THEMATIC SECTION:
ANTHROPOLOGY OF EDUCATION

Educação & realidade

Cultures of Accountability in Indigenous Early Childhood Education in Mexico

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ABSTRACT – Cultures of Accountability in Indigenous Early Childhood Education in Mexico. Accountability policies are meant to improve educational quality; yet, too often, they interfere with quality instruction, including bilingual instruction. Drawing on 18 months of ethnographic work in a multigrade Indigenous preschool in the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico, I describe how Elisa, the teacher, principal and janitor, navigated demanding administrative tasks while implementing different governmental programs, placing on her a significant bureaucratic burden. Also, this led her to shift her attention from a culture of *teaching-learning accountability to a culture of bureaucratic accountability*. This study shows that early childhood education in Indigenous communities in Mexico depends on the astuteness and preparedness of frontline workers, such as teachers and school supervisors, as they keenly navigate the culture of bureaucratic accountability that governmental policies impose, while trying not to sacrifice an accountability to their own responsibility to the learners.
Keywords: **Indigenous Education. Early Childhood Education. Language Policy. Bureaucracy. Mexico.**

RESUMO – Culturas de Responsabilização em Educação Infantil no México. As políticas de responsabilização têm o objetivo de melhorar a qualidade educacional; porém, muitas vezes, interferem na qualidade da educação, inclusive na educação bilíngue. Com base em dezoito meses de trabalho etnográfico em uma pré-escola indígena multisseriada na península de Yucatán, no México, descrevo como Elisa, professora, diretora e zeladora, cumpria as exigentes tarefas administrativas enquanto implementava diferentes programas governamentais que impunham sobre ela uma significativa carga burocrática. Isto também a levava a deslocar sua atenção de uma cultura de *responsabilização por ensino-aprendizagem para uma cultura de responsabilização burocrática*. Este estudo mostra que a educação infantil em comunidades indígenas no México depende da perspicácia e da preparação de trabalhadores da linha de frente, como professores e supervisores escolares, pois cumprem com habilidade a cultura da responsabilização burocrática imposta pelas políticas governamentais enquanto tentam não sacrificar uma responsabilização frente ao seu próprio dever junto aos estudantes.
Palavras-chave: **Educação indígena. Educação Infantil. Política de Linguagem. Burocracia. México.**

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Introduction

Efforts to offer high-quality early childhood education (ECE) have noticeably increased in recent decades (United Nations, 2015; Yoshikawa; Wuermli; Raikes; Kim; Kabay, 2018). Governments across the globe have rallied for quality ECE strategies and programs, many times without a clear definition of what quality education means or how it is delivered (Raikes; Yoshikawa; Britto; Iruka, 2017). For instance, to accompany the delivery of high quality ECE across Mexico, the government announced the implementation of the *National English Strategy* in 2017. The Strategy heralds English as the purveyor of justice and inclusion for all children at every educational level and is one of the novel solutions that recent governments have emplaced in order to heal social inequality in the country (SEP, 2017). Another example of novel solutions to promote inclusion in the Mexican educational system is the *Programa Escuelas de Tiempo Completo* (Full-time School Program – PETC). The PETC was launched in 2007 as an optional program where public schools could choose to extend their school day from three to six hours per day by including families in the management of the schools (SEP, 2019).

Schools, especially Indigenous ones, are the social spaces in which these policies come into contact, revealing implementation challenges at all levels. Indigenous preschools, for example, have already struggled to implement Indigenous bilingual programs because textbooks and professional development are based on Spanish learning models (García; Velasco, 2012; Hamel, 2016). In the case of the PETC, families are not always willing nor able to help in the management and administration of the schools (Gómez Zermeño; Flores Fahara; Alemán de la Garza, 2014). Originally designed to create inclusive environments, foster learning, and promote a quality education across Mexico, these novel solutions act in many cases as an unintentional addenda to prevalent challenges within Indigenous schools: (a) the multigrade organization of the classrooms; (b) the shortage of pedagogically trained teachers; (c) the inadequacy of books and pedagogical methodologies; (d) the poor condition of the schools' infrastructure; and (e) the scarcity of teachers who speak Indigenous languages (Flores Farfán, 2011; INEE, 2019). All these challenges are further encapsulated in an implementation that pushes for a culture of bureaucratic accountability rather than a culture of teaching-learning accountability.

