

Intercultural Bilingual Education and Teacher Agency in Guatemala

By

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## I. Introduction

In the first-grade classroom where he serves as a bilingual teacher, Manuel<sup>1</sup> stands facing the white board. Dry-erase marker poised to write, Manuel looks over his shoulder and calls for a response from his students who, at age six, recognize that five follows four.

*Cinco*, they call in Spanish.

*Jo'ob*, Manuel replies, providing the number for five in K'iche', a Mayan language spoken by nearly all the residents living in the town of Nahualá, Guatemala. He draws a straight, horizontal dash on the board, the Maya numeral for five, and searches for a physical representation in the room to better illuminate the symbolic representation on the board. He pulls a piece of firewood from the pile contributed by students each week to light the fire for the midday snack.

*Jo'ob*, he repeats, holding the firewood horizontally. He approaches his desk and picks up a pen. Displaying it, he repeats, *jo'ob*. For a final representation of the Maya numeral, Manuel exhibits a fly swatter, much to the delight of his young audience. *Jo'ob!* With twenty years of experience teaching, Manuel confides that, given his students' enjoyment of both K'iche' and Spanish, a dynamic lesson proves the most effective approach to teaching.

Later, with the math lesson well advanced, Manuel pulls four students to the front of the room to demonstrate subtraction. Explaining that the students are like little birds, he ushers away two of them, eliciting giggles as he narrates, *Kexik'ik'ik*. They fly away.

*Jampa xekanaj kanoq?* How many remained behind? he asks, before offering a hint in a mix of Spanish and K'iche': *Na más taj, menos*. It is not more; it is less. All twenty-five students, more or less, call out the correct answer.

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<sup>1</sup> To the extent that they are included, the names of research participants have been changed in order to protect their anonymity.

Manuel's experience has provided him an ideal vantage point from which to engage with Guatemala's intercultural bilingual education program. He is one of a handful of teachers in the town who have taught in local schools and also coordinated with the Ministry of Education at the national level. Manuel's father was a well-known linguist who helped produce language materials in K'iche', and Manuel landed his first job with the Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala (known in Spanish as the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala, or ALMG), which has played a central role in producing and promoting texts in Mayan languages. Later, on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Manuel trained bilingual teachers in Nahualá and other municipalities, and helped prepare the evaluation exam for bilingual teachers.

Despite considerable experience providing teacher training in other municipalities on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Manuel explains that his personal encounter with Mayan culture is first within the town of Nahualá. In Spanish, he tells me, "When I say Mayan culture, I start with our story of Nahualá. We first have to know this place here. We from Nahualá come from Mayas, too." Lacking resources from the state that reflect Nahualá's dialectical variation of K'iche' and the local history, Manuel took the initiative to write two books in K'iche' and personally financed the printing of a thousand copies.

Manuel's initiative is exceptional, however, and he recognizes this. He believes only a small percentage of teachers — in Nahualá and throughout Guatemala — enjoy giving bilingual instruction, while most teachers do so strictly to comply with recent changes to the state curriculum mandating bilingual instruction in indigenous communities. While the majority of teachers try to provide bilingual education, asserts Manuel, their effectiveness in the classroom depends on their abilities. The important thing, he says, is that they are fighting — *están luchando* — and he espouses a popular and precise expression for articulating the progressive

gains of bilingual education teachers and the political, cultural, and linguistic victories achieved by Guatemala's larger Maya movement.

Through interviews conducted during summer 2015 with bilingual teachers in Nahualá, I aim to emphasize the particular role of local Mayan teachers in Guatemala's education system as they interpret education policy in community-specific ways. Teachers expressed their support of the state's intercultural bilingual education program, yet, in the words of one teacher, they felt somewhat *abandonado* (abandoned) by the state in their work as educators. In their testimonies, teachers voiced their critique of the state's manner of developing and supporting bilingual education. At the same time, teachers explained the creative solutions they innovated to effectively provide bilingual instruction that promotes students' Mayan cultural and ethnic identity. I argue that teachers' freedom within the classroom gives them agency as educators working within a state system that has historically delegitimized indigenous language, culture, and knowledge.

Working within a state system that has historically disempowered indigenous peoples, agency permits Mayan teachers to individually interpret how a state mandate should be implemented locally. Anthropologist Paul Kockelman, who has conducted extensive linguistic and ethnographic fieldwork with speakers of Q'eqchi' Maya, has outlined a tripartite conceptualization of agency that is particularly useful for thinking about bilingual teachers' role in the classroom and the historical, political, and cultural context of their work. Kockelman defines agency in the modern sense as: a kind of inherent human capacity, whether it manifests itself in human instincts or through the faculty of free will; a resistance to an antagonistic system; and a mediating relationship in which we construct ourselves but not the conditions in which we do so (Kockelman 2007). Kockelman's modern view of agency corresponds to the operational

and symbolic work of bilingual teachers in Nahualá, and likely in other indigenous areas of Guatemala.

As authorities within the classroom, teachers individually determine the degree to which they give bilingual instruction. As teachers' experiences reveal, whether bilingual teachers give quality bilingual instruction depends on the initiative of individual teachers, despite the fact that state education policy mandates dual language instruction. Teachers' free will is particularly evident in their interpretation of the intercultural dimension of the most recent education reform. Because the state failed to inscribe interculturalism in the curriculum, teachers individually determine how they valorize Mayan culture in the classroom. While teachers interviewed expressed overwhelming support for Guatemala's education policy, they also rejected teaching materials that confused distinct Mayan languages and found fault with education planners for not organizing consistent teacher training workshops. In response to an educational program that they considered inadequate, some teachers produced texts based on local knowledge and relied on each other's expertise, rather than consulting municipal or state authorities. As collaborators in the bilingual education program, teachers symbolically and practically resist the long and violent history of schooling for indigenous peoples, which advanced policies of erasure or assimilation of the indigenous population. While the historical context of state-backed violence against Guatemala's indigenous population remains fixed in the memory of Mayan communities, teachers combat the conditions of economic, political, and cultural disempowerment within Mayan communities by working to fulfill a vision of education that nurtures indigenous children's identity as Mayans and as Guatemalans.

Teachers' agency in their everyday work renders the classroom an agentive space. As educators, bilingual teachers are actively, if not formally, involved in linguistic and cultural

revitalization. Often, other sites of linguistic and cultural engagement are more readily designated as agentic spaces. One such site is the Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín (PLFM), a nongovernmental organization dedicated to scientific linguistic research on Guatemala's Mayan languages. In 1975, the PLFM became the first legally, professionally, and administratively autonomous Maya NGO to do this work (French 2010). The Mayan linguists involved in the PLFM found agency in an organization that departed from pre-established linguistic missions, such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), which had undermined native speakers' knowledge in favor of expert linguists (French 2010). In the realm of linguistic revitalization, the PLFM is undoubtedly a space in which native Mayan-language speakers exercise their agency. However, at the community level in which bilingual education programs are implemented, the classroom sustains bilingual teachers' individual agency.

While exercising their agency in the classrooms, teachers like Manuel nevertheless cite the struggles they encounter while implementing the intercultural bilingual education program. Struggle is a popular concept used by Mayan activists and academics alike to describe indigenous Guatemalans' confrontation with the state, which has been an inescapable aspect of cultural and linguistic revitalization efforts, not to mention endeavors to attain political inclusion. Since the 1980s, the Pan-Maya movement, or *movimiento maya*, has united Mayan intellectuals in pursuit of cultural resurgence and, ultimately, equal footing as Guatemalan citizens alongside the non-indigenous, or *ladino*, population. While the Pan-Maya movement was founded on the basis of cultural and linguistic rights, it has become more politically oriented as indigenous representatives gained positions in local governments and state ministries (Postero and Zamosc 2006). The Pan-Maya movement has supported indigenous language education and literacy while also promoting Guatemala's cultural diversity (Warren 1998); effectively, the movement



has ushered in an education policy that advances the movement's priorities. Despite setbacks and slow-earned successes, the Pan-Maya movement's victory in the realm of linguistic and cultural revitalization became encoded in current state mandate. At the same time, the Pan-Maya movement has inspired other activist groups, most of whom advance cultural and linguistic revitalization projects and all of whom share this common struggle for respect, inclusion and equality in their activist work.

One such organization is the Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala (ALMG), whose members fought for legal recognition for seven years before the Academy became a legal state entity in 1990, reliant on the state for financial support alone but otherwise autonomous (Nelson 1990). Though a political entity by the nature of its work, the Academy focuses on advancing legislation on cultural issues, promoting Mayan language use in schools and throughout the larger society, producing texts in Mayan languages, and training linguists (Nelson 1990). The ALMG's struggle for legal recognition cannot be separated from the recent initiatives in intercultural bilingual education: While pilot programs in bilingual education were initiated before the ALMG gained legal recognition, Mayan activists' work in cultural and linguistic fields has made the existing state mandate for intercultural bilingual education logistically feasible. Therefore, the work of politically-oriented cultural revitalization groups has buttressed a state education policy that promotes diversity, including indigenous language use, within Guatemala's multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural context.

Considerable scholarship is dedicated to the political, cultural, and linguistic activism of Pan-Mayanists. Despite the struggles activists, linguists, and political leaders encounter, these advocates have proven their agency within an unequal relationship of power with the state. Their agency is evident in the concrete rights they have secured and the national and international

recognition they have garnered. However, many Pan-Mayanists are part of an urban and intellectual elite that, collaborating with national and foreign academics/experts and regularly engaging with state institutions, aims to present the political, cultural, and linguistic agenda of Mayans throughout Guatemala. In their efforts to articulate the indigenous population's demands for political, social, and economic inclusion and civil equality, Pan-Mayanists cooperate with a select group of collaborators. Yet, while their work benefits Mayans nationally, it, perhaps necessarily, unfolds largely outside of rural, indigenous areas.

Rather than critiquing Pan-Mayanists' regard for fellow urban intellectuals, foreign actors and state institutions, this paper seeks to foreground teachers as fellow agents of cultural and linguistic revitalization who operate locally within the intercultural bilingual education program. When the National Bilingual Education Program (PRONEBI) became a permanent institution of the Ministry of Education in 1984, its mission was to strengthen Mayan ethnic identity through the use of indigenous languages for instruction. PRONEBI empowered teachers to give bilingual instruction in order to respond to the cultural and linguistic context in which students learn. In 1995, the government incorporated interculturalism into education policy by forming the General Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education (*Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural*, or DIGEBI), which now oversees the program. Operating within these frames, bilingual teachers abide by the standard national curriculum ("*Curriculum Nacional Base*," or CNB) but interpret state policy to respond to students' learning environments. Teachers enjoy a certain level of ambiguity — and therefore latitude — in the state's mandate to provide bilingual instruction that respects and promotes interculturalism, and this imprecision creates an agentive space for teachers within the classroom. Teachers' agency is evident in their development of resources to facilitate bilingual instruction; their incorporation of Mayan culture in the

classroom; their defense of a program sometimes regarded with skepticism by parents; and their collaboration within local teacher networks. Their agency sustains the program at the community level and corrects certain disjunctures between state-level policy and local implementation.

The current intercultural bilingual education program must be situated within its historical context, particularly because the current education mandate differs drastically from past education initiatives. Historically, these initiatives have targeted Spanish language literacy in order to convert indigenous peoples to Catholicism or acculturate them to a non-indigenous society. Early bilingual education programs were similarly driven by assimilationist policies; only recently has the education policy articulated the state's recognition of Guatemala as a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual country supporting education that reflects this context. Historical contextualization therefore also elucidates the political climate and cultural context in which the current education program developed.

