Chapter 11
Critical Classroom Practices: Using "English" to Foster Minoritized Languages and Cultures in Oaxaca, Mexico

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Abstract Mexican children grow up in a society where English and Spanish are associated with "development" and economic success and *minoritized* Indigenous languages with backwardness marginalization. In the context of Oaxaca, the most culturally and linguistically diverse state in Mexico, the chapter aims (1) to present ethnographic portraits of two Indigenous-background student teachers of English who conducted their teaching "praxicum" in an Mexican Indigenous community; and (2) to present classrooms practices, developed by these two student teachers with a critical language educator, which attempt to foster Indigenous languages, interculturalism and egalitarian societies. Taking critical pedagogies and language learning and the notion of 'identity texts' (Cummins J, Identity texts: the imaginative construction of self through multiliteracies pedagogy. In: García O, Skutnabb-Kangas T, Torres-GuzmánImagining ME (ed) Multilingual schools. Multilingual Matters, Toronto, pp 51–68, 2006) as its theoretical basis, the chapter develops three main themes: (a) respecting Indigenous community practices; (b) considering children's lives and contexts as the foundation of classroom practices; and (c) seeing teachers and children as authors of identity texts. It is argued that international languages can be used to promote minority languages if taught critically.

Keywords Language teacher education • Identity texts • Mixtec • Indigenous language • English • Spanish • Critical pedagogy

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11.1 Introduction

The presence of English in Mexican society and schools has been a contested issue. On one hand, government officials and intellectuals have been concerned with the "threat" that English poses to Mexico's national language and sovereignty (Heath 1972; Zavala 1996) and have defended the Spanish language from the English invasion. There are also nationalistic views: "… vis-a-vis the US, Mexico's neighbour, the Spanish heritage creates bonds of solidarity that help to resist the penetration of English and cultural aggression from the north" (Hamel 1994, p. 292). On the other hand, even though most politicians, intellectuals, and people in Mexico hold ambivalent attitudes toward English (Francis and Ryan 1998), they send their children to private bilingual (English/Spanish) elementary schools, so that the children can learn English from a young age. (Regarding elite bilingual schools in Mexico, see the 2003 special issue of Mextesol Journal.) In addition, due to the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1991, the English language has become more prevalent throughout Mexico including public elementary schools. In 2008, the federal government decided to bring the English language to all fifth- and sixth-grade classrooms in public schools, by way of Inglés Enciclomedia, an interactive computer program. (For a critical analysis of this program, see López Gopar et al. 2009.)

In the arguments regarding the place of English in Mexican society and schools, Indigenous languages have been forgotten or set aside. Over 60 Indigenous languages have survived almost 300 years of Spanish colonization (1519–1810) and then approximately 200 years of "independent" Mexico (1810-present). During this latter period, the "common rhetoric" has held that we need the Spanish language as a national unifying force and thus need to eliminate Indigenous languages and cultures (Garza Cuarón 1997). Indigenous languages therefore have struggled to survive in Indigenous bilingual schools located in rural areas. These languages are now being "reinvented" in urban centres to which Indigenous people have migrated since the 1940s.

Oaxaca, the home state of 16 Indigenous groups in Mexico, has one of the highest migration rates in Mexico (Pimienta Lastra and Vera Bolaños 2005). Indigenous peoples in Oaxaca have migrated to different cities within Oaxaca, to other states in Mexico, and to other countries, mainly the USA. (For an ethnographic account of the transborder lives of Indigenous peoples, see Stephen 2007; also, for migration destinations in the USA see Huizar Murillo and Cerda 2002). For many Indigenous communities, migration has turned into a new initiation ritual which prepares children and young people for the contemporary world (Barabas and Bartolomé 1999). However, López Hernández (2002) and Acevedo Conde (2007a, b) state that migration has resulted in the loss of linguistic and ethnic identity. In addition, due to this Indigenous migration to the USA and the countless Indigenous returnees, and due to the media and new educational reforms, the discourses of English as the language of power and technology have made their way into rural communities in Mexico; and as a result, Indigenous parents want to

add English to their children’s linguistic repertoires (López Gopar and Clemente 2011).

The context of this chapter is a rural Indigenous community of Mixtec heritage in Oaxaca. This Mixtec community is currently participating in a Critical Ethnographic Action Research Project (“CEAR Project” henceforth) whose goal is to use English as a pretext to foster multilingualism and interculturalism. Taking critical pedagogies and language learning (Pennycook 2001; Norton and Toohey 2004) as well as the notion of identity texts (Cummins 2006) as its theoretical basis, this chapter has a two-fold purpose: (1) to present ethnographic portraits of two Indigenous student teachers of English who conducted their teaching “praxicum” (term defined below) in the aforementioned community**,** and (2) to discuss the classroom practices carried out by these two teachers in the same community in order to foster Indigenous languages, interculturalism and egalitarian societies. In order to fulfil the second purpose, this chapter will develop three main theme emerging from the same classroom practices: (a) respecting Indigenous community practices; (b) considering children’s lives and contexts as the foundation of classroom practices; and (c) seeing teachers and children as authors of identity texts.

In this chapter, in order to develop the above two-fold purpose and arrive at the above themes, we first present an overview of the state of Indigenous peoples and their languages in Mexico, while focusing on the Mixtec ethnic group and the Mixtec community in which this research took place. Secondly, we present the CEAR Project and introduce the research methodology. Third, we present ethnographic portraits of the student teachers participating in the CEAR Project. Finally, we discuss the above three themes emerging from classroom practices that attempted to connect the “English” classes to children’s realities and to bring English, Spanish and Indigenous languages to the same level of importance.