To understand what a culture of bureaucratic accountability entitles, it might be useful to start with a definition of bureaucracy, which *encompasses a system of government rules and ways of doing* (Bureaucracy in Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). In this article, I refer to the culture of bureaucratic accountability in education as the ways in which governments have burdened teachers with policies and programs that involve tasks that move them away from teaching, and one could assume, as a consequence, move children away from learning what is expected by the school curriculum (Biesta, 2015). I argue that rather than

promoting a culture of teaching-learning accountability, many of these programs have pushed schoolteachers and supervisors in Indigenous multigrade schools to focus on filing paperwork ad nauseum and engaging in performances where people speak about learning without the latter happening (Hornberger; Chick, 2001).

Drawing on ethnographic work, I describe how Elisa, who is a teacher, principal and janitor in a multigrade Indigenous preschool in Mexico, navigated different administrative tasks while implementing the PETC, placing on her a significant bureaucratic burden and pushing her to shift her attention to a culture of bureaucratic accountability rather than to one focused on teaching-learning accountability. This shift in accountabilities has consequently impacted her instructional time of Yucatec Maya[1], the Indigenous language spoken in the region, where teaching has become a balancing act between the bureaucratic requirements Elisa has to comply with and the strengthening of a language that is undergoing a language shift in the region (Terborg; García Landa; Moore, 2006). To be and become a teacher in these multigrade schools means to be structured by bureaucratic incentives and recognize that these factors persist. I argue that educational policies should facilitate instruction and learning rather than hinder it through their bureaucratic accountability culture.

Situating the Study: context and methods

The data for this article derives from a larger ethnographic study realized over two periods: between May 2017 and August 2018, and between June and August 2019. The overall aim of the study was to understand how national and global discourses about early childhood and language education intersect with and influence schooling practices in Indigenous education in Mexico. The study was situated in Huaytsik[2], which has been described by the Ministry of Indigenous and Social Development as the most Maya-monolingual municipality in the state of Quintana Roo in the Yucatan Peninsula (SEDESI, 2015). This linguistic characteristic is closely tied to the town's high rate of social exclusion and poverty, as has historically been the case in Indigenous communities in Mexico and throughout Latin America, (Hall; Patrinos, 2012; Robles Vásquez; Pérez Miranda, 2018). In light of this, one of the government's efforts to reverse this poverty trend was the introduction of Early Childhood Education (ECE), a global policy that has been branded as a societal equalizer through the promotion of school readiness and promises of economic development (Penn, 2011). However, as evidenced by my observations and conversations with parents, ECE policies have inadvertently diminished the knowledge and use of Indigenous languages, as these languages are rarely used in Indigenous preschools as the languages of instruction in favor of Spanish.

As part of the study, I engaged in ethnographic and participatory research in Palal-na, a single-teacher multigrade Indigenous preschool attended by 27 children (ages 2 to 6). At this research site, I participated

in the day-to-day aspects of schooling with Elisa, the only teacher who attended this school, and in informal early childhood educational activities in the community. In this article I also incorporate the experiences of Elisa's school supervisor, as well as the municipality's Educational Chief – who is in charge of overseeing Indigenous education from nursery to high school, as they dealt at their own levels with the culture of bureaucratic accountability which move them away from their own duties as supervisors of the delivery of the schools' curricula under their jurisdiction.

Data Management and Analyses

Qualitative research methods included participant observation in schools and at community events; audio and video recordings of classroom and school activities; archival work focused on ECE and language policies impacting the educational landscape in Mexico; and semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in both Spanish and Maya with parents (n=30), teachers (n=6), students (n=20), and community stakeholders (n=20). The interviews, with adaptations in format and content (e.g., drawings and games for children) explored, in general, the following themes: (i) life history; (ii) schooling; (iii) job history; (iv) language use in school, family and upbringing; (v) ECE (formal and non-formal) in town; and (vi) migration and language practices. Interviews with adults lasted between 45 minutes and 4 hours, while interviews with children depended on their interest and attention span, sometimes extending for days (Hatch, 2007). Methodological triangulations were done by employing fieldnotes, interviews, and policy texts as elements to map out the relationships between local and global ECE discourses, Indigenous language schooling and learning, as well as the socio-economic processes under which parents and teachers make educational choices (Denzin; Lincoln, 2008).

