

**Indigenous-Led Education in Cauca, Colombia:
Land, Language, and Cultural Identity**

Thirty Years of Establishing an Educación Propia

Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca (CRIC), Colombia
Intercultural and Bilingual Education Program
Popayán, 2004



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Thirty years of establishing an educación propia.



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Foreword for the English Translation

In the summer of 2014, I traveled to Colombia with a group of ten students who were enrolled in the summer course “Indigenous and Human Rights in Latin America” at the University of Winnipeg. The course included a field trip section in Colombia, with partners from the University of Cartagena and the Autonomous Indigenous Intercultural University (UAIIN in Spanish). In addition to lectures with leaders, academics, and members of NGOs concerned with human and Indigenous rights, activities included visits to communities displaced or affected by the internal armed conflict. The expectations of the trip were enormous because that year, the Colombian government and the guerrilla group (Revolutionary Colombian Armed Forces – FARC in Spanish) were assembling in La Habana to develop a peace negotiation accord. Two years later, negotiations between both parties were concluded with the signing of a peace agreement.

When we visited the UAIIN, the students were amazed by the work of this Indigenous institution of postsecondary education operating independently of the national and provincial governments. Questions about the origin of this initiative and the reasons for an Indigenous organization to establish a university by itself emerged. UAIIN staff members and leaders of the Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca (CRIC in Spanish) provided information in classrooms and informal conversations to the group. UAIIN instructors and students shared their experiences as well. The students wanted to know more about this educational experience that began with the creation of CRIC in the seventies. In answering, the CRIC leaders pointed to this book *“Indigenous-Led Education in Cauca, Colombia: Land, Language, and Cultural Identity”*,¹ published in 2004 to explain the origin and development of their educational initiative. The purpose, scope, and meaning of the CRIC educational program will be better appreciated by considering the social and political context of the Indigenous movement in Colombia.

iii

Like other countries in the region, under the colonial regime and after gaining Independence from Spain (1820), Indigenous peoples in Colombia were subjected to reduction and extermination policies. Back then, the defeat of the Spanish regime did not imply recognition of the existence of rich and diverse cultures. Under the republican period and the liberal democratic regimes in the 19th and 20th centuries, Indigenous peoples faced policies oriented towards the elimination of their cultural identities, their worldviews, and their ways of life. The idea of the superiority of European culture dominated the foundation of state policies aimed at eliminating the native cultures that were and have been de-legitimized as forms thinking, interpreting, and dealing with the reality.² As under the Spanish domain, the social hierarchies and cultural differences were naturalized by imposing the European tradition as the authentic and unique goal of the human condition. Race and cultural identity served as social classifiers of the population.³ Different political regimes stigmatized and degraded Indigenous ways of being, beliefs, and ceremonies as devilish, barbarian or uncivilized.⁴ The expropriation of their ancestral lands, the depredatory military actions,

1 Original Spanish title of this book: *Qué pasaría si la escuela...?: 30 años de construcción de una educación propia.*

2 Dussel, E. (2000). Europa, Modernidad y Eurocentrismo. In E. Lander, E. (Ed.).

La Colonialidad del Saber: Eurocentrismo y Ciencias Sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas. Buenos Aires: CLACSO-UNESCO. Pp. 41-54

3 Quijano, A. (2000). Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina. In Lander E. (ed.). *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas.*

CLACSO, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Pp. 201-246

4 Nieto, M. (2000). *Remedios para el Imperio: Historia Natural y la Apropiación del Nuevo Mundo.* Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia.

the disrespect of their cultural identities, and the missionary Christianization were all actions implemented towards the genocide or reduction of Indigenous peoples.

By the end of the 19th century, the Republican State signed with the Vatican State a Concordat whereby the government transferred to the Church all responsibility on Indigenous peoples. Internal legislation consolidated this international agreement. The Act 89 of 1990, “by which it determines the way to govern savages that are reduced to civilized life,” legitimized Church evangelization campaigns and unilaterally decided on the life of Indigenous peoples. With these powers, the diverse religious congregations deployed aggressive missions to convert Indigenous communities to the religious creed, eliminate their ceremonies, customs, and languages, and replace the Indigenous authorities. The missions established boarding schools that concentrated children from an early age, forbidding them to speak their language or use their traditional costumes and isolating them from their parents as a method to eliminate their customs, beliefs, and language. At the same time, the missions used children’s work in agricultural activities and domestic tasks for the benefit of those who performed as educators. This religious schooling strategy promoted the open suppression of cultural identities, the loss of the Indigenous way of life, the dramatic separation between parents and children, and the alteration of an entire system of native social and spiritual beliefs.⁵

The arrival of the Capuchin missionaries to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta region in 1917 illustrates the intervention of religious orders in communities’ lives. The Capuchins arrived on the pretext of serving literacy in Spanish and mathematics to Arhuaco children. As soon as the mission settled in the community, they aggressively characterized Arhuaco’s cultural practices as fanaticism, idolatry, and wild aberrations. The real purpose of the mission was to suppress all traits of Arhuaco culture and substitute Arhuaco spiritual leaders or Mamos.⁶ Children and young Indigenous people who tried to escape from the boarding school were recaptured and repressed. Only in 1982, after numerous complaints about abuses and the disintegrator effect of its culture, were the Arhuaco people able to expel the Capuchin Mission and close the boarding school.⁷

iv

From the perspectives of the State and the Church, religious conversion was the fundamental step of their educational strategy to reduce and assimilate Indigenous peoples. Leaders of the two main parties at the time, conservative and liberal that confronted themselves in military disputes, agreed that Indians were an undesirable burden. They shared the idea that the modern State required a greater white homogeneous social base and promoted the mixing of the different ethnic groups to eliminate black and Indigenous traits. This genocidal policy was defended publicly in the Congress by recognized representatives of the liberal and conservative parties.

Rafael Uribe Uribe for instance, a parliamentary and general of the Colombian army officially acknowledged for his reformists and liberal ideas, stated in his manuscript “The reduction of savages” of 1907:

⁵ State policies and Church strategies are like those applied in Canada. See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Canada’s residential schools: the final report of the truth and reconciliation commission of Canada* (Ser. McGill-Queen’s native and northern series, 80-86). Published for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada by McGill-Queen’s University Press. For a comparative analysis about the operation of residential schools policies in Canada and the United States see Woolford A. (2015) *This Benevolent Experiment*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

⁶ Shlegelberger, B. (1995). *Los Arhuacos en defensa de su identidad y autonomía resistencia y sincretismo*. Santafé de Bogotá: Centro Editorial Javeriano. CEJA.

⁷ Murillo, L. A. (2009). This Great Emptiness We Are Feeling: Toward a Decolonization of Schooling in Simunurwa, Colombia. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 40(4): 421-437.

It is evident that the civilization cannot penetrate the biggest part of the Colombian territory because of the existence of 300,000 barbarians. The civilization encounters the obstacle represented by those thousands of savages, many of them are battle-hardened and don't understand our language. As it already happens, they can attack the Christian families. They are a burden to progress, and such danger will grow in direct proportion to the multiplication of the Indians.⁸

Two decades later, Laureano Gómez, Conservative President of Colombia from 1950 to 1953, expressed his classist perception about the Colombian population in a public address:

Our race comes from the mixture of Spanish, Indians, and blacks. The two latest flows of inheritance are stigmata of total inferiority...⁹

Religious ideology and a strong hierarchical social structure contributed to the subjugation of Indigenous families within extensive landholdings previously expropriated by landowners throughout the country. Indigenous people could grow small plots within the landholdings in exchange for pay in produce or labour. This form of exploitation of the Indigenous families in the Andean region confined Indigenous people as *terrajeros*¹⁰ (a condition similar to slavery) within their ancestral territories.¹¹ The whole system was backed by the municipal, regional, and national authorities with the blessing of the Church, which, in turn, received large tracts of land for their missionary work.

V Facing the extensive and unproductive land property, the liberal Government promoted an agrarian reform in the sixties. Emerging agro-business and commercial classes wanted to diversify the country's coffee agro-export base and benefit from the green revolution. The liberals wanted to use the peasantry as a social force against the landowners who controlled lands with enormous agricultural potential. The reformist liberal government, for instance, created the National Association of Peasant Users (ANUC in Spanish) to overcome landowners and the dominant conservative sectors. Additionally, the government introduced institutions like the Agrarian Reform Institute (INCORA in Spanish) to back up the agrarian reform with technical assistance and credits.

In the context of strengthening the agricultural sector, the State focused on the Indigenous population as potential labour. The Act 81 of 1958 put in place a program for training Indigenous peoples in arts and farming work under the Ministry of Agriculture and Ranching. This new emphasis was coherent with the the American pan-Indigenous policy and the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 107 of 1957 aimed to integrate Indigenous people as agricultural workers. However, Indigenous communities did not see major benefits from the modernization of agricultural production; their motivation was not to access a piece of land for agricultural products intended for the market.

From an Indigenous perspective, the land was not to be divided into individual holdings but to be recovered to re-establish the community relations with their ancestors,

8 Pineda-Camacho, R. (1984). La reivindicación del indio en el pensamiento social colombiano (1850-1950). In Arocha-Rodríguez, J. and S. de Friedemann, N. (eds.) *Un siglo de investigación social. Antropología en Colombia*. Bogotá: Etno.

9 Vasco L. G. (2002). *Nacionalidades indígenas y Estado en Colombia: la lucha por las siete llaves*. Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia. {<http://www.luguiva.net/libros/detalle1.aspx?id=232&l=3>} Accessed August 26, 2017.

10 See Glossary for definition

11 Tunubala, J. and Pechene, L. (2010) "518 años de resistencia, 200 años de lucha de los pueblos". *El deber, el derecho de re-existencia y libertad.*, Maguare, (24), pp. 415-426. See definition of *terraje* in the glossary.

spiritual beings, mountains, rivers, plants, and animals. Consequently, the Indigenous leaders and communities oriented their struggle to recover their ancestral territory and to restore their way of life, their language, and their cultural identity. Getting back their land was the only way to resist further reduction or total extermination as Indigenous people. At this time, Indigenous leaders realized that the ANUC, the organization initially promoted by the government to advance the agrarian reform, could not represent their goals as dispossessed and oppressed Indigenous nations.

The conviction of their political objectives led Indigenous leaders to create the first Indigenous organization in Colombia in 1971, the Regional Indigenous Council of the Cauca (CRIC). The Indigenous leadership designed a strategy that included the use of legal and *de facto* actions to achieve its objectives. The leaders sought the enforcement of the laws that secured colonial titles on *resguardos*¹² or lands of collective titling, usurped by landowners. At the same time, they looked for the recovery of political institutions like *cabildos*¹³, which were originally established to grant social control to Indigenous authorities but ultimately fell under the control of municipal authorities and landowners. Tatay remarks that in the awakening of the Indigenous movement in Cauca, the *cabildos* became the links of the Indigenous politico-organizational base for the recovery of the ancestral lands.¹⁴

De facto ways included the gradual and strategic repossession of extensive private holdings. Taking the land back was imperative for recovering their identity and collective being. For example, to reconstruct their way of life and identity, the Guambianos had no other option than to recuperate their productive lands located in the valleys of the Rio Piendamó. In their worldview, the territory and their Guambiano identity were fragmented by the seizure of the valley lower lands. Reuniting the high lands – where they were displaced – with the low and warm lands was necessary for sustaining their way of life nurtured with products harvested from cold and warm climates. “We deal with large farms accordingly: we climbed up to conquer the top parties, close to the moor and neighboring lagoon, and then we went down to inhabit the lower parts, on the banks of the river Piendamó. Thus, we left an escape route so that landowners could not only leave but take their cattle with them as we were advancing; then, we retrieved our ‘civilization’ and our culture by being able to move in both directions again.”¹⁵

The unique connection and identity of Indigenous peoples with their territory, the sense of being incomplete without their ancestral lands, and the consolidation of the collective organization powered people’s struggles. From 1981 to 1983, the Nasa, Guambiano, and Coconuco nations recovery large landholdings previously expropriated to them in the Cauca province.¹⁶ The organization process in Cauca stimulated Indigenous mobilization in the country, leading to the participation of other Indigenous nations in the 1973 CRIC Congress and later to the establishment of the Indigenous National Organization of Colombia (ONIC) in 1982. The repressive State action against Indigenous peoples intensified under control of the 1978 to 1982 government, although it did not stop there. Landlords and local politicians who wanted to maintain the subjugation of Indigenous peoples resorted to illegal retentions, torture, and even execution of leaders, with the complacency of the local authorities

¹² See Glossary for definition.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Tatay, P. (2012). Construcción del poder propio en el movimiento indígena del Cauca. In Peñaranda D. (coord.), *Nuestra vida ha sido nuestra lucha: resistencia y memoria en el Cauca Indígena*. Bogotá: Centro de Memoria Histórica. pp. 52-83. See definition of *cabildo* in the glossary.

¹⁵ Dagua A.; Aranda M.; Vasco L. (1998). *Guambianos hijos del arco iris y del agua*. CEREC Bogotá. 265 p.

¹⁶ González, Nidia Catherine. (2014). *Resistencia Indígena. Alternativa en medio del conflicto colombiano*. Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. 207 p.

and the national army. The expansion of the FARC into Indigenous territories brought the actions of paramilitary groups who targeted Indigenous activists and CRIC leaders, accusing them of being guerilla allies. In fact, CRIC leaders and Indigenous communities suffered attacks from insurgent groups because of their declared independence and rejection to align and subordinate their struggle under the guerrilla direction.¹⁷

The threats against the Indigenous political, social, and economic project in the Cauca region motivated the creation of the Indigenous “Quintín Lame” guerrilla in 1969. This armed organization was a self-defense mechanism to face the violence coming from different fronts, not an insurgent group for offensive action and territorial expansion.¹⁸ Despite state repression and attacks from the guerrilla and paramilitary groups, the CRIC successfully advanced its goal for repossessing a substantial portion of their ancestral territory. During the seventies, the CRIC led the recovery of 13.036 hectares, in the eighties 43.701 hectares, between 1990 and 1996, 17.490 hectares.¹⁹ By 2004, the CRIC had achieved the recovery of 250,000 hectares.

The Indigenous struggle for the restoration of ancestral territory and cultural identity in the Cauca region relied on the central importance of education for its survival and resistance. Indigenous leaders understood that the future of Indigenous organizations and communities would be shaped decisively by the type of education available to their children. As they learned from history, the State and the Church employed education to reduce or eliminate Indigenous ways of life and identities. Conversely, the CRIC committed to building an education program with innovative pedagogic approaches and alternative practices for preparing children, young people, and adults from an Indigenous worldview but at the same time incorporating scientific and technical knowledge.²⁰

vii

In their struggle to ensure a relevant and appropriate education that recognized the diversity of cultures and languages, and in contrast to the homogenized education provided by the State and the Church, Indigenous peoples achieved legal protection for bilingual education. With the intervention of the Indigenous organizations, the State introduced legal changes. For example, the Decree 1142 of 1978 approved the teaching of native languages in Indigenous schools and opened options for bilingual education programs funded by the state.

In the context of the Indigenous struggle for the recovery of the ancestral land, culture, and language in Cauca, to do education was to do politics, and to do politics was to do education.²¹ The Indigenous leaders realized that education could be transformed from an institutional program of domination to an Indigenous strategy of resistance. In this sense, education became the foundation of the Indigenous struggle for survival with dignity and autonomy. Thus, during more than 30 years of social mobilization and challenging relations with the state, CRIC shaped its Bilingual and Intercultural Education Program (PEBI in Spanish). The PEBI was the CRIC’s backbone for the transformation of education. The active participation of Indigenous experts, elders, community authorities, leaders,

17 Caviedes, Mauricio. (2002). “Solidarios frente a colaboradores: Antropología y movimiento indígena en el Cauca en las décadas de 1970 y 1980”. Bogotá. *Revista Colombiana de Antropología*. Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia. ICANH, Vol. 38. Pp. 237-260; Gross Christian. (1991). *Políticas de la etnicidad: identidad, cultura y cambio social*. Bogotá. Fondo Editorial CEREC. 335 p. 18 González, *ibid.*

19 Hernández, M. (2004). “Obligados a actuar: iniciativas de paz desde la base en Colombia”. In *Alternativas a la guerra: iniciativas y procesos de paz en Colombia*. *Revista Controversia*. Número extraordinario. Londres/Bogotá CINEP y Conciliation Resources ACCORD. Febrero 2004. Pp. 24-29. Quoted by González. *Ibid.* p. 138.

20 Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC). Ed. (2004). *Qué pasaría si la escuela...?: 30 años de construcción de una educación propia*. Popayán: Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca. 231 p.

21 *Ibid.*

and allies committed to bringing radical transformation of schooling shaped the PEBI. Despite the lack of provincial support for its educational project, the accomplishments of the program later attained the recognition of some sectors in the national government. The project influenced other parts of the Colombian territory where other Indigenous peoples faced similar challenges building their own educational project. What is known as Indigenous education (or educación propia in Colombia) is the result of numerous efforts inspired by the CRIC's experience.

Covering nine different Indigenous nations in its territory (Nasa, Misak or Guambiano, Yanacona, Ambalueña, Totoró, Kokonuko, Emberá, Siapidara, and Ingana), and progressively extending to Afro-descendant communities and mestizo-campesinos, the design of the educational program involved unexpected complexities. Through their work with Indigenous communities and families, the designers of the educational program found that they needed to ground the education system in their ancestral worldviews. They involved traditional healers and elders in raising awareness about the importance of Indigenous languages and ancestral knowledge and teachings. They understood worldview as "the process of creating mechanisms to analyze the world and act within it. ...it is rooted in the life experience of a people, to its ancestral wisdom. However, it is also nourished by the actions of the present and by appropriate outside tools."²²

The CRIC also found that the concept of multiculturalism, widely received in the eighties, was inadequate to reflect the complexities faced when designing their educational program. The concept of multiculturalism did not recognize the validity of diverse worldviews and knowledge systems. For instance, despite the State's formal adoption of multiculturalism, its educational system was built on the superiority dogma of a homogenous national culture that excludes other worldviews. In practice, the State proclaimed the concept of multiculturalism, but at the same time, exerted constant pressure towards the implementation of a single official education model. The state authorities assumed that there were diverse ethnic groups or minorities, but not Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples with the right to self-determine their education. Multiculturalism is more about embracing cultural and linguistic diversity within a political project for assimilation. From the State's authorities there was only one central national culture that dictated curricula content, fragmentation in subject areas, and the professionalization of teachers. Public funding was allocated only to programs that conformed to the governmental approach.

Alternatively, the designers of the Indigenous educational program developed the notion of interculturalism. Accordingly, they understood the relations between diverse cultures not as those of one culture that subordinates and validates other cultures, but as a recognition of various forms of being, thinking, and understanding. If multiculturalism distinguishes the existence of multiple ethnic and cultural groups, interculturalism embraces respect and equality between different worldviews and systems of knowledge. The CRIC understood interculturalism as "the possibility of coexistence and mutual understanding between different cultures..."²³ Educación propia is the synthesis of theoretical discussions and tested practices grounded in an intercultural approach between members of diverse Indigenous nations from the Cauca region, as well as mestizo, afro-Colombian, and non-Indigenous researchers, who contributed pedagogical theories and approaches. Interculturalism facilitated the dialogue between different research methodologies and worldviews that evolved and consolidated into what is known as educación propia.

²² Ibid, p. 83.

²³ Ibid, pp 123-4.

Rather than succumbing to an external dominant culture, PEBI designers promoted a non-hierarchical framework where Indigenous people could assess, transform, and appropriate what comes from other cultures within their own peoples' worldview.²⁴ In this publication, the reader will learn about the main challenges of the research process and the collective generation of knowledge wrought by applying interculturalism.²⁵

The CRIC initiative also highlighted the participation of communities in shaping their educational system. This participatory practice led to communitarianism as an approach based on Indigenous worldview. Communitarianism played a critical role in land recovery and cultural reaffirmation. A distinctive characteristic of the PEBI was that the ones deciding on their educational needs were the communities; the Indigenous leadership's response was to satisfy them. The communitarianism notion in education emerged out of the process of recovering the collective ownership of the land. Communities established schools as soon as Indigenous families took possession of the lands previously expropriated from them by landlords. Communities selected the first schoolteachers based on the candidate's understanding of the Indigenous struggle for land and their native language skills. The schoolteachers were named regardless of their professional and technical training.²⁶

ix However, this circumstance imposed the need for teachers' training and professionalization. The focus of such professionalization was *Training Indigenous teachers to teach in their language and Defend Indigenous history, language, and customs*.²⁷ Initially, the CRIC and some cabildos entered into agreements with conventional institutions to develop sporadic training for their teachers. Subsequently, the CRIC addressed the training with a long-term approach. The first professionalization program was in Communitarian Pedagogy structured from an Indigenous worldview. The alliances with conventional universities did not consolidate because the non-Indigenous allies were unable to understand and adjust to the education communities' needs and priorities.

Nevertheless, the professionalization of teachers became more relevant along the Indigenous struggle as the CRIC's education program expanded to cover over 16,000 children associated with about 800 teachers in schools.²⁸ The initial program on Communitarian Pedagogy was insufficient, and additional programs were required to cover other areas like communitarian management, business administration, agricultural production, customary law, and Indigenous languages. The government turned down or completely ignored several of CRIC's petitions for the creation of an Indigenous University. Therefore, the Indigenous councils on the Board of Directors of the CRIC decided to create the Autonomous Indigenous Intercultural University (UAIIN) through Resolution of 20 in November of 2003.²⁹ The CRIC made this decision exercising their right to autonomy and self-determination. The creation of an Indigenous university was a necessary step in the process of building an autonomous education system to satisfy the diversified and growing demands of Indigenous

24 Rappaport J. 2005. *Intercultural Utopias. Public intellectuals, cultural Experimentation, and Ethnic Pluralism in Colombia*. Duke University Press.

25 Ibid, Chapter 3. *Interculturalism and propia education*. See also Piamonte-Cruz M. and Palechor-Arévalo L. (2011). *Interculturalidad: Logros y desafíos en el proceso de formación de maestros/as Indígenas del suroccidente colombiano*. *Nómadas*. 34. 109-118.

26 Ibid, p. 28.

27 Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca. (1990). *Historia del CRIC*. Popayán: CRIC

28 Bolaños, G., Pancho, A. and Tatay, L. (2009). *Universidad Autónoma, Indígena e Intercultural (UAIIN): Un proceso para fortalecer la educación propia y comunitaria en el marco de la interculturalidad*. In Mato, D. (coord.), *Instituciones Interculturales de Educación Superior en América Latina. Procesos de construcción, logros, innovaciones y desafíos*. Caracas: Instituto Internacional de

la UNESCO para la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe (UNESCO-IESALC), págs.: 155-190.

29 Resolution of November 20th of 2003 creates the Indigenous Intercultural Autonomous University, define its nature, geographical scope, principles, organization, and direction. It is created by the Indigenous Authorities of Cauca, Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca, Colombia.

communities and families in Cauca.³⁰

The struggle of the Indigenous movement in the eighties and nineties led to the popular election of two Indigenous leaders to the Constitutional Assembly; a third Indigenous leader participated as a representative of a demobilized Indigenous guerrilla group, the Quintin Lame. As a result of the participation of Indigenous leaders, the new Constitution recognized the ethnic and cultural diversity of the nation and included progressive provisions on the right to bilingual education, Indigenous jurisdiction, equality of all cultures, and the establishment of Indigenous territorial entities.

The ratification of the ILO Convention 169 of 1989 by the Act 21 of 1991 strengthened the obligations of the Colombian State to guarantee an Indigenous bilingual education. Act 21 ensured that programs and education services should be responsive to the needs of Indigenous peoples (Arts. 27 and 28). During the 1990s, the Act 115 of 1994 or Education Act, dedicated Chapter 3, Section 3 to education for ethnic groups. Nevertheless, despite legal adjustments, resources and institutional support change with every government and Indigenous peoples have to continuously mobilize to achieve their demands.

Additionally, regulations have proven inadequate to stop the linguistic erosion as the homogenizing policy continues promoting Spanish as the national language contributing to the disappearance of linguistic diversity in Colombia. At the end of the 20th century, out of 65 Indigenous languages, only three had more than 50,000 speakers (Wayuu, Nasa, and Embera); eight had between 10,000 and 50,000 speakers, nine had only between 5,000 and 10,000, and eleven had between 1,000 and 5,000. More than half of the Indigenous languages, however, had less than 1,000 speakers.³¹

In the history of social movements in Latin America, the CRIC forged one of the strongest organizations in defense of Indigenous rights, but CRIC's achievements in education are less known. The UAIIN was the university that we visited with the group of Canadian students eleven years after its creation. As a modest contribution to disseminating the CRIC's education experience in the English-speaking world, some of the UW students who participated in the 2014 Summer course volunteered to begin the translation of the book that you have in your hands. After finishing a first English version in 2016, we reviewed, and then annotated and edited it with Kayla Quiring. The translation did not find a publisher who could see an economic potential of the work *"Indigenous-Led Education in Cauca, Colombia: Land, Language, and Cultural Identity"*. When we selected this work with the CRIC and UAIIN authorities for translation, we did not have an economic motivation. We wanted to share the successful story of an Indigenous educational system developed by an Indigenous organization in the Southern hemisphere. The book, written at the time of the creation of the UAIIN, has allowed new generations of children, teachers, and parents to learn about the struggles, advances, questions, and orientations that forged the current CRIC's Indigenous system of education including its university. This successful story, in addition to its influence and the national and regional recognitions it has achieved, was confirmed with the governmental recognition of UAIIN as the first official post-secondary education in the Colombian system in 2018. However, Ermes Pete Vivas, legal representative and Main Counselor of CRIC and UAIIN, reminds us that the recognition and public funding for the UAIIN is not a gracious governmental concession but the result of four decades of struggle

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30 Nemogá G. 2017. Indigenous and Intercultural Education in Latin America: Assimilation or Transformation of Colonial Relations in Colombia, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 39:1, 1-19, DOI: 10.1080/07256868.2017.1410115

31 Landaburu, J. (2000). Clasificación de las lenguas indígenas de Colombia. In Rodríguez M. E. (Ed.) *Lenguas Indígenas en Colombia*. Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo.

and many Indigenous lives lost in social mobilizations and occupations of the Pan-American Highway.³²

The publication of *“Indigenous-Led Education in Cauca, Colombia: Land, Language, and Cultural Identity”* celebrates this new CRIC achievement.

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July 2020

³² El País. Así es la UAIIN, la primera universidad pública Indígena de Colombia. 02, 02, 2020. Report by Luz Stella Cardona. {<https://www.elpais.com.co/educacion/asi-es-la-uaiin-la-primera-universidad-publica-indigena-de-colombia.html>} \1 “:~:text=As%C3%AD%20es%20la%20Uaiin%2C%20la%20primera%20universidad%20p%C3%ABblica%20ind%C3%ADgena%20de%20Colombia,-Febrero%2002%2C%202020&text=Entre%20los%20diez%20programas%20que,de%20Artes%20y%20Saberese%20Ancestrales.” Accessed June 21st, 2020.

Note about this translation

The English version is based on a Spanish publication made by the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC). Ed. (2004). *Qué pasaría si la escuela...?: 30 años de construcción de una educación propia*. Popayán: Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca. 231 p. The translation does not include Annexes on legislation. The footnotes provide specific contextual information additional to the historical Foreword. This translation also provides a glossary of terms left in Spanish that appear underlined in different sections of the book. The italics and bolded words were preserved from the Spanish version as well as the square [] and rounded () parentheses. The English version uses semi-rounded {} parentheses in exceptional circumstances to add information necessary to complete the idea in the English language.

Glossary of terms used in this text

(these words are left underlined in the translated text):

Bambuco: A traditional music genre performed by percussion and string instruments. It is associated with dance and is representative of the Andean Colombian region.

Cabildo: A colonial council established by the Spaniards and integrated by Indigenous leaders to regulate community affairs. After the Colombian Declaration of Independence and during the era of the Republic of Colombia, the cabildos were controlled by local politicians and landlords. After the 1970s, Indigenous organizations focus and reclaim the cabildos as strategic political spaces for strengthening Indigenous leadership in Cauca.

Chonta: Staff of office, or palm stick recognized in Cauca Indigenous communities as a symbol of political, cultural, and spiritual authority.

Chumbe: A thin piece of cloth sewn with symbols that represent the history of Nasa people, normally used as belt.

Compañero/Compañera: Companions, friends. Literally “comrade,” the word implies brotherhood.

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Cosmovisión: Literally, vision of the cosmos, or worldview.

Normal school: A graduate school for training elementary school teachers.

Gamonal: A powerful person from a semi-feudal system, typically a landowner, who exerts their influence with money and violent threats. A gamonal usually accrues significant political power in a rural setting, and has de facto control over the justice system and economics (although such control may not necessarily be legal).

Hacienda: Traditionally, a landed estate.

Indigenismo: A politically loaded term that generally refers to the political ideology of elevating indigenous peoples and interests. An Indigenista is one who defends this ideology. The precise usage of the term changes throughout Latin America, depending on the political circumstances.

Jigra: A big bag made of cabuya or wool in the Cauca region, normally used to harvest corn or for carrying coca leaves.

Ksxa'w: A spirit that can associate with things or beings.

Mambero: A gourd used as a container for carrying lime powder, or mambe, that is chewed with coca leaves in ceremonies or community events.

Mestizo: A person of mixed indigenous and European (usually Spaniard) descent who identifies himself/herself with their dominant white hereditary line rather than with their indigenous ancestry.

Minga: Traditional collective action of Indigenous people for performing community work like sowing, planting, harvesting, and building roads and houses. More recently, the collaborative action through minga is applied to political action and mobilization.

Propio/Propia: Something that is propio to a community is both something ancestrally inherited by the community and something that has been taken from a different culture and serves Indigenous interests.

Resguardo: Land that was set aside for indigenous communities by the Spanish crown during colonial times, similar to an indigenous reservation in North America. In Colombia, the resguardos are collective and the property rights are imprescriptible and inalienable.

Terrajería: System established in Cauca and other provinces in Colombia, under which the Indigenous person and their family were forced to pay terraje.

Terrajero: A person who has to pay terraje.

Terraaje: Free work pay by the terrajero to the landlord for living in a small piece of land within the landed state expropriated to Indigenous people.

Tul: A Nasa Yuwe term for “garden.”

Vereda: A Colombian municipal subdivision in a rural area.

Acronyms

ACIN: Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte de Cauca, or Indigenous Cabildos Association of North Cauca.

AICO: Movimiento de Autoridades Indígenas de Colombia, or Movement of Indigenous Authorities of Colombia.

ANUC: Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos de Colombia, or the National Association of Peasant Users of Colombia.

CCELA: Centro Colombia de Estudios de Lenguas Aborígenes, or Colombian Study Center of Aboriginal Languages.

CECIB: Centros Educativos Comunitarios Interculturales Bilingües, or Intercultural Bilingual Educational Community Centres

DEFILAM: Centro de Formación Integral Luis Ángel Monroy, Cauca, or Integral Education Center Luis Ángel Monroy, Cauca.

CETIC: Comité de Educación de los Territorios Indígenas del Cauca, or Education Committee of the Indigenous Territories of Cauca.

CINEP: Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular, Bogotá, or Center for Research and Popular Education.

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CRIC: Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca, or the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca.

CRIT: Consejo Regional Indígena del Tolima, or the Regional Indigenous Council of Tolima.

CRIVA: Consejo Regional Indígena del Vaupéz, or the Regional Indigenous Council of Vaupés.