11.2 Oaxaca, Indigenous Peoples, Mixtecs and Nundichi

The State of Oaxaca is located in the southern part of Mexico, close to Guatemala. Its ecological diversity and beauty is juxtaposed with the poverty of its inhabitants. The poverty level and marginalization of Indigenous people have their roots in Oaxaca’s history of colonization (Murphy and Stepick 1991). Oaxaca has a population of 3,801,962 (INEGI 2010). According to the 2010 state census, 13 % of the total population has received no schooling and only 10 % has reached the level of higher education. The state average for formal schooling is grade 7. In other words, the average person in Oaxaca studies up to the first year of secondary education (junior high school). In addition, approximately 20 % earn the equivalent of two minimum wages (59 pesos for 8 or more hours of work per day). In sum, over two and a half million people in Oaxaca live in poverty.

Oaxaca is the most culturally and linguistically diverse state in Mexico. The population includes distinct Indigenous ethnic groups such as the Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Chatinos, Triquis, and Mixes, to mention a few (cf. Barabas and

Bartolomé 1999). In Oaxaca, one of every three people speaks an Indigenous language; however, Spanish is the *de facto* official language. The Indigenous population is 1,165,186, of which at least 85 % live in poverty (INEGI 2010).

Barabas (1999) argues that the number of Indigenous people in Oaxaca should be counted as being much higher and that the exaggerated proportion of those who identify with the so-called non-Indigenous (*mestizo*) population is the result of Indigenous identity loss and cultural elements tied to Indigenous languages: "... speaking a 'dialect' [pejorative term to refer to Indigenous languages] is considered a custom of Indians, associated with an inferior identity" (p. 164, our translation). In other states of Mexico, being a Oaxacan is often equated with being an Indigenous and formally uneducated person. Hence, "many Indigenous peoples deny their ethnicity, language and culture" (López Hernández 2002, p. 5, our translation). Despite linguistic and racist attitudes (Montes García 2004) and thanks to Indigenous educators' activism (Hernández Díaz 2004), 16 Indigenous languages of Oaxaca have been officially recognized by the government. (For a map of Oaxaca and its Indigenous languages, see http://www.ieepo.gob.mx/2n1.htm). However, there are many more languages spoken in the state of Oaxaca. The number depends on the criteria selected to categorize these languages. For instance, the "Zapotec" language, which officially is considered "one language," has "possibly 40 variants reciprocally unintelligible" (Summer Institute of Linguistics 2012, n.p.). In other words, people who speak "Zapotec" in one community may not understand the "Zapotec" spoken in another community. Hence, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (2012, n.p.) labels the Indigenous languages by adding the name of the community (e.g., Zapoteca de Amatlán).

In terms of the number of speakers, the Mixtec language is second only to the Zapotec language. According to the last census (INEGI 2010), there are 476,472 speakers of "Lenguas Mixtecas" or Mixtec varieties. In this census, six main varieties were considered: Mixtec, Mixtec from the Coast, Mixtec from the high region, Mixtec from the low region, Mixtec from the Mazatec Area, and Mixtec from the neighboring state of Puebla. The Mixtec region of Oaxaca has been affected by drought and land erosion for decades, which has caused the emigration of this ethnic group. Acevedo Conde (2007a, b) states that according to official figures, approximately 200,000 Oaxacans live in the USA. Most of them are from the Mixtec region of Oaxaca. Mixtecs live mainly in San Diego County, Sonoma County, Ventura County, and San Joaquin Valley, all located in California. Stephen (2007) also reports the presence of Mixtecs in the state of Oregon.

Mixtec people have experienced discrimination in their new places of residence and the loss of their linguistic and ethnic identity. In a study of English teachers in the city of Oaxaca, Mexico, López Gopar et al. (2006) document the discrimination suffered by two Mixtec university students throughout their studies. One of the students stated:

> When I was in high school, I used to deny I spoke Mixteco because if they see you speak Mixteco, people think that you don't know anything. They discriminated you. That is why I prefer to say I spoke only Spanish. This still happens to students who are in the university level here in Oaxaca in different faculties like accounting and architecture (p. 99).

Julián Caballero (2002) has also reported the struggles faced by Mixtec speakers in the Mexican education system. This discrimination has led Mixtec parents to stop teaching Mixtec to their children. Igabe (2012) states that the mayor of a Mixtec community reports that 90 % of the Indigenous people residing in the Mixtec region "have lost their Mixtec identity due to the fact that they consider speaking an Indigenous language synonymous with poverty and discrimination" (n.p., our translation). This mayor also emphasizes that people of Mixtec origin, especially children, are forgetting their Mixtec language and giving more importance to foreign languages such as English.

In order to problematize this issue, two Indigenous student teachers of English from the public state university of Oaxaca conducted their *praxicum* as part of the CEAR project (below). This praxicum was carried out in Nundichi, a Mixtec community. Hence, we focus now on Nundichi.

Nundichi is an agricultural community located in the heart of the Mixtec region of Oaxaca. Nundichi is close to San Juan Ñumi and Tlaxiaco, which was considered the "Little Paris" of Oaxaca due to its importance in commerce at the end of the 1800s. Cold and humid, Nundichi has a climate conducive to the local agriculture. Approximately 90 % of the people in Nundichi cultivate crops such as corn, beans and tomatoes. The cultivation of tomatoes, in particular, has been done through communal green houses. In addition, people in Nundichi raise chickens, turkeys, goats, lambs, and cows for self-consumption. Other people in Nundichi make handicrafts out of natural materials from palm trees. On Saturdays, many people from Nundichi go to Tlaxiaco to sell their produce, animals and handicrafts at the weekly market and to buy supplies and goods.

