

# **BRIDGES TO BILINGUALISM: TEACHERS' ROLES IN PROMOTING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN GUATEMALA**

**Madeline Milian<sup>1</sup>**

*University of Northern Colorado, USA*

**Dana Walker**

*University of Northern Colorado, USA*

---

## **Abstract**

The Peace Accords of 1996 sought to bring significant changes for Indigenous people of Guatemala by promoting new educational opportunities centering on the recognition that culture and language are critical components of education. Bilingual intercultural programs have been created and attention to the detrimental effects of language loss and cultural identity have gained attention as Guatemala portrays itself to the rest of the world as a proud multiethnic and multilingual nation. As teachers are essential in the implementation of educational programs, this study explores the perspectives of 13 Indigenous bilingual teachers from multiple communities, and their role in implementing programs that promote bilingualism, biliteracy, and intercultural education in their respective communities. Teachers proudly accepted the responsibility of bridging school and home languages and recognized that educational progress had taken place, but expressed the need for continued improvements, as there are still many unmet goals both at the national and individual community levels.

**Keywords:** bilingual intercultural education (BIE), Indigenous education, Mayan languages, Guatemala

---

---

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondence:* Madeline Milian, McKee Hall Box 107, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO, 80639; Email: [madeline.milian@unco.edu](mailto:madeline.milian@unco.edu)

*Acknowledgement:* With respect and agradecimiento to all of our collaborators. We are honored by your trust. Chjonte, b'anyox, maltyox, matyox, yuch'antiyoxh, yujualdios, tantix, gracias, and thank you.

## Introduction

*Cuando era pequeña hablaba español y maya q'eqchi', a pesar de las restricciones gubernamentales por la política de castellanización en las escuelas. Las lenguas mayas las seguimos practicando por la necesidad que había de comunicarse con las personas monolingües maya hablantes pues mis padres eran muy visitados por las personas para recibir atención ya que ellos eran promotores voluntarios de salud por muchos años. Ahora, sigo utilizando mis dos idiomas español y maya q'eqchi'. Hablo indistintamente los dos idiomas de acuerdo al ámbito donde me desenvuelva. ....español es el idioma oficial de Guatemala y lo hablo sin ninguna limitante siempre que no esté en una comunidad monolingüe q'eqchi' en donde según la normativa legal del Estado de Guatemala, el idioma oficial debe ser el de los nativos (Verónica, Q'eqchi', bilingual teacher).*

As Verónica explains, she spoke both Spanish and the Mayan language Q'eqchi' as a child despite the government policy of Spanish only at school. One reason she maintained her Q'eqchi' was that she frequently communicated with monolingual health workers who came to visit her parents. Now she speaks Spanish, the official language of Guatemala, freely, but when she is in a monolingual Q'eqchi' community she speaks Q'eqchi', the official local language.

The participants of the 1996 Peace Accords in Guatemala viewed equal access to basic education as an essential tool for fostering a shared sense of values and respect for diversity within the multicultural context of the country, as well as a means to support equity and economic development, particularly in rural areas (Anderson, 2001; Meade, 2012). With the Accords, the Mayan Movement succeeded in pushing through an amendment to the Constitution on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which redefined the nation as multiethnic, multinational, and multilingual. The government subsequently committed to profound educational reforms, which included: 1) decentralizing and regionalizing the educational system to address local cultural and linguistic contexts, 2) granting Indigenous communities greater control over their local curricula, academic calendars, and the hiring of bilingual teachers and administrators, 3) enforcing the constitutional right to education in all communities and creating legal structures to enforce this right; and 4) increasing the educational budget to implement these reforms (Balcazar, 2010). However, while the Peace Accords included significant new rights and recognition for Indigenous languages and cultures, recent research has raised the question as to whether these rights and recognition have strengthened the education and living conditions of Indigenous Guatemalans. Indeed, as Abbott (2017) wrote in the NACLA Report: "The end of the war did not mean that conflicts ceased in Guatemala, but rather established a peace without social justice that has failed to address the root problems and inequalities that drove the war." Today, many Indigenous communities are still waiting for the educational promises made as part of the signing of the Peace Accords on December 29, 1996.

Concerns related to language contact, language shift, and language loss in Indigenous communities in Guatemala, as well as the negative cultural and linguistic consequences associated with those trends have been well documented (Balcazar, 2010; Richards, 1998). While important political, cultural, and educational movements and reforms have noticeably advanced the status of Indigenous cultures and languages, the implementation of effective bilingual education as a vehicle for maintaining and enriching the languages of Indigenous children and youth continues to encounter serious challenges (Moya, 1997).

The purpose of this paper is to explain the crucial role of Indigenous teachers during the implementation of language policies that were designed to recognize and value the multiple languages that co-exist in this multilingual and multicultural country. Through the examples of the 13 teachers who participated in the study, we aim to represent their perspectives on national, regional, and local actions to promote bilingual intercultural education in their Indigenous communities. We also seek to illustrate the roles these teachers have played in promoting bilingual intercultural education and the factors that facilitate or inhibit their efforts. Finally, we aim to share how the work these dedicated teachers conduct on a daily basis, functions as a bridge connecting young Guatemalan Indigenous students to a renewed and positive vision of language and culture that was non-existent in the world many of these teachers experienced as young children growing up during the Civil War.

### **The Policy Context of Bilingual/Intercultural Education in Guatemala**

In the context of Guatemala and as described by the *Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural*, Bilingual Intercultural Education is an educational modality planned and developed in two languages: the mother tongue or first language (L1) and Spanish (L2); that promotes the coexistence between people of different cultures, directed to the four *pueblos* that cohabit in the Guatemalan territory: Maya, Garífuna, Xinka and Ladino. Bilingual Intercultural Education is the axis in which identity is built and provides the necessary tools so that the four *pueblos* that cohabit in Guatemala expand their opportunities for local, regional and national growth, achieving full development of their potential in all social areas for a true intercultural coexistence.<sup>2</sup>

In a detailed history of language policies in Guatemala, Helmberger (2006) explained that linguistic and ethnic conflicts in Guatemala can be traced to the Spanish Colonization and their efforts to *castellanizar* the Indigenous people by replacing their languages with Spanish and converting them to Christianity. Even after Guatemala gained its independence in 1821, efforts continued to eliminate Mayan languages and replace them with Spanish. These efforts were still evident during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when the government developed programs to teach young Indigenous children Spanish in preschool. As noted by Engle and Chesterfield (1996) it was not until 1965 that Guatemala moved from a monolingual to a bilingual approach when native speakers of Indigenous languages, who had mastered Spanish and completed the sixth grade were recruited as preschool teachers. However, this was a very limited effort to enhance bilingualism as the program resulted from a newly approved constitution in 1965, that included a law titled *Ley Orgánica de Educación* declaring that all teaching should be in Spanish with some Mayan languages. The new law included the program *Castellanización Bilingüe* which provided free instruction in the Indigenous language and an intensive year of oral Spanish instruction to 5-year old children. These efforts began with the Ixil community and were then expanded to include preschool children in the K'iché, Kachikel, Q'eqchi', and Mam communities. The teachers were referred to as *Orientadores de Castellanización* since they were not trained teachers. According to the *Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural* website<sup>3</sup> a total of 65 *Orientadores* were initially employed. In addition to their responsibilities with preschool children, they also conducted community work in the afternoon and worked in an adult literacy campaign in the evening. Unfortunately, instruction starting in first grade was delivered in Spanish, leading to limited success of the early preschool bilingual efforts. The program existed until the late 1970s but

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mineduc.gob.gt/DIGEBI/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mineduc.gob.gt/DIGEBI/index.html>

as explained by Richards (1989), more than 80 percent of Mayan children received monolingual Spanish instruction only.