In part, gradual improvements have been made to the bilingual education program because of assessments that determine weaknesses or challenges in the implementation of the bilingual initiative. To assess the effectiveness of recent improvements to the bilingual education program, collaborators have evaluated gains in students' academic performance, produced cost-benefit analyses of the program, and predicted the role of bilingual education in increasing social and economic mobility. Quantitative assessments like these, although important, provide only a partial representation of the bilingual program. Difficult-to-discern factors, such as the promotion of interculturalism in the classroom or program improvements through teacher collaboration, remain absent from quantitative analysis. Linguistic studies complement quantitative evaluations and illustrate the effects of linguistic (and cultural) revitalization on

indigenous language communities. Findings from these studies are equally important but still minimize the role of teachers as local agents imparting dual language instruction.

With this in mind, one way to glean a more comprehensive understanding of the bilingual education program's implementation and impact is community-specific ethnography. Education policy is developed and decreed at the state level but implemented in notably divergent Mayan communities, where numerous variables affect how teachers interpret the state's directives. Variables affecting the implementation of bilingual education include, but are not limited to, the accessibility of language- and dialect-specific resources, the size of the language community, and communities' historical engagement with the state. Ethnography can clarify how teachers negotiate these variables in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers may distinguish themselves as community-level agents of linguistic and cultural revitalization. Interviews and participant observation conducted in the K'iche'-speaking municipality of Nahualá proved this to be the case for bilingual education teachers working in primary schools. Given the challenges that persist in bilingual instruction, particularly against the backdrop of the historical and social context of Guatemala's indigenous communities, teachers' agency in the classroom makes the bilingual education program a successful initiative and its intercultural component manifest within the classroom. As activists enact change on a national stage and with the collaboration of national and foreign institutions, teachers cultivate a linguistic and cultural consciousness in children, thus participating in the larger revitalization project.

## **II. Historical, Political and Cultural Context of Intercultural Bilingual Education**

Today, the Guatemalan government recognizes the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity of the country and maintains the goal of promoting this diversity. With 60 percent of

Guatemalans identifying as indigenous, the *ladino* — non-indigenous and largely monolingual Spanish-speaking — population represents a minority within the country. Spanish is the only language with official status, although the state recognizes Garífuna, Xinka, and twenty-one Mayan languages. The twenty-one Maya language groups are: Achi, Akateko, Awakateko, Ch'orti, Chuj, Itzaj, Ixil, Kaqchikel, K'iche', Mam, Mopan, Popti', Poqomchi', Poqomam, Q'anjob'al, Q'eqchi', Sakapulteko, Sipakapense, Teko, Tz'utujil, and Uspanteko. The size of language communities varies greatly, ranging from a handful of speakers to more than one million, as is the case for K'iche', which boasts the most speakers. Linguistic, cultural, and ethnic affiliations have factored prominently in the development of Spanish-Mayan language bilingual education programs.

The trajectory of formal education — initiated by a non-indigenous, overwhelmingly monolingual group favorably situated within an unequal power dynamic and, most recently, purportedly servicing Guatemala's indigenous population — can be cast into three critical stages. Julia Becker Richards and Michael Richards divide the history of castilianization, and eventually bilingual education, into three stages (Richards and Richards 2012). The literacy (alternatively, education) initiatives developed during each phase do not strictly reflect the political climate from which education policy stems. For example, radical improvements to bilingual education programs were made during the 36-year civil war, which ended with the 1996 Peace Accords, despite the fact that violent military attacks targeted indigenous communities. These stages include the erasure of Mayan culture and language from the arrival of the Spanish in Guatemala in 1524 until the mid-1940s; the integration of Mayans into "dominant" society and the recruitment of indigenous languages through documentation to further that goal, which lasted until the mid-1980s; and the promotion of Mayan language and culture within a multi-ethnic,

multicultural and multilingual society, which continues today (Richards and Richards, 2012). However, although a neat schema of education initiatives over the past half-millennium belies the tension of shifting attitudes and priorities for indigenous communities and governing bodies, these three critical stages chronicle the tacit or explicit goals of education initiatives during each phase. The social and political attitudes engendered through each stage advanced radically different education initiatives. The initiatives most relevant to this paper began in the mid-1900s.

Beginning in 1524, Spanish colonization triggered the political, cultural, religious and linguistic subjugation of indigenous people in Guatemala. The Spanish Crown charged Dominican and Franciscan friars with catechizing and converting the indigenous people through the Spanish language (Richards and Richards 2012). This process of castilianization was coupled with strict intolerance for indigenous language use. After independence from Spain in 1821, Spanish was decreed the unifying language of the nation, and Hispanicisation continued to be the post-colonial government's position on education for the indigenous population, although poor state infrastructure meant that most of the indigenous population remained formally uneducated, and thus monolingual (Richards and Richards 2012).

Radical changes to the policy of castilianization began in the mid-1900s. This period of Mayan language integration into the non-indigenous population's monolingual framework was characterized by intensified literacy initiatives that stemmed from *ladino* preoccupation with the nation's composite ethnolinguistic identity. Education, conceptually constrained by hegemonic ideas about learning, took the form of literacy campaigns legally backed by the 1945 National Literacy Law, which proclaimed literacy a national emergency (Richards and Richards 2012).

Foundational to the state's attention to Mayan languages during this time was the goal of socially integrating the indigenous population into larger society. Mayan languages were

recruited, recorded and standardized so that the indigenous population could gain literacy in indigenous languages first, and then apply the newly acquired reading and writing skills to Spanish language skills, which would facilitate assimilation into the monolingual sector. Social integration of indigenous peoples was a state project regulated and systematized through the National Indigenist Institute, which was formed in 1945. Social integration also drove economic integration as the indigenous population could use Spanish language capital to enter a work force dominated by ladinos and contribute to Guatemala's economy of export agriculture (Richards and Richards 2012). An indigenous population with Spanish language capital was considered a prerequisite to national unification — and to the country's status as a "modern" nation. Thus, the state's education policies were predicated on causal relationships between literacy, social integration and economic advancement: Investments in the education of indigenous children would lead to the social integration of entire communities and economic progress for the nation.

During this period, the "expert" work and financial support of external institutions also factored into state policy. For example, work in Mayan linguistics was still often underpinned by the religious motivations of participating institutions. In 1952, Protestant linguists in Guatemala formally incorporated as the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and, with the oversight of the Ministry of Education, agreed to advise the National Indigenist Institute (Richards and Richards 2012). The work of the SIL produced dictionaries and grammars of Mayan languages while also producing translations of the New Testament into Mayan languages. In the early 1980s, the SIL advised the dictator Efraín Ríos-Montt during his presidency and ensured continued bilingual education programming despite the state-led military attacks that terrorized indigenous communities during Guatemala's civil war (Richards and Richards 2012).

Literacy arose as the primary thrust of education initiatives. The initial stage of literacy campaigns was to develop a unified Mayan alphabet in order to facilitate the production of texts across the diverse Mayan languages, which the 1949 First Congress of Linguists aimed to accomplish. This connection between literacy and education was fixed institutionally since the participants in the 1949 First Congress of Linguists, who were not linguists themselves but rather representatives from the Ministry of Public Education, the Technical Council of National Education, and the National Indigenist Institute, were connected to educational institutions (Richards 1993). Education initiatives responded to indigenous culture without promoting it. The National Indigenist Institute offered cultural representation to indigenous groups in its appellation alone. Casting the indigenous population as an impediment to the nation becoming a modern state, the institute pushed an explicitly assimilationist mission (Nelson 1999, 88). The literacy initiatives proposed by the National Indigenist Institute simply served as a bridge to aiding children's acquisition of Spanish language skills. Its work with Mayan culture responded to the intellectual current of *indigenismo* spreading across Latin America that preserved indigenous culture while pushing indigenous peoples to so-called modernity through Spanish-language education and social and economic inclusion in the state (Van Cott 2007).

During this period of heightened efforts to socially assimilate the indigenous population, bilingual education gained the legislative backing necessary to advance education initiatives. The Education Law of 1965 explicitly named education as the vehicle through which indigenous communities would experience cultural, social and economic progress (Richards and Richards 2012). The state's political agenda, aimed at constructing a unified national identity, downplayed cultural differences while quashing indigenous languages through castilianization. In this hypothetical monolingual, monocultural state, legal directives determined the use of indigenous



languages in educational settings, which had previously been justified for the purposes of literacy. The law simultaneously elevated the status of Spanish by according it official language status in the 1965 Constitution (Article 4), while devaluing indigenous languages by conditioning their use. The 1965 Education Law required that school instruction occur in Spanish, while providing an option for indigenous language instruction in indigenous communities (Richards and Richards 2012). Castilianization remained the purpose of indigenous language use, and so teachers restricted the use of indigenous languages to circumstances deemed absolutely necessary. According to the law, the pedagogical role of indigenous languages was temporary and transitional; implicitly, teachers could avail themselves of indigenous languages in order to further dilute them within a singular, national cultural and linguistic identity.

The Bilingual Castilianization program of 1965 stemmed from this legislation. The first programs concentrated on speakers of Ixil and then extended to speakers of K'iche', Kaqchikel, Q'eqchi', and Mam (MINEDUC-DIGEBI). This program provided for "bilingual promoters" (*promotores educativos bilingües*) equipped with at least a sixth-grade education to extend bilingual instruction to pre-school students during the daytime and teach literacy to adults at night (MINEDUC-DIGEBI). Because the unified Mayan alphabet, reformed in 1962, paralleled the orthographic conventions of Spanish by removing diacritic markers, program coordinators reasoned that Mayan language literacy skills would transfer to Spanish (Richards and Richards 2012). Bilingual instruction resulted in reduced dropout rates and higher school achievements, but a single pre-school year of bilingual instruction was not sufficient preparation for monolingual instruction in primary school (Richards and Richards 2012).

In 1980, the National Bilingual Education Project emerged as an experimental initiative to test the benefits of extending bilingual instruction. For each of the four languages with the most speakers — K'iche', Kaqchikel, Q'eqchi', and Mam — ten pilot schools were equipped with bilingual programs for preschool through second grade. At this point, pedagogical materials were also developed for academic subjects beyond language and literacy (Richards and Richards 2012). This project therefore anticipated the larger scope of bilingual education and its necessity for effective instruction. The project, designed to span four years, was two-thirds funded by USAID. Once again, evaluations reflected the positive impacts of bilingual education, including higher scores in Spanish and other subject areas, reduced dropout rates, and higher promotion rates (Richards and Richards 2012). At the completion of the National Bilingual Education Project in 1984, Government Accord 1093-84 made bilingual education a permanent fixture of the Ministry of Education by creating the National Program for Bilingual Bicultural Education (Programa Nacional de Educación Bilingüe Bicultural, PRONEBI) (MINEDUC-DIGEBI).

As the state began to extend a level of respect to Mayan languages — albeit largely as a symbolic token of national heritage rather than a fundamental part of nearly half the population's ethnolinguistic identity — education initiatives again became rooted in the law. In a landmark manifestation of state support for indigenous language and culture, the Constitution of 1985 recognized Guatemala as a multicultural and multilingual country and claimed "the intention to recognize, respect, and promote the multicultural and plurilinguistic nature of Guatemalan society" while mandating bilingual instruction in indigenous communities (Richards and Richards 2012). Thus, PRONEBI departed from past educational initiatives by not recruiting indigenous languages as a tool to facilitate transitional acquisition of Spanish.