ILV: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano, or Summer Linguistic Institute.

INCORA: Instituto Colombiano para la Reforma Agraria, or Colombian Institute for the Agrarian Reform.

MEN: Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, or Ministry of National Education of Colombia.

OIA: Organización Indígena de Antioquia, or Indigenous Organization of Antioquia.

ONIC: Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia, or National Indigenous Organization of Colombia.

ONU: Organización de las Naciones Unidas, or United Nations Organization.

OREWA: Organización Indígena Regional Embera Waunana, or Indigenous Regional Organization Embera Waunana.

PEB: Programa de Educación Bilingüe, or Educational Bilingual Program

PEBI: Programa de Educación Bilingüe e Intercultural, or Bilingual and Intercultural Education Program.

PEC: Proyecto Educativo Comunitario, or Community Educational Project.

PEI: Proyecto Educativo Institucional, or Institutional Educational Project.

TDH: Terre des Hommes, Germany.

UAIIIN: Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural, or Autonomous Intercultural Indigenous University.

UNESCO: Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura, Paris, or United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

UNUMA: Organización Indígena de Puerto Gaitán, Meta, or Indigenous Organization of Puerto Gaitán, Meta.

In memory of our compañera Graciela Bolaños

Who sowed the seeds of our own education (Indigenous education) from the first days of the Indigenous Organization; she accompanied and completely embodied in her life and heart the Intercultural and Bilingue Education Program PEBI-CRIC.

Graciela never walked alone, she was always with us; with her we learned the importance of existing as a community, of thinking for ourselves, of always starting from within, of being rooted, to continue being.

Her knowledge about education and her commitment to the Indigenous movement are inspiring to many of those who are dedicated to educating today.

May her memory and her teachings live forever and continue on with us, strengthening all our paths.



December 23, 1947-August 24, 2021

To all communities who made possible the existence of CRIC
and whose struggles shaped the educación propia.
To all teachers, compañeros, even if they are not mentioned in this book

With everyone's heart as if we were one!

Preface to the Original Spanish Text

After 33 years of existence, the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC) has established itself as the standard for the Colombian Indigenous movement and has become one of the most influential social organizations in the country.

Simultaneously, the Bilingual and Intercultural Education Program (PEBI) stands out within CRIC for its valiant organizational, political, and cultural contributions, moving beyond that which is strictly indigenous.

PEBI's history, which is described here, acts as a reference point for explaining the evolution of CRIC, the indigenous movement and its relations with the state, and the construction of a social and political alternative movement in Cauca.

Let us review some of CRIC's main points of action and the contribution of the Bilingual and Intercultural Program to its identity and development.

Resistance

For indigenous communities, resistance to the systemic domination that has been imposed on them for centuries has been the only way to avoid extermination.

1 However, by the time CRIC was founded in 1971, the disappearance of indigenous peoples was already very advanced in Colombia. Some peoples were eliminated physically, by territorial displacement, as well as by ongoing aggressions against the social organization and cultural structures of Indigenous communities. With the slogan "Unity and Land", CRIC focuses prioritized needs to try to reverse the secular process to which indigenous peoples have been subjected.

The recovery of the resguardo³³ lands was the central goal of indigenous mobilization in the earlier decades, along with the strengthening of the organization beginning with the indigenous cabildos³⁴.

When the PEBI was established at the end of the 70s, CRIC suffered the greatest repression in the history of the organization. Several of the main leaders were assassinated, including the compañero³⁵ Benjamín Dindicué. Members of his Executive Committee were also imprisoned while others continued the struggle clandestinely.

In addition to its own functions, the Education Program, along with the Health, Production, and Law programs, provided a legally sanctioned space for activists and leaders to escape severe persecution.

After the most serious emergency passed, and once CRIC had recovered its spaces for open action, the PEBI continued to articulate the prioritized needs of the Organization.

In this historical account, we explain in detail how the first schools were established in communities that were strongly committed to the struggle for the land. And most importantly, we explain how, throughout the development of the Education Program, political organizational aspects always took precedence over strictly pedagogical aspects.

³³ See Glossary for definition.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Culture

In its first years, CRIC's motto was broadened to "Unity, Land and Culture." Emerging from the heat of peasant struggles, the indigenous movement did not become fully aware of the meaning of its identity as peoples engaged in a process of struggle and resistance. But with the collection and dissemination of the history of the indigenous struggle, as well as the appreciation and engagement of indigenous language, this identity quickly emerged.

Gradually, culture was recognized as an indispensable component of resistance and political representation, as it was used to integrate a range of elements that increasingly enriched the self-knowledge of the indigenous peoples.

PEBI is undoubtedly the most qualified cultural project of CRIC and has greatly contributed to the maturation and expansion of the organization.

One of the chapters in this history will explain in detail how the worldview became the main axis of indigenous identity and the foundation of our own education, or educación propia.

Popular Project

Since its establishment, CRIC has clearly expressed the position that indigenous people are part of Colombian society, and that their struggle is to build a just and democratic society for everybody, alongside other exploited and oppressed populations.

This position, which has received strong criticism from other sectors that refer to themselves as "indigenistas,"³⁶ has remained unchanged into the present day. This position has been expressed through numerous joint struggles and solidarity with other popular organizations and groups suffering systemic repression.

However, the role of the indigenous movement inside the joint democratic and popular project is not always understood clearly. A great deal of reflection and teaching is necessary to overcome this challenge and avoid confusion. Again, the PEBI plays a decisive role in this aspect of the project. This is examined thoroughly in the third chapter, which focuses on interculturality.

2

Autonomy

Although the use of the term "autonomy" was a late addition to the motto of the indigenous organization, the theme was present from the beginning. Autonomy was at the root of several clashes with government officials, and even caused dissent within the popular sectors.

For the indigenous peoples, autonomy is an inalienable right by virtue of its own nature, which is recognized by international treaties and Colombia itself since the 1991 Constitution. However, in practice the recognition of autonomy is almost never given willingly. Organizations must fight for it by putting pressure on the State and other entities of power that are determined to subordinate the indigenous movement for their own interests.

It is concerning to see that there are sometimes attempts in the popular sector to belittle or exploit Indigenous organizations. One example is that of ANUC³⁷, whose leaders

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ La Asociación nacional de Usuarios Campesinos de Colombia, or the National Association of Peasants Users of Colombia.

attempted to seize control of both the peasant and indigenous movements, and another example is that of guerilla groups who censured and threatened organizations and leaders that did not submit to their authority.

CRIC has emerged unscathed from these confrontations, and indigenous autonomy has a high degree of acceptance today, even in sectors of the State.

The work done by PEBI has significantly contributed to the many achievements gained in strengthening the autonomy of indigenous peoples. The constant effort to build our own educational project—educación propia—is one of the pillars of indigenous autonomy today.

Relations with the State

CRIC has kept its position clearly defined, even while the relationship with the State was fundamentally confrontational. But as the indigenous movement overcomes violent persecution and increasingly gains institutional recognition, relations with the State have become more complex.

Gradually, CRIC and other indigenous organizations are able to participate in institutional spaces, always with the purpose of strengthening their own political projects but also with the continuing risk of being co-opted by dominant interests.

It is a continuous power struggle with various sectors of the State, which sometimes works in our favour, but other times does not.

The Bilingual Education Program has pioneered relations with the State by achieving official recognition of our own projects such as the PEC (Community Education Program) and obtaining State funding for various indigenous proposals. Today, the work is focused on implementing an indigenous higher education system.

3

Pedagogy for Life Projects

The final and most extensive chapter in this book demonstrates how the pedagogical proposal was put together by PEBI through the above processes. The final chapter also examines how the proposal has been consistent with the evolution of the indigenous movement over time.

The definitions of knowledge and education content, the designing of teaching materials, the pedagogical strategies, and the very conceptualization of teaching and learning processes are historically connected to the issues raised in the first chapters (resistance, worldview and culture, interculturality, communality, etc.). All of these concepts came together and a new knowledge emerged: the knowhow which sprang from the various problems that arose to the unique circumstances of individual teachers, the children, and the schools. A generational change is currently taking place in PEBI. This book is useful for new teachers who did not experience the origins of CRIC and did not participate in those foundational struggles for our own system of an educación propia. They will find a sense of why the Cauca indigenous movement opted for assuming control over education in their own territory.

Construction of Own Power

As noted earlier, the concept of resistance has been central to indigenous struggles. Most of the time, it was a defensive concept, when the physical, organizational, and cultural survival of indigenous peoples was the primary objective. However, as the indigenous movement has been able to successfully reverse the historical process of disappearance in recent years, resistance is instead becoming a political projection focused on shaping our own future.

The life plans {an Indigenous alternative to governmental development plans} that various communities and indigenous peoples have developed point to their desire to build their own path, alongside Afro-Colombians, mestizos, workers, and urban dwellers. The goal is to build a fair and equitable future, based on the propio³⁸ power held by indigenous peoples and other subordinated sectors of our society.

It is a long and difficult road, but it is already on its way. Education is of extreme importance in this process. It will continue until our utopia is one day made reality.

Pablo Tattay

Indigenous Social Alliance

³⁸ In Spanish, propio. See Glossary for definition.

Introduction

Who Are We?

Why would an Indigenous organization take on the responsibility of developing its own system of education in a country like Colombia, where the State is obligated by law and constitution to provide basic education for all citizens? This is the fundamental question we address in this book through specifically analyzing the historical education processes promoted by the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC).

In many cases, education appears only as an appendix to the central goals of a social movement's agenda; it is rarely recognized as a fundamental part of the Indigenous struggle. At CRIC, however, to do education is to do politics, and to do politics is to do education. Therefore, the Bilingual and Intercultural Education Program (PEBI) contributes directly to the fundamental political objectives of the CRIC organization CRIC: *unity, territory, culture, and autonomy*.

We are an Indigenous organization that emerged in Cauca, Colombia in 1971 from the struggle for land in the Guambiana, Kokonuko, Nasa, Totoro, Eperara and Yanacona Indigenous communities. Presently, we have recovered more than 250,000 hectares of land, which is an 80% increase of Indigenous territory in the Cauca region. Based on this territorial increase, we have rebuilt the region's Indigenous authority. By strengthening the cabildos as the centres of self-government, we have forged the conditions for autonomy. From the very beginning of our organization, re-claiming our Indigenous cultures has been one of our primary goals, because we have found the roots of our Indigenous resistance through culture. Our political project not only includes the unity of Indigenous communities, but also seeks to build a truly pluralistic country.

Education is at the foundation of our struggle. For us, education is seen as a process to develop our thinking, to analyze different problems, to discover our roots, and to strengthen our identity. Furthermore, education is an organizational space where we strengthen our community, train leaders, promote critical thinking, and encourage learners to develop their own life projects. In this sense, education goes far beyond the classroom. By assuming control of our educational process, we had to explore from within our culture an entire constellation of philosophies, values, and analytical tools. Our research strengthened our potential to help build a world where differences do not lead to discrimination, but rather enrich the experiences of everybody. This process of self-recognition involves not only an appreciation of what we already have in the cultural field, but also the redefinition of culture as an approach to project ourselves inside a more diverse and complex world. For us, culture has more to do with revitalization than with recovery. Today, we collect the past so that we can advance into the future.

All of this has resulted in an effort to create a new pedagogy that puts our communities in control; in collaboration with teachers and children, the communities guide and evaluate their educational processes. In this way, the roles of teacher, student and community are continuously built and rebuilt within the dialogue of the contexts in which they operate. Research acts as the engine of the educational process; it is used as both a training tool and a method of discovery. In this process, the wise members of the communities, the elders, the knowledge keepers, and the experts can work to deepen the aspects of epistemology and pedagogy that are more in line with our traditions and our life projects. In other words,

our goal is to establish our own guidelines for analyzing the world through our own language and systems of thought.

Focusing on what is propio for us implies an intercultural perspective. We are not separatists, nor are we isolated from the rest of the world. For us, education is a process of incorporation; we seek to incorporate and re-appropriate spaces to strengthen our culture. The school is very clearly one of these spaces. However, there are others that are equally significant. By developing writing in Indigenous languages, we are opening up a space that has traditionally been restricted to the use of the national society for colonization. In developing our languages, we are creating tools to articulate external concepts within the framework of our own political project. Simultaneously, we have taken over the space of Spanish literacy to develop it in parallel with the writing of Indigenous languages. Through mastering the national language, we can identify elements of other cultures—both nationally and internationally, as well as those of other Indigenous peoples—to identify how they can be useful for our project.

At the same time, interculturality provides us with the tools to communicate with others outside of our communities. It enables us to influence the discussions that are taking place in diverse fields such as ethnic education, propio law or ancestral law, and the construction of new social relations. In other words, although interculturality is an approach stemming from education, it also helps us build bridges that connect us to broader social and political spaces. Interculturality is a methodology that helps us deepen our ties and our commitments as members of society in general.

The Research Process

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Why have we chosen to write about the *history* of the Bilingual Education Program, instead of focusing our effort on evaluating our current situation? When we began thinking about writing our story, we wanted to present a vision of the whole process over time; we also intended to spur on new research in this area. Thus, we decided that we needed to look into the past, taking into account the different milestones in our process of education. One of the foundations of our project has always been to rescue historical references; we take advantage of the knowledge of the past to generate new methodologies and new concepts that we use in the present. Therefore, by examining our educational history, we are able to reflect upon the *dynamics* of the entire process and the efforts we had made to *generate* concepts, instead of accepting them as given or static. By re-constructing our history, we can see the full complexity of our experience. Moreover, our historical research required us to collect the voices from within the context of our struggle. We thus broadened our investigative process, which united the local and regional processes to the general dynamics of the organization.

As per our understanding, history is not a simple account of events, but a conceptual framework to learn about ourselves. In order to use history as a mirror to examine ourselves, we needed to establish some main conceptual points by which we could analyze the implications of various (historical) events. Therefore, we launched a series of workshops with members of the PEBI team, schoolteachers, and leaders of the CRIC organization. During these workshops, a collection of nearly 200 key questions were formulated. These questions revolved around the current needs and visions of the educational process. We processed these questions through analytical categories to understand history, and were therefore

able to construct a bridge between the past and the present. The questions formulated in these workshops brought us to three central, closely interrelated categories or points of our work:

(1) **Communitarianism:** We built our educational project based on the input from the communities involved in the Indigenous struggle. These communities possess a general critical awareness and a group of leaders capable of rethinking the school as a space within the context of the organizational goals of the communities. On one hand, our positioning from within the community enables new approaches to education, because the local teachers have not internalized the conventional models of schooling. On the other hand, it allows for the community's values and concepts to enter into collaborative dialogue with outside innovative ideas. Communitarianism has characterized the Indigenous movement from its beginning, allowing it to build an organization with which there is permanent dialogue between the diverse zones. Therefore, communitarianism is a CRIC organizational principle inherent in our educational project, as it allows a continuous flow of ideas between the team at the regional level and the communities at the local level. Essentially, communitarianism enables a dialogue between school pedagogy and politics.

(2) **Worldview:** We understand worldview as the processes of generating our own philosophies or epistemologies that nourish our political and pedagogical practices. The history of our educational process has involved us growing progressively closer, through research, to those elements of Indigenous cultures that provide us with clues for pondering the reality in which we live, and clues for transforming the world. It is clear that the development of our worldview has only been achieved through communitarianism: the exchange of ideas both locally and in the larger community, which is the organization {CRIC}. Due to this focus on the worldview, dialogue between generations and different languages becomes important. It involves acquiring innovative methodologies from outside, such as linguistic research to enable reflection on mother tongues—both Indigenous, and in some cases, Spanish—and devices for recovering and reworking elements of the oral tradition, material culture, and production.

(3) **Interculturality:** It would be a mistake to assume that Indigenous reconstruction occurs in isolation from other social currents and the processes of society in general. Interculturality is a key tool in the Indigenous movement; it provides us with the conceptual means to weave our history. We have written our history through an intercultural team, composed of Indigenous peoples from various ethnic groups from the Cauca region. Non-Indigenous people have also contributed to this process as external researchers. This collaboration has facilitated the dialogue between different research methodologies and interpretations into a collective and horizontal relationship. It has helped us synthesize different points of view, so that we can draw closer to our very complex reality. As a method, Interculturality also helps to articulate the different voices and perspectives on education found throughout history, including political voices, pedagogical approaches, Indigenous thinking, theoretical currents, and how the relationships between these voices and perspectives have transformed over time.

These three central axes help us to interpret the process of developing our pedagogy and extend it beyond our organization. Moreover, this interpretation provides the foundation for developing an entirely new proposal for the Indigenous education system. We will address the pedagogical implications of our process in chapter four.

From these three central axes, we interviewed key players in the history of the education project. Participants also reflected on the three central questions from their own experiences with education. For example, teams from diverse places such as López Adentro, Ambaló, Pueblo Nuevo and Jambaló, as well as different participants of the regional team, contributed their own research. Workshops were also conducted in Tierradentro, in the Western area of Cauca, in Guambía and in Paniquitá, where contributors shared their perspectives on education while also sharing their experiences and knowledge on the work being done in this theme. Importantly, these events not only provided us with data for the historical account of our system of education, but also provided a new conceptual path for analysis. Moreover, we conceived this project as something that does not end in the written text, but also provides guidelines for reflection and the re-appropriation of the history of the education process, encouraging further research.

The Roots of our Organization

Before the establishment of CRIC in 1971, many Indigenous communities had lost their land to landowners in the Great Cauca. These oppressors converted the land to ranches and forced the previous owners to pay to live on the land, a tax, whether with produce or with labour known as the terraje.³⁹ The consolidation of the farms on Indigenous territories began in the late nineteenth century—when the economy of Great Cauca was declining—which covered more than half of Colombia, including what is now known as Valle, Huila, Nariño, Cauca, Caquetá and Putumayo. This consolidation was also due to the colonial devastation of forests and mines, which led the ruling class to turn their focus to the Indigenous lands. Simultaneously, the expropriation of Indigenous lands freed Indigenous wage laborers to work the land. By the early twentieth century the State made a pact with the landowners, enacting Law 55 in 1905, for the appropriation of resguardo lands, handing them to municipalities. In this context, the movement led by Manuel Quintín Lame arose with the focus of countering the expropriation of lands and abuses against the terrajeros⁴⁰ who had lived on them. Quintín managed to raise awareness among Indigenous communities on the need to defend the resguardo land, but failed to break the terraje in Cauca due to acute repression on the movement by the State and landowners.

At the dawn of CRIC's creation, most families in the fields had less than two hectares, while half of the land belonged to two percent of the landowners. Land shortages forced many families to move to other regions and become labourers. The cabildos administered the few remaining resguardo lands, but because of the displacement of the community members and the influence of traditional political parties and the Church, they were an extremely weak institution with little capacity to resist government policy that was advancing the termination of the resguardos. Furthermore, external dominant values introduced in many communities (particularly through official schools) and the control of education were leading Indigenous persons to deny their identity, to take underground

³⁹ See Glossary for definition.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

the elders' specialized knowledge and to reject their native languages.

When the process of establishing CRIC began in 1971, it was thought that the struggle of the communities would have to move towards political and organizational ideals consistent with those of the wider revolutionary process. Therefore, at the assembly of February 24, 1971 (when CRIC was founded) and in other related processes, peasant organizations, social activists and progressive factions of the Church participated with Indigenous communities. The CRIC established a program that returned to many of the goals of Quintín Lame:

1. Recover the resguardo lands;
2. Expand the resguardo territories;
3. Strengthen the Indigenous cabildos;
4. Abolish the terraje payments;⁴¹
5. Increase awareness of the laws concerning Indigenous peoples and demand their fair application;
6. Defend the history, language and customs of Indigenous peoples;
7. Train bilingual teachers to provide culturally relevant education in their respective languages.

Later, two more points, derived from the land recuperation process, were added to the agenda of the struggle:

8. Promote communal economic organizations;
9. Defend natural resources and protect the environment.

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It should be noted here that the right to bilingual education was one of the foundations of CRIC's program from the beginning, in connection to the struggle for land, authority, and culture.

Since its inception, community involvement has been instrumental in building the CRIC organization's policies. Local and zonal assemblies have always worked with the regional conferences, in which they have periodically created a space for discussions—a process that continues today. These conferences have been key to formulating many of the principles of the educational policy and establishing the criteria for programs created in accordance with organizational needs, including legal, social and cultural development (education, communication, health, women's issues) and economic needs (production, cooperatives and community enterprises). While seeking to meet the diverse challenges facing communities, these proposals proved organizational capabilities and served as inspiration to other communities in the region.

CRIC's achievements are considerable. It has recovered most of the resguardo land that communities had lost in the century prior to the founding of the organization. CRIC operates nearly 400 businesses and community stores, providing an economic alternative for the development of communities. The number of cabildos has significantly increased; little more than twenty councils existed in Cauca in 1971, but today there are over one hundred. The organization's positions regarding solidarity in the economy, environmental conservation, and food security remain top priority. These positions are not framed exclusively

⁴¹ See Terraje definition in Glossary

as Indigenous issues but are intertwined with the demands of other popular sectors, both urban and rural. The recent recognition of Indigenous Territorial Entities, including active regulation and conformity to these rights, represents the continuity of this struggle for land that began three decades ago.

The history of CRIC's Program of Intercultural Bilingual Education (PEBI) has to be located within the development of the whole organization's agenda. In the following chapters, we will examine in detail how this educational project developed within the political and organizational framework of CRIC. Since the beginning, the Program has been committed to the following criteria:

1. Prioritize the teachings by example;
2. Schools must act as pillars in sustaining the recovery of land and other social rights as they are being reclaimed;
3. Teachers should be selected by the communities themselves;
4. Teachers must be bilingual or willing to recover their native language;
5. The bilingual schools should act as nurseries for revitalizing cultures;
6. The community should participate in orienting school activities;
7. The school must teach insider knowledge and external knowledge in a critical manner;
8. Children must be guided so that they will remain in the communities and provide services within their communities;
9. The schools should not begin from the official [national] curriculum; rather, new programs of study should be designed collectively;
10. Instruction should be given in both Indigenous and Spanish languages.

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The implementation of these criteria has undergone significant changes over the years. This story is the subject of the following pages and chapters.

Chapter 1

Collective Building and Education as Politics

*“Graft yourself into our culture
the best of the universal culture,
but the trunk must continue
to be our culture”*

- José Martí

The Origins of the Bilingual Education Program (PEB)

What is education for CRIC? What is their educational projection in comparison with conventional education? How can education be a political tool? These fundamental questions have governed the work of the Bilingual Education Program from their early years. Some characteristics of education in the region—the separation between the school and the political community, the non-valuation of the Indigenous, the absence of respect for the community authorities (namely the cabildos), the silence of the Indigenous language within the classrooms, the authoritarianism of teachers, the teachings that ignore and belittle the environment—were criticized within the PEB and they led us to reconceptualize education in general. We can already catch a glimpse of these new objectives among the Conclusions of the 5th CRIC Congress in 1978:

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- Strengthening the struggle for culture and for the cabildos means creating power to build and control our own autonomy as Indigenous and exploited people.
- Education is not in the hands of the communities, it is in the hands of the government and the church, and its content does not benefit our interests. It is essential to create the Bilingual Education Program to research and design an Indigenous educational proposal as the basis of our search for autonomy.
- The education criteria require that the teachers be bilingual, that they research the history and culture of their communities, and that these experiences be collected. Equally, it is required that the linguistic and educational situation be analyzed in order to establish new policies generated from the peoples themselves.

These conclusions were generated by a political movement, not by a pedagogical movement. The movement aimed to boost a “non-alienating” education, not only with the view of humanizing relations in the classroom, but with the community itself. Beyond the goal of transforming the school itself, it was sought that the community take ownership of [this education] as a part of their daily lives. And it did not stop there. If the school belonged to the community, it would also be a fundamental axis for the development of the people’s struggle, a tool for awareness and organization. The idea was not about “doing school” as a goal by itself, but about achieving political strength for the entire community through the school. As Pedro Cortés, then professor at the University of Cauca and a collaborator

with CRIC, expresses: “CRIC was a movement for education by the unschooled masses.” When the collective construction of education is discussed in the PEB, it is in this sense.

The First Community Schools

The community schools were established in those communities that had sustained struggles for land, critical settlements where there had been organizational advances. In this way, a school was established in Laguna de Siberia, a multi-ethnic territory which presented an eminent risk of the loss of the Nasa Yuwe language, but where a strong struggle was waged by the terrajeros to regain the resguardo territories. Roberto Chepe recalls:

So I was a day labourer and the promoters were from Silvia; I went there with cargo and food with the Silvians. So the time passed until it was proposed to have a meeting in a community, where there were terrajeros, where some compañeros⁴² had come, and where the cabildos of Caldono were meeting together. And the compañero from Silvia arrived there, this [Julio] Tunubalá. He spoke about the land, how it has been since the time of the conquest. We were originally from the plains, but we have been confined more and more to the mountain-lands. And those lands were rightfully ours, so we had to unite ourselves, both the peasants [and] the Indigenous people. That’s how we were meeting for almost a year; after a year of meetings they proposed a plan [to recover] that estate belonging to Heliodoro Tróchez. So, I joined that plan and we began to work. In 1975, the Executive Committee began to arrive, they were [Marcos and Jesús] Avirama. They directed how they were going to collaborate for the land; it was very conflictive then, the landowners were always going to persecute us, taking people to jail, but the community had to continue working for long time. Palechor participated too. Yes, Gregorio Palechor, he told us about his struggles, how he participated in the Thousand Day War, he explained that they had to fight. So I liked that and I began participating, although the terrajeros had much more responsibility.

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Other communities that also showed great organizational capacity and, where CRIC schools were founded, were Chimán-La Marquesa ([in] Silvia), El Cabuyo (in Tierradentro), Vitoyó (in Jambaló), Potrerito (in Toribió), El Canelo (in Popayán) and Las Delicias (in Buenos Aires).

Let us pause for a moment and consider this last community, where the struggle for Indigenous authority and for the land was awakened with the creation of CRIC, and listen to the voice of one of their most recognized leaders, Juan Peña:

“[The first] recovery here [was] of Kwe’sx Kwet, which they call Paridero, and another here, Upper La Chapa, which was recovered; the first victory [was] Upper La Chapa. Upper and Lower La Chapa, there yes, of Agustina up there; all of that was recovery. Then we started to see that the need was not only to recover land, but that the need was to have an Indigenous leader or leadership where there had been a resguardo, or where a resguardo had been created. Wherever there was a resguardo, we had to have our own cabildo. Land recovery means to produce our own food, no?”

⁴² See Glossary for definition.

Nasa communities were not the only ones involved in the process. The Guambiana community of El Chimán founded the Chimán-La Marquesa school, as Álvaro Tombé, ex-president of CRIC 1990-1991, recalls. The Guambianos from Chimán were organized in the struggle several years before the Guambiano cabildo recovered the hacienda of Las Mercedes (which is called Santiago today):

We started to fight for possession of the land from the landowners Pacho Morales and Aurelio Mosquera many years ago. In 1970, with the help of the INCORA and the compañeros of CRIC, we recovered the land of El Chimán in Silvia, and it was when we organized the community business of El Chimán, that today we also call La Marquesa. With the elders and the community we got to thinking, because it was also discussed in the assemblies and in the congresses. And therefore everybody was learning that recovery of the land was not sufficient, that we had to become strong peoples, great peoples as they say. So, out of those meetings came the idea that it was necessary to create a school with everyone's shared effort. The school in El Chimán was organized with our partners of the Chorrera, and Loma Pueblito was among the first bilingual schools; in 1979, we gathered the children and named the first teachers: Abel Tombé—who is still a teacher in that school—as well as Franciso Hurtado and other compañeros that were coming to us. Many compañeros of CRIC's program visited us and would talk with all of the parents about how to recover the customs, [we said] that we had to write in our language, because here we all were speaking *namuy wam*, but we had to fight for the school to teach our ways. Some of our compañeros helped to teach history with the teachers. We taught about the struggles for land recovery, performing plays with the elders for the children to see and learn.

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CRIC Demonstration

There were other places in Cauca where the struggles were more cultural, where the Indigenous language was alive and the history of the first chiefs was present. One of these places was the vereda⁴³ of El Cabuyo, resguardo of Vitoncó (Tierradentro), where the school was founded. In Tierradentro, the Catholic Church was controlling education because the zone was officially “missionary territory,” where they intended to “civilize” the Indigenous people—in other words, to teach them Spanish and de-Indigenize them. There was an alliance between the Apostolic Prefecture of Tierradentro and the gamonales⁴⁴ of the traditional parties, who controlled the composition and function of the Indigenous cabildos. Therefore, the struggle for autonomy was as cultural as it was political, as Jorge Penagos, who at that time was a teacher in El Cabuyo, recalls:

Within education, what happened is that Indigenous people were very suppressed in the official schools. I remember that we were ashamed of being Indigenous and of speaking our own Nasa Yuwe. Benjamín [Dinducué] had a clear vision to strengthen the organization. From here, we adopted a seven-point program that had already been organized [elsewhere], in his view in order to have education with ideological content and for the education to be accepted by the Indigenous people, it was necessary to train Indigenous teachers. However, back then, the cabildos were not clear. The cabildos were controlled by the Catholic religion, by the priests. I think that confronting this, Benjamín began discussing this situation at assemblies, meetings and conferences. In 1980 [education] began to be strengthened through workshops.

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The compañero Jorge talks about the ideological clashes he had as a teacher arguing with the Prefecture:

The priest was named Juan Murcia. This priest was the parish priest of Vitoncó, and he was also the school inspector and supervisor in the education system. Then, he came there and tried to scold me. I told him that I was there by the authorization of the community and by members of the cabildo, and therefore we were taking stance.⁴⁵ This was my reply, and then I let him speak. When he had said everything to me, he belittled me heavily. He said that ‘no, you guys can’t continue teaching, even if you manage to teach a first or a second grade class, you people will never be able to teach high school, never mind university’. He said that in our own little school. That’s when I lost my patience, I had already raised my head, and they had already prepared me on how to respond to a person with upper education; I immediately began thinking about what they had taught me and raised my head and looked directly at him without lowering my eyes. He crouched. Then, I began to tell him that if they wanted to continue exploiting us, as they had been doing since 1492 when the priests arrived with the Christ, and brought the bayonet with the left hand and the cross with the right hand, claiming that it was within the Bible. I kept talking at him like that, and I told him that our affairs were our own, and that as visitors they had to respect us. That we were organizing ourselves to raise our heads and not to look down, that we have to educate ourselves in order to educate our children according to our customs. Thus, the priest, as he saw that I did not bend down, spun his horse around and said that we shall leave it that way for now and left.

⁴³ See Glossary for definition.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Literally, Jorge said “we are lifting our head.”

Because of its ability to link the cultural strength to the struggle, El Cabuyo was incorporated within the cluster of CRIC's community schools. Another school founded in response to the knowledge of the oral tradition of the Nasa people there was the Miravalle school in the municipality of Suárez. But because the organization did not grow there, the school ended there as well.

The last school founded during the first wave of creation of CRIC schools was the one in Totoró. In this community, there were no more than four families speaking the native language. For that reason, the community demanded that CRIC come and develop a strategy for training teachers, aimed at the recuperation of the language by linking the school with the few native speakers that remained. With the alliance of Totoró to the first group of schools, the PEB was tasked not only with the political and territorial recovery, but also with a strategy for bringing the process of cultural recovery in support of the communities' struggles.

