International Institute of Social Studies

No space for being Indigenous in the educational institutions:
The everyday experiences of migrant Indigenous children from Oaxaca, Mexico.

A Research Paper presented by:

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(Mexico)

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

Social Policy for Development

(SPD)

Specialization:

Children and Youth

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The Hague, The Netherlands
December 2019

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List of Acronyms

APPO	Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca
CMPIO	Coalition of Indigenous Professors from Oaxaca
CNTE	National Coordinating Committee of Workers in Education
FGM	Fondo Guadalupe Musalem
IEO	Institute of Education in Oaxaca
INEE	Institute of Evaluation of the Education system in Mexico
INEGI	Mexican Census
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PTEO	Plan for the Education in Oaxaca
SNTE	Teacher's Labour Union in Mexico
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Acknowledgments

Abstract

Development practitioners have been looking to a different way of development that allow other knowledges and epistemologies to be part of the main theories in development studies. Indigenous researchers and practitioners have also been more involved in how to re-make development. This research is focused on an Indigenous children perspective and their understanding of the educational institutions in Oaxaca, Mexico. First this paper contributes to change the perspective that adults in general have about the agency of Indigenous children, with this research under a child centered methodology, were children between 5 to 15 years old shared the main findings. This qualitative research used also, postcolonialism as a way to critique childhood studies, and a child's rights approach and to understand that Indigenous children cannot be homogenized. They have their own needs; different contexts and they need different solutions. The work with 44 Indigenous children from Oaxaca, allows this research to present forms where children can and want express their opinions and suggestions about spaces that affect them directly, in this case was the way schools in Oaxaca works for them. To improve and to create more inclusive and respectful educational institutions it is necessary that Indigenous children share their own thoughts, the limitations that they see and the changes that are relevant for them. Social inclusion of Indigenous children needs to start creating spaces where these children are able to be agents of change instead of restricting them from the decision-making process.

Relevance to Development Studies

Within the field of Development Studies and Social Policy, this research contributes to the debates that exist around Indigenous children and the educational institutions that have been providing the right to education to these children, while they are also violating other rights according to a children's rights approach. This research also aims to challenge the idea that policy makers and development interventions have about the limited agency of children, trying to show that children are capable and that they have the right to participate, give their opinion and make decisions regarding the spaces, as schools, that affected them directly. A postcolonialism theory was also relevant to understand how development interventions and childhood studies could find other ways to see and work with Indigenous children.

Keywords

Chapter 1 Situating the research

1.1   The base of this research: Why migrant Indigenous children and the educational institutions?

I am from Mexico City, and I grew up seeing a country full of colors, traditions, food, cultures, and a result I fell in love with Mexico, with its diversity and vibrancy. Most of this diversity and these traditions come from our history, roots, culture and knowledge of the 68 Indigenous groups that shape Mexico (INEE, 2017). However, in this very same Mexico, I also grew up going to schools with professors that taught us that Indigenous peoples were only part of the past and where 'indio' or any Indigenous characteristic was used as an insult or something negative. This discourse was accompanied by the daily realities I witnessed – Indigenous peoples asking for money on the streets of Mexico City, or selling handicrafts, always in contexts of poverty, or as Genner Llanes[1], a Mayan scholar, mentioned, '*Indigenous peoples have been seen as these "creatures" forming a part of Mexico but not as genuine Mexicans*'.

The education system, through both public and private schools, has been one of the main institutions that has created the ideas that non-Indigenous peoples have about indigeneity. I personally experienced this discourse. Growing up seeing the unequal reality between Indigenous peoples and mestizos[2] and realizing how schools are also perpetuating and reproducing this, I decided I wanted to work with Indigenous children and their experiences in their schools. I chose to work with children because they are directly affected by the practices that schools are implementing, as well as with Indigenous communities because I wanted to learn from them and to understand their ideas and listen to their part of the story, that, by virtue of being mestiza, I was missing. This process was crucial in order to start leaving behind the stereotypes and ideas that I have had about them. I decided to work in Oaxaca because it is one of the most diverse cities in Mexico and also one of the cities where the resistance against the exclusionary national educational policies has stayed the strongest.

The Mexican government has promoted how proud the country is to have all the cultural diversity and multiculturality that the Indigenous peoples bring to the country. However, the reality is totally different. In Mexico, the history of Indigenous peoples, after the creation of Mexico as a nation state, has always been characterized by a dynamic of

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[1] A Mayan scholar, during a conference at ISS about the movie in Times of Rain.
[2] The mix between Spanish people and Indigenous peoples in Mexico.

domination, where the indigeneity was seen as something that was delaying the modernization (Maldonado, 2011: 19). This context has been part of the history since the colonization and then supported by the discourse of the Mexican Nation-State through policies, programs and projects that have been implemented trying to assimilate and 'mexicanizar'[3] those who were different. (Baronnet and Morales-González, 2018: 4). These policies of assimilation implemented by the government have therefore seen Indigenous peoples as an implicit reminder that they have not been able to integrate into the mestizo society. (Solis and et al, 2019: 15). Parts of these policies and the rooted poverty are the consequences of the migration trends of Indigenous peoples.

The migration of Indigenous peoples seeking better opportunities especially in education and employment has been constant since 1970 (Barabas, 2016: 78). In the 90s more than a third of Indigenous peoples had already left their communities (Maldonado, 2000: 55). The internal migration to urban areas has been common for Indigenous peoples as a consequence of "no viable economic alternatives in rural areas, where Indigenous peoples are drawn to urban settings by the prospects of job opportunities and economic security" (UNPFII, 2008). In Oaxaca alone, there are 16 Indigenous groups, meaning 16 different languages, knowledges and customs. As the capital, Oaxaca City is the main destination – all 44 children participants in this research have migrated from their communities to Oaxaca City. These children are now co-habiting with other indigenous groups and according to the educational institutions and society, Spanish and mestizo ideologies are the commonality between all of them, despite this Indigenous diversity.

The policies implemented in Mexican schools, managed by the SEP, have perpetuated ethnocentric and racist practices against Indigenous peoples (Castellanos, 1994: 102). Indigenous children have always been the first objective of these dynamics that have essentially invisibilized them through practices that highlight social injustice and inequalities within the process of children´s integration in the context of school (Puente et al, 2017: 3). Tuhiwai describes this pattern, noting that "the organization of school knowledge, the hidden curriculum and the representation of difference in texts and school practices all contain discourses which have serious implications for Indigenous students as well as for other minority ethnic groups" (2012: 11).

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[3] Transform Indigenous peoples to 'real mexicans', meaning the asimilation to the mestizo society.

Schools are typically a symbol of better opportunities for Mexicans, but have also been a space where the needs, opinions and identity of Indigenous children have not been respected. As McCowan states, "schools can infringe as much as promote rights" (2011: 286), and as shown in this research, violence, exclusion, and discrimination are among the elements that schools are promoting. There is also a lack of spaces where children can express their opinions – denying their right to participate as mentioned in the UNCRC´s (1989) fourth core principle 'respect for the views of the child'. The perspectives of children are important and need to be considered and taken seriously especially in spaces such as schools.

1.2 Research question and outline of this paper

The elements presented above are the foundation of this research. Elaborating on this base, the **main objective** of this paper is to highlight how participatory research with migrant Indigenous children can positively influence the educational decision-making process, with a broader objective of understanding how these children feel that the school is or is not inclusive in order to help rethink educational policies in Oaxaca, Mexico. This research has as the main question: <u>How do migrant Indigenous children understand their everyday experiences in school?</u> Whilst attempting to answer this question throughout this paper, other **sub-questions** are also explored and developed:

- How do migrant Indigenous children understand and feel about their schools?
- What are the expectations that migrant Indigenous children have of their schools?
- How do migrant Indigenous children imagine their ideal school?

Based on this, I argue that <u>migrant Indigenous children in Oaxaca understand school as a space to achieve better opportunities, but also as a space where their indigeneity has to remain invisible as a consequence of the practices of exclusion, violence and denial of their identities. They have been forced to create new senses of belonging and to transform their identities in order to fit into existing educational institutions, largely as a result of the lack of resources to establish and promote spaces that can satisfy the diverse and multicultural context of Oaxaca.</u>

This paper is divided into six chapters that expand on the main argument of this research through the experiences of the 44 children participants. **Chapter 2** explains the theoretical framework and the main concepts used to analyze this research. **Chapter 3** develops the methodology and the process of working with these 44 children, and delineates the main ethical challenges that this research faced in the field. **Chapter 4** describes the Indigenous context of Oaxaca and begins the analysis of the findings regarding the limitations of the policies implemented in the schools in Oaxaca City. Furthermore, this chapter also explains how the 'formal' school works and the spaces of resistance that Indigenous communities and the CNTE have created. **Chapter 5** presents the findings according to the experiences of the 44 participants, their understanding of their schools and also shows how these children imagine their ideal school. **Chapter 6** presents conclusions on the importance of children´s participation in the decision-making process, particularly concerning policies implemented in schools and changes aimed at promoting a more inclusive space for migrant Indigenous children in Oaxaca.

Chapter 2 Childhood studies and postcolonial critique: explaining experiences of migrant Indigenous children

This research has the main objective of putting children first. Therefore, this research is framed upon a Critical Childhood approach that is based on the notion of children's voices (Alanen, 2011: 147) and which categorizes "children as part of a minority in an adult-dominated society […] Children often go unseen and unheard, and have relatively few visible opportunities to influence society" (Esser et al, 2016: 3). Moreover, this approach claims that "children are agents of change and social actors able to act on their own behalf and both capable of and entitled to have a say in what is done to and for them" (Kehily, 2009: 150). Childhood studies are also based on the UNCRC Convention (1989) as the overarching framework for understanding the rights of children. The Convention guides this research with regards to recognizing the rights to education and participation that every child has.

According to the UNCRC, every child has the right to access to education, free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages (1989). For the purpose of this research, this right is understood as having access to a school. In Childhood studies, school is a main element in the construction of childhood, as children spend much of their childhood at school. It is therefore crucial that children are seen as agents, knowers and competent informants in a context of school where children are directly involved (Osman, 2005: 182). However, as found throughout this research, children have always been seen and recognized through intergenerational relationships, taking into consideration that adults are always present and influencing children's lives (Kehily, 2009: 19). Children have not had the opportunity to suggest what they need or want; this has always been associated with their parents and tutors, especially in schools and in policies related to education, resulting in the devaluation and exclusion of children. In response to the limited opportunities for children to express their ideas that schools provide, childhood studies note it is important that children are aware of their rights to freely express their own opinions about important issues that concern them (Osman, 2005: 183).

Another important point to take into consideration through the lenses of childhood studies and throughout this research is the premise of understanding children as a social 'being', rather than a 'becoming' (Nieuwenhuys, 2013: 7) – focusing on current needs rather than viewing children simply as part of a transition to adulthood. Children are seen as agents

of change, in contrast to historical definitions, which Kehily mentions, stating, "children have also served as a synonym of other inferior social groups such as colonized people, slaves, and women" (2009: 37). Moreover, this research recognizes that childhood is not universal, the context and the relationships that are around these children vary across time and place (2009: 7). Although childhood is not homogenous, Indigenous children have been left behind because "Western discourses have been exported and become globalized standards for judging other peoples' childhoods" (Kehily, 2009: 21).