With the December 21, 1995, Government Accord 726-95, PRONEBI yielded oversight of intercultural bilingual education to the General Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education, or DIGEBI (MINEDUC 2009). DIGEBI now oversees the program, publishes educational materials, makes adjustments to the curriculum, and provides teacher trainings and workshops. Since the creation of DIGEBI, intercultural bilingual education has been bolstered by legislation and government agencies that support the promotion of indigenous language and culture and provide for their use and visibility in the classroom. For example, in 2003, the *Ley de Idiomas* (Language Law) was passed to assign Mayan languages official status within their linguistic communities, and simultaneously a vice-ministry of intercultural bilingual education was created to expand the education program (MINEDUC 2009). Progress occurred not only through state legislation, however. Mayan activists' engagement with the state to secure recognition and autonomy for indigenous social movements, and thus advance cultural and linguistic revitalization projects, gave Pan-Mayanists a place on the local and national political stage (Fischer 2004, Van Cott 2000). Finally, at the local level, teachers today advance the intercultural bilingual program by resourcefully applying it within the classroom and creatively interpreting its meaning for students' formation. Teachers also incorporate local histories, regional dialects and knowledge imparted to children by parents and grandparents into the classroom, making the larger community a source of learning for children. Teachers' work on the ground level and the effectiveness of the policy at the state level have been assessed in myriad ways.

### **III. Assessment of Intercultural Bilingual Education's Impact in Guatemala**

More than thirty years after the creation of PRONEBI, collaborators advancing bilingual education initiatives seek to determine whether the bilingual education program has achieved the

goal of promoting Mayan language and culture in schools in order to ensure their corresponding validation within society at large. Evaluations have focused on different factors to assess the gains of intercultural bilingual education, following a quantitative, qualitative or hybrid approach. Each approach possesses merit by offering an analysis of the achievements of bilingual programs that can inform recommendations for improving existing programs. Quantitative evaluations from Guatemalan and international institutions are readily available, although they prove unidimensional, reporting only a certain number of observable factors affecting intercultural bilingual education programs. They do not inquire into the cultural and linguistic factors that inevitably impact the success of intercultural bilingual education programs despite the fact that these programs aim to promote Guatemala's multilingual and multicultural diversity.

Some quantitative evaluations have examined disparities in performance between indigenous and nonindigenous students attending rural schools, but these evaluations have not accounted for the outcomes of bilingual education programs. For example, in 2007, economists Patrick J. McEwan and Marisol Trowbridge examined the range of academic achievement in indigenous and non-indigenous student populations and concluded that non-indigenous students outperformed indigenous students in rural primary schools (McEwan and Trowbridge 2007). McEwan and Trowbridge measured third- and sixth-grade student achievement through Spanish and mathematics test scores based on Guatemala's PRONERE (Programa Nacional de Evaluación del Rendimiento Escolar) survey of more than 500 rural schools. They observed that three general factors explain the achievement gap: home educational environment, including parents' formal education and income; quality of schooling, including pedagogical materials and qualification of teachers and school infrastructure; and linguistic diversity, based on the fact that

bilingual education is neither universal nor implemented uniformly. While other evaluations report that students who attend bilingual schools receive higher test scores, the authors argue that the information fails to distinguish between the causal impact of bilingual programs and the unobserved characteristics of families. This conclusion remains problematic, however, since bilingual education was officially recognized in the Constitution in 1985, and the gains of bilingual education should have been measurable by the time of the PRONERE evaluation. While the PRONERE evaluation, conducted in Spanish and four Mayan languages, was administered in 1997, it could not be used in many bilingual schools due to the number of students dropping out before third grade, which was the initial grade during which students were tested (Ferrer 2006). Further, it did not take into account bilingual education gains fostered after the 2003 passage of *Ley de Idiomas*. The PRONERE data therefore demonstrates an incomplete evaluation of student performance in rural schools, and McEwan and Trowbridge's conclusion reflects this oversight.

In his assessment published in 2009, Jeffrey H. Marshall, a specialist in international education policy, similarly focuses on the learning gains of students in rural schools. However, he considers factors that influence student performance — especially in light of the tendency for standardized tests of indigenous students to be lower than those of non-indigenous students — by analyzing the number of school days, teacher absences, teaching methods, and teacher content knowledge (Marshall 2009). Further qualitative analysis, Marshall states, would tease out the unobserved cultural and institutional factors, including tacit attitudes contributing to unequal educational opportunities and impeding comprehensive assessments of rural schooling (Marshall 2009). Even from a strictly quantitative perspective, language and ethnicity influence results within the classroom, as Marshall reports that the ethnicity and language of self-described

indigenous teachers positively impact indigenous students' Spanish and mathematics scores. If bilingual education programs are to be sustained, the teacher must have language capital in an indigenous language, and indigenous language use nearly always correlates with self-identification as indigenous. Marshall rightfully recommends a study of language use in the classroom in order to assess bilingual education, but his own study remains incomplete without an analysis of this highly influential variable. This is not to suggest that the factors McEwan and Trowbridge and, separately, Marshall assess are not relevant, but they provide only a partial perspective.

In their 2009 article, "Costs and benefits of bilingual education in Guatemala: A partial analysis," Harry Anthony Patrinos and Eduardo Velez, researchers for the World Bank, assert the efficiency of bilingual education programs and their potential to cut education costs long-term. Patrinos and Velez argue that the social gains of bilingual education, especially for the complete curriculum that extends from preschool to fourth grade versus the incomplete curriculum that ends after preschool, surpass the monolingual Spanish education approach for bilingual students. The benefits of bilingual schooling, including increased enrollment rates, improved test scores, decreased dropout rates, and decreased repeat rates, prove that bilingual education programs offer more social and personal returns in the long run. Students in bilingual programs also demonstrate greater Spanish, or majority language, fluency, which the authors label as human capital. The correlation between Spanish fluency and increased economic mobility has been articulated not only by outside researchers representing foreign institutions. In personal interviews, teachers in bilingual education programs uphold the Spanish curriculum — and even the L3 English courses within the curriculum — for the benefit of Spanish fluency when students enter the labor force. Whether the view of Spanish fluency as human capital originates within the

community or has been internalized by the community — the result of long-ingrained state policies and economic pressures to migrate for work — remains to be investigated. Still, while Patrinos and Velez enumerate the social gains of bilingual education, they neglect to mention the importance of legitimizing Mayan languages through the bilingual curriculum. Thus, a discussion of Mayan language and cultural promotion is absent from the authors' study of the outcomes and benefits of the bilingual education program, despite the fact that an explicit goal of the program is to promote cultural and linguistic diversity. The authors' analysis is entirely economic, while the objectives of the bilingual program are social as well.

Patrinos and Velez's observations of the educational and social gains achieved through the bilingual program would seem to justify the higher cost of producing educational materials in local languages. Yet, in a 1999 article, "Producing education materials in local languages: Costs from Guatemala and Senegal," Patrinos, collaborating with fellow World Bank researcher Ayesha Yaqub Vawda, describes the challenges of adequately supplying instruction materials to meet the bilingual mandate — challenges that, teachers assert, directly impact classroom results. Patrinos and Vawda's economic analysis offers an explanation for the challenge repeatedly articulated during interviews with bilingual education teachers: The lack of materials in the regional dialect of K'iche' presents a hindrance to teaching. The authors, enumerating the factors influencing the cost of production of local language materials, cite a lengthy list: "the development and experience of the publishing industry in the country, type of production process employed, the development, standardization and universalization of the local language orthography, development of the curriculum, availability of experts in the local language and time taken to build consensus on materials to be published in the local language" (Vawda and Patrinos 1999, 288). These variables make it difficult to estimate the cost of developing and

implementing a bilingual curriculum at every level. In 1995, the costs of DIGEBI's primary education budget were manuscript development and publication (54% of the total production cost), curriculum development (37% of the total production cost) and teacher training (9% of the total production cost). Within the area of curriculum development, the authors include salaries of linguists who develop standards for written texts and the expense of seminars held by the Ministry of Education in order to tailor the curriculum to different communities' needs. The authors find that one way to reduce costs is to simply reprint accurate texts instead of editing, rewriting and reprinting texts deemed to be inadequate; it therefore stands to reason that when language communities are involved in the initial stages of production, the materials produced and printed are suited to the social context and regional linguistic variations of discrete language communities. While the authors only explicitly address the economic benefits of this method of production, there is social and political merit to a method that creates dialogical opportunities for language communities and policy makers cooperating to implement state policies. Unlike quantitative assessments, ethnographic accounts of collaboration between local teachers and the groups producing pedagogical materials can illuminate the positive social impacts of indigenous teachers' involvement.

Since the bilingual education program became official in the 1980s, (socio)linguistic research has investigated the impact of bilingual education in specific language communities and in relation to linguistic revitalization projects. Anthropologists have also harnessed the bilingual education programs as part of larger studies of the Pan-Maya movement and indigenous cultural and linguistic revitalization throughout Latin America. These studies incorporate the uniquely ethnographic approach to assessment that would illuminate particular challenges faced by teachers of each language group, determine how state resources are utilized and local resources



are produced, and gauge collaboration across the local, regional and state levels of policy. Qualitative assessments based on ethnography are crucial to understanding the bilingual education program at the community level. In particular, these kinds of assessments bring to light the disjuncture between policy and implementation, as well as the experiences of teachers and students from diverse language communities. The findings from qualitative, and particularly ethnographic, assessment at the community level are manifold. While qualitative findings reveal the weaknesses and strengths of bilingual education as a project, they also elucidate the state's role in language planning since the bilingual education initiative naturally parallels language policy and planning.

Language planning is not a neutral or apolitical process. In Guatemala's recent history, the official designation of Spanish as the national language created a linguistic (and, by extension, cultural) hierarchy legitimated by the Constitution and conditioned by centuries of Spanish language imposition on indigenous peoples. The bilingual education initiatives taken since the mid-1900s have reflected changing attitudes and priorities of top-down language planning, specifically by advancing an education policy that valorizes Mayan languages, Xinka, and Garífuna within Guatemala's plurilingual society. The politicization of language planning is evident in the Spanish-Mayan language binary, but even among the country's indigenous languages, language planning proves political. Among Guatemala's diverse Mayan languages, language planning becomes politicized by the state resources allotted to Mayan language teachers and the production of pedagogical materials, by the dialectical varieties determined as the standard within individual languages, and by the preference for certain languages' lexical and grammatical structures in the creation of neologisms.

Recently, language planners in Guatemala have put an increased focus on literacy in Mayan languages. In Guatemala, the interlaced efforts toward language planning and bilingual education tend to target children's writing and reading skills in indigenous languages. Given the tendency for children to hear and speak an indigenous language at home and in public places, bilingual teachers emphasize reading and writing skills within the classroom. This, too, can influence how Mayan language speakers engage with language. For example, an emphasis on literacy is often coupled with increased efforts to create habits of reading, effectively changing how people employ language (Sam Colop 1995). The process of acquiring literacy skills can also be viewed as a tool to combat language ideologies that cast certain languages as inferior to others. Since Spanish literacy has historically been promoted (or imposed) when Mayan literacy was not, Mayan language literacy may advance the Maya movement (Brown 1998). Literacy undoubtedly refutes the language ideology that diminishes the social and cultural value of Mayan languages and denies their communicative power in comparison to Spanish. As R. McKenna Brown writes, "Becoming literate in a Mayan language provides just such a challenge by contradicting many of the myths used to justify Mayan oppression: that the languages are inferior, have no grammar, and are not fit to be written or used pedagogically" (Brown 1998, 162). In situations of language contact, it is not uncommon for language ideology to uphold one language as more advanced and linguistically superior while trivializing another. Literacy may give Mayan languages more social prestige, but at the same time, may encourage speakers to legitimize a discriminatory linguistic hierarchy that privileges the written form over the spoken form of communication.

