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Linguistic Hegemony and Counterhegemonic Discourse in the Borderlands

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Transborder Indigenous Education: Survivance and Border Thinking in the Professional Development and Practice of *Maestros Indigenas*

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Abstract

This study examines the experiences of Indigenous Mexican educators following their participation in a transborder professional development initiative aimed at strengthening Indigenous Mexican education. Using qualitative and ethnographic methodologies, this article is guided by the following research questions: How do former participants in *Transformación Docente*, a U.S.-based and funded professional development program, conceptualize and enact culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogy in their practice? And how have their perceptions of pedagogy been impacted by their participation in *Transformación Docente*? The findings challenge the hegemony of development agendas through multi-sited critique of top-down Intercultural-Bilingual Education policy and analyze on-the-ground enactments of Indigenous education. Findings reveal transborder professional development supported opportunities for Indigenous educators to: 1) legitimize Indigenous identities, 2) further Indigenous language agendas, and 3) rethink inclusion and relationality in teaching. This article highlights Indigenous teachers as strategic border negotiators, and narrators of counterhegemonic practices within institutional spaces. The study's implications further discussions of Indigenous survivance, and demonstrate the significance of transborder Indigenous dialogues to advance Indigenous struggles for self-determination.

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Introduction

In 2003, the Mexican Congress approved a new General Law outlining the rights of Indigenous¹ peoples to linguistic and cultural preservation and enrichment, including obligations and competencies placed on public institutions to respect these rights (Hamel, 2008). Within broader Latin American inclusion policies known as Bilingual Intercultural Education/Intercultural Bilingual Education (BIE/IBE) (López, 2013), the 2003 policy shift from discrimination and subjugation of Indigenous peoples toward inclusion and diversity in Indigenous education (Tinajero & Englander, 2011), commits the government “to guarantee and increase bilingual-intercultural education” (Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2009, Art. 2, para. 17), offering new potential for Intercultural Bilingual Education in Mexico. Yet, many question the viability of countering longstanding institutional inequities and historic discrimination toward Indigenous communities through top-down policy (López, 2008). The process of transforming schools from instruments of state control over Indigenous populations, toward spaces of self-determination and Indigenous co-construction of educational goals is complex and at times ill attended (Bertely Busquets, 2006; García & Velasco, 2012).

Mexico’s Indigenous population is estimated at 12 million, constituting of 11% to 13% of the country (García & Velasco, 2012, citing the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas [i.e., National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples]. Since the late 1990s, Mexico has expanded Intercultural-Bilingual Education (IBE) to an estimated 1.3 million Mexican students across Mexico’s diverse terrains, rural and urban, providing essential services in early childhood education through the end of primary school (6th grade/typically age 12) (Morales Garza, 2011; Tinajero & Englander, 2011). Under IBE, policy priorities target improvements in school access and attendance rates among Indigenous students, as well as the preparation and hiring of Indigenous teachers (Morales Garza, 2011). Political authorities claim great strides toward improving Indigenous education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2014); however, research indicates the application of IBE remains contradictory and inconsistent across the country (Treviño, 2013), and Indigenous student achievement remains disproportionately low in comparison to non-Indigenous counterparts (Santibañez, 2016). Even with increased focus on

¹ We capitalize the term Indigenous to recognize the unique political and cultural relationships between Indigenous peoples and their homelands and as a marker of legitimate political status.

IEB, the preparation of Indigenous teachers struggles to break the colonial mold of monolingual/monocultural pedagogical ideologies (García & Velasco, 2012; Podestá Siri, 2009).

Schools in Indigenous communities are contentious sites of cultural and political negotiation (Briseño, 2017; Rockwell & Gomes, 2009), where Indigenous teachers are frontline brokers between local identities, Indigenous community agendas, and wide reaching educational policies (Bertely Busquets & Robles, 1997; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Menken & Garcia, 2010). As such, there is a need to understand how Indigenous teachers mediate the fixed and shifting lines of colonial hegemony through ideological and pedagogical negotiations in classrooms and schools. Further, there is need to understand how professional development opportunities contribute to global/local spaces for teachers to push back against hegemonic education policies they enact Indigenous visions of IEB (Hornberger & Swinehart, 2012).

This study emerged from collaborative work in an intensive transborder professional development program, *Transformación Docente* (TD),² a U.S. foreign aid-funded program targeting Indigenous Mexican primary educators. Between the years 2010-2014, TD sponsored 7 cohorts of 20 professional Indigenous educators to study at a U.S. institution through a cross-governmental initiative to strengthen the education of Indigenous Mexican youth. In the First World/Third World context of development, political and economic divides between North-South perpetuate the global coloniality of power, especially in programs targeting Indigenous peoples (Quijano, 2014), a hegemony that frequently maintains Indigenous knowledge as Other. Despite this colonial backdrop, post-TD participant evaluations suggested that Indigenous teachers experienced the program as a transformative professional and personal process. A desire to understand the complex experiences of TD participants launched a multi-year process documenting participants' post-program reflections and experiences as they returned to their communities. This participatory and ethnographic research draws on open-ended post-participation surveys, ethnographic site visits, and in-depth interviews to better understand how transborder Indigenous professional development complicates development agendas and makes space for complex scripts of local educational sovereignty in contentious sites like schools.

In this article we address the following research questions: How do former participants in *Transformación Docente* conceptualize and enact culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogy

² *Transformación Docente* is a pseudonym to respect the identity of the program.

in their practice? And how have their perceptions of pedagogy been impacted by their participation in *Transformación Docente*? We draw upon frameworks from Latin America, such as Intercultural Bilingual Education, frameworks from Indigenous Education in the U.S., and transborder theorizing to situate this cross-border professional development.