Childhood studies have brought important debates to the field of childhood and the understanding of children. However, it has not been critical enough, and it has not opened a space for the 'others' or as Nieuwenhuys calls them, those who are termed 'subalterns'[4]. Postcolonialism is therefore relevant to allow this research to challenge Eurocentric ways of looking at the world and seek to open up intellectual spaces for Indigenous children (2013: 4). One drawback of Childhood studies is its homogenization of children based on a Eurocentric[5] point of view. With the addition of postcolonialism, I am not trying to disregard or reject what Childhood studies have brought to children's rights debates. However, as I will expand upon in my positionality, it is always important to challenge and reflect upon knowledges that have been universalized under Western societies' understanding. In this research, Indigenous children are viewed as part of the Southern childhood(s) and how they have been dominated by the Northern childhood(s) representations (Nieuwenhuys, 2013: 4). It believes that childhood and children must not be seen "as an isolated phenomenon, intelligible only through the lenses of experts through the dominant Western discourse […] they are part of a larger and more complex world" (Canella and Viruru, 2004: 3).

In the case of Indigenous children, and especially in the case of this research, under a postcolonial approach schools are the institutions through which the distinction and comparative relegation is done and without significant change "our minds, if not our hearts will remain colonized" (Macedo, 1999: XV). In the case of the right to education for example, where the normative dominance of these rights come from a Northern childhood over the Southern childhood, Indigenous children could be receiving the right to education but the manner of its provision causes more violations to their rights (Nieuwenhuys, 2013:

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[4] Referring to the "people that were opressed during the period of European colonization, and that have been represented as having no agency or voice" (Nieuwenhuys, 2013: 4).
[5] Wester societies, the Global North, that represent the colonizers and the sominant knowledges.

4). As Tuhiwai mentions, "educational institutions are elite institutions which reproduce themselves through various systems of privilege. Indigenous students find little spaces for Indigenous perspectives in most academic perspectives and most research approaches, they define educational institutions to be toxic" (2012: 133). It is therefore relevant to continue understanding the importance of having spaces where children can always suggest what they want and claim what they need.

With respect to marginalization, children have experienced different types of exclusion simply for being children. As childhood studies mentions, age is a social category that we cannot analyze as universal and homogenous. Moreover, childhood studies mention that children have not only been excluded for their identity as children but also in the context of race, gender, class, disability, sexuality and geography (Konstantoni, 2016). This is understood as intersectionality – the way those different identities that are part of the children intersect and create spaces of exclusions, and how power relations are (re)produced through social groups' interactions with institutional structures (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality applies to this research and its participants by analyzing the intersections of being children, Indigenous, migrants and in most cases from a context of poverty, while keeping in mind that these identities are still in a process of transition. The concept of identity is thereby "multiply constructed, and intersected in a constantly changing, sometimes conflicting array" (Weaver, 2001: 240). Identity is likely to change over time, defined again on the context and sense of belonging that every person has. Identity could be a composite of different things such as age, race, class, education, region, religion, and gender (ibid).

"Identities are formed within relationships with others and are constantly subject to the influences of other people and institutions" (Campton-Lilly, 2006: 59). In the case of this research's participants, identity is in flux and non-static, transforming through the learning process that these children have in their schools. The teaching process and the ways in which these children interact within the schools are relevant to understand "how children use to identify themselves as members of socially meaningful groups through the way professors value 'discourses', 'ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, and of acting'" (Gee, 1990: 143).

Postcolonial approach serves as a tool which highlights and challenges the oppression reflected in the influence of childhood studies by dominant Western discourses about children (Viruru, 2005: 14). Tuhiwai describes the need to decolonize these methodologies,

claiming the need to change how minorities are seen as the 'natural object of research' in development contexts (2012: 122). There is however a common thread between childhood studies and postcolonial approaches. It aims specifically at using decolonizing methodologies that require a critical awareness for research working with groups such as children and Indigenous peoples because researching with them should not only strive to produce knowledge but also to contribute to empowerment and social justice for these groups (Alanen, 2011: 147). I believe this research has this as one of its objectives, to focus on the experiences of these 44 migrant Indigenous children and to reflect on how my positionality can affect or benefit the analysis to portray their knowledge and beliefs. Other commonalities exist between these two approaches, such as the acknowledgement of children and Indigenous peoples as stakeholders in their own learning to create their own knowledge through their own methods (Tuhiwai, 2012: 120).

Ultimately, these two approaches were useful to understand the analysis of this research in its attempt to break with the idea of children as an inferior social group while also challenging the stereotypes surrounding the knowledges of Indigenous peoples. Despite difficulties in applying both approaches, the postcolonial approach has worked as a theoretical tool to challenge the implicit assumptions that Childhood studies, from a Western viewpoint, has brought to this research. Childhood studies is useful in order to understand the relevance that children have, and the combination of the two approaches consequently concludes that the childhood approach needs to move in directions that represent all children (Viruru, 2005: 21), as demonstrated throughout this research with Indigenous children that do not have the same realities of Western children.

Chapter 3 A child centered methodology: Listening and working with migrant Indigenous children

The methodology in this research was fundamental in order to obtain the correct results. Throughout the research, qualitative methods were implemented. I used a child centered methodology that allowed me to work with migrant Indigenous children and which allowed them to be the main participants, meaning that the main findings and subsequent analysis were obtained directly from these 44 participants. This was achieved through participatory research and participatory ethnography, as well as the undertaking of four deep interviews. Moreover, a literature review was also executed to obtain more information about the context and background of the problem that the research is targeting.

The research was implemented in Oaxaca City, Mexico during a 4-week period and through 5 workshops. The participants were migrant Indigenous children that left their communities with their families seeking better opportunities and have since settled in Oaxaca City. The research was conducted with 44 children (18 boys and 27 girls)[6] aged 5 to 15 years old and was focused on the primary school level in accordance with the age of the participants. These children belong to three indigenous groups: Mixtecos (11), Zapotecos (31) and Cuicatecos (2). The deep interviews were conducted with three directors of different NGOs working with Indigenous children, one of whom works exclusively with Indigenous girls: *Canica, Calpulli* and *Fondo Guadalupe Musalem*. The fourth interview was with a member of *EDUCA*, an NGO in Oaxaca that works with adult education.[7]

These interviews were conducted with the objective of more clearly understanding the context of Oaxaca, and the way schools work within the region. I wanted to hear the stories and experiences of people involved in issues related to education as well as in various political and social movements in Oaxaca. Moreover, the interviews and conversations that I had with the staff of *Canica* helped me to understand the mission and modes of operation of the organization. The information obtained from them was vital in order to understand how these NGOs are working with Indigenous children and how they see and understand the educational policies that the government from Oaxaca has

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[6] All the names used for this research, the age and their Indigenous groups of the participants could be found in Appendix 1.

[7] Appendix 2, shows more information about these organizations.

implemented. Furthermore, the interviews helped me to become more involved in the context of Oaxaca and realize an important point. During my conversations with them, my visits to the organization, and whilst meeting the people that they work with, I more noticeably realized that I am an outsider and was forced to recognize all the differences and the privileges that I have (Tuhiwai, 2012: 139). Ultimately, even though these interviews were enlightening and helpful, the research is still focused and centered on the information that the children shared.

The participation of *Canica* was crucial because they were the gatekeepers of this research. They work on the promotion of the development of marginalized girls, boys and adolescents whose families live in contexts of poverty, most of them having migrated from rural communities in Oaxaca. This is accomplished through an educational program that strives to create social change for these children. The fieldwork was implemented in July, during which Mexican schools were closed for summer holidays. By continuing to be open, *Canica* therefore served the function of the primary school in this research. The figure below shows the community center where the fieldwork was implemented.

Figure 1

The community center where the fieldwork was conducted

Source: Fieldwork 2019.

Canica was established in 1992 and has worked mainly with girls, boys and adolescents that have migrated from different communities to Oaxaca City and that live in poverty and face a lack of opportunities. This NGO is based on UNCRC´s universal rights of the

child and their objective is to work with children that are facing high levels of poverty, obstacles obtaining access to schools, and lower performance in schools for those with access. Their staff openly shared their interest in working with Indigenous children and having more spaces to include them. However, they expressed that in terms of economic resources and internal capacity available to them, they are unable to give the proper space to Indigenous children.

Canica works through programs and projects related to education and the active participation of children and their families in order to create more equity and justice for them. There are three different phases where they operate with their target group. The first is 'Contact and awareness' where they have the initial contact with families. Their staff walk around the city trying to find families – most of them working on the streets or in markets – that owing to their status as migrants are unable to fulfill all their basic necessities. The second phase is 'Intensive services', where their professional team comprised of teachers, psychologists and doctors works directly with the children in order to help them, their parents and families. The third phase is 'Participation and social compromise', in which *Canica* tries to provide education to create an active citizenship, as well as helping families to create a life project[8].

The living conditions of these children and their families can be described as a context of poverty in which the parents cannot get a formal job, where they are migrants in Oaxaca City, and where they often live in informal settlements in unsafe areas. The average number of members in these families was four or more, and there were children with households totaling up to 19 members. 70.5% of fathers and 70.1% of mothers involved do not have basic education or they are illiterate (Canica information, 2019). Moreover, according to the Director, most of these children are experiencing violence at home and sometimes in their schools. Most of these families do not have access to basic services; hence many of the children have to work to help the parents. During a conversation with the Director and institutional coordinator, they told me that they do not have data to show either the percentages of Indigenous children that have enrolled in the NGO or from which community they have come. When I asked them why they do not have that type of

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[8] Information obtained in Canica's website. http://canicadeoaxaca.org.mx/

information, they answered that '*It is too difficult for us. In terms of our capacity as an institution, to also focus on Indigeneity, it is a topic that unfortunately we cannot reach right now*'.

In this research the participants were located in *Canica*'s second operational phase, a phase in which *Canica* as an organization represents the formal school for some children and acts as a kind of home for others. During this phase they provided two programs. The first, entitled 'Multigrado', reaches children that are not registered in a formal school. This is often due to the fact that 'some of them do not have the documents that are necessary to have access to school, like an identification card or birth certificate. For these children[9]. Canica provides access to education through this program. 'Multigrado' takes place in a classroom with two professors and 14 children that attend every weekday in order to learn what they should be learning according to their age in the formal schools. *Canica* therefore plays the role of the school for these children. The second program of this phase works with children that are enrolled in a formal school but because of a variety of reasons related to their context, they are not performing well in school. This program thereby provides them with extra help and aims to ensure that the children avoid failing. Furthermore, it provides children with food and specialists that support them in order to understand why they are experiencing difficulties at school.

Before starting my participation at the community center where the children arrive every week, I had a meeting with the staff of the organization. I explained to them what the objective of this research was and what I aimed to do. They helped me to schedule the workshops during the four weeks that I would be present and subsequently organized a meeting with the parents and tutors of these children. During that meeting I explained the objectives of my research anew, this time to the parents. I was also able to have brief conversations with some of them, during which they shared some of their own experiences with me and the way they see the role of schools, and their children. Moreover, I also asked for the consent of the parents to work with their children. I wrote a letter in Spanish (Appendix 3), which some parents could not read, so I explained it to them and they all agreed to give their consent for me to work with the children. Five parents told me that they did not feel comfortable signing but were fine with the research, so I had the verbal consent of those parents.

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[9] Information obtained from Canica staff.

This research, as previously mentioned, seeks "to see Indigenous children as fully capable of reflecting and offering unique perspectives on their worlds, in short, as a means of recognizing and establishing their agency" (Esser et al, 2016:105). It strives to respect their vision and suggestions that help to obtain answers regarding how their experiences have shaped their understanding of school and how they feel in that space. Based on this premise, children were seen as agents that can contribute as "knowers" (Mason and Fattore, 2005:21). This research therefore claims to be child centered firstly because all the information is based on the opinions, suggestions and understanding of the children of their schools, and secondly because the structure of the workshops and activities was designed to make children to feel comfortable and give them a space to express their opinions and ideas.