Conceptual Framework: A Bottom-up Perspective on Language Planning

Language planning is understood as a multilayered construct in which different agents and processes are interwoven in highly complex and often unorganized and unpredictable ways. Ricento and Hornberger (1996) depict these multilayered interactions with the metaphor of an onion, which emphasizes how language policy and planning (LPP) is not solely a top-down process but one in which negotiations take place at different levels amongst different agents. The relevance of their metaphor is that it responds to the rational and positivistic models that understand language planning as a process to solve language problems from a top-down perspective (Nahir, 1984) while highlighting the agentive role of local actors and how their practices impact language policies on the macro level (Huebner; Davis, 1999). Understanding LPP as a multilevel process, the *Ethnography of Language Policy and Planning* tries

to address the gap from policy to practice in terms of scalar and layered interactions by exploring the connections between processes of education, language use and agency as they relate to broader economic, political, and sociological formations (Hornberger; Anzures Tapia; Hanks; Kvietok Dueñas; Lee, 2018).

By using a detailed ethnographic process, one can see how bottom-up LPP processes work and create *ideological and implementational spaces* even when these have been closed at top-down policy levels (Hornberger, 2005). *Ideological spaces* refer to the ways through which policies are understood and where discourses about their potentials and possibilities are observed, while *implementational spaces* are the purposeful enactments of those discourses. Ideological and implementational spaces not only interact, overlap, and merge, but also mutually transform and create new spaces. For instance, while teachers, such as Elisa, might recognize the importance of teaching Maya (an ideological space), the purposeful implementation of its instruction could be shut down by the paperwork she needs to fill out, pushing her to fulfil other roles in the school, dedicate her time to other subjects, or even be absent for days, literally and metaphorically closing a space for learning.

According to McCarty (2015), adopting an ethnographic paradigm to explore LPP processes is a threefold enterprise: as a way of seeing, where we see LPP as a human and cultural process; a way of looking, where we address LPP processes in a systematic ethnographic way; and as a way of being, where ethnography is a way of doing social justice – of bringing humanness to LPP. In this way, the Ethnography of LPP reminds us to trace the development of language policies and how they travel from top-down, bottom-up and side by side perspectives as they are part of cultural processes (Hornberger; Johnson, 2011; Menken; García, 2010).

Like much of the contemporary views on LPP as a complex enterprise where individual actors influence the way policies are implemented, the *Street-Level Bureaucracy* theory foregrounds frontline workers as the agents that are in contact with public service delivery who exercise norms based on their own beliefs and values, not only by shaping these norms, but producing or neutralizing them too (Harklau; Yang, 2019; Maynard-Moody; Portillo, 2010). From this perspective, teachers in public schools are seen as frontline workers who use their own criteria to implement programs and negotiate, contest and adapt the administrative tasks that comprise them while interacting with political, societal, community and bureaucratic demands.

Against this background, the Street Level-Bureaucracy theory recognizes that public policy administration is not a neutral process, but one where there are tensions and opportunities between the ideals designed by legislatures – an ideological space – and its implementation by local agents (Hupe; Buffat, 2014; Lipski, 2010). Teachers, as frontline workers, interpret mandated policies, while also being held accountable for the perceived correct implementation of these policies (Brod-

kin, 2008). For example, in some school districts in the US, and until recent years in Mexico, teachers' salaries are tied to the students' test scores, pushing many teachers to implement the curriculum according to what would be examined in the test, and not to what would be desirable for children to learn beyond the test (Echávarri; Peraza, 2017; Ravitch, 2016). Such policies, although hidden in a mirage of teaching-learning accountability, unintentionally push teachers to a culture of bureaucratic accountability in education, burdening teachers by teaching to the test, and as a consequence, moving children away from learning. Accountability is then one of the dilemmas Street-Level Bureaucracy highlights: policies and programs will always maintain a potential for corruption, especially in places where there are no consistent or useful accountability measures.

By bringing attention to this dilemma, the Street-Level Bureaucracy theory shifts our analytical perspective on frontline workers from being those with the least authority to those who are potential game changers in society (Maynard-Moody; Portillo, 2010). It changes a vox populi perspective on policy as an impartial process to policy as relational work where emotions and ideologies are invested as people relate to their superiors, to those who are attended to by the policies, and to the contexts and structures in which these policies are developed (Maynard-Moody; Musheno, 2000). Together, Street Level Bureaucracy theory and the Ethnography of Language Policy and Planning highlight why, from a bottom-up policy perspective, governmental policies and programs are rarely implemented in expected ways.