Since that time, a number of campaigns have been undertaken to transform national language policies and help move the country toward the goal of maintaining a linguistically and culturally diverse country. Examples of these efforts include the Bilingual Education Project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which began as a pilot study in 1979 and incorporated 40 schools using the four major Mayan languages: K'iche', Mam, Q'eqchi', and Kaqchikel. Based on the positive results of this pilot program, the National Program of Bilingual Intercultural Education was incorporated into the Ministry of Education (MOE) under the title *Programa Nacional de la Educación Bilingüe Intercultural* (PRONEBI). In 1995, PRONEBI became the *Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural* (DIGEBI), to make bilingual intercultural education a permanent part of the MOE rather than a temporary program. Currently, DIGEBI is charged with developing bilingual education programs at all educational levels and in all areas; strengthening the identity of different ethnic groups with their own cultural values to promote self-realization; developing, implementing and evaluating the Bilingual Intercultural curriculum; and developing, consolidating and preserving additive bilingualism and language maintenance for Mayan language-speaking students (Chesterfield, Rubio, & Vásquez, 2003). The DIGEBI website<sup>4</sup> provides multiple sources of information ranging from its mission, language policies, and linguistic map to some free instructional materials for teachers in Ixil, Kaqchikel, K'iche', Mam, and Q'eqchi', along with Spanish as an additional language.

The number of schools and communities implementing bilingual intercultural education has continued to grow since its initial implementation in four languages in 40 schools in 1979. As of 2018, the programs administered by DIGEBI include nineteen educational departments (districts) and twelve linguistic communities: Q'eqchi', Achi', Kaqchikel, Ch'orti', Poqomam, Mam, Q'anjob'al, Garifuna, Mopán, K'iche', Tz'utujil and Xinka.

For the purpose of providing BIE throughout the country, linguistic communities in Guatemala have been divided into four different categories determined by their sociolinguistic characteristics. As described in the *Modelo Educativo Bilingüe e Intercultural* (DIGEBI, 2009), these linguistic communities have been classified as: Type A (monolingual in L1), Type B (bilingual in an Indigenous language (L1) and Spanish), Type C (Indigenous community experiencing language loss with a tendency to be monolingual in Spanish), and Type D (pluri-ethnic and multilingual). For each type of linguistic community, a different approach to bilingual instruction is applied with the goal of supporting, maintaining, or revitalizing the community languages and Spanish. It is interesting to note that the MOE (2009, pp. 62-64) uses the term *Modalidades de Intervención* (Intervention Modalities) to describe language instruction recommended for each linguistic classification, rather than making reference to the more traditional Bilingual Educational Models that educators typically use, at least in the U.S., to describe implementation models such as transitional, developmental, or dual-language. The indicated *Modalidades de Intervención* explain the recommended use of L1 and L2 for literacy, oral language, and grammar instruction depending on the grade for each linguistic classification. These sociolinguistic communities and their schools range in size, as indicated by the figures published by the DIGEBI (2015,

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mineduc.gob.gt/DIGEBI/publicaciones.html>

p. 11). In 2015, 64% of communities were classified as Type A, 20% Type B, 13% Type C, and 4 % Type D.

In addition to the legal mandates that frame of BIE in Guatemala, an important accomplishment that assisted in the advancement of Mayan languages was the creation of the Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala (ALMG), which was founded in 1987 and oversees language preservation and standardization (Barrett, 2008). Its main mission is to support the teaching and use of Mayan languages both in public and private sectors in Guatemala. As explained by French (2010), the creation of the ALMG has its roots in the *Segundo Congreso Lingüístico Nacional* (Second National Linguistic Congress) that took place in Quetzaltenango in 1984. At this Congress, Maya linguists, North American missionary and secular linguists, Ladino scholars, and military personnel met to address the effects of multilingualism in Guatemala and to discuss language planning. The group recommended the creation of a new autonomous Maya institution that would exclusively deal with the analysis and promotion of Mayan languages in Guatemala and also emphasized the participation of native speakers with expertise in Indigenous linguistic analysis. This important recommendation was followed by the establishment of ALMG as an autonomous government institution directed by Maya members. Currently, ALMG also engages in language training and materials development as part of their role to promote Mayan languages.

Today, the case of Bilingual Intercultural Education in Guatemala can be viewed with both pessimism and optimism. Progress has been made in establishing a legal basis for the rights of Indigenous students to receive instruction in their languages, and there are ongoing efforts to develop and provide bilingual materials. However, in a study of two Indigenous communities focusing on the revitalization of Mayan language literacy, Holbrock (2016) found that the government has not matched the teachers' enthusiasm with continuing education programs, bilingual curriculum or materials development. She concludes her chapter, however, with reason for hope for Mayan language literacy improvements, based on the enthusiasm and empowerment that she witnessed from instructors and students.

Undoubtedly, the legal mandates that have framed the implementation of BIE in Guatemala are due to the noteworthy efforts that have taken place since the era of *castellanización* and represent a more accepting and supportive stance towards multilingualism and in a multicultural nation. It is worth mentioning that prior to the Peace Accords, few bilingual Indigenous teachers were employed; and when employed, they were often assigned to a community where another Mayan language was spoken so as to prevent them from providing instruction in their own languages. This resulted in instruction being delivered only in Spanish (Maxwell, 2009). Currently, bilingual teachers who successfully pass a bilingual exam and teach in their linguistic communities are rewarded with a modest monthly stipend as long as they are implementing bilingual instruction, as describe in the *Acuerdo Gubernativo Número 22-2004* (Governmental Agreement Number 22-2004) (*Ministerio de Educación*, January 2004). This was a significant change in the way bilingual teachers were selected, placed, and rewarded based on their Indigenous language proficiency. The agreement underscored the importance of having teachers and students communicate in the same shared languages. Additionally, the same governmental agreement decentralized bilingual intercultural education so that the practices were more relevant to each linguistic community. Unfortunately, while there have been efforts to improve bilingual intercultural education Guatemala, as Mead (2012) explained the goal of providing bilingual and intercultural education has not yet been achieved in many communities, particularly in remote rural communities where students experience serious educational disadvantages.

Considering the centrality of teachers' role in the development and maintenance of bilingualism and multiculturalism in the classrooms, our study specifically explores how Indigenous bilingual teachers promote bilingualism and biliteracy in their communities and the role they play in accomplishing this goal.

### **Framework and Methods**

In conceptualizing our study, theoretical perspectives related to language, schooling, Indigenous Intercultural Bilingual Education, and teachers' roles in bilingual contexts guided our work. We believe that Fishman's (1966) significant work on the role of schools in reproducing status relations between languages and identifying the language shift to English that occurred among members of all ethnolinguistic groups in the United States by the third generation, is relevant to the study of other contexts where language shifts are also occurring. López (2009, 2013, 2014) examined the importance of community and school in Indigenous communities in Latin America, and the widening gaps between policy and practice in the implementation of Indigenous Intercultural Bilingual Education. Menken and Garcia (2010) reported on the critical role of teachers' agency when negotiating language policies and as the final arbiters of these policies in the classroom. As these authors explained, there is limited research as to how the complex process of language policies is implemented in different educational contexts and how teachers, who are at the epicenter of this process, translate language policies into practice. Menken and Garcia explained that both external and internal forces influence how teachers interpret and implement educational language policies in their classrooms. Finally, our conceptual framework was informed by Valdiviezo (2010, 2013), who studied the challenges and potential of bilingual education in Peru. Her study of Peruvian Indigenous bilingual teachers illustrates the complexities and contradictions that surround the work of practitioners when implementing BIE policy in their schools.