Nundichi is a Mixtec-speaking community. According to the statistics provided by the town mayor, 87 % of the people speak Mixtec as their native language. Nundichi practices *comunalidad*, which, according to Meyer (2010), refers to Indigenous practices that "reach far beyond Western ideas of cooperation, collectivization, or social concern for the other" (p. 23). Pursuant to *comunalidad*, general assemblies or "town meetings" are held. In Nundichi, decisions pertaining to the well-being of the community are reached through general assemblies, which can be considered "the expression and patient consideration of many disparate points of views, collective and critical discussion, and consensual decision making" (Meyer 2010, p. 20). These assemblies are conducted in Mixtec. In Nundichi, people also engage in *tequio*, which, according to Flores Quintero (2004), refers to the community work that Indigenous peoples undertake as a moral obligation and without pay. For instance, if a road needs to be cleared out, everybody helps without receiving payment.

Even though the use of Mixtec is vibrant in Nundichi, the hegemony of Spanish and the "importance" of English make their way in through different institutions, migration and the media. In Nundichi, there is a Catholic church, a municipal building, a kindergarten, an elementary school, a secondary school, and a clinic. Maldonado Alvarado (2002) states that the Spanish and later the liberal non-Indigenous or mestizo Mexicans attempted to dominate Indigenous communities through these institutions and impose the Spanish language in place

of the Indigenous languages since institutions operate mainly in Spanish. Because these institutions are considered official and wield power, their use of Spanish sends a strong message to the children: that the children's heritage, values and language are not worthy enough and should be replaced by Spanish and "Western" ideas (Meyer and Maldonado Alvarado 2010). English has also been introduced to Nundichi through schools, media, movies, TV programs, and advertisements from English language institutes claiming that English will changes peoples' lives. In addition, migration to the USA is a common phenomenon among Nundichi people. This has also brought English to the community.

11.3 The CEAR Project

The CEAR Project is a response to a world phenomenon that places English over other hegemonic languages like Spanish and French, and especially over Indigenous languages struggling to survive in developing countries and in communities like Nundichi. The CEAR project, carried out since 2007 in different Oaxacan rural, urban and semi-urban schools, community centres and a non-profit library in the city of Oaxaca, is a university-based initiative led by Mario López-Gopar with the collaboration of student teachers of the English language. The CEAR project uses English as a pretext to foster multilingual practices and interculturalism. Dietz (2003) argues that multiculturalism acknowledges the existence of different cultures but does not challenge the inequities among them. Interculturalism, on the other hand he argues, challenges these inequities and promotes understanding, valuing and learning among cultures.

The CEAR Project also attempts to develop teaching expertise and to co-construct affirming identities among all the participants. In the CEAR Project, language educators from the Faculty of Languages of the University of Oaxaca collaborate with student teachers of English who do their teaching "praxicum" (see below) in pairs in the aforementioned settings. These pairs of student teachers, usually 8–10 pairs per academic year, meet on a weekly basis to share experiences and connect their praxicum to theory, the socio-cultural context in which they teach, and their own lives.

In the CEAR Project, we have developed the concept of teaching *praxicum*. The construct of "praxicum" stems from the concept of "praxis" proposed by Freire (1970) while connecting with the concept of student teachers' "practicum." Freire (1970) argues that reflection with no action is "blah." Action without reflection is activism in the manipulative sense. Praxis requires reflection plus action. In teacher preparation programs, the word practicum is typically used to refer to student teachers' application of theory and knowledge acquired in their teaching preparation program to their classroom practice. Johnson (2006) refers to this phenomenon as the "theory/practice dichotomy" (p. 240). This is a technical view of teaching in which student teachers are consumers and applicators of theories (McLaren 2003). In our view of praxicum, student teachers are considered individuals who can create

theories before, while, and after they teach (practice). Student teachers hence become "critical action researchers" from day one in their placement classrooms. In critical action research, interventions are the heart of research projects. In our case, our interventions occur throughout the CEAR Project in formal interviews, informal conversations, and in the classes during the praxicum.

In addition, the term "praxicum" underscores that the student teachers' classroom practice is connected to the historical and sociopolitical milieu where teachers teach *and* learn from students while working towards their own professional development, their students' literacy and language development, and the co-construction of egalitarian societies. The student teachers' praxicum is constrained by the context but can also serve as a starting point to change that context.

The CEAR Project takes critical pedagogies and language learning as its theoretical basis. Freire (1970, 1994) argues that critical pedagogy need not be followed but rather reinvented in different contexts. In other words, Freire maintains that critical pedagogy is not a prescriptive method, and that critical pedagogy changes according to the context. Norton and Toohey (2004), taking Freire's ideas, use the plural "critical pedagogies" to reject the one-size-fits-all approach to language teaching across different settings. In this volume, different language educators present their reinventions of critical pedagogies in their own contexts: some language educators working with teachers, others with adult learners while others with young adults in different countries.

In the CEAR Project, critical language pedagogy is reinvented by each pair of student teachers in their different classes, having as a basic principle that both teachers and children have a lot to teach each other. They also regard each other as "subjects" of their own histories but capable of transforming their historical conditions (Cummins 2000). Hence, in the CEAR Project, the life histories of student teachers and children are highly relevant since they are the "subjects" that attempt to contest linguistic and ethnic hegemony of the Spanish language and the Spanish and mestizo groups. Their life histories are also relevant because they represent the standard against which theories, language policies, curricula, textbooks, and materials are measured.