In summary, the creation of these schools, as seeds planted throughout Cauca, followed three criteria: (1) locations that showed a cultural strength and could act as role models for the other communities, (2) places where the culture and especially the language were in decline, but the processes of land recovery were demanding education for further cohesion, and (3) places that were losing their culture completely and needed to recover it.

Kwe'sx piya yat – Our School

The objective of these schools was to contextualize education in everyday life, or in other words, to generate an education system that will defend the Indigenous people as a collective and not a system to better ourselves individually. Although the local schools were there to supposedly fulfill the latter purpose, in practice they provided second-class education to Indigenous communities.

Partially, the contextualization drawn from the community's realities meant that the schools were reflecting on and researching the political, social, economic, and cultural problems of the territory, which we will address later. For the moment, let us consider how the community participated—and continued participating—in the construction of a new school. The same Indigenous communities, working alongside the regional organization, generated the guidelines for these community schools. In particular, the communities contributed to the development of themes that would be studied there, the elaboration of criteria for the use and assessment of their languages, the definition of profiles of the people and the types of communities and teachers that we wanted to have, the relationship that should exist between the school and the community, and the orientation of activities and methodologies. The periodic evaluation of the school as a whole was central to this process, a task that included a community activity every two months. The progress of the school was assessed, and the community would reflect collectively to generate recommendations about how the school should continue in the future.

The community members themselves attended training workshops to generate ideas for creating new curricula, so that those schools would be different from both the government and church schools. It is true that at first, people understood the educational project only in terms of scholarly education. What they wanted was a school, but one school to serve the community, an institution that promoted cultural revitalization instead of disintegration. However, during the process of constructing an alternative community school, the same community members opened their eyes to a different idea of what education should be, through public dialogue between parents and students, as Aberlardo Ramos explains:

That's why we were talking about a different sort of thing, where the parent began to understand that in the school, children were talking about the conversations that they had at home, about their experiences with their parents, and that socialization on this topic was happening. Then, every two months when they called for evaluations at the parent's meetings, the children could present their reflections, their discussions, and establish communication with the community. Then, the parents realized that their children understood what they were being asked, that they had expanded their knowledge, and that they could demonstrate, for example, mathematical operations; and that eventually any parent could pose a question to the children and they were ready to answer and talk normally, with confidence and without fear of making mistakes and being corrected. Simply, having a conversation between children and adults of the community was something new and different, but it permitted parents to see that their children were dealing with interesting topics for the community at the school.

At the school in Potrerito, ten minutes from the town of Toribío, the community took education into their hands. They established the school despite their proximity to Toribío, because the school in that town did not fulfill the needs of the community, as Evencio Tombé explains:

The main problem was that the school in Toribío didn't teach about what we were thinking, our thinking as Indigenous people. So we planned our own school. We have compañeros who were teaching, while others were getting additional training, and so we moved ahead. Even though we were near that other school, it was not worth it, and we created our own school. That was saying and doing.

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Many important leaders of the regional movement were living in Potrerito. They participated in the process of creating a school, which initially worked out of a private home. Afterwards, they built their own building which at that time served as the community store and a place for holding meetings. This demonstrated that our intentions went beyond just a school, as Evencio narrates:

Seeing the needs that we had, because the children were not received in the town nearby and because of our shortage of resources, we made the combined effort to open the school among ourselves. There were very few compañeros in Potrerito, but it also involved compañeros from the vereda nearby. The school was opened in my house. It lasted there for approximately two years. I believe that the first teacher was the compañero José Fidel Secue, then Saulo Valencia continued working. They worked as volunteers, without receiving economic compensation. Saulo was very young (...)

Later we realized that we had to build a bigger space for the school, because it is always better to have our own. People approved and we set out to do it. We did it with two services in mind: a larger room for running the school and a smaller space for the school store... At that time the ones pushing the struggle for land recovery was the vereda Potrerito (...)

When the store still did not exist, we had to go and shop at the village. There they sold half a pound of sugar for [the same price as] a pound. We started to think and found this as the primary reason for establishing our store in the school.

The community that created this school hoped that it would serve as a training camp for future leaders. Evencio says that after the creation of the school, Cristóbal Secue began participating in the struggle: "At that time the compañero Cristóbal Secue was still not involved completely in the struggle. Later on, he told me that he wanted to fight for the recovery of the land. So, we integrated him into the process and he was rising up like foam."

The community participated in multiple assemblies to direct the course of education. In order to open the school, all of the elders and the *thē' wala*, (traditional healer), were convened. Together, we examined the suitability of opening the school under the community's responsibility. The PEB had to advise and guide the training of the teacher and monitor the school. In this way, the teachers were linked to the training activities offered by CRIC schools every two months: workshops that analyzed what the teachers were doing in the schools, for developing our own pedagogy, and for programming activities. We also had evaluation workshops in Potrerito with the community, the teachers, the students, and members of the PEB team. In those workshops, the children presented what they had learned in different areas so their parents had a frame of reference for discussing the function of the school more clearly. The teachers also gave information about the children's attitudes, their willingness to work as a team and to collaborate, and their responsibility to complete their homework and make small inquiries. Based on the work presented by the students, the whole community would engage in debate about the pedagogic orientation of the curriculum and the way in which the students were learning. They discussed the use of the language in the school, and whether or not we were speaking Nasa Yuwe. They evaluated the progress made in literacy. On this basis, future forms of work and study were recommended. As Graciela Bolaños says:

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On one occasion we went to the evaluation of the Potrerito school, and we found that a large portion of the community was unhappy with the school's results. They complained that the children were learning nothing, that they did not want to work at home, and that they spent all this time at school and yet it seemed like they weren't learning to read and write properly. Gathered to give account of their work, the children showed their work to all the parents; all the work of the previous two months was recorded in their notebooks. Here we could see the tours they had done through the community enterprises in the surrounding areas, the way that they were working these lands, the products that they were taking to the market, the products that were destined for the home. The children noted how livestock produced erosions on the hillsides, and asked questions about it. They showed their suggestions for producing organic fertilizers. They supported their presentation with a large map of the region where they located all the community-productive businesses. They marked the production that was being done at these businesses and they suggested that not everything should be taken to the market; some of the products should be left for family consumption instead. They shared community stories that had been told by the elders, and they also showed how they had organized the school's library. Parents had the opportunity of putting forth problems for the children to resolve as part of the evaluation. Cristóbal Secue stood and put forth this problem: "I have a square of land and I want to plant a clump of bananas every five meters and an orange tree every three meters. How many banana saplings do I need and how many little orange saplings do I need prepared as seed?" The children that were listening copied the problem on the board. They were not sure how to solve the problem, so they were

adding, subtracting, everybody helping. Finally, they decided to go out to the pasture surrounding the school, and first they marked out the portion corresponding to the square. Then, with some twine they made knots every five meters and every three meters and put sticks in front of the five meters and measured the knots every three meters. By visualizing, they could solve the problem in a practical manner. The community was alert and tense because it seemed like the children weren't going to solve the problem. However, the community was very satisfied with the more practical approach adopted by the children to solve it.

Everyone offered advice on how to improve the work in the school and felt very positively about the work presented by the children. Cristóbal got up and said: 'Well, then, the community says that it's okay. I think that there is a lot to improve, but given that we could not eliminate this school, I will enroll my child for next year.'

These assemblies did not just serve to ground the school, but also to strengthen the community because the attendants would use this time to discuss other problems regarding both the school and the community. This generated a collective responsibility toward the school-community and community-school relationship. In other words, in these assemblies we did not just build a school, we built a life project. In this way, we made *kwe'sx piya yat*, or "our school," in Potrerito.

The Selection and Training of Teachers

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For schools like the one in Potrerito, we needed to create new types of teachers, trained without the prejudices of the conventional schools. They would be leaders sprung from the same community. The profile of our teachers would be very different than those of the "official" school; our teachers would be "agents for political and educative change," as William García (educator and collaborator in the first years of the PEB) describes:

The profile and role of a teacher as defined by the Indigenous communities is completely different from the profile and role that we have for a teacher who graduates from a normal school.⁴⁶ It fell to us to demonstrate that [the community] should not have the same profile in their heads when they think of the Indigenous teacher as they do for a normal school graduate. Perhaps the question was whether the Indigenous teacher establishes a more affectionate relationship with children because of his mastery of their native Nasa Yuwe language, for example, which from a psychological side is of fundamental importance, especially in their early years. Well, that would be a good thing. Then, that was of great value, but a non-Indigenous teacher would not have this valuable asset; the non-Indigenous teacher might have good academic training... but he would be at a complete disadvantage compared to an Indigenous teacher, because the latter developed a much better relationship directly with the child and with the community as well. This was what the Indigenous movement was fighting for because the teacher disliked the fact that traditional education ignored the identity, the culture, denied the language, and so on. Therefore, the new profile was the right

⁴⁶ See Glossary for definition.

fit, but the Colombian institutions came to recognize it only recently, and opened the doors to this new profile.

William also told us, with a certain sense of humour, how the communities chose their teachers:

I collected testimonies of how the teachers were chosen. For example, Henry Corpus, of the Nápoles school in Caloto. He told me that he did not want to be a teacher, that he wanted to be a peasant. 'But a peasant' and he insisted that he wanted to be a peasant, 'But then, why did you get involved with teaching?' 'It was because the community chose me and sent me to teach.' And he added: 'I did not know how to read and write.' So, I asked him 'why did you not ask them to send you for training to a normal school or a college?' 'Yes, I told them, but they said "no", they said that I had to be a teacher.' He added that his father had been a worker—how do you say it?—like a slave, he was a terrajero at an hacienda⁴⁷ that had already been recovered and that now was his turn to stay on that hacienda and became a teacher. Finally, I insisted, why had he not studied, why had he not done anything else? Then he told me: 'But the community is the one who knows and the community put me here because the community says that I serve.' This is what he said.

But the stories of some of these teachers named by the community show us that they were local leaders who had already inspired confidence and respect from the community—they were not just ordinary people. This is the case of Roberto Chepe, teacher at the Laguna of Siberia, who before founding the school was participating fully as a cabildo councilman in the land recovery struggles. CRIC did not abandon those new un-schooled teachers, but instead provided them with training, as the same Roberto narrates:

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So I continued that way until 1978 when the compañeros Aviramas and other compañeros arrived. They had already talked about the education system, I mean, in order to organize a school; they had already spoken with the community, so the community chose me to go for training. At that time we went to Canelo, Puracé, it was there that we started. And with [Jorge Penagos], we went to Medellín and Buga.

In those workshops, they trained the new teachers in both political and educational issues. The workshops were spaces for socialization about the Indigenous legislation, about the history of the communities, as well as spaces for the development of methodologies of cultural recuperation; they also functioned as circles of reflection about what they were looking for in the education system. Pedro Cortés tell us:

So, the thing about the teachers is that they were agents of the Church, or they were agents of the politicians. So, we did all critical thinking, say, a reflection with a critical look about what was happening in the school at the time. I believe that the workshop, basically, focused on that, on the need to reclaim the history, to reclaim the language but obviously without having linguistic elements, because no one was a linguist, so we still did not discuss that side much.

47 See Glossary for definition.

In pedagogical terms, this vision implicated a turn in the methodology of the classroom, as Pedro relates: “There was no literacy, there were no subject areas, it was a rather a critical view of the official school system.” Graciela Bolaños adds:

There was a strong discussion. For example, they removed repetition; there were no lined notebooks at this time. They tried to make a very different school. The classroom was not the four walls; the classrooms were in open fields and without boards, without chalk.

The idea was not even to have teachers with experience, but people to be trained. That is, the idea was that schools were laboratories for the learning process, with a lot of practical work that would provide the foundation for theoretical development. And on the other hand, the school had to take into account the problems of each location where the school was situated, as it had to be linked to the production, to the cultural situation of each region in order to strengthen it.

Well, I asked many times and said: ‘But, teachers with just two years of primary school? I don’t know how we will do that.’ Then, they replied: ‘No, but that can be learned, it has to be this way because if we took teachers who were already trained, it would not be possible to develop something completely new.’ And the strategy was to establish the experimental schools like laboratories. So that’s how it was done.

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At the beginning of the process of establishing these schools, the communities had sent different people to each of the workshops, which hindered the continuity and the follow-up needed to create a [curricular] approach. Following discussion with the communities about this problem, we overcame it, emphasizing the importance of a more continuous training of the same teachers.

Although the first teachers did not have higher academic training, this situation contributed to maintaining an open input from the community regarding what training the teachers ought to receive. Thus, the teacher became an entity of the collective, and although the demands always went beyond what any person could give for their community, the teachers were willing to bring the best results to their people. This attitude facilitated making everyday school life the main training context for the teachers. The teachers of the first schools, together with their communities, received their training through the same processes as the shaping of the schools. By taking part of an inter-ethnic (in the sense that it consisted of various Indigenous ethnic groups and *mestizo*⁴⁸ partners) and interdisciplinary team (as educators, psychologists and anthropologists participated alongside the traditional authorities and *thë’ walas*), the first teachers were trained through the practice of creating and carrying out an innovative educational proposal both in its collective methods as well as its political intentions. The very context of the schools—the cultural scope of the communities, their relationships with mother nature, their struggles and organizational processes—was building an educational environment where the communitarian life was an indispensable condition of the pedagogical model that we were looking for and the community was the main source for the teacher training. In this sense, the pedagogical training was not exclusive to the teachers; instead, it extended to

48 See Glossary for definition.

the local leaders, the community, the coordinating team, and the regional organization itself. Through this process, the role of the teacher in the community changed, because the teacher ceased to be the only carrier of knowledge and instead became a coordinator and articulator of different streams of knowledge.

Thus, every workshop, seminar, meeting, and assembly became a laboratory to discuss the schools' practices and issues and turn them into viable pedagogical proposals. In what sense were the participants trained in this process? Everyone had to refocus their own vision of what the education system was about: its role in the Indigenous community and in society in general, who would teach and who would learn, where teaching occurred and where learning occurred, which criteria was used to generate a methodology and the content of learning and teaching, how to investigate regional and local needs, and how to connect these demands to the education system. Likewise, of vital importance was the reflection and recognition of the languages, histories, and cultural practices that were not only contained in the education system but were fundamental to it. This required an internal research process around the language, the oral tradition, and the cultural practices that embodied these concepts. The process of training participants did not only include reflecting on and researching Indigenous cultures, but also looking to the conceptions and practices of other societies in order to analyze them and determine how to learn from them. The research covered, for example, political and historical issues about Colombia and other countries, and the economic and working conditions of other regions. The research also reflected on different forms of education of other peoples, including Latin American models of scholarly education and popular alternatives. The fundamental tool for these incorporative processes was—and remains—interculturalism, a concept that we will cover in the third chapter.

The teachers themselves and the schools around La Laguna and López Adentro, where the foundations of the Indigenous education proposal were consolidated, converted these schools into training centres. Other teachers who had been selected by their communities to open new schools arrived there as well. Besides articulating the daily activities of the school, they developed a more intense work program. This program began with a basic training plan based on the seminars and workshops that had been directed by the regional program. Later, this program would be taken up again for the professionalization of Indigenous teachers in agreement with the State. This plan included recognition of socialization and childhood development processes in the different regions, diagnosis of scholarly education in the organizational context of the community, and integration of linguistics into the curriculum. Two of the professors who participated in this stage were Isidro Fernández from Pueblo Nuevo, who worked with the school of La Laguna and remained there for over a year before opening a new school in Loma Amarilla, and Judith Dagua from La Esperanza de Vitoyó, who spent a year and a half in López Adentro before joining a school in Toribío. The training centre of López Adentro then moved to a new land recuperated in the plains, where the current coordinator of Florida (Valle) and teachers from the resguardos of Cauca like Canoas, Munchique, Delicias, and Caloto received their training as a team. It should be noted that participants in the training activities were delegates of the cabildos of various resguardos and a regular dialogue was maintained with them through quarterly assessments. In this way, the communities continued to participate in guiding the process and, in the medium term, the delegates went back to their places of origin not only as teachers, but also to assume organizational positions in management of the cabildos.

Research as a Central Strategy

The process of cultural recovery occurred through research. Research was central and strategic for making the school central to the community. Graciela continues:

Along with the entire team of teachers, we began the process of, first of all, defining the central components of the research; this is described in a document. A guiding element said that the research should be conceived from within itself. It was even indicated that we should not begin to work with pre-established objectives; that we should be making the objectives as part of the collective work and as an outcome of the process. The guide was kind of like a recommendation from the different *compañeros* who remained there, recommending how to work, how to guide the process methodically. We were instructed to not work with defined questions, but to instead let the research process reveal the conflicts, because if we took something predefined, it was said that it might be influencing the cultural aspect. But notice that with this approach, we were giving a strong importance to the ways in which cultures develop their thinking. This view, obviously, went against the structure of the concepts of academic research, and so we began working on the role that linguistics and languages would play in this process.

The research was done on the Indigenous language, as Manuel Sisco narrates:

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We asked: “But you were a bilingual teacher. What was it like to be a bilingual teacher? What was the role of language?” Manuel: “It turns out that one had chances to speak because it was truly Nasa, but myself, I always felt that whatever I was saying, conversing with them, was pointless because I didn’t understand yet. I moved very quickly within the process. Then with the guidance of José Fidel [Secue, who was the program coordinator at the time for Caldon], I began to try to speak, and instead of keeping the children cooped in there, I began to take them outside and we went walking and looking around, then we went back to the school to talk about what we had seen. So, for me there was not first grade nor fourth, the discussion for everyone were purely in *Nasa Yuwe*. Then that process became very interesting because the children have many observations; they are very observant. I was selecting topics and giving discussion to everything, but despite this I was not sure of what they were doing: whether this was education, or research, or what it was that I was doing; because I had understood that to educate you have to provide finalized knowledge. Gradually I came to understand that that’s not true, that was not what education is for us. So then if you are really bilingual, you have to go to both languages, first Nasa with the comments, but you also had to bring Spanish, but slowly.”

But they were also already developing tools for the research strategy to work as a starting point, as Abelardo Ramos tells us:

We had writing exercises to identify the problems that could arise in this process of literacy and we were aware of the need to improve the capacity to work with those techniques. It was as if the writing of the language also served as the community’s contemplation, reflecting about the possible problems we might encounter and seeking

out possible themes—areas of knowledge of the culture—to further deepen this search. For this reason, there were already conversations about how Indigenous cultures already possess a knowledge, and how the traditional healer is the one who manages that knowledge. We recognized that we needed to understand the knowledge of plants; we needed to see how that oral knowledge, which was used at practical, daily, and ordinary levels, could be used and translated to better structure and develop methods for analyzing and understanding current needs. It was done within an oppositional approach that pitted conventional medicine—which is eminently commercial—against the Nasa medicine that is practically free of charge. So, we wanted to develop things like that, processes of methodology, reflections, or analytical thought. The purpose was to understand the myths, the traditions, whatever messages existed; to understand the mechanisms at work, the structures, the narratives; to identify their types and to understand why they have endured. We should assess these myths, these beliefs, these practices that we have called cultural practices, to understand a little about the thoughts of Indigenous people, of all the participating Indigenous peoples. I believe that these elements, in later times, have been grounding the work of Indigenous peoples, the perspective of areas like territoriality, based on how Indigenous peoples have defended this territory throughout the ages, who they were, things like that. And the political thought—based on history—clarified all those aspects.

This linguistic work arose from the people's demands. When Ángel María Yoinó spoke in *Nasa Yuwe* at the 3rd Congress of CRIC in Silvia, the crowd was moved. His words lead them to seek the legitimization of their language in education, to gain space and prestige for the language, for it to realize its full potential. Later, the Indigenous language became a vehicle for public expression of people's demands, as Roberto Chepe states in his account of the founding of the PEB at the 5th Congress of CRIC in Coconuco, 1978: “[Benjamín Dindicué] spoke in *Nasa Yuwe* at the Congress. He said: “*Kwe'sx yuwete piyawa' pejxa', kew'sxyakh ewme kapiya'na ústa*” (We need to study in our own language. They are not teaching us well.)”

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But the research also involved connecting children to the community's production processes. For example, from the beginning, schools created experimental gardens. Juan Peña de Las Delicias (Buenos Aires) discusses the project, emphasizing the participation of community leaders in the process:

So that's where the parents would react to the experimental work, as they bring a lot from outside. But we didn't know how to prepare the fertilizers. I had walked by Toribío, by CICEC, and saw that there, they leave about six months stirring lime and ash. And it's not like they leave it all piled there, but instead they have four people who are tending it, stirring in rabbit shit, stirring up guinea pig shit. When I asked why, they explained that by doing it this way, flies cannot breed there.

The compañero Peña shares his memory of the first attempts to bring production into the school, a topic we will continue in the chapter on the worldview, where we will look at the introduction of tul, a school garden intended to connect production to cosmogonic vision. At the school of La Laguna, there were several attempts to plant a school garden using organic supplies and seeds from the region. A pamphlet called “The experience of our school garden,” produced by the school in 1986, explains:

Since the birth of our bilingual school in 1980, we agreed that we would have a school garden with vegetables so that we would also learn to work, to produce other foods, to love and to care for our mother earth at our school. Understanding the importance of food and the necessity of sustaining the school restaurant, the community decided to start the garden in 1982. We chose a lot on the site that we had selected for building the school house, and we prepared it.

We tilled the land; we made some furrows and planted onions, cilantro, carrots, tomatoes, and cabbages. All the plants germinated, but they all died quickly that year because of the summer; we could not water them every day due to school vacation. We planted again, but some compañeros from the community had converted the garden site into a playing soccer field during the following vacations.

Analyzing these events showed that neither the community, nor the teacher himself, nor the compañeros of the regional coordination understood the importance of connecting nature and production at the school. Therefore, in practice it was difficult to accept that children learn to cultivate the land, although meetings and conferences recommended that the community allocate land for the children to plant, cultivate, and harvest.

Additionally, we didn't have experience with planting some of the vegetables, and we were not familiar with some of the plants that they gave us to cultivate or grow in the garden.

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Another problem was that some compañeros weren't used to eating vegetables, so they didn't like them. Therefore they also didn't want us to plant them. However, through discussion and study, we decided to try the work in the garden again. We assessed the types of plants that we wanted and that we knew about and we agreed to give priority to the plants of the traditional tlul. So, the project of the garden was conceived as a laboratory: to establish which were the best conditions for cultivating the vegetables, to learn about organic fertilizers, to identify the best treatment against plagues, and other important questions. In other words, we were able to connect production to the pedagogical processes of the school, taking advantage of the knowledge that the elders had taught us and learning to cultivate new foods like the carrot.

Finally, the research process implied that the PEB team lead their own reflections around the process. It was political education through research, as Graciela Bolaños argues:

As I remember, there were different levels in the field of research. One of the first projects was general in nature, saying "What had to be researched in order to consolidate the school?" ... Do you remember what we did with Edgar Alzate [an anthropologist of the PEB coordinating team] from the regional team to support the kind of education that was required and to be able to sustain the curriculum? In that study we focused on social context; we investigated historical context; we set out to investigate the learning process, not too deeply, but we did investigate the learning processes present in the communities; the development process of the child;

and the agro-ecological process that allowed us to structure the various school subjects. From the beginning of the research, we prioritized the importance of environmental issues. I recall that there were many things that we needed to research, but logically, they were at different levels, with different actors like teachers, children, community, and other specialists. As for the research that had to be done on the linguistics side, we assumed that we knew about the language processes; the already existent bilingualism was a subject of permanent research. On this point, the first thing that had to be done was an immense survey to identify the levels of language retention and the current bilingual situation; both had always been topics of research but we had not yet broken them down in a practical way.

We were able to produce the booklet, “The stages of socialization of the Nasa child” (1988) as a product of those investigative processes at the regional level. This booklet helped the teachers adjust their classroom activities to the ages of the children during their class preparations.

It is important to note that the research carried out by the regional team had a strong communal component. They held workshops with the community in different corners of the town of Caldono; among them, Picacho, Andalucía, La Laguna, and Las Mercedes. There, parents and elders gathered, although dialogue with the women was prioritized. Those workshops, which were held outside with groups of ten to fifteen people, were held in Nasa Yuwe. Unlike training workshops with their comprehensive planning sessions and set discussion questions, the Caldono workshops were more like open conversations with the community and discussed various topics related to the children’s socialization. The PEB team coordinated these conversations, organized the information, reflected, and elaborated on the educational material to be used in the process. Afterwards, they reflected on this and other experiences and developed the first booklet “*Kih’ yuy a’tkha’w ya’papeyi’ / Why we investigate*” (1988), in which they began to conceptualize the specific characteristics of our approach—as the PEB team—towards the researching task.

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Produced Materials

Community participation was also consolidated in education through the collective production of materials that would be used in the schools. It was based on the premise that the main task was to regain a sense of community and take the language of the children into account. We achieved this through material-producing workshops in which parents, children, teachers, and the regional PEB coordinators participated. To give an idea of how the community participated in this process, we shall refer to the workshops that nurtured the writing of the booklet “*Ets tengia ipikitaú / (We invite you to read)*” in the early years of 1980.

This booklet was made through a series of workshops that occurred in several places including El Cabuyo, Potrerito, Las Delicias and Piñuelos (in Santander), among others. The participants came to the different Nasa schools founded by CRIC—El Cabuyo, El Canelo, Las Delicias, La Laguna and Vitoyó, among others—but teachers, children, and parents from the *Guambiana* community of El Chimán participated as well. Each school brought their proposal regarding the content of the booklet to the workshops. They brought texts in Nasa Yuwe or in Spanish which included drawings and ideas for thematic organization.

Among the most significant points agreed upon in the workshops was the need to maintain differences, such as varied Nasa Yuwe dialects and diverse cultural and political experiences in different zones. These cultural and political differences led the people from each zone to produce different texts that contextualized their local situations. It was decided that two parallel booklets would be produced, one that focused on the specific dialect and experiences of El Cabuyo and La Laguna, and the other, of Las Delicias and Toribío. More than two days of debate revolved around the thematic organization of the booklet, such as whether the starting point of reference should be the family and the school, or if it should be the community and land recuperation. We opted for the latter, since these struggles were the central element that allowed the communities to establish schools with the pedagogical and political objectives that characterized the CRIC schools.

As a result of this decision, the booklet opens with the following text on its first page: “*Pui kiwe. Aisu kuesh kiwe. Was jipsa, kiwe wala jipsaty ki kusaja jiptjau.*” In the spelling of the unified alphabet and making the corrections needed to reconceptualize some ideas of Nasa Yuwe, it would be written in the following form today: “*Puyi kiwe. Aysu kwe’sx kiwe. Waas ji’psa, kiwe wala jipsatxi ki’ kwe’sx kusetey nuypa’ja ji’ptha’w.*” The translation in Spanish would be “Esta tierra es de nosotros. Por eso la recuperamos”, or in English, “This land is ours. Therefore we took it back.” The text is accompanied by a drawing—made by the children themselves—of a group of people working the land with machetes and axes.

The contents of the booklets were also discussed at these workshops. Then, the groups returned to the different schools in order to work on the writing tasks agreed upon at the workshop. The two resulting booklets were commented on in the periodic evaluation meetings in the different schools.

In addition to the written materials, we also produced recordings that have been taped on audiocassettes and videos about rituals, workshops, oral traditions, and music. These materials were also produced during workshops. In chapter four, we expand on this topic with other examples, and we will attach a list with brief descriptions of the most significant materials that we have produced.⁴⁹

Picking Up the Organizational Thread

It is necessary to highlight the connection between the educational program and the general dynamics of the organization in such a way that education is evaluated and oriented as one of the central pillars of CRIC’s entire political-organizational project. This was also the case for the general CRIC congress and the regional levels. This task has been in effect as of the Sixth Congress of CRIC, given that the PEB was founded during the Fifth Congress. Since the Sixth Congress, which took place in Toribío in March of 1981, the children have participated, deliberated their needs and desires, and drawn their own conclusions in a special commission. Within the very important conclusions of the various congresses of CRIC, we highlight the following:

- Sixth Congress, Toribío, 1981: The schools should be responsible for strengthening culture and teaching history, bearing in mind the elders’ and leaders’ knowledge.
- Seventh Congress, Caldono, 1983: It is recommended that education take production into account, so that children and youth will contribute to the protection of nature.

⁴⁹ See Chapter Four, section: *The booklets and the educational materials.*

It is also recommended that any teaching about production in the schools be connected to the teachings of the *thë' walas*.

- Eighth Congress, Tóez, 1988: It is recommended that the oral and written use of Indigenous languages be intensified, and education should be grounded within the criteria of identity and community participation. Likewise, the process of training Indigenous teachers should be intensified.

Besides working on education in a specific committee (of both children and adults), the issue of education always surfaced in other committees of the congresses. From there, the issue expanded and opened new political horizons for the organization. In other words, the process of Indigenous education was not limited to the narrow space of the school and has spread throughout the global project of the organization, contributing to the broadening of identity, sense of community, and spirit of transcendence. Likewise, in these spaces, and not only in scholarly activities, education is a strategy for the life project constructed collectively by each Indigenous people.

Consolidating the “Escuela Propia”

CRIC's educational project is based on a constellation of ideas that revolve around the concept of educación propia. During the different events that were held to try to define the criteria that would guide the developing educational model, the communities always referred back to the fact that they needed education to be lifted out of a propio process. At a 1982 workshop in Delicias, while deliberating what propio meant to the local communities, one cabildo member clarified that they were looking to construct an educación propia. He explained that he did not want them to segregate themselves from the other groups, because everyone from the community needed to be able to contribute their experience to the construction of the project. In this way they would make it propio – their own. In other words, they needed to define what was going to be taken from within the community and choose which outside sources would be included in the teaching process. Thus, it was necessary to unite with other groups to force the government to respect all of us. And above all, it was necessary to ensure that children would be raised according to the community thinking, with the goal of equipping capable people who would be able to direct the community's struggles in the future. In other words, propio does not imply placing special attention on only Indigenous culture; propio also requires dialogue with other cultures and the development of a political conscience. Between the CRIC leadership and the education team, it was understood that the concept of propio was not only useful for Indigenous people, but also for other sectors of the population that needed to rethink education according to their interests.

The community ideals surrounding educación propia that had developed during those earliest years of the Program were consolidated and extended to broader spheres with the professionalization process directed by CRIC from 1988 until 1999 in Tóez, Toribío, Munchique and Segovia. During this process, 296 teachers were trained, the majority Indigenous. By the nineties, the bilingual schools in Cauca had multiplied. However, the CRIC leadership also noted the need to disseminate the PEB's experiences with teachers from schools that were not connected to the organization.

The advancement of CRIC's educational proposal influenced both the construction of

Indigenous education in other parts of the country as well as the State, who were being pressured to be more flexible in their educational policies and to support the education that the Indigenous people were building. This same strength of the Indigenous organization forced the State to legislate recognition of the rights of ethnic groups to define their own education. Such is the case of Decree 1142 of 1978 – enumerated with other decrees in the annexes.⁵⁰ But the educación propia project is not a product of state legislation; the legislation is the result of the proposals and experiences of organized communities. It is important to stress this, because the Colombian experience is different from other countries. In Colombia, Indigenous organizations were active protagonists in the process of rethinking formal education, as opposed to accepting the proposals drawn from State policies. In this aspect, the Colombian experience is different from what happened in other Latin American countries, such as Ecuador, where the State initiative was intended to prevent Ecuadorian Indigenous organizations from imitating Colombian organizations.