Complementary to literacy, orality is one aspect of Mayan culture, transmitted through Mayan language, that may not be truly incorporated within the education policy. Instead, orality

may pertain to the somewhat ambiguous domain of interculturalism within education policy, and therefore only be privileged to the degree that teachers personally see fit. As linguist and Mayan language scholar Sergio Romero remarks, “Oral traditions are part of a tense, continuous conversation on ritual, tradition, and their normative role in ever-changing community” (Romero 2015, 4). Within communities, orality takes the form of myths and fables shared in public and private spaces, while in classrooms, orality may be subsumed under literacy. Although orality conforms to an intercultural program, whether oral tradition is addressed in the classroom depends on teachers’ preferences.

One disjuncture between policy and its implementation concerns which indigenous language is designated for instruction alongside Spanish. Many municipalities can be designated as areas where one or two Mayan languages are widely spoken. However, while the bilingual curriculum incorporates the language(s) spoken by each town's inhabitants, a challenge naturally emerges when a municipality is home to speakers of diverse languages. Linguist Judith Maxwell claims that this is the case for Ixcán, a multilingual and multicultural municipality of the Department of Quiché, where external and internal refugees from the civil war reside. Residents of Ixcán represent nine Mayan language groups and boast a 70% retention rate for native language fluency, which poses a considerable obstacle within the classroom, where teachers default to instruction in Spanish (Maxwell 2009). The bilingual education program is unequipped to negotiate the linguistic diversity in Ixcán, but ethnographic studies might illuminate whether, and how, teachers incorporate the intercultural component of the curriculum. Migration has also impacted dialectical variation in Mayan languages (Romero 2015). While perhaps not as prohibitive to bilingual education as the linguistic diversity in Ixcán, high degrees of variation within a single language also present a challenge to implementing bilingual education.

From qualified personnel to economic support to pedagogical materials, the scales tip in favor of the languages with more speakers, especially Mam, K'iche', Kaqchikel, and Q'eqchi'. This is evident in neologism projects, for example. Neologism projects, which have incorporated Mayan and non-Mayan linguists, represent an important piece of Mayan linguists' language revitalization work. These projects have advanced the mission to produce pedagogical materials for school subjects in Mayan languages. Given the production of pedagogical materials as a necessary step to making IBE feasible and accessible, neologism projects have strongly favored the production or synthesis of words to describe mathematical, scientific, linguistic and ecological concepts. Neologism projects advance language revitalization projects by preventing speakers from relying on Spanish or English terms and unifying speakers of diverse Mayan languages through common word roots (Maxwell 2009). However, Mayan languages spoken by the greatest number of speakers are consistently favored in the process (England 2003). For example, Maxwell, who has collaborated extensively in Mayan language revitalization projects, states that when the Ministry of Education updated the curriculum in 2003, the textbooks were originally written in Spanish with the intention of translating the texts to Mayan languages and Garífuna. However, DIGEBI limited translation to the thirteen languages with at least one thousand children enrolled in nationalized schools; furthermore, only eleven of those languages were ultimately included in the translation project "due to lack of recruitable personnel" (Maxwell 2009). Distinct Mayan languages are therefore visible to varying degrees at each level of policy, which makes teachers' experiences in the education program very different.

While it may be difficult to inscribe interculturalism in educational materials, the bilingual curriculum and state-produced materials tend to be ethnocentric. The 2003 curriculum proved ethnocentric, Maxell contends, by both tacitly and explicitly framing aspects of Mayan

culture as folklore or cultural patrimony. One example she cites is a kindergarten book that instructs children to label parts of nature, like trees, that are “incorrectly” depicted as sentient beings as absurd; this exercise corresponds to a Western worldview but not to a Mayan worldview (Maxwell 2009). DIGEBI's pilot materials used the base 10 system for mathematics, rather than the Mayan base 20 numeric system, and content related to Mayan spirituality was incomplete because the pilot materials disregarded day-keepers, *or ajq'ijab'* (Maxwell 2009). As Maxwell attests, “[t]he respect offered Mayan culture is a nod to a historic past, a patrimony, rather than an ongoing vibrant element in the national society” (Maxwell 2009, 91). Educational materials may prove ethnocentric because of persisting stigmas surrounding Mayan spirituality as well. For example, animal transformation in Mayan ritual represents an important aspect of Mesoamerican thought, but has been stigmatized on religious grounds (Romero 2015). While appropriate for educational materials used in intercultural contexts, the fullness of Mayan ritual would not be represented in school materials produced by the state.

Studies of community-level implementation of education policy prove valuable by showing the ways that policy can be improved. At the same time, these studies illustrate the state’s approach to language policy and planning. The interplay of education policy and language planning and policy is most visible at the community level when teachers put policy into classroom practice. Still, the observations furnished by ethnographers and anthropologists are far from exhaustive, and both education policy and language planning and policy could be improved to better respond to community experience if teachers’ testimonies were heard.

In their article, "Slicing the Onion Ethnographically: Layers and Spaces in Multilingual Language Education Policy and Practice," professors Nancy H. Hornberger and David Cassels Johnson argue for further ethnographic studies about language policy and planning (LPP) and its

application within education programs globally. Hornberger and Johnson's ethnography of the intermediary agencies connected to bilingual education programs shows that despite diverse geographic regions and cultural environments in which language education policy unfolds, a disjuncture persists between the legislative realm that anchors policy and the experiential testimonies of those people charged with implementing bilingual education programs. Beyond proposing ethnography as a medium for understanding language policy and planning for education, the authors emphasize the importance of local ethnography that presents the experience of educators who adopt bilingual programs. Metaphorically representing the classroom, community and policy levels as the nested layers of an onion, the writers attest, "An ethnography of language policy can include textual and historical analyses of policy texts but must be based in an ethnographic understanding of some local context. The texts are nothing without the human agents who act as interpretive conduits between the language policy levels (or layers of the LPP onion)" (Hornberger and Johnson 2007, 528). Ethnographic examination at the micro-level illuminates the diverse ways that language policy and planning is implemented within the classroom and the ways in which policy impacts language ideologies and identity.

A growing body of literature shows that indigenous educators positively impact indigenous students' achievement in formal school settings and support the students' personal and collective growth as a result of their agency in the classroom. Ethnographies focusing on indigenous communities throughout Latin America prove that indigenous teachers in intercultural bilingual education programs reshape schooling practices by legitimizing indigenous knowledge and imparting this knowledge in indigenous languages. Education policies in Latin American states authorize indigenous language instruction, but local teachers interpret the policy in community-specific ways. For instance, anthropologist Bret Gustafson has

shown the significance of Bolivia's education reform for the Guaraní in his book *New Languages of the State*. While Bolivia's education reform historically vacillated between violent exclusion and forced subordinate inclusion through *castellanización*, local Guaraní and non-Guaraní scribes and schoolteachers validate both Guaraní and Spanish language and culture (Gustafson 2009). Therefore, they give epistemic authority to the Guaraní despite historical marginalization of indigenous knowledge in Bolivia's state-planned education programs. In Paraguay, where Guaraní is an official language spoken by the majority, bilingual education has not been implemented at the classroom level and teachers continue to teach in Spanish. In the study "With Spanish, Guaraní lives: a sociolinguistic analysis of bilingual education in Paraguay," UNESCO expert Hiroshi Ito interviews parents, teachers, policymakers, and intellectuals from Paraguay to assess the challenges to developing an effective bilingual education program (Ito 2012). Thus, in multilingual regions where bilingual education programs are absent or ineffective, ethnographic accounts of teachers' experiences elucidate the steps that must be taken in order to begin implementing bilingual programs.

Even in Latin American countries with relatively small indigenous populations, such as Chile and Colombia, ethnographies show that teachers in intercultural bilingual education programs use the classroom as an agentic space in which teaching methods and curricular content resist hegemonic, non-indigenous learning processes. In his ethnography of a rural Mapuche community in Chile, Professor Patricio R. Ortiz underscores the symbolic and practical value of the intercultural bilingual education program's policy of hiring *Kimches*, "a Mapuche traditional indigenous sage," who privileges *Kimün*, or indigenous knowledge, in his curriculum (Ortiz 2009). Ortiz finds that the *Kimches*' methods of integrating *Kimün* into the classroom validate indigenous knowledge, ritual practices and Mapuche language (Ortiz 2009).

Furthermore, Ortiz distinguishes between *Kimches*, organic intellectuals whose knowledge is fostered in the community, and Mapuche urban intellectuals who attended Western academies and no longer involve themselves in traditional cultural practices and political roles in communities (Ortiz 2009). In this Mapuche community, local intellectuals' interpretation of the Chilean state's education program valorizes indigenous knowledge and reinforces Mapuche language and culture within the community.

Similarly, anthropologist Joanne Rappaport studies organic intellectuals in Colombia's southwestern region of Cauca, where a bilingual education program developed as a result of local indigenous political mobilization. In her ethnography *Intercultural Utopias*, Rappaport describes the bilingual education program developed by an interethnic organization called the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC), which politically unifies Guambianos, Nasas, Totoróes, Yanaconas, and other cultural groups but focuses its bilingual education programming on the Nasa peoples (Rappaport 2005). This program diverges from others in Latin America because it developed at the regional level rather than the state level and the role of bilingual teachers is as political as it is pedagogical. Because the bilingual education program stemmed from a political organization, bilingual teachers serve as political agents who possess local knowledge and indigenous language skills. As such, part of the work of these local intellectuals involves mediating tensions that develop between collaborators at the local and regional levels. In addition to surveying the role of indigenous language and culture in the educational setting, Rappaport's ethnography highlights the political orientation of bilingual education at the community level and the unique political agency of teachers in Cauca.

While bilingual educators in other Latin American countries have created similar agentive spaces between their language communities and state policy, bilingual teachers



representing Guatemala's other Mayan languages certainly share common experiences with K'iche'-speaking teachers in Nahualá. For instance, in *The Life of Our Language: Kaqchikel Maya Maintenance, Shift and Revitalization*, Kaqchikel intellectual leader Wuqu' Ajpub' (Arnulfo Simón) shares his experiences as a bilingual teacher in a small Kaqchikel community and as a collaborator in the state's bilingual education program. After working as a Kaqchikel teacher with the Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín (Francisco Marroquín Linguistic Project, or PLFM), Ajpub' became a bilingual Kaqchikel teacher with PRONEBI. Later, he cooperated on educational projects with the Ministry of Education and designed bilingual education materials as a member of the Section of Curricular Development of PRONEBI. Although his professional career transcended the local Kaqchikel community where he provided bilingual instruction, his collaboration with the state as an education planner reinforced the work of local teachers. Furthermore, the experience Ajpub' gained as a bilingual teacher undoubtedly made his insight invaluable as he collaborated with the state. Ajpub' explains, "As well as accomplishing my own dreams of academic advancement, I was equally concerned with applying my knowledge for the benefit of my people" (Ajpub' 1998, 185). Ajpub' shares the experience of teaching locally and collaborating in education planning with several K'iche'-speaking teachers in Nahualá. There is symbolic ambiguity in Ajpub's reference to "my people" since he possibly refers not only to the linguistic community of Kaqchikel speakers but also to Mayans throughout Guatemala. At the same time, by teaching Kaqchikel and producing pedagogical materials in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Ajpub' furthers the state's project of promoting a multicultural, multilingual and multiethnic nation to the benefit of his people, Guatemalans. Further ethnographic research at the level of Guatemala's individual

linguistic communities would show how bilingual teachers interpret state policy and envision their role as educators and collaborators.

