to include in their classrooms and what aspects of the children's habitus and cultural capital must be changed as parts of their lives are discussed while others are not. Furthermore, the literature on intercultural bilingual education cites that the problems that indigenous students not only in Mexico, but also in other communities around the world, encounter in the classroom are due to the lack of their own cultural capital being taught. This has resulted in indigenous children being unable to find relevance in the curriculum, undermining the goals that their parents have for their children, creating cultural alienation, inhibiting school readiness, low success rates, and an increased potential for being labeled with a learning disability (Ball & Mclvor 2013; Deyhle 1995; Lopez-Gobar 2007; Hidalgo 1994; Hamel 2008; Despaigne 2013). This labeling of students was a frequent occurrence at Benito Juarez as nearly every teacher told me of their students who learned too slowly, were unable to learn, or did not pay attention because of a learning deficit or disability. In fact, the school had identified so many students as having a learning deficit or disability that the director told me on my last day in the community, that there was another maestra coming to work specifically with those who had been identified as having a learning challenge.

Some teachers attributed these learning disabilities to outside forces (television and high levels of caffeine and sugar), genetic factors, or like those two teachers above, because of poverty and that they are indigenous students. When local learning practices are not utilized within the classroom, indigenous students are disproportionality perceived as socially restrained or resistant to instruction as well as an over identified with developmental delays and disorders (Ball & Mclvor 2013). Thus, the problems that the students of Benito Juarez faced extended beyond that of the lack of culture or language in the classroom, and included the differences in learning styles that they encounter in the classroom with what they experience within their homes and communities. As discussed above, a person's habitus is an embodied shared history and the cultural capital is the knowledge that results from interactions that we have. Thus, habitus and cultural capital are more than understandings of hygiene and systems of care, but how those came to be embodied and learned, how those knowledges were acquired. The local learning practices are a part of their cultural understanding, but this part of their cultural understanding has been left out of the conversation when it comes to calling for change within bilingual and intercultural education programs. It is something that is an important key in providing the best possible education for students as it takes into account all sides of their

habitus. In the following section, I will discuss how the learning practices that the children of Papalotlan encountered within the classroom vary drastically from those that they encounter at home in order to fill in the gaps within the bilingual intercultural education literature. I will continue the use of Foucault and Bourdieu to show how through utilizing Westernized-learning practices the school is still creating docile bodies and changing the habitus while discussing alternatives through decolonizing education.

Finding Balance through Decolonizing Education

It was early September, a week before we were to leave the community. We were in Luciana and Diego's kitchen roasting and grinding coffee beans to sell in their store. Luciana sat next to her fire, stirring a small batch of the beans that were roasting over the open flame on a large flat ceramic plate. I stood at their kitchen table stirring a bowl of already roasted beans, trying to get them to cool quickly so that they could be ground. Diego and my husband were at the small hand crank meat grinder that had been converted for the use of shelling and grinding the beans. They took turns grinding the roasted beans, as it is hard and tiring work, and as they grind, the smell of coffee filled the small room. Mica told me stories of her family, working early in the morning with her father out in the *rancho*, and going to school. As the conversation lulled into silence, I listened to the sound of Luciana's wooden spoon scrape on the ceramic plate, the sound of coffee being ground, dogs barking, and frogs croaking outside. As I stirred the coffee I reflected back on what I had learned from the community, what they had told me about learning at home and about the school, what the teachers had told me and what I had seen in the classrooms. Before leaving to do my fieldwork, I had read literature on bilingual intercultural education and found what I described in the above section, the emphasis on how indigenous Mexican children are assimilated and the lack of discussion about how the learning practices that are used in the classroom affect their education outcomes. Once I arrived in the community and began having conversations with people I kept hearing, "the school has no effect on learning in the home, it is too different, there is only one way to teach how to sweep and clean," or "school and home, they teach different things." As I kept hearing this, I reflected back to what I had read, or rather what I didn't read, in the literature. Why was there this gap in how they learn? Why is there this division between home and school? Why was no one talking about it? Why do advocates of improving bilingual and intercultural education push for the better use of language and culture in the classroom when learning practices are a natural extension of this as