The Ministry of National Education of Colombia (MEN in Spanish) decided to implement Indigenous education with the appointment of bilingual Indigenous teachers, the creation of the Group of ethno-education of the MEN, the recognition of the National Aboriginal Language Committee and the acceptance and approval of a special program for the professionalization of Indigenous teachers, among other initiatives. This was possible because Indigenous organizations had already made significant progress in establishing the foundations of an educación propia. For this reason, the State partnered with Indigenous organizations towards the development of “ethno-education.” In this context, CRIC decided to participate in the professionalization of teachers, and opened its program to other sectors of the Indigenous Cauca population. In future chapters, we will discuss the guidelines, content and development of the professionalization programs that would grant the degree of “Bachelor of Pedagogy with an emphasis on Ethno-education” to approximately three hundred individuals. The degree is granted by one of the colleges of education of the region under agreement with CRIC and the Secretary of Education of Cauca. For now, however, we shall focus on the community process that would lead to professionalization, and then to university-level training.

According to the objectives of these professionalization programs, the role of the community was central. Within the cabildos, in the communities with schools, and as well among the leaders of CRIC, we intensely debated the implications of working alongside the State to develop the professionalization process. It was concluded that the PEB would work on a proposal based on the educational experiences currently in progress, and that the State would be responsible for financing it. When this proposal was presented to the MEN, no State financial support was received until the project had already been in progress for two years – CRIC had to negotiate the initial funding with the Colombian Institute of Agricultural Reform (INCORA in Spanish). Afterwards, CRIC maintained a co-funding strategy with MEN during the four cohorts. The cabildos participated in making decisions about the courses and core activities of the program and in the evaluation of the teachers. Each group of students had, as a main actor both for management and for development, the respective educational committee of the zone in which the program took place. The first cohort was directly coordinated by CRIC in Caldone (Northeastern zone) and Toéz (Tierradentro). The cabildos of Toribío and San Francisco, together with the Nasa Project, lead the professionalization of Toribío for the second cohort. For the third cohort, the

⁵⁰ The list is not included in the present English translation.

cabildo of Munchique, in the North, assumed the coordination. The final promotion of Segovia was coordinated by the cabildos of Tierradentro, especially the cabildo of Santa Rosa and the Juan Tama Association of Cabildos.

Each cabildo selected the teachers that would be trained in the different cohorts. They followed the teachers' progress throughout the training period by means of socialization and information sessions, especially regarding the research projects that the students had to select. A basic criterion was to select one the most urgent problems of the local community and integrate it into the curriculum process in the schools. Rodolfo Ipiá, a graduate of the professionalization of Segovia and a teacher in Tierradentro, states that it was very useful for him to learn how to conduct research:

In the professionalization I presented the proposal about the "Educational and Productive Project of the Chachafruto." I came to this idea by observing how the water runs out and the soil gets destroyed. The idea arose from observing these elements. It is a project that has been able to advance, beginning with the nursery. I chose the *chachafruto* because, before going to the professionalization, I had the opportunity to work with the environment secretariat in the municipality and I wanted to learn more about the management of natural resources. Among the things there, I liked the *chachafruto* because it is a plant that for every side you look at and touch, it provides a specific function for Indigenous people. First, because the fruits are of a high nutritional value; the leaves that fall produce nitrogen and improve the soil; and the roots are not very deep, so they don't deteriorate the soil, but rather they restore it. Additionally, the roots hold water; they are like a sponge that sucks water. So, this is a special plant in many senses. It is originally from this town; it is entirely native.

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I began the project with the third grade class; it has been running for two years now. First we sensitized the saplings, afterwards we transplanted them to a permanent place, then we had to weed, and they have been doing well so far; they are already beginning to flower.

The theory is explained in the classroom, but this could be applied to all subjects. For example, it can be applied to mathematics by counting the holes and measuring the distances between plants; you can tell its history in social studies, and it is a main part of natural sciences; even the leaves are food for cows.

Benilda Tróchez, a teacher in López Adentro and a graduate of the first cohort of the professionalization program in Tóez, did her research on linguistics, focusing on the development of literacy in Nasa Yuwe. This was deeply needed in her community, where the multi-ethnic character of the community and the scarce number of *Nasa Yuwe* speakers among the children at school required special attention to the Indigenous language and the pedagogical methods for re-learning it.

The cabildos also contributed logistically to the graduating cohorts in the forms of food and housing. They raised resources for the processes in the municipalities, and they contributed directly from the cabildos' own funds. They managed the budgets on the sites where the classes were located, reporting to the cabildos of that zone. Equally, the cabildos participated in the evaluation and planning meetings, as well as the curriculum adjustment meetings at every level of the program. This process of reflexivity and conceptual development

constituted a formative opportunity for them to appropriate the educational model. In particular, as is described in the following chapters, not only were the students able to take advantage of the special advances in the subjects of worldview, history, and writing in both Spanish and Nasa Yuwe, but the same cabildos and communities were able to benefit from them as well.

The Creation of the Intercultural Bilingual Educational Community Centres (CECIB)

As the development of our educational proposal advanced, new and increasingly complex problems appeared. We began to recognize that the training from the community itself was insufficient for adequately directing an educational system that had already acquired a degree of pedagogical sophistication, in part thanks to the professionalization program, which the first graduating cohort was still completing at the time. For example, many disagree about teaching in the Indigenous language, because they argued that it was already known. In addition, they did not have the basic linguistic elements needed to guide a curricular project. Some communities did not understand the importance of games as pedagogical resources, nor the usefulness of drawing in teaching. Many still carried the traditional school in their minds, despite the effort to refocus education.

In order to achieve good performance at the schools, it was necessary to create pedagogical and organizational relations that were suited to the communities' standards. Traits such as the vertical structure of the school, with the teacher always standing at the front of the room, the children standing in formation in long lines, and the linear arrangement of the classroom that privileged the teacher's control and did not develop horizontal relationships with the students, were all intended to create authoritarian positions. This model needed to give way to a more coordinated and dialogical relationship between students and teachers. In the same way, the vertical attitudes worked against establishing a more dialogue-based relationship between teachers and parents, because in the traditional school, the teacher is the expert while the parent is the recipient, which goes against communal participation. In the "official" school, the community's contribution is almost always reduced to mere logistics—building classrooms, providing food, setting up infrastructure—and any educational direction or guidance from the parents falls to the wayside. This problem was not understood by all the parents, who had the authoritarian structure of the official conventional school as their principal frame of reference. It was necessary to develop new attitudes to allow us to deepen CRIC's educational model, in conformity with the criteria that had been raised from the beginning of the program.

As a result of this situation, the pedagogical orientation was falling more on the shoulders of the professionalized teachers than into the wider process of community appropriation, which slowed the consolidation of the educational process. These problems emerged even in the communities that had a long history with the organization and had participated in the educational project. They were considerably more acute in those communities that did not have such experiences, but were connected to the PEB project anyway. In fact, the project began with five schools, increasing to nine in the third year, nineteen in the fourth, and from there the project continued to grow. Considering the relationship between the PEB and the teachers who graduated from the professionalization of Tóez, it is possible to speak of some forty schools between the years of 1991-1997, although not all graduates worked

in schools sponsored by the Program. Today, there are nearly two hundred PEB schools in Indigenous zones.

This increased scope hindered the proper monitoring of all schools. Therefore, we decided to consolidate some experiences in each of the areas to concretize the communal model in a more comprehensive way. This signified the creation of the Intercultural Bilingual Educational Community Centres (CECIB), so that these centres, by their own practice, would become educational references for the entire project. The goal was to establish an organic relationship between the community and the school, so the parents might not be occasionally guiding the educational process, but rather they became continual teachers in their daily lives for shaping the community process. In this sense, the parents were envisioned as the main source for the research that the children should address at the school. Likewise, we highlighted the importance of linking the school to the collective activities of the community, such as assemblies, communal projects, and festivals. This facilitated a more organic relationship between the school and the *thë' walas* and other specialists of ritual and medicine, which we will discuss in greater detail in the chapter on worldview.

There can be no CECIB without bilingual teaching and learning, or without experimenting with the research developments for oral and written use of the native and Spanish languages. It is important to emphasize the relationship between the development of the languages and the research, because the languages have been revitalized through the research not only in the school, but also in the community itself, given that the research is understood to be a communal activity. The findings have been applied to materials, methodologies, and attitudes that function as the engines of educación propia, not only in communities where the CECIBs are located, but throughout the entire region.

The CECIB emerged in the communities of El Cabuyo (Tierradentro, and after the flood of 1994, the resettlement of Juan Tama), Las Delicias (Buenos Aires), and López Adentro, all belonging to the Nasa people. All these communities have long histories in the educational community project with teachers trained in the professionalization process. Their schools were selected with the same set of criteria that was applied when the first schools were chosen. In this sense, the CECIB of El Cabuyo continues to maintain the prevalence of the *Nasa Yuwe* language and the Nasa culture as the basis of education. In Las Delicias, they had implemented projects that had strong interaction with the communities and had worked on environmental improvement as a curricular component, which we sought to deepen. López Adentro has special importance given the convergence of different distinct cultures there—Afro-Colombians, mestizos, and Nasa—as new communities formed through the recovery of land in the plains. We established another CECIB in San Antonio (Pueblo Nuevo), but it failed to consolidate.

But the idea of the CECIB embodied the notion of interculturalism, and was thus never confined to the Nasa people. CECIB was also established in La Peña (Totoró) and in El Chimán (Guambía). In Totoró, they were recovering the Indigenous language and this experience projected the development of the educational model, integrating handcrafts, history, and production towards a linguistic dynamic in the schools. El Chimán was one of the oldest CRIC schools, with strong participation in the community, where they worked in the Guambiana language.

In addition to the CECIB with emphasis on the primary education, we also designed the Centre for Integral Training “Luis Ángel Monroy” (CEFILAM in Spanish), in which they integrated the approach of an educación propia at the high school level, maintaining the same criteria of communality, bilingualism, and interculturalism. The CEFILAM had a

student population that came from the different areas of the Cauca, working in dialogue with the community of Pueblo Nuevo, where the CEFILAM was located. It should be noted that this centre symbolically stands at the same camp where the negotiations for the reintegration of the Quintín Lame Armed Movement (a self-defense group for Indigenous communities) occurred.

The most effective way to share concepts in the context of the community is through concrete experiences. In this sense, the CECIBs felt like spaces where the ideals of education are experienced. This does not happen in other schools that do not have the same educational and organizational monitoring, and that lack different components, such as libraries, video equipment, spaces and resources for crafts, school councils, agricultural and environmental projects, school stores, and provisions for music and dance, among other resources.

The CECIB of López Adentro, for example, began its work in history through dramatic theatre that recalled how the recovery of the lands of this area came about. This community emerged with the land recovery of 1984, which had participation from mestizos, Afrodescendants, and Nasa peoples who came from both the area and other parts of Cauca. The history project was pertinent in the context of the creation of a new community of a multicultural character. The plays relived the processes of land recovery, experiences which had to involve seniors, the elderly, women, children, youth, and teachers. Some of these experiences were captured in videos that serve today as pedagogical inputs. Similarly, billboards, murals, and small booklets that recounted the main events and major actors of the land recovery were prepared. A large assembly was made with participation from communities across the department to remember those who had given their lives for the struggle. The idea for the assembly came from one of the quarterly assessments that were done in school, where different history materials and plays were presented. The reflection in which everyone participated mentioned the problem of forgetting those who had fallen in the struggle. These reasons led to convey the assembly.

The work on recovering history continued in the form of researching the customs that the people who reclaimed the land had brought from their different places of origin and their different ethnicities. It also examined the organizational process of the community during the recovery and subsequent work in the community once it was established. The work on recovering history had to cover larger areas, as the community expanded to regional areas. For example, the people of López Adentro played a central part in rebuilding the cabildo of Corinto and in the recovery of lands in the flat lands. Another example is when we participated in the first march towards Popayán to protest the assassination of the Nasa compañero priest, Alvaro Ulcué in 1985. These regional experiences brought the researchers of López Adentro to consider both regional and local history. Currently, we are trying to research how people perceive the historical *cacique* Juan Tama in comparison to the current leaders.

In the CECIB of the CEFILAM, in order to keep the students within the community dynamic, the formative work was organized in periods of six weeks. The students remain at the headquarters of Pueblo Nuevo for three to four weeks and for the remaining time return to their communities of origin to work on the practical aspects of the high school curriculum, particularly those relating to policy formation and management, production and land production, and communication and language. Initially, there was an intense evaluation process led by the cabildos of the places of origin, but as the model was consolidated and both the students and the communities were trained, the collective evaluations were spaced further apart, occurring every six months instead of every three. In these evaluations, both

the communities and the youth presented their perspectives for the centre. In one of these evaluations, people evaluated the need for specific practices in communities beginning with production projects and artistic development. An intense debate took place regarding the resources needed to implement these projects, identifying the emergence of several obstacles. It was suggested that communities could sustain the projects with internal resources and that the center should receive resources for the development of artistic projects, in a clear convergence of the centre towards the community and the community towards the centre. It was also recommended that the practitioners of the central area participate in the sites where the students have their practices.

The project that takes place in the CECIB is not and will never be a finished project. The construction process itself generates the dynamic and demands according to the problems that are appearing. The process of the CECIB is, consequently, a progressive approach to the understanding of these problems and their solutions in a dialogue between school and community.

The CECIB experiences were fundamental for CRIC to be able to present to the State viable and politically coherent alternatives consistent with the processes of Indigenous autonomy in regard to education.

The Community Education Project

In 1994, as part of the development of the Education Act (Law 115 of 1994, Ch. 3), the State proposed to strengthen the autonomy and capacity of each school or educational institution and brought forth the Educational Institutional Projects (PEI), a strategy of French origin. Each institution would design a project with the participation of the entire school community to adapt the educational objectives and curricula to local needs. CRIC, the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC in Spanish), and the Indigenous movement in general, with their proposals and demands, influenced the definition of this legislation. An agreement was established to develop a process of discussion about Indigenous education, and through various regional and national seminars, the contents of the chapter that would be a part of the Law were determined and agreed upon. Likewise, the ethnic communities elaborated the guidelines and principles of educación propia or (Decree 804 of 1995), redesigning all the existing Indigenous legislation on education since 1976.

If the PEI energized the school, promoted participation and sought a curriculum that was more suitable to local needs, why did CRIC oppose its introduction to Indigenous communities and schools?

The PEI projected by the state focuses on the educational community in a restricted sense, without considering the participation of the community surrounding the schools – parents, local authorities, and community specialists, among others. The PEI as an official proposal fell short in one of the fundamental principles of the educational process that CRIC had already advanced for more than a decade: the community character of the educación propia. The PEI was also, for us, a top-down standard established by the State, in contrast with our process which was built from below.

As an alternative to the PEI, our movement proposed the Community Educational Project (PEC in Spanish). This proposal was negotiated with the Minister of Education and accepted by the government; it was extended not only to all Indigenous communities, but other ethnic groups, such as Afro-descendants and Romani people. On one hand, the PEC

involved the development of guidelines from the community dimension, refocusing education from the perspectives of the cultures and local communities. That is to say, the institutional component was expanded and resized from a community perspective. On the other hand, unlike the PEI that often became a formal document for complying with the new regulations (sometimes drafted by actors contracted outside of the school community), the PEC was conceived as a methodology for the development of traditional knowledge, something appropriated by the actors themselves—community, leaders, teachers and children—in a dynamic interrelation between locations, areas, and regions. The PEC meant, then, to expand the process of education to a larger space that exceeds school education and articulates community life.

In the ninth congress of CRIC, held in Silvia in 1997, the cabildos proposed the adoption of a policy for the development of the PEC in each one of the resguardos. The goal was to cover all school education in the territory under its central orientation. However, it left open the decision to each community to register with the departmental Secretary of Education as PEC or PEI; 70% chose to enroll as PEC. A very significant fact is that the PEC was registered by the cabildos and the PEI by the principal of each school, which is to say that the communities that chose to register as PEI resigned in practice their right to decide on education. Instead, those who chose to enroll as PEC managed to build a collective political strategy of the communities through their participation in the Committee of Education of Indigenous Territories of Cauca (CETIC), where delegates of each region defined the main paths of Indigenous education. As Hermes Angucho, member of the coordinating group of CETIC, narrates:

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When the CETIC arose (...) there were some goals about the orientation of policies (...). One assumed at the time that the task was to conceptualize all the work done by the Program [of Bilingual Education] and begin to extend it to other zones, from the initial zones, taking as a starting point the Community Education Projects, because that was what we submitted to the Secretariat. And the other task was to provide advice and support to these zones about Community Education Projects, to canalize the support offered by those who remained in the committee, who could be in meetings, who would socialize, who would say 'Look at the potholes, the difficulties' and ask 'Are these Community Education Projects or are these simply a diagnosis?' and they would identify what was missing. Then they would meet to share their findings. Also, another central activity of the CETIC was to form working groups by zones, taking into account all of the zones and to bring to each one that which was educación propia, Indigenous education in the zones and to reach all of the resguardos, because although the resguardos were registering Community Education Projects, not every cabildo had... that commitment to developing educación propia and working for it. They only had... general information that they had to do that, but they weren't really...thinking and consolidating the process with their communities. So...with those perspectives, the CETIC operation started.

The PEC had had different developments in Cauca. There was no single recipe, but essential components were aimed at steering education beginning with the needs and perspectives of the communities. We were not looking for a homogenous development, but a development in accordance with the local realities. Therefore, in reviewing the situation existing from the late 1990s, we found that over 50% of the communities were just recognizing the

right to decide on education and had not yet begun processes to build an educación propia. These communities have not yet achieved substantial development in relation to the PEC, but they did achieve the support of their cabildos with their process. Approximately 30% of the communities have advanced along the guidelines of their Community Education Project, organizing actions in coordination with their cabildos to create general profiles of their education projects. While this process has been useful to formulate a set of basic criteria, there were difficulties implementing pedagogical practices coherent with the advanced political discourse, as we see in greater detail in chapter four. Approximately 20% have managed to deepen the education project and establish a proper dialogue between community and school, providing new meaning to the relationship between scholarly education and everyday socialization. It is not accidental that in building the PEC process, the most successful communities were those in which the educación propia had deeper roots. This is particularly the case where the CECIBs are located and those communities have a long history of struggle and cultural recuperation.

An example of the latter group is the community of López Adentro, whose school functioned in the first years of the PEB as a training centre for teachers and then, later, was established as CECIB. Thanks to its long experience, the PEC could do a more analytical and evaluative reflection of this process. In López Adentro, the members of the community understand and manage the objectives and fundamental principles of educación propia. They understand the intercultural relationship that exists between the different ethnicities that make up the community and the process of appropriating concepts, values, and contents of the larger society. They have developed a knowledge of their history—as we have already said—from collective research. They have achieved a coherent proposal for the teaching of *Nasa Yuwe* as a second language that has not only been embraced by the Nasa community, but also by Afro-descendants and mestizos attending the school. The process has led to greater community understanding of the building blocks of education. That is, there are members of the community—parents, alumni and community leaders—that can directly affect the selection of curriculum content and the formulation of pedagogical projects.

The strength of the community, working in concert with teachers, generates an integrative dynamic that embodies all the objectives that the organization had in mind when the idea of the PEC was proposed. Unlike many communities where the school remains an enclave outside of the community, the teachers of López Adentro are full members of the collective and play a specific role in connection to the other parts of the community. Therefore, López Adentro has served as a reference for neighboring resguardos and for the educational proposal in general, as is the case with other CECIB. The PEC is now a fundamental strategy for collectively targeting and addressing education in each resguardo and is part of the life plan of each people.

We have completed this chapter reflecting on the general nature of the educational process of the PEB and their latest advances in the development of the PEC. It should not be treated as a finished product. Rather, it should be understood as a dynamic and progressive process of deepening dialogue between community and school that transforms the notion of what school is, how the community takes ownership of it, what the role of a teacher is in the community, and what the role of education is in an Indigenous society.

Chapter 2

“Cosmovisión” – Our Worldview as the Source of Our Education

Between the two paths

"I remember very well that I made a little plaque that said "Our Home." I gave meaning to the house, because the house was traditional, although it has changed now.

And for us the house is meaningful; the house contains parts of the body... We started from there and we began to support our actions. Just like a house has a name, and has its parts, in the same manner, its actions have to be supported. That was how we started.

We would ask, then, what has to be done if the house has its body parts? Well, that means the house is a person. But who embodies that house? The health agent, the traditional healer, they were already there. We went to visit Liberia, and of course the healer carried the knowledge about what to do with the house so the house wouldn't get sick; right there I understood that that was a ceremonial action.

In a dream I was walking on the moors through a wide path until it divided in two. On the right side there was a Nasa person and to the left side there was a musxka, [a] white man. And he said, "I was waiting for you." I looked down below. "What do you see?" Of course I looked, and because it was a plain, I saw drunks, I saw people fighting, there were people passed out, it was a social chaos, so much trouble. They both told me: "Look down there, now you are going to listen to my advice, the advice we both have to give, and you will help to guide." So we walked and reached the fork in the road, and both of them stepped forward. The Nasa took the path to the right and the white man took the path to the left but both of them spoke Nasa Yuwe. So I asked myself, who should I go with? I stood there, stopped. The Nasa called me and the white man also called me, but both of them said that I have to listen to the advice they both have to give and if I go with the Nasa I won't hear the white and if I go there with the white I won't hear the Nasa either. So instead I went in the middle. And so they kept talking to me and talking, until I observed: you have to hear us and you have to start to guide everyone. After that was when the discussion on education began: look, there are already printed materials, and they are already indigenous. Picking up the house as the foundational material lead me to be excited and to understand that I was doing the right thing ..."

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- Manuel Sisco

From Customs to Worldview

In this chapter, we are going to cover the central theme of culture within the development process of the Bilingual Education Program, a process that in recent years has emphasized the Indigenous worldview. We do not understand our worldview as an innate way of viewing the world. The worldview of an Indigenous people is not a collection of their rituals, oral traditions, and cultural practices, nor is it folklore. It also should not be understood as a mystical perspective, because it is so much more. A worldview is not equivalent to religion, because spirituality is one thing while the integral vision of the world is another thing entirely. Our worldview encompasses both aspects, while religion only focuses on the administration of spirituality. A worldview is the process of creating mechanisms to analyze the world and act within it. Today, we refer to this as methodology and politics. In part, the worldview is rooted in the life experience of a people, in their ancestral wisdom. But it is also nourished by the actions of the present and by appropriate outside tools. For example, we will see how linguistics are instrumental in analyzing outside ideas from one internal point of view. In this sense, we cannot speak of our worldview without being able to relate it to our process of political organization and to the context of constructing our Indigenous education.

All Indigenous peoples in the Cauca province have ancestral wisdom, but only some of them have moved forward in their task of bringing out their worldview based on the knowledge they possess. Other peoples are still in the preliminary stages of recovering their Indigenous ancestral wisdom and shaping a memory about this set of practices that nourish their worldview. Due to several different factors (that we will enunciate later), the Nasa people have prioritized revitalizing their worldview. But this has not been the entire Nasa people as a unit: we still need to construct our worldview from the many spaces where the Nasa people are present, such as urban sectors, settlements near the cities, border-resguardos, and recently occupied lands. For this reason, we are going to examine the case of six communities: Tierradentro, Pitayó, Jambaló, Caldonó, Quichaya and Pueblo Nuevo as examples. This experience can motivate other communities that are undertaking this path; the worldview has been included since the origin of the CRIC as part of its struggle and political program.

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The Process of Valuing our Culture

In every Indigenous people, there are certain values that acquire a particular social relevance. Among the Nasa, work is highlighted as a central community value necessary for individuals to belong to the “big home” that is the Nasa collectivity. This is expressed in our daily lives. When a person passes beside another person or a group that is working, we say “*çxhuçgu*”. It is not easy to translate this term because the Spanish language does not have a word with the same meaning. The term is not intended for greeting the people, but rather for greeting the activity that they are doing – the work itself. It is a way of saying “thanks for your work”. It is also used to say thank you for the food provided, because the food is a product of hard work. In the Nasa way of thinking, this practice emphasizes a value that focuses on the activity of the work rather than on things themselves or in the benevolence of an individual. In addition, the expression recognizes that work is a collective activity and not an individual one. In this short and daily expression, we can perceive an entire collection of Nasa values.

Other examples also demonstrate the Nasa value of work. When a Nasa man searches for his life partner, she must have calluses on her hands which signify that she is a hard worker. To reach womanhood, a Nasa female must demonstrate her capacity to work through weaving three *jigras*⁵¹ and three ponchos. But work is not just a physical activity; it is also a spiritual service. In Nasa Yuwe, *mji* means “work”. It is what you do when you harvest the land or when you weave a *jigra* or bag, but it is also what the traditional healer—the *thé’ wala*—does. The work (*mji*) of the *thé’ wala* is an exercise that is spiritual in nature but is also a mental effort through which we seek to reestablish harmony through “refreshment.” The healer uses herbs, he interprets “signs” or signals, he focuses, he works. But the work of weaving a “*jigra*”, even though it appears to be physical work, is also spiritual: the weaver is constructing the order of the cosmos through the seven levels of small squares in the *jigra*’s design. Some Nasa researchers have argued that while a woman is weaving, she is building her path to the sun.

The process of looking for explanations through the interpretation of dreams, the messages of nature, and the signs from the body is a methodological tool that protects the Nasa people. Juan Peña, a leader of Las Delicias (Buenos Aires) elaborates:

I have received collaboration from everything. If it’s the cloud, when they were chasing the people, the cloud came to protect us. If it’s the wind, when we were at danger, strong winds came to help. This is the spirit that we have to believe in. The dream is similar to our conversation here. The spirit talks and does everything. If there is danger, he informs us, and then one knows. Just like that.

Work, as a physical-material exercise that is simultaneously spiritual, is the foundation of Nasa educación propia. The necessity of using the tools of traditional healers has led us to have the *thé’ wala* practice his ritual work within the educational space. In other words, it broadens the scope of the school. Without this harmonizing work, the school would be foreign within its own territory; it would not form part of the Big House. On the other hand, the traditional healer’s perspective provides the principles of the Nasa science, and therefore must be incorporated into the education system, together with Western science. If the work within the Nasa is both material and spiritual, these two dimensions form one unit that needs to reflect throughout the curriculum. For example, the creation of the *tul*⁵² or the garden on the school grounds works as a tool for understanding both Western science (regarding the ecological relationships between species) and Nasa science, which sees the *ksxa’w* (a spirit that can associate with things or beings) as the components of nature. In this manner, the work of teaching in the school collaborates with the process of harmonizing the territory, because it highlights that learning must be oriented towards this work of harmonization. This is how one finds the “middle path” between the two paths that Manuel Sisco spoke about in the beginning of the chapter. Now, we are going to look at the process of how we got to these reasonings.

During the first years of the PEB, the term “worldview” was not used, although all the principles that it encapsulates today were experienced among the people back then. “Worldview” did not yet exist as an analytical tool or pedagogical practice, although we were already in the pursuit of a concept that would help us appropriate, comprehend, and focus our own educative process. We used to talk about getting our Indigenous traditions

⁵¹ See Glossary for definition.

⁵² Ibid.

back, such as the minga,⁵³ the weaving, the language, the home, the sacred spaces, and the history, but we did not understand these customs as components of a system where all the aspects are related to and strengthen one another. This combination of traditions had political importance for the CRIC at that time.

However, we did not have this knowledge about the customs on hand; it was unconsciously experienced by the community, but it was also undervalued due to the influence of evangelization and formal education. Traditional healers used to work underground. Each of them had ended with partial and segmented knowledge, most of the time influenced by Western ideologies. As activists and educators, we had to find and build a logic that could articulate those fragments. Research processes began with the participation of the *thë' wala*, so we could re-appropriate this knowledge. Manuel Sisco discusses his first researching steps:

...So that's where we started working in 1987. I arrived to Vitoncó and started with seven healer partners, among them were Roberto [Andela] and Ángel María [Yoinó]... I loved it, and as I was already taken with the unique Juan Tama⁵⁴ and his history, they started talking about the Puente Bejuco, the Mojano mine over in Cabuyo, and we visited the Piedra Santa. I have a fantastic memory of all this and how I was further inspired. I remember that at Piedra Santa there was a small hole called the mambero.⁵⁵ I remember that my compañero Ángel María sat down, measured his feet and said: "The little mambero has been here, look". He then placed his mambero with such assurance; it didn't just mean "look, here's where our ancestors' blood ran," instead what we saw was how the white people have destroyed a vast number of our stories, but over there we had the story. We started to get together right after this.

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Just as traditional healers used to accompany researchers to further study sacred places, they also accompanied them when entering the institutional and physical spaces of the schools. The purpose of doing this was to guarantee the school's harmonious functioning and its integrity in the midst of foes. This was done through the ceremony of refreshing, or cleansing. The cleansings worked in a practical way while in the process of fixing one problem but also in a didactic way to prevent the loss of the cultural grounds of the children, teachers, and the community itself.

The community located at La Laguna de Siberia is a remarkable example. The Nasa people of La Laguna used to—and still do—live scattered within an environment of non-Indigenous peasants and Guambiano people, within a territory that they began to recover through purchases of small plots, and then through occupation of land. Roberto Chepe, one of the founders of the school, talks about his participation in these struggles:

So we started working the land. Some people were caught and sent to jail. I was being chased for a year and a half but they couldn't catch me. But after another year and a half they did. They took me to Santander and accused me of three crimes: stealing coffee, stealing bricks and...they also accused me of being a leader. The judge kept me

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Juan Tama lived in the 17th century and was a leader among the Nasa people who led the people against the Spanish and eventually convinced the Spanish crown to legally recognize Nasa land rights. He established norms and laws for the Government and care of the territory. The lake Juan Tama in the *vereda* Cabuyo, *resguardo* Vitonco is sacred for Nasa people because it is where Juan Tama, the elder Sa't (or Cacique) lives.

⁵⁵ See Glossary for definition.

for the night. He asked if I knew which charges were laid against me, so I told him that I didn't know. Then, there at the table he said: "You know, but you don't want to tell. Are you a leader?" And I didn't know what a leader was. So he asked: "Where do you live? You live in that community, don't you?" I replied: "I live almost nearby Pescador." I got lucky right there because I used to work at that farm, although I wasn't really working the land, I just participated because I was helping. The terrajeros⁵⁶ were the ones who were working their gardens there. And that's what helped me, otherwise, I would've been sent to jail.

In this environment of fighting for the community, the teacher was at the same time involved in land recuperation. Initially, the school operated in a family's home, and then it moved to a community-lead store. It was later transferred to an empty brick factory, which also served as a place where community assemblies occurred, as Roberto tells us:

The fact is that after the land recovery, the school and the community-lead store were born. We even had to deal with the cabildo issues. It was already called a cabildo back then. I worked 18 months as a secretary. All that time we were very criticized as a communist cabildo because we didn't even have legal documents so we weren't recognized. It fell on me to participate a lot at the cabildo and the assembly, in the same job, including land recoveries that we had been doing and participating in. Well, it turned out that I had to help a lot, and that was besides my work at the school. I didn't just work at La Laguna; we also had to be in the demonstrations, strikes, and we could go out at night and travel to Pueblo Nuevo, Caldono, Lopéz Adentro, and Delicias. We used to go to the recoveries of these lands up here and at Lopéz Adentro too, so we just kept going that way. Like so. We would arrive one day and leave the next, but we had to leave by a different route. During that time, we couldn't even go through the town, not even through Mondomo, Caldono, nor Pescador, and it wasn't only because people, but because the police were after us, they pursued us.