Findings

To illustrate the cultures of accountability with which Elisa engages, in the following sections I present some of the paths taken and made by her as the only teacher and principal at Palal-na, as she tried to keep the school open by implementing the Full-time School Program. In doing so, I argue that this type of program is meant to alleviate an immediate problem of access to education under the guise of quality education. However, it ultimately promotes a culture of bureaucratic accountability rather than a culture of teaching-learning accountability, perpetuating the multidimensional poverty affecting many of these children and communities (Alkire; Santos, 2011). Afterwards, I demonstrate how Maya, which supposedly is the language of instruction at the school, is reduced to a bureaucratic performance as a consequence of accountability measures that call attention to be focused on paperwork rather than on the accountability of teaching and learning practices.

Full-time School Program: a strategy for school survival

When Palal-na was founded in 1990, it had three teachers with one per grade. By the time Elisa arrived midway through the 2010-2011 school year to replace a retiring teacher, the preschool had been

reduced to two teachers, including her. Despite having no training in school administration, Elisa was given the dual appointment of teacher and school principal, simply because she had a permanent appointment with the Ministry of Education, with 180 pesos[3] extra payment per month. After two years, only one classroom remained as; the other teacher, who had no permanent appointment with the Ministry of Education, was assigned to another community, and Elisa was left to manage what became a multigrade single-teacher school. Elisa learned that, in order for the school to survive, she had to make concessions that other teachers in town did not: some children would arrive late, others would be absent for weeks, and she would invite and register children with significant disabilities. Not accepting them would result in fewer children on paper and thus a real possibility of closing the school.

Preschool student enrollment was thus critical in Huaytsik. A school could be shut down if it does not register at least 15 students per year, and the competition for students was fierce. Elisa knew that if she could register 35 students, the Ministry of Education could send another teacher to support her. This promise was in her mind in February 2018 as she cancelled classes for three days in a row to visit the houses of potential students as well as the houses of children in other preschools in order to convince parents to switch their children to Palal-na. She knew that having the school open would bring a big reward for her, for the children, and for all the families.

Yet, after exceeding this number, the Ministry of Education denied Elisa another teacher, arguing that the town already had four other preschools. This was devastating news, especially for her; as noted in my observations at the time, "[...] se arrepentía porque ahora tiene muchos niños y no sabe que va a hacer con tantos"[4] (FN. 2018.06.13). At this point, Elisa had already accepted José, with cerebral palsy; Adán, a child who is partially deaf; and several children who were regularly denied entrance into their previous schools due to lateness. In the case of José, the proximity to others and caring love he received from other children was not just valuable for him, but for his mother and for all the children. However, Elisa struggled to meet his specific needs in the midst of so many other demands.

The educational system has established policies that are difficult to administer and, thus, made schools inaccessible for children like José (Cisneros, 2016). This is one of the phenomena that Elisa is trying to fight against. Palal-na is considered a school for *los olvidados*[5] (Elisa in FN. 2016.06.01); Elisa has opened spaces and opportunities for these children to socialize with their peers, learn basic literacy strategies, and for many to have some food in their belly through the *Programa Escuelas de Tiempo Completo* (Full-time School Program – PETC).

Full-time School Program: A *good* fit for Indigenous multigrade preschools?

In the 2013-2014 school cycle, Elisa enrolled the school in the PETC, where students ostensibly attend classes from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. and where parents partner with teachers to manage schools by, for example, creating social participation committees to clean the school or food committees to prepare meals for students (SEP, 2019). The commitment from the government to these schools is that, as long as they become part of this program, their schools will have better infrastructure; receive a food stipend, and have access to the pedagogical resource *Lineas de trabajo educativas*[6], which aims to guide teachers on how they can help children in the extended school day (SEP, 2016). During my time in the school, Elisa never followed the activities suggested by the *Lineas de trabajo educativas*, since in many cases they asked for parents' participation, took for granted that schools had digital cameras and computers and, overall, did not consider the multigrade nature of the school.

The criteria[7] for any school at any educational level to become part of the PETC has allowed 10,800 multigrade schools to be candidates for its implementation. Put differently, 43% of the 25,000 schools that are part of PETC are multigrade. Even if these numbers speak for themselves, multigrade schooling is not taken into account in the design and revision of the PETC (Schmelkes; Aguila, 2019). On one hand, this raises the question of why the PETC is not adapting to the realities of multigrade schooling, while on the other hand suggesting that, even if the PETC is not adapting to these realities, the needs of many of these schools are such that, no matter if the curriculum is appropriate for them, the inputs of food and the extended schedule are huge factors for children to stay in school.