Literature Review

Intercultural-Bilingual Education and Indigenous Teacher Preparation in Mexico

The context of Indigenous education in Mexico is at best ambiguous (Despaigne, 2013), and at worst a continued process of institutional racism (Lopez, 2008). The origins of Intercultural education in Latin America can be found in rural education in the early 20th century. In Mexico, Intercultural education emerged in rural contexts as an institutional response to post-revolution nationalist policies to assimilate those who did not self-identify as part of the Mexican Nation, nationalizing Indigenous people in the space of compulsorily schooling (Dietz & Mateos Cortes, 2011). Curricula in most rural schools were decontextualized (Heath, 1986), and few, if any, links were sought between Indigenous students' daily lives and linguistic abilities, and the content/language of classroom instruction (Despaigne, 2013). The language of instruction in Indigenous schools occurred almost exclusively in Spanish and/or presented Indigenous languages as inferior to Spanish, denying students access to effective bilingual instruction even as policies have progressed (Patrinos, Sakellariou, & Shapiro, 2006; Santibañez, 2016). Decades of linguistic hegemony have produced widespread deficit ideologies relating to the validity of Indigenous knowledge and linguistic practices in schooling and wider social application (Dietz, 2012; Lopez & Küper, 2000).

Teacher quality has been a political priority in Mexican education for nearly three decades (Morales Garza, 2011; Tatto, 1999), gaining momentum with the rise of Neoliberal policy and the Fox administration in the 2000s (Ornelas, 2004). The "professionalization" of over 58,000 teachers in the Indigenous system offer opportunities for teachers in the Indigenous system hold degrees in IBE from federal and state-run teachers' colleges (*Universidad Pedagógico Nacional* and/or *Universidades Interculturales*). This represents a significant shift from previous eras where Indigenous teachers predominantly entered the field with only certificates in secondary education (Morales Garza, 2011; Santibañez, 2016). Yet, the primary mission of Indigenous teachers,

remains to adapt the national curriculum to local context using Indigenous language and Spanish, and to integrate Indigenous students into mainstream culture (Dietz & Mateos Cortes, 2011).

The focus of recent teacher education reform centers on standardization while discursively supporting diversification. These contradictory trends share similarities with broad policy moments in the U.S., where discourse on diversity and inclusion dot the lines of standardized state and national accreditation rubrics, yet the preparation and evaluation of teachers remains heavily task-based with emphasis on decontextualized content (Sleeter, 2012). As an example, teachers in the Indigenous system are required to pass proficiency exams in an Indigenous language, yet language competency is not linked to teaching placements (e.g. a teacher proficient in Ayuk [Mixe] can be assigned to teach in a Diidxazá [Zapotec] variant speaking community) (Despaigne, 2013; García & Velasco, 2012). In many cases, the implementation of IBE is often reduced to the “folklorization” of cultural motifs, add-ons to classroom teaching, and relegations of Indigenous languages to decontextualized practices or one-way bridges for learning standardized content (Naranjo, 2012; Podestá Siri, 2009).

We are not interested in maintaining a universal narrative of schooling and recognize the duality of entrenched settler-colonialism *and* innovation in schools serving Mexican Indigenous youth. The efforts of teachers in the state of Oaxaca (Maldonado Alvarado, 2016), the grass-roots resistance in the Zapatista regions of Chiapas (Hirmas, Hevia, Treviño, & Marambio, 2005), as well as clusters of collaborations with regional and international specialists (Bertely Busquets, Gasche, & Podesta, 2008) are points of opportunity and persistent struggle within the complex landscape of Indigenous schooling in Mexico. In states with high populations of Indigenous communities, Indigenous teacher organizations and communities alike have been known to push for autonomy in education and for education that reflects local values and ways of knowing (Baronett, 2013; Hirmas, Hevia, Treviño, & Marambio, 2005; Maldonado Alvarado, 2016). These efforts often operate locally, and reflect diversity of methods and perspectives.

Transborder Professional Development and Settler-Colonialism

Innovations in inter-institutional and trans-Indigenous exchanges can have explicit goals to engage Indigenous participants in deconstructing settler-colonial relations in education and land-management (Aikau, Goodyear-Ka’opua, & Silva, 2016; Galla, Kawai’ae’a, & Nicholas, 2014), however, decolonial thinking was not an articulated focus of TD from the perspective of project

fundings. Latin American nation-states with large Indigenous populations are often recipients of international development funding whereby Eurocentric, standardized education and evaluation are prioritized as remedies to high rates of poverty and minority language use (Johnson, 2010; Walsh, 2013). The contradiction of sending Indigenous educators to learn from the sociopolitical context of U.S. education, where Indigenous students are the least served by educational institutions, and the most at risk of academic failure (Brayboy & Maaka, 2011; McCarty, 2009), and Mexican-American/Latinx students experience high rates of school marginalization (Pearl, 2011), was rarely, if ever, acknowledged by foreign aid funding personnel or funding discourse. Likewise, the bisection of Indigenous lands by the U.S.-Mexico border, and the erasure of Indigenous experiences from border politics was absent from development discourses of policy initiatives such as TD. Yet, drawing upon Chadwich Allen's (2012) term "trans-Indigenous", from comparative literary studies, the process of border- and context-crossing held forth the possibility of comparative learning and the emergence of a space for border thinking, even in contradictory settings like the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

Conceptual Framework

We draw from U.S.-based conversations in Indigenous education regarding the importance of teachers in the reclamation of community-centered learning, and the development of culturally sustaining and revitalizing practices (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Lee, 2015). According to McCarty and Lee (2014) culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogies are 1) expressions of Indigenous sovereignty; 2) work to reclaim and revitalize that which has been disrupted and displaced by colonization; and 3) engage educational practices that serve the needs of communities as defined by communities. From the point of view of program coordinators (led by Vanessa), the "unofficial" work of TD was to support Indigenous Mexican teachers to "destabilize dominant policy discourses" (McCarty & Lee, 2014, p. 103) as they negotiated the complexities and contradictions of Intercultural-Bilingual Education. To understand the impact of transborder study on how teachers conceptualized Indigenous ways of knowing/doing in schools, we braid the concepts of educational survivance (Vizenor, 2008) and border thinking (Mignolo, 2012).