Through ethnography, Hornberger and Johnson specifically seek to highlight the *agentive spaces* in which actors at the local level interpret and adopt state policy and scrutinize the tensions between state policy and individual experience. Hornberger and Johnson's designation of *agentive spaces* aptly corresponds to the educational context of Guatemala's Mayan language communities, and particularly of Nahualá, where interviews show that teachers demonstrate individual agency in the classroom while abiding by the state's language policy for education. When policy is applied to local settings, actors within these *agentive spaces* interpret policy initiatives in myriad ways. In the case of schooling in Nahualá, for example, bilingual teachers are supportive of the bilingual education initiative, but articulate the challenges that surface as they implement the program, justify the program to parents, and seek teaching support within and beyond the community.

As a richer alternative to the qualitative assessments of bilingual education, ethnography can elucidate the real-life experiences of teachers and determine how intercultural bilingual education programs can be improved at each level. Intercultural bilingual education as a program could be improved and bilingual teachers could receive necessary support with micro-level ethnography that presents the experiences of teachers from distinct communities. After all, the factors influencing teachers' experiences in bilingual classrooms and the outcomes of bilingual education programs vary widely across language communities. Scholarship that studies variations between dialects of a single Mayan language or examines specific language communities has been critiqued by Pan-Mayanists as a divisive depiction of Maya identity and a hindrance to the larger Maya movement (Brown 1998). However, ethnographic studies that

evoke similar testimonies from bilingual teachers may ultimately produce a unifying effect; by sharing individual experiences, bilingual teachers may achieve common ground with educators in other communities or language groups. Furthermore, if intercultural bilingual education is left uninvestigated, the assumption may arise that individual language communities' experiences within PRONEBI has been, and remains, uniform. In a plurilingual country such as Guatemala, a study of agentic spaces prevents a reductionist view of teachers' experiences and highlights the myriad ways teachers embody the spirit of the policy by interpreting it appropriately for the needs of students and the linguistic and cultural context in which students learn. Borrowing Hornberger and Johnson's designation of the classroom as an agentic space, interviews conducted in five bilingual schools in Nahualá support teachers' claims of agency within the classroom and the local community.

#### **IV. A Study in Nahualá**

Nahualá, or *Nawalja'* in K'iche', is a municipality in the department of Sololá where K'iche' is spoken by nearly all residents. The three linguistic communities in the department of Sololá are K'iche', Kaqchikel and Tz'utujil. K'iche' speakers compose roughly 35% of the department and Kaqchikel speakers make up about 50%; the remainder of the population of Sololá speaks another Mayan language and a mere 3.5% identifies as monolingual Spanish-speakers (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Guatemala 2013). More than 66,000 people reside in Nahualá, making it the department's second-largest municipality in terms of population size (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Guatemala 2014).

Nahualá boasts a strong cultural and linguistic heritage that is evident in the K'iche' conversations one hears in public places; the statue of the town's founding leader, Manuel Tzoc,

placed prominently in the town center; and the popularity of the women's traditional *corte* and *huipil* embellished with the town's particular woven design. However, Nahualá's cultural and linguistic heritage is also evinced by the enthusiasm of bilingual teachers who support the intercultural bilingual education initiative and readily implement it within their classrooms, often availing themselves of a certain level of flexibility within the curriculum and interpreting the state's directive to promote Mayan language and culture in community-specific ways. The benefit of the particular initiative of teachers is that students are formed both as Nahualeños and as citizens of Guatemala. As a pre-primary grade teacher observed of the town, "There are places now that don't give this same value to bilingual education as they do in Nahualá. Here, they conserve it" (Interview 15). Undoubtedly, the strong linguistic heritage of the community fosters children's acquisition of K'iche.' However, as teachers conveyed to me through their testimonies, the application of K'iche' and Spanish in the classroom requires concerted effort on the part of teachers to promote the oral and written use of both languages, to teach effectively despite a lack of resources, and to encourage student's curiosity about and appreciation for Maya culture.

In July and August of 2015, I spent roughly three weeks visiting five public schools near Nahualá's town center. Previously having spent six weeks in a K'iche' field study program in Nahualá, I had met a number of teachers who invited me to observe their classrooms and graciously shared their experiences as bilingual teachers. My objective in conducting the interviews was to understand how teachers apply the state's directive for bilingual education to the classroom setting. As teachers articulated to me, the state policy was planned in the capitol, but local teachers were charged with implementing it (5); I reasoned that a policy that not only spans geographic regions but also a multilingual, multicultural matrix would produce a disjuncture between policy and implementation and perhaps open agentive space for local

teachers. While teachers upheld the state directive for bilingual instruction, they also took advantage of a certain level of freedom/ambiguity within the curriculum to teach appropriately to students' linguistic and cultural context.

I used snowball sampling to ask teachers to participate and limited the participant pool to bilingual teachers currently working in kindergarten, pre-primary or primary school grades (first through sixth) in Nahualá. With the 21 teachers who agreed, I conducted semi-structured interviews in Spanish with each teacher and did participant observation for about half of the classrooms. Within the sample, one-third of the teachers were men and two-thirds were women. The extent of teaching experience ranged from 5-23 years, and more than three-quarters of participants had ten or more years of experience. The 21 teachers I spoke with were spread across five schools in or near Nahualá's town center. All schools were public and co-ed; four were designated as rural, meaning they were removed from the town center, and one was designated as urban, since it is located in the town center.

My interview schedule proceeded as follows. I first gathered general information from teachers, such as the levels they had taught and the number of years they had been teaching, before asking them to describe their general experience as teachers in a bilingual program. I inquired into how they employed K'iche' and Spanish in the classroom, how parents reacted to the bilingual program, and whether teachers noticed a tendency among students to favor one language or another. I also asked about the challenges facing teachers within the classroom and how teachers mediated those challenges. Given the most recent developments in intercultural bilingual education, specifically the policy promoting cultural diversity within educational settings (and, by extension, within Guatemala's larger society), I asked teachers whether they were able to incorporate aspects of Maya culture into their lessons and whether they had

resources — their own or state-supplied — that made that possible. Finally, in an attempt to determine how teachers interact with administrators and policymakers on the regional and national level, I asked whether they had collaborated with representatives from DIGEBI or the Ministry of Education or whether they had received bilingual education training or workshops over the course of their careers.

The testimonies of these bilingual teachers supports my designation of the classroom as an agentive space for local teachers to promote the K'iche' language and Mayan culture within the community. All of the teachers whom I interviewed attested to the complexities of implementing bilingual education, although they all expressed their support of intercultural bilingual education initiatives and their belief that it should be a priority within indigenous communities. While the state directive for bilingual education legally upholds the use of Spanish and indigenous languages in the classroom, teachers' experiences reveal that the town community and the network of teachers is the greatest source of support for children's comprehensive education. Teachers instruct from the national curriculum but also provide cultural and linguistic instruction which, given the promotion of Mayan heritage in Nahualá society, can be reinforced in the community. The strength of the bilingual program in Nahualá is largely made possible by teachers' own initiative and commitment to promoting K'iche' language and Mayan culture, as evidenced by the day-to-day challenges teachers experience and their negotiation of those challenges.

Teachers consistently mentioned that the lack of K'iche' materials to complement their own knowledge of the K'iche' language presented a challenge within the classroom. As a second-grade teacher observed, "The government, the Ministry of Education, propels the bilingual education program, but as for materials that come from the Ministry for the children, there's

almost none” (21). Teachers described several reasons for this disjuncture between policy at the state level and its implementation locally. Teachers had received books from the Ministry for the subjects of Spanish, mathematics, and social and natural sciences, but said that it was rare for the state to furnish pedagogical material in K'iche.' The dearth of K'iche' resources is partly a consequence of economic constraints on educational funding. One teacher said that, although the Peace Accords had been signed, the state's allocation of 3% of the budget's funding for education was meager compared with other countries' budgets (7). Teachers explained that when they had received bilingual materials, they did not receive full classroom sets. Furthermore, because of the bilingual program's continued emphasis on students' early school years, the upper-level primary grades had not received grade-appropriate materials equivalent to those distributed to pre-primary, first and second grades. With respect to materials to assist teachers in bilingual instruction, when a bilingual education teaching guide was distributed, schools received a single copy for all teachers to share. As an alternative, many teachers have bought their own resources in K'iche', such as collections of stories, poems, local history and Maya numeration.

Although the lack of resources can be a source of frustration for bilingual teachers, the inaccessibility of K'iche' texts has revealed an agentive space for a number of teachers in Nahualá. The desire for resources that capture both local knowledge and culture — and are written in Nahualá's dialect of K'iche' — has opened an avenue for teachers to have agency as compilers, scribes and producers of local knowledge. Referencing the lack of resources, a fourth grade teacher said, "It's a shame because we are changing. For example, we retire after 25 years. And if we don't take advantage of everything that one knows, you can't leave it in written form" (1). Attaching a sense of urgency to the issue of producing K'iche' pedagogical materials, this teacher prioritized seeking information from experienced teachers and recording that information

for future generations of students. Furthermore, teachers sought materials specific to Nahualá's dialectical variety. Teachers recognized the multiple varieties of K'iche' as an obstacle to the production of a single learning tool (10). Ideally, teachers would be equipped with resources in the Nahualá variety of K'iche'. One teacher affirmed, "I would collaborate on making materials in K'iche', but the pure K'iche' of Nahualá" (6). In fact, a number of teachers have taken this initiative to produce materials truly reflective of local knowledge, history and language.

Since there are no dialect-specific pedagogical materials, teachers must acquire their own resources, usually paid for out of their own pocket. "In the public schools here in Guatemala," says one teacher serving sixth-graders, "the teacher is a bit abandoned, one might say, because the Ministry hires teachers, but from there each teacher must see how to produce the work" (14). Without a text specific to the community to help them perform their jobs, some teachers have taken the initiative to transcribe their own texts, supporting the popular opinion that every community should be empowered to create local texts. As one teacher described, "That's where the idea came from that it would be better to write a book ourselves, that has words that we use, so that it's not so difficult for [the students]. For example, here, papa for example, we say *tat*. In [Tonicapán, a nearby city], they say *tata'*. For example, among us we say *nan* for mama, there they say *chuchu'*. So there are words that we don't use here but that appear in the texts. And sometimes they even come mixed with Kaqchikel, since here in Sololá they also speak Kaqchikel, and sometimes they come mixed together. And that complicates it a little more" (14). With limited resources that are often produced in a generalized form of K'iche' or even incorporate words from a distinct Mayan language, teachers have sought to produce their own materials, effectively extending teachers a greater role in their students' education. The few teachers who wrote and published books and pamphlets in the local dialect of K'iche' assumed



an additional and uncommon role as writers. Their initiative in the production of knowledge is exceptional since it is not expected from them in their capacity as educators, but the latitude that teachers enjoy while still abiding by the national curriculum enables their individual production of teaching materials.