In order to reinvent critical pedagogies in the CEAR Project and bring student teachers and children's life stories to the forefront, we rely on the notion of "identity texts" developed by Cummins (2006). The student teachers invest their own identities and those of the children in their classes through the development of identity texts, which Cummins (2006) defines as "the products of students' creative work or performances" (p. 60). Cummins (2001) also states:

> Students will be reluctant to invest their identities in the learning process if they feel their teachers do not like them, respect them, and appreciate their experiences and talents. In the past, students from marginalized social groups have seldom felt this sense of affirmation and respect for language and culture from their teachers. Consequently their intellectual and personal talents rarely found expression in the classroom. (p. 124)

One of the ways students feel that their talents and identities are recognized, valued, respected, and affirmed in classrooms is through the creation of students' own texts, their own stories. It is in these stories that students invest their identities and thus become protagonists. In the CEAR Project, texts can be written, visual, multimodal, signed or spoken, and multilingual. In other words, all the materials created by the student teachers and the children are considered identity texts since they are connected to their own life histories and realities.

11.4 Methodology and Overview of the Student Teachers' Praxicum

The CEAR Project's methodology is a fusion of critical ethnography and critical action research. The growth of critical ethnography has resulted from researchers being dissatisfied with other theories and methods that have been unable to ask and answer fundamental social questions (Anderson 1989). Critical action research, inspired by Freire's work, takes a step forward and acts on those social questions (e.g. McTaggart 1997; Reason and Bradbury 2001).

Critical ethnography is committed to social justice. Higgins and Coen (2000), who worked in Oaxaca, argued that their way of doing critical ethnography was through *ethnographic praxis*, by linking their research to issues of social justice and its objectives to the desires and concerns of those with whom they were working. Critical ethnography is committed to social justice by carving out spaces for participants' stories to be heard in order to expose practices that are socially unjust and to raise awareness with the "hope" that societal inequities and oppressive practices will be resolved (Jordan and Yeomans 1995).

In critical action research, interventions are the heart of research projects. Interventions are in many ways part of the praxis proposed by Freire (1970). These interventions turn "hope" into actions. In our case, our interventions occur throughout the CEAR Project in formal interviews with the children, informal conversations with children and parents, and in the classes we have with the children. In the CEAR Project, teacher educators and student teachers within a school or a community, using the English language as a pretext to foster multilingualism, interculturalism and affirming identities among all the participants. The teacher educators and student teachers get to know the community and children's lives in order to develop critical thematic units pertinent to the context. Then, the student teachers carry out their teaching praxicum, in which the role of "teacher" and "learner" is not fixed since student teachers are there not only to teach but also to learn from the children.

The praxicum we describe in this chapter was carried out in Nundichi, the Mixtec community described above, by Narcedalia and Arcadio, two student teachers, in collaboration with Mario, the teacher educator. In Nundichi, Narcedalia and Arcadio conducted a 40-h praxicum throughout three and half months in the

Fig. 11.1 Children from Nundichi

spring. They met with the children from 10:00 to 1:30 p.m. on Sundays in a classroom provided by the mayor. This class had 15 chairs, which were not enough for the 30 children who attended the praxicum. Hence, Narcedalia and Arcadio used *petates* (mats made from palm leaves) to accommodate the children (Fig. 11.1).

The ages of the children ranged from 6 to 14. Some of the children had to walk for about an hour to attend the sessions. During their praxicum, Narcedalia and Arcadio developed a critical thematic unit entitled "All about me and my community." The main message they wanted to convey to the children was that the children's lives, heritage, languages, values and customs were valued and that they could freely use Mixtec, Spanish and English in the classroom.

Narcedalia and Arcadio collected data before and during the praxicum. Before the praxicum, the data collected included ethnographic field notes, interviews with the mayor, and informal conversations with parents, teachers and children. Narcedalia and Arcadio spent several weekends in the community to learn more about it and understand the sociocultural and economic context of their praxicum. They met with the mayor to discuss the goals of the praxicum and to learn more about the community. They took field notes about their observations as well as their meetings with the mayor. They also held informal conversations with teachers, parents and children as they were advertising their praxicum and trying to recruit students. While they were doing ethnographic work in Nundichi, they each also wrote an autobiography (as referred to in the following section).

During the praxicum, Narcedalia and Arcadio collected data in several ways. Narcedalia and Arcadio audio-recorded all their classes. They also kept a diary of all the classes. On some occasions, they video-recorded some segments of their classes. They also took photographs of their classes. The materials and children's work samples were either photographed or scanned. In order to learn more about the children, Narcedalia and Arcadio interviewed children representing the different ages in the classroom. These interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed.

During the praxicum, Narcedalia, Arcadio and Mario analyzed the data in order to identify emerging themes and adjust the praxicum accordingly. The data was analyzed in a recursive and reiterative manner throughout the praxicum through weekly meetings with other student teachers conducting their praxicum somewhere else. Also, Mario held weekly meetings with Narcedalia and Arcadio to discuss their sessions, to plan ahead, to connect their praxicum with the general context of Oaxaca and the Mixtec region, and to start identifying emerging themes.