Such is the case of Elisa, for whom the benefits are not so much reflected in the promises of a better educational attainment but more so in school retention as well as the marketable advantages that the PETC gives the school when compared to the other schools in terms of receiving money for school maintenance and free food. Along these lines, the Education Chief of the municipality, who is in charge of overseeing Indigenous education from nursery to high school, affirmed how the multigrade nature of these schools does not allow them as supervisors to push for a teaching-learning accountability that aligns to their own programs

> Entendemos que un maestro que atiende tres grados es complicado, no podemos dar un cien por ciento en cuanto al proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje, los resultados no llegan hasta el 70% digamos, por la misma complejidad de atender los grados. Muchos de los maestros de hecho me dicen 'no me exijas que yo trabaje con el plan y programa porque los niños no saben leer ni escribir, yo voy a hacer lo que me corresponde hacer y luego puedo trabajar con el plan y programa, pero ahorita los niños están en cero[8]' (Interview with the Education Chief, 2019.07.10).

In a school market, such as the one in Huaytsik, where school is supposedly free and the competition for preschool students is fierce, the PETC positions Palal-na as an interesting and economically viable option for parents, since Elisa does not ask for any type of voluntary fees[9] to buy school materials or food. These fees, especially in rural and Indigenous contexts, have an impact on children's school attendance, since preschool is not often seen as an important educational level by parents in the region. Thus, the money spent in preschool by parents could be saved for later years by not sending their children to the school (Camarillo Martínez, 2018).

In different instances during the school year, Elisa urged parents that they had to bring their children to school, and every time a child arrived late, she told the different caregivers to remember to bring them on time, every day. For example, she discussed consistent attendance at one of the social participation committee meetings, where she told the parents that, for the 2018-2019 school year, the laws would change, allowing schools to punish parents who did not take their children to school. Parents could not prove at that moment if this was true or not, but they also did not ask any questions, so she invited them to organize themselves, be active, and tell everyone that they need to come to school.

Across her years as a teacher at Huaytsik, Elisa has tried to position Palal-na as an Indigenous school that can offer a quality education to children by registering the school in the PETC and trying to highlight some of its benefits, such as the improvement in infrastructure, the purchase of pedagogical material, and of course free food for children. However, an aspect that was not considered was the significant burden the PETC placed on Elisa. This resulted in a paradox: the PETC's accountability measures were there to foster learning and curb corruption, but the burden they placed on the teacher actually hindered learning and, as I observed, fostered discontent among the parents. They were asked to spend time at the school to cover administrative tasks, but not to see how their children are learning.

From Accountability *to* Learning *to* Accountability *to* Paperwork

At the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year, Elisa applied for an economic stimulus of 30 thousand pesos[10], a grant available only to PETC schools, which she received. To prove the money was spent on the children, she needed to show receipts and take pictures of the materials with the children, with the parents, and by herself. This process took an entire day, so classes were cancelled. The following day, classes were cancelled again because Elisa was required to present this proof in person at the Ministry of Education in Chetumal, the state capital, four hours away from Huaytsik.

This form of accountability was coupled with so much bureaucratic paperwork that, according to Elisa, many schools do not apply for the PETC (Schmelkes; Aguila, 2019). Activities such as these took most of her time, leaving little for actual teaching. Because of this, during the 2018-2019 school year, she decided not to apply for any of the economic stimuli that the PETC gives her an opportunity to apply for, since a new federal program called *Escuelas al 100%*, would automatically repaint and repair the school. She later regretted this decision. By the end of the school year, *Escuelas al 100%* had never arrived, leaving Elisa with a school in need of repair and without any money to do so. Furthermore, without a guarantee of monetary compensation, parents did not want to help, calling into question the ideal of a school managed by the community that the PETC wants to promote (Mendieta Melgar; Castro; Priego Vázquez; Perales Franco, 2019).