well? As I reflected on this that night, I broke the silence in the kitchen and asked, “The school teaches differently than you do at home, right?” She looked over at me and agreed, “*Kejma*” “yes”. I continued, “But do you think that the school should use the same way of teaching that you do in the home?” She continued to stir the beans as she replied, “No, they shouldn’t.” I was taken aback, after hearing for the last three months from nearly everyone in the community that I met with, the importance of having language and culture represented within the school, of having teachers that respected the community, their knowledge, and their practices, why wouldn’t it also be important for them to use the learning practices that they use in the home in the school? “*Por qué?*” “Why?” I asked, still trying to understand what she meant. She replied, “They couldn’t teach the same way because the school and the home are different, they teach different things in the school. They teach how to read and write, we don’t teach that, it wouldn’t work.” Luciana reiterated the dichotomy that divides the school and the community that others had spoken of, the dichotomy that splits the lives of the children into two separate worlds. In one world, their own learning process is nurtured and they are connected to themselves, those around them, and their natural and spiritual environments, and then the other, where they are violently torn from that reality, where not only their knowledge but also the ways in which they come to understand their worlds is not recognized. However, this dichotomy between the school and community that Luciana and others described does not have to exist, but it requires a re-centering and redefining of bilingual intercultural education and our understanding of how children are supposed to learn within the classroom.

This process of re-centering and redefining education in Papalotlan, if utilized, would be a process of decolonization. Decolonization is about centering the concerns and worldviews of the community and coming to know and understand theory and research from their own perspectives and for their own purposes (Battiste 2013). The goal of this is to undo the negative impacts of colonization and creating a space for knowledge and ways of knowing where the previous practices are unlearned and deconstructed to make room for practices that are reconstructed, reframed, restored, and reclaimed by the community itself (Emerson 2014; Battiste 2013; Busquets et al. 2015a). In the previous chapter, I provided a brief history of education in Mexico and the processes of assimilation that have occurred since the conquest, since colonization. As we saw in that chapter, and in this chapter as well, these processes have not ceased to exist, they only have been rebranded under neoliberalism, but the process and

desired outcome remains. However, it is through implementing decolonizing practices that there is no need to control the bodies of students, to create docile bodies, nor is there a need to alter the habitus and reinforce a cultural capital that is not theirs because decolonizing practices reject these processes of historic and current colonization. The cultural and linguistic colonization has been discussed, and so I would like to discuss the importance of learning practices and how what the children of Papalotlan experienced within the classroom was significantly different from that of their homes and community and why it is important to decolonize not only knowledge and language but the ways of knowing as well.

As we have seen, the bodies, the habitus, and the culture of the children of Papalotlan are controlled to achieve the means of correcting undesirable behavior in order to prepare them to work, access the consumer market, and participate in the mestizo world. This process extends to changing not only the knowledge that they have but how that knowledge is learned. Thus, the ways in which knowledge is produced has been reduced to “effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge...apparatuses of control. All this means that power, when it is exercised through these subtle mechanisms, cannot but evolve, organize, and put into circulation a knowledge or rather an apparatus of knowledge” (Foucault 1991:102). Therefore, as knowledge and the production of that knowledge are controlled by the school it puts forth the knowledge that the school has legitimized. In Chapter 2 we saw how and what children learn is a result of being connected to each other and their experiences in the environment in which they grow up in (Lancy 2010; Fernandez 2006; Velazquez 2012; Chamoux 2015). Thus, learning is not simply a process that occurs separated from the techniques that are used in teaching knowledge. Because of the connections between the knowledge and the processes of how that knowledge is gained, it becomes evident that knowledge produced and knowledge production is inexorably tied together. Therefore, in order to have power over one aspect, you must also have power over the other in order to achieve the level of change that the school attempts to create. As a result, Benito Juarez doesn't simply have to ignore the fact that they have legitimized mestizo and Western cultural capitals, but by extension, they are also able to ignore “the methods and techniques of that transmission and the criteria of judgment it applies” (Grenfell et al. 2015:55). With the combination of ignoring knowledge *and* learning practices, the students are faced with unequal opportunities to succeed within the classroom (Grenfell et al. 2015). Let

me explain how this disregard for local learning practices was accomplished within the classrooms of Benito Juarez.