Educational Survivance

Gerald Vizenor's (2008) term survivance highlights Indigenous peoples' continued "active sense of presence" in hostile landscapes through a complex combination of survival and resistance. The experiences and voices of Indigenous teachers in this study (re)situate ongoing pedagogical choices within constrained educational terrains. We use educational survivance to highlight the negotiated struggle between Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, and colonialism. Centering Indigenous presence draws attention to the ways teachers' persistently negotiate educational sovereignty through the development of strategic processes for personal, familial and community continuity within hostile educational landscapes (Brayboy, 2005; Wyman, 2012). Use of Vizenor's (2008) concept of survivance privileges Indigenous stories and Indigenous self-representation as forms of immediate and longlasting action and agency, not merely as reactions to state and top-down policies.

Border Thinking and Trans-Indigenous Learning

Border thinking (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006) and borderland theorizing (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008) provide frameworks to understand counternarratives as rejections of the imposition of colonization and domination. Decolonial thinking, rooted in Latin American intellectual responses to the expansion of Western capitalism (Quijano, 2000), challenges the binary of borders, while dwelling in the double consciousness of borders which both recognizes and disregards colonial boundaries (Mignolo, 2007). Border thinking "has the possibility of overcoming the limitation of territorial thinking" (Mignolo, 2012, p. 67) when the power of marginalized peoples is not subsumed by the colonial. We use border thinking to explore the collective sense-making of Indigenous teachers engaged in transborder, trans-Indigenous learning, and to gain insight into how teachers conceptualize Indigenous education within contexts of asymmetrical power relationships. By trans-Indigenous learning, we mean the process and space of comparative learning that emerges in transborder and context crossing (Allen, 2012), such as the U.S.-Mexico border. Trans-Indigenous learning is built upon a belief that settler-colonial relations are to be critiqued not just in classrooms, but through Indigenous relationship building, across contexts and borders (Aikau et al., 2016). We link border thinking to acts of educational survivance, which are not subsumed by the colonizer, even as they exist within and alongside colonial structures such as political, institutional, and linguistic boundaries.

The Program: *Transformación Docente*

The *Transformación Docente* (TD) program was a foreign aid-funded program hosted by a College of Education at a major public university in the U.S. southwest from 2010-2014. Located less than 100 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border, TD served 40 teachers and teacher-coaches each year for intensive professional development cycles of 5 (teacher coaches/*asesores técnicos pedagógicos*) and 11 (teachers/*maestros/as*) months. The program was funded as part of a USAID global development initiative, and included a network of sub-contracted colleges and universities, all managed by a large intercultural education institute at a prestigious university in Washington D.C.³ Many of the sub-contracted institutions, often community colleges and/or smaller public and private institutions, participated in various iterations of USAID funding marked for youth and adult education programming in Latin America and the Caribbean during the Bush and Obama administrations. TD was distinct from other funded programs because it was hosted at a major research university, and had a single focus to strengthen the quality of rural primary education for Indigenous children in Mexico. From 2010-2014, TD worked only with educators from Mexico, an initiative with co-investment from the Mexican government (SEP/DGEI).

From 2010 to 2014, nearly 200 teachers participated in TD. All participants brought with them between 2 and 20 years of service in the Indigenous Mexican teaching system and ranged between early 20s to mid 50s in age. Nearly all TD participants identified as Indigenous people⁴ and located themselves on a spectrum of Indigenous language competency (ranging from emergent to fluent language skills). TD participants came from all regions of Mexico. In any given cohort, TD participants represented between 10-15 different states of Mexico, speaking between 10-15 different Indigenous Mexican languages, in addition to Spanish. All received the fully funded professional scholarship award through a multi-month national selection process that included in-country pre-program orientations and culminated in a ceremony with high-level U.S. diplomats and Mexican politicians.

TD participants did not have to apply to or be accepted into the host university's accredited graduate programs. Programming was designed around an intensive cohort framework

³ Similar iterations of such funding are detailed in Johnson (2010), *Mapping part of an emergent field: Cross-border professional development for teachers*. Unpublished Dissertation, Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona.

⁴ Between 2010-2014, only 3 TD participants did not identify as Indigenous.

that integrated academic study, personal reflection, and service learning in time intensive segments. Being housed within an internationally renowned academic unit, the program was able to draw up experts in language policy, Funds of Knowledge, Indigenous language education, and a large work force of qualified graduate students and practitioners to design and implement a program of study tailored specifically to Mexican Indigenous elementary education. All course work was offered in Spanish and was organized to address needs identified by both funders and experts in Indigenous-bilingual education in the U.S. and Latin America.

Due to the borderland location of TD, the program coordination integrated insights from a rich variety of available educational experiences and perspectives to its participants: Mexican-American education, Indigenous education, bilingual education, outdoor education, etc. TD contracted instructors with bilingual education teaching experience, many of whom were Mexican-American and had long family histories in the borderlands. TD scholars had rotating internships in a diversity of K-12 schools experimenting with bilingual and bicultural education (examples included two-way immersion programs, dual language curriculum, and Reggio Emilia approaches to early childhood education, among others). As most bilingual schools in the region dealt with Spanish-English bilingualism, TD coordinators facilitated opportunities to compare, critique, and relate Indigenous bilingual education to colonial language education (such as Spanish/English). TD was intentional in facilitating collaborations with a variety of regional Indigenous communities, tribal leaders, and Indigenous scholars through workshops, field trips to Indigenous language immersion schools, and special sessions to engage issues of Indigenous education in the U.S., and the Americas. The 11-month cohort participated in a month-long Indigenous Language Revitalization Institute with other Indigenous language speakers, educators, and activists from around the nation, and occasionally Latin America.