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Given this persecution, it was necessary to ritually protect both the school and its people. This work fell to Benigno Collazos, the only *thë' wala* in the area. Both Indigenous peoples and peasants consulted him regularly. A *thë' wala* is a traditional healer; however the *thë' wala* doesn't only cure the sick person but also takes up the role of protecting society in a much broader sense. In these conditions, the shaman's work ceased to be clandestine and became an everyday experience at the school. For more than 20 years, Benigno has kept an eye on the school and the children's well-being. Today, he continues performing refreshing rituals and gives oral presentations in the school about plants' uses, as part of a class called "Nature and Community" (it was previously called "Natural Sciences").

The intervention of *thë' wala*s' in schools has not been exclusive to La Laguna; on the contrary, the PEB has recognized them as cultural referents and as possessors and distributors of knowledge in all the communities and schools. Probably the most important example of a *thë' wala*'s involvement in the educational process has been the experiences of elder Ángel María Yoinó in El Cabuyo, Tierradentro, during the land recovery in Lopéz Adentro, the disaster of the Páez River in 1994, and during the relocation of Juan Tama (Leticia). In the case of the relocation of Juan Tama, several shamans participated, not like

⁵⁶ See Glossary for definition.

in La Laguna, where Ángel María, besides being a *thë' wala*, has assumed several political roles in the community and has even been the Governor on several occasions. He is the son of the old Captain of Vitonocó, which grants him more relevance. He is also a storyteller and a great speaker at assemblies and congresses. Above all, he is a cultural counselor. Ángel María represents an almost unique case of a *thë' wala* that has known how to apply his gifts both to his job as a *thë' wala* and to the secular and political world. From the beginning, Ángel María thought of education as a way of cultural strengthening:

Our ancestors were great thinkers. [Our communities] asked themselves this important question: 'Why don't teachers take culture into account when teaching?' The elders would ask 'Why don't they teach our culture and its elements?' I used to ask myself: 'what are they talking about?' But now I understand that our thinking was heading the right way. We realized that our thoughts had been laid out quite well. And how were we able to notice this? Because we have been gaining strength. And we notice this because we advanced with a greater thinking capacity.

Ángel María took a variety of paths before assuming the role of cultural counselor:

I am not going to lie to you. I used to be the kind of person that asked God for everything. By then, I was an evangelical Christian. I used to read the Bible a lot, üjü⁵⁷! I would interpret much of it, and I knew how to direct myself correctly. While some people despised me, others wanted to give me the role of chief governor [at the end I was elected as a substitute governor]. All these events moved me. When I felt like this, I thought about my grandfather's teachings, I realized that what he said was true, something that was valuable.

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However, acting as Governor, he addressed the Monsignor of Tierradentro, (who, at that time, was Enrique Vallejo), using the story of Chief Juan Tama to reinforce his authority:

'I am the son of the Star, we are the grandchildren of the Star, for goodness sake!' INCORA has been dividing our lands and exposing them to expropriation. 'We don't want that. Not when our people have come to us for protection. I've been commissioned by them to investigate this.' That's what they kept requesting of me, as though I was the main Governor. I used to get large crowds, I would receive worried women saying: 'What are we going to do?' They would say: 'We don't want the land division.' They would address me saying: 'Well, aren't you our Elder?' And that's how the Vitonqueños⁵⁸ would come weeping to me.

From early in the area of education, Ángel María captured the essence of Indigenous education, guided by the elders:

As my grandmother used to be angry all the time, she would say: 'What are you learning? Are you learning how to be extravagant and brutal with people? That's not how we live!' And she would keep asking this until she broke out in tears. She would say: 'We don't want those attitudes, we don't want that'. She would get so angry because this

⁵⁷ An affirmative exclamation, like "yes!" or "uh-huh!"

⁵⁸ Those who are originally from Vitonocó.

education had been around for so long, but our Indigenous words [our thoughts, our worldview] weren't being taught, so she entrusted it to us. We used to think: 'What is she talking about?' What the old lady was demanding was that our ways of thinking, our worldview, be taught. She longed for the teaching of our way of life. It must have happened this way: when Christopher Columbus arrived to these lands, way back then..., since that moment he conflicted with our authorities, and among the many things he said, he claimed that he had come to educate us. Doing that, he went on taking and taking; he was so deceptive. But not everything worked out for him; that's why we must be malicious, the so-called Indian malice. But saying *idxu* (Indian) is also a Spanish expression. We, the Nasa, we used to think fluidly, like water. We will take care of ourselves. The only way of moving is doing so cautiously. (Interview done in Nasa Yuwe, translation to Spanish by Abelardo Ramos)

So how is it that Ángel María, being a *thë'wala*, managed to develop his thinking about education? The answer lies in what we now call our worldview:

This is very good, *üjü?* This is how we do it: we communicate with elders of the upper world [the Thunder], like the *ksxa'w*, or the duende spirit⁵⁹; when it comes to it, we will speak with the rainbow. Well, we speak with anything that comes to us. This is how we are taught: 'This is one way and the other as well'. We do not learn in only one way.

It is a way of thinking that is not always expressed in a didactic manner: "[The priest] only finds out through questions. But we move around without questions. We identify who is the thief without questioning him." This is the knowledge that PEB tried to incorporate within their educative project.

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Going back to La Laguna—where you could strongly feel Angel Maria's wisdom—the school was open not only to the *thë'wala*, but also to other traditional authorities, who shared the physical and conceptual space of the school. As we have said, the community's assemblies also took place there. Likewise, a school *cabildo* was created early on. This way, the school served as a training camp for leaders, which has been PEB's objective since the beginning. According to Roberto Chepe, many of his ex-students ended up being active members of the *Cabildo* and today participate in the community's Civil Guard.

Why did we Move from the Notion of Custom to Culture?

Unlike the notion of custom, culture is so fundamental that it cannot be preserved in a museum. It is something that is generated: it is a mechanism for survival, not a way back to the past. Although culture serves Indigenous people to face the dominant society, it does not imply that Indigenous people adopt a complete Western approach when they use the notion of culture. On the contrary, the notion of culture is adapted to an Indigenous worldview: the cultural practice is located within the harmonization process with the environment. In other words, what is Indigenous is not reduced to simply a list of customs, rather the customs became part of an integral process. Customs are interconnected with ways of life. In the appropriation of the notion of culture by the Nasa people in the early years, culture was

⁵⁹ A spirit of nature, a trickster spirit, the Spanish word *duende* is often translated as "goblin."

seen as the sum of people's practices, practices that had meaning from a spiritual realm or within the work of the *thē' wala*.

Why did this change come about at that time? By the mid-eighties, the PEB research practice advanced to deeper levels of understanding. As we explained in the previous chapter, research was simpler during the first years because the questions that we were addressing were more general, without complete rigor and precision. Similarly, this transformation is shown beginning from a general appreciation of language, as it was at the first stage of the PEB, and advancing towards the search for a more rigorous approach in phonetics and phonology first, and then in grammar and semantics. Over time, we realized that the study of specific aspects of the language could lead us to appreciate more its importance and meaning.

The PEB felt many needs surrounding the search for more precision in understanding the language. These needs coincided with the establishment of the Ethnolinguistic School at the University of Los Andes in Bogotá. CRIC decided to take advantage of this opportunity to train a group of Indigenous ethnolinguistics and allocated some funds for this purpose. This was an exceptional case at the time, because the academic training of Indigenous peoples was generally not valued. Furthermore, academic training was not believed to have a significant impact on the Indigenous struggles to reclaim their rights. Three Nasa attended the Master's Program in Ethnolinguistics at the University of Los Andes, completing two research projects focused on the grammatical categories of the Nasa Yuwe language. Linguistics provided us with a working methodology that helped us to better structure more precise questions about the components of our culture. Our previous work had focused on the discussion of culture in general terms, without a clear understanding of what it was. The meticulous work on language, in this case grammar, opened the possibility to approach culture from a very intimate experience. This is to say we realized that the daily use of our language alone was not enough for us to analyze the logic of the language. It was not enough to articulate our language with the logic of our culture. This new approach to language as a cultural foundation was a critical step in both political and technical terms. Thus, we had to look for academic training and knowledge.

Given these new studies, we began to consider Nasa ritual practices, especially marriage. We sought to know which concepts were the most relevant in the discourse of this ceremony. The first was *puukx ja'da*, "reciprocity," which is applied here because marriage establishes equal relationships between people. The other was *'wēt wēt Fxi'zeyə'*, "to live happy," because the godparents set the patterns for the couple's behaviour. We concluded this reflection with the development of a key concept: *wēt ūskiwe'nxi*, which we translate as "culture."

Let us break down this concept to show how cultural linguistic analysis in this case contributed to the appropriation of external concepts such as the word "culture." *Wēt* is a word that has different meanings, among them "pleasant favours," "wellness or happiness of people or animals," and "harmony". *Ūskiwe'nxi* is a compound word formed by *ūs*, which means "what is constant or what has been," and *kiwe*, which means "land or territory" in the earthly world, but also in the worlds above and below. Together, these worlds integrate the three levels of the cosmos. *-nxi* functions as a suffix meaning "the outcome of a process." When these parts are expressed as a unit, the expression means the following: "the product of living in harmony with the territory." By this method, we came to identify a concept of our own culture from within the Nasa language.

With this new understanding of what culture is as drawn from the Nasa Yuwe language, we were more confident in developing our resources and pedagogical foundations.

Our language became more than just something we ought to value; it became a tool for analyzing both our struggle and the world. We have always emphasized⁶⁰ the communitarian character of the CRIC schools, but by using linguistics as a tool, we were able to dig into the roots of this communitarianism. To give an example, let us look at the structure of greetings in the traditional scheme of Nasa Yuwe. When a Nasa addresses his or her greeting to someone else, he or she uses the singular form *ma'wga fxi'ze*, where the suffix *-ga* means "you" in singular. However, the answer of the listener is given in plural: *ewtha'w*, where *tha'w* is the suffix of the first person in plural. This Nasa greeting has not been influenced by Spanish and we think that it is the genuine way of greeting in Nasa Yuwe. The person who responds is including the family or community of the greeter, depending on the situation. The very structure of the greeting itself expresses the Nasa cultural value of community, the collective principle.

To discuss how these studies affected our schools in practice, we have the testimony of Mérida Camayo, who had been a teacher at the El Cabuyo school (in Vitoncó) during that time. Mérida organized the students to study the ancestral names of the places in the vereda.⁶¹

I worked with the children in this way: to learn the name of a river, we would take the children to the river. They would go for a swim and then gather firewood. Back at the school, we would ask about everything they had seen. We would ask them about the name of the place, the name in Nasa Yuwe, and finally its meaning in Spanish. With this purpose, we would explore the entire vereda and learn the names of the other veredas, as there are six in Vitoncó. I participated in one study that the community was conducting about its Development Plan. In each vereda, we drew a map and identified the different places and names with the help of elders.

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This short passage provides a good example to analyze how the children developed an inquiring spirit. They came to embrace the new understanding of the meaning of Nasa culture and values within a communitarian context. First, through a playful exercise, the children learnt about the primordial value of work: they got to swim, but they also had to gather firewood. Second, the children connected with the territory: the visit to the place is a recognition of the shared heritage between human inhabitants and their sacred places, where the ancestors live. Thus, the communality went beyond human beings and embraced the territory and the ancestors. We need to recall that in Nasa Yuwe, there is a relation between *thô'*, "top of the mountain," and the compound word *thô'busx*, "the crown of the human head". Third, the teacher acted as a link between the children and the community, because she joined the communitarian work through the preparation of maps for the Development Plan.

From Culture to Worldview

The notion of culture in Nasa Yuwe is a vision grounded in the worldview. We can understand the worldview by referring to the term *neesxi*. *Neesxi* is a word with multiple related

⁶⁰ The word used is "Reivindicado," which implies something which is rightfully theirs that has been claimed or recovered after being withheld. In this context, the communitarian character of the Nasa schools is what has been reclaimed.

⁶¹ See Glossary for definition.

meanings. First, we could translate it as deep knowledge or the traditional knowledge of a *thë' wala*, a speaker, a weaver, or a midwife. However, *neesnxi* also refers to the process of acquiring wisdom, which stems from learning, ritual support, or ceremony in a spiritually powerful site (for example, the Stone of the Midwife in Pisxnu, in the Páramo de las Moras). This means that this knowledge is not a thing; rather, it is a process of relating to a space, to work itself, or to a group of people. It is not an ancestral knowledge like sowing corn, which everybody knows; rather, this knowledge is a special skill that not all people attain. In this sense, *neesnxi* is a highly adequate term for understanding the worldview, because it implies a process of development, a way of thinking, and a method, localized in time and space.

The process of constructing the Nasa worldview by members of PEB began by searching for this knowledge. For this purpose, they had to contact the association of *thë' walas* in Tierradentro. The PEB team did this not to collect data, but to develop understanding and knowledge through dialogue. An oral tradition that describes the origin of life through the history of the first beings, Uma and Tay, emerged from this process. To clarify, the story of Uma and Tay in itself is not the worldview. For us, the worldview is the methodology of dialogue and the process of interpretation that bring a dynamic around the importance of bearing those beings in mind. The story is described in the CRIC Health Program documents – therefore, it is best to focus on how traces of these supreme beings were initially found. Manuel Sisco tells us:

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Therefore [there were] two very interesting characters in my analysis. One was my mother-in-law, the mother of Avelina [Pancho], [a Nasa Yuwe] speaker. I visited her as a researcher; I brought my tape recorder to ask her for stories. It got my attention that she always was referring to Uma as a female being. But other times, when we were in Taravira, the other was Rosalba [Ramos], and Rosalba begun to talk about Tay. So, Tay was the man, the principal father. Uma was the principal mother, and people always made offerings to her. Then, I was observing that the traditional male healers always made offerings to Uma and the traditional female healers made offerings to Tay. This was very important for me to understand because the Christians only speak of man, no more. On the contrary, the Nasa is always [speaking of] the couple.

The story of these first beings was the product of a research project that became a milestone in the history of PEB: the emergence and understanding of a worldview. It is here that we see the interaction between the pedagogic process of PEB—in particular, the professionalization of teachers—and the establishment of deep dialogue between the shamans of Tierradentro and, later, between the *thë' wala* and the *sa't ne'hwe'sx*, the captains. The process of researching our worldview simultaneously represents the internal curricular and methodological development of PEB and the organic interaction between the PEB and the Nasa cultural authorities.

The concept of a worldview was developed in parallel with conceptualizations of culture, as we have already discussed regarding Manuel Sisco's narration related to his first attempts to walk the territory with two shamans from El Cabuyo. However, the disaster of Río Paéz in 1994⁶² marked a milestone for the Indigenous worldview because during those

⁶² In June 1994, an earthquake caused an avalanche in the municipality of Paéz, Cauca, directly and indirectly impacting 15 surrounding municipalities, 9 in the province of Cauca and 6 in the province of Huila in an extension of 10,000 K2. It caused the death of more than 1,100 people,

critical times, we were able to contrast our ideas with broader assemblies of *thë' walas*. The urgency of the situation forced this conversation; the *thë' walas* interpreted the avalanche as evidence of the social and natural unbalance, a warning call from Uma and Tay. Before the natural disaster, between twenty to thirty *thë' walas* came together, all of them from Tierradentro. Their research also took place in different localities, among them, Toribío, Florida (Valle) and Caquetá. Their research contributed to our understanding that the Nasa in each region infused their territory with the stories of their ancestors, as for example, Juan Tama, the chief of Vitoncó:

It turns out that Juan Tama is in the geographical location of Mosoco (Tierradentro). I begin to understand that the people carry the history with them and infuse it in a sacred place. For people from Tierrafuera, Caldonó, Juan Tama would be in Munchique, and for people from Toribío and that region, Juan Tama would be in the Laguna of San José (Peña Blanca). I think this is what happens. So, people from the lower parts, like Delicias, Guadalito, Paéz, place Juan Tama in the Hill of Catalina. Meanwhile, the people right here locate him in the Puracé Volcano, here in Sotaró. And in Caquetá – amazingly, people in Agua Clara, El Laurel would say that Juan Tama is there, and the traditional healer would say “there is Juan Tama”. The same thing happens in the plateau on the way to Villavicencio; they have their sacred site and they place Juan Tama there as well. So, you see how people are carrying Juan Tama’s story with them and inserting him in sacred places.

This same strategy, as narrated by Manuel Sisco, was used by the victims of the Vitoncó disaster. They relocated to Santa Leticia, in the municipality of Puracé, and identified the archeological site of Moscopán as the very seat of Juan Tama. A handful of *thë' walas* used to get together sporadically before the Disaster, but their dialogue was not very deep. After the avalanche, they returned to work on the worldview much more vigorously:

Then, because of the avalanche, the Nasa people shout to the sky: ‘Well, let’s see, traditional healers. There are traditional healers everywhere’. And so the interpretations began; some said that the avalanche heralded the birth of a new chief, or that a chief had escaped; others claimed that the disaster was Christ’s coming, and still others said that it was the final judgement. We could not allow those rumors to spread out. And, of course, because we were dealing with displacement, we were able to find several traditional healers there; even though the majority had left, some had stayed. So, we began to work with them; we had wanted to have a representative meeting of about, say, eighty traditional healers. So then, we reached a conclusion, and they said: ‘this was an omen calling us to attention, a chastisement.’ But why call us to attention? This animated them to continue their research: but what is it that we have done to deserve this chastisement? Some explained: well, we were chastised because, well, just look at how we are behaving, how we treat each other as traditional healers, how we are dealing with Juan Tama, how we see him. Of course: it is touristic site now, where just anybody could climb up, open a can of sardines and toss it aside. It had even been said that a cabildo member once forgot his staff of authority, casually tossed aside

there, which is a complete lack of respect. And another thing that had happened which called their attention was they began to remember a dream a traditional healer had. In his fear, the healer's first thought had been to look for the peak of the Juan Tama mountain, but he soon got tired. Then, when he sat down, an old woman appeared; she was bald, and her skin was torn and scratched. And that woman, that elder or grandmother, said to the healer: 'get up lazy man! See how I have come to be in this state! Look at my breast. Look, I am disheveled; I have no clothing. But you people will all have to reflect deeply, so that you realize what life is like without me!' Having said this, she turned her back on him and left. And that's why the earth was shaken.

Manuel Sisco continues describing that they gathered nearly 300 people to visit Juan Tama's Lagoon and verify if he was angry. The trip confirmed this.

The early research findings of the *thë' walas* coincided with the first professionalization process in Tóez. The student-teachers of the professionalization course assumed the responsibility to collaborate in the interpretation of cosmogonic knowledge through monographs. Their research did not cover the same topics that occupied the *thë' walas*, but their work complemented the knowledge that the general assemblies of the traditional healers had generated. José Miller Mulcué, a *thë' wala* from Mosoco, and a student in the professionalization course, wrote his monograph about the training process of these compañeros in the community:

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My pedagogic project was about the training of traditional healers. I have a careless, lazy relative. He once tossed aside his bag used for traditional medicine. I told him: 'come to my house and work with my materials, I exchange plants to treat hot and cold illnesses'. I offered to let him work with me because there are a lot of people who came to me for help. I have told them that the assessment is provided by their own body, with the chonta.⁶³ I orient him as well; I showed him the steps. The training is very important, because if one does not orient the students well, then people learn what is wrong; what they use is malice, as we have seen so many times now; for the sake of money, medicine is transformed into something else. We were in a workshop with traditional healers, and we emphasized that we should not change the main purpose of traditional medicine. I advanced slowly; it was easy to write my project, but the practical work moves more slowly.

It is significant to note that the students' interest in the professionalization program led them to analyze from within their own indigenous language. In other words, they wrote their monographs in Nasa Yuwe. Politically, this was a strategic development, because the mechanisms of cultural resistance are strengthened through the intellectual development of using language. But this meant they needed to develop ways for writing formally in Nasa Yuwe, as the language had never been used for technical writing. As Manuel Sisco relates:

I mean to say that, in Nasa Yuwe the same words are repeated several times. This repetition has a function, it is trying to convince. In Spanish, this is not allowed; the use of the same word three times in one paragraph does not work! It is completely different. One thing is the Nasa Yuwe code and another thing is the Spanish code. For example, here's a thing that I've always looked at. If people say *ksxá'w* to me, I can

⁶³ See Glossary for definition.

already imagine who they are talking about. But, if I want to say *ksxa'w* in Spanish I have to say “spirit”. I could be referring to the *ksxa'w* of the *duende*, the *ksxa'w* of the *tul*, the *ksxa'w* of the animals, the *ksxa'w* of water, the *ksxa'w* of the earth, the *ksxa'w* of the house, the *ksxa'w* of the cat, the *ksxa'w* of the flea. In Spanish, it would sound silly to say the spirit of the flea, the spirit of lice, or the spirit of water⁶⁴. So that’s how it came about that I decided to write in **Nasa Yuwe**, just as it is spoken. I remember saying... ‘I don’t care if we repeat ourselves, what really matters is that we write as we normally speak Nasa Yuwe; we could even include jokes and fun dynamics.’ What I was learning is that, sure, when we speak in Spanish we need to be more concrete. But that style does not fit with Nasa Yuwe.

The next task, then, was to find a technical format and a series of literary conventions to write properly in Nasa Yuwe. This took us far beyond the proposal of an alphabet, because it gave us the tools to make something meaningful with those written symbols. In this sense, our research about the worldview also led us to deepen the areas of communication and language.

Worldview and Linguistics

The influence of linguistics goes beyond its scientific techniques. At the heart of the Indigenous movement, linguistics becomes a political tool because it provides a research methodology: a methodology for self-discovery and for assimilation of the external into our own framework. To fully understand the relevance of linguistics, we have to go back to the translation process of the 1991 Constitution of Colombia into Nasa Yuwe. Because we are simultaneously Indigenous and Colombians, and because we are part of a wider nation, it is necessary to understand the political organization of the dominant society. We cannot forget that, as members of the nation, three Indigenous persons were members of the Constitutional Assembly that wrote the 1991 Constitution. In other words, that constitution is not completely external to our interests. This vision carries a political decision within the Indigenous organization itself. It is true that Indigenous persons participated in the elaboration of the Constitution and it is true that we are Colombians. But while translating this document, we had to reconceptualize what a nation means from an Indigenous perspective so that the translation could emerge from our worldview. Abelardo Ramos tells us:

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Like other cultures, the Cubeo people—Indigenous people in Vaupés who also translated the Constitution into their language—and their language, for example, appeal to the river, which is what brings life. The Cubeo people understand the river as a resource and as a primary source of life, for survival. The river protects life, and life rests around the river, which acts like an axis. The Indigenous linguist in this case rescues this feeling and goes further to establish the link with the mother Earth that breastfeeds. So, they construct the notion of a river with the milk; almost how we would say in Spanish “the river of milk.” Then, with the milk metaphor—which by the way is how the mother protects and provides the source for growth and endurance, development, and strength—is similar to how each ethnic group methodologically searches for their sources,

⁶⁴ The Nasa worldview includes this spiritual entity in the territory for controlling, guiding and providing advice to Indigenous people.

their images to express the idea of protection, the social condition. Well, strangely enough, [we noticed that] even after 500 years of evangelization, after the European conquest, nobody in any Indigenous culture took the Christian god as the source of life. It seems strange, but nobody took that as the starting point, but they all looked to their own resources, their own mythological and cultural images.

When CRIC was carrying out the consultation with the resguardos, the cabildo Moscoso (from Tierradentro) adopted the proposal {to translate the 1991 Constitution into Nasa Yuwe} in collaboration with bilingual teachers. The team was reinforced with two elders from the resguardo, Genaro Bolaños and Anselmo Baicué. Anselmo was the captain of the resguardo at the time; he later perished in the disaster of the Río Moras in 1994. The team added two experts to the team: Dr. Raúl Arango, abogado (a consultant at National Planning) and Abelardo Ramos, ethnolinguistic. The procedure was as follows:

First, we did a reading to approach the sense of the text in Spanish. We looked through a series of metaphors, examining terms like State... Through a series of comprehension and appropriation exercises, we moved to establish the relationship with our own Indigenous organization and the exercise of the Indigenous authority. The lawyer's role was to explain the concepts in great detail in the local or regional Spanish. Among other things, it could be said that we, as linguists, got the idea that we ought to speak of scientific matters to ordinary people, explaining issues to them as if they were children. With that idea as the starting point, we could assume that we could translate technical texts such as law, and its technical legal language, to a regional Spanish more accessible for Indigenous people and teachers. Then, having finished this approach, we began to think here and there, always speaking in Nasa Yuwe, and taking notes on the main ideas. It was not a literal translation but what is technically called a contextual translation. This means that from the aspect of syntax and sequence of the Spanish constitutional text, when it passes to the Indigenous language, the language selects, prioritizes and emphasizes the content that is relevant to the perspective of the culture. (Abelardo Ramos)

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In other words, this process was more complex than just simply applying a translation technique. On the contrary, it was a methodological proposal in the sense that we could give ourselves the necessary tools to appropriate external ideas without violating our own thinking. Simultaneously, it was an epistemological proposal, establishing the bases to carry out our own reflection drawn from the foundations of our worldview, from our very language. We brought this methodology to the professionalization program, so that the teachers-students could better understand the concepts they were studying through their own language. Later, these same teachers took this same methodology to the Bachelor's Degree in Communitarian Pedagogy, which was introduced by the PEB in Caldono by 1998. Here we find an interesting example of how this methodology was applied – the students of the Bachelor degree in Pedagogy adopted the notion of a double conscience. W.E.B. Du Bois [1868-1963], an Afro-American scholar who lived at the beginning of the twentieth century, described how Afro-American people felt a double belonging: they were simultaneously African and American. However, the dominant society did not recognize them as American with full rights. Therefore, they feel an internal contradiction because they cannot live out to their different identities. The group reflected several days on that idea. The students'

conclusions were published in the magazine *Çxayuçe*, in an article written by Alicia Chocué. Here, we will analyze the development of this concept, that was achieved from the Nasa Yuwe language in that exercise. The conclusion was that to act with a double Nasa consciousness means, first, to have your own thought (*nasnasa fxi'zenxi*) or to think with a Nasa heart (*nasa ûuza's ew atxahçxa fxi'zenxi*). But the double consciousness is, additionally, to think broadly with an open mind (*mahtx ûus yaatxnxisa*), and not to talk only about ourselves, but also about others (*vitetxpa puutx tenga fxi'zenxi*). Thus, the students appropriated an idea, adapting it to their own needs and political objectives. Additionally, they made good use of the all the work done on the Nasa worldview to ground their analysis.

In the next chapter, we are going to examine the importance of interculturalism within the PEB project. For the moment, let us consider the importance of adopting the aforementioned translation methodology for the training of an autonomous way of thinking. There are many valuable ideas for the educational and political Indigenous project that come from outside, but we need to assimilate them from a position of autonomy. We are not looking to transplant schemas or logics, but to generate our own approaches. We want to use external ideas to spur our own research, and not as a straitjacket to hinder our ideas. This is what autonomy means. Autonomy does not mean to close off oneself to shield oneself from foreign ideas. On the contrary, it means to generate a development within which the external ideas can enter in a horizontal dialogue with a system of thought that adopts the ideas into its own cultural framework. Through this parallel work on the worldview and on linguistics, the PEB created very specialized tools that contributed to this process of developing a horizontal dialogue between external and internal ideas. This achievement was possible due to a particular set of circumstances that we, the Nasa, were facing at the time (considering that this tool was designed on the basis of the Nasa Yuwe language). First, the political work of the CRIC established the foundations so that the communities themselves could carry out the processes; this is what we saw in the Mosoco community's translation of the Constitution. Second, the PEB had already acquired enough maturity at that point regarding its approaches and projects. They also had a solid body of local teachers who had been trained in the struggle, being the teachers-students of the professionalization program that adopted the translation methodology. Third, by this point, we had the linguistic tools that we had acquired through academic training at the Colombian Center for the Study of the Indigenous Languages (CCELA) in Bogotá, directed by Dr. Jhon Landaburu of C.N.R.S. from Paris. Without this support, it would have been difficult to focus on the technical development we needed to start our translation work. Fourth, we had just been through the constitutional process. This process had helped us to think about ourselves as builders of a nation and had made the translation of the constitution necessary. Finally, as Nasa, we had the advantage that our language was alive and that we had a long history of struggle and appropriation of the external. Our history is sculpted by outstanding figures such as Juan Tama, Manuel Quintín Lame, and Benjamín Dindicué.⁶⁵ All of these circumstances helped develop a methodology of appropriation of external ideas, drawn specifically from the Nasa Yuwe language. But even though this methodology emerged from a specific ethnic group and within a particular organization, such methodology could certainly work for other peoples, be they Indigenous, Afro-descendants, or the popular sectors in general. Therefore, by creating this form of appropriation of the external from an autonomous context, the PEB has made a contribution that crosses borders.

⁶⁵ Benjamín Dindicué: Indigenous leader of the Tierradentro region in Cauca. He won regional and national recognition as honest, strong and incorruptible in his defense of Indigenous rights. He was assassinated because of his political and regional leadership in 1979.

Worldview and Primary school

Thus far, we have focused on the teachers in the professionalization programs and postsecondary students' appropriation of the worldview and the Nasa Yuwe language. But how were those approaches implemented in primary education? We will explore how those investigations of worldview were implemented through everyday practices in the tul, the school garden. The tul is not a simple garden; it is a holistic model of the cosmos.

Within this fenced space, we grow not only produce for the kitchen (onion, garlic, coriander, cabbages, etc.), but one can find a variety of fruits, medicinal plants, grasses, and foliage to feed the guinea pigs, one or two cane plants if the climate allows, and even wild plants native to the region. There is a special thinking behind the selection of plants available in each tul; it is more like a forest than a monoculture, demonstrating a diversity of crops grown together. Domesticated animals wander in the space and leave their droppings as fertilizer. But this is also a space where the spirits are present, and [the tul] has its own *ksxa'w*. This comprehensive model of cosmos provides a variety of products to feed a family, but at the same time serves as a socialization space where children learn from each other.

There is a tul at every single Nasa house. On one hand, to have a tul at the school means that the school can develop continuity between the domestic space and the school space. On the other hand, the tul links the school and the cosmos. One of our pedagogic strategies is to take advantage of the complexities of the tul space to focus on themes in different scholastic fields. For example, the daycare children differentiate sizes and colors in the tul. They learn to identify plants and the relationships between different varieties and develop quantitative concepts in mathematics in the tul. All this takes place outside the classroom and through hands-on experience in a space that is similar to their homes. In more advanced grades, the children develop more complex thinking, expressed in written assignments and drawings. In this way, they establish increasingly complex forms of understanding every day.

The tul is, necessarily, different in every zone. These individual differences are caused as much by environmental differences as by the diverse trajectories taken by each of the PEB schools. We shall now see how some of the schools developed their unique tul and for what pedagogic purpose they used them:

The tul—as a cultural, economic, educational, investigative, and ecological strategy—projects us towards analysis and collective reflection as a means to reduce environmental decay. The tul expands and recuperates the cultural practices that involve species diversity, protection and reciprocity [of and with the environment], the use of organic fertilizers, and the use of biological materials. It is a means for us to maintain balance and harmony, as we are the reproducers of the Nasa worldview. Here is where the traditional healers intervene in the development of the class with the children. In this space, our cultural practices of refreshment and preparing the ground are carried out; for these activities, we coordinate with the traditional healers and the community. (Mélida Camayo, a teacher writing in *C'ayu'ce* No. 2, Page 6). 1997.