### **Methods**

The study was guided by the following questions: 1) What are the perspectives of bilingual Guatemalan teachers regarding national, regional, and local actions to promote bilingual intercultural education in their Indigenous communities? 2) What is the role of teachers in promoting bilingual intercultural education in their communities and what factors facilitate or inhibit their role?

Participants in this study consisted of 13 Indigenous Guatemalan bilingual elementary teachers who attended a six-month professional development program at a public university in the United States funded through a collaboration with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)<sup>5</sup>. The teachers, representing more than ten different Indigenous languages and eight ethnic groups, taught in rural Indigenous communities throughout Guatemala. Teachers' ages ranged from 29 to 44 years old, and their teaching experience ranged from 5 to 17 years. They were selected using convenience sampling, from among a group of 20 Guatemalan teachers who participated in the professional development program. The 13 teachers participating in the study were specifically selected because they were bilingual or multilingual and were teaching in classrooms where the Indigenous language was used to promote bilingualism and biliteracy. The teachers were presented with the idea of the project by the authors, both professors of bilingual and multilingual education, and enthusiastically agreed to contribute their experiences. They seemed honored to

---

<sup>5</sup> This research study was not funded by USAID. The content of the manuscript is solely the responsibility of the authors.

participate and when presented with the consent form, many were rather surprised that they needed to sign a permission form to contribute information that they were so passionately and willingly wanted to share. As researchers, our intention was to create a collaborative effort that would allow the teachers to share their perspectives and experiences as a way of understanding the complex nature of their work. Participation in the study was described by some of the teachers as an opportunity to analyze and reflect on their practices in ways that they had not done in the past. For example, Lupe, from Totonicapán, wrote, “*Participación en el estudio fue importante porque nos damos cuenta de cómo nos encontramos en cuanto a nuestro idioma materno, la importancia que le hemos dado, y que lo valoramos.*” (Participation in the study was important because we realized where we are in terms of our mother tongue, the importance that we have given it, and how we value it). The pseudonyms, first language, and home communities of participants are listed in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Participants’ Languages and Communities*

Name*	Indigenous Languages Spoken**	Community
Bal	Achi	Baja Verapaz
Katerina	Achi	Baja Verapaz
Violeta	Tz’utujil K’iche’ Kaqchiquel	Sololá
Verónica	Q’eqchi’	Alta Verapaz
Pablo	Q’eqchi’	Alta Verapaz
José	Kaqchiekel K’iche’ Tz’utujil	Sololá
Marta	Mam	San Marcos
Ofelia	Mam	San Marcos
Orlando	Mam	Huehuetenango
Salvador	Mam	Quiche
Hector	Popti’	Huehuetenango
Carolina	K’iche’	Suchitepéquez
Lupe	K’iche’	Totonicapán

\*Each participant selected a pseudonym name for the study.

\*\*All participants spoke Spanish in addition to their Indigenous language(s).

In order to examine the participants’ roles in promoting and maintaining bilingual intercultural education in their schools, we conducted individual semi-structured interviews, written questionnaires, and a focus group with six participants who were on campus when data collection took place. We also administered an electronic written questionnaire to seven participants who went through the program but who had already returned to Guatemala when the study began. The interviews were conducted towards the end of their professional development program to allow the participants to feel more comfortable with the process. All face-to-face interviews were conducted in Spanish, audio recorded, and transcribed. We contextualized the teachers’ narratives through an investigation of language use and language shift in their respective communities, using a language survey similar to that

developed by Balcazar (2010) to explore intergenerational language use among Kakchikel-Mayas. In order to understand the teachers' point of view and the meanings attributed to intercultural bilingual education in their communities, we used the ethnographic interview methodology developed by Spradley (1979), using domain, contrastive, and taxonomic analyses to discover central themes, which are reported below.

### **Findings**

Our analysis of the data representing teachers' perspectives on their efforts to promote bilingual intercultural education in Guatemala revealed two general findings. First, all teachers have undertaken multiple strategies for furthering bilingual intercultural education at multiple levels, including in the home and in their personal lives, communities, schools and districts. Second, teachers' efforts are both supported and obstructed by policies and educational-sociocultural practices at the local, state, and national levels. In the following section, we begin with an overview of teachers' perspectives on their efforts to promote Bilingual Intercultural Education. We then discuss the teachers' perspectives on the socio-cultural contexts of education that support or inhibit their efforts to develop bilingual intercultural education in Guatemala.

#### ***Personal Professional Development to Become Bilingual Teachers***

Having been educated primarily in Spanish, though from Mayan speaking homes, the participants in this study were not sufficiently literate in their Indigenous languages to teach in a bilingual classroom. In order to become bilingual teachers, they pursued professional development at the *Academia de Lenguas Maya*, often at great expense and personal sacrifice, such as traveling long distances through the night by bus to attend classes. The Academy of Mayan Languages (*Academia*) is an autonomous state organization established to sustain the Mayan languages in the nation, and to standardize their writing systems. The teachers viewed this professional development as fundamental in their roles as bilingual teachers and community leaders. They learned not only how to read and write in the mother language, but several teachers also learned other Mayan languages spoken in their communities. As Pablo, stated,

*Mi familia es Q'eqchi; hay otros dialectos, para entender gente de esos dialectos, la Academia dio la posibilidad.*

My family is Q'eqchi; there are other dialects [in the community]. The Academy gave me the possibility and to understand people from those dialects.

They also learned about Mayan cultural practices in the different regions of Guatemala.

*La Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala está preparando a muchas personas a rescatar y salvaguardar los elementos culturales mayas de cada región.*

The Academy of Mayan Languages in Guatemala is preparing many people to recover and safeguard cultural elements of each Mayan region.

The teachers expressed pride and sense of great satisfaction in having become literate in their mother language. There was also a sense of frustration at the shortage of bilingual teachers in the country, and the fact that there were monolingual teachers in their own

schools who were incapable of imparting Mayan literacy and linguistic knowledge to the students.

### *Teacher Perspectives on Language and Identity*

Parent outreach by teachers about the importance of maintaining the mother language at home, and to gain parental support for bilingual intercultural education in the school, was one of the main themes discussed by participants. They framed their commitment to promoting the mother language at home and in school in terms of preserving ethnic identity, as well as the cohesion of the pluralistic nation and the well-being of its people. Regarding the relationship between language and identity, Verónica, Q'eqchi' speaker from Alta Verapaz, noted,

*Nuestro mayor legado es que estamos hasta la fecha, hablando nuestro idioma, aun cuando dejamos muchos de usar el traje o muchas personas usan sus trajes, pero no hablan el idioma.*

Our greatest legacy is that we are, to this moment, still speaking our language, even when many of us no longer wear the indigenous dress. There are, [on the other hand], many people who wear their traditional indigenous clothing but do not speak the language. – Verónica

Salvador, a Mam speaker from Quiche, shared a similar perspective:

*El idioma es parte de la identidad étnica, es decir, no pueden existir ambos de manera aislada, ya que se complementan entre de sí.*

Language is part of ethnic identity, that is, both cannot exist in isolation, since they complement each other.