11.5 Ethnographic Portraits of Arcadio and Narcedalia

In the CEAR Project, the lives of student teachers and children are essential. Life stories have been absent in the literature, especially in applied linguistics focusing on children. (For a recent exception, see Denos et al. 2009; for a collection of essays, novels, and poems by 30 authors who once were language minority students, see Santa Ana 2004.) Teachers and student teachers are typically portrayed generically, as if their personal background would have no connection to the curriculum. In the CEAR Project, in contrast, the lives of the student teachers are intrinsically connected to all areas of the praxicum as they are the agents of change. Hence, in this section, we present ethnographic portraits of the student teachers. These portraits were developed from the student teachers' autobiographies and further enhanced by Mario's semi-structured interviews with the student teachers.

11.5.1 Arcadio

Arcadio Delgado Jimenez is a graduate from the BA program in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at the University of Oaxaca. Arcardio was born in Tlaxiaco, the biggest town in the Mixtec region, where Spanish is predominantly used. Arcadio grew up in Ocotepec, a Mixtec community, due to his mother's work as an elementary school teacher. "My childhood was happy because I was always with my mother and we travelled every weekend to Tlaxiaco . . . since we did not have enough money to commute every day."

Arcadio grew up as an emergent bilingual. He considers Spanish his first language. Even though Arcadio is not a fluent speaker of the Mixtec language, he

understands some of it. “I remember in my childhood in Ocotepec I had a friend named Josue, who used to teach me some words in Mixtec. When he would see a girl passing by, he would have me say some phrases in Mixtec.... However, some of those phrases would be bad words, but I didn’t know what I was saying.” Arcadio also learned some Mixtec from his mother. “My mother taught me some words in Mixtec ... something that was very interesting was that she taught me how to say some words in Mixtec from Chalcatongo, which is her hometown ... maybe because she wanted me to learn that Mixtec and not the Mixtec from Ocotepec ... because she may have thought that Mixtec from Chalcatongo is the best. First she taught me words in Mixtec from Chalcatongo, and afterwards she would teach how to say those words in Mixtec from Ocotepec. I also practiced Mixtec from Ocotepec because I listened to how people spoke.”

Arcadio became an independent person at a young age, but lost contact with the Mixtec language. His mother decided that he should study in his hometown since she was relocated to a different community. Even though his mother would come to visit Arcadio three times a week, “it was very difficult because I was used to being with my mother”. When the food at home ran out, Arcadio himself would cook and eat fried eggs and bring fried-egg tacos to school. At school, his classmates would call him *huevito frito* (little fried egg) because of this.

Music became an important part of Arcadio’s life. “In secondary school, I learned to play flute.” With the help of a band leader, Arcadio learned to play the clarinet. Arcadio participated in music events at school and won several competitions. He was later asked to join a band in another community and he started to make some money. “I started to earn money playing and I was happy because I could help my mother with my expenses ... My mother was spending a lot of money since my sister Luz had started medical school.”

Arcadio moved to the city of Oaxaca, 3 h away from his hometown, to pursue higher education. While he was in high school in the city of Oaxaca, he lived with his older brother and experienced a lot of financial difficulties. “Sometimes we didn’t have money to buy some material that teachers asked for at school and sometimes we didn’t have money to buy anything to eat.” In order to make money, on the weekends, he would return to his hometown to work at his older brother’s car wash or play in a band at a party.

Arcadio enrolled in the Faculty of Languages to become an English teacher. This was his second choice since he did not have the money to afford a major in sports education. The major in teaching English was a challenge for Arcadio: “At the beginning it was difficult for me because I couldn’t speak English, and it was hard to learn ... I almost quit because I didn’t have money to spend or to buy books.” The financial situation of Arcadio’s family was so critical that Arcadio’s older brother quit architecture school and migrated to the USA. Arcadio continued to support himself with the little support his mother would give him and by commuting to his hometown to work at the car wash left behind by his older brother and to play in a band.

Arcadio has plans for his future now that he has finished his degree:

> I would like to get a good job and to help to my mother principally in building a house for her. Also, I would like to visit some cities around the world to get more knowledge and to know more things around the world.

11.5.2 Narcedalia

Narcedalia Jimenez Morales is also a graduate from the BA program in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at the University of Oaxaca. She was born in a town called Santa Catarina Yosonotu, and she grew up in a big Mixtec family with five brothers and three sisters. "Two of my sisters and two of my brothers live in the USA, and three brothers and one sister live in Tlaxiaco." At a young age, Narcedalia left her hometown. "I was four years old when we left our hometown and moved to Tlaxiaco. My mother decided to live in Tlaxiaco because we had some problems with my father's mother."

Narcedalia grew up in a Mixtec-speaking family and learned Spanish in the community and at school.

> When we arrived to Tlaxiaco, my mother sent to me to the kindergarten close to my house. During the break my mother would bring lunch with the hand-made tortillas she had just prepared. "*Yaa yo stajiniroo ji toliro*" ("Here are your tacos and atole [a corn-based drink].")... When I was with my mother, we always talked in Mixtec because she spoke to me in Mixtec since I was a baby. Also we talked in Mixtec because she spoke very little Spanish and she felt more comfortable speaking in Mixtec.

Narcedalia also spoke Mixtec with her grandmother who helped her develop it more: "When I didn't know how to say a word in Mixtec, I would tell it to my Grandma in Spanish and she would answer in Mixtec." Concurrently, Narcedalia was learning Spanish with the Spanish-speaking children in the community: "Every night I played with my neighbors and practiced my Spanish."