A common observation shared throughout the program was the invisibility of Indigenous peoples from the perspective of one-border looking across the next (North-to-South, or South-to-North) (outside of stereotypical media representations, such as the many *Geronimo* action movies, or *La India María* comedy program). The intentional work of creating space for Indigenous peoples to narrate their own experiences, facilitated continual discussion about sovereign tribal initiatives in education, and countered the invisibility of Indigenous Mexicans within the U.S. context (Casanova, O'Connor, & Anthony-Stevens, 2016). Cross-cultural learning exchanges required translators and considerable linguistic and cultural brokering.

Upon completing the rigorous program, TD participants received a certificate of participation for their 600-1200 hours of course work, internships, and workshops. The certificate was valued as a *diplomado*, similar to accredited professional development hours required for teacher recertification in the U.S. Years of program evaluation data, both administered by program funders and the TD program coordination, recorded high levels of program satisfaction, particularly in years 2-4 of the program. However, during the program itself, many participants endured extreme challenges, such as home-sickness, separation from family, cultural isolation, interpersonal conflict from dorm-like living, cultural and linguistic shock, and frustration being in the vulnerable role of student. TD was, without doubt, an immersive experience.

Methods and Methodologies

Indigenous methodologies recognize that relationships form a vital part of *how* and *why* research is conducted. While neither of us identifies as Indigenous, we draw upon Indigenous research methodologies (Brayboy, Gough, Leonard, Roehl, & Solyom, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999) to inform our relationship with the research participants before, during, and in the outcomes of this research as an on-going process reciprocity and accountability (Anthony-Stevens, 2017). We recognize that TD took shape within a complex web of neoliberal globalization efforts. As participants in TD, we do not excuse ourselves from critique; rather, we humbly analyze ways *Transformación Docente* created cracks in the cross-border flows of cultural and linguistic hegemony.

As researchers, we were participants and observers in the life of TD over the course of four and three years respectively. Vanessa joined TD in 2010, as an advanced doctoral student and she served as co-coordinator, then coordinator and co-Principal Investigator on the grant over its four-year period. Paulina joined TD as an early graduate student in science education. We are both bilingual (Spanish-English) but had limited experience in Mexico prior to our work with TD. As we developed programming and courses for TD, we leveraged our distinct experiences to create links between the U.S. and Latin American contexts of education. Vanessa drew upon her experiences as a former teacher in American Indian communities, a consultant/instructor for a variety of tribal institutions, and the mother of Apache children.

Paulina drew upon her background as a Chilean, and her professional experience working with science teachers in underserved schools in Santiago, Chile.

Our positionalities have been significant in shaping the research process. Our choices regarding the methods and purpose of this research have been defined through dialogue with our teacher colleagues. Given that teachers left their homes to engage in months of intensive study at TD, we understood that no sacrifice of such magnitude should end without reciprocity. Following the TD experience, many teachers asked us to visit their schools, and provide support through workshops with colleagues, supervisors, and community members. We both engaged in grant seeking during and after the TD program to fund continued collaboration and research with TD teachers upon their return to Mexico. Each trip had negotiated goals and outcomes in which TD teachers served as leaders and protagonists. In nearly all cases, teachers and their families hosted us for the duration of our visits. We offered professional workshops, met with school and community leaders, participated in radio and youth group interviews, spoke at parent meetings, and advocated for a variety of the Indigenous-centered initiatives our teacher colleagues spearheaded. This is to say that we took a Freirean (2005) orientation to research, whereby we continually attended to reflection and action, in the context of Indigenous-led efforts to create better possible futures for Mexican Indigenous youth, according to Mexican Indigenous peoples.

Data Collection and Analysis

Our research employed ethnographic and mixed qualitative methods. Between 2014 and 2016, six trips were made to the following states: Puebla, Oaxaca, and Estado de México. Reflections and images provided by former TD participants through surveys and distance interviews were also gathered. The data used in this article is drawn from the following sources:

- (1) Twenty-two responses from open-ended surveys sent electronically to 120 former TD participants in fall 2014. Questions were structured around how former participants use culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy post-TD, and their perceptions of its impacts on their pedagogy and student-community relationship;
- (2) Eight ethnographic site visits to different schools: three schools in the state of Puebla (central and southwest region), and five schools in the state of Oaxaca (central, northwest and eastern region), including semi-structured interviews with teachers in each site.

The survey data, in-depth interview transcriptions, and ethnographic field notes were coded using a multi-step grounded theory analysis whereby key themes were identified in emergent and holistic ways (Charmaz & Liska Belgrave, 2012). Shadowing and collaborating with teachers in their work sites for one to five days at a time allowed us to gain a glimpse of how teachers negotiated culturally and linguistically responsive teaching in their classrooms and the broader community context in real-time. We used interviews during and at the end of site visits to expand the dimensions of our understanding with participants. Interview transcripts were shared with each participant, and participants reviewed drafts of this manuscript.