As did Bal, Achi from Alta Verapaz:

*Perteneceemos a la etnia Achi, por lo que la enseñanza se da en Achi. Con ello se valoriza y se da a conocer nuestra identidad, incluso con la vestimenta.*

In our case, we belong to the Achi ethnic group, so we teach in the Achi language. In this way, our identity is valued and made known, even with the clothing.

The teachers described the preservation of Indigenous languages as an ongoing struggle against the forces working to erase Mayan ethnic identity and language: globalization, social and mass media, the desire of young people to learn English instead of the local Mayan language, and the stigmatization of Indigenous culture and languages. The teachers saw themselves as the 'keepers of the flame,' as it were, as defenders of the language that would disappear without their work with families and in the schools. Bal and José, the latter a multilingual Kaqchikel speaker from Sololá, expressed a similar opinion on this topic.

*Actualmente se está rescatando el idioma, por lo que los únicos que le están dando ese valor son los docentes que a diario lo practica con los estudiantes. Muchas familias que*

*pertenecen a esta etnia ya no practican el idioma, sin embargo, en la escuela es el lugar donde lo aprende.*

Currently the language is being rescued; the only ones who are giving it value are the teachers who practice it daily with the students. Many families that belong to this ethnic group [Achi] no longer practice the language, however school is the place where they learn it. - Bal

*Poco a poco, se está exterminando por los procesos de transculturación mundial. Los padres de familia, casi no quieren que se les enseñe a sus hijos el idioma, sin embargo, hay exigencias de parte del Estado de Guatemala, por medio del Ministerio de Educación.*

Little by little, [the language] is being exterminated by the world transculturation processes. The parents, almost do not want their children to be taught the language, however, there are demands from the State of Guatemala, through the Ministry of Education. – José

Interestingly, the value attributed to the maintenance of Mayan language is grounded in both local historical, ethno-linguistic considerations and in the educational and languages policies of the nation, established in the post-1990 constitution. Teachers thus situate themselves at the nexus of the local and the national, the Indigenous groups and the nation-state, and as mediators of both within their local contexts. Bal, in the following explanation, highlights the role of the national language policy in shaping identity and allowing for the four main ethnic groups – Maya, Garífuna, Xinka and Ladino – to co-exist within a multilingual nation:

*Dentro del Currículo Nacional Base (CNB) se han establecido la enseñanza del idioma materno, desarrollado en sus 4 habilidades, escuchar, hablar, leer y escribir.*

Within the National Base Curriculum (CNB), the teaching of the mother tongue has been established, with a focus on developing the four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing.

*La Educación Bilingüe Intercultural –EBI– es el desarrollo y modalidad educativa planificado y elaborado en dos idiomas: la lengua materna o primer idioma (L1) y el español (L2); que promueve la convivencia entre personas de diferentes culturas, dirigido a los cuatro pueblos que cohabitan en el territorio guatemalteco: Maya, Garífuna, Xinka y Ladino.*

Intercultural Bilingual Education [BIE] is the educational modality planned and developed in two languages: the mother tongue or first language (L1) and Spanish (L2). This promotes the coexistence between people of different cultures, especially the four primary ethnic groups that cohabit the Guatemalan territory: Maya, Garífuna, Xinka and Ladino.

*La EBI es el eje en el cual se construye la identidad y proporciona las herramientas necesarias para que los cuatro pueblos que cohabitan en Guatemala amplíen sus oportunidades de crecimiento local, regional y nacional, logrando el pleno desarrollo*

*de su potencial en los ámbitos de la vida social para una verdadera convivencia intercultural.*

The IBE is the axis through which identity is constructed and provides the necessary tools for the four groups that cohabit Guatemala to expand their opportunities for local, regional and national growth, achieving the full development of their potential in the areas of social life for a true intercultural coexistence. – Bal

The teachers thus saw themselves as carrying out the nation-state's constitutional obligations to fulfill the goals of Intercultural Bilingual Education, as well as the historical necessity to preserve local Indigenous identity, language, and culture.

***Work with Parents to Promote Indigenous Language Use at Home.***

A major focus of the teachers' efforts to promote use of the Indigenous language has been with parents. This work represents both possibilities and great challenges for promoting bilingualism and bilingual intercultural education in their communities. The perception of parents' attitudes toward the mother language, and willingness to use it at home, seems to vary across regions. Ofelia and Orlando, speakers of Mam, expressed a rather pessimistic view:

*Los padres no enseñan a sus hijos en el idioma de la comunidad por ciertas razones, a veces existe el racismo cuando van a la secundaria, porque tienen que ir a la Ciudad a estudiar donde solo se habla el español. Los padres temen a que sus hijos sufran un Bulling.*

Parents do not teach their children in the language of the community for several reasons: sometimes there is racism when they go to high school, because they have to go to the city to study where only Spanish is spoken. Parents fear that their children will suffer bullying. – Ofelia

*Los padres de familia le dan más prioridad a otro idioma que no se habla a diario en la familia o la comunidad.-*

Some parents give priority to another language that is not spoken daily in the family or the community. – Orlando

In contrast, Verónica, speaker of Q'eqchi' from Alta Verapaz, noted that there were mothers who refused to speak another language than their Indigenous language at home:

*Nuestras madres son muy opositoras – insisten en hablar su lengua ... se resisten a comunicarse en otro idioma con sus hijos e hijas.”*

Our students' mothers are very oppositional - they insist on speaking their language ... they resist communicating in another language with their sons and daughters. - Verónica

As we will discuss below, the teachers also described discrepant experiences working with parents to promote bilingualism in their schools.

### ***Efforts to Promote Bilingual Intercultural Education in School***

The participants emphasized schools' and teachers' central role and responsibility in promoting and reviving Indigenous languages in the school and community:

*Nuestro papel en la educación bilingüe es implementar el idioma materno de los niños y niñas para seguir fomentando y rescatando nuestro idioma materno. Casi se estaba perdiendo nuestro idioma materno por muchos factores: Por la transculturización, por padres jóvenes que se avergüenzan reconocer lo que son, por discriminación, etc.*

Our role in bilingual education is to implement the mother tongue of children to continue promoting and recovering our mother tongue. We were almost losing our mother tongue due to many factors: transculturation, young parents who are ashamed to recognize what they are, discrimination, etc. – Carolina

Teachers described their concerted efforts to promote the local Indigenous language, such as those described by K'iche' speaker Lupe from Totonicapán:

*Motivar a los padres de familia a tener una práctica de idioma materno; concientizar y sensibilizar a los padres de familia sobre la importancia de idioma materno; mantener y recuperar el idioma materno a través de las prácticas de lectura y escritura en las aulas.*

Motivate parents to use the mother language; raise awareness and sensitize parents about the importance of mother language; maintain and revitalize the mother tongue through reading and writing practices in the classroom. – Lupe

However, the teachers felt strongly that their ability to promote multilingualism and intercultural education depended in large part on parental buy-in and support. Katerina argued, “You have to work hard with parents to help them understand the importance of education.”