Narcedalia had a tough time in elementary school. She attended an elementary school that was far from her house. "My class started at 7:00 A.M. For that reason, I needed to leave my home at 6 o'clock. My brother and I would walk for an hour." Narcedalia was a slow walker, which brought her terrible consequences. "When I arrived late, the teacher would beat me with a wooden stick. For that reason, when I was late, I didn't go to school and I spent my time playing in a river, which was near the school." Narcedalia's continuous skipping school affected her reading development:

> It was very difficult for me to learn to read. My teacher noticed that I couldn't read, so she decided to give me extra classes in the afternoons... I went to her house for two hours every day. After two months, I improved my reading skill and learned to read in Spanish.

At the end of her elementary school years, Narcedalia was able to move to a secondary school closer to home. At this time, her parents started a business selling fruit and household items in different communities.

> My mother would accompany my father to sell. They went to different towns to get money, and it took them around twenty days to come back. My brothers and I had to stay without my parents. That was hard for me because I needed to make the food for myself and my younger twin brothers.

Narcedalia maintained this responsibility all the way through high school:

> My life was the same because my parents continued selling. We had a better quality of life because we could buy the things we needed. I finished secondary school and enrolled in high school. My twin brothers were still in elementary school. For that reason, I chose the afternoon shift in my high school, so I had time to bring breakfast to my twin brothers every day. During the break in high school, I came back home to have lunch in order to save money. I also checked on my twin brothers to make sure they had already had lunch. It was hard for me because I had to take care of my brothers.

Narcedalia continued in this role until the end of high school when her mother came home due to illness:

> My mother became diabetic, so she stopped working. I was happy because I could see her every day when I came back from the school, but at the same time we were very sad because we knew that she was sick.

With her mother's moral support, Narcedalia pursued university studies. She first wanted to study tourism administration, but this major was too expensive for her family. She had to choose something different: "I was confused because I didn't know what to study. However, I knew about the Faculty of Languages and I decided to give it a try." Narcedalia moved to the city to attend the BA program in teaching English, having to leave her mother and hometown behind:

> When I came to Oaxaca, my mother was very sad because we were used to being together. However, she told me that to study was the best option because with this I would have more opportunities in life and would not suffer like her.

Unfortunately, Narcedalia lost her mother during her second year of the BA program: "When my mother died, I was very sad. Life made no sense because my mother was everything to me. I got depressed, and I didn't want to continue my studies." The death of Narcedalia's mother was also very hard on Narcedalia's siblings: "My younger brothers dropped out of school, and soon after my sister eloped with her boyfriend. My family did not have enough money and my father alone wasn't able to be in control of that situation."

Narcedalia overcame the loss of her mother and financial difficulties with the help of her boyfriend and one of her sisters. "My boyfriend helped me to overcome my situation. It was hard to leave my sadness behind. I started to work with my boyfriend in his car wash in order to get money to continue my studies." Luckily, Narcedalia's sister, who was living the USA, helped her, too. "Sometimes, my sister Paula would send me some money to get the things I needed."

With all these family and financial problems, Narcedalia had a rough start in her BA studies: "At the beginning of the BA, it was very hard for me because I didn't know any English." She improved little by little. Now that she has finished her degree, Narcedalia has plans for her near future. "Nowadays, I have improved my

English. However, I think that I need to practice more. For that reason, I would like to travel to the USA to practice my English."

11.6 Connecting Student Teachers' Life Stories to Their Praxicum

Both Narcedalia and Arcadio come from a Mixtec background. Their road to the BA in TESL followed different routes. Nevertheless, they both experienced financial difficulties and had to become independent from a young age. Narcedalia was fortunate enough to grow up with her family, so she could maintain her Mixtec. Even though Arcadio's case was different, he considers himself Mixtec "at heart."

The life stories of both Narcedalia and Arcadio were connected to lives of people living in Nundichi where they conducted their praxicum. They could relate to the reality of the children. They were also "insiders" in the community, which gave them access and a deep understanding of the sociocultural context in which their praxicum took place. Most importantly, they were critically aware of the hegemony of the Spanish language and the uncritical influence of the discourses regarding the English language in this Indigenous community. Hence, their praxicum was by no means "neutral," "objective," or "technical." They started their praxicum with a clear and open agenda. They were not just "English teachers"; they were "language educators" (López Gopar et al. 2006) who believed that English could be taught in a critical way that would respect Indigenous community practices, anchor the curriculum within children's lives, and tap into children's expertise and creativity in order to create authors in the classroom. This will be illustrated in the next three sections, where the data will be presented as narrative passages that were developed from the field notes, class observations, photos, and videos collected throughout the praxicum.

11.7 Respecting Indigenous Community Practices

Narcedalia and Arcadio walk into the Mayor's office. They explain to him the goal of the CEAR Project. Even though he welcomes and completely supports the project, he asks them to come back next week to present it before the general assembly. Next week, Narcedalia and Arcadio join the assembly, which is held in Mixtec. Arcadio presents in Spanish and the mayor translates into Mixtec, since Narcedalia got stage fright. People are interested in the project and ask different questions regarding the logistics of the course. The mayor makes sure there is consensus before welcoming the project.

In Indigenous communities, democracy is taken to a whole new level since they practice *comunalidad*. Decisions have to be made by reaching consensus. It is not a

matter of the "majority" accepting something. Everybody has to agree. The CEAR Project respects these Indigenous practices. In Nundichi, parents' consent was granted through the community assembly. Later on, children were also consulted about their participation. Narcedalia and Arcadio were aware that throughout history research has been done *on* Indigenous people and not *with* Indigenous people (Smith 1999). Having both grown up in Indigenous communities, they wanted to respect the parents' decisions regarding the inclusion of "English" in their children's lives. They took into account that parents and children wanted to add English to their linguistic repertoires; and they linked this desire to issues of social justice by emphasizing the importance of the Mixtec language. In Higgins and Coen's terms (2000), they were trying to construct "ethnographic praxis."