The 44 participants therefore shared the reality of their schools and their experiences within them. They wanted to share their ideas, suggestions and complaints with me regarding their schools, and viewing these through a child-focused approach was the best option. As Eduardo mentioned, *"I like that we can say what we like and what we dislike. Sometimes I want to say that in my school but I feel my teacher could get mad and then he will tell my mom and I can be punished"*. They want to participate and be involved in the everyday contexts in which they take part. In accordance with this, the five workshops, which were conducted, were designed collaboratively with the children. In the first three workshops, I gave them several options of potential topics of analysis related to their schools, from which they chose the ones, which most interested them. They chose to talk about the physical spaces and infrastructure, their professors and the curriculum offered in their schools. During the last two workshops, children explained how they feel about Indigenous peoples in a broad sense, as well as how they perceive themselves as Indigenous. All the workshops were based on Participatory research because it allows children to feel confident and strives to "provide opportunities for children to express themselves, but also as a potential source for empowering them for a fuller participation in society and for decision-making in matters which affect them" (Punch 2002: 325).

As a whole, the organization works with groups at three different levels: basic (5-7 years old), intermediate (8-10 years old) and advanced (11-15 years old). The five workshops were implemented in each group, totaling 15 workshops in total. Every group worked on the same topics but the activities were modified depending on the age levels of the children. During each workshop, the children were informed about its objective, the activities to be implemented and were subsequently asked for their consent to be recorded and to participate

in the activities. Throughout the activities, they explained the meaning of each drawing, every word, or communicated the way they felt about a question or an idea that I was sharing with them. Each group had a professor in charge, and before each workshop I asked the children if they wanted the professor to stay or leave. Overall, the staff was really helpful and always listened to the decisions of the children. For the basic group, the professor was always there and she helped me to work with the younger ones. I tried to always be ethical and respectful, reflexive and critical as an outsider researcher, even if I was conducting the workshops. I always tried to understand the participants and to be humble, understanding my privileged position and combatting the notion the children had of me by reassuring them that I am not an expert (Tuhiwani, 2012: 140). For example, I communicated to them that I am not non-Indigenous, nor am I a child anymore, thereby making it clear that they were the ones giving me knowledge about their school and their experiences. All the activities that were realized are described in the Appendix 4.

During my communication with the organization, I also decided to apply participatory observation to allow me "to get close to people and make them feel comfortable enough with my presence" (Bernard, 2011: 256). This was achieved by asking the organization to allow me to participate as a volunteer in their everyday programs and operations. By volunteering with the organization, the participatory observation method enabled me to interact with the 44 participants during their daily routines and observe their everyday experiences. I spent time in the organization from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm helping the staff, playing with the children and conducting the workshops. This ultimately provided me with the chance to interact with the children in their daily exercises and to also start creating a relationship with the children. During the first week I decided to involve myself in their routines and I quickly realized that a mosaic approach would be a useful means of contextualizing the children's experiences. The advantage of the mosaic approach is that it would "implement multiple methods to canvas the views and experiences of children" (Bottrell and et al, 2015: 128). The design of their ideal school was thereby created through drawings and role plays, in part because some children "experience some difficulties in expressing themselves verbally […] images allow them to express themselves more easily and make their participation in research more pleasurable" (Spyrou, 2011: 153). The meaning and interpretations of all the drawings and of all the activities and reflections were subsequently verbally communicated the 44 participants themselves.

Childhood studies allowed this research the option to engage with the topic in a different way, by maintaining the notion that "it is important for children that us as adults take them seriously not only as knowers, but also as partners" (Mason and Fattore, 2005, 21). As Alejandro, the institutional coordinator of Canica mentioned, *"Children are not stupid –they are accurate. They are complex in their social interactions, and that is why working with children means working under their own rules. Playing with them is really important since they have a sense of control here. They know how to play"* (2019). When researching with children it is important to break down the power dynamics between adults and children, and this can be done through play, an activity where children have and retain control, therefore feeling more comfortable to share their experiences. Following the discussion of these ideas with Alejandro, the children decided on the activities that would expand upon the different topics they had already chosen for each workshop. Once the activities had concluded, the results lead to a reflection and discussion with the Indigenous children in order to have a final understanding of how they feel regarding school and what they expect from the school (Groundwater, 2015: 128). The analysis and information reflected in this research was therefore established by the 44 participants making it the main focus, in conjunction with my own observations.

During the development of this research, I spoke with the participants and explained that their names would remain anonymous, and thus we decided to vote for the names they wanted to be included in the paper. The first idea was to select two names – one for boys and one for girls – but after some reconsideration, this option was not put into practice because this research wants to give every child their own importance, and mixing all the names into two options would be breaking with the main idea of this research. Therefore, after modifying this, using the recording of this workshop to see the names that each participant nominated, I decided to use these names that every child mentioned to be the new names during this research. All of the names that were chosen were in Spanish, and even when I proposed 'Biulú', a Zapotec name that means humming bird, they made fun of this name and they said it was weird, that they did not like it. They solely chose names in Spanish, because it is the language that they have been taught in their schools, and as David told me, *'everyone speaks Spanish, I do not know how to speak those other weird languages'*. They clearly have this idea that Spanish is better, and based on their decisions I portrayed the names they chose.

The stories of these 44 children explain their understanding of their schools, what limitations they see, and the ways they wish to make changes to their schools. This is based

upon a view of schools as spaces where they learn and where they are undergoing a process of transition in their lives.

3.1 An Outsider positionality and the encounters with migrant Indigenous children

"Research is a process, not just a product […] Research represents a shared space, shaped by both researcher and participants" (England, 1994, p. 82). I am writing this paper as a researcher but also as a woman with opinions, ideas, assumptions, bias and a background that have made me who I am. The objective of this research has always been focused on the migrant Indigenous children that participated. However, even in spite of this objective, it is important to understand that my positionality has been present throughout the design, the understanding, and the analysis of this paper. As a result, it has been a complex process of encounters to accurately portray the ideas of these children as my positionality is undoubtedly reflected throughout this research.

When the entire research process began, I knew I wanted to research and work with Indigenous children because I have had experience in certain projects that work with Indigenous women, girls and boys. In these early stages where I decided on the topic of my research and its participants, I never thought about my positionality. I had made assumptions that because I had acquired certain knowledge on these topics, because I am Mexican and because I understood the context and was familiar with issues within Oaxaca, that I was therefore familiarized enough to work in this research without reflecting more deeply on the way my positionality could affect or influence the research (Crossa, 2012: 111). For example, when I was designing the questions, I did it from my own understanding of the indigeneity of these children. However, when I was there with them, I realized these preconceived notions could make a difference in the information that I would ultimately obtain. Reflecting on this process is an essential part of trying to work with Indigenous peoples, being an outsider (Tuhiwai, 2012: 140).

Every step of this research challenged who I am. Two important and constant elements that were present throughout this research were awareness and reflection, both concerning me and my relationship with the participants and their environment, and the acknowledgement of me as an outsider (Tuhiwai, 2012: 138). During my analysis I had to avoid the imposition of my ideas as the one truth. Moreover, while working with the Indigenous children I realized that I had made some assumptions concerning questions that I

thought the children would not be able to answer and would therefore be absurd to ask – this arose from my position as an adult and non-Indigenous. I understood that to have good intentions is not enough, that this would be a "process of continuous reexamination of my biases that cause me to privilege one knowledge over the other" (Canella and Viruru, 2004: 5).

Part of being aware of my positionality was to understand the position that I had with these children when I started to work with them. Being an adult was enough for them to see me as a teacher figure, and this had a big impact in my relationship with the participants as they saw me through the dichotomy of teacher/student. Consequently, this affected what things they wanted to share with me at the beginning of the research as they viewed me, my positionality, as the dominant one. Another dichotomy, of being indigenous and non-Indigenous, produced early effects that were similar. I therefore always tried to break with these dominant positions and encouraged the 44 children to engage directly with the research on their own terms.

I want to use this paper to somehow break with all the stereotypes and assumptions that I had about children and Indigenous peoples, recognizing and taking into account my own position to embrace it, and doing the same for the position of the Indigenous children in order to write this into my research practice (Rose, 1997: 305). I acknowledge myself as a non-Indigenous Mexican woman and recognize that in terms of this research, I hold a privileged position. However, I also truly believe that throughout the journey that I underwent with these 44 children, I attempted to maintain my loyalty to them and also to who I am. I ultimately strove to uphold and expand upon the values that originally made me want to work with Indigenous children in order to create a change in the way non-Indigenous people and adults understand the realities of migrant Indigenous children. I wanted to be committed to my idea of helping children and to continue working and defending their rights in every context, background and environment. This research does not completely change whom I am, but has made me be aware and reflect on who I am in a context such as the one where I decided to conduct my research. Finally, as Canella and Viruru express, I believe this could serve as a reminder that there is always a place to "learn, think, challenge oppressive power, and to rethink who we are and what is important to us both personally and professionally" (2004: 7).

3.2 Being an adult working with children: Research challenges and limitations

For this research, as I mentioned before I created workshops with migrant Indigenous children in search of better opportunities, but whose families often remain living in precarious and difficult contexts. Due to their situation, they were really hesitant to share their experiences, not only because they did not know me well, but also because their classmates and friends were present. I tried to create activities without specific questions about their lives and to make them fun for them to feel more comfortable and help them realize that everyone in the room was experiencing similar situations. However, children are really honest and some participants sometimes made fun of their classmates even if they were living the same experiences. It was difficult during the first workshop to have them open up about some information that I knew was relevant for this research, largely because these topics might make them sad, or because they were not comfortable sharing. I therefore had to omit or change certain questions for them to feel safe, and I explained to them the objective of this research. I also always asked them if they consented to be recorded or if they wanted to participate in each workshop. For two workshops, one of the participants told me that she did not want to be recorded and so I did not record those two workshops, instead only using my written notes.

When I was not working with them during the workshops, I was implementing participatory ethnography – volunteering at the organization to try to know them better. I noticed that my positionality as a researcher, as non-Indigenous, as a woman from the capital and as someone studying in a European university was challenging for them and for me. They saw me and I felt like an outsider in their environment and hence it was sometimes difficult to engage with the organization's staff and the children. Perhaps I could not get to know everyone, but I nonetheless tried to talk with them in hopes of better understanding their realities. Lastly, I acknowledge that it was difficult for them to create a strong relationship with me when I was only planning on staying for a short period of time.

During one of the workshops we were talking about positive and negative characteristics of the professors of these children, most of them expressed that they professors hit them if they were having a bad behavior, or if they do not do their homework's. It was my first-time hearing form first hand, this type of information, during that workshop the professor in charge of that group was there and I talked with her about this, and she told me it was a normalized practice but that they were teaching these children that they have rights

and those practices were bad. After that day I went to talk with the coordinator of the center and she told me it was again a normalized practice, and unfortunately, I could not do something to help those children. It was difficult for me to presence that and to feel useless facing a practice of violence that was something normal for the children, and the staff of the organization. These children were talking about their professors in the formal schools, and the organization does not have the names or the information of the formal schools because they do not work on that area. It was shocking to see this and also to be part of the side that does not do anything about it. My position as a researcher and as a non-expert in dealing with these issues was an ethical dilemma that I would like to change and be prepared for the next time I could face those contexts.