While the survey data was gathered from participants in seven different Mexican states, spanning from Northern Chihuahua to southern Chiapas, the bulk of the ethnographic participant-observation, and in-depth interviews were gathered from the southern region of Mexico, with participants in the states of Oaxaca and Puebla. These states are unique within the larger context of Mexico. The state of Oaxaca has a 35% Indigenous population, a strong teacher movement (Bautista Martinez & Briseño Maas, 2010), and an organized educational orientation called *Comunalidad* (Community Education) (Maldonado Alvarado, 2010; Martínez, 2002). *Comunalidad*, as a worldview and theoretical framework, conceptualizes schooling as community-based and builds upon millennia of Indigenous knowledge. *Comunalidad* is well known among Indigenous educators in neighboring states, such as in Puebla, Chiapas and Guerrero.

Findings

Theme 1: Legitimizing Indigenous Persistence

Participants reflected on their border-crossing experiences in TD as significant for legitimizing Indigeneity and (re)centering Indigenous persistence. Learning was expressed as related to one's own identity, as a teacher, and as an Indigenous person. These intersections coalesced into narratives linked through local and global Indigenous struggles. The reflection of Felipe, a male teacher from central Oaxaca, captures a sentiment of (re)encountering local and global purpose through transborder learning:

De una manera el diplomado [TD] me dio ese poder ahora de no tener miedo, [...] hacer lo que me toca hacer como, como parte de esta sociedad, ¿no? [...] a trabajar a

favor de, en caso de la lengua, de las costumbres, darle ese valor que muchos no nos atrevemos a dar [...] cuento con mucha fortaleza, con mucho coraje, con mucha sed de, de hacer cosas nuevas que no se han hecho. / In one way or another, the program [TD] gave me the power to no longer be afraid [...] to do my part, as a member of society, right? [...], to start to, to work in favor of, in this case the language, traditions, and to give them the value many of us fail to give [...] I have a lot of strength, lots of passion, and a great deal of thirst for, to do new things that have not yet been done] (Maestro Felipe,⁵ Oaxaca, TD 2013-2014, interview May 2015)

Other teachers echoed sentiments of (re)invigorated Indigenous persistence, and situated border thinking as a source of new power:

...me di cuenta que no estoy sola, y que la lucha no sólo es de un pueblo, sino de todos los pueblos que son originarios que también están haciendo lo suyo para hacerse oír en el mundo y con el gobierno. Eso me dio más fuerza [...] y debemos continuar hasta el último momento para hacernos oír, con la lengua, con la cultura.../ I realized that I am not alone, that the struggle is not just in one community, but in all First Peoples communities, and that they are also doing their part to make themselves heard in the world, and in government. That gave me a lot of strength [...] and we need to continue until the very end to make ourselves heard, with our language and our culture. (Maestra Martha, Puebla, TD 2012-2013, interview December 2014)

Interruption to the narrowness of colonial border imaginaries which positioned Indigenous identities outside of schools or in conflict with “modern” institutions was a re-occurring theme when TD participants discussed their conceptualizations of education following the program. Participants articulated drawing strength from contradiction, such as study in an institution of privilege which typically marginalizes Indigenous knowledge, yet facilitated as space of collaboration among fellow Mexican and Indigenous teachers. Many teachers wove connections between experiences they gained in the U.S., such as internships in K-6 dual language programs

⁵ Participants selected to have pseudonyms or their real names featured in this publication. The names used throughout the data reflect the names selected by the participants themselves.

(Spanish-English), and exposure to tribal language revitalization efforts (most of which occurred outside of schools) to (re)conceptualize the intersectional opportunity space of being both a certified teacher and an Indigenous person. Martha, an experienced teacher in the Nahuatl region outside of Puebla, Mexico, described transborder learning as a way to explode identity binaries, and to understand Indigenous diversity as deep, distinct and interconnected:

...el conocer al otro que es de tu país y que tiene la misma tradición, pero con diferente significado, eso fortalece [lo] que hace lo diverso. / to know another who is from your country, who had the same tradition, but with different significance, that strengthens what makes us diverse.

She went on to extend her thinking about legitimate Indigenous ways of being through reflection on a summer workshop she attended during TD with Indigenous Haiki/Yaqui language teachers. The significance of learning with and from Haiki/Yaqui elders, individuals whose history and physical mobility has been bisected by the U.S.-Mexico border enlivened new layers of understanding Indigenous presence in the border region:

...señores grandes con mucha experiencia mucho conocimiento de su cultura, pero faltando la fortaleza académica, entonces uno se pone a pensar; bueno si ellos como personas de la comunidad pueden estar aquí en la academia y no se ve un gran papel académico, si no por su experiencia, creo que la comunidad de uno mismo puede lograrlo. /...grown men with so much experience and knowledge of their culture, but they didn't have the academic backing, so it makes one think; ok, if they, as people from the community can be here in the academy, without academic credentials, but with the credentials of their experience, I believe that one's own community could do that.

As described by the reflective vignettes, shifts in individual imaginaries were embedded within larger struggles of Indigenous communities, and grounded in (re)affirmed commitment to one's community and role(s). Significantly, border-crossing surfaced new interrogations of power and positioning, as seen in Martha's reflection of *who* gets credited as knowledgeable about

Indigenous cultural practices, and *who* typically does not. Multiple visits to the home communities and school sites of Maestra Martha and Maestro Felipe demonstrated them both to be leaders of innovative community pedagogies and Indigenous language maintenance/reclamation.⁶ In different sites, Martha and Felipe worked extensively to involve families, community members, and their colleagues in their work. The transborder experience, similar to other research on Indigenous intercultural experiences (Johnson, 2010; López, 2008) was cited as providing opportunity to (re)invigorate ones resolve to negotiate struggles, locally and across settler-colonial divides.