The tul is a truly Nasa space, interlinked with and generated from the worldview. The school's tul is, additionally, a space for intercultural dialogue, where children from different ethnicities and non-Indigenous teachers can learn through Nasa culture and think about their own cultures. Florandine Ávila, a non-Indigenous teacher who graduated from the

professionalization program in Tóez, integrated these ideas into her work in a multiethnic school in the municipality of Caloto, particularly ideas about the tu that she learned in Tóez.

To conclude, we think of the school's tu not only as an extension of the home space, but also as something that has influence in and from the home. A Nasa family without a tu is a family that is living a cultural crisis, because they do not have the mechanisms for food sovereignty on hand, and they cannot use the space to establish a dialogue with nature. A family without a tu lacks the mechanisms for cultural resistance because they cannot see their cosmological symbols. A Nasa school lacking the tu space for the cosmological thinking would be in the same condition as a family without tu. The understanding of the meaning of the tu taught by the school brings out an essential communitarianism; not only between humans, but with nature and the cosmos. In this manner, the complex processes that took us to the concept of worldview are materialized in the school (See Video *Kwe 's 'tu* by Sisco M., Chocué A. and Bosque J. 1996.).

Chapter 3

Interculturalism and Educación Propia

We understand interculturalism as the possibility for dialogue between cultures. It is a political project that transcends the educational field to think about the construction of societies that are different.

What is Interculturalism?

Today, we understand the concept of interculturalism as a relationship that is rooted in our own knowledge in order to integrate other knowledge from the outside. The exercise of interculturalism is purely political because it pursues the establishment of horizontal relations for dialogue between different cultures. That is, interculturalism comprises relations that are generated and lived from the valuation and respect for the “other” in the pursuit of equality among differences.

Interculturalism is manifested in the heart of the demands of the Indigenous movement. What is sought is the establishment of horizontal relations both between Indigenous and other social movements, and between Indigenous peoples and the dominant society. This goal is the reason behind the efforts for unification with farmers, urban, and trade union organizations. Examples include the Territory of Coexistence, Dialogue and Negotiation in La Maria (Piamamá); coalitions of the Indigenous Social Alliance with mayors; and CRIC support for the candidature of guambiano leader of AICO, Floro Alberto Tunubalá, for governor of Cauca⁶⁶. The negotiation processes and the recognition by the Colombian State earned by CRIC in the context of several strikes in La Maria are also examples of a horizontal reordering within a dominant society. The dialogue between the Bilingual Education Program of CRIC and the MEN described in the first chapter is another example of the contributions that the Indigenous movement has made to the generation of new educational policies in the country.

Within the field of education, we recognize that interculturalism transcends the school space. From the PEB perspective, the school has been a space to organize and generate policies from within the context of the community. This means that the school itself is an intercultural space intended to shape the children’s open attitudes towards other Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and mestizo identities. Interculturalism involves the recognition and valuation from within each culture as a condition for recognizing and valuing the other. Roberto Chepe, teacher at the Lagoon of Siberia, expresses this objective very clearly:

Education is not very consistent with the needs of the people; not only for Indigenous people but fo’ all peoples. So we said we want an education that is consistent with our needs and that projects into life, not only for the teachers, but for the youth as well—an education that projects, that analyses over an entire lifetime— not only for Nasa people, but for the entire world. And many times they’ll say that bilingual education is only about speaking one’s own language; instead bilingual education is to level out what is propio—our own—and appropriate what is foreign, while strengthening our own. Education that is consistent with and for all of the peoples. Not just fo’ the Indigenous people but to serve the peasants, the black people, etc.

This view of Indigenous education shows that its objectives go far beyond just teaching courses; with the construction of the educational project, the PEB intends to redefine and deepen cross-cultural attitudes towards the construction of a new society.

The political platform of CRIC sets pluralism forth as a political principle. This occurs within the cabildos that integrate members of different ethnicities and is reflected in the efforts of the organization to promote the political development of other sectors such as

⁶⁶ With the support of CRIC, Floro Tunubalá became the first Indigenous Guambiano who won the popular elections for Governor General of the Cauca Province (2001-2003).

peasants, groups in urban areas, and non-organized Indigenous communities. Pluralism is a political goal that is exercised at various levels: in practice, it is exercised by organizations with other organized groups, in the integration of different actors in the local bodies of authority, and in the relationships of people in their everyday life. Interculturalism is an expression of this last principle. In this sense, the school is a space where the processes of self-recognition, the recognition of the other, and the enrichment between cultures acquire a specific dynamic which contributes to the development of school children, community members, and to a new understanding of what democracy is.

Therefore, we can think of interculturalism within the educational project as a methodology of appropriation of the external, which is very different from the process of assimilation that we had been subjected to by the official education and the church. Throughout the history of PEB, we have appropriated academic theories and sought the cooperation of specialists to build our own education; our project is not separatist. As described in the previous chapter, this led to the adoption of new methodologies such as the practice of using the Nasa Yuwe translation to interpret universal concepts such as nation, State, justice, etc. But the external content does not come only from the societies that have traditionally controlled education and state institutions. The project also seeks to establish mechanisms and forums for the exchange of ideas between Guambianos, Nasa, and Totoro, among others, because part of the hegemonic and historical strategy of the Colombian state has been to divide us and make the exchange of ideas between the different peoples impossible.

Moreover, interculturalism is not a process that only works towards appropriation, but it assumes the contribution of new elements made by the Indigenous society to their neighbors and the state. In this sense, interculturalism builds new ways of understanding democracy. One of the best examples was described in the second chapter: the incidence of the Indigenous organization when building the ethno-educative legislation, particularly in PEC's proposal.

It is not only at the local level of areas and schools where a new intercultural proposal is projected. The PEBI itself is an intercultural space of dialogue between Indigenous activists and non-Indigenous allies, and also between the PEBI team and the international NGOs that fund us. In other words, the PEBI functions as a place we try to live out the interculturalism. The intercultural project that characterizes the PEBI team is a collaboration in which outside allies—who arrive to PEBI with a broad vision about what the Colombian society should be—energize and support an Indigenous movement process in which the councils and communities (the organization as a whole) determine the direction. In other words, interculturalism does not presume to replicate relations of domination within the organization. The act of hiring partners or integrating new allies does not presuppose giving them a decision-making role. It is the reverse: interculturalism is everyone's commitment to a project that is led by the Indigenous movement.

Our notion of interculturalism today is the product of a quarter century of work. How we define and understand "interculturalism" today forms part of the demands that our organization has always advocated for, only now, the process is confirming it more clearly. The aim of this chapter is to explore these historic transformations to understand how we arrived at the approach that we manage today.

Interculturalism and Popular Struggles

From the beginning, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have collaborated in the PEBI. The Indigenous participants have always recognized that their objectives go beyond the purely Indigenous sphere. As Abelardo Ramos expresses:

In this sense of relationship between allies and Indigenous people within the Indigenous movement, what we have to see is that we Indigenous are Colombians from different peoples and that the Indigenous movement also has a role in the transformation of the country, in the history of the country.



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A demonstration in solidarity with compañero Pedro León Rodríguez.

These are sentiments shared by non-Indigenous partners, as recounted by Graciela Bolanos:

We are working on a project that is much larger than the Indigenous movement itself [...] From this point of view, the Indigenous movement for me [...] is a space of action, it is not about being Indigenous in itself.

Such feelings are reflected in CRIC's political platform, dating from the founding of the organization in 1971. It is recognized that the Indigenous peoples are part of the Colombian people and, in this sense, their struggles are inserted into the claims of the popular sectors. At the same time, it is understood that the Indigenous sector has unique and different characteristics from the other popular sectors, which gives them the right to autonomy within the popular struggles. The platform expresses the political thought of the cabildos and elders at the time of the foundation of CRIC; it established the direction for the sociocultural

action, emphasizing the need to avoid the risk of *indigenismo*⁶⁷, which can lead to racism. *Indigenismo* was understood as the isolation of Indigenous people from the social fabric, and from the popular struggle in a broader context. Instead, the organization sought to articulate its objectives in what was understood to be a class struggle at that time.

What was understood by “Indigenous” at that time? The discussion about the political platform that took place at the Fifth Congress (published in the newspaper *Indigenous Unit* in March 1978) gives us clues on this issue:

On the first point about foundations of our political position: We Indigenous descended from the original inhabitants of our continent, yet we are part of the exploited classes, as well as the deviations that occur when we lean more towards one side or another, most of the discussion the first day was about this...

At that time, the Indigenous issues were present at the struggle, but with a history denied by the state policy which attempted to homogenize the Colombian society and ignored different cultural values, particularly those related to land tenure (resguardos) and Indigenous ways of self-governance (cabildos). Back then, there was no consciousness of ourselves as “peoples,” but rather only as Indigenous persons; nor was there a clear articulation of what our own propio thinking was – in the sense of what arose later during the interpretations of the Indigenous worldview. At that time, the importance of language was felt, but without the technical tools to develop it. The movement established the paths to transform those feelings into knowledge. The guiding principle that articulated all was a notion of autonomy, which was based on the need for people to emancipate themselves from the subjugation of the Church, the gamonales from the traditional party, land-holders, and middlemen traders.

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Different cultures were participating within the organization, involving both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Its members were united by a revolutionary commitment, a political objective which stressed Indigenous interests, without CRIC thinking about “Páez interests for Páez people” or “Guambiano interests for Guambiano people” (as was said at the time). The movement was Indigenous because of its practice (recovering land, reconstituting cabildos, enforcing legislation), articulating its political and revolutionary objectives in a concrete way. Being Indigenous in CRIC meant having the responsibility of generating positions and strategies, as did the cabildos in their local struggles and in their general assemblies.

What did it mean to be Indigenous as part of the team that comprised the Bilingual Education Program in the late seventies? The Indigenous activist was one with a political responsibility within the Program, although they were not called a “coordinator”. By that time, the collaborator entering the program was a non-Indigenous person who voluntarily assumed a commitment with the organization. They joined the struggle as allies, within a relationship that today we would call intercultural because it involved interaction between different people, but at that time we understood such relationships more strictly in political terms. The point of insertion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons lay principally in the responsibility to jointly coordinate the development of the educational project.

67 See Glossary for definition.

The Dynamics of the Areas

In the eighties, new dynamics were generated in northern Cauca, and violence increased in the area. At the time of the CRIC's foundation, the violence was perpetuated by the landowners who opposed the Indigenous struggle for land. In the eighties, the Indigenous movement had regained lands and landowners, and their "birds"⁶⁸ had retreated temporarily. The guerrillas, who had always existed in the area without taking sides in the struggle of the Indigenous peoples, took advantage of the vacuum left by landowners to impose its hegemonic power, killing several leaders. One of the first Indigenous people who was killed was Avellino UI from the resguardo of San Francisco. Afterwards, among others, Pedro Julicue, also of San Francisco, and Floro Campo, captain of the resguardo of Caldoño, were killed. Other allies and collaborators also gave their lives at this time. Gustavo Mejía, peasant leader, president of the Agrarian Federation of Northern Cauca (FRESAGRO) and founder of CRIC, was one of the first to fall, followed by priest Pedro Leon Rodríguez from Corinto.

This repressive situation forced the Indigenous movement to take action to repel the weakening of the organization because of the killings of their leaders. This led the Indigenous people to look back to the resources that they already had when defending themselves against the landowners and creating the "Indigenous self-defense" groups, as they were called at the time. Some youth and adults chose to arm themselves by rudimentary means, working in small groups to patrol the region, although the mobilization of these groups was not determined by the community and their activities were not formalized by the cabildo. The context showed the need to strengthen the organization in the area so that the people could direct the control of their own territory and its processes by themselves.

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Before the Indigenous-guerrilla conflict, the landowner violence was not only against the cabildos, but against anyone who supported the Indigenous struggle. One such supporter was the Indian priest Father Álvaro Ulcue of Toribío. He attended land recoveries and supported the educational proposals promoted by Indigenous organizations; he himself was a member of the PEB in that regional area. There, he created the conditions for a rapprochement between the Church and the Indigenous movement. However, it is important to emphasize that Father Álvaro represented more elements of a broader and deeper process than a single person can put together. Remember that CRIC was established in the north; some of the early recovery of land occurred there, and the first community businesses and stores were created in that area. Therefore, we cannot talk about the process in the north without considering the communities themselves and the efforts of CRIC as a regional organization. Through these struggles, the communal bases for the creation of what would become the Nasa Project were being laid, a regional process for the creation and training of a body of leaders. Father Álvaro became leader in this context.

On November 10, 1984, Father Álvaro was murdered in Santander de Quilichao by the police. The previous day, the army had evicted the López Adentro Indigenous occupants, destroying their houses, their crops, and their school. Aware of the vacuum left by Father Álvaro's death, the Church resumed its support for community processes, naming Father Armando as his successor. The activists of the organization of other regional areas and those who were already collaborating with the North also revived and intensified their work. For example, the educational project that Father Álvaro had supported, in conjunction with the PEB, that addressed reading and writing in Nasa Yuwe (in the schools of Potrerito, La Palma,

⁶⁸ "Pájaros:" ("birds") slang term used for the killers supported by landowners to attack their political enemies, especially indigenous and popular (peasant, working-class, rural) leaders.

Lamina, and Vitoyó) and the first steps for developing this project under what is called the Nasa Project, continued thanks to the efforts of the PEB program and the Parish of Toribío.

Therefore, by the mid-eighties, the consolidation of the northern region in Cauca was underway. Despite all the obstacles that appeared in the north region and the organizational impulse of its population, this region consolidated itself, extending its influence to Jambaló. This condition was necessary to enter into a dynamic management and relationship with the state and non-governmental organizations, in order to obtain funding for projects. The process culminated in the creation of the Association of Northern Indigenous Cabildos (ACIN) as a body to facilitate this management and administration. At both the regional and the Northern zonal level, self-managed projects and associations between cabildos from other zones were promoted, for example, in the northeast (the resguardos of the municipality of Caldono) and in Tierradentro.

The Struggles of Peoples and Interculturalism

The organizational process in northern Cauca coincided with a shift in the international arena, caused by the fall of the Berlin Wall. The political framework of class struggle gave way to a broader range of strategies, many of them arising from within or promoted by what would be called the “new social movements”. In this context, the ethnic claim acquired more relevance. On the eve of the Constituent Assembly that recognized the pluriethnic and multicultural nature of Colombia, some Colombian Indigenous representatives participated in UN summit meetings, proposing and sustaining the concept of Indigenous peoples. Here, the driving notion was not one of ethnicity, but the concept of “peoples,” which involved a political-organizational dynamic, an acknowledgment of Indigenous struggles, and an understanding of the movement as a process of social building – this concept embodied the right to self-determination. Therefore, it was a less static and more a political concept than an ethnic one.

Along with the concept of peoples, the notion of interculturalism as the possibility of coexistence and mutual understanding between different cultures came into play. Interculturalism as a conceptual tool emerged precisely within the bilingual educational process in the Andean countries. We have already explained how we understand interculturalism as a process of appropriation and dialogue between cultures. What we need to emphasize here is that the theories about interculturalism being shaped in the Andean countries were oriented towards the construction of a different society and not just a school. In other words, interculturalism is a political project. In this sense, it goes far beyond multiculturalism, because the latter concept implies the recognition of minorities within an existing system, whereas interculturalism requires the development of horizontal interethnic relations through the creation of a new social order.

While interculturalism is a political project that transcends education, intercultural theories contribute with specific methods and strategies in the field of education. These approaches provide an option for the incorporation of native languages within the schoolwork. Instead of using the Indigenous language as a bridge to the acquisition of the national language, interculturalism presupposes the development of the two languages in their own dimension, establishing dialogue with each other. The first option is called “transition bilingualism” and the second—which is adopted within the intercultural methodology—is “bilingualism maintenance”.

At the time when CRIC was opening itself to the notion of peoples, there was a need to proceed in two directions that appeared to oppose each other, but in reality these two directions were interrelated. On one hand, it was an effort to deepen the Indigenous culture. But on the other hand, it was felt that autonomy demanded that we open dialogues with external allies and the state. This is to say the concept of “peoples” involved a simultaneous movement inwards and outwards. In the field of education, it was understood that establishing a dialogue between the two languages, the Indigenous and the national, was necessary. But we had to conceptualize the characteristics of this relationship more precisely: how to avoid letting the two languages fall into a hierarchical dynamic, and how the relationship could be transformed in order to achieve conditions of equality between the two languages.

What was needed was a set of tools to achieve this objective under the conditions of the time, so that education would provide the foundations of a practical notion of peoples. Interculturalism, which was handled within popular education sectors in other countries, filled this gap.

During the first period, the PEB kept a dialogue with Colombian currents of popular education that placed education within the class struggle. The interculturalism, which arose in countries with large Indigenous populations, gave us new tools in the process of rethinking ourselves as peoples and redirecting education in these political developments. Through bibliographical research, dialogue with the non-governmental organizations that funded us, and our internal workshops, we came to the conclusion that the concept of bilingual-bicultural education was not casting enough light to help us understand the complexity of the relationships between languages and cultures. We came to appreciate that it was not a matter of two cultures at stake, but that in our reality we had different influences coming from more than two cultures. The relations between Indigenous peoples could not be analyzed without understanding the power processes that permeated these contexts. You could not understand the “white” without specifying their class position and their ideological perspective in relation to the Indigenous movement. Interculturalism helped us to realize the complexities involved. And so the PEB turned into PEBI: Program and Intercultural Bilingual Education.

Interculturalism is a proposal, not a product, which means that it will always be in a state of transformation and appropriation, subject to the tensions of the context in which it is applied. The interculturalism that we integrated from other Andean contexts was very focused on schooling, and indeed we appropriated it and used it in our schools. But since CRIC schools were—and still are—centres of political organization, we necessarily had to expand the concept towards other projects of the organization.

As we delved deeper into the notions of project life or worldview, we saw the need to project a new intercultural perspective into community spaces beyond school, to establish relationships with other actors, to recognize the interplay of cultures within these spaces, and to create relations of peaceful coexistence, even in sites of sharp conflict.

Interculturalism Within the Work of PEBI

The remainder of this chapter will describe the impact of the notion of interculturalism in the PEBI’s projects. For now, however, let us assess how interculturalism influenced the relations within the team itself. In the early years of CRIC, to be “Indigenous” meant (as explained earlier) to belong to the larger exploited sector. Simultaneously, it meant to belong to a group suffering a particular exploitation (the terraje, for example) and having certain

institutions compared to others that did not (*cabildos*, for example). In this sense, cultural difference was not central to the discourse of the Indigenous people at the time (although the importance of traits like language, etc. was recognized); the structural relationship that they shared with other exploited sectors was more important. With the policy shift, there was a change towards an appreciation of Indigenous peoples in terms of identities and cultural differences. We are still exploited, but now the concept of *being different* is what is important, which sets us more on a horizontal plane and strengthens our negotiating capacity.

Within the political and cultural work of PEBI, Indigenous people began identifying themselves as members of *peoples* – Ambalúeño, Guambiano, Nasa, Totoro, etc. They became actors whose political actions were based on their cosmogonist thought and positions of identity. Consequently, new procedures were introduced within the team. In the past, the rituals conducted by the *thé' wala* were exercised more in the schools than within the team, but after the identity shift turned more towards the worldview, the Nasa shamanic work began to harmonize the work of the PEBI team itself. It begins to promote cosmological research in other peoples, for example in Ambaló, and the cosmological and linguistic variation within the region and each Indigenous people became evident. The ethnic heterogeneity within the PEBI ended up being one of its strengths and created a significant space for reflection.

What happened with the non-Indigenous allies during this shift? They made the effort to articulate themselves with the rituals, expressing and practicing respect. On the other hand, because the many projects and relationships with institutions had emerged by then, the new category of “advisor” was introduced, so they would end up as experts whose contributions would be very specific. The distinction between collaborators and advisors was never resolved, since both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people hold a variety of opinions. The partial adoption of this new term “advisors”—which is felt more clearly in the process of recruitment of non-Indigenous persons—has an unexpected result: a political and practical rift between Indigenous and non-Indigenous team members. While the Indigenous leaders begin to appreciate and work fruitfully with cultural diversity, the naming of the non-Indigenous people as “experts” instead of “allies” resulted in some sectors of the organization denying the non-Indigenous employees the opportunity to participate fully in the intercultural dynamic. This lack of harmonization is deeply felt within the PEBI, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people were trying to maintain and deepen more cohesive intercultural relations.

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Interculturalism and Linguistic Work

The intercultural approach proposes the coexistence of diverse languages – several Indigenous and Spanish. One of the major changes that highlights the work advanced with Indigenous languages within the PEBI has been a progressive understanding about the possibility of working linguistically with these Indigenous languages without resorting to the Spanish language. That is, the structure of the Guambiano Totoro or Nasa Yuwe language developed and operates independently of Spanish. Let us discuss, in the first instance, the work in Nasa Yuwe, and then we will refer to the Guambiano and Totoro languages.

Before the creation of CRIC, the Apostolic Prefecture of Tierradentro kept a body of bilingual teachers fluent in Spanish and Nasa Yuwe. Many of them had low levels of formal schooling and included several elders, for example, Pete Reyes, captain of the Vitonco

resguardo, Lisandro Campo, captain of the San José resguardo, and Feliciano Pete, from Huila resguardo. Another teacher, although she was not an elder at that time, was Elvia Oteca, a teacher in La Troja and San Jose. The only Indigenous trained teacher at this time was Elvia Medina of Togoima, who later organized training for Indigenous staff. Appointed as “bilingual assistants”, they collaborated with the official mestizo teachers, translating the content of the courses and, in particular, working with smaller children who came to school without any competence in Spanish. They understood that their role was to translate, as Elvia Oteca Calambas recounts:

Anyway I [say] that the prefecture identified the need for interpreters at school. Pedro “Mono” [ACHICUE – captain of the Avirama resguardo] was more or less 60 years old, he was an old man. [Other elders were: Pete Reyes, captain of the resguardo Vitonco, Feliciano Pete, of resguardo Huila, Genaro Bolaños of resguardo Mosoco] ...Yes, at that time I was 23, but I do not know why they chose me. The [director] was called ... No, I was first appointed in San Jose ... [And] compadre Lisandro Campo. But in San Jose I worked with [mestizo teacher] Arenas, so [she] was very nice, but when they sent me down here [in Troja] it was when I started to suffer. And the second year they sent me again to San Jose but this time alone. What? Yes, I worked alone. Of course, I say that we did not know which was our work? Sure, they had told us that we work with the smaller children, that we should teach them some songs... yes, yes, to those who did not understand [Spanish]. But anyway we were sent to teach the little ones, the kindergarten, but we did not know which was the work we had to do with them. [...] Then the principal said: Oops!, but then it is a waste of time, she will get a salary very easy. [...] just talking to them in Nasa Yuwe, for example, to say chicken in Nasa, or that *perro* is in Spanish, but alku in Nasa, so everything just superficially. And then, every Friday we were taking training in Belalcazar, but not only for kindergarten, but training for everything. When [the opportunity] arose to get the title in pedagogy it was later, when I enrolled in the College of education to get the title. I was in Taravira. But the first few days it was very hard as I said, because white people treated us very badly. They said that the teaching profession has very low status because of the Indians in it. Just as I was, we did not know or speak [Spanish] then, and that yes, Monsignor had that group of indians in the teaching profession, that’s what they said, so [...] we didn’t want to take that professionalization course [we were disappointed because] of the way they put us down. They claimed that it was a pig mess⁶⁹ at the College because of us. At a meeting a guy, I do not remember ... degraded us so much that Mr. Virgilio Casas, who was secretary, defended us, because they were lowering us too much. We were like interpreters say, no more. But the appointment that came to me was as bilingual assistant.

[The woman director] commanded me like: ‘Elvia, go to check if the rice is already drying and place for me the cap.’ “Ay! Elvia, look. I have serious morning trip, could get me a beast? Of course, I went and did all that. At that time we were receiving a consignment [CARE, USA], some jars of oil, rice, flour, oats. You know that she used to do? She made bread to send to her daughters. Once I said, ‘Oh, Miss Inés, why you don’t give me a little bit of that flour, so I could also make bread’. She said, ‘No. If you want, take that oats and grind it, and prepare your bread’.

⁶⁹ The Spanish text uses the term “sancochera,” a word made to disqualify the quality of something because of the apparent lack of order and cleanliness.

I remember Father Gonzalez Reyes, he used to go frequently there, to watch if we were working or wasting time. It turns out that a teacher used to go on Tuesday and left on Thursday but I never say anything. And that priest told her that she had to do what she was supposed to do and if not, she should stay home and be lazy, he said. At that time they were very angry, they scolded us... But they were the supervisors and in that time a teacher who was not working, was fired. If someone wanted to go to Belalcázar they had to hide.

Now they go there and do what they please. But at that time it was very strict. There are still many white teachers, for example, in the resguardo Vitonco ... I don't know how many non-Indigenous. [Also] in Taravira. But the resguardo of Mosoco [now 2003] no longer has white teachers.

The objective of this insertion of Nasa Yuwe speakers in the teaching profession (the so-called “contracted education”) was to achieve a transitional bilingualism. The mother tongue was used so that the child could move towards the official language of the country, which was the school's language.

CRIC questioned this model from the beginning. CRIC vice-president Benjamin Dindicué, who is remembered as one of the most determined to develop education as a political strategy, had claimed that the Nasa Yuwe language should be used to teach the Nasa culture, and not just as a bridge for teaching in Spanish. But, simultaneously, he acknowledged the importance of Spanish as a vehicle to ensure our rights. Therefore, it was important to teach Spanish in Indigenous schools; similarly, he argued that without the Spanish language it was impossible to forge alliances with other popular sectors. Bilingualism was sought, then, not as transitional, but as a profound development project in both languages, strengthening both the Nasa culture and political relations with non-Indigenous popular sectors. At this time, the notion of interculturalism was not explicit, but its seeds can be seen in the priorities of Benjamin Dindicué.

When PEB was founded, we were already planning on building an Indigenous education in which the ideas grounded in the traditional teaching in Spanish were not against the Indigenous culture. It was felt that Spanish notation was not suitable to represent the sounds of Indigenous languages, as it would ignore the phonology of the Indigenous language that acts as the carrier of meaning in everyday use. For example, *kiite* means “rise” in Nasa Yuwe. To refer to a person who has a habit of getting up early, we say *kiitsa*, where *-sa* is a suffix that characterizes the person who has that action as a habit. The Nasa voice *uweça*, “he or she is catching,” contains a similar sound, but in this case takes on another meaning: *-ç-* means a progressive action. In both cases, however, the sound is produced in different way. *Uweça* is a unique phoneme, or a unit of sound with meaning. In *kiitsa*, instead, the sound results from the union of a root, *kiir*, and a suffix, *-sa*. If we use the same spelling for both voices, as does the first alphabet of Nasa Yuwe of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)—they used /ts/ in both cases—then the two meanings are confused. This is what we mean by the interference between Spanish and Nasa Yuwe, in which the spelling of the first language alters the meaning of the second, causing problems in teaching reading and writing the native language.

However, during the first stage of PEB, there was not a rigorous understanding of this problem, nor was there an alphabet to solve it. The SIL alphabet was in use in the first bilingual materials. One of the most important means for writing Nasa Yuwe were cards with

interrogative sentences used to stimulate the production of oral narratives touching on a range of subjects (biology, social sciences, math, etc.). Roberto Chepe, one of the teachers working with those cards, describes that:

Two years without board, we worked only with cards. The cards have the words in Nasa Yuwe and also in Spanish, but not what we have now from our own alphabet; we were working with the alphabet of the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

That methodology was inspired by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who proposed teaching reading by bringing words and phrases to generate discussions on pressing problems of the people. CINEP (Center for Investigation and Popular Education), a Jesuit organization based in Bogota, collaborated in the implementation of this methodology. CINEP's participation in the process of PEBI is an example of what we call interculturalism; it created a space for intercultural dialogue between educational experiences that were culturally diverse, as Abelardo Ramos recounts:

Regarding the CINEP, we have to see this within the organization's policy about relationships with friends sectors that could contribute to the Indigenous movement. In this sense, CINEP was seen as a popular and academic research entity in the country; it was assumed that it could help boost the organizational process of *CRIC* in terms of organization because it was leading educational experiences at that time in the Atlántico province, in Arroyo de Piedra, and Suán, and that was important.

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However, it is a very complex process to establish an intercultural relationship with completely horizontal relations, particularly when one of the participants is dominant in the country (regardless of the political commitments of its representatives, who were, in this case, left-wing). Although the Freirean dialogic method has a clear political emphasis, CINEP's work was focused primarily on the pedagogical and didactic exercise. But the aim of *CRIC* was to direct the school as a vehicle to build and strengthen a movement from the bottom up, as Graciela Bolaños explains:

Maybe Javier [Serrano] emphasized the first part, only the pedagogical side, but it did not take all this political process. That is, education would not have been re-proposed in a consistent way. When education was changed, it was given to the cabildos with the purpose of substantiating its bases; it was say, 'Well, what do you want with the school? What's the education's role? What is education? From where we go, where could we build the parameters?' We began almost from scratch. On the contrary, over there the goal was to apply a methodology, a pedagogy, say, the one they wanted, perhaps it was something more developed, well developed but with a minimal chance of implementation because there weren't appropriate conditions and it was not a collective process. Then of course, there was a crash between a way of articulating the theoretical work in a defined community with a clear political project, in such a way that we had to develop the reasoning and ask people: 'What do you want? How are we going to build here?' And then, based on a simple assumption, let's do what people want on a critical and reflexive basis, and on that basis we slowly designed the best pedagogical developments. So we arrived to the same process by different ways.

Javier himself refers to the problem that he faced while defining the objectives of the organization regardless of their own training:

I think there was something I did not understand... 'Look, I can help you', for example, in the educational and pedagogical part, 'but you guys do the rest' ... And I think that I was not very clear; it was something that I only understood later. I could not be a representative of the culture. I could be a helper, that was what I had been invited for, but there were pods in the work of the Nasa organization with a different sense from what we had in this national society, the conventional education system, let's say.

Besides the problem of intercultural relations within the team around the process of "flashcards", this team realized that this methodology was insufficient for a bilingual and bicultural education, because the process of learning was focused on questions and answers so punctual, they ended up being mechanical and not allowing space for the generation of independent questions. The problem centered on a lack of adequate pedagogical training to really generate a deep reflection and a continuous research dynamic involving the flashcards. We still did not manage interculturalism adequately to fully appropriate outside ideas. Therefore, this methodology was abandoned, even when the New Rural School reclaimed it as an educational model in Colombia.

In addition to the flashcards, the PEB was producing other materials for the reading and writing training Nasa Yuwe in these early years. These materials showed that the relationship between the texts produced in both languages was not completely understood. Martha Pabón, an anthropology student at the time, states in her thesis *Maestros del Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca -CRIC-: socialización y cambio cultural (Teachers of the Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca -CRIC-: socialization and cultural change)* (Universidad de los Andes, 1986) that the PEB of the time articulated "a vision of the bilingual relationship equating Spanish and Paéz in writing, leading a trend towards the translation in Paéz of contents generated in Spanish". In other words, her argument is that what was produced in Nasa Yuwe was modeled from texts created in Spanish.