Another limitation of my research was the realization that working with children is a slow process requiring dedication and time, and I unfortunately only had one month to be with them. In future situations, I would try to ensure that I would be able to spend more time on this research in order to have more information, not only in terms of quantity but also more in-depth details and nuances that the children could share with me. One further challenge and potential limitation that I faced was my attachment to the children. These children have been with me during every step of this research and I feel I have to contribute to their cause somehow. I think it has made my research more personal and I have therefore struggled at times to maintain it as a purely academic paper. I am still in touch with the organization and we have agreed that after my Masters I want to return and discuss my findings with them because they have mentioned that they wish to improve the methods they employ when working with these children. Moreover, I want to return to show the 44 children my final findings and continue the debate with them about their schools, to listen to them further and internalize their other suggestions, which as I mentioned were perhaps not included in this research because of the time constraints.

Chapter 4 Oaxaca, a place of resistance and the limitation of their educational institutions

4.1 The starting point: Oaxaca City and their Indigenous context

Oaxaca is a state located in the south of Mexico. It is one of the regions in Mexico with the highest number of Indigenous peoples. According to the last census (INEGI) in 2015, Oaxaca has a population of 1,968,889 people, 53.4% of which are women and 47.6% men. 16.3% of the entire population older than 3 years old speak an Indigenous language and 65.7% of Oaxaqueños perceive themselves as Indigenous peoples. Children between 0 and 14 years old are the second-largest cohort with a total representing 29.5% of the entire population. (As quoted in DIGEPO, 2017).

Oaxaca has 16 Indigenous groups: Amuzgo, Chatino, Chinanteco, Chocholteco, Chontal de Oaxaca, Cuicateco, Huave, Ixcateco, Mazateco, Mixe, Mixteco, Nahua, Tacuate, Triqui, Zapoteco and Zoque (Figure 2). Every group has their own Indigenous language and every language has different variants. The main languages spoken in Oaxaca are Zapoteco, Mixteco, Mixe and Chinanteco (Oaxaca Población, 2018). Oaxaca is composed of eight regions and 570 municipalities and since 1995, 412 of them are governed by the Indigenous customary law, "where leaders are selected through a range of processes ranging from inclusionary community assemblies to exclusionary council of elders meetings" (Eisenstadt, 2006: 53). This means that Indigenous peoples have the power to make decisions related to their schools and the practices that are implemented (Bautista and Briseño, 2010: 135).

Map 1.1

Indigenous population in Oaxaca
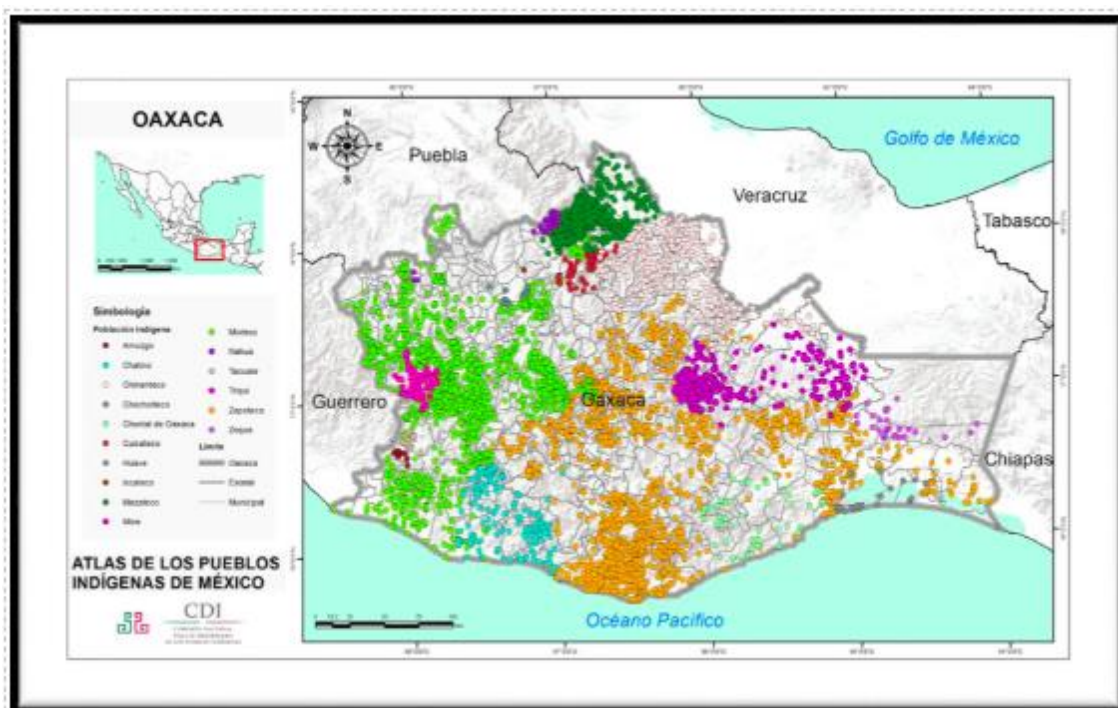
Source (National Institute of the Indigenous Peoples, 2015)[10]

Many of Oaxaca's Indigenous peoples are still living in rural areas, but there has been an increase in rural-to-urban migration. 77% of the state population now lives in urban areas and 23% in rural areas (INEGI, 2015). Most of the Indigenous peoples previously living in rural areas have emigrated to metropolitan areas and to the United States of America seeking better opportunities for their families because, rather unfortunately, "many Indigenous communities continue to live within political and social conditions that perpetuate extreme levels of poverty, chronic ill health and poor educational opportunities" (Tuhiwai, 1999: 4). In 2015, Oaxaca was one of the six states with the highest proportion of Indigenous peoples (officially 64.8% of the state's total population) in Mexico, with 70.4% of them living in conditions of poverty compared to the national averages of poverty levels (43.6%) (Coneval, 2018).

There has been a considerable effort to combat these worrying trends, and 2006 was a particularly important year for Oaxaca that changed the way the city and people understood themselves as a force. The Oaxaqueños that I interviewed noted that '*2006 was an important*

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year for Oaxaca, in terms of the support and the mobilization of the masses'. As Aristegui (2016) states, "In 2006 teachers were on a strike against the government of Ulises Ruiz. The government reacted with violence and 30 professors, one student, ten civilians were hurt and eight hostages were the result of the answer of the government". As a sign of solidarity to the professors against the governments of Oaxaca and the Federal administration, different social groups became involved in the demonstrations, and as Indigenous groups, farmers, students, civil society and others, they all collaboratively constituted the "Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos Indigenas de Oaxaca" (APPO) (Avila, 2015: 227). During my fieldwork the director of *Calpulli*, one of the organizations that I interviewed, stated *'I remember coming to this restaurant during 2006, we were supporting the movement. We were and we are still sure that the policies implemented in our schools need to change. It is Oaxaca, we cannot be blind and continue invisibilizing the Indigenous children and their needs. We know they exist and we know they come more and more to Oaxaca City, so we need to continue fighting and asking for educational policies that give them a school that respects who they are'.*

It is really important to understand the context of Oaxaca because their history with Indigenous peoples has been different to the rest of the country, both in terms of the power of the masses and how Indigenous peoples have worked to fight for their rights and resisted the assimilation policies implemented by the federal government. Indigenous peoples have faced a history of exclusion under the discourse of the Nation-State "created under the idea of a monoethnic state. Nation was a cohort of men with the same beliefs, dominated by a same idea and with the same objective" (As quoted in Vargas, 2007: 694). Under the Nation discourse, historically, Indigenous communities have had to face assimilationist educational reforms where the Indigenous peoples were left behind and their practices were not taken into account. The proposals that the government has implemented to integrate them have not been very successful, resulting in Indigenous peoples feeling neglected and that all these reforms and laws were more on the paper than in practice. *'In Oaxaca the educational policies concerning bilingual and multicultural education for Indigenous peoples are nonexistent or do not work because a true understanding of what they need does not exist. The government and even we sometimes think that by 'letting them' speak their language we are doing enough'* (Director of Canica).

In response to obstacles that Indigenous communities have to face in Oaxaca, movements of resistance to the educational policies that are not adapted to involve Indigenous knowledges have been gaining more force. In such a diverse city such as Oaxaca City, Indigenous peoples are asking for recognition, respect, and among other things, they believe that

the state of Oaxaca needs a new constitution which legally recognizes the original groups and their rights to speak their Indigenous language as well as their autonomy (Bautista and Briseño, 2010: 144). Although the government in Oaxaca is the only one in Mexico that accepts the Indigenous customary law, the federal government has continued implementing educational reforms that do not take into account the diversity and multicultural characteristics that Oaxaca contains, and this is still affecting the way education is provided in Oaxaca through schools. As the director of *Canica* expressed; *'In Mexico, or at least in Oaxaca, a project of Intercultural Bilingual Education has existed. However, in practical terms it is not really happening. There are very few spaces that are doing that and they are typically encouraged by the Indigenous peoples, not the government'.*

As Solis and et al note, "In Mexico speaking an Indigenous language, being part of an Indigenous community or having a darker skin tone results in less probabilities of having higher education, having a good job or being part of a higher social class" (2019: 4). The national average of completed school years is 8.6 years, while in Oaxaca it is 6.9 years. Furthermore, "4 out of 100 Indigenous students have dropped out of school and their performance has suffered in comparison with the non-indigenous students, because they are victims of discrimination" (Rodriguez, 2013). According to the Institute of Evaluation of the Education system in Mexico (INEE), Chiapas and Oaxaca, both regions which are mostly Indigenous, had a total of 518,361 illiterate people in 2017.

> *'There is this common idea that Indigenous children are dumb or slower to learn, but it is not true. They are as smart as any other children, but the schools and professors have not understood that they are different. Even if they are not Indigenous, every child comes from a different reality that affects their behavior and performance, and there is this idea of putting all these children in the same box'* (Director of Calpulli).

In Oaxaca, statistics show that for Indigenous children, the levels of graduation rates, literacy and enrollment in school are still really low in comparison with the rest of Mexico, resulting in a trend known as education lagging. In 2010, Oaxaca was positioned in second place as one of the states with the most educational lagging at 29.9%, of which the population aged 6 to 15 years old suffered 8.9% educational lagging (AZ, 2014). This reality comes from a school system that has homogenized the understanding of children and has not provided the adequate elements to these children in order for them to develop and make

progress in their performance. There is also a lack of resources and accessibility. As David told me '*I do not like to go to my school because it's super far and there is mud everywhere and I am always dirty. Also, there are no proper lights'.* This is compounded by the difficulties within the process of adaptation that they are experiencing, having settled in the city. As Rodrigo mentioned, '*I miss things from my other school[11], this one is nice but I miss my friends and the garden'.* All these factors have affected their performance and what they are learning in school.

4.2 Schools in Oaxaca: The role of the CNTE and the Civil Society Organizations

To understand the context and the background that the 44 children have had in Oaxaca, it is important to clearly note the school options available to them. The schools in Oaxaca represent a different context than the rest of the country. This has arisen as a consequence of the resistance movements that have been present throughout Oaxaca's history. However, as previously mentioned, this research focuses solely on these movements since 2006. One of the main actors in these movements, specifically related to the fight against the educational policies and the way they have been implemented in the schools, is the CNTE that was founded in 1979 as a movement of opposition and resistance against the SNTE, as well as the acts of corruption and political control that were happening inside the trade union.