Theme 2: “I came to do something for my culture, my language”: Indigenous Language Education

For many TD participants, language was seen as a critical element of Indigenous education. TD was often described by many as a space for teachers to further develop an understanding of Indigenous education as bilingual education. According to post-TD survey responses, “Strengthened understanding and commitment to Indigenous language education” and “strategies for teaching literacy in the Indigenous language” were key learning outcomes stated by participants when asked to identify specific concept or tools gained through TD to improve their teaching. Detailed statements regarding how Indigenous language and literacy strengthened their teaching practices ranged from individual consciousness building to specific pedagogical application:

Mayor sensibilidad y valoración de los aspectos culturales y lingüísticos como medios y recursos para los aprendizajes dentro y fuera del aula. / Increased sensibility and valuing of the cultural and linguistic as modes and resources for learning inside and outside of the classroom. (Anonymous survey, Maestro, Puebla, TD 2013-2014)

⁶ Maestra Martha Sanchez is from a community where significant language shift has occurred between the older generation and the younger. As Náhuatl speaker, she has spent the last three years working on developing pedagogies for language immersion and has pursued a Master’s degree to investigate language ideologies within the community. Maestro Felipe is from and works in a community where the Zapotec language is spoken widely. Most children come to school as proficient Zapotec speakers, however the school has not had a history of sustaining Zapotec throughout the primary years. As a Zapotec speaker, he has initiated workshops, expositions and classroom activities to highlight and encourage 5th and 6th graders to use Zapotec as a language of school and community.

Ahora, convencido estoy que definitivamente es prioritario la lengua materna del alumno. Antes enseñaba a leer en español y luego en lengua materna, ahora después de mi regreso de [TD], eso cambió. / Now, I am convinced that the first language of the student is a definitive priority. Before, I would teach students to read in Spanish, then their mother tongue. Now, after I returned from TD, that has changed. (Anonymous survey, Maestro, Chiapas, TD 2011-2012)

While teachers' conceptions of Indigenous language and schooling were embedded within complex language ideologies and practices (García & Velasco, 2012), expressions of greater attention to the role of Indigenous language in schools was re-occurring. Conceptual shifts and their links to pedagogical application revealed a diversity of language education experiences among teacher, all of which were multifaceted and dependent on context and collaboration. Notwithstanding, connections between teachers' prior perceptions, and the connections activated while in TD, factored into post-TD orientations to language education. As an example, Tania, an experienced teacher who worked in her home community, before and after TD, underscored her pre-program goal to leverage TD as a space to organize her own approach to language and culture centered teaching:

...por lo que yo venía, era a hacer algo para el para...para mi cultura, para mi lengua [...]...[yo] tenía muchas, así como, que sueltas en la cabeza /...for what I came, was to do something for, for my culture, for my language [...] I had so many [ideas], like, just floating in my head. (Maestra Tania, Puebla, TD 2013-2014, interview May 2015)

When she returned from TD in 2014, Tania began implementing her ideas for language (re)clamation in her 1st grade classroom and founded a community youth language group. In her classroom, Tania experimented with dual language pedagogy, alternating periods of instruction in Spanish and Ngigua.⁷ This practice included many levels of complexity, among them the need to

⁷ Ngigua, is the community term used by Tania and her community to self-identify. Ngigua is also referred to as Ngiwá and Popolucá of the Sierra Negra in academic literature (see Gámez Espinoza, Ramírez Rodríguez, Correa de la Garza, 2009).

leverage support of her supervisor, both to ensure she was evaluated equitably on standardized teacher performance rubrics, and to buffer the criticism she faced from her colleagues as the only teacher to use Ngigua as a language of instruction (most teachers taught Ngigua as isolated grammar content, if they taught it at all). Ethnographic fieldnotes from October 2015, describe Tania's bilingual approach in her classroom.

October 21st: Tania (maestra) opens day in Ngigua, greeting each student personally. She presents *canasta* from *dia de Muertos* book she has created. In front of the class she asks questions about the various items that are required for *dia de Muertos* baskets. She invites students to share “what you do at home” in Ngigua, and students mostly respond in Spanish, but do so with enthusiasm. Tania spends first hour of class speaking and writing primarily in Ngigua. Students repeat what Tania tells them in Ngigua very fluidly, but few produce Ngigua as fluidly when they are prompted to put together their own words, in response to one of Tania's questions [...] Students are tasked to create picture dictionaries with the Ngigua term and a hand drawn image of items for their *día de Muertos* baskets (Fieldnotes, October 24, 2014).

Tania's use of Ngigua as the language of instruction, coupled with contextually relevant practices (Day of the Dead observance in end of October) for content instruction, ruptured the relegation of living Ngigua language and identity as outside of the school, or academically illegitimate.

In addition to shifting her classroom practice, Tania also began an outside-of-school club—*Ni Kjen Tha Ngigua* / Young Writers of Ngigua Club—with youth as documenters and promoters of Ngigua knowledge through written and oral stories. Mothers of students who participated in *Ni Kien Tha Ngigua* said Tania sought them out upon her return from the U.S. The mothers, women of humble means, expressed their surprise at being complimented by a teacher for their children's Ngigua fluency. In an interview, two mothers described their reasons for allowing their children's involvement in Maestra Tania's club, *Ni Kien Tha Ngigua*. Their explanations underscore Indigenous presence and offer visions of Indigenous language dissemination and literacy as significant counter-hegemonic acts which legitimize Indigenous peoples in the face of colonial

power, and allow Indigenous people to share their knowledge across borders. The mothers' statements of commitment to the *Ni Kien Tha Ngigua* project a possible world in which their children, with access to Ngigua literacy, can make different kinds of claims in public about their identity and knowledge because they will have a literate 'voice' that these mothers did not have access to in their youth.