The lack of parents' collaboration affected the way children were learning since the teacher on occasions had to start late, end school before 2 p.m., or even cancel classes in order to deal with facilities related issues in the school, such as changing chairs, cleaning the toilets or painting the school. Sometimes, when the teacher asked children to help her, they were happy to do so, but for some parents, the children needed to be paid if they were going to help in some tasks. Cancelling classes also gave the parents an excuse to not take their children to school, undoing all of her efforts to persuade the parents to bring their children to school. This restarted a cycle to prove that the school would be open, although it inevitably closed due to bureaucratic tasks, such as taking pictures of the school, counting the chairs, or complete fake reports on the parent's committees work, while also filling out all the corresponding paperwork.

Elisa had difficulties managing a diverse range of ages, cleaning the school, fulfilling her paperwork, and pushing parents to buy into the idea that this is a school managed in collaboration between the parents and herself. Teaching Maya became a low priority, especially when she was not held accountable for it on a regular basis and was not given resources and support for her own teaching. This lack of accountability led eventually to a bureaucratic performance in the way Maya was taught, as well as in the ways Maya was presented in the school.

The Bureaucratic Process for the Absence of Maya Instruction

During the end of year celebration of the 2016-2017 school cycle, Elisa's supervisor talked about the success of teaching Maya at the school and how this was a characteristic of the instructional quality provided at Palal-na. During her 2017-2018 end of the year speech, Elisa touched upon the role of the PETC's *Lineas de trabajo educativas* at the school, especially the ones concerning Maya. Curiously enough, she engaged in this same institutional rite at the end of the following school year celebration. The recursive nature of these speeches spoke to the

co-construction of school safe time (Hornberger; Chick, 2001), where the teacher, parents and the supervisor were all acting as expected as they spoke and heard about what is learned in the school – especially about Maya. However, in reality, formal instruction in Maya ever actually happened.

Although Maya instruction was not present in the regular discourse nor curriculum of the school, it manifested as a feature that identified the uniqueness of the school during bureaucratic events (Loyola-Hernández, 2018). Even though these performances were repeated from year to year, the supervisor did not hold the teacher or the school accountable for teaching Maya. Furthermore, because including Maya in her own assessments was optional, Elisa decided not to include it, and the parents, in many ways, because of their particular way of understanding how Maya is learned, held to the ideas that Maya needs to be taught at the house or that the teacher would know how to promote it when needed. These rituals and mechanisms did not go unnoticed. When I interviewed the Education Chief for the municipality, who is also Elisa's supervisor boss, he emphasized that:

> Nosotros como maestros, no hablamos maya, entonces se va perdiendo. Todo es en español. El maya se practica de una forma más administrativa, nada mas, como un folclor, y no se adentra como en otras culturas[11] (2019.06.26).

Another illustration of the absence of Maya instruction came in its relationship to multigrade schooling, where the absence of policy attention to multigrade schooling promoted and perpetuated a culture of bureaucratic accountability rather than a culture of teaching-learning accountability. In October 2017, the supervisor went to visit the school and asked Elisa for her scope and sequences. Elisa did not have them and explained to me that this is one of the greatest challenges since she needs to attend to the different age cohorts at the same time. She explained to the supervisor that she was confused, and instead of bringing her scope and sequences, she brought her Maya planning books. Two things are worth mentioning here. Firstly, when I asked Elisa if she ever followed a scope and sequence, she told me that she did not, since *no hay un programa normal para los tres grados*[12] (Interview with Elisa, 2019.07.10). Thus, she cannot be accountable to a program that does not consider the nature of multigrade schooling (Mendieta Melgar; Castro; Priego Vázquez; Perales Franco, 2019). Moreover, her Maya planning books were actually instead her own notes from a Maya course she was taking, which was considered satisfactory evidence for the supervisor to report to the Education Chief that Elisa had her scope and sequences.

As I mentioned before, focusing on the bottom-up policy perspective allows us to see a prevalent dilemma in policy implementation: policies and programs will always maintain a potential for corruption, especially in places where there are no consistent accountability measures. Even though Elisa nor the supervisor were willingly exercising a corruption practice, it was evident that bureaucracy affected not just

the instruction and learning of Maya that happened inside of the school, but also its supervisory activities. The school's supervisor had to visit ten schools all around the municipality, fill out paper work and try to also be accountable to her own superiors, which in turn seemed to also be an overwhelming practice that responded to a culture of bureaucratic accountability rather than a teaching-learning accountability at the supervisory level. In the end, education at this school was a balancing act of papers, signatures and official events that would hopefully lead to teaching and learning Maya.