Oaxaca and its Indigenous heritage have been always linked with a history of struggle for the recognition of Indigenous rights. Indigenous teachers from Oaxaca, from CNTE's Section 22, were also part of the CNTE demanding an alternative education for the context of Oaxaca with different pedagogies that were more similar to Indigenous cultures (Bautista and Briseño, 2010: 139). Since its inception, the CNTE and Section 22 have been countering the educational reforms made by the Federal government that attempt to homogenize the way schools work in Mexico and that often fail to embrace the diversity that Oaxaca represents in terms of culture, languages and knowledges. All the organizations that were interviewed have supported the CNTE actively. They have stated that '*the demands cannot stop now, were not ready, we are not done'.* The children are also aware of the importance and the power of the CNTE. As Manuel told me, '*I am going to be a 'rebel' and go to the strikes'.* Although he was not fully informed about what was occurring behind these movements, he was aware of the power that these movements have in Oaxaca. Moreover,

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[11] Referring to his school in his community.

other children shared that they have also joined the strikes and marches that the CNTE has organized because their parents go or because their older siblings are involved. Therefore, they have been part of these movements since they moved to the city, and regarding CNTE, they know that '*they are the good ones*' as Alondra mentioned.

The CNTE is an actor that is helping but '*we need to continue from our trenches. Public policies are nonexistent or do not work. It is necessary to create those spaces that could be transformed into public policies, and that is also part of our work*' as expressed by the director of Calpulli. In terms of education, CNTE has looked for a better development of the curriculum and the practices implemented in Oaxaca's schools. As a result of this, in 2012 the CNTE and the IEO created the PTEO, a plan that takes into consideration the communitarian knowledges and pedagogies, through a collective creation of the programs and projects for the education of the children and youth (SNTE and IEEPO, 2012). This plan's main objective is the transformation of the education system and with this, of the formal schools where these children are currently enrolled. One of the main demands of this transformation is to change the educational policies in Oaxaca to serve a bilingual and bicultural education, giving spaces to the local communities to take part in this change and to make the Indigenous population recognized in schools (Bautista and Briseño, 2010: 139).

However, besides these movements and organizations that have created change in Oaxaca, there are other key elements that the directors of the organizations shared with me that are affecting how migrant Indigenous children experience their schools. As mentioned before, the rural communities where Indigenous groups live are lacking in resources and opportunities, and the city is the most common answer to this problem. However, the urban institutions do not have the resources or the capacities to work with all the Indigenous groups from Oaxaca. As the director of *Canica* mentioned,

> '*Imagine the 16 Indigenous groups here in the city – how we can help when we do not have the capacity? We do not have the money to reach the three Indigenous groups and if we choose one of them the others will feel excluded, so it is better if we stay with the things that bind us, like Spanish and being Mexican, and even if we try, the professors here do not speak all those languages or those professors do not even exist*'.

Among the 44 Indigenous children, they belong to three different Indigenous groups: Mixtecos, Zapotecos and Cuicatecos. As described in the passage above, there is a preference to work with the common denominator – Spanish and the mestizo culture.

The director of *Canica* also mentioned that since they work as second school for migrant Indigenous children, they aim to create a more inclusive space for these children and to promote Indigenous identity but do not have the institutional capacity. The result of this has been the reproduction of the practices implemented by the formal schools – the invisibilization of the indigeneity of the children.

> *'We have to follow the guidelines of the formal basic education so children can get access to a formal schoo*l, *and sadly we cannot incorporate Indigenous languages. We need to teach Spanish and English as the formal languages. Sometimes when we based our job on the children's right approach, the part of the local knowledges or epistemologies of the south ended up being forgotten'.*

Calpulli also has a role as a second school for the children that they work with. They mentioned that their limited resources have also adversely affected them, and that the practices that have been implemented in schools do not allow them to work as they wish. The director told me that *'It is sad that we cannot create a 'nest of languages' when we create spaces where the children can practice or feel comfortable speaking their language. We tried with one of the kids that speak Mixteco, but he was scared that other children would know that he was Indigenous, so we did not insist. We help from where we are able to help'.*

The various organizations are doing what they can to help these children and to create spaces that do not feel exclusionary because they understand the realities that are part of the schools provided by the State, through SEP. However, they are faced with a lack of resources and other difficulties and ultimately need help from the government. As a result of a lack of operational capacity, these NGOs have had no option but to continue with the practices of hiding the indigeneity of these children that the current educational institutions have perpetuated.

4.3 '*I wanted to stay but it was not a real option for me*': Education in Indigenous communities in Oaxaca

Schools in Oaxaca City, provided by the SEP, have shown "the singularity of agents and institutions who control and dictate what is acceptable and what is unacceptable" (Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2012: 11). In the case of the state's formal schools, it has been the denial of Indigenous identities. As a response to this trend, new models have been created as the CNTE and the organizations in the city are not the only ones fighting and resisting. In the Indigenous communities, communal schools serve as an example of resistance against the homogenizing idea of how a school must function. Under the Law on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Communities of the State of Oaxaca (2001), Indigenous peoples from Oaxaca have been claiming their autonomy to make their own decisions about the practices they want to adopt in terms of education. Throughout Oaxaca, Indigenous groups have tried to collaborate with local communities in the process of the implementation of the curriculum in hopes of including Indigenous knowledges, as well as seeking to support the fight for the recognition of Indigenous rights in the context of the education system.

There have been several movements created by Indigenous peoples and the government of Oaxaca to allow Indigenous knowledges and identities to become part of the everyday experiences of the schools. These have typically been advocated for on behalf of Indigenous anthropologists and have resulted in the creation of the Ayuuk Institute in a Mixe community (an Indigenous group in Oaxaca) and an institute for professors that want to teach Indigenous education. All these movements have been created with the objective of strengthening both Indigenous autonomy and the communal idea that is part of the Indigenous communities in Oaxaca (Maldonado, 2000). A clear example of the positive changes that this resistance is having was discussed during the field work, where most of the interviewees mentioned CMPIO and the work they have done:

> '*It* is *a success model that is also sustainable. According to the guidelines of the formal schools but with different elements where Indigenous cultures are really taking in consideration […] they use maize as the central element of the schools and the education, and they are also creating other projects with Junior High-school where the CNTE is also involved*' (member of EDUCA, 2019).

This member of EDUCA also stated: '*Sadly these models of schools are implemented in the communities. The city does not provide this type of schools, the bilingual and multicultural schools exist only on paper*'. The reality of the Indigenous communities, as previously mentioned, is that they lack opportunities in their local communities. These Indigenous families therefore migrate to the city out of necessity, largely in search for better opportunities even if they have to put the identities of their children at risk. As one of the mothers of the participants mentioned, '*I want them to learn something useful that can change their lives, and my language and my background is useless*'[12]. Therefore, there appear to be two options –staying in their communities with the freedom to be Indigenous and preserve this identity, or leaving to the city and seeking better opportunities at its expense. As the directors of Canica and Calpulli shared:

> '*When Indigenous children leave their communities, the context in which they settle and the institutions in the city do not reinforce their indigeneity because even the ones that want to do not have the resources. Migrant Indigenous children then start forgetting their languages, their traditions. The social context affects how they perceive themselves through the exclusion and discrimination that is present in their schools'* (Director of Canica).

> '*We know that in the moment these children leave their community, they are going to lose their identity as Indigenous. Calpulli tries to maintain the Indigenous knowledges and traditions, but with the language it is really complicated because we have different Indigenous groups, so what we can do is teach them and reinforce the feeling of being proud of their indignity, through the customs, traditions, food, dances, etc.'* (Director of Calpulli).

Other organizations have also attempted to address this lack of spaces for Indigenous children. For example, FGM is helping from another perspective. In response to how the urban schools' practices work and how they erase the identity of Indigenous children, FGM gives scholarships to girls with the condition that they stay in a high school in their local communities. As they stated, '*The city is not yet ready for them'.* Thus, FGM allocates resources, which enable these girls to remain in their communities and have

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[12] I got verbal consent to use some things from my conversations with the parents.

access to a school that provides them with a good education, without the risk of losing their indigeneity.

The 44 children shared all the aforementioned elements, and as Perla mentioned, '*I really love my old school, and I had friends, but my mom was not happy, so we came to live here*'. Eduardo also shared, '*I really wanted to stay but it was not an option, my whole family was coming to the city, and I had to say goodbye to all my friends and my professor, he was really nice*'. The government has not formulated a response to create better opportunities in Indigenous communities. Consequently, Indigenous peoples have urban migration as their only viable option, even despite the threat of facing exclusion and the denial of their indigeneity. The schools in the city may provide them their right to education, however they simultaneously violate other rights, such as their right to "respect their own cultural identity, language and values"[13] (UNCR,1989). As a result, these children have been forced to choose between preserving their identities and the access to opportunities.

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[13] Art 29 (C)

Chapter 5 *'For a better life, even if we have to face discrimination':* The understanding of the school by migrant Indigenous children

5.1 The school that migrant Indigenous children want

> *'We want a school full of colors where we feel happy and not like in a jail, where we can learn properly, where we can play. We want a school where we can have access to proper chairs, enough books and computers, a place where we can feel safe. We want a proper playground or field where we can spend our free time without the danger of being hurt. We want a place where we can learn things that are useful, and where we feel represented. We want a professor that does not make fun of us and that does not hit us or punish us when she/he is mad. We have the right to have a nice school'* (Composed quote from the 44 participants).

Children have the right to participate according to Article 12 of the UNCRC with the general principle of a child´s right to be consulted and listened to in matters that affect their life (1989). Claudia expressed their desire to be involved, stating, *'I like that we can say what we like and what we dislike. Sometimes I want to say that in my school but I feel my teacher could get mad and then he will tell my mom and I can be punished'* (13 years old). Children must be actively involved in the spaces that affect their life, and school is one of the institutions that comes into most contact with children (Nolas, 2015: 157). However, they have not historically had the space to participate and be involved. This research attempted to reverse this trend, granting them the opportunity to share the aforementioned thoughts with their professors in *Canica*. It is important to make the distinction that these comments were regarding their formal schools, and that even if they could not express this to their formal school professors, they felt heard and were happy. As Ana shared, *'I was nervous when we were presenting but I felt happy that I was like the teacher, and you and my professor were listening to us. I hope the professors from my school could listen to this'.*

Children understand that they have to go to school to learn, even mentioning *'Canica taught us that we have the right to study'* (Monserrat). Moreover, Martin also expressed *'My school here is a place to have better opportunities because in my community I cannot find a good job. I now have a teacher that teaches me English, and with that I can go to United States and there I can make*

money.' However, despite the provision of this right to study, its implementation has promoted practices where these children do not feel completely accepted. Elena spoke with me every day about her dreams, about how she loves to visit the mountains, and how she wants to help her mom. She knows she will increase the opportunities available to her if she goes to school, telling me '*If I come to school, I can learn a lot of new things. I can learn English and I can have a job with a lot of money'*. However, during another day, she also shared that '*Sometimes I wish I could have a lot of money so I would not have to go to school. I do not like it; my classmates make fun of me and my professor does not like me. I wish my school was Canica, here the professors love me and they take care of me'*.

This research process demonstrated that children are aware of what they want and what they need. However, they have not been listened to – adults still believe that children are limited and do not have the maturity and knowledge to actually suggest something that could benefit them and their schools (Canella and Virurur, 2004: 2). This research therefore strives to reconceptualize this idea, integrating what they have shared. An activity that attempted to address this asked the children to describe, in one word, what they think, how they feel or what they understand about schools. Figure 2 shows all of the words they shared.