Modern Western science dictates the process of learning as universal principles, and by controlling bodies and minds, the school is attempting to conform students to these ways of knowing (Cajete 1999; Cajete & Pueblo 2010). Which is why you can observe an elementary classroom in the United States or Maestra Ximena's classroom in Papalotlan and find similar teaching methodologies being utilized. These principles are based in the theory that all students fit into one of four categories or types of learning (Cajete 1999). These range from learners who are sequential thinkers who rely on abstracting theories and concepts and desire logical/rational thought and objectivity to students who are integrative learners who tend to combine and synthesize experiences and then apply them to new ones where they learn through self-discovery, experimentation, acting, and testing (Cajete 1999). While education researchers have discovered differences in learning styles, these have been slow to be implemented, and teachers are generally trained to recognize only those who are sequential and logical thinkers (Cajete 1999 & 1994). Thus, Western scientific logic and linear thought processes permeates the methodologies that teachers use. This then contradicts what the children of Papalotlan experience in their home and community. However, while scientific thought attempts to place all children into a category, what I witnessed in Papalotlan, is combinations of these types of learning exist in all the students. This is because, these differences in learning processes, that researchers have found, limit differences to right brained and left brained learning processes (Cajete 1999). What this scientific approach has failed to account for is differences in the sociocultural context in which knowledge is learned and produced within their homes and in the community (Cajete 1999). This is seen in the classrooms with the majority of the teachers as they rely on the use of lectures and textbooks to teach children the required curriculum rather than observational or experiential learning processes. As a brief reminder, the local learning process is a combination of observation and experiential learning as the children navigate the peripheries and gradually, as they are comfortable and gain more knowledge and experience, move towards greater participation and knowledge through legitimate peripheral participation (Chamoux 2015; Lave & Wenger 1991). The only time that I saw teachers utilizing observational or experiential learning was when the fifth (soon to be sixth) graders were learning to march to

perform the flag ceremony every Monday¹⁵ or when the sixth graders practiced their dance for graduation. In these circumstances, the teacher would model, telling the children *mira*, watch, as they demonstrated the proper way to march or the proper dance step. In Chapter 2 I explained how Julius indicates that the children in the community can't just sit and listen to instruction, they have to watch and do, or else they will fall asleep. Luz, Luciana's sister, expressed similar sentiment as she discussed her frustrations with the school and what they expected of the students, she said, "how do they expect them to sit all day? Our children need to move and be active."

As I observed in the classrooms, I began to notice patterns in the students' behaviors. At the start of each activity, they were attentive and participating in what the teacher was having them work on or discussing with them. However, as time wore on and the longer they sat listening or the longer they sat working out of their textbook the more they engaged in other activities such as talking, playing, finding excuses to get up to sharpen their pencil, or go to the bathroom. It was the activities where they were working in groups or creating something that they were more likely to remain engaged and participate for extended periods. This does not mean that these children cannot sit for long periods because this is something that they are expected to do at home as they learn (Chamoux 2015). However, while this time is spent sitting still and silent for extended periods of time, there is little verbal instruction or required interaction with those involved (Chamoux 2015). Therefore, this time spent actively observing is a process that is different and has different meaning for them than sitting and listening to a lecture that has little to no reference to their own lives. Additionally, within the home or in the community observation is not always restricted to watching attentively and silently at all times, as they have the ability to learn and understand aspects of their lives that they may not be directly paying attention to or intently focused on (Chamoux 2015; Gaskins 2011). Yet, if the students are not silent with their eyes on the teacher, they were perceived as not listening, understanding, or paying attention. What this means is that while the education system (local teachers and administrators included) attributes students with an inability to pay attention or with a learning deficit and is unwilling to alter classroom pedagogy in favor of local practices,