As with the efforts to encourage Indigenous language use at home, the teachers reported discrepant experiences in gaining parental support for bilingual education in their schools. Some parents viewed bilingual education as an impediment to academic learning:

*La población se opone a incluir la educación bilingüe en las escuelas con la excusa de que atrasa la educación de sus hijos, pero se les ha concientizado del valor cultural que se tiene cuando dominan dos o más idiomas. El maestro explica detalladamente que cuando sean futuros profesionales, serán contratados en sus comunidades y en la actualidad las empresas privadas requieren de personas bilingües en las zonas rurales en donde predomina un idioma indígena.*

The population is opposed to including bilingual education in schools with the excuse that it delays the education of their children. But they have been made aware of the cultural value the children have when they master two or more

languages. The teacher explains in detail that when they are future professionals, they will be hired in their communities and that now private companies require bilingual people in rural areas where an indigenous language predominates. -Orlando

An extreme example of parental opposition to the more progressive approaches of bilingual intercultural education in rural Mayan speaking communities was provided by Katerina, who is an Achi speaker from Baja Verapaz. Her example highlights the difficulty teachers encounter in bridging past educational experiences and contemporary efforts to promote more democratic, pluralistic educational practices. Katerina suggested that parents are often mistrustful of schools because in the past, as she said, “*Las escuelas arruinaban los niños, arruinaban su lengua y sus costumbres.* / Schools ruined the children, ruined their language and their customs.” According to Katerina, parents view the teachers, whom they call “*suelteros,*” the salaried workers,” as promulgators of linguistic and disciplinary practices that were contrary to those that the parents were familiar with:

*Ellos [los padres] quieren la pedagogía de antes. Los cambios en la metodología y la disciplina correctiva, no preventiva, es diferente de lo que experimentaron los padres. Mi maestro era dictador... Nunca escucho los padres hablando de la democracia.*

They [the parents] want the pedagogy from the old days. Changes in methodology and corrective discipline, not preventive, is different from what parents experienced. My teacher was a dictator ... I never hear parents today talking about democracy [as the teachers do.]

Katerina recalled how one year, during a workshop designed to bridge the gap between parents’ expectations for schooling and the more progressive approaches promulgated by the Ministry of Education and implemented by teachers, the parents and teachers engaged in a nine-hour contentious meeting where parents expressed their dissatisfaction with the changes. The incident was sparked by the teachers’ insistence that a promising student be allowed to go to school, while the mother insisted on keeping him home under the pretext that he was ill. Parents in this region typically pulled their children out of school after third grade for economic reasons, the need for more laboring hands at home. The incident spotlighted the lack of trust between the parents and teachers in this community.

*Los maestros no iban a hacer lo que los padres querían. Discutimos fuertemente, porque queríamos que un niño fuera a la escuela – era muy inteligente. Estaba supuestamente enfermo, y la madre no quería que fuera. No hay confianza entre padres y maestros.*

The teachers were not going to do what the parents wanted. We strongly argued, because we wanted the child to go to school - he was very intelligent. He was sick, and the mother did not want him to go to school. There is no trust between parents and teachers.

This was an extreme example of opposing perspectives and expectations among parents and teachers resulting in a confrontation. Yet in the same department and in the same minority Mayan language community of Achi, Bal described a very different experience. He stated

that gains in bilingual education in his Achi community were made possible through the support and trust of parents:

*[El fomento de la educación bilingüe en nuestra comunidad] ha sido facilitado por la aceptación de los padres de familia y la confianza que le están depositando a esta nueva modalidad. Primero, se han concientizado a los padres de familia sobre la importancia del aprendizaje del niño en su propio idioma, así mismo ellos han ayudado a sus hijos con pequeños trabajos en la que se utilice la lengua materna. Al principio los padres estaban inconformes con estas nuevas formas de aprendizaje, sin embargo, hasta la fecha se han dado cuenta del beneficio adquirido. Los estudiantes han aprendido más rápido en su propio idioma y no ha habido mucha repetencia de grado.*

[The furtherance of bilingual education in our community] has been facilitated by the acceptance of parents and the trust they are placing in this new modality. First, parents have been made aware of the importance of teaching the child in their own language, and they have helped their children with small jobs in which the mother tongue is used. At first the parents were dissatisfied with these new forms of learning, however, to date they have realized the benefit acquired. Students have learned faster in their own language and there has not been much grade repetition.

Acceptance by parents of more progressive bilingual intercultural approaches to education were described by other teachers, such as Lupe, a K'iche' speaker from Totonicapán in the western highlands:

*Los padres de familia han ido aceptando la práctica de lecto-escritura del idioma materno. Motivan a los alumnos con cantos y cuentos en el idioma materno para lograr el desenvolvimiento personal... La metodología que se está utilizando es la de exposición oral, dramatizaciones, narración de cuentos, historias, leyendas, y cantos en su idioma.*

The parents have accepted the practice of reading and writing in their mother language. The teachers motivate the students with songs and stories in the native language to achieve personal involvement [in academic tasks]. The methodology that is being used is that of oral presentation, dramatizations, storytelling, stories, legends, and songs in their language.

These examples provide insight into the divergent experiences that bilingual teachers have had with Mayan-speaking parents in their efforts to gain parental trust and further bilingual intercultural education in their local communities.

### ***Teacher Development of Materials in the Indigenous Language***

The teachers in this study all reported that they developed their own classroom materials in the local Mayan language, due to the dearth of Mayan language materials provided by the Ministry of Education, especially in minority Mayan languages. The teachers contextualized the national curriculum using local traditions, material and cultural resources that addressed local needs.

*Los maestros, somos creativos, aunque no tenemos recursos didácticos utilizamos los elementos de la naturaleza para el proceso enseñanza-aprendizaje.*

Teachers, we are creative, although we do not have teaching resources we use the natural elements for the teaching-learning process. – José

*La mayoría de docentes elaboran sus propios materiales para facilitar el proceso de aprendizaje. Realizan las adecuaciones curriculares acorde al contexto como establece el Currículum Nacional Base.*

Most teachers develop their own materials to facilitate the learning process, and make curricular adjustments to the local context, as established by the National Base Curriculum. – Pablo

The types of materials developed in the mother language include grammar worksheets, short story books, vocabulary flash cards, the *lotería* game, posters, workbooks, dictionaries, and graphs.

The teachers noted that while the majority of educational materials provided by the state were written in Spanish, there were some texts written in the major Mayan languages of K'iche', Q'eqchi', Kaqchiquel, and Mam. The teachers disapproved of the fact that these texts were intended only for learning to read and write in the Indigenous language, not for content area instruction.

*Todo recurso dotado por el Ministerio de Educación, solamente está en español en las áreas curriculares de enseñanza. Algunos textos vienen específicamente en el idioma mam para implementar la educación bilingüe en el aula, pero sólo para aprender a leer y saber escribir.*

All resources provided by the Ministry of Education are only in Spanish in the curricular areas of education. Some texts come specifically in the Mam language to implement bilingual education in the classroom, but only to learn to read and know how to write. – Orlando

*Les enseñan solamente a leer y escribir a los niños en la lengua materna indígena en la escuela.*

The children are taught only to read and write in the Indigenous mother tongue at school. – Verónica

Indigenous language materials were provided by non-governmental international agencies such as German Cooperation, but they were not widely available throughout the Indigenous regions of Guatemala.

*Elaboración de Libros Grandes muy del contexto real de nuestras escuelas ya que hacemos concursos de cuentos inventados en ambos idiomas y afortunadamente contamos con el apoyo de la Cooperación Alemana, La Intersindical de España y La Asociación de Maestros del Noroccidente con quienes unimos esfuerzos para la*

*publicación de nuestros libros regionales. Básicamente es el Nivel Preescolar y Primer grado de Primaria.*

The elaboration of Big Books based on the real contexts of our schools, in which we make invented stories contests in both Spanish and the Indigenous languages. Fortunately, we have the support of the German Cooperation, the Inter-Union of Spain and the Association of Teachers of the Northwest with whom we join efforts to publish our regional books. Basically, it is the Preschool and First grade of Primary [for which we have these Indigenous language educational materials]. – Verónica

In developing materials in their local languages, the teachers drew on local community resources, especially regarding the natural environment.