It is really with the conceptual development of PEBI work, reinforced by academic training of CRIC Indigenous linguists in various campuses and dissemination of these tools among teachers through professional training, that it becomes clear how to move between the Spanish and Nasa Yuwe. On one hand, in the late eighties, the book *Nasa Yuwete piisan f'i'n'i* (Nasa Yuwe alphabet) published {in 1988} an alphabet proposal consistent with the structure of the language. With the introduction of the proposed spelling of CRIC, the written language used in school and non-school education reopened. The diffusion of the new alphabet focused on the training of teachers of the different professionalization cohorts. As there were four promotions between 1988 and 1999, with 296 teachers trained, we can assume that the orthographic proposal was widely disseminated among leaders, teachers and schools. Not only was the management of the alphabet taught to teachers at these workshops, but they sought to empower community leaders and introduce elementary aspects of writing in Nasa Yuwe into the daily work of the cabildos. For example, in several communities, council seals were written in Nasa Yuwe and this practice spread to other Indigenous languages. The schools received Nasa names (eg school Êeka Thêe '- Thunder, in Lopez Adentro), a practice that later spread to some associations of cabildos (such as Nasa Cxhâçxha, the association of cabildos of the Páez municipality). Some parents began to give names to their newborn children in their language, such as the Totoro name "Maitik."

It is also important to stress that these workshops were beyond technicities; they addressed policies to strengthen the language and, overall, cultural revitalization. That first attempt to arrive at a methodology to approach the Nasa Yuwe writing was confined to the Nasa people more directly related to CRIC. Other sectors, such as the resguardo Pitayó and the whole world of evangelical education on the one hand, and the Apostolic Prefecture of Tierradentro and the contracted education on the other, continued to use an alphabet based to some extent on the SIL model. There were several attempts at unification, but they did not bear fruit until late last century. Ten years after the appearance of the alphabet proposed by CRIC, a series of discussions with Indigenous educators of the Prefecture and the Pitayó culminated in a new unified alphabet that allows a more coordinated and more effective dissemination of materials between the different sectors. In this sense, when we talk about interculturalism, we refer not only to relations between different ethnic groups, or between Indigenous groups and the dominant society. It is equally important to recognize the internal diversity, which in this case involved an appreciation of dialectal variations in Nasa Yuwe, and even more, of methodological, theoretical, and political differences between the various sectors.

The issue was not limited to the alphabet, but interlocutions around the alphabet made it possible to establish a consensus regarding the relationship between structures of Nasa Yuwe and Spanish, and their implications for education. Through the discussions, the participants—who were previously antagonistic—developed a collective identity that would facilitate the establishment of relationships and partnerships beyond language in the future.

The adoption of the Nasa Yuwe alphabet promoted the creation of new teaching materials. The best example is the reading and writing booklet for school levels second and third, *Sa ʔ Úus* (The Cacique thoughts). This material in Nasa language brings together several stories about cultural practices. The readings include exercises designed to develop children's skills to understand new words by connecting syllables and to strengthen cultural teachings through the creation of riddles. The booklet fosters research by teachers and students, asking them to collect examples of cultural practices linked to children's socialization processes (for example, asking the kids to kiss a chicken to stimulate verbalization), and then reflect upon them. Additionally, through this type of research the school encourages our community pedagogical approach and techniques because the researchers must reach out to traditional healers and elders. The research process brings together diverse sectors of the community, as highlighted by a PEB curricular assessment in 1990:

children's knowledge is recognized... parents bring their knowledge and the knowledge that they receive from the traditional healers, and they participate with their worldview... the practices of the organization work as a mechanism for applying knowledge, attitudes, and values.

In brief, by adding a specialized linguistic approach, we not only achieved a more rigorous and autonomous writing of the Nasa Yuwe, but we actually deconstruct the conventional school model by putting together the pedagogical and political objectives of the program.

Working with Other Indigenous Languages of Cauca

Although various ethnic groups have always participated within CRIC, work around *educación propia* has been particularly profound and extensive among the Nasa. However, among the first CRIC schools, the Guambiana Chimán School in La Marquesa and the school La Peña in Totoro were also spaces where they applied many of the methodologies mentioned earlier.

Yanacona	English	Spanish
pusruk	Head	Cabeza
lstur	Forehead	Frente
mal+	Face	Cara
Kap	Eyes	Ojos
Kapisik	Eyelash	Pestañas
Kim	Nose	Nariz
trp trap	Mouth	Boca
Trukul	Tooth	diente
nil+	Tongue	Lengua
nas'ik	Neck	Cuello
l akarto	Shoulders	Hombro
went+	Back	Espalda
matrarak	Armpit	Axila
k+t+	Stomach	Estómago
l as'	Penis	Pene
Sruk	Testicles	Testiculos
sr+k	Leg	Pierna
tonto	Knee	Rodilla
katsik	Foot	Pie
kual'c'ukul	Hand nails	Uña de manos
katsik c'ukul	Foot nails	Uña de pies
kampik	Fngers	Dedos
kual tonto	Elbow	Codo
palanta	Arm	Brazo
pis wase	Breast	Seno
Kalo	Ear	Oído
Ani	Blood	Sangre
milisik	Beard	Barba
lsik	Hair	Cabello

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List of Yanacona words and their English and Spanish translations.

More recently, in the last fifteen years, the *cabildo* of Totoró has embarked on a process of language recovery; the Totoro participation in the PEB has been characterized more through linking them to workshops and general reflections, which, although has nurtured the process, does not imply that the PEBI has played a central role in its development. The same can be said about the relationship with the Guambiano people, although regarding the education in Chimán, a founder school of PEBI, the community somehow participates in an educational process of the Guambiano people's *cabildo*, affiliated with AICO. Ultimately,

the PEBI has participated in the production of didactic materials for reading and writing in *namuy wam* (guambiano), with the intervention of an intercultural team of two linguists, one Nasa and one from Popayán. The work of this team with the community of El Chimán shows, moreover, that interculturalism assumes horizontal relations and exchanges between Indigenous groups, as the Nasa linguist contributed all her curricular work experience.

The relationship with the Spanish monolingual communities such as the Yanacona people and Canelo communities or the Coconuco people, has been even less constant. With the La Maria Project (1998) we were able to compromise the State in the revitalization of Indigenous languages of Cauca through the PEB participation in the production of school materials. Specifically, the direct link between the PEBI and these processes in recent years has been the assessment performed by a Nasa linguist from Tierradentro in the drafting of brochures aimed at Yanacona schools from the Colombian Macizo. Today, the active participation of the Education Committee of the Yanacona people is becoming more relevant in the PEBI. The Yanacona CRIC representative is playing a key role in the educational process.

Regarding the intercultural PEBI project, the most significant intercultural achievement of the PEBI was the creation of the Education Committee of Indigenous Territories of Cauca (CETIC) by the mid 1980's. The CETIC was established by recommendation of the 10th CRIC Congress (1997) to guide development of the PEC- PEI and negotiate with the state the development of an educación propia from an Indigenous autonomous position. This process was re-affirmed by several blockades of the Pan-American highway in La Maria by the mid-nineties, as well as the Indigenous mobilization for management and negotiation in response to the avalanche of 1994 that affected multiple communities in Tierradentro. The CETIC represents a regional attempt to coordinate activities of the different cabildos on education. Hermes Angucho, Totoro member of the PEB, explains its objectives:

The creation of the CETIC was the result of Law 115 of the new Constitution, which regulated that schools should have their own principles [...]. The policy of the [Bilingual] Education Program had always been not to work as schools only, but integrally. By accepting the new law in the cabildos, work with institutions almost autonomously was going to break with many things. If we had divisions at that time, this will divide us more. As everyone would be autonomous and as the cabildo's authority would be lost, it would be diluted in many resguardos who had difficulties with teachers, with many coordinators: [...] it would be a disadvantage with the difficulty of building processes in many communities, particularly community processes. So I think it was necessary to confront that law, suit it to the communities from a much larger structure aligned to the guidelines of the Program and also the Organization.

According to this vision, one of the main objectives of the CETIC was to develop and support the implementation of the Community Educational Projects (PEC) as alternatives to the state's proposal about the Institutional Educational Project (PEI) subject that we discussed above. Here we focus, instead, on the intercultural nature of the CETIC project as seeking a horizontal dialogue between the different Indigenous peoples of Cauca.

CETIC activities focused on meetings where the alternative PEC was socialized. Also in regional seminars with cabildos and their teachers where we analyzed conceptual and labor issues affecting the teachers of the resguardos. The CETIC, more than a management tool, is a scenario where education becomes politics. Alvaro Cabrera, then collaborator in

the PEB, shows that the CETIC has served simultaneously as a collective memory device for the organization in general and a channel for spreading the PEBI achievements:

I think one of the points that has functioned has been trying to spread, to socialize the experience as a program, [because] that is not known in many areas, there are many areas that have remained distant from *CRIC*, such as the Yanacona. So, they have no idea of what happened with *CRIC*. What I wanted to mention is that right now most cabildos and most of the cabildos' members are young. There is a generational change [from] those who kept the memory of what were the first congresses, the first analysis, the first needs in terms of our own education. There is a disconnection. The youngest don't have that memory. Then, as CETIC we had to, in any work that we do, begin with the socialization of what is the context of the organization, the emergence of the Organization, the emergence of the Program, that is where we had to begin.

Through the meetings sponsored by CETIC, we shared the cosmological research that was carried out by the Nasa and Guambianos in their diverse processes, and we contrasted this research with Western pedagogical notions. According to Hermes Angucho, these results enriched the process in Totoró:

In this case we found that there are stages within the Nasa culture. We concluded that the center could be the father and mother. Then it was hard to understand if the mother was the moon and the father the sun; it came up there, and there everything originated from. The Guambianos, in turn, said that for them ... there were many points of reference, such as the fireplace, the family, but they also have a myth of origin as Guambianos, that is ... I do not remember now, but the culture revolves around a few central points that are not the same as those in general and ordinary education, where the center is the pupil, [where] the student is the one that has to be perfected and the teacher is a collaborator, and everything is around that and you forget the rest. Within the Nasa cultures this does not happen, the work is with the student, but the purpose is to strengthening the culture, the language, the customs, the identity, these are the priorities based on the Indigenous peoples and their cultures. So, one would find that [...] the discussions were new, but we got together and we did not find many differences. At first, we thought about doing one joint evaluation proposal, first as *CRIC*, then as *CETIC*. However, the Guambianos argued that they could perfectly submit their evaluation proposal, and that it was good that we could meet and say: 'Look, we're already together and we can work.' And it was good, because as Alvaro used to say, those who were on the committee at that time had no problems, they were not isolated, and we could integrate easily. So, that showed us that we could get together even if we have differences – because the end goal was to strengthen education.

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Similarly, these meetings facilitated us to do some epistemological comparisons between various cultures, as Luis Yonda, a Vitonqueño member of *CETIC*, accounts:

We found a big difference that we identified when the Nasa said, 'We think and feel with the heart, the Guambianos with the liver.' So that was a big difference. There were other questions, such as 'What is the center of education?' And there was

confusion between the meaning of education within the spaces where education is transmitted, disseminated, or socialized. The point of highest coincidence was territory as the center, but the spaces where each culture emphasizes it varies, for example, for us the fireplace was the center while we had firewood and while we had those fireplaces, [but] when exchanged for electric or gas stoves, that fireplace lost centrality or relevance. We had those kinds of reflections, I think that these events are in a memoir of CETIC. We realized that it was important to look at differences. There were other issues strongly marked by the official education, for example we asked ourselves... 'What is the center of education? Is the student or the teacher the center of education?' Other members from other areas have positions which are very different, some more influenced by formal education, others much more engaged in the reflection of their own education, identifying the center of education much further back, linked to their laws of origin.

These experiences shared in the CETIC by Indigenous partners showed us that interculturalism should not be conceptualized exclusively in terms of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. Rather, the PEBI process has served as a place for building intercultural relations between Indigenous peoples.

PEBI Intercultural Project and Institutional Relations

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How could horizontal intercultural relations be established within the Colombian society, a society which has historically subjugated Indigenous people? This is one of the challenges that poses the intercultural approach within the PEBI. Interculturalism does not always mean harmony, but also connotes tensions and conflicts. How, then, does one manage those tensions to achieve a constructive dialogue? We can answer this question by reviewing the history of relations between the State and PEBI and, in particular, the history of relations with State institutions engaged in educational policy.

The first years of PEB passed under the Security Statute regimen of President Turbay Ayala {1978-1982}, who imposed a wave of repression against CRIC in Cauca. The Indian Statute, which emerged at the time, tried to eliminate resguardos and cabildos. Many Indigenous leaders and allies were imprisoned, tortured, or killed by the repression, by both "birds" and the state security bodies. The founder of PEB, Benjamin Dindicué, was murdered at that time. Paradoxically, the same repression against CRIC helped the PEBI to become publicly known as a legitimate community movement, as Pedro Cortés recounts:

[The first workshop was done in Buga, in the Instituto Mayor Campesino], and it was the first workshop to be focused on education because, somehow, the image of the Indigenous movement was left a reddish image. It was a tactical need, rather, to present another face of the movement, and the education issue showed precisely that the movement had very legal claims, with a lot of acceptance. So, the workshop was done. The basic theme in this workshop was the critique of the official school and the religious imposition against native language and culture.

A working relationship with the state did not occur until the 1980's, when the repression declined. However, as expressed by Cortés above, the initial isolation allowed the development of an alternative educational policy with the PEB, questioning the formal education foundations.

The relationship between the PEB and the State began to develop when the PEB had strengthened its position, consolidated its body of teachers, and founded a network of schools with their own vision of what education is. The first exchanges with the MEN took place within a relationship that can be called "strategic", an exchange of materials and ideas in which the Ministry opened a dialogue with the organization. The state, which at the time supported an experimental approach called the "New School" to be introduced on a large scale throughout Colombia, was open to listen to other experiences. That is, PEB-State dialogue developed in the context of a broader pedagogical movement.

CRIC experimental schools operated independently of formal education. However, it was never the intention to replace the State responsibility to ensure education for the Indigenous population. The purpose was that given the accumulated experiences, the state granted legitimacy and recognition on one side and, on the other, demanded the state rethink its policies. In the mid-eighties, CRIC made an agreement with the MEN to publish a series of booklets for communities, teachers, and Indigenous children of the country. These booklets reflect the basic approach of our educational proposal and the dialogues that Indigenous children developed with children of Bogota at the First Congress of the ONIC. It was agreed that the publication would keep the texts developed by the Indigenous organization, inserting an Indigenous voice within the materials of the Ministry. Once published, the materials (with the authorship of PEB) were sent to the Secretary of Education of Cauca where, due to a different approach, the Secretary refused to hand them to the localities, which led to the cabildos' pressure to demand the delivery.

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With the introduction of CRIC's professionalization process of teachers in 1987, the relationship with the Ministry became more specific with an interagency proposal to enhance existing experiences, disseminate the experiences, and advance in the process of extending the coverage of the educational project. CRIC designed a proposal on professionalization which was accepted by the Ministry. It did not receive a budget, because it was at the provincial level. Given the lack of the province's interest, CRIC applied to INCORA to fund the first two years of the program. Then, the province began to partially support the project, at the request of the Ministry. The professionalization includes the participation of the University of Cauca, and the College Schools "Jose Eusebio Caro" of Popayan and "Los Andes" of Vega-Cauca, both for educational planning and for the institutional endorsement. Similarly, along the four cohorts completed, we received contributions from various institutions and people, which enriched the learning process.

This experience shows that one cannot speak of an intercultural relation with the state that is not mediated by power. In part, the Ministry's response was thanks to the intervention of people that already understood and sympathized with the educational proposal of CRIC, such as Yolanda Bodnar and Gina Carrioni from the Ethnoeducation Division of MEN. But it should be emphasized that, despite the decisions made at the national level, the communities still have to demand the enforcement at the provincial level, where the contradictions with CRIC were more acute.

One reason the PEB advanced a community educational proposal with certain autonomy in relation to state objectives was to avoid any funding that would involve abandoning their political objectives. If we look back over time, sponsorship has been on one hand very specific contributions from the MEN or the INCORA and, on the other hand, has been a very close

collaboration with European non-governmental organizations, particularly Terre des Hommes (Land of Men), a German organization that stands in solidarity with the processes of marginalized sectors. Terre des Hommes (TDH) has work in Colombia. The collaboration between TDH and PEB began in the early years of the program and continues to the present. In particular, the contribution of TDH—beyond economic contributions—consisted of a dialogue that led us to conceptualize our projects within a broader intellectual context. The long duration of our relationship has enabled a more enriching dialogue for both parties, which redefines the north-south relationship between the donor agency and the recipient of the aid. Ute Sodeman, a TDH representative in Colombia, so perceived educational action:

There are problems, yes, but the school was a good entry; that is, to work with the children when they are small, make them leave their houses and bring them to schools with all the organization that the schools have. It was not just a school as such, but it was a community school with a whole organization behind it. There are exchanges, children's organizations, vegetable gardens, community life, a very different school compared to what we have here in the cities. Additionally, the role of women, the organization process, and the political impact is different and liberating, right? And...it is important for everyone.

75 For example, almost two decades after establishing a relationship of support, TDH contributed to an assessment of the program, in conjunction with the PEBI, visiting the Intercultural Bilingual Community Learning Centres (CECIB) of CRIC. The assessment itself was understood as a space for dialogue between the PEBI team and a German expert in linguistics and pedagogy, Ingrid Jung. The purpose of the evaluation was not that a foreign institution comes to judge, but rather to provide a space for a joint reflection around key points of the educational process and global analysis of a program that has already spread to many places and become more complex. The evaluation was carried out through visits to the different localities, with workshops not only with teachers, but with the community. That is, it served as a tool to deepen processes qualitatively and to ensure a very productive feedback.

The continuous dialogue with Terre des Hommes opened the possibility to consider issues previously ignored in all its complexity by the Indigenous movement. For example, while it is true that a Woman Program has existed within CRIC since the eighties, gender considerations were not incorporated into other projects. Graciela Bolaños reflects on this:

The [Woman] Program was formed long ago. First, because we have always been vigilant for the greater participation of women; this we insisted upon with the cabildos. But second, because women themselves began to demand greater participation. There was the peasant organization, which was in its initial stage, the process of organization of ANUC where an essential component was women. There were organized women committees in Paniquitá, in Pitayó, in Quizgó, in Guambía too, and in El Chimán. They had basically dedicated to promote community enterprises. But in the end, what was most worried about was the lack of women in managerial areas. On the other hand, the organization of women was like fashion at the global level. The NGOs themselves began ask 'What is the participation of women in the social projects that we promote?' Gender became one of the cornerstones of any organizational project that we wanted to manage; gender was the measure of its coherence: 'How do women participate in this project?'

TDH also influenced discussions on the labour relationship between the members of the programs and CRIC, suggesting that they all be paid social benefits, including Indigenous members. Until then, CRIC as a popular organization had not contemplated this right. This dynamic, mediated by various actors and strategically constructed by the Indian movement, has brought the autonomy and social identities as fundamental benchmarks for the effective exercise of interculturalism. This condition is clearly expressed by Marcos Yule, Nasa ethnolinguist of Toribio, bilingual education coordinator in the Northern region:

I would say that the Indigenous movement takes up the tradition but adds something that we need to respond to in today's reality. For example, it has to add the writing, the use of written laws to defend the territory. Today we add other things, the use of Spanish, techniques, technologies, but all in function of serving the community, our own life project. And elements of other cultures are taken up. In that sense I think it's good when interculturalism is assumed; we are Indigenous communities, peoples of a country, we need to prepare ourselves and understand ourselves to dialogue with other cultures. A dialogue with other cultures is possible as you understand the knowledge of others, the values of culture in general, that is, the universal knowledge. But taking the universal knowledge with discernment, taking what serves us, and examining what helps us, is to that extent, I think, what the Indian mind put forward. This intercultural approach is valid and is being assumed in this way because of its importance to education; and right now it is becoming more necessary because there are new needs. For example, being able to say that we must manage our own territory, the Indigenous territorial identity. The constitution gives us several points that we have to develop; we have to study, analyze, and think about them and we also need to analyze our culture to say how we can advance. That is the problem lies in the how, in how we are going to do it, if we can do it the same way as the system thinks, as the state that dominate us wants, or we do it as we want for our life project, then we have to do it gradually, slowly. So, in that sense, there is sometimes a contradiction, but it is a very important and necessary part. I feel that the sense of unity and organization is getting stronger, we are gaining political spaces, we are gaining spaces also in the legal field, even though many things have yet to improve, which requires more time. In this regard it seems to be important, for example, to make an effort to apply our own law in our communities; this is very important, and I would say that's how I see it at the level of the organization process. The most important thing is the idea of building autonomy culturally and economically; this is coming slowly, and we can see certain things, maybe on the issue of identity, in strengthening the language, I think we have prioritized some spaces, maybe the political space at the beginning, now the economic space, it has things but we still need to mature more in this process and I also would say on the part of cultural identity, in the language, the approach to focus the educational process based on the language we need a lot, but we have ideas, we have the bases, but doing it requires to be able to use the native language of each people. For example, in the north, it is said that the new generation are people who are speaking the language very little; that implies the need to rethink maybe encouraging, motivating this, stimulating the families to revitalize the language from their own familiar space. We need to promote the use of language, although I don't know how, somehow binding for the new generation. These are things that worry me because if our process is resistance, how do we deal with things that are big, the policies of those that handle extensive economic power

worldwide, such as globalization, neoliberalism. We must prepare ourselves to deal with all that. The proposals for higher education point to that, and most importantly in this process is that it has been built on its historical roots, from the ancestors, like Juan Tama, Quintin Lame, La Gaitana. Practically, our work is to add continuity to what they did, locating ourselves in the current situation; we will play a role, as father Alvaro played a part, he planted something there, and we have to go back and give life to and strengthen those ideas and see what serves up in this moment, and analyze how our life process is going on.

The other important part is how the construction of the Indigenous movement is not only made by Indigenous peoples, but has been a process to which others persons have contributed and been supportive. Our process is being built not only with Indians but with input from other people who share and understand that this project is valid not only for us, but for humanity, for the development of the country, based on diversity and culture. Then the contributions made by Gustavo Mejia, by father Álvaro, made by a lot of people, are not wasted.

Chapter 4

A Pedagogy to Frame the Community Life Project

Lagunate luch mem
(The lagoon children's song)

We are little Indians who always go happily
Towards our school to work.
We go out learning from plants and singing our songs
And if there is time left over we will go for a swim.

Every day we learn more and more about numbers
So we can do our accounting and not let ourselves be deceived,
We write letters to greet
Our brothers from the other communities.

We always tell them how content we are
And how we all will fight united together,
We also tell them that in our schools we all learn
To always respect our elders.

If we want to learn more about our territory
We go out and walk through the fields
We search the rivers, we search the paths
And we sow crops on our parcels of land.

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Every week the community
Comes together to work in the recovered land.
Some weeding, some sowing,
And some others preparing the food.

When we reunite to work
Even the Crocodile helps
To make bricks, he carries much earth
And with more friends it is his turn to step.

“For us, learning is to assimilate experiences; it is to live them, it is to relearn what had been forgotten and unlearn what has been learned. This means that each person ought to put into practice whatever knowledge they have in order to change the daily routine of work; it is to fulfill experiences guided by the ideas – trying, practicing, imitating in order to obtain various working experiences while simultaneously evaluating them to correct the errors. In addition, one must bear in mind the creation of methods to perfect the work. In order to obtain a good experience, there must be an interest in the work, a good will, and a growth in thinking from day to day to fortify ourselves as persons and as a community. At the same time we must give ourselves clear goals. The most important thing is to be clear-headed and ask ourselves, “what do I want to learn?”, “What do I intend to do with that which I have learned?”, “For what?” and “Why?” Ultimately, we must ask ourselves many questions to reach a conclusion. Knowledge is not always useful or valuable by itself, because if it cannot be lived out and experimented, practiced, recreated, and evaluated, then it remains reduced as non-critical knowledge. For this reason, both theory and practice are necessary to transform reality, and on that basis advance solving the difficulties of everyday life. If we do not comprehend and critically analyse the experiences we have lived permanently, that is to say, if we do not give ourselves a sense of what we are doing, it will not be possible to effect the changes that are necessary for a better life.”

Alicia Chocué, bilingual teacher and current governor of the resguardo of Pueblo Nuevo
(*Informe Taller Pedagogía Comunitaria*. 2001)

In one of the first documents of the Program, we affirmed that, before the “what” and the “how,” we ought to clarify the “why” or the purpose of education. In the previous chapters, we analyzed in detail how we progressively advanced in identifying the purpose, and how the social and communitarian processes led education to become a strategy of social mobilization in Cauca. At the same time, we have traced the path of how we transformed our way of understanding education. Now, we return to the previous themes like a spiral; we will deepen the “what” and the “how,” the cultural knowledge and pedagogical knowledge that we the teachers were building in this process, and how we went about articulating our proposal for an educación propia in the small details of scholarly life.

It was difficult to construct criteria and pedagogical references that permitted us to design an educational model that suited our way of feeling, thinking, and planning. For that reason, the first obstacle that we had to overcome was to locate the horizon of the model or pedagogical proposal that we were seeking.

One of the first strategies for conceptualizing an Indigenous school was to analyze the schools that already existed in our communities. What were their origins, what were their effects and consequences, what were their problems and difficulties, and why were schools wanted in these communities? Our work on this perspective permitted us to grasp diverse opinions and approaches that, one way or another, demonstrated that the “official” and missionary schools were, by the way they were functioning, one of the means that had the most influence on cultural disintegration and the loss of identity in Indigenous communities. However, it was also recognized that these spaces were needed anyway—from the political dimension of the Indigenous peoples—as a mechanism for cultural revitalization. We began our work in 1978 with this perspective. The first schools were opened; these schools were the theoretical-practical laboratory of a new educational “model.” Initially, we were searching for a pedagogical model that would be an alternative to the “official” education. This approach is what we proposed in *Nuestra Experiencia Educativa (Our Educative Experience)* (1987, edited in 1991). But the concept of a “model” was insufficient to express what we wanted, because besides being static and rigid, it presupposed the adoption of a specific general format that did not recognize local diversity or the dynamics of the processes that were underway at the community level. As a result, the concept of a “model” was progressively replaced by the concepts “educational project” or “educational proposal.”

However, elaborating on a new proposal demanded a critical look at what results were being sought and the means to obtain them. The communities with educational needs and our main funders, Terre des Hommes, as well as many other interested entities and persons who were observing the development of the pedagogical project, demanded immediate results for the cultural and political dimension that this process was projecting. More than once, we, the coordinating team, rebelled against the collective (of Indigenous leaders and a few non-Indigenous collaborators) because they demanded that we begin from the results that we wanted to achieve. They wanted to see the children writing and speaking their Indigenous languages at a time when they were not even convinced of the importance of maintaining their original languages and being bilingual. Therefore, we went on understanding that first we needed to raise awareness and elaborate policies that would help to push the transformative processes. And in this sense, we began to perceive the tension that was generated by the diverse interpretations that existed within the team of the Educational Program regarding the existing conditions.

Our comprehension about the moment that we were in was always very problematic. Javier Serrano, the pedagogical advisor of CINEP, recounts his memories of that time:

There are two episodes that I remember quite clearly; for me, these incidents were quite revealing. Not so much about me, but rather about what happens in an organization in certain conditions, and during that time [the raw repression of the Indigenous organization during the government of Turbay] is when all this process about education started. During these times, I remember saying to Abelardo, "Listen, brother, I cannot continue advising a project like this if I do not learn the Nasa Yuwe language, you guys ought to make me learn and facilitate me to learn it." And Abelardo... told me "Here's the thing: the organization is never going to facilitate you to learn it." And I said to him "Why?" – "Because then you would be able to speak directly with the people." I remember feeling angry, so I told him "But see here, you guys are making an error then, you can't have someone advising a project which is so important—like it was for me and maybe for Abelardo and for you [Graciela], but not for the rest—in whom you do not trust enough so that he can speak directly with the people. So you are going to have to think about finding a new person." This was in the last period in which I was with them. This was an episode [...] And the other is a time when someone told me "Brother, what happens is that you have a bourgeois concept of the school" when I started to insist on the importance of personalized education, something that I believe more and more will be the salvation of this country [...], sometimes with such a gutsy mobilization of the people, the displacement and all that junk. I said to him, "Sure, it's because the school is the product of the bourgeoisie, it's that teaching to read and write is an individual activity, and to write is an activity that in itself grants the possibility of irresponsibility and one does not know fo' whom one writes, and reading is a liberating process because nobody can control what one reads. So I told him: "You all should think on one problem, and that is the school is not just useful, it's something that can fuck you over, because it forms individuals and individuals can be disobedient, disloyal, and all that junk...they can be...and they are incontrollable."

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Effectively, the first years of the educational project's development were marked by insecurity, doubt, and the unceasing disquieting worries that plagued the direction we wanted to take the process. Doubts, complications, and conflicts still exist today, but they follow a different order now: they are methodological, investigative, and political-organizational. One of the alternatives that we adopted and that contributed to give direction to the educational project was the communities' reflections regarding the "what" and the "why" of education. The first question that needed to be resolved in this dynamic was the issue of what to teach and what to learn... In the PEB team we started to understand the communities' expectations and weave them into the project; these expectations would later become the defining lines of the education.

Taking a Bit from Here and a Bit from There: The Curricular Process

Because we incorporate education into our Life Project, we carry out continuous analysis of the various types of knowledge that circulate and that ought to be present in the schools. Our decision of what should be taught resulted from the complicated processes of negotiations inside the communities and with the State and Colombian society. Finally, the schools themselves have their own unique dynamics; children express what they want to learn through their enthusiasm, with their compromise, with their disinterest, or with silent resistance.

The 29th *Periódico Unidad Indígena* (Indigenous United Newspaper) from 1978 records the recommendations regarding education of CRIC's Fifth Congress, which occurred in Coconuco in 1978:

The total or partial loss of the elements of Indigenous identity—such as the resguardos, cabildos, language, communal work, history, medical knowledge and the defence of our traditions—has contributed to the oppression and regression of Indigenous communities by the dominant society. To counter these trends a little, the commission for education gives the following recommendations:

- a. To study traditional history; apply geography to processes of learning and mapping of the veredas and resguardos; to study botany.
- b. To encourage the making of traditional objects such as *jigras* (woven bags), haversaks, woven braids for making hats; in addition to displaying our Indigenous culture, such crafts allow us to avoid purchasing similar articles from peddlers of cheap junk when our communities could produce them on their own.

Besides discussing the importance of “rescuing”—as it used to be called—Indigenous culture, the commission of the Congress reached an agreement that it was necessary to adopt some elements of technology and modern knowledge in agriculture, livestock, and political training; however, the community itself would be the one that decided what to incorporate into its pool of knowledge. Modern technology and Indigenous knowledge can be complimentary. The commission also evaluated the educational mechanisms and the materials that had been produced. The commission highlighted the illiteracy of most of the Indigenous population as a grave problem. This mass illiteracy halted comprehension of written materials and greatly limited the effectiveness of workshops, mini-courses, and other formative activities including study groups and discussions that the organization was promoting in Indigenous zones. This Congress made clear the importance and urgency of continuing adult literacy. This literacy work taught reading and writing while simultaneously permitting the rise of peoples’ awareness regarding the problems they had.