¹⁵ The flag ceremony consisted of a small presentation by either the teacher or a class about their duties as citizens of Mexico (i.e. going to school, being responsible, contributing to society). After, the sixth grade would walk the flag around the courtyard and the students would sing the national anthem in Spanish and in Nahuatl.

they are, whether knowingly or unknowingly, dismissing and ignoring the context and the process of learning that the children are being expected to engage in within the classroom. This learning process is not theirs, but it is a process that they are expected to succeed with. However, decolonizing education processes create a space for communities and schools to use situational learning and learning practices that are of their own making and own understanding (Cajete & Pueblo 2010; Busquets et al. 2015b). Thus, through reclaiming these practices as a key aspect of education, communities like Papalotlan can “return to the cornfield as an educational space” (Busquets et al. 2015b:37) as well as actively resist the learning processes that attempt to homogenize them with the mestizo populations (Busquets 2005). As these spaces are reclaimed decolonizing education processes also create changes that extend beyond limiting the use of lecture and the emphasis on textual learning to redefining the timetable of schooling and the relationships between teacher and learner to align with what the children experience in their lives.

In addition to scientific based learning strategies, Western science has also determined a standard for child development based on a linear timetable. Foucault addresses the use of such timetables as means of control as “moments are integrated one upon another, and which [are] oriented towards a terminal stable point” (Foucault 1977:160). This terminal stable point for the school is achieving the proper development in terms of test scores or reading level for the appropriate age and grade of that student. If the student does not move toward this arbitrary point then they are held back, punished, and seen to have learning deficits or disabilities. However, recall from Chapter 2 that the children in Papalotlan are not held to a specific standard or time for when they are to achieve specific knowledge, but they develop and learn at their own pace and in their own way as they embody the knowledge and process of learning. This sequential way of thinking and developing does not take into consideration the holistic and interdependent nature of the relationships that the people have not only with other community members but also with their environments and the knowledge gained from every aspect of their lives (Cajete & Pueblo 2010 & 1994). As the children engage in their own process of learning through the help of the other children and adults around them, they make decisions on when and how they learn and engage with those around them. Thus, they lack direct supervision in how they learn and have more freedom in what they do day to day. The children of the community, as we have talked about in previous chapters, are free to wander and engage

in tasks as they choose. However, this was something that the teachers saw as a drawback to their ability to learn and succeed within the classroom. Maestra Ana told me,

“[The child] does what he wants to, the mothers do not set rules, there are no rules. The child can talk on the street until four o'clock in the afternoon, until five o'clock, and mom and dad do not care. So, at home there is no discipline. Here there is. But because of this it is a lot of work, because they are not disciplined, they are not used to it, so here is very difficult for them.”

Because of the differences in what is defined as the terminal end point of development, the students are not accustomed to such levels of structure and discipline in their acquisition of knowledge. This is revealed in their behaviors in the classroom as they play, talk, or engage in activities not designed by the teachers. Thus, teachers attempt, through providing discipline and increased structure, to change and ultimately fix this behavior.

Additionally, as children have the freedom to learn in their own way the parents are but guides in providing spaces and opportunities for them to learn and acquire knowledge (Chamoux 2015 & 1986). However, within the classroom, the teachers are seen as the sole imparters of knowledge, rather than co-producers or guides (Cajete 1999). Therefore, through utilizing decolonizing processes within the classroom, students are not held to an arbitrary standard or timetable for development or success, and the learning processes becomes something that is not unidirectional, but rather multidimensional and bi-directional as “teachers are placed in a unique relationship with students as co-learners and act as guides” (Cajete 168). Instead of the children struggling between two worlds, one of their own design, and one that is not, they would be able to find balance as the learning practices and the relationships that they encounter in the classroom are not starkly different from those within their homes and in the community, and that go beyond the emphasis on linear thought and development. If the school continues to legitimize ways of knowing that are not those of the community and continues to use a one size fits all approach (Battiste 2013) to how children and knowledge are developed the students will continue to face significant roadblocks and symbolic violence within their education experience. However, decolonizing education processes offer the school an opportunity to broaden their perspective on the connections between knowledge, knowledge production, and relationships that are built through learning and teaching.