Mamá 1: "...no sabemos escribir y es pues ahí es donde se nos complica porque sabemos hablarlo, pero escribirlo, y lo negamos. Y que bonito ahora que mis hijos, pues, aprendan a escribirlo, que lo entiendan, que lo hablen; [...] Para mi, escribirlo son muy difíciles. / ...we don't know how to write [Ngigua] and, so, there is where it gets difficult for us, because we speak it, but don't write it, so we are denied that. How nice that now my children will learn to write it, and they will understand, and speak it [...] For me, to write it is really hard."

Mamá 2: "...que se dé a conocer [la lengua nuestra], en diferentes partes, aquí en Puebla, en México, o en los Estados Unidos. Porque también hay muchos paisanos allá. Muchos paisanos se fueron hacia allá.... /...that people would come to know our language, in different parts of the country, here in Puebla, and Mexico, or even the U.S. Over there too we have lots of community members. Many from our country have gone to over there."

Both of their responses extend imaginaries of Indigenous presence. The mothers, striving to make their point despite difficulties doing so in Spanish, recognize language hegemony, yet situate Indigenous language literacy as a source of capital and connection to the outer world. Shifting classroom language practices required Tania to engage the complexities of language ideologies and uneven language repertoires with little institutional infrastructure. It also required building coalitions with strategic partners, such as parents and administrators to support and expand her efforts enacting Indigenous education as language education.

Reflections across the post-TD data underscore ways Indigenous teachers conceptualized language education through frameworks of Indigenous persistence and continuity, such as Indigenous language reclamation. Teachers leveraged their transborder experience to expand

concepts and action toward Indigenous agendas of linguistic survivance, creating alternative narratives for teachers, families, and youth to speak their languages in ways that both recognize and disregard colonial boundaries (Mignolo, 2007).

Theme 3: Rethinking Inclusion and Relationality in Teaching

Our last finding highlights ways Indigenous teachers engaged in pedagogical thinking which both questioned and subverted the Western logic of colonial forms of schooling. These shifting hierarchies ranged from emergent—legitimizing Indigenous linguistic and cultural practice within the curriculum—to pedagogical orientations which challenged the exclusive logic of western modernity and uncouple them from school as Western and colonial (Walsh, 2013). For some teachers, integrating the community and parents in schooling beyond the traditional “school as authority” relationship, was conceived as a significant new opportunity for (re)framing teacher-parent dialog. Movement from formally engaging parents only in issues of school maintenance and repair toward teacher-community relationships where parents are seen as knowledge keepers was cross-cutting. Many teachers described new forms intergrating parents, “*en algunas actividades [como] contando cuentos, narraciones o leyendas de la propia cultura / in some activities, like storytelling, personal histories, and creation stories*” (Anonymous survey, Teacher coach, Nayarit, TD 2012), post TD.

Emergent reflections such as the one above, articulate initial points of interruption in colonial schooling by (re)positioning Indigenous ways of knowing as useful inside of school, not just as technical support for maintaining colonial schooling. Many teachers also discussed new understandings of themselves within the ethnohistoric context of school-community relationships, reflections which pushed teachers to confront knowledge/power divides that maintain Indigenous marginality. Here, a male teacher from Puebla discusses his (re)constitution of school-community relationships as he describes what Indigenous pedagogies means to him through his thinking prior to and after TD:

Considero que implica un mayor acercamiento a la comunidad y relación con los padres de familia y sus actividades diarias [...]. Anteriormente mi practica se concretaba a los materiales oficiales que nos marca la SEP, por ahora estoy tratando de involucrar la cultura, la lengua y el trabajo con las prácticas culturales y sociales del lenguaje en el que

los alumnos participan fuera del aula escolar. / I think [indigenous pedagogies] implies a greater approach to the community and relations with parents and their daily activities [...] before, my practice was based upon SEP's materials, but now I am trying to involve culture, language, work around cultural and social language practices in which students participate outside the classroom. (Anonymous survey, Maestro, Puebla, TD 2013-2014)

Recognition of experiential and situated learning was often described as a counter movement to decontextualized standards-based content and pedagogy, as stated in the quote above. Conceptualizing Indigenous ways of knowing and learning as processes which require different types of relationships, not simply a change of content, was an emerging articulation in post-TD interviews.

A visit to the rural multi-grade school of Maestro Israel Ramos in the state of Puebla, showed another layer of shifting school community relationships to include student funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), and to build learning through applied and experiential learning. In his classroom of 4th through 6th graders, Israel structured his class around student-generated questions. Pedagogical turns such as allowing students to select the focus and outcome of a multi-week research project, or study of community dances to teach cycles, arts, language, and civics, were all ways he (re)shaped Indigenous knowledge inclusion in the curriculum. Fieldnotes taken by Vanessa after a walking field trip to an agave plot to study milenia old agave juice harvesting practices (*agua miel*, used to create fermented drink called *pulque*) for science content, described the interaction between Indigenous knowledge inclusion and the curriculum of school.

Salida a sacar la agua miel—walking with students (4th, 5th, 6th graders)—roughly one hour walk from school through *campo/monte* to the fields of Don Aurelio (father of student Alondra, 6th grader, and her sister, 4th grader). Students were very lively, excited to be walking. They showed me their farm plots, offered me flowers, and collected fresh rain water from the crevices of the rocks we pass by. Students busily described to me where they live in relationship to the pathway we are following, mapping the area through landmarks, and family names. Students

taught me Ngigua, and offered me wild foods. Two children picked wild fruits as we made our way to the fields of Don Aurelio, and consumed them and shared them with enthusiasm. (Fieldnotes, October 28, 2014)

During the half-day walking trip, students' demonstrated knowledge of their surroundings in complex and nuanced ways. With school issued tablets, pen and paper, students filmed and documented the process of taking *agua miel* (sweet water) from agave plants under the guidance of a parent, and participated in guided graphing of the process, including the life cycle of the agave. Maestro Israel's use of the environment as a legitimate source of academic learning allowed school learning to be (re)contextualized within sophisticated daily practices where students and their families are experts. Israel reflected on his approach to school-community relationships as "experimental," and at times unclear to him and the parents. In spite of the need to negotiate new forms of school-community participation, Israel's pedagogical approach anchored learning to community strength, and its deep knowledge systems maintained by relationships between people and place since time immemorial.