*[En los materiales que yo desarrollo en q'eqchi'] uso recursos naturales como árboles, animales domésticos, el suelo, rocas y elementos culturales: la rudimentaria, la comida, la artesanía, la alfarería, etc. La comunidad se convierte en laboratorio para los estudiantes.*

[In the materials that I develop in Q'eqchi '] I draw on and represent natural resources such as trees, domestic animals, soil, rocks and cultural elements: food, crafts, pottery, etc. The community becomes a laboratory for students. – Pablo

Ofelia also spoke of drawing on local knowledge of natural resources and cultural practices of the community:

*Utilizo material reciclable como cartón, cajas de huevo, vasos y platos desechables donde el niño puede dibujar y escribir en mam. También ya aprendimos a utilizar la naturaleza pintamos con las flores. Salimos a las montañas a buscar flores de colores luego pintamos en papel bond o cartulina.*

I use recyclable material such as cardboard, egg boxes, cups and disposable plates where the child can draw and write in Mam. We have also learned to use nature, we paint with flowers. We go to the mountains to look for flowers of colors then paint on bond paper or cardboard. – Ofelia

Similarly, Bal described using local folklore in his educational materials:

*Como docente, he utilizado como recurso elementos propios del entorno para la redacción de otros textos, cuentos, leyendas en su propio idioma.*

As a teacher, I have used elements of the environment as a resource for the writing of other texts, stories, and legends in their own language. – Bal

As Ofelia summarized,

*Los educadores locales tienen conocimiento de la comunidad, por lo tanto, ellos usan los materiales que encuentran en el contexto.*

The local educators have knowledge of the community; therefore, they use the materials they find in the context.

***Support for Teachers' Efforts to Promote Bilingual Intercultural Education from the Guatemalan Governmental and Civil Society***

In general, efforts identified by participants as supporting them in the implementation of BIE were rooted in the governmental agreements and language policies that have taken place in Guatemala in the last decades. They repeatedly mentioned the *Decreto 19-2003, Ley Idiomas Nacionales (Decree 19-2003, National Languages Law)*<sup>6</sup>, *Acuerdo Gubernativo Número 22-2004 (Governmental Agreement Number 22-2004) (Ministerio de Educación, January 2004)*; and the *Modelo Educativo Bilingüe e Intercultural (DIGEBI, 2009)*.

Participants described how a proficiency exam identifies those teachers who can use the Indigenous language in the classroom and these teachers are given a modest stipend that can be used to buy materials for their classrooms. Ofelia explained,

*El Ministerio de Educación nos da un bono por bilingüismo de 200 quetzales equivalente a 25 dólares más o menos cada mes. Todos los docentes fuimos sometidos a una evaluación para saber el porcentaje del dominio del idioma materno de la comunidad donde trabajamos y lo ganamos con 70 puntos mínimo para lograr el bono.*

The Ministry of Education gives us a bonus for bilingualism of 200 quetzales equivalent to 25 dollars more or less every month. All teachers were subjected to an evaluation to know the percentage of proficiency in the native language of the community where we work and we had to get 70 points minimum to achieve the bonus.

Participants also mentioned the professional development opportunities some of them had received through the *Ministerio de Educación (MINEDUC)* that enhanced their understanding of bilingual intercultural teaching practices, the materials in L1 distributed by the MINEDUC, as well as the specific language instruction that they had received through the *Academia de Lenguas Maya*.

Participants considered decentralization of the federal educational system as having both positive and negative outcomes for particular linguistic groups. On the one hand, teachers considered decentralization to have been a positive development in that it allowed rural Indigenous communities to organize their own schools, contextualize the national curriculum, and provided closer physical accessibility to the administrative offices. On the other hand, they discussed how decentralization creates more a burden for bilingual teachers: "*MINEDUC nos deja muchas decisiones sobre nuestros hombros*" (The Ministry of Education leaves many decisions on our shoulders). It was also noted by participants that decentralization has disproportionately favored the larger Indigenous language groups "*idiomas mayas mayoritarios (k'iche', mam, q'eq'chi, and kakchikel)*," because of the provision of

<sup>6</sup> <http://fresce.campanaderechoeducacion.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/O69-III-GUA-A2-DP-Man.1.pdf>

instructional materials; that lack of materials and administrative support has disadvantaged minority Mayan languages such as Achi and Popti'.

In terms of civil society, teachers noted the importance of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in providing bilingual materials and opportunities for professional development when the federal and regional governments were unable to do so. In the next section, we discuss the obstacles to teachers' efforts to promote bilingual intercultural education in their communities and schools.

### ***Obstacles Teachers Face in Trying to Promote Bilingual Intercultural Education***

Our analysis revealed several themes that are important in understanding the teachers' perspectives on their efforts to support bicultural intercultural education in their communities, including the obstacles they encounter in their efforts. We describe the challenges encountered in the community, the school, the media, the regional and federal governments, and national language ideologies.

### ***Globalization and Communication Media***

Teachers identified the absence of Indigenous languages in mass and social media as a major factor contributing to the low status of Mayan language among young people, and their desire to learn English instead of developing literacy in the local Indigenous language. Most participants pointed to the influence of globalized communication media as the major barrier to overcome in maintaining and developing the mother language in their communities.

*La Globalización, está haciendo estragos en nuestra lengua, costumbres, tradiciones y globalización que trae la transculturización y la aculturación, ya que la gran mayoría de personas no tienen bien cimentado el amor a su identidad, aunque hemos estado trabajando en eso desde hace algunos años como para recuperar el orgullo de ser guatemaltecos, pero poco se ha logrado. Es observable que se necesita crear y desarrollar más conciencia en nuestros niños y jóvenes.*

Globalization is wreaking havoc on our language, customs, and traditions and globalization brings transculturization and acculturation, since the vast majority of people do not have a strong foundation in the love of their [Mayan] identity, although we have been working on this for some years now to recover the pride of being Guatemalan, but little has been achieved. It is obvious that we need to create and develop more awareness in our children and youth. - José

Most of the television and radio programming in the regions where the teachers live and work came from Mexico or the United States. However, a few teachers lived in communities where community radio (*emisoras comunitarias*), usually affiliated with religious organizations, were active and were viewed favorably as a way to inform community members about important issues and daily events.