Figure 2

Words that children use to describe their schools

Source: Fieldwork 2019

The children developed several conclusions together. Firstly, the schools are not built with their needs in mind, lacking furniture or proper learning spaces. Raul told me, '*I feel that I am in a jail when I go to school. I do not like it*'. Secondly, although they agreed that some of their professors are good, many of them use violence to control the children. Moreover, some of them are often not fully prepared to teach and do not show interest in the children. As Sofía expressed, '*My professor is always on his cellphone and when we have questions, he does not know the answer*'. Thirdly, regarding the curriculum, the children expressed that they have some classes that they really enjoy, but many others are quite boring for them. Thus, they desire classes that can help them feel more included in their schools, stating '*I want to learn other things that are related with what I want to do when I am an adult*' (Alejandro). Finally, they concluded that *Canica* was a strong example of a school that makes them feel comfortable, happy and secure. Even so, they expressed some changes that they would like to see in *Canica*, more in terms of the physical spaces, but ultimately agreed that if their formal schools were more like *Canica*, that they would enjoy school much more. The following chapters will

share these children's understanding of their schools and what they are suggesting to create a space that actually works for them.

5.2 Violence and Punishments: Our everyday in school

These children understand that school is an important vehicle for them to obtain better opportunities and a place where they can learn and attain more knowledge. However, they also understand that school is a space where they have to face violence, unsafe conditions and the invisibilization of part of their identity. '*If I could choose, I would not go to school but I know I can have a better life if I go*' (David). They often do not see school as an enjoyable place, but rather as an obligation and commitment they must make if they want to improve their lives. As previously mentioned, most of their parents did not have access to education and therefore this represents a historical link to the struggles that they now face. Moreover, they constantly expressed how they are exposed to structures of power perpetuated by their professors, thereby creating this "intellectual domination" (Canella and Viruru, 2004: 6). The children described how teachers typically view themselves as the only ones that possess the truth. As Monica said, '*one time, I corrected my professor and she was really mad. She told me "if you are the teacher then come and teach your classmates". They feel they cannot make mistakes.*'

When I started talking with these children about their favorite memories and moments in their schools, I was expecting to hear happy and fun memories similar to some of my own personal experiences. However, this assumption was framed from my positionality, and their answers were completely different. Their responses demonstrated how school is not a place that brings them joy or happiness. Conversely, they have experienced a reality of violence and discrimination. I noticed that they were a bit hesitant to share their experiences because they saw me as a teacher and hence were scared that I could also perpetuate those harmful practices. Regrettably, the normalization of violence in their schools is a topic that they have accepted in certain ways because it is a practice that even their parents have allowed. As Astrid told me, '*My mom tells my professors that they can hit me if I am not good',* adding in a laughing manner, '*my professor named a ruler 'Paquita' to hit us. Every time someone is not behaving or someone does not do their homework, he says 'Paquita is going to play today'*'. All the participants shared stories similar to this. Furthermore, some of these children attend the same schools so they know the same professors. They spent almost an entire workshop sharing experiences about their professors hitting them or punishing them, locking them in their classrooms or not

allowing them to eat. According to their experiences, they ultimately created a table with the characteristics of a bad and a good professor, and next table describes these main ideas.

Table 1 Characteristics of good and bad professors

Good professors	Bad professors
Explain without getting mad	They are late
Nice with us	They physically abuse their students
They love us	They only play movies
They help us	They always let us play but they do not teach us
They do not hit us	They do not let us eat if we do something wrong
They support us	They hit us
They do not give too much homework	They expose our errors to the entire class
They give us space for recreation	They give us homework that we do not understand
They arrive on time to our classes	They give us nicknames and make fun of us
They play with us	They are always mad
They do not yell at us	They do not have patience
They let us go to the bathroom	They do not listen to us
They do not lock us in the classroom	They only let us write 'lines'

Source: Fieldwork 2019

One of the participants, Martin, is 15 years old and he has a little brother, Enrique, and an older sister Patricia. Since she has a disability, he has to take care of them because his mom has to work in the market. His siblings also go to *Canica* after school to have something to eat and to receive help from the professors that work in the organization. His sister Patricia needs special attention because of her disability. He told me that he is almost done with junior high school and wants to continue studying in high school and then university. He wants to work with computers and technology, telling me one day, '*I really like to learn, and I know that with a good education I can have more chances to have a good job and help my mom so she can stop going to the market every day and spend more time with my brother. To be honest though, sometimes it is really hard to wake up and go to school and always be strong. People make fun of us, and I need to take care of my sister, so I always act like those things do not affect me and I do not say anything to mom because I know she wants a better future for us, but sometimes going to school really hurts'.* He and his siblings shared these experiences of discrimination and exclusion in their schools, as well

as some of the jokes or comments that other classmates said to them. Therefore, this environment of violence is not only perpetuated by the professors but also by the other children.

Ronaldo, another participant, also has a little brother, Manuel. He shared with me, '*I want to be an example to Manuel. This is why I always tell him he needs to go to school even if sometimes he does not want to. He misses our grandma and sometimes it is difficult for him to adapt to the new school where he does not feel he is very welcome*'. During one of the workshops, Manuel stated, '*I do not like this school. I want to go back with my grandma and play with my cousins*'. These children do not have a safe space where they can be themselves and the violence that they have suffered makes them feel tired, hurt and sad. I asked them why they do not tell their parents or the director if their professors do that, and they simply laughed. Valeria said, '*My mom also allows them to do that and the principal says that we are always complaining and that instead of that, we need to study so we do not receive those punishments*'. These acts of violence are present among different aspects in the lives of these children and have further transformed the way they see themselves and understand their position in their schools, not only as Indigenous but also as children. According to the practices in their schools, they are not ready to participate nor to raise their voices on issues that affect them.

5.3 '*I am a child, and can I tell you a secret?... I am also Indigenous*': Intersecting identities that do not fit in the schools.

These migrant Indigenous children describe their experiences in their schools and their position in it in various manners. First, they argue that they want to participate in the decision-making process and give suggestions about their own school. However, they feel they are seen as ignorant, irrational and immature children that are not allowed to contribute, even if they feel they can do it (Kehily, 2009: 23). As Juan told me, '*Adults do not listen to us because we are kids. We cannot change things related to our schools – the professors only listen to my mom*'. They have also noticed that, although not explicit, school forces them to hide their Indigenous identity through the different dynamics that are present. For example, their schools do not often talk about Indigenous peoples and when they do, their classmates and professors cast Indigenous peoples in a negative light. Moreover, many children have faced violence and bullying because they showed their indigeneity. Two sibling participants in the basic group, Rodrigo and his sister Perla, were new to *Canica*. They had recently moved to the city and

their Spanish was limited. As a result, it was a bit difficult for them to adapt to their new context, and they quickly realized that speaking an Indigenous language and talking about their community was not really accepted in their schools. During the first workshop, I asked them "Who speaks an Indigenous language?" but no one raised their hand. However, when I was leaving, Rodrigo approached me and told me, '*Can I tell you a secret?*' I said yes, and he replied '*OK, I am going to tell you, but please do not say this to my classmates – I speak Zapoteco*'.

Rodrigo provided a clear example displaying the shame he feels to show that part of him. I told him that I would keep the secret, but I also asked why he did not want to disclose this fact. His response was indicative of this shame as he told me that he missed his community, he missed his grandparents and their friends, and said '*here everyone laughed at my family and I. In my school, my teachers are mad with my sister and I because our sneakers are not clean and because they are broken*'. I also observed that other children were making fun of him and Perla in *Canica*, telling them to '*say something in your language*' as they laughed, causing Perla and Rodrigo to become more isolated. Children have learned the importance of belonging to their school and they want to be included. These harmful practices were thereby learned as a means of becoming part of this system, copying and reproducing the way the rest of the society behaves. They have learned this behaviour in the educational institutions that embrace the idea of creating spaces for everyone. However, these schools ultimately perpetuate policies of "invisibilization as a synonym of exclusion" (Perez, n/d: 4). As Castel explains, people that are included in the system could still be excluded in educational terms. The exclusion from the educational system is a normal practice that nobody notices, but that is present in academic circles and outside them (2004).

For Perla and Rodrigo, it is difficult to be far from their community. They did not have a choice when their parents decided to migrate – they had to go with them. Now that they are living in Oaxaca City, they have been excluded because they are Indigenous, because they speak Zapoteco and because their family is poor. Rodrigo also noted, '*I like mathematics. I like numbers but my grades are not good because I do not have the time to do my homework. My teacher is mad with me because of that but I do not do the homework because I have to help my dad to sell fruits in the market, because if not we do not have money to eat*'. These realities are seldom understood by the schools, which believe that all children are the same. However, as childhood studies mentions, every child has a different reality. Furthermore, postcolonialism notes that the Eurocentric point of view is always involved. There is a need to show that there are other realities that may not be present in the dominant Western societies. This research therefore attempts

to bridge the gap that exists by thinking differently and listening to these Indigenous children to understand their genuine needs and shape the type of education that is necessary to implement.

Migrant Indigenous children have these multiple layers of discrimination and marginalization that intersect each other, creating a reality of exclusion. As Esser expresses, children are a ""minority group", because they have a marginalized position lacking opportunities in an adult-dominated society […] Children often go unseen and unheard, and have relatively few visible opportunities to influence society" (2016: 3). They do not feel included in the decision-making process and as these children have mentioned, they have suffered violence, bullying and exclusion and have felt discriminated for being Indigenous. Broadly speaking, Indigenous peoples experience high levels of discrimination. They are exposed to abuse and people making fun of them for the way they dress and speak. The levels of discrimination against these groups have reduced from 92.6% to 87.4% but are still too high (Gómez, 2018). As the case of Rodrigo shows, most of these children live in situations where they must work to help their parents. For children living in a context characterized by poor economic status and living conditions, they have less time to focus on school and their performances often suffer as a result. This has made them feel bad and as Paula said, *'I've never been in the 'cuadro de honor'[14] and my brother and I are sometimes part of the 'donkeys'[15]'*. These experiences compound the discrimination they face because the staff of their schools are the ones exposing them in front of the entire school as the 'bad students'. It is therefore understandable that these children feel ashamed not only about their performance and grades, but about who they are because they know that the root of this negative labelling is their Indigenous identity. Eduardo told me *'If I do not go to work then I can study more, and that is why I feel mad with mom when I have to help her, but she does not understand'*.

According to the stories that they told me about the dynamics in their schools, in conjunction with my own observations in *Canica*, adults always make the decisions for them. They decide what they have to eat, how they have to eat it, what they should play, where they have to sit, among other things. These dynamics have reinforced the children's position as passive actors within their schools, even if they know they have the agency to make these decisions. Lucia told me, *'I take care of my little siblings. I am like the mom in my house but in school,*

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[14] A space where you know who are the best students of each grade.
[15] In some schools teachers are implementing these practices, where if a student is having a bad performance, he/she has to wear donkey's ears in front of the class.

according to my professors, I am still too immature to decide what I want. I want someone to tell me if I am an adult or a child, it is not fun being both'. The realities faced by these children have forced them to grow up faster than other children. However, they are not asking for their childhood to be taken away, as being a child and wanting to play do not limit their decision-making capacities – the two are not mutually exclusive. Lucia also told me that it was harder to be a '*different child*' in her school, referring to her Indigenous background:

> '*I remember one of the professors in my class 'Entidad Oaxaca'[16] used me as an example when we were studying the Indigenous groups in Oaxaca, but it was not nice. I felt he was trying to expose me. After that, my classmates were making fun of me and even the professor was using the nickname that they gave me. When I told him that I did not like to be called that, he laughed and told me to not be a baby. After that day I decided I did not want to share anything about me being Zapoteca*'.