Several teachers mentioned that local teachers had received assistance from the NGO CARE to produce a book with teachers from Nahualá but lamented the short supply (17, 19). Lack of sufficient or appropriate materials inspired Manuel, whose experience spanning the local, regional and national levels was described in the introduction, to pen two books independently (5). Another teacher described being motivated to write and publish by an institution in the capitol where, after graduating college, he was employed to teach homeless children. He remained in contact with the institution and they solicited him to write poems, stories and jokes in K'iche' and, from there, he practiced writing in K'iche'. Although he did not collaborate with the Ministry of Education, he worked on a K'iche'-Spanish bilingual pamphlet and provided the town supervisor and the municipality administration with a copy (8).

In another instance, a team of teachers envisioned creating a technical team for teaching that would produce materials for teachers. Beyond writing books on K'iche' grammar, the team recorded local history. The teacher charged with writing pamphlets in K'iche' said, "I went to people familiar with the traditions and we wrote a book on Nahualá, on the foundation of Nahualá, the customs and traditions of the town, even the parish, how it was built is preserved just in the words they tell, but we've written it down. We took the trouble to go house to house listening to the older people, and they told me how it was built and I wrote it down" (14). This same teacher plans to finish a current bilingual book this year, proving that there is no limit to the local knowledge that could potentially be recorded in texts and that teachers deem the work a

priority. One of the challenges to independently producing texts is the cost of printing, which can be prohibitively expensive. To circumvent this problem, a teacher who wrote a book in K'iche' explained that he sends it digitally to fellow teachers for them to print or read at home (14).

The state mandate for bilingual education, while obligating teachers to give bilingual instruction, remains rather flexible about how teachers and students engage with language in the classroom. Even within Nahualá's town center and the surrounding hamlets, students' language skills remain highly variable, and so the level of flexibility within state policy is necessary. This also gives teachers agency in structuring their classroom around the needs of their students, as teachers at once comply with the mandate for Spanish and K'iche' instruction while allowing the home and community environments in which students begin their language acquisition to inform the methods they use to teach. Across the board, teachers explained that K'iche' was "L1," or the first language, and Spanish was "L2," or the second language; both are courses taught within the curriculum, but in the kindergarten, pre-primary and early primary years (grades 1, 2, and 3), K'iche' was also used to reinforce Spanish instruction. One teacher referred to K'iche' as *"el pan de cada día"* — the daily bread — to illuminate how essential it is for teaching younger children. K'iche', then, effectively sustains young children's education. Teachers described how they accommodate different language skill levels in order to achieve the objectives of bilingual education. In order to teach effectively, teachers first observed how their current students fared speaking, reading, writing, and listening to Spanish and K'iche'.

Teachers consistently observed a pattern for language use among students that traced a rural-urban divide. As mentioned previously, interviews were conducted at four schools designated as "rural" and one school designated "urban." Interestingly, past state directives for indigenous language use allowed native language instruction in areas designated as rural, like

Nahualá. However, within the town, the center was designated urban and the surrounding *aldeas*, or communities, though not far from downtown, were called "rural." Teachers currently or previously working in rural areas observed that students from rural schools mastered K'iche' more readily than students in urban schools, who tended to enter school with more knowledge of Spanish (10,8,7, 4, 3). A second grade teacher explained,

"There are some who master K'iche' and there are some who do not, since [parents] started to teach them Spanish from their birth. And in the four years that I was teaching in a rural school far away, they made it really easy. It was easy for me and I really liked working with them because they mastered K'iche', almost none of them spoke Spanish...when I asked them something they responded quickly to what I asked and their use of K'iche' is more, how would you say, it was more than the students here manage. Now, here in the urban school it's difficult for me and takes longer to teach the content, for example what I taught today, you realized that a lot of them said, 'This is difficult for me, *señor*' and 'I don't know how to write this, since I can't handle K'iche'"(3).

The consensus among teachers was that families from the urban area of Nahualá were more likely to teach children Spanish at home, and this made the teaching experience in an urban school drastically different than in a rural school despite the common curriculum. Still, teachers observed that students were livelier and more likely to ask questions, reason and theorize, and put more trust in the teacher when K'iche' was the language of instruction and communication (8). This observation affirms teachers in their method of instruction. Many teachers expressed the importance of teaching dynamically, and so seeing students engage in learning when the language of instruction was K'iche' validated their teaching strategy.

As part of this observation of their students' language use, teachers remarked on children's language difficulties as bilingual learners. For example, the glottal and guttural phonemes of K'iche' complicated students' pronunciation (16, 11). While pronouncing the distinct sounds of K'iche' gave students trouble, so did learning two alphabets and the sounds corresponding to the letters of the Spanish and K'iche' alphabets (11). Reading also posed a

problem, since parents did not emphasize literacy in K'iche'. A fourth grade teacher explained that she performed a diagnostic test at the beginning of each school year to determine students' skill levels in both languages. This year, she found that only two students of the 31 students in her section could fully communicate in Spanish (1). By taking this initiative to assess students' skills, this teacher was able to justify the bilingual program to parents who questioned its purpose and effectiveness. Thus, by taking full advantage of their prerogatives within the classroom, teachers improve their methods for instruction and are affirmed in the larger project of bilingual education.

Teachers themselves admitted to applying Spanish words to K'iche', mixing the two languages (even incorporating English), and not speaking "pure" K'iche' (8, 13,6). Teachers saw this as a detriment to students' language acquisition and a setback to the objective of promoting indigenous language use. Several teachers mentioned reviving older K'iche' words or incorporating more neologisms as a solution. As one teacher remarked, "It would benefit us to resurrect old words that have fallen out of use and to speak a pure K'iche'. Neologisms really help us, because students use Spanish words like *avión* [airplane] and *bicicleta* [bicycle]" (14). An alternative solution was simply structuring language use better, with the recommendation that, "we should leave Spanish a little, use K'iche' more, and then go to Spanish, use Spanish well, and not mix anymore" (6). Teachers have the prerogative within their classrooms to make those adjustments, and having observed the ways in which students struggled with both Spanish and K'iche', teachers are motivated to teach as they saw fit. One teacher, for example, explained her approach, saying, "I don't impose on them that they have to write in Spanish, If they want to write in K'iche', they can write in K'iche'. The important thing is that they're reasoning" (19). For this teacher, the priority was teaching students how to become learners; whether that process

avored K'iche' or Spanish was less important. As a bilingual instructor, this teacher was equipped to assist students in either language they preferred.

The unique learning environment for bilingual students has inspired teachers to make teaching and learning a dynamic, integral experience that merges the knowledge that students bring to the classroom with the standard subjects of the curriculum imparted by the teacher. This requires teachers to develop a teaching strategy that establishes literacy skills in L1 but support gradual acquisition of L2, since teachers employ K'iche' in the younger grades and Spanish in the upper grades of primary school. A fourth grade teacher explained, "One adapts and instills, going little by little in a progressive way to Spanish. But it's more in the maternal language. So, it's a process that yes, requires a little strategy, skill and methodology to be able to teach bilingual education well" (2). The strategy and methodology employed varies from teacher to teacher, but while improving reading and writing skills in K'iche' was an explicit objective universally, many teachers described a dynamic approach to teaching. As one teacher said, "They learn more, not necessarily when the teacher fills the whole board and they copy that, education shouldn't be like that. Education should be more dynamic, more active, more constructive, because the student and the teacher are the two principle subjects of education, as well as the parents... when they work at home, parents take part in the [education] process, maybe they don't come here to school, but at home they also collaborate..." (8). Importantly, it was possible for teachers to involve parents in learning because whether parents preferred K'iche' or Spanish at home, both languages were spoken in the classroom. With parents practicing at home with their children, instruction given in the classroom was reinforced at home.

One drawback to this flexibility with respect to language use within the classroom may be that teachers working in the bilingual program can do so without giving quality instruction in

both languages. One teacher explained that for their service in the bilingual program, teachers received 200 *quetzales* monthly as an incentive from the government. This teacher remarked that there is an inherent contradiction: here are some teachers who receive the bonus without giving bilingual instruction as the national curriculum mandates or, he clarified, without giving quality bilingual education that could reasonably achieve the objectives of the education program (2). However, this is not the majority of teachers. In fact, many teachers not only create their own agentive space as they determine a teaching method specific to their students' skills, but act as promoters of bilingual education when parents question the bilingual initiative, thus finding an agentive space beyond the classroom.

In schools in Nahualá, as in schools elsewhere, teachers interact with parents to provide feedback on students' progress or suggest ways for parents to participate in children's education at home. In Nahualá, however, teachers often adopt the role of promoter of bilingual education, as well, upholding a state directive that parents may deem hostile to their children's future prospects. Unlike teachers in the castilianization programs in the mid- and late-1900s, teachers in Nahualá are largely residents of the town or nearby towns and learned K'iche' as children, too. When they defend the bilingual education program, they defend a linguistic and cultural heritage that they personally share with other Nahualeños. Cognizant of the economic advantage of learning Spanish but preoccupied with the idea that Mayan language and culture can be lost, teachers' reasoning offers justification for acquisition of both languages and, importantly, the feasibility of such an endeavor.

When they were asked about parents' attitudes toward bilingual education, teachers' responses ranged from ambivalence to widespread acceptance among parents. However, across schools and grades, teachers articulated an observation that parents were more accepting of

bilingual education today compared to ten or twenty years ago. Often, teachers said that it was their explanation to parents about the benefits of the program that encouraged parents to support bilingual instruction. Teachers may have been able to justify bilingual instruction as parents themselves, presenting themselves as both promoters of the bilingual initiative and parents of children reaping its benefits. While most teachers reported that only a few parents questioned bilingual instruction, the source of parents' disapproval varied and teachers employed diverse strategies to defend the bilingual initiative.

According to teachers' testimonies, parents opposed the bilingual program because of a combination of economic and social disincentives. "The parents say that they prefer that their children receive classes in Spanish," one teacher reports. "For what reason? Because we want our children to be smarter and know how to speak Spanish better, because if you go to another town to study, or to work, or to try to get a job, a young person can't ask for a job in K'iche', not to mention submit an application in K'iche', since here in Guatemala discrimination really exists" (20). Discrimination is a real source of fear and anxiety for Mayans in Guatemala; beyond a fear of discrimination exists the fear of becoming a target for violence, which harkens back to the Civil War. Fear of discrimination due to markers of indigeneity, such as language and dress, motivates indigenous peoples across Guatemala to shed those markers. As expressed in this quote, K'iche' is often seen as a detriment to adolescents and adults seeking work in Guatemala. Furthermore, many children and teenagers face the reality of migration to the United States, where even speaking Spanish is more likely to help secure a job than speaking a Mayan language. Thus, parents know their children may be discriminated against in Guatemala or abroad for speaking K'iche'.

Discrimination is social and political and widespread: One teacher explained that, upon entering any office of the government, if one is seen as indigenous or heard speaking an indigenous language, one has the sense that they are mocked or ridiculed (8). Because of this discrimination, and the historical state-backed marginalization of indigenous peoples, there is distrust of a bilingual education policy that mandates indigenous-language instruction for Mayan children, but not for ladinos. One teacher expressed this tension as follows:

“Understand that I have talked with other people, I’ll tell you that first. A lot say, why talk about bilingual education. A lot of times people say that the government wants us to continue with our...with our language and how we are, because they want to get ahead, whereas those from the other community, we’re talking about the *ladinos*, they are learning other languages from abroad, whether it’s English, French, German, while some [the indigenous population] stay the same. That’s the reason some say that. But the truth, what I think is, that for me, our language is very beautiful because not many people know it. I’m really pleased to have been born into the K’ichean group” (20).

Although the distrust some Mayans’ maintain for the state is not unfounded, teachers must combat this in order to justify their method of teaching. Teachers discursively asserted ownership of Mayan culture and K’iche’ language to explain their reasons for promoting these aspects of their identity. Additionally, they articulated belonging within a cultural and ethnic group that they had earned by speaking K’iche’.