Conclusion

I would like to return to what Luciana said regarding the division that exists between the school and home. According to her, the school, being completely different in what and how they teach could not utilize the learning practices that she uses to teach her own children. However, as we have seen throughout this chapter, if we apply processes to decolonize education in every sense of the word, through culture, language, *and* learning practices, the community is provided with the opportunity to collapse the wall that currently stands between them and the school, to find respect within this system, and reclaim their knowledge and ways of knowing that have for the last half century been sought to be changed and reformed into something that it is not. Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing do not have to be the antithesis to mestizo or Western knowledge and ways of knowing, but what decolonizing educational practices offer is an opportunity for the community's knowledge and learning practices to be legitimized as well (Cajete 1999; Cajete & Pueblo 2010; Battiste 2013; Busquets et al 2015c). Therefore, instead of the school seeking to control the minds and bodies of children or to colonize their habitus and cultural capital, the aim is to transform these subjectivities in order to build viable alternatives for the students and community to actively exercise their individual and collective rights and generate counter hegemonic practices (Busquets et al. 2015b & 2015c). While Benito Juarez has attempted to provide a platform for the community's knowledge and language to regain priority in the school through their bilingual intercultural program, it is still far from achieving the goals of a truly decolonized education program. However, while change has yet to occur within Papalotlan, there is hope for change as small pockets of communities in Mexico, and throughout the world, have begun to develop and implement decolonized education programs that not only include the local language and culture, but also the local learning practices as a means of resisting neoliberal education policies. Specifically in Mexico, in some communities in the states of Guerrero, Jalisco, Oaxaca, Michoacán, Yucatan, and Puebla groups such as *el Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS)* are working with communities to create programs such as, *La Red de Educación Inductiva Intercultural (Rediin)*, in order to develop education programs and re-center the knowledge and knowledge production to fit that particular community (Busquets et al. 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). The key components of these programs is to provide education in the local language, to train teachers to work with indigenous students and in intercultural education (that is not defined by neoliberal ideals), and

to reclaim learning practices. Additionally, there are also movements within Mexico in the state of Chiapas and in other Latin America countries, which have allowed indigenous communities to become autonomous and have control over their own education (López & Sichra 2008). This autonomous control over education could allow for the complete decolonization of education as they are no longer operating or are dictated by Western theories of education, development, or pedagogies. As we look back on the history of Mexico, these models are revolutionary. These are models of education from below, one that is not dictated by Western neoliberal ideas or mandated by the control of the government, nor are they systems that colonize or violently oppress (Busquets 2005; Busquets et al. 2015b; Cajete 1999; Cajete & 2010; Battiste 2013). Whether this means that communities become completely autonomous, if this becomes their goal, or to create decolonized intercultural education programs that would allow for space to be created where the school and community can work together to create education programs to meet the needs of that particular school, in both cases the communities and the children would greatly benefit. In such programs, the question of “what says your heart” would not be something that is asked as a way of only seeking to celebrate certain aspects of their cultural identity, but it would become a question that is seriously considered. As it is now, this question has no meaning as it is impossible for the school to truly ask it, when the perspectives and knowledges of the community is ultimately silenced. By creating autonomous education programs or decolonized intercultural education programs, this process of silencing would no longer occur, and what is in their hearts would then become a key component of the education that they receive. If the government continues to refuse to allow such spaces for the indigenous populations of Mexico that it serves, the school will lose its legitimacy (Busquets 2005), and the violence that has been seen in Oaxaca will continue elsewhere, and could affect the lives of people such as Maestro Sergio and Maestra Mica and Luciana, Miguel, and their children, and everyone else in Papalotlan. Such violence between the government, schools, and communities has ravaged this region once before, and it has the definite potential to occur again as communities seek to limit the control of the government and find balance within this neoliberal education system.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have explored the experiences of the people of Papalotlan as they interact with the school and the broader education system. As I have addressed these experiences, I have covered a wide range of topics in order to encapsulate, to the best of my ability, the tensions, challenges, negotiations, and hope that come as a result. Through this, I have discussed the considerations of doing research with Nahua children, the connections between livelihood, learning, childhood, and knowledge, the relationships of teachers and community members, and the continued colonization of minds and bodies through education and the ways of reversing these processes. Through all of these different topics I have traced the role of history and neoliberalism as they have shaped and been shaped by the community.