The children also mentioned that their schools were not for Indigenous peoples, referring to their friends and family in their communities. Juan and Eduardo were discussing this, and Eduardo said, '*My cousin cannot come to my school because he does not speak Spanish well and our books are not in his language. My professor does not speak his language, so he cannot learn*'. Juan replied, '*Yes, I had a new classmate this year that speaks differently and other classmates were making fun of him and my professor was always mad with him because he could not understand*'. In their discussion they told me '*Teacher, I do not think they can come to school here. I think they have to build schools where they can go because in Canica they taught us that kids have the right to go to school. They are also kids but they do not have a school for them. The President should do that right?*'

These children understand that they have to change and transform themselves to actually be included in their schools. They recognize that in their schools and even in Canica, nobody asks about their Indigenous groups. They know that if they speak another language they may be ridiculed by their professors and their classmates will make jokes about Indigenous people. They understand the reality of how their parents being Indigenous has put them in situations where they have to work, where they do not have basic resources. Ultimately, they realize that their identity is the source of this exclusion, and their thoughts about being Indigenous have subsequently started to change, favouring the 'hiding' of their indigeneity

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[16] A class in primary school about the history, geography and politics of Oaxaca.

and to behave and think as non-indigenous peoples do. This realization has been strengthened by how schools perpetuate the hegemonic culture, in this case the Eurocentric way of thinking, and does not allow the co-existence of other educational models, spaces and knowledges. (Maldonado, 2000: 5). "Schools have been the most ethnocidal institution" (Maldonado, 2000:6). This statement demonstrates how the educational institutions are killing and disappearing the indigeneity that is a fundamental part of these children. Alejandro, now working for *Canica* expressed, '*I am Zapoteco and I proud of my roots, but when you are a kid or a teenager you want to fit into your context and if you see and realize that being Indigenous is not accepted, then you prefer to forget that*'. During the children's journey to the city, their schools have played an important role in shaping their understanding about themselves, about what is accepted and what is not, about how they have to think and how they have to behave. Regrettably, the schools are shaping them without asking them what they need and what they want.

5.4 '*Sometimes I am Indigenous, sometimes I am not*': The transformation of their identities

These children are shaped through different fundamental elements that have created their identity, such as their indigeneity, their language, their gender, their class, their age. These elements influence their identity that is constantly transformed and likely to change over time. "Identities are always fragmented, multiply constructed, and intersected in a constantly changing, sometimes conflicting array. Although in reality the various facets of identity are inextricably linked" (Weaver, 2001: 240). Their identity as Indigenous is in flux, is not static and has been shaped and transformed by their schools. This is because identity may also be shaped by the perception and recognition of others. In this case, the role of the schools is transforming the way these children identify themselves. They have started to hide the more visible elements of their indigeneity, such as their language, and they have started to say they are not Indigenous. As Lucia expressed, '*I do not like to say I am Zapoteca. When the new school year started, I decided I was not going to say it anymore, and now I am OK. The professor cannot make fun of me because she thinks I am like my other classmates, and if I could hide that I do not have money I would also do it*'.

They are thus choosing to deny their Indigenous identity. As Monica told me when I asked her who was Indigenous, she replied '*My mom and my grandma are Indigenous, but I am not*'. Most of the children denied being Indigenous. This choice has been influenced by the role of schools and the dynamics present in those spaces that have been filled with discrimination

and exclusion to their indigeneity (Weaver, 2001: 246). Schools have invisibilized Indigenous peoples through a lack of recognition and through stereotypes in aspects such as language. Schools have reproduced the discourse about how speaking an Indigenous language is seen as a disadvantage, and have therefore shown these children that speaking Spanish is better for them and for their future, and that their first language it is not useful for them. As Rodrigo expressed, '*I do not like to speak Zapoteco in my school. I prefer to speak Spanish and only speak Zapoteco at home*'. This has brought about negative consequences such as the fracturing of their identities, the rejection of their languages and the resulting loss of the language that gets replaced by Spanish in the case of Mexico (Sartorello, 2019).

The reality of the transformation of these children's identity has also been shaped through other elements – the exclusion and discrimination that they have suffered has not only arisen because of their indigeneity. The children represent a case of intersectionality, where their age, their social class, and migrant status in the city has also affected how they see themselves. They have new experiences living in the city, co-habiting with other Indigenous groups, facing new realities that they were not exposed to back in their communities. This change has been difficult for them, so they justifiably want to fit in with their classmates in their school. During one of the workshops, they shared with me how they describe and understand Indigenous children. They said, '*They live in the mountains, in their communities. They dress differently and weird. They do not have a government. They use sandals and not shoes like us. They have different ideas and dark skin tone. Here you can see white people, we have cars, we have houses*" (a composed quote). They also drew how they picture Indigenous children (Figure 3). When I saw the drawing and I heard their description, I realized that they were thinking as a non-Indigenous person does. This drawing represents all of the stereotypes that we were taught in school and in the media. It is clear that they now have also changed how they perceive Indigenous peoples and how they see themselves.

Figure 3

Drawing of how one of the participants understand an Indigenous person
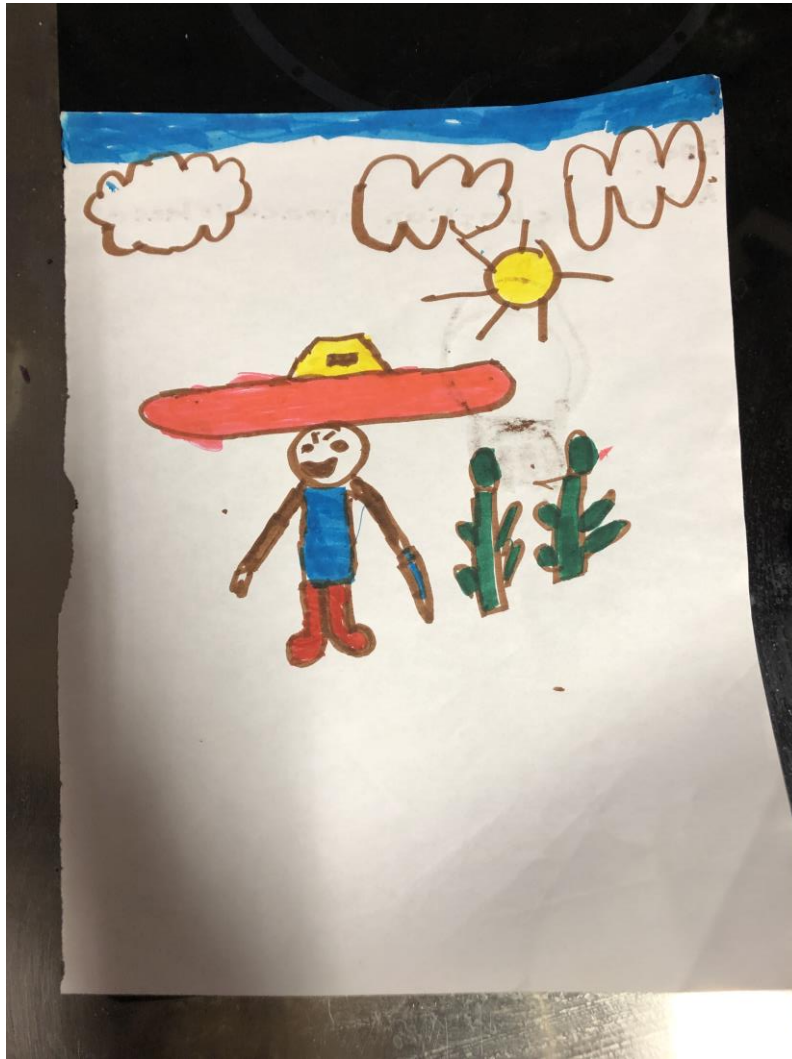
The idea that they have about being Indigenous has also been modified by the racism and discriminations that they have observed in their schools, and together with the ontological exclusion have created this coloniality of being that makes them change who they are, their identity (Maldonado-Torres, 2007 :253). The curriculum has been influenced by dominant Western discourses working under these knowledge structures and perpetuated by the school practices (Viruru, 2005: 10). These children talked about how they would like to see other courses more directly focusing on who they really are and what is important for them. Raul mentioned '*I know these topics are important but as you know, I have to work to help my family so it would be nice to also learn other relevant things that maybe for the principal are not that important'* .

Eduardo also told me '*I only speak my language with my mom, but sometimes I feel I am forgetting it. I would like to have someone that teaches me Zapoteco. They can bring someone from my community and then they can have a job and have money... I think it is a good idea, right?*' The things that they suggested are reflected in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4

Classes that the participants would like to see in the curriculum of their schools

Source: Fieldwork 2019

Regarding some of the ideas that they expressed concerning suggestions for the curriculum, they demonstrated that there are other elements of their Indigenous identity that have not been touched by their schools and that are still part of them. When they were talking about their communities, they felt really proud sharing different elements that are representative of their communities. Their Indigenous identity is still connected to their community and their traditions. Particularly in Oaxaca, the sense of communality is very important for Indigenous communities. It is an essential element of the Indigenous peoples that want to be collective, and it is a lifestyle and these children still have it (Maldonado, 2000: 16).

The sense of belonging to their community is still very strong. After the first workshops where everyone denied that they were Indigenous, I then asked what were their favorite things from their communities. Amalia told me, *'I love when my family and I go to the mountains because we can play everywhere. It is not like here in the city where I can only play in my house'*. Enrique told me *'I like that everyone helps. If someone is sick everyone cooks for them, or bring fruits for them – some moms do the same here in Canica'*. All the children then explained to me that they see *Canica* as a place that helps and takes care of them, and that is why they decided to implement 'el tequio' - a biyearly event where professors, staff, parents, and children go and help to clean the community center. Monserrat also told me, *'I like the guelaguetza from my village, not the one here in the city. We go with my grandmother and everyone cooks, we dance, we share all the food that is delicious and my uncles drink mezcal. It is like a big, big party, and I love that'*. All these practices are part of a communality that is an important element that Indigenous communities in Oaxaca have. These elements could be linked with what Rendon explains as the four elements of communality: a communal land, communal power, communal work and communal enjoying (1992). All of these are important elements that make them feel Indigenous and that represent another part of their identities that have not been addressed by their schools.

The concept of Indigenous identity was shaped by their context and surroundings, and it serves as a reminder that they have to hide their Indigeneity to fit not only in their schools but in their society. Eduardo told me one day during the workshops, *'I think I am Indigenous and I like it'*. However, this only happened once they felt that I was fine with the topic and that I was even interested in asking them for some words in their languages or asking them more about their traditions and their communities. These effects were clear, as "a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, can be a form of oppression when there is an absence of recognition or a misrecognition" (Weaver, 2001: 243). It is clear that these children feel Indigenous when they are in their communities, but it ultimately becomes a conditional identity that changes and moulds itself depending on the context that they are in.

Chapter 6 Conclusions: Creating a real option for migrant Indigenous children

The 44 participants in this research shared what their experiences in school are, as well as their needs and what they want. They were able to share these ideas and suggestions with the staff of *Canica*, and were then curious if their formal schools could have the space to do the same. Spaces where children can participate are really important and crucial for them. They were a bit hesitant at first to share their opinions, especially considering the situations they are accustomed to where adults are always controlling what they can do, what they can say and what they need. However, they showed interest in suggesting new things for their schools, a place where they spend most of their time and the main institution that they see as an important space to have access to better opportunities. Apart from the differences and changes that they would like to see in the future, they also shared the everyday experience that they have to face in their schools. They seemed to view their schools as spaces where violence, bullying and exclusion are normalized through the ridiculization and invisibilization of their identities as children, as Indigenous, migrants and within contexts of poverty.