Narcedalia and Arcadio arrive half an hour before their class starts. They get the classroom key from the mayor. As they are about to start cleaning, two of the mothers and their children arrive to the class. "Maestra Narcedalia, let us help you clean." "Yes," adds the other mother. "We can do *tequio*. The children can help, too." When Narcedalia and Arcadio turn around, they see one of the children is sweeping the floor while another comes into the classroom with a bucket filled with water. Before they know it, the classroom has been cleaned in half of the time they had planned. This gives them time to engage in conversations with the mothers and the children.

As mentioned earlier, doing *tequio* [the community work that Indigenous peoples undertake as a moral obligation and without pay] is a communal practice carried out in most Indigenous communities around Oaxaca. Narcedalia and Arcadio had not planned to make this practice part of their praxicum. The mothers and children, however, reminded them that the teaching of English could also incorporate practices valued in the community. They noticed that as children and mothers engaged in cleaning the classroom, they were making it their own. Their acceptance of the mothers' suggestions sent a powerful message to the mothers: they and their Indigenous practices were welcome in the classroom. This differs greatly from traditional school practices, which have pushed parents and grandparents away from schools by making them feel that their knowledge is archaic, primitive and backward (Molina Cruz 2000; Maldonado Alvarado 2002; Rockwell 2004). Narcedalia and Arcadio also tried to bring children's lives and realities into their classes.

11.8 Children's Lives and Contexts as the Foundation of Classroom Practices

It is the first of day of classes. Narcedalia and Arcadio welcome the 30 children registered for the course. The class is a mixture of different ages. This is not atypical in small rural communities where due to lack of facilities and teachers, all the elementary school children end up in one class. Narcedalia and Arcadio introduce

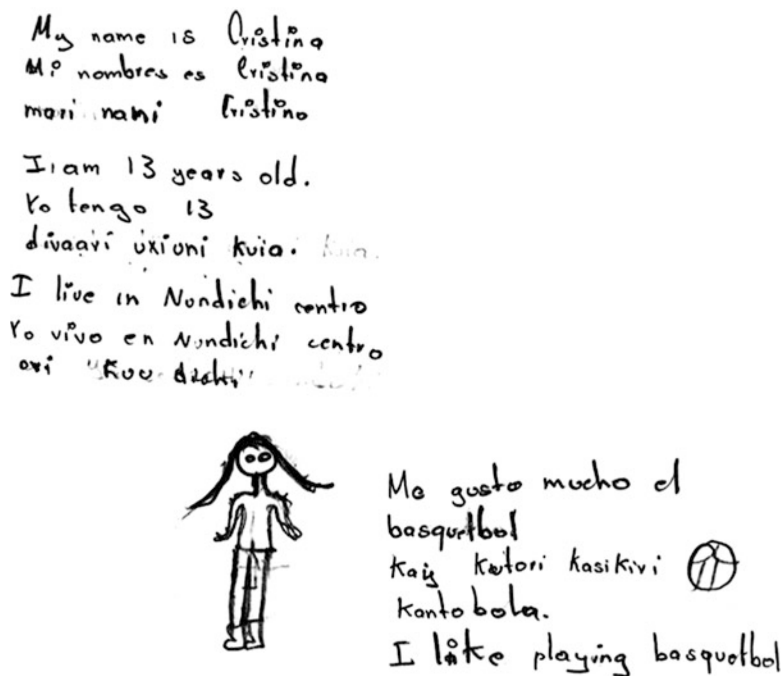

Fig. 11.2 Children's use of multilingualism from day 1

themselves in Spanish, the lingua franca, and have everybody do the same. Then, they repeat the activity in Mixtec. Everybody does it, except four children who do not want to do it because they can't speak Mixtec. However, Fredy, a fluent speaker of Mixtec, gets up and tells them: "I will help you say it in Mixtec." The four children try following Fredy's model and do it really well. It is now time to do it in English, and everybody points to Perla, a 7 year-old who was born in the USA and came back 2 years ago: "Teacher, Perla can speak English." Perla gets nervous because she is on the spot. She does it and then everybody gives it a try with Narcedalia and Arcadio's help. Multilingualism is set as classroom practice from Day 1 (Fig. 11.2).

Narcedalia and Arcadio were well aware that one of the key principles of critical pedagogy is to believe that students have much to teach and to contribute to the curriculum. As Freire (1970) argues, students are not blank slates or empty buckets waiting to be filled with knowledge. Even though Narcedalia and Arcadio are "English" teachers, the class is not an English-only zone. They bring the two languages most children have in their backpacks into the classroom. By doing so, Arcadio, who is not a fluent speaker of Mixtec, allows Fredy to take the stage as the expert in Mixtec; and Fredy does a very good job at sharing his "minoritized" language with Spanish-only speaking children. Children, knowing each other's background very well, readily attribute expert status to Perla, the Mexican-

Fig. 11.3 Children drawing market practices in their community

American person in the room. In critical pedagogy, expertise does not reside solely in the teacher (Freire 1970; Norton and Toohey 2004). Cummins (2001) argues that children's knowledge is encoded in the language(s) children bring to the classroom. Hence, by welcoming Spanish and Mixtec into the English classroom, Narcedalia and Arcadio also tapped into children's knowledge, as the next episode shows.