In Chapter 1, I focused on the methods that I used throughout this process of research as I attempted to use methods that accurately reflected the context of the community. Thus, I strove to use methods that did not single children out for “childlike” skills or required Western based knowledge. Through this process, I discovered the need to look beyond the words that occurred between those that I worked with and look to their actions as a means of communication, understanding, and a form of knowledge. By defining my methods based on the community, not simply by the fact that they were children, I was able to address and contribute to the debates within the new social studies of childhood as I explored the construction of childhood, agency, and voice in Papalotlan through the methods that I used. Thus, while this chapter focused on the methodological and ethical considerations of this fieldwork it also discussed the role of neoliberalism and a Western institutional logic that attempts to dictate and generalize the experiences of children. While I look at the construction of childhood in this chapter through the lens of methodological and ethical considerations, the following chapter explored the construction of childhood through its connection to livelihood, knowledge, and learning practices.

Throughout the second chapter, I provided the evidence for how knowledge is transmitted and learned within the community through processes of observation, participation, play, and practice. As I addressed these aspects of the learning process, I showed the changes that have occurred to childhood, knowledge, and the learning processes through globalization and the adoption of neoliberal economic policies and land reforms within Mexico as the access to spaces where knowledge is created is being limited and altered. I concluded that even

through these drastic changes to the economy, the community has still been able to maintain a core system of knowledge and knowledge production. However, the school proves to be an additional force that puts pressure on maintaining these practices, and this is seen in the relationships between teachers and the community.

In Chapter 3, I show the difficult space that teachers, especially non-indigenous teachers, occupy within the school as they attempt to negotiate their own perspective with that of government regulations and the perspective of the community members of Papalotlan. I address the role of history in building these relationships, and how they are currently being shaped by neoliberal education policies for bilingual intercultural education as the trainings that teachers receive are informed by the past and are dictated by the current policies. I determined that within this community, the process by which these teachers are trained is inherently assimilationist because they are trained in an intercultural education program that is about celebrating only certain aspects of the community and culture. Additionally, while all teachers were trained the same, the majority of those who were non-indigenous did not enter into the community from a place of respect or understanding as they attempted to limit local culture and language within the classroom. This adds increased tension to these relationships. However, these relationships are not the only aspect of the education system that contributes to the attempted assimilation of this community.

Throughout Chapter 4, I provide the evidence for the continued process of colonization of the bodies and minds of the children of Papalotlan. I show the division that currently exists between the school and the home because of this process of colonization as the education system of Mexico seeks to have power over and legitimize one form of knowledge and culture. Ultimately, as we see in this chapter, this form of knowledge and culture is not of their own making, making it difficult for the children and community to navigate between these two spaces. However, what I was able to conclude is that through utilizing processes of decolonization within their education system the divide that exists between the school and the home would no longer exist and balance could be created between these two systems. In order to accomplish this the school has to respect, recognize, and accurately represent not only the local language and culture, but also the local ways of knowing through their pedagogies.

Throughout these chapters, I have sought to answer the question of *“how do Nahua children experience formal Western education in relation to their local ways of knowing?”* Within