While access to the internet and technology were generally limited – Pablo's Alta Verapaz community did not have electricity – teachers reported that most young people had cell phones and connected to the internet and social media this way. Many teachers did not view social media as productive educational medium:

*Bueno, más que todo en la reciente generación se está utilizando de manera emergente el sistema de Internet como un medio de comunicación social en este mundo globalizado. Lamentablemente las familias no monitorean lo que los hijos e hijas ven. Usualmente, el uso de las páginas sociales, la pornografía, los juegos electrónicos y muy poca información académica son las cosas a las que están expuestos nuestros jóvenes y niños en menor escala. Mas son los adolescentes. Obviamente en idioma español pues en los idiomas mayas como el q'eqchi', no hay nada de exposición en tecnología, excepto algunos programas radiales sea religiosos o noticiosos de manera esporádica.*

Well, more than anything in the recent generation, the Internet system is being used in an emergent way as a means of social communication in this globalized world. Unfortunately, families do not monitor what their children see. Usually, the use of social pages, pornography, electronic games and very little academic information are the things that our young people and children are exposed to on a smaller scale. Especially the teenagers. Obviously, it is in the Spanish language because in Mayan languages such as Q'eqchi', there is no exposure to technology, except some radio programs, whether religious or news, sporadically. – Orlando

### ***Combatting the Denigration of Indigenous Languages and Peoples***

In addition to globalized media, the efforts to maintain the Indigenous language among children and youth was viewed by many of participants as being hindered by the historical and continuing threat of symbolic and physical violence against Indigenous people in Guatemala. Commenting on this struggle, often with sadness, teachers described the long history of discrimination against Indigenous groups in the country. Ofelia, for example, stated,

*Ahora la preocupación más grande es con la nueva generación que se está viendo que los jóvenes prefieren el idioma español que el idioma mam debido a las constantes violaciones a los derechos humanos que crean 'mucho discriminación.'*

Now, our biggest worry with the new generation is that we see that young people prefer Spanish over the Mam language due to the consistent human rights violations that lead to 'much discrimination.' – Ofelia

Similarly, Orlando provided this thoughtful comment that spoke to the struggles of freely speaking Indigenous language in public.

*Mi sueño sería que la gente hable en su idioma en donde sea y se le respete su comunicación, ya que en ocasiones se burlan cuando te comunicas con tus acompañantes, dándole vida a la discriminación, cuando hay que cultivar una cultura de paz.*

My dream would be that people can speak their [Indigenous] language wherever they want and that their communication is respected, as sometimes people make fun when we communicate with our companions, giving rise to discrimination, when we need to cultivate a culture of peace.

Both Ofelia and Orlando's comments are powerful reminders of the connection between the struggle to maintain Indigenous languages and discrimination that has existed, and continues to exist, in Guatemala.

### ***Neglect of Minority Mayan Languages by Governmental and Non-governmental Agencies***

In addition to the general discrimination against speakers of Indigenous languages, teachers reported that the four major Mayan languages – K'iche', Kaqchikel, Q'eqchi' and Mam – have received more support from both governmental and non-governmental agencies, than less numerous language groups. This has allowed members of the major linguistic groups to advance their bilingual intercultural programs, while bilingual intercultural education in smaller minority communities languishes. One of the comments related to this problem was shared by Katerina who speaks Achi:

*Los únicos idiomas que están presentes en algunos materiales didácticas son el k'iche', kaqchikel, q'eqchi' y mam. Los materiales que proporciona el Estado no están escritos en todos los idiomas mayas, según la región lingüística, pues por la falta presupuesto. Cada maestro lo va traduciendo de acuerdo al idioma maya que habla cada comunidad o municipio, cuando va impartiendo su clase o durante la redacción de su plan de trabajo.*

The only languages that are represented in some educational materials are in K'iche', Kaqchikel, Q'eqchi' y Mam. The materials that are provided by the State are not written in all of the Mayan languages ... because of the lack of funding. Each teacher must translate their materials into the local Indigenous language, while teaching or planning a lesson.

### ***Bilingual Teachers vs Bilingual/Intercultural Educators.***

While teachers expressed their approval and satisfaction with the national language policies that require the passing of a language proficiency exam to teach in a bilingual classroom, they also lamented that many teachers who can pass the proficiency exam, have not received sufficient preparation in bilingual/intercultural pedagogies. As Hector, from Huehuetenango, mentioned,

*Si el docente no sabe aplicar metodología bilingüe y no tiene voluntad de trabajar bilingüismo en el aula, de nada serviría todo un sistema bien estructurado y las políticas que el MINEDUC promulga.*

If the teacher does not know how to apply bilingual methodology and does not have the desire to work with bilingualism in the classroom, a well-structured system and the policies that the MINEDUC promulgates will not help.

Indeed, these teachers' participation in a USAID funded professional development program in the United State, where they received instruction in bilingual education pedagogies and were able to observe best practices in multiple dual-language programs, increased their understanding and expectations for what a bilingual/intercultural educator should be expected to do in the classroom.

Perhaps the best summary and conclusion of the obstacles faced by Indigenous teachers in Guatemala was provided by Violeta, a teacher from Sololá, who stated,

*Son muchas las realidades que se tiene en Guatemala en relación a la potencialización de los maestros bilingües. De alguna manera u otra, la educación bilingüe en Guatemala ha sido un proceso lento y la causa de este fracaso tiene sus orígenes en la falta de personal capacitado, de metodologías, de políticas públicas serias y la falta de conciencia de parte de los mayablantes*

There are many realities that exist in Guatemala in relation to the potential of bilingual teachers. In some way or another, bilingual education in Guatemala has been a slow process and the cause of this failure has its origins in the lack of trained personnel, methodologies, serious public policies and lack of awareness on the part of the Mayan speakers.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The ambitious goal of providing bilingual intercultural education throughout Guatemala will require a significant financial commitment and the political will to create and enforce rules related to Indigenous language policies. Financial challenges include the need to provide curriculum materials in many more Indigenous languages and increase the professional development opportunities of those bilingual teachers who are teaching in classrooms designated as bilingual. Significant resources must be dedicated to expanding teacher preparation programs in bilingual intercultural education, particularly in isolated geographical communities where multiple structural and contextual factors present serious barriers to the provision of quality educational services.

In terms of policy, ensuring bilingual and intercultural education across the nation would mean responding to the demands of communities with little political power, with few representatives in the Congress of the Republic: in 2015 Indigenous members of Congress made of less than 12 percent of the body, and many of the 24 Indigenous groups were not represented at all (Conway, 2016). One significant reform should be the creation of a bilingual intercultural education system that is more consistent and expansive in its implementation goals. In other words, early efforts in home language literacy should be consistently expanded past elementary grades and should also include content area subjects. Ideally, they should include minority Indigenous languages in addition to the four major languages of K'iche', Mam, Q'eqchi', and Kaqchikel.

Many young people in Guatemala live in communities where their Indigenous language is not supported at the school level. Consequently, present and future generations of children may not be able to sustain their ancestors' languages. While these young people have the legally mandated right to maintain their Indigenous language, educational practices and policies deny them the opportunity to become bilingual and bicultural, and increase the risk of language loss in ways that may be difficult to reverse.

Our research confirms previous studies that report that Guatemalan Indigenous bilingual teachers have played a central role in the support of bilingual intercultural education in their schools and communities (Holbrock, 2016; Menken & Garcia, 2010; Valdiviezo, 2010, 2013). In general, the teachers who participated in our study were cognizant of the essential role and responsibility that being an Indigenous bilingual teacher represents in the struggle to maintain Indigenous languages and cultures in their schools and communities. They have contributed to Indigenous language maintenance through extensive personal and

professional efforts. They willingly accepted these responsibilities and viewed themselves as protectors and promoters of language and culture. Confirming Benson's (2004) findings, it is evident by the multiple roles and responsibilities these teachers encounter that these bilingual teachers experience very high demands in their daily work in their efforts to promote and support bilingualism in contexts that often challenge and contradict the very same goal. Indeed, teachers in our study developed materials in the Indigenous language and Spanish, improved their own language skills and pedagogical knowledge, conducted intensive work with families in the community related to the importance of education and language and cultural maintenance, mentored and supported their colleagues' professional development through *talleres (workshops)*, defended their students' rights to receive bilingual intercultural education, and took the time to learn about language and educational policies and regulations that affected their lives as teachers and that of their students.