Relational boundary-pushing across examples, was negotiated in context. When teachers spoke about transforming school-community relations, their negotiations reflected strategic knowledge of the specific community where one worked, and an understanding of one's leverage and leeway within local systems of institutional power. Maestro Israel, was Nahuatl, not Ngigua, but he demonstrated Ngigua language competencies in ways which garnered community respect and invited use of community language repertoires in the classroom. His school was also isolated from the regional district headquarters. As echoed by a teacher from Nayarit, pushing the boundaries of Indigenous knowledge inclusion involved daily border navigations, a kind of recognition, yet dismissal of colonial constraints:

...el estar en una escuela alejada, no te visitan y tienes la oportunidad de trabajar con actividades que mejores la escritura y lectura en lengua materna, y no tener la presión de cumplir con estándares a cada momento. /...being in an isolated school, they don't visit you and you have the opportunity to work with activities that strengthen reading and writing in the mother tongue. You don't have the pressure to be

following the standards at every moment. (Anonymous survey, Teacher coach, Nayarit, TD 2012)

Teachers post-TD reflections and actions brokered top-down policy in ways that bent and manipulated the space for community knowledge to be a co-constructor of school processes, even as de jure policy was written to support such practices. Teachers readily understood that supervisors, Indigenous or not, may interpret their work as functionaries of the state, hence enforcing state policy to use language and culture as tools of Indigenous assimilation to Western content. Yet, in spite of overt hegemony, many destabilized dominant policy discourses (McCarty & Lee, 2014) by virtue of “reading” opportunities to subvert hegemony, in collaboration with youth and families. Given professional spaces to question the coloniality of school-community interactions, TD participants articulated and enacted shifts in their epistemological stances toward pedagogy, curriculum, and community, as well as development of new professional repertoires of inclusion and relationality.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings reveal the complex ways that committed Indigenous teachers’ negotiated educational opportunity in Indigenous Mexican contexts following their involvement in TD. Operating within hegemonic structures, we saw again and again how Indigenous teachers navigated complex terrains to destabilize dominant discourses around language, identity, and legitimacy in schooling. The findings bring into relief ways that leveraging social status and transborder exchanges can help teachers (re)center Indigenous ways of knowing in their ideological understanding and practical application of teaching. The nature of hosting TD at a prestigious university in the United States, yet also within the historic homelands of Indigenous peoples pre-dating the U.S.-Mexico border, offered a significant space for resignifying aspects of Indigeneity within local educational struggles.

In line with academic and activist conversations in the Americas on counter-hegemonic education (Grande, San Pedro, & Windchief, 2015), Indigenous educational autonomy (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002; Rendón Monzón, 2011) and epistemological variation in schooling (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008), we argue that the work of Intercultural Bilingual Educators ought to be considered in both a global and local sense, so as to not sever

local action from broader movements of power and agency extending beyond colonial borders which divide Indigenous peoples. In the Americas, Indigenous self-determination predates colonial occupation, and should be considered as an ongoing struggle, both in and outside of schools. The Indigenous teachers in this study (re)emplaced their work within a continuum of self-determination through relational practice, chipping away at colonial thinking and opening up space for Indigenous reclamation.

As teachers and researchers, we elected to emphasize ways Indigenous teachers leveraged their transborder experience as a tool for operationalizing culturally sustaining and revitalizing education (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Our focus on survivance is not meant to disregard the violent colonialist legacy of schooling in Mexico, and its reverberating impacts. However, to honor the complexity of the space occupied by TD teachers, we believe it is important to privilege “desire-centered” teacher narratives (Tuck, 2009), efforts which (re)frame school learning from a place of Indigenous strength and community accountability. Teachers who agreed to participate in this research overwhelmingly found value in cross-border relationships, though they interpreted and embodied culturally sustaining and revitalizing education in diverse ways and on different scales. Collectively, this research shows that Indigenous-centered transborder professional development can complicate neoliberal agendas and cultivate ideological and implementational spaces (Hornberger, 2005) where Indigenous educators experiment with culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogies (McCarty & Lee, 2014). As participants evidenced, the TD program challenged participants to examine and deconstruct colonial relations in education. Through the design of the program, courses, and discussions, and the diverse experiences educators brought with them to TD, struggles faced by Indigenous people and minoritized populations in general in the U.S. became visible, facilitating space for border thinking to become a dominant construct, rather than a marginal construct. In this, participants reflected upon their experiences in such contradictory places of learning. Findings showed how teachers used transborder learning to further their own agendas [e.g. language], their sense of agency, and the inclusion of de-colonial orientations and applications to constitute new spaces for culturally sustaining and revitalizing teaching upon return to Mexico.

Lastly, this research complicates the hegemony of development agendas by showing that transborder professional development can expose the contradictory nature of Intercultural-Bilingual education and invite ideological and implementational shifts with the potential to support

Indigenous self-determination. Such shifts can transform interactions within Indigenous schooling to produce “sites of hope and possibility” (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). We underline the significance of local policy negotiations, and suggest continued research on border thinking (Mignolo, 2007) transborder Indigenous learning center upon survivance and Indigenous border thinking to better understand and support Indigenous self-determination in schooling, and the everyday policy-making of Indigenous presence over absence.

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