For all of these reasons, bilingual education can be viewed by parents as a setback and teachers, as the ones charged with implementing the bilingual program, must explain to parents why they uphold the initiative. One teacher remarked, "We explain more about what bilingual education consists of, since a lot of people say that bilingual education leads to poverty, and it's not true. One knows that articles and laws have their foundations, and that's how to tell parents that it's not a step backwards" (6). Thus, teachers also rely on the legal foundation of the bilingual directive to convince parents of bilingual education’s value, at once legitimizing the law and combating the pervasive belief that bilingual education restricts social and economic



mobility and engenders poverty. Personal experience may inform some parents' belief that bilingual education restricts social and economic mobility, since they may recall their school experience during the early bilingual and/or castilianization programs. These programs were less effective than the current bilingual program, since students only received a pre-primary year of bilingual instruction. Therefore it follows that parents would remain skeptical about a bilingual program that they experienced to be only minimally effective. Faced with the difficult position of denying parents' personal experience, bilingual teachers might emphasize the legal foundation for their method of teaching.

As speakers of a Mayan language, teachers recognize the threat of discrimination. The pervasiveness of linguistic discrimination means that teachers readily acknowledge parents' concerns that fostering K'iche' skills rather than Spanish skills makes children vulnerable to discrimination. Still, they emphasize that the objective of the bilingual program is to promote language capital in K'iche' and Spanish. Furthermore, a number of teachers viewed monolingual instruction in Spanish as discrimination against K'iche'. Teachers reiterated that *not* using K'iche' would amount to allowing K'iche' to fall to the wayside. In effect, monolingual instruction would marginalize K'iche' within the community and risk its loss among future generations. One teacher attested, "I think that if we don't use our language in the classroom, it's like we're discriminating against our own language, K'iche', which is ours. I have told the parents, we have to value what is ours, what is the most important. Of course, Spanish is impressive just like English too, but we value more what is ours, which is K'iche'"(13). Beyond a certain sense of responsibility that teachers expressed in protecting and promoting their linguistic heritage, when teachers spoke of K'iche', they expressed pride in knowing their language and simultaneous woe for the loss of certain words and the introduction of Spanish ones. One teacher attested that the

linguistic richness of K'iche' is much greater than that of Spanish (2). Teachers' maintenance — and even more, articulation — of pride in K'iche' combats discrimination students may encounter outside the linguistic community.

Maintaining the importance of not letting either language fall to the wayside, some teachers remarked that they encourage children to speak K'iche'. One teacher justified this by saying that if the teacher only speaks Spanish, students might be anxious to attend school (12). Encouraging students to speak K'iche' creates an inclusive environment for most students, although arguably not for students whose parents interact with them solely in Spanish at home. Upon reading a story in K'iche' and asking for students to explain what they understood in K'iche', a pre-primary teacher noticed students were reluctant to respond or giggled nervously. "I would almost say it's like they're ashamed," she said (9). Once again, by encouraging students to use K'iche', teachers make the education inviting and attempt to reverse any unwillingness to practice oral skills. At the same time, when a parent protests that a child failed the K'iche' (L1) course, the teacher explains that literacy skills, along with oral skills, enable children to fully appreciate the K'iche' language (5). As many teachers reiterated, a benefit of the K'iche' is that students improve reading and writing skills that are often not fostered at home.

One teacher strategically demonstrated students' and parents' lack of knowledge about names, proper nouns, and numbers in K'iche' in her argument for bilingual education. The teacher explained that when she asked fifth grade students how to say the name "Isabel" in K'iche', most of them did not know. "Imagine if we can't recover what is ours in twenty or fifteen years," she asked (18). This teacher also combated parents' assumptions that the limited K'iche' learned at home was sufficient for students. Describing how she handled a parent's complaint about bilingual instruction, she said, "I, for example, explained to a parent, 'But if you

say to me the numbers up to a hundred in K'iche', do you know it?' And he told me 'No, I don't know.' So imagine, we're leaving what is ours to the side. And we have to recover what our ancestors knew." (18) At once, this teacher's justification recalled past knowledge that had been cast aside and imagined the loss of future knowledge. Both are convincing and popular strategies for proving the importance of intercultural bilingual education in the present.

One way of counteracting parents' opposition to bilingual education is to include them in the education process. Parental participation in education, coupled with teachers' explanation of the value of writing skills acquired at school, has reversed a lot of negative opinions. A sixth-grade teacher remarked,

"The parents have come around and, on the contrary, have told me that bilingual education is important. There are some who maybe didn't understand, but when one explains, parents understand, because we speak K'iche' at home but we don't write it, so what we do at school is written K'iche', there are even words I work on with the students, there are topics they research at home with their fathers and mothers, and so that knowledge in part of bilingual education because it's part of our same culture" (8).

Teachers emphasize that K'iche' oral skills introduced at home satisfy one component of L1 education, while literacy skills practiced at school give children full language capital. At the same time, by integrating parents' knowledge with the standard curriculum taught at school, teachers show parents the value of knowledge imparted in K'iche' and the importance of parents' active role in education. Teachers also use themselves as examples to prove that the potential for learning in K'iche' is unlimited. Since teachers are viewed as legitimate authorities in the sphere of formal education, admitting their own doubts about K'iche' words demonstrates that merely speaking K'iche' in the home will not provide students with a strong foundation for future language use.

Parents do have some control over where their child attends school and which teacher will instruct them. A teacher of a multigrade classroom (1, 2, and 3) of a remote *aldea*, or

hamlet, said that parents can choose where to inscribe their children, and that factors like the size of the school or the number of teachers may inform their decision. However, the teacher explained that their preference for one school over another would not change the fact that all schools are required to provide bilingual instruction and abide by the standards of the national curriculum (16). Furthermore, I recorded that in the urban school (but perhaps not in other schools), parents could enroll their children in a specific teacher's classroom until the class reached capacity (7). Knowledge of a teacher's reputation for promptness, availability and effectiveness would likely lead parents to select one teacher over another; it also stands to reason that knowledge of teacher's methods of instruction and language habits in the classroom could influence that choice. Therefore, while the national curriculum is universal, parents may act according to their own views on bilingual education when it comes to teacher selection. However, parents have no choice but to comply with the bilingual education directive, and so instead of convincing parents to choose bilingual education for their children, teachers more accurately convince parents of the benefits of bilingual instruction.

Just as teachers often must defend instruction in K'iche', they also defend a curriculum that upholds the teaching of Mayan culture within the classroom. Mayan culture is evident in Nahualá in the often-essentialized markers of language and dress, but emerges also in local history, sacred/important sites around town, and oral storytelling. By intentionally incorporating elements of Mayan culture into the classroom, teachers valorize Mayan culture as part of students' formation and solidify their personal beliefs that their students should expand their cultural consciousness. My interviews with teachers reflect how they incorporate culture into the classroom as well as how they discursively support the intercultural aspect of the education program.

I asked teachers how they incorporated culture into their lessons. One teacher said that cultural topics emerged in the lessons of social and natural sciences, since the themes of nature and culture go together (17). For example, a sixth-grade teacher explained that he had taught his class about medicinal plants used by Mayans, as opposed to chemical and manufactured medicines popular today (8). Another teacher said that it was taught in the civic formation (formación ciudadana) course, and that interculturalism in the classroom incorporated lessons on honesty, social values, equal rights, equality of the sexes, and local culture and history (10). As part of culture, students study the history of the town, its foundation story and its leader, as well as values such as respect, responsibility, and equality (8). Standard math lessons of the national curriculum taught Maya numerals, but one benefit for students' appreciation of Mayan culture was that it uplifted Mayan culture. One teacher said, "In math, we teach Maya numerals, subtraction with Maya numerals, addition with Maya numerals division with Maya numerals, also a little bit to show them that what is ours is also at the heights of what other cultures have" (14). Many teachers remarked that they taught the Maya calendar, and one teacher even mentioned a lesson on hieroglyphs (9). During an art activity or a dynamic activity involving manipulatives, teachers said that they depicted the planting of corn, dramatizing an integral part of Mayan life and culture (9).

Teachers across the board described a comparative approach to culture in the classroom that parallels a nostalgic discourse outside the classroom that holds high the Mayan culture of the past. When discussing ancestors' more authentic use of language and loyalty to Mayan culture, teachers even mentioned alternative ways of knowing and viewing the world. One teacher said, "They had their ideas about how things would happen, they looked at the sky and the constellations, the stars" (18). Thus, teachers may not attempt to revive certain aspects of culture

— as they might Mayan numerals, for example — but rather, as this quote shows, simply teach students about ancestors' worldview.

The creative strategies that teachers employed to incorporate Mayan culture into lessons undoubtedly extended agency to teachers. However, teachers also promoted Mayan culture by encouraging learning outside the classroom, whether at a community site or within students' homes. When a sixth grade teacher explained that lack of financial resources prevented him from visiting a museum in the capitol with students, he found an alternative way to teach interculturally. He accompanied students on a walk to visit a local Maya ceremonial center located on a nearby hill. He said, "I enjoyed explaining to them that the ceremonial sites are part of our Mayan culture, and they felt really inspired...and it was a great experience and they all wanted to do it again" (8). He called this part of the civics course that was a formal subject in the classroom, but he had brought students to a site with local and cultural significance. Thus, when designing an intercultural lesson, teachers uphold a state mandate but also foster cultural awareness in students, a consciousness that can be reinforced within the community. Beyond being reinforced in the community, this consciousness can be reinforced at home.

Urging family members to participate in education, while a strategic way for teachers to allow entire families to appreciate bilingual education, also advances the intercultural component of the education initiative. As one teacher commented in support of interculturalism in the curriculum, "Bilingual education isn't only centered on writing and speaking K'iche', it's much greater still because it's a whole culture that is practiced here" (8). Some teachers saw their role in interacting with parents as raising a consciousness about bilingual instruction and appreciation of Mayan culture within the classroom (1). The idea surfaced that if Mayan cultural values are learned — at school or at home — the result would be greater community consciousness about,

or awareness of, a shared culture (14). Bolstered by the directive for intercultural education, teachers encourage students to appreciate what is not learned through texts in the classroom. One teacher described recovering part of Maya culture by incorporating stories from home, "stories that are only maintained in the oral tradition and that you can't get in any book, there are stories that are only told from father to son, with family members and friends, but that you don't find written" (14). Another teacher assigned research projects, for example, on the Mayan calendar, to be completed at home with the help of family members (8). Thus, integrating school lessons with family members' knowledge has become a strategy for making education more intercultural. As teachers told me, there is no state-supplied text book on Mayan culture and the curriculum was implemented nationally, even in non-indigenous communities. Therefore, the teachers' role was to highlight culture as part of their lessons.

Teachers also reflected on tourists' and researchers' interest in the languages and cultures of Guatemala against the ways they perceived communities to neglect aspects of Mayan culture and language. One teacher commented,

"Recall that Guatemala is one of the countries that still conserves a large part of its culture...and we want it to be preserved, we don't want it to be lost. Because there are people who come from other countries who come to appreciate what Guatemala has and a lot of times, we who live in this country don't do that, even though people from other countries appreciate what Guatemala has. And I like to preserve that, like the music, the indigenous instruments – the marimba, the tun, the chirimía – the gastronomy!" (21)

Teachers excitedly talked about the richness of Mayan culture but lamented the fact that, as one teacher put it, "we now give more importance to other cultures, to foreign cultures" (4).