Overall, schools have played an important role in the understanding of how they see themselves. Their identity is in flux and is still taking form, and school has made them hide some parts of themselves, especially their indigeneity. This is because schools have not been able to shape a space where Indigenous peoples can emerge, participate and feel represented (Maldonado, 2011: 25). However, during my time spent with these children in Oaxaca, I was able to learn a lot from them and their experiences. They shared things with me that demonstrated their qualities and agency that we as adults tend to underestimate. These children show resilience in a context in spite of the challenges, obstacles and the exclusion that they have to face. They know what they want and what they need. Children from 5 to 15 years old shared the things that they care about and the things that worried them. Most crucially, even if most of them hide their identity as Indigenous, they demonstrated that they are still interested in changing this trend, not only for themselves but also for other children from their communities.

The children were aware of their rights because *Canica* has played an important role in this as well as the other organizations that were part of the research. They are doing the work that they can from their own understanding but there are still so many structural problems

that need to be addressed first. Despite their crucial work, they must continue until every child feels that their schools are a safe space for them and that they have the right to study in a school that respects their identities, that respects who they are and where they can learn without the threat of discrimination and exclusion that they have felt.

On a broad scale, schools in Oaxaca City are not prepared for the cultural diversity that the city offers. There are not enough economic and human resources to implement the correct spaces and practices where the migrant Indigenous groups that migrate to Oaxaca City, in search of better opportunities, can co-exist without the risk of losing their languages, their knowledge and their Indigenous identity. The public, mandatory and free of charge schools run by the federal government claim to provide the universal right to education. However, through the experiences of these children it is evident that the educational institutions continue having structural failures in their implementation of practices – particularly in those that allow the co-existence of the diversity that the Indigenous communities represent – as they continue perpetuating the universal idea of the development of a child without taking into account the different realities that every child faces.

The policies must also take into consideration the root causes of the migration of Indigenous peoples to the city. If this Indigenous urbanization is contributing to the exclusion of Indigenous children in their schools which lack the proper resources, it must be addressed. If these institutions are unable to provide a proper education to the 16 Indigenous groups that a pluricultural city such as Oaxaca has, then it is important to start thinking about improving and addressing the lack of opportunities in their communities. This is crucial especially because these local schools often have more open spaces where children feel free to show their indigeneity. This could reverse or slow the migration trends, but it is nonetheless important that the city continue making changes in the formal schools because it is not an option to separate Indigenous and mestizos. A good example is the model created by CMPIO. This is not a war between them and us, but rather as the director of *Canica* mentioned, *'there is a need to mix both worlds, the local knowledge and our Western knowledge, but both at the same level'*.

This research helped me to understand that, as an outsider, I have more responsibility to always recognize Indigenous and children's beliefs, systems and knowledges. I already acknowledged that I am not Indigenous and I am not a child. However, even if I am recognized as an outsider, I truly believe that I want to continue working with Indigenous children,

recognizing that they have rights and that there is a universal framework to provide children with rights. I also believe the implementation of these rights should not be universal because every child, such as Indigenous children, represents different realities, context and needs.

After this research, I hope that the experiences and suggestions shared by these children may be internalized by the people that are in charge of their schools and the policy makers. I hope to contribute to the understanding that they have agency, the maturity and the will to change things that affect them. I believe it is important to continue working with children and to conduct more research that will open spaces where children can not only share but design the methodology and subsequently evaluate it. For this research, the timeframe was not sufficient, but I think it is important that these types of papers focus on what every child needs and why and how they understand their position. These children helped make me aware of the things that they feel are relevant for their development in spaces such as schools. It is children like these that policies must listen to, as they are the main group affected by every change and each practice.

Appendices

Name	Age	Indigenous group
Enrique	5	Zapoteco
Manuel	5	-
Alejandro	5	Mixteco
Elena	5	Mixteco
Wendy	5	-
Emmanuel	5	Zapoteco
Perla	6	Zapoteca
Rodrigo	7	Zapoteco
Alberto	6	Zapoteco
Mia	6	Cuicateca
Gabriela	6	Mixteca
Amalia	7	Zapoteca
Perseo	7	-
Victor	10	Zapoteco
Carlos	8	Mixteco
Monserrat	7	Mixteca
Roberto	9	Mixteco
Dalia	7	Mixteca
Vania	11	Zapoteca
Ana	10	Zapoteca
Astrid	9	Mixteca
Katia	9	Zapoteca
Juan	10	Zapoteco
Eduardo	10	Zapoteco
David	10	Zapoteco
Anwar	9	-
Monica	11	Zapoteca
Claudia	11	Zapoteca
Laura	10	Mixteca
Guadalupe	9	Mixteca
Alex	10	Mixteco
Martin	14	Zapoteco
Patricia	15	Zapoteca
Sofia	15	-
Lucia	12	Zapoteca
Valeria	12	Zapoteca
Paula	13	Zapoteca
Valentina	12	-
Raul	12	Cuicateco
Ronaldo	12	-
Daniela	13	Zapoteca

Amanda	13	Zapoteca
Estrella	12	Zapoteca
Cielo	13	Zapoteca

Appendix 2
Organizations that participated in the research

Fondo Gudalupe Musalem[17]:

It is an organization working with Indigenous girls in Oaxaca. They support them to continue studying. The study group 'Mujer Rosario Castellanos A.C' created this organization in 1995. Their work is support Indigenous girls that do not have enough recourses to continue studying and that have a good performance in school.

EDUCA[18].

EDUCA is a non-governmental organisation based in the city of Oaxaca. It was founded in 1994 and conducted as a civil association since July 1994. Since its initiation, **EDUCA** has been advising organisations and communities in the defence of their rights as citizens, especially in indigenous regions, by promoting civil education, training indigenous authorities and supporting local development projects. The organisation's activities focus on strengthening the political prominence of social and community organisations in Oaxaca, deriving from the articulation of civilian initiatives defending their territory, and to make visible citizen agendas, through an integral focus on human rights in order to influence a profound democratic transition.

CALPULLI

This organization was created in 1994, to protect and fight for the rights of the children, specially the right to education without losing the identity of Indigenous children. They have 170 children that go to the community center to practice music, dance and the history of the diversity of Oaxaca. They have an official group of children dancers, which represent different traditional dances from Oaxaca. As well

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[17] https://www.fondoguadalupemusalem.org/blank

[18] https://www.educaoaxaca.org/

as a'El Comité de Ninos, Ninas y Adolescentes sus derechos' (CONNAD). Children that work to create proposals and to demand rights for the children from Oaxaca shape this Committee.
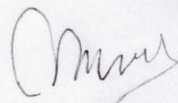
Oaxaca de Juarez

Julio 16 del 2019.

Por medio de la presente. Se les informa que la señorita Ana Laura Zarco Fuentes, estará realizando una investigación para obtener su grado de Maestría en La Haya, Holanda. Ella pidió apoyo a Canica para realizar esta investigación con las niñas, niños y adolescentes que participan en el programa de la organización.

Toda la información que se obtenga de los niños será utilizada para los fines de la investigación que es entender como las niñas, los niños y los adolescentes que han migrado de sus comunidades a Oaxaca de Juárez, entienden y viven sus experiencias en sus escuelas. Los nombres de los participantes serán totalmente anónimos, y no se mencionara ningún dato personal. Asimismo, también se les preguntara a cada niña, niño y adolescente si se sienten cómodos participando en la investigación.
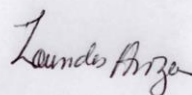
Por medio de esta carta se les pide, que si ustedes como padres o tutores de los niños, niñas y adolescentes están de acuerdo en que participen en esta investigación, firmen o expresen verbalmente al final de esta reunión que dan su consentimiento para que Ana Laura pueda realizar su investigación.
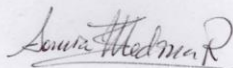
También es importante que sepan que si en algún momento de las 4 semanas que Ana Laura estará trabajando en Canica, ustedes cambian de opinión y no quieren que sus hijos o hijas continúen participando, pueden acercarse sin ninguna duda a cualquier membro de Canica y sus hijos e hijas no tendrán que seguir participando.
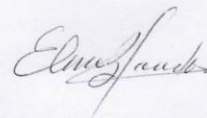
Sin más por el momento agradecemos la atención prestada, y si tienen alguna duda, aclaración, o comentario pueden contactar a Ana Laura o a cualquier membro de Canica.
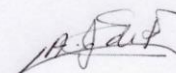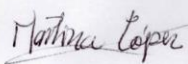
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Appendix 4
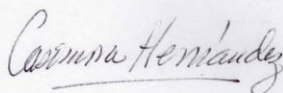List of Activities

Activity	Description	Objective
Participatory observation in the organization *Canica*	For the first days of the research I observed and took notes about the dynamics in the organization between the staff and the children.	-Organization practices -Children behavior and participation in the activities -Interaction between the teachers in the organization and the children
Workshop *designing your idea school*- working with Indigenous children	During this workshop, children from Canica were part of the workshop. Creating groups of 5 children from 6-11 years old will play designing their ideal school taking in consideration the policy requirements. The workshop was implemented twice a week talking about 1. Physical space in their school 2. Curriculum/Things that they want to learn. 3. Professors	-Create the space to Indigenous children to think, decide and design what they need from the education system -Understand children concerns -Analyze how children can generate ideas and how they agree about a topic that affect them. -Show how Indigenous children can use their agency in important topics and decisions that normally they are not taking in consideration.
Workshops about how these children feel and understand their position in their schools	Having more specific conversations whit the children about how is being indigenous outside their communities and how school makes them feel about this I will talk about the moment where they feel happier and sadder in school, what they think about it and their personal experiences and how this has made them feel. 1. How is being indigenous 2. Their perception about themselves.	-Have a better understanding of what they have experienced as an inclusive education system and what as excluding. -Understand the perception of Indigenous children about the education system Open the space to these children to speak up about what they need and want in their life's now
Participatory observation in the villages in Oaxaca	Canica has this playroom where children from different neighborhoods can go and play. I observed the dynamics and interactions and how Indigenous children participate on them.	-Observe and understand the dynamics that these children has when they are not part of Canica
In-depth interviews with the director of *Canica*	Interview with the director and staff of the organization to see how they understand the participation of the children and how they observe and understand	-Understand the institutional concerns about the topic of exclusion or inclusion or Indigenous children in the education system.

	about the education system as inclusive or excluding.	
In-depth interviews with the Director of Calpulli and the director Fondo Guadalupe Musalem	This is an NGO that works with Indigenous children that have emigrated from their communities. The second NGO works with indigenous girls to provide them scholarships to continue their studies. They try to work with the Indigenous knowledge's and their traditions	-Understand how other organizations work with Indigenous children that do not live in their communities and how they understand about the inclusion or exclusion of Indigenous children form the education system.
In-depth interviews with the Miguel Angel Vasquez (EDUCA and Radio Universidad	Miguel is a man that came from the grassroots organizations in Oaxaca and has worked with Indigenous communities. Actually, he works with an NGO that is called EDUCA that works with adults and tries to provide them education. And with Radio Universidad.	-Understand the perspectives that an educated man that also has worked with Indigenous communities has about the policies that the government in Oaxaca is implementing and how he describes the way Indigenous children are living in Oaxaca City

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