By the end of the supervisor's visit, which more often than not came as surprise, Elisa shared with me how the supervisor told her that "[…] ella no sabía que todos los días eran así, pensaba que era una tarea mucho más sencilla de hacer, y que de verdad entendía que todo esto era un reto[13]" (Interview with Elisa, 2019.07.10). Elisa told me that this was the first time in all her years at the school that the supervisor recognized the challenge she, as a teacher, confronted every day and that she hoped the supervisor understood why she needed more help in the school. The school's supervisor did not know the workings of multigrade schools, what they could or could not accomplish, and what they should be effectively accountable for. Still, after knowing Palal-na's multigrade situation and at the same time not knowing what it could and should be accountable for, the supervisor asked Elisa to create her own contextualized materials and scope and sequences for each one of the age groups, which Elisa agreed she should develop while also stating, "[…] siempre lo administrativo me quita tiempo[14]". Elisa thus asked the supervisor to free her from some of her administrative tasks, like organizing the parents' committees, completing checklists of learning tasks that she did not have time to teach, or reviewing the state of the school's infrastructure. The supervisor told her that what she should do is organize the parents in order for them to help her to create the school materials. Informed by her prior experiences, Elisa knew this was a dead-end recommendation and solution.

When she actually received help from the Ministry of Education, it was because of a bureaucratic confusion. During the 2016-2017 school year, she had two student-teachers helping her, but they soon left because they only arrived due to a paperwork error made by the supervisor, who had forgotten that Palal-na was a single-teacher multigrade school, and the student-teachers needed their practicum in an *escuela regular*. The supervisor thus hid a reality that these future teachers would confront in the region and, at the same time missed an opportunity for these student-teachers to help children to hopefully learn some Maya by alleviating Elisa's administrative burden.

Discussion: dilemmas at the frontline

The gap from policy to practice in the Indigenous ECE in Huaytsik is not attributable to a single stakeholder but to the complicated relations among social mechanisms (e.g., institutions, administrative pa-

perwork, speeches) as they work in systematic ways that reproduce and perpetuate – not necessarily intentionally – the poorest education for the poorest people. These social mechanisms have inadvertently produced a cycle where teaching and learning processes are caught in what I call a culture of bureaucratic accountability, rather than fostering a culture of teaching-learning accountability. Policies related to testing, merit-pay and school and country educational rankings become obstacles for learning.

Palal-na, as the only single-teacher multigrade preschool in Huaytsik, had at its core the mission of opening ideological and implementational spaces for Maya to be taught, learned, and practiced from the preschool level. However, Elisa, as the only teacher servicing the school, dedicates time to required bureaucratic duties, foreclosing ideological and implementational spaces for children to learn in a Maya school environment. As Johnson and Johnson (2015) explain, during the implementation of language policies and programs, some frontline workers act as language arbiters who hold a disproportionate amount of influence as they interpret and implement policies. In what I presented, it is not the teacher or the supervisor who disproportionately exercise their power to interpret the PETC and its *Lineas de trabajo educativas* to open spaces for Maya to be taught; instead, it is the PETC itself and the paperwork that it involves that have enmeshed the school and its stakeholders in a cycle of bureaucratic paperwork that places learning, and especially the learning of Maya, as a low priority for the teacher and the supervisor.

Elisa successfully kept the PETC and applied for available grants throughout her years in Palal-na. However, as I have shown, keeping the program has raised certain dilemmas.

Dilemmas Revealed by a Bottom-Up Policy Perspective

According to Elisa, the lack of community commitment to the school has not changed during her eight years at Palal-na. This puts forward a first dilemma: *what does placing blame on the community, the teacher, the supervisor, and the educational system really do for us?* I argue it is not productive to place blame on any one individual or institution; rather, we should examine how various factors come together to produce the absence of instruction, supervision, accountability, and collaboration.

Elisa persists with her goal of establishing what she understands as quality education: a functional PETC, inclusion of the *forgotten* children in town, and the survival of Palal-na as an institution. She knew that registering children allowed Palal-na to exist. But this surfaced a second dilemma: *what is the function of the school if the registered children don't come?* Elisa many times questioned her own flexibility in allowing children to arrive as late as 9 or 10 a.m. (sometimes even 11 a.m.) when classes supposedly started at 8 a.m. She wanted children to have an opportunity to get a formal education which, for various reasons,

was denied in other spaces. However, she also felt that people were taking advantage of her flexibility, and she did not want schooling to be a bureaucratic rite of passage where you will be given the official paper to go to primary school as long as you are physically present a couple of times. Even though she recognized the bureaucratic accountability field in which they all acted, she still wanted the school and students to be accountable for learning.