these chapters I have addressed various aspects of this question such as how childhood is constructed within the community, the challenges and contradictions between non-indigenous teachers and the community, the process by which the community is able to find respect and maintain their ways of knowing, and the role of history and current neoliberal policies in shaping their experiences. As I sought to answer this question in reference to these different aspects, I have concluded that, rural education in Mexico still contributes to a process of colonization and assimilation that should have ended hundreds of years ago. As policies and reforms are made within the education system they limit the ability for the community and teachers to work together to create curriculums and programs that work specifically for that community based on their language, knowledge, and ways of knowing. While the Mexican education system may provide bilingual intercultural education this program is dictated by neoliberalism and thus continues to celebrate diversity while undermining the differences within communities and does not include space for the use of local learning practices. Thus, there is a need to either provide the space for indigenous communities to have educational sovereignty where they are able to make their own educational decisions and have control over the education that their children receive. Another option would be to reconstruct bilingual intercultural programs in such a way that they are no longer dictated by neoliberal rhetoric in order to build relationships between the community and the school, to better train teachers to work in indigenous communities, and to accurately and respectfully include language, culture, *and* ways of knowing. Recall the saying, *toni kijtoua mo yolo*, what says your heart. The irony of this saying on the wall of the cafeteria has been explored as this thesis has shown that what is in their heart is not actually taken into account through the relationships that are built and the colonization that still occurs. If such educational sovereignty or reconstruction of the bilingual intercultural program within Benito Juarez were to be accomplished, it would create education that is true to the community as it would eliminate or significantly reduce processes of assimilation that they face within the school. They would be able to find respect for their way of life, and what is in their heart would actually be represented and understood. As I came to this conclusion, it gave me the opportunity to provide an additional perspective within the literature of education for indigenous children in Mexico.

In Chapter 4, I argue that a gap exists within the literature on bilingual intercultural education as it only addresses the importance of including the local language and culture within

the classroom while failing to address the importance of including the learning practices as well. This thesis not only provides an additional perspective of the experiences of an indigenous community and its children in the challenges and tensions that they face as they interact with a system that includes very little of their language and culture, but it also provides a case for the importance of including learning practices into these programs. I provide a detailed explanation of the learning process of this community and the outside forces that seek to threaten this process. I also utilize this discussion in order to show the differences that exist between what the children experience within the school and at home or in the community in how knowledge is produce, conceptualized, and learned. Thus, I provide the evidence for the challenges that exist for indigenous children within formal Western education systems that go beyond just language and culture. While this thesis provides the evidence to broaden the literature of bilingual intercultural education in Mexico, it also helps to provide a bridge between that and the literature of decolonizing education systems. Within the literature of decolonization education, there is little reference to bilingual intercultural education programs, as these are generally colonizing programs. As it is now, there is a divide between these two bodies of literature that does not have to exist. What this thesis offers is a way to bring these two bodies of theory together as it suggests the creation of new bilingual intercultural programs that no longer colonize and include the local learning practices. Thus, instead of intercultural bilingual education and decolonized education programs, it becomes decolonized intercultural education. As these two bodies of theory come into conversation together, communities, educators, researchers, and policy makers can work together to make more informed decisions and better policies in creating better education programs. For instance, my hope is to be able to provide the community and school with a summary of my findings and the ways in which the school can better serve the community. The director of the school made this request of me before I left, indicating that he wanted to know the ways in which they could improve the school. My purpose behind providing this is not that I believe I have all of the answers, nor that I provide a better representation of their experiences than what the community would be able to give, but to provide an account of some of the experiences of those that I worked with in order to provide a point for the school and community to come together and discuss the best course of action in providing meaningful education. While this thesis deals directly with a specific community and

all discussions have been applied to the experiences of the people within Papalotlan, it can also be applied to a much wider population.

Thus far, I have addressed the way in which this thesis can be used to address the problem of restructuring and redefining bilingual intercultural education for an indigenous community in Mexico, but it can also be used to address a similar problem within formal Western education as well. The contribution that this thesis makes to the wider body of literature that falls under the anthropology of education is that bilingual intercultural education programs and even decolonizing education practices can benefit more students than just indigenous students. This is because it also outlines the issues that exist within formal Western education such as how knowledge is conceptualized, limitations in how learning is achieved, how diversity is understood, and how power is used within the system. Indigenous students are not the only ones who construct knowledge differently or have different learning practices. Nor are indigenous students the only ones who have a different habitus or cultural capital than what is found in the school. Thus, while decolonizing education is usually only addressed in terms of indigenous populations, and while that is how I have used these theories in the majority of this thesis, the same principles that I have addressed here can be applied to many different populations of students. If decolonized intercultural education practices were to be utilized across schools, across populations, many more students would benefit from these practices as Western knowledge and scientifically based learning styles no longer become the most important ways of understanding or seeing the world.

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