Similarly, a teacher's comparison of foreigners' willingness to study a Mayan language against the perceived ambivalence of native speakers to the language, or their inability to speak "pure K'iche," shows teachers use outsiders' interest in Mayan language and culture to recommit to their practice of it. To that end, one teacher commented, "I was thinking about that and reflecting

on it. If [foreigners] manage it well and they come from another country, and I am living here, then why am I mixing it now, now I am not practicing what is really my native language. I mix some words from another language to be able to start a conversation. So, speaking pure K'iche', we almost don't do that now. But you can practice it, above all if you have the willingness, it's the willingness that we lack" (1).

Other teachers found that the same strategy for encouraging acquisition of both languages, specifically by speaking K'iche' with students and encouraging students to practice their oral skills, simultaneously reinforced the intercultural aspect of education, since language is a strong marker of cultural identity for Mayans. The use of traditional clothing also placed a marker of Mayan culture literally front and center in the classroom. While female teachers perhaps wore *traje* because of personal preference, that choice made one aspect of Mayan culture visible inside the classroom. A female teacher explained that wearing *traje* was one way she brought Mayan culture to the classroom, effectively setting an example for her students. She said, "I use my *traje* in front of them because they see that I'm not just talking, I also revive the use of *traje*...so I teach how to act, it's not just talk..." (6). The disuse of *traje* was an observation that other teachers considered a reason for interculturalism to be taught in the classroom, so that children would appreciate the traditional *corte* and *huipil*. Interestingly, only the female teachers I interviewed wore *traje*, not men; this follows a trend in Nahualá and in other indigenous communities where women sustain the use of *traje* in daily wear.

The state's directive for intercultural bilingual education has made professionalization workshops and trainings a part of any discussion concerning teachers and their methods for implementing the education initiative. Workshops can span a range of topics, from seminars on teaching intercultural themes and indigenous languages to training sessions on bilingual



instruction and resource production. Evaluators of the IBE program may expect the state or the municipality to provide for teacher training, and to some extent, this has taken place. However, these interviews evoked a greater sense of collaboration among local teachers than between the local, municipal and national levels. By sharing their experiences, knowledge and resources with one another, teachers supported each other and made the local bilingual program stronger.

To a certain extent, teachers in Nahualá had received professionalization trainings. Responses varied greatly, given the range of teachers' job experience and previous teaching sites. One teacher, for example, said that she had received an intercultural training on the Mayan Calendar when she was teaching in another region of Nahualá called Boca Costa, but had not received any professional training since transferring to her current school (18). Another teacher reported receiving training for the primary school age group, but not for bilingual instruction (11). In teachers' responses, there was no consensus regarding frequency of trainings, initiators or trainings or topics discussed in trainings.

These interviews, therefore, problematized the idea of trainings. Teachers reiterated their desire for support, especially in terms of resources and pedagogical materials. Teachers were also receptive to receiving training from the state or municipality. One teacher reported that there is a professionalization program provided by the government that should be made mandatory as a complement to the education degree (13). Many teachers also expressed a personal desire to improve as educators, to adapt and perfect their teaching methods, and to continue learning independently in order to better teach students. However, when asked whether they had received bilingual training, a number of teachers responded that they had received their degree specifically in bilingual education; Since there are monolingual degree tracks, specializing in the bilingual track *was* career-specific training (15, 16, 17). As mentioned in the evaluations of

bilingual education programs nationally, one critique of training workshops is that those charged with giving the workshop are less prepared than local teachers to give instruction on bilingual education, indigenous languages, or interculturalism.

Instead, teachers often rely on one another for support. When teachers have collaborated at the municipal and national level but remain in their position as local teachers, their past experience collaborating outside the community assists their fellow teachers in their roles as educators. A third-grade teacher said that she collaborated with DIGEBI as a departmental advisor (for the department of Sololá) when the national curriculum was compiled, speaking on Mayan education, its influence and its challenges. This teacher also gave training courses to colleagues in the district and in the department of Sololá (7). Another teacher worked at the level of the magistrate on regional trainings on reading and writing in K'iche', working in the department of Quiché and in Sololá (5). Thus a few teachers had collaborated outside the local institutions but in a way that directly affected teachers locally, which gave these teachers agency within the national program. As representatives from Nahualá, local experiences informed the curriculum and the trainings at local, regional and national levels.

One teacher recalled the help he had received from a respected colleague, saying, "My colleague working in the first grade has helped me a lot because he has a lot of knowledge about our culture, how to write and work in K'iche. So he has a lot of knowledge and more experience, but we have helped each other" (8). This same teacher also had experience working with a foreign institution in the capitol, and during that time had traveled to Nicaragua to share the K'iche' language and Mayan traditions and customs with Nicaraguan students. He remained in contact with the institution in the capitol and they continued to solicit him for pamphlets in K'iche'. Despite his own contacts outside of the community, he privileged his colleague's

knowledge of K'iche' and local history as an asset to the local education program. He affirmed, "One of the most important aspects here in the school is that we support each other among teachers. Any doubt I have I can ask my colleague about, and I know he will help me because this is how education should be, because we're working toward the same end, right. Education is for the children at the end of the day" (8). Referencing this same experienced teacher, a fourth grade teacher reiterated that he and his colleagues always sought answers from him because he truly practiced bilingual education and was very knowledgeable about written K'iche' and word meanings (2). Ultimately, while teachers expressed a desire to improve as educators, they did not suggest that the municipality or the state could offer better support than the support they received from local teachers equipped with extensive experience, considerable knowledge of K'iche' language and Mayan culture, and a passion for the spirit of the bilingual education program.

When they collaborate beyond the local network of teachers, educators in Nahualá see their role as imparting the reality of bilingual education to municipal and national officials. One teacher described working with a team of teachers to develop a diagnostic for the municipality, which involved collecting information for the Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe (DIGEBI) of Sololá so that the department could send it to the Ministry of Education. He remarked, "To the extent we've collaborated, we've done it with the Ministry of Education, because they almost can't leave from the Ministry office. We are the teachers, those who live the reality of the children's education. Those who work on the curriculum guides, they do it on the official level. But those who work directly, it's us and our children" (21). His comment reveals the fact that teachers effectively negotiate the needs and skills of students with a state policy that mandates bilingual instruction and encourages interculturalism, yet remains ambiguous about its implementation. Although teachers abide by a state directive that is sometimes contested by

parents and often complicated by a lack of resources and children's wide range of language skills, teachers fill the most influential role in the school system. Their initiative, their agency and their creative strategies for defending and implementing the policy of intercultural bilingual education ultimately sustain the program on the community level.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

As protagonists of the intercultural bilingual education program at the community level, teachers enjoy a powerful role in imparting bilingual education that valorizes the cultural and linguistic context in which students learn. Furthermore, through bilingual instruction and incorporation of cultural elements, teachers promote the Mayan identity that they share with students. As the case of bilingual teachers in Nahualá shows, a certain degree of latitude within the national curriculum and the directive for intercultural education yields agentive space to teachers. As they internalize and interpret state policy, teachers both promote the educational mandate and react against it. They uphold the mandate by defending it to parents who doubt its objectives, by developing students' literacy and oral skills in K'iche' and Spanish, and by addressing elements of Mayan culture within and beyond the classroom. At the same time, teachers react against it by rejecting teaching materials that confuse discrete Mayan languages or dialectical variations, by producing texts more representative of local language and history and by seeking support from within the local network of teachers instead of relying on workshops hosted at the municipal level.

In this way, bilingual teachers become local agents of linguistic and cultural revitalization just as their collaborators in the Maya movement push for the demands of Guatemala's indigenous peoples at the municipal and national levels. At times, these spheres intersect, as is

the case for teachers who gained experience in the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG) or the Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín (PLFM) and continue to apply that experience in their current teaching positions. Qualitative assessments of the intercultural bilingual education program, especially performed through ethnographic work, may illuminate possibilities for further collaboration between local teachers and activists and intellectuals engaged in the Pan-Maya movement beyond rural communities. To this end, ethnography should especially foreground the lived experiences of teachers in order to reveal how local actors interpret and practice state policy and to enhance the intercultural bilingual education program in the future.

Rather than focusing on the limited quantitative evaluations that attest to the benefits of bilingual education — including improved test scores, increased enrollment rates, decreased dropout rates, and decreased repeat rates — this project aims to show the positive impact of teachers who give dual language instruction and valorize the cultural context in which their students learn. Unlike the missionaries, *ladino* instructors, and bilingual promoters who spearheaded the castilianization and early bilingual education programs, nearly all the teachers in Nahualá are native K'iche' speakers and residents of the town. For this reason, teachers in Nahualá articulated a sense of accountability to their students, to the community of Nahualá and to the larger Mayan movement. Working in the intercultural bilingual program, the overwhelming majority of teachers in Nahualá simultaneously reinforce their own cultural, linguistic and ethnic identity in their capacity as teachers.

Given the agency of teachers in the classroom and in the local community, collaboration between teachers from different towns who represent the same linguistic communities can produce avenues for improvement to the education program. Teachers in Nahualá reiterated the

value of local history and regional dialects. Thus, rather than arbitrarily dispersing materials produced in one community to other communities, teachers would benefit from sharing their experiences as educators and recorders of local knowledge with teachers from neighboring communities. A major conclusion of this research proposes that local teachers possess the agency to be irrefutably successful educators without overwhelming logistical support from the state. As teachers seek to improve as educators while remaining committed to their local schools, collaboration among teachers presents an ideal opportunity for widening the agentive spaces in which teachers work and students learn, thereby enriching the intercultural bilingual education program from the ground up.

## Appendix of Interviews

From July 27, 2015, until August 18, 2015, I conducted participant observation and semi-structured interviews with twenty-one bilingual teachers in five different schools in Nahualá, Sololá. Below is the reference number for each interview (as cited in Part IV), the date the interview was conducted, the designation of the school as urban or rural, and the grade level(s) taught by the teachers interviewed (two teachers served multigrade classrooms). I conducted research in one urban school, called such because of its location in Nahualá's town center, and four rural schools located outside the immediate downtown area. The two years of schooling children receive prior to first grade are *párvulos*, or preschool, and *preprimaria*, or kindergarten. Primary school extends through sixth grade.

**Interview 1** — August 4, 2015; rural school, grade 4

**Interview 2** — August 5, 2015; urban school, grade 4

**Interview 3** — August 6, 2015; urban school, grade 2

**Interview 4** — August 6, 2015; urban school, preschool

**Interview 5** — August 10, 2015; urban school, grade 1

**Interview 6** — August 11, 2015; urban school, grade 3

**Interview 7** — August 11, 2015; urban school, grade 3

**Interview 8** — August 11, 2015; urban school, grade 6

**Interview 9** — August 11, 2015; urban school, kindergarten

**Interview 10** — August 11, 2015; urban school, grade 1

**Interview 11** — August 13, 2015; rural school, grade 1

**Interview 12** — August 13, 2015; rural school, preschool and kindergarten

**Interview 13** — August 17, 2015; rural school, grade 3

**Interview 14** — August 17, 2015; rural school, grade 6

**Interview 15** — August 17, 2015; rural school, kindergarten

**Interview 16** — August 17, 2015; rural school, grades 1, 2 and 3

**Interview 17** — August 18, 2015; rural school, grade 1

**Interview 18** — August 18, 2015; rural school, grade 3

**Interview 19** — August 18, 2015; rural school, grade 2

**Interview 20** — August 18, 2015; rural school, grade 3

**Interview 21** — August 18, 2015; rural school, grade 2



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