Finally, accepting many children with disabilities raised a third dilemma. Elisa felt she had to balance competing needs, and she wondered: "[…] what should take greater priority: inclusion of students with high needs, or quality instruction for the larger number of children?" In the end, Elisa attempted to mold the institution in ways that benefited the families and the children.

Towards a Teaching and Learning Accountability

Elisa shrewdly navigated her administrative tasks and the children's schooling experience. To be and become a teacher in these multigrade schools means to be structured by bureaucratic incentives and recognize that these factors will persist (Rockwell; Garay Molina, 2014). It is a creative process that responds to the rise of a culture of bureaucratic accountability in education, rather than to a culture of teaching and learning accountability. Elisa responded to a system where everyone is under tremendous pressure. Changing the status quo of the school, in the end, would require more work for her, the supervisor and the Education Chief. All in all, this balance produced a system moved by inertia rather than by intentions.

Accountability to bureaucracy and paperwork thus have become an educational aim, a procedure to control the implementation of programs, which unfortunately, end up not being implemented (O'Neill, 2002). Quality multigrade schooling and bilingual education do not exclusively depend on an innovative curriculum or dynamic strategies for teachers; they depend on concrete conditions that respond to larger economic, social and political factors such as the need for school materials, effective supervision, flexible schedules, more teachers for multigrade schools, janitors and less administrative burden (Mendieta Melgar; Castro; Priego Vázquez; Perales Franco, 2019; Weiss, 2000). These conditions are the building blocks that impede or sustain the quality of schooling.

Top-down policies that promote a quality early childhood education or bilingual education that ignore socio-economic conditions and bureaucratic burdens will keep on being ineffective without serious and consistent interventions (Anyon, 2005; INEE, 2019; Little, 2004). If Indigenous schools are framed as places where minoritized languages will be revitalized, we are doomed, not because revitalization itself is so challenging, but because the necessary conditions for learning are rarely addressed.

Conclusions

The existence of a policy such as PETC is not sufficient; systemic barriers must be addressed in order for these programs to accomplish their mission of improving the quality of education and inclusion. Otherwise, governments are simply promoting *policy fiction* (Brodkin, 2008, p. 325). The current situation allows, at most, a superficial policy achievement. Further, frontline policy workers such as Elisa merit scholarly attention for their role influencing ideological and implementational spaces.

Hornberger and colleagues (2018, p. 178) ask, "Why is it that so many promising and well-intended policies lead to naught?" Too many promising policies focus more on the form than the actual content of implementation. Such ambitious policies overemphasize the culture of accountability to the detriment of actual teaching and learning.

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Notes

1 Hereafter Maya.

2 Pseudonyms are used for the name of the town and people.

3 Approximately $9 USD.

4 She regretted [her previous decisions] because now she has too many children and she does not know what she will do with so many.

5 The forgotten.

6 Educational Guidelines.

7 (a) serve vulnerable populations or be in a social risk context and (b) present low educational attainment or high school dropout rates.

8 We understand that it is complicated for a teacher that attends to three grades, we cannot account for 100% of the teaching-learning process, the results do not even get to a 70%, because of the complexity of attending to these grades. In fact, many teachers tell me "[…] do not ask that I work with the [official] program because children do not even know how to read or write. I am going to do what I have to and then follow the program, but right now, the children are at zero".

9 From the sixth article in the Mexican General Education Law: The educational authorities in the area of their competence, will establish mechanisms for the regulation, purpose, application, transparency and monitoring of donations or voluntary quotas. The payment of any consideration that prevents or conditions the provision of educational services to students is prohibited (SEP, Ley General de Educación, 1993-ratified on 2018.01.19).

10 Approximately $ 1,560 USD.

11 As teachers, we do not speak Maya, thus it is getting lost. Everything is in Spanish. Maya is practiced in an administrative way, nothing more, it is like folklore, not like in other cultures.

12 There is no normal program for the three grades.

13 She did not know that every day was like this, she thought that these tasks were way simpler, and she really understood that all this was a challenge.

14 The administrative tasks always take my time.

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