While the scope of our work is limited to a very specific case of bilingual intercultural education – that is, bilingual Mayan-speaking teachers in Guatemala – the results of our study may be applicable to similar communities where language loss and shifts are concerns of community members, particularly in other minority language communities in Latin America.

We believe that one of the most significant findings in our study is related to teachers' ownership of the challenge of promoting and maintaining Indigenous languages. Teachers in our study recognized the significance of their role in changing the future of the Indigenous language and culture in their specific communities. Through their own personal and professional activities, they were actively engaged in slowing down the degree of language loss and language shift patterns that are evident in many Indigenous communities, as well as creating positive models of bilingualism and intercultural practices. Indeed, these teachers' commitment and agency can encourage future teachers to develop this impressive type of ownership and responsibility so that they can also view themselves as protectors and promoters of Indigenous languages and cultures, and can themselves build bridges to bilingualism through their daily practices inside and outside of the classroom; hence cultivating *una cultura de paz* (a culture of peace).

## References

- Abbot, J. (January, 2017). 20 years of "peace" in Guatemala. NACLA Report. Retrieved from <https://nacla.org/news/2017/01/04/20-years-%E2%80%9Cpeace%E2%80%9D-guatemala>
- Anderson, M.E. (2001). *Guatemala: The education sector. Guatemala Poverty Assessment (GUAPA) Program Technical Paper No. 2*. The World Bank, Washington, DC.
- Balcazar, H. (2010). Education policy and language shift in Guatemala. In J. E. Petrovic (Ed.), *International Perspectives on Bilingual Education: Policy, Practice and Controversy* (pp. 43-65). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, INC.
- Barrett, R. (2008). Linguistic differentiation and Mayan language revitalization in Guatemala. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 12(3), 275-305.
- Benson, C. (2004). Do we expect too much of bilingual teachers? Bilingual teaching in developing countries. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 7(2-3), 204-221.
- Charlton, T. L., Myers, L. E., & Sharpless, R. (Eds.). (2006). *Handbook of oral history*. Oxford, UK: Altamira Press.

- Chesterfield, R., Rubio F. E., & Vásquez, R. (2003). *Study of bilingual education graduates in Guatemala*. Guatemala Ministry of Education, General Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education. MEDIR Project.
- Conway, K. (2016, June 1). Indigenous Guatemalans Call for Meaningful Representation. [blog] *Democracy works*. Washington D.C.: National Democracy Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.demworks.org/Indigenous-guatemalans-call-meaningful-representation>.
- Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural (DIGEBI) (2015). *Caracterización sociolingüística y cultural de comunidades y escuelas [de párvulos, preprimaria y primaria de Guatemala 2010 al 2014]*. Guatemala Ministerio de Educación. Retrieved from [http://www.mineduc.gob.gt/DIGEBI/documents/Investigaci%C3%B3n/PRESENTACI%C3%93N\\_RESULTADOS\\_CHARACTERIZACI%C3%93N\\_2010\\_a\\_2014.pdf](http://www.mineduc.gob.gt/DIGEBI/documents/Investigaci%C3%B3n/PRESENTACI%C3%93N_RESULTADOS_CHARACTERIZACI%C3%93N_2010_a_2014.pdf)
- Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural (DIGEBI) (2017). *Marco legal de la educación bilingüe intercultural*. Guatemala Ministerio de Educación. Retrieved from <http://www.mineduc.gob.gt/DIGEBI/leyes.html>
- Enge, K. I., & Chesterfield, R. (1996). Bilingual education and student performance in Guatemala. *International Journal of Education Development*, 16(3), 291-302.
- Fishman, J. A. (1966). *Language loyalty in the United States: The maintenance and perpetuation of non-English mother tongues by American ethnic and religious groups*. Boston, MA: De Gruyter Mouton.
- French, B. M. (2010). *Maya ethnolinguistic identity: Violence, cultural rights and modernity in highland Guatemala*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press.
- Helmberger, J. L. (2006). Language and ethnicity: Multiple literacies in context, language education in Guatemala. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 30(1), 65-85.
- Holbrock, M. J. (2016). Mayan literacy in education. In M. J. Holbrock, *Mayan literacy reinvention in Guatemala* (pp. 145-195). Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- López, L. E. (2014). Indigenous intercultural education in Latin America: Widening gaps between policy and practice. In R. Cortina (Ed.), *The revision of indigenous citizens in Latin America* (pp.19-49). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- López, L. E. (2013). Keys to Indigenous youth and adult education in Latin America: Lessons learned in the pursuit of social literacy. *Tertium Comparationis. Journal für Internationa und Interdulturell Vergleichende Erziehungswissenschaft*, 19(20), 109-146.
- López, L. E. (2009). Reaching the unreached: Indigenous intercultural bilingual education in Latin America. UNESCO. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001866/186620e.pdf>
- Maxwell, J. M. (2009). Bilingual bicultural education: Best intentions across a cultural divide. In W. E. Little & T. J. Smith (Eds.), *Mayas in postwar Guatemala: Harvest of violence revisited* (pp. 84-95). Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press.
- Meade, B. (2012). A mixed-methods analysis of achievement disparities in Guatemalan primary schools. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32, 575-589.
- Menken, K., & García, O. (Eds.) (2010). *Negotiating language policies in schools: Educators as policymakers*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ministerio de Educación de Guatemala (2004, January). *Acuérdase Generaliza la Educación Bilingüe Multicultural e Intercultural en el Sistema Educativo Nacional. Acuerdo Gubernativo Number 22-2004*. Retrieved from <https://www.mineduc.gob.gt/DIGEBI/documents/leyes/22-2004.pdf>

- Ministerio de Educación Guatemala (2009, September). *Modelo Educativo Bilingüe e Intercultural*. DIGEBI: Guatemala
- Moya, R. (1997). Interculturalidad y reforma educativa en Guatemala. *Revista iberoamericana de educación*, 13, 120-155.
- Richards, J. B. (1989). Mayan language planning for bilingual education in Guatemala. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 77, 93-115.
- Richards, J. B. (1998). Case study one: San Marcos La Laguna. In S. Garzon, R. McKenna Brown, J. B. Richards & W. Ajpub (Eds.), *The life of our language: Kaqchikel Maya maintenance, shift, and revitalization* (pp. 62-100). Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press.
- Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Valdiviezo, L. A. (2010). "Angles make things difficult": Teachers' interpretations of language policy and Quechua revitalization in Peru. In K. Menken & O. Garcia (Eds.) *Negotiating language policies in schools: Educators as policymakers* (pp. 72-87). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Valdiviezo, L. A. (2013). 'El niño debe aprender su idioma': A teacher's approximations to language policy in an Indigenous Peruvian school. In J. A. Shoba & F. Chimbutane (Eds.) *Bilingual education and language policy in the global south* (pp. 13-29). New York, NY: Routledge.

### **About the Authors**

*Madeline Milian*, EdD, is Professor of Bilingual and ESL Education at the University of Northern Colorado. In addition to teaching pre-service and in-service teachers, she has been directing international teacher exchange programs for the last 11 years. She received her academic degrees from Teachers College, Columbia University (EdD), California State University, Los Angeles (MA), and Florida International University (BS).

*Dana Walker*, PhD, is Professor of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education at the University of Northern Colorado. Her research focuses on youth media, poetry, and arts for multilingual youth, most recently in a Translocal Youth Media research project that connects students and teachers in Barcelona, Spain and Colorado, US. She received her academic degrees from the University of Colorado at Boulder (PhD), University of Texas at Austin (MA), and University of California at Santa Cruz (BA).