Narcedalia and Arcadio have taught the children how to say simple phrases in English to talk about themselves. They come into the classroom cognizant of the important role that agriculture and the market play in their students' lives. "Today, we are going to start talking about the market in Tlaxiaco. Why do you go there every Saturday?" Narcedalia speaks in Spanish to engage the whole class in the next topic. Many children raise their hands to provide information about the produce and animals their parents sell. With excitement, they continue sharing about all the activities people engage in during a market day. Narcedalia passes out a big piece of paper on which children will draw a market scene in preparation for their learning in English and in Mixtec for some of the children (Fig. 11.3).

From the ethnographic data about the community, it was clear that the lives of the Nundichi inhabitants revolved around the market day. Children were experts in market practices. During class, everybody had something to share about what people do, what they buy and sell, and especially how this helps their family's economy. From a young age, children participate in market day and in preparations for it. Many children from the class collaborated at home by helping their parents in the greenhouses or by looking after the animals, which would be later sold or exchanged at the market day. Children's expertise was clearly evident in their drawings and comments regarding the importance of the market day in their lives. Narcedalia and Arcadio used this strong foundation to transfer this knowledge into English. In addition, during

Fig. 11.4 Children creating their own materials

Narcedalia and Arcadio's praxicum, the materials were created by the students with Narcedalia's and Arcadio's assistance. In other words, they created identity texts throughout their praxicum. This is the focus of the next section.

11.9 Teachers and Children as Authors of Identity Texts

Narcedalia and Arcadio have taught vocabulary regarding vegetables, fruits and animals grown and raised in the community. They have also taught colors and numbers along with grammatical patterns for children to create sentences such as "In Nundichi, people grow tomatoes. People sell tomatoes at the market." Children have learned this vocabulary in different ways: through repetition, games and songs. Narcedalia and Arcadio have made up during their praxicum. Especially, students' learning has occurred through their involvement in creating all the materials. The depiction of vegetables, fruits and animals in their community is their own. Narcedalia and Arcadio make the lack of resources (computers, printers, etc.) work to their advantage as they make everything from scratch with the children (Fig. 11.4).

During their praxicum, Narcedalia and Arcadio had the children create their own materials. McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008) argue that

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

Fig. 11.5 Ernesto next to the poster with medicinal plants

In order to avoid this “Othering” discourse, Narcedalia and Arcadio ensured that the teaching materials (Fig. 11.4 above) originated from the children’s lives and hands. Having the children create their own materials was also an excellent way to make the best out of the lack of financial and technological resources in Nundichi. Most importantly, it was the perfect way to have children’s knowledge and lives validated. Besides, it was a way for children to display their art skills and engage in their learning. The same thing occurred when children produced other texts.

Narcedalia and Arcadio are wrapping up their praxicum after having taught for 3 months. They have two more classes to teach. The children come into their classrooms with different plants they have brought from home. Their assignment was to gather medicinal plants their grandmothers and mothers use on them as remedies. The knowledge passed through generations is evident as the children share the different uses of the plants. Ernesto starts sharing about *chamiso blanco*: “My grandmother uses *chamiso blanco* when we have fever. We put the *chamiso blanco* on our chest and when the *chamiso* gets dry, the fever is gone.” Ernesto’s presentation is backed up by other children’s claims that their mothers do the same. Anahi starts presenting and talks about the use of *yavi tataa* (aloe vera in Mixtec) for injuries, and *mirto*: “We use this plant whenever we have an earache. We put a leaf of *mirto* inside the ear and we get better very soon.” Children create a poster with all the plants they brought to class (Fig. 11.5). Then they start creating a little book about the plants.

One of the main of goals of the CEAR Project is the co-creation of children’s affirming identities. Narcedalia and Arcadio wanted children to feel proud of their culture and ways of knowing. During the praxicum, the children invested their

identities in the different texts and materials that they created. Cummins (2006) argues that identity texts:

> . . . hold a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light. When students share identity texts with multiple audiences (peers, teachers, parents, grandparents, sister classes, the media, etc.) they are likely to receive positive feedback and affirmation of self in interaction with these audiences. . .. When this kind of expression [and interaction are] enabled, children come to see themselves as intelligent, imaginative and talented (pp. 60, 64; italics in original).

The recognition of children's intelligence is extended to their parents and grandparents. Narcedalia and Arcadio negotiated the children's identities, not only through their own stories, but also through the stories of their parents and grandparents. By engaging the knowledge inherent in the community, they used English to validate the Mixtec language and ways of knowing.

11.10 Conclusions

The future of Indigenous languages vis-à-vis other dominant languages and English, in particular, is not promising if English and other dominant languages are taught uncritically. As Pennycook (2006) argues:

> . . . if we are concerned about the relation between English and lesser used languages [and their speakers, we must add], the way forward may be not so much in terms of language policies to support other languages over English but rather in terms of opposing language ideologies that construct English in particular ways" (pp. 111–112).

Narcedalia and Arcadio's praxicum is a testament that English language teaching can be used in favour of Indigenous languages and Indigenous people's way of knowing. The use of multilingualism and Indigenous practices in English language classrooms challenges pervasive discourses that positions English as a superior language. Indigenous languages can thrive if teachers validate them in the classrooms.

The CEAR Project is being implemented in different contexts, including urban centres, with similar positive results (López Gopar et al. 2013). However, most of the CEAR projects have been carried as extracurricular activities. The ideal situation would be to implement the CEAR Project principles in official school programs, so that most Mexican children value Indigenous languages and ways of knowing. We have started preparing pre-service English teachers, such as Narcedalia and Arcadio, hoping they will continue fostering Indigenous languages in their future work places.

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