“To learn to read is to fight” was the name of a pamphlet that CRIC created to teach reading and writing to adults, years before the creation of the Bilingual Education Program of 1978. It was a serious concern of the communities that adults could not read and write. Comrade Mario Escué de Vitoyó remembers, “As it turns out, in that time almost none of us could even manage to scribble a signature, and there we were looking for the land titles of resguardos. That was the urgency of the school, and that’s the reason we organized ourselves.” It became necessary for the authorities to check the land titles or documents of their resguardos; the land issues required us to take censuses, to allot plots of land, to establish official records, and to document minutes of their meetings and community assemblies and multiple activities that, with the development of the organization, were taking on a greater dimension. The activities of the cabildos inherently required the establishment of relations with other worlds and societies by means of the written word. This preoccupation with literature and writings was transmitted into the schools. However, although we were focused on internal adult literacy of the study of legislation, Indigenous rights, and political formation during that time, we did not want to translate this body of adult knowledge into the schools. From the beginning we have prioritized children’s processes on their own terms. Because of this focus, we were not in agreement with the activities of a missionary woman in 1982.

She would visit some schools in Tierradentro to teach the articles of Law 89 of the Indigenous legislation. We did not see any sense in having the children mechanically recite the articles of the Law without any understanding of its meaning.

One of the problems expressed by the communities regarding the effects of “official” schooling was that students became disconnected from and contemptuous of agricultural and productive pursuits. One of the main complaints expressed by parents was that school made children lazy; this deeply concerned parents because children and youth would lose their love for the land, and parents noted that their children believed physical labour degraded them. Many teachers would use agricultural labour as a punishment, without measuring the consequences that such practices were generating in the children’s minds. The children’s attitudes changed progressively in proportion to the community’s appropriation of their own educational focus. The coordinators of CRIC’s educational program realized that productive work should become another one of the central criteria. In this way, it became possible to strengthen appreciation and value of the territory, as well as the importance of work in children’s formation. By considering agricultural work an important part of the curriculum, the schools could not only take advantage of the crops to finance the schools, but raising of various different species of vegetables in the garden and having animals became pedagogical projects that required skills such as care and disciplined observation, records of their evolution, management and maintenance techniques. The garden and its surroundings became a laboratory for the development of many kinds of learning.

For example, at La Laguna school, after multiple failed attempts to build a garden as a laboratory, the women of the community finally made it happen:

So we gathered ourselves and discussed and organized the Feminine Committee Sek Buyitsa (awakening sun), formed by various women who dedicated themselves to making this garden work succeed and attending the kitchens in turns. (From the pamphlet *La experiencia de nuestra huerta escolar, The Experience of our School Garden*, August 1986, p. 11)

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During those initial years of the Program, there was an educational reform within Colombia which would define the objectives and the content for all the grades of the educational system until 1994. That year, the General Law of Education (Law 115) was enacted, animated by the spirit of the new Political Constitution of 1991. The Program of Qualitative and Quantitative Educational Improvement (National Plan 1975) was issued through Decrees 088/76, 1419/78, 1816/78, 1002/84, and their regulatory Resolutions. The Reform proposed what became known as the “curricular renovation,” with a new conception of the curriculum, eleven goals for the educational system, and the instrument to implement them (educational technology). The 1419 Decree and the 1978 Decree defined the curriculum as “the structured and planned collection of educational activities, in which teachers, students, and the community participated within the goals and objectives of Colombian Education”. Spanish and Literature, Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Health, Social Sciences, Aesthetic Education, Physical Education, Recreation and Sports, and Religious and Moral Education should be taught at all schools in the country. The 1142 Decree and the 1978 Decree were implemented for Indigenous communities. This decree signaled that the curriculum needs to respond to the needs of the cultural, territorial, social, and political contexts of these communities, and should, therefore, be bilingual and participatory. This decree equally recognized the Indigenous peoples’ rights to give themselves their own education – educación propia. More specific

rules about this 1978 decree were issued in 1985, as of the first seminar on Indigenous education in Girardot, under the agreement between MEN, ONIC, and the regional Indigenous organizations that already had experience in the development of their educación propia. Among them were CRIC, UNUMA, CRIT, OREWA, and CRIVA.

In those first years, we had a critical vision of “official” education, but we also had the curricular reform as a frame of reference. The former can be seen in the document that supported the research proposal, elaborated by the team that coordinated the fledgling Program (1980). This interdisciplinary team included professionals from the disciplines of pedagogy, anthropology, linguistics, and social education. Among them, there was a Nasa Indigenous person:

One of the fundamental characteristics of the Colombian scholarly apparatus is to mask the real situation of society while educating. It veils the historical, economic, and political reality from the student; this way it produces a distorted vision of reality, so that it unravels reality. The former refers to the content that is transmitted. But attitudes of submission to the dominators are reproduced in this pedagogical practice; passivity, unconscious dedication to work, contempt and devaluation for everything that does not represent an immediate economic value, the silence, the repetitive attitude – all of this ends up configuring the overall picture. (Untitled document, 1980, page 5).

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This same document criticized the fact that the educational content in the Indigenous communities was the same as in schools throughout the country, urban or rural, and that they therefore did not address the cultural and specific characteristics of each Indigenous people. The “teaching content in the areas of knowledge” were structured at that time in five subject areas: Social Studies, Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Language, and Arts (page 12-13). They were, of course, the very same scholastic “areas of knowledge” of the Curricular Reform of 1978, aside from Physical Education and Religious Education. Nevertheless, under this same structure, new themes appeared. For example, in Natural Sciences, the first topic was “Traditional Indigenous Medicine” and the last was “Preparing the Land” [for cultivation of crops]. The “revision and adaptation of the official curriculum in this subject” was explicitly mentioned in both Language and Mathematics (page 13). Physical Education was not considered because some of the compañeros believed that the subject was not necessary, or they associated it with military training; the children strengthened themselves by working and by walking, not with special exercises. Religious Education was a contentious topic that we have tried to rethink after that time, as we shall discuss later. The reason was that the schools had been under the supervision of religious communities for centuries. In Cauca, the education contracted with the Prefecture of Tierradentro was only recently passed over to the hands of the Department and the communities in 2003.

Towards 1983, given the critical questioning of the schools, evaluations with the community and the cabildos were performed, and from there Indigenous schools were defined as “essentially communal”. This definition arose from the “curricular” and didactic debates surrounding one of the first booklets prepared by the program, “We Invite You to Read”. The people were debating where the booklet should start, what was essential, and what should be prioritized. While it may seem that everything indicated that family was the basic starting point, the communities and the cabildos were the ones who finally posed that the community and the recovery of land should be the starting point of the booklets and the subject matter. The didactics were once more decided upon from the political standpoint.

As of 1985, evaluations are conducted every two months in each school. The evaluations take several days, and children, teachers, parents, *cabildos*, and sometimes representatives of the Executive Committee participate. One of the central themes of evaluation is the relevance and application of the subject matter taught in our schools. In the same way, all the Congresses—especially through the Commissions of Education and of Children—were oriented towards the content that should be taught. These orientations were not based as much on analyzing the official curriculum or on the indications from specialized international organizations such as UNESCO, but rather on studying the problems that the communities complained about, the difficulties they presented, and what we wanted as a Life Project.

However, during the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, what really influenced and focused our work concerning the curriculum were the demands that surged from within the school-community about the children's situation. The communal schools began directly with grade one, and learning was based on reading and writing. Given the complexity of the process being bilingual and the individual differences between children within the same school (monolingual in Spanish or in their mother tongue, as well as varying degrees of bilingualism), and because these problems and even the students' attitudes towards an innovative process, we found it necessary to create preschools. In some cases, the preschool groups A and B existed to respond in a scaled manner to the difficulties that we found. We were very concerned about the serious problems that the children were having adapting to the new schools that we were proposing. Many of the boys and girls expected that the teachers would have them draw graphs and perform other mechanical exercises, as they did at the "official schools" or missionary schools. Some parents behaved the same way, and they demanded that their children be taught as they had been taught. The children were used to schooling based on fear ("by blood the letter enters"),⁷⁰ and they did not express themselves, have opinions, or participate. We therefore concentrated on a proposal that we called "integral preparation."

The new program was not only an instrumental program, as preparatory preschool courses tend to be. It really was a change of focus toward the generation of conditions that would form the foundation to transform the school in conformity with the requirements of the communities. These requirements included the strengthening of identity and the recognition of community and cultural values. We needed to develop specific abilities that were necessary for reading and writing, but above all, abilities that were necessary for a new student life. We needed to encourage observation, develop the ability to ask questions, and strengthen oral expression in the children. In this sense, this preparation was necessary for every child that arrived at the communal school for the first time, even if they were not placed in the first grade.

The concept of "preschool" was replaced with the integral preparation course. In addition, the integral preparation course first entailed generating a different attitude towards the school. The child went there to find companionship in the process of knowing, of investigating and exploring the world in which they were the primary builder. The preparatory process, then, meant finding new ways to learn, teach, and support the child. The booklet "On the Path to Knowledge" (1986) says the following regarding the difficulties a child would arrive at the school with:

⁷⁰ *La letra con sangre entra* is an old Spanish proverb that refers to beating literacy and knowledge into children.

Timidity, silent children and sometimes isolated from the group. Distraction, lack of attention, disinterest. Discontinuity, children who rarely finish an activity, they do not always listen, they are not interested in the tasks before them. Aggressiveness, they fight, cry, and they do not like to have their behaviours corrected. Frequent absences, dread or fear of the teacher, rejection [shame] of their own mother tongue. Special problems: children with auditory problems (deaf) or with visual deficiencies.

For us, the role of the integral preparation course was to join the children of the community to the school, and join the school to the community; this meant drawing from cultural experiences, recreating them in the school, and building values, knowledge, and skills that the child needs for full development. This process considered the child's emotional, intellectual, and physical development beyond mere motor skills.

By beginning with knowledge about the problems and needs of the boys and girls, we were able to find the causes of the problems in the family environment, in the relationship between child and teacher, in the methodology and character of the school, and in the communal experiences. During this time, we launched several systematic research projects on the processes of socialization and traditional rearing practices; above all, we researched the development of boys and girls, supported by the psychologist Fernando Romero and other professionals. This research formed the foundation that guided the integral preparation courses. We were interested not only in the community, but in the particularities of the children both in their culture and as individual persons. The previously mentioned aspects constituted problematic components for designing booklets that outlined, in general terms, our reinterpretation of the school as a space of cultural strengthening. By launching these systematic experiments, we found ourselves with valuable inputs that were organized into three booklets for children and two guidebooks for teachers. The first booklet addressed the place and role of the community in its different relationships with the family, with the school, with the earth, and with nature. The second principally emphasized work, the various tools for working, and nature; it integrated exercises of mobility, development, and the location of the child in space and in time. The third booklet deals with the processes of symbolization and meaning that begin to link the child to the reading of their natural and cultural context, and continue relating this context to the use of an alphabet. In this manner, the child lives out a process of consolidating from their cultural base. This condition is fundamental for every learning process and for life itself. The three modules, in their diverse expressions, stimulate the development of both oral communication and interest in written expression. Of the teacher's guidebooks that accompany *De Camino al Conocimiento (Walking in the Path of Knowledge)*, the first gives conceptual orientation while the second emphasizes methodological practices. This way of understanding and working the integral preparation contributed decisively to cementing the bilingual and intercultural educational proposal and characterizing the central themes that would later evolve into curricular components in their own right. Such was the case with Community, Nature and Work; Communication and Language; Mathematics and Production; and Man and Society. These were the central themes that today are worked on in different levels of depth at the various levels of formative education.

The case of the integral preparation course or of the preschools demonstrates how our school system was developing out of the needs and the problems related to the interaction between children and teachers within the school setting. But even in this case, the dimension of community, culture, and politics did not become a secondary subject.

After all the efforts that we put into elaborating the framework for the elementary children's integral preparation classes, we launched the new curriculum as of 1987. This was also when the developments of the teachers' professionalization in ethnoeducation program put the subject forward as part of their training processes. The politics of MEN during that time (Appendix on educational Indigenous legislation⁷¹) made the Indigenous teachers' professionalization a requirement to work in the schools. This requirement motivated the PEBI to work more intensely at streamlining the formal system for training teachers and presenting the proposal to MEN for the Indigenous teachers' professionalization. In the end, this process became the very first curriculum for teacher training. Although there were collections of information and specific curricular processes active in the schools, we still did not yet have a unified vision for the diverse levels of schooling that we were working with.

In 1990, after several sessions of work through the workshops, meetings, and study groups that analyzed current developments, we were able to outline a curricular profile for elementary grades in Nasa communities, which was taken as a guide for the other communities in Cauca. We solidified this curricular information in a document entitled "Elaboration of a Curriculum in Paeces Indigenous Communities" (1990, a 113-page document). This material allowed us to perceive the curricular framework in a more structured manner to advance the development of education as a strategy for creating our Life Project. Many of the proposals that were adopted from that document are still in use today and remain reference points for work in the schools.

The 1990 document considers that a Nasa curriculum must include two important aspects: "the type of man we hope to raise and (...) the collection of knowledge that the child appropriates in the school". The same document mentions the "social knowledge" of the community, as well as their "pedagogical" knowledge, which is no more than the social knowing organized and formalized in the school. "The school organizes, administrates, and adjusts that social knowledge that the Nasa community has created" (page 14). By these means, the school animates this knowledge, both in the process of production and thematic selection with the community through collective research, as in the process of re-elaboration and giving back to the community. From this point of view, the affirmation that the teacher is not the only depository of knowledge becomes clear. We also understand that, by these means, the school ceases to be a tool for cultural imposition. It is not simply a matter of incorporating communal knowledge into the school; instead, we are integrating scholarly life with communal life, and vice-versa. Eugenio Oteca, who has now passed away, former main musician of El Cabuyo, commented to Inocencio Ramos in the eighties:

Let's stop and think a little moment among ourselves, what would happen if the school had musical instruments to help us teach words. For example, so much so in the native language they would have an instrument that is known to them, that they know how to play...like in Spanish... so it is not necessary to think about how a drum is, because in the community they know how to make it, they know how to play it, they know how to care for it. So, think of it in that way. But the deepest thing is that those instruments are made by the communities, they are used in the festivals; they make songs to play at the parties. Let us say that the instruments of the community appear there, their songs, their joys, not only once in a while, but rather as the Indigenous culture that is

⁷¹ This English edition does not include this Appendix.

present in the schools; culture is not a once-in-a-while sort of thing, but something that is forever, and we need to understand that and apply it in education. It is not a simple exhibition of how the Indigenous peoples used to do things, but rather it is about what Indigenous people are doing now; it is the way that they understand their lives or live their events, their way of life.

This same document breaks down the communal and scholastic knowledge into courses, from grades one to five, grouped together in Mathematics, Reading and Writing, Community and Nature, and Social Studies. It formulates objectives, as prescribed by MEN's requirements, and proposes didactic and methodological resources. Despite the similarities in structuring the scholastic knowledge with the ministerial directives, the intentions and the logic behind the articulation, production, and circulation of the information was very distanced from the intentions of the MEN. The document also records an explicit reflection on the subject area of "Religion" in the school, written by a commission. Although it recognizes that it is a "complicated topic", it again adopts the Nasa communal pragmatic attitude: "We say that religion is good if it contributes to strengthening the organization, enriching the culture, and solving social, economic, political, cultural, and organizational problems" (page 101). The commission proposed that the communities should strengthen a religious perspective that "starts from our own knowledge". The avalanche of 1994 in Tierradentro would be the event that definitively consolidated the propia perspective regarding "religion" or more accurately, "spirituality".

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With the Constitution of 1991 and the new General Law of Education (115 of 1994), the educational politics moved forward from a curricular focus towards the strengthening democracy and the State of law. The scholastic government appeared—something that we had already been doing through the scholastic cabildos since the beginning of our educational experience—to strengthen the institutional autonomy of the Institutional Educational Projects (PEI). The central State's demands for implementing the PEI were assumed, once again, in a creative fashion, adapted to our direction and needs. Therefore, we proposed that the State recognize the Communal Educational Project as a propio Indigenous mechanism instead of the PEI. The MEN not only accepted this proposal, but also articulated the PEC within the ethnoeducational policies. This permitted the Afro-Colombian communities to also be included by this same policy.

This compulsory directive for all the schools in the country offered the Indigenous movement the opportunity to socialize its pedagogical developments of more than 15 years, mobilize itself to achieve support from PEC, and convert it into a platform to provide political orientation on education. From this cultural perspective, the PEC—as we saw in previous chapters—would oversee all the education in the territory, and not only the scholastic education.

At this point in the development of the Program, the curriculum was considered a central process that was intentionally defined as focusing on child development, youth development, or teacher training. It was the PEC's function to articulate the diverse educational processes, especially the existing curricular processes. While the focus of the PEI throughout most of the country considered the debate regarding scholastic knowledge and traditional wisdom to be a secondary issue, in our communities the PEC maintained the concern for them and their integrity.

Starting with the idea that propio thinking was an integral and integrating thinking, from the first years of the Program we wanted to implement an integrated curriculum with

only two subject areas: language and mathematics. All the topics were articulated, but in practice this proposal failed a few years later because it was too complicated. Regarding the document *Elaboración de Currículo en Comunidades Indígenas Paeces (Elaboration of the Curriculum in Indigenous Paeces Communities)* (1990), it has been said:

The experience of integrating the subject areas that we have in the school has been completed based on the integral preparation booklet “Knowing Our Life”. This material take the diverse activities of the community as their starting point: the ethnic Guambiana cultivation of the potato, the school, the market of Toribío, a dance, the *Thé’ Wala* performing a cleansing ritual, the cultivation of corn. These activities of the Indigenous economic and cultural life can constitute one determined topic that can, in turn, originate different knowledge. For example, the market of Toribío permits us to analyze the diversity of products according to the regions, the forms of commercial exchange, addition and subtraction, the classification of products, and the diverse social groups that participate. We can learn about mathematics, economy, social studies, and biology (...). However, the teachers faced several difficulties in practice when developing these activities; if they don’t have clear objectives, there is much confusion (...). Eliciting and connecting the subject areas to each situation requires not only a great teacher capacity, but also child disposition to connect the various aspects. (pages 29 and 36).

Later, with the passage of time and the development of several different strategies to achieve the integration of subject areas, we found one of the most appropriate methodological sources in our pedagogical project. Each pedagogical problem involves research and generally begins with a problem that need clarification. Theory and practice are combined in its development, and we connect to several disciplines that contextualize the theoretical contributions. The final report of the *Profesionalización de Maestros en Ethnoeducación (Teachers’ Professionalization in Ethnoeducation)* (2001) comments the following:

The projects highlighted the importance of the fields of knowledge that interested the teachers: language, art, music, history, agriculture. [...] The push to increase production [productivity] in a manner that could support the nutritional condition of the community, which in turn would help solve the problems of school drop-outs, migration, the idleness of the youth, and social and cultural disintegration. What is important among the different themes addressed in the projects is their sustainability on a cultural foundation. Another important factor is the integration of each one of the projects and monographs into an educational-intention approach which gives them meaning, validity, and vision. In part, it addresses one of the manifest concerns in the development of the four training cohorts – the integrality [integration] of the subject areas.

Related to the previous passage, another source that has fed into our curricular concepts is the philosophy of the Indigenous leader Manuel Quintín Lame (1893-1965) in his holistic way of thinking about the relationship that exists between nature, knowledge, and education. In his book *Los pensamientos del indio que se educó dentro de las selvas colombianas (The thoughts of an Indian who was educated in the Colombian jungle)* (1939), he affirmed:

Everybody talks about the cloisters of education. For this reason, I must also speak about the cloisters where nature educated me. That school of my education is the following: the first book was when I saw four winds cross the earth; the second book was to contemplate the mansion of heaven; the third was seeing the Solar Star being born in the East and watching it die in the West, and in that way the man born of woman will die; the fourth book was to contemplate the smile of all the gardens, sown and cultivated by that Young Lady Nature, who is clothed in blue garments and who crowns herself with flowers – she perfumes herself at her unending dressing table; the fifth book was the everlasting chorus of songs; the sixth book is that beautiful garden of the mountain wildlife; the seventh book was to listen attentively to that bubbling chatter formed by the streams of water in the woods; the eighth book was *The Idylls*; the ninth book was the true *Book of Love*; the tenth book was the book of harmonious laws that Nature has in the palace of its three kingdoms; the eleventh book was the one of agriculture and that we are the sowers and field labourers; the twelfth was the book of mountain husbandry. These were the books of my study, but that was not all, because there are thousands upon thousands more books.

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We faced many difficulties, and there are many that have yet to be solved regarding concepts, focus, and types of curriculum. For some people, the curriculum has been reduced to a study plan, a thematic recipe, that the teacher must plan and portion out at the beginning of every year; a curriculum that must be enforced completely, regardless of whether the child learns or not. For us, the curriculum must be a holistic formative process, marked within a movement for cultural continuity, and consistent with each community's Life Project and the type of society they want to build. Its contents should be drawn from carefully selected materials depending on the type of person that we want to raise. The material should be drawn from the problems, needs, and interests that each community has and equally for each child or person as individuals. The curriculum is a process of articulation and a generator of experiences, knowledges, ways of knowing, and values that are required to attain the formation of specifically defined groups (children, youth, teachers). In the same way, the curriculum selects, organizes, and develops teaching procedures and physical teaching spaces – but we shall discuss this later.

Previously, most Indigenous children would not progress beyond the second or third grade of primary school. The continuity and prolongation of the educational endeavours led us to question the problem of sequencing course topics that were addressed in the schools. What was being taught in first grade? What about in second grade? Nevertheless, this problem was not a priority for various reasons: first, the majority of our schools—like nearly all the rural schools in the country—are one-room classrooms, in the sense that only one or two teachers are in charge of the students, and they assist all the students from different grades simultaneously in the same classroom. Secondly, we had never been partial to the idea of stratifying the courses to the children, of separating them rigidly; the communal character of the school is reflected in this aspect as well. In the same manner, we believed that the way scholastic content was sequenced responded to a linear logic, a rationalist logic, that contradicted the communal, circular logic. In this circular or spiral logic, topics are not abandoned; instead they are taken up again and constantly reconstructed. Finally, we also questioned the content sequencing from the point of view of a gradation of complexity that deconstructs the whole into units or that prioritizes the didactic over pertinence. Graciela Bolaños reminds us of how she was opposed to begin a booklet on learning and

literacy beginning with the word “*recuperación*” (recovery), because she was concerned that the word was too complex. This word, according to her, was long and included a “c” and an accent mark, which did not make the word a good candidate for beginning to learn literacy. However, the other team members insisted that this was the word that the booklet ought to open with, because it fit the context of the movement. “*Recuperación*” was ultimately the word that the booklet opened with and, curiously, it did not create any didactic obstacles for the learners.

Nevertheless, from the beginning we perceived that we needed to learn and teach at diverse levels. With the children, the process began in practice in the schools; with the teachers, it was also in their practice in the classrooms, both while teaching and in the specific context of teacher’s professional training. For the directors and students’ parents, it was necessary to generate criteria for orientation and ways to monitor the pedagogical model. The coordination team was formed on the same basis.

We have already seen how the first levels were organized with the integral preparation course, as well as the entire primary school in the curricular document of 1990. Secondary school arose in the Program in 1987 as linked to the teachers’ professionalization process. In 1991, the idea was broadened with the people reinserted from the Quintin Lame political organization,⁷² who finished an “accelerated and bilingual” primary school created for them.

Among ourselves, the secondary system did not respond so much to a need of our “educational system” or to a legal mandate; instead, they responded to the teachers’ process of qualification and to the needs of the people coming from the Quintin Lame, as well as providing continuity to the process started in the primary school. The curricular subjects are maintained in the secondary grades and in the teachers’ professionalization, but two more basic subjects are introduced regarding Administration and production, and Organization and politics. In this way, we emphasized that the preparation of young adults should be directed towards inserting them into the world of work in their local or regional context.

Today, we grant diplomas and are now proposing an Indigenous university that will permit us to continue this process of qualification without abandoning our Life Project or our culture.

Another aspect that we have had to resolve in our practice has been the contradictory explanations about phenomena such as the origin of the world, the lightning, or the rainbow offered by Western science, the Catholic religion, and the thinking of our elders:

Regarding the minerals, Western science says that they are inert, that they have no life. In the Nasa mindset, they are beings that have life and therefore are male and female. Here we must ask ourselves who is correct in this sense, how to make the child understand that there are two different conceptions at work here? Should we only provide the child with some of the knowledge? *Elaboración de Currículo en Comunidades Indígenas Paeces (Elaborating a Curriculum in Indigenous Paeces Communities)* (1990, page 37).

⁷² Quintin Lame Indigenous Movement (MIQL in Spanish). The Indigenous Movement Quintin Lame organization was established in 1984 in Cauca, as self-defense mechanism against the repressive actions of the State. It took the name of the leader Manuel Quintin Lame who, at the beginning of the 20th century, defended the rights of indigenous peoples from the colonial and republic regime. The MIQL was dissolved as a result of the peace negotiations in 1991. This organization had a delegate at the National Constituent Assembly that issued the new Political Constitution in 1991.

The school was initially an instrument for Christian conversion, and recently, for modernization. What place should Christian knowledge and scientific or Western knowledge have in our schools? What should we do when their explanations conflict with the knowledge of our culture? In the professionalization workshops, these contradictions have been frequent, but they have been less common within the schools.

The Catholic religion—and recently, the Evangelical one—has become part of the thinking and practice of the Indigenous communities today. It is common—even in the present day—to pray in the official rural schools, or to celebrate religious festivities such as the month of Mary in May. This came about because many of the teachers were trained by religious communities. In the La Laguna school, one group of parents was concerned as some neighbors were criticizing the bilingual school, saying that it was a communist school because it did not teach religion and that such schools should be done away with. We had to hold a formal reflection with the community to orient the teaching of religion in the school. We analyzed a selection of religions around the world, the role of religions in the Cauca region, the impact of religion on Indigenous thinking, and the different forms of spirituality, such as those of the traditional medicine practitioners. Among ourselves, there were several different positions on the matter; we formulated critiques and we debated, but we respected each other. Ultimately, the valuation of a spirituality based on the traditional thinking of the Indigenous peoples has been strengthened, as well as the teachings of the traditional healers and keepers of traditional knowledge.

Regarding Western science, the “universal” or hegemonic knowledge and ways of knowing, we are trying to research and understand them, although we have severe questionings; in practice, we have not perceived any serious conflicts within the schools, because knowledge is re-elaborated there and the knowledge of the communities are prioritized. In the school, we start from what is ours, and the worldview of each Indigenous people is the conducting wire that directs what is appropriated. We present many of these non-traditional knowledge systems from another perspective, as another way of looking at a problem. We adopt a pragmatic position: we will assume whatever will grant us results in practice. The children have a special interest in machinery, such as tractors, radios, computers, motorcycles; they like to know how they function. The same happens with the adults; they are interested in reading and writing, not out of love for literature, but because they want to know Indigenous legislation and how to defend their rights.

Science, school, and Spanish are hegemonic, we cannot deny it. We consider that they have harmed us historically, but they are necessary for our survival. Today in the school we adopt them out of the reasoning of interculturality, like a recognition of other peoples, other knowledge, other ways of understanding the world, that enrich us if we know how to connect them to our Life Project.

Proposing Alternatives to Boards and Chalk

It was clear to us from the beginning that the repetitive and authoritarian procedures of the school in the Indigenous zones could not cohabit with the new school that we wanted to create. We intended to leave behind all those resources that characterized that school; overcome the closed classroom with four walls, the chalkboard and chalk, the notebook, the dictation, the question-and-answer spoken in unison, and the repetitive memorization. We made use of everything that was at our disposal, but on that road, through trial and error,

we went about selecting, appropriating, modifying, and creating our own ways to do things that have become characteristics of our proposal today: the “flashcards;” the “guides;” the journals, encounters, outings and participation in communal life; communal work; the school’s cabildo; the ways of expression such as drawing, music, dance, and drama; all the different educational materials; and a series of strategies that we recovered from our communities’ traditions such as oral tradition and stories, dreams and signs, symbolism and personification, analogy, and the experience and observation of nature.

The “flashcards” or the pedagogy of the question

We began analyzing the official programs and creating guides for each of the subject areas. We would ask questions every day about the topic that was believed to be relevant, which was written down onto a piece of notebook paper. This was the “flashcard.” Through this process, the image of the authoritarian teacher softened; the teacher’s position was no longer exclusively standing in front of the child, but rather beside the child to guide him. The child would ask, respond, relate, inform, and request explanations about what needed to be learned. Before writing, the child needed to spend a long time reflecting on their ideas and how to express them which is to say how to communicate with their parents, friends, or teacher. Therefore, this process made the relationship more dynamic between a boy or a girl with their parents or their teacher. Every day, the child would take one or two new questions home to ask their parents. Many of the parents understood the importance of having the children discover or develop their own thinking for themselves, so they would support them by teaching them history, about their work, or about mathematics. We often found parents or members of the cabildo sitting next to their children in the school, working alongside them. Other parents who were less interested would complain to their children: “But, why would you ask me this? This is why I sent you to school, that is what the teacher is supposed to be teaching you!”

Thus, the schools received feedback on content to include in the curriculum; they received recommendations from the traditional healers, from the midwives, from the leaders and cabildo members, from parents, all would pass on their knowledge from home – a myth, a riddle, a story, a belief. A parent would say “When my children were sick, the first thing to do is take them to the *thē’ wala*, and he would tell me what illness had taken hold of them. If it was fear, he would take their pulse or blow on them. He told me what they’ve got. Sometimes, children do not get sick from any known illness; for example, if one sells a cow or a horse without offering schnapps to Mother Earth, the *duende* spirit⁷³ comes and makes the children and animals sick.” This cultural reality that surrounds the children has meaning for them and for their communities, meaning that is discovered through what they learn with their family. The school is a new space, but it should not break away from the world that the children bring.

The first strategies that we used were therefore centered on the question. More precisely, a topic was addressed by starting out from three or four questions. But, unlike the questions of the traditional booklets and catechisms that already had a previously defined answer and would be repeated time and time again until they were memorized, these questions were open. They addressed our issues and encouraged children to go out from

⁷³ See footnote 57.

the school, speak with their parents, with their elders, and with the *thë' wala*. They required observation of nature, reflection, analysis, and comparisons in equal measure. The children should answer these questions individually or in groups, and either in the school, in the home, or in the community.

Let us look at one of the “flashcards” that circulated the schools in the ‘80s for the grade three class and that, afterwards, became the basis for creating the first booklets:

Why are these lands called the resguardo?
Who are the members of the cabildo? What do they do?

For the first grade, drawing was set forward as a special way of expression. The “flashcards” then, instead of questions, contained drawing proposals:

Draw your house with its plot of land.
Draw a story your dad, mom, or sibling told you.

These materials were shared in the schools; they were discussed and became murals on the walls. This type of work created a team attitude in the children, in such a way that they would feel sad if each student did not have a chance to present their materials.

The “flashcards” were one of the most common strategies between the years of 1978 and 1986. The questions that the cards contained were an invitation to broaden the frontiers of the school, to involve the community in the production of scholarly knowledge, cultural research – to break away from the authoritarianism of the teacher’s knowledge.

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The “guides”, or the beginning of the teacher’s pedagogical knowledge

Although the flashcards pointed to the production of a cultural and communal knowledge and were more oriented towards the children, the “guides” were written on one or more pages that tried to strengthen and systematize the pedagogical knowledge of the teachers. The guides were normally—and continue to be—the resulting synthesis or the supporting material from a teacher’s training or professional development session, or from a teachers’ conference. They included concepts and content, methodology or didactic strategies, and evaluation techniques. They were the result of the teachers’ reflections, either autonomously developed or aided by a consultant, an external collaborator, or a specialist in the topic from the same community. The guides fulfilled the role of systematizing the collective process from the pedagogical perspective and the teachers’ perspectives, and of directing the work in the classroom or with the community.

To further illustrate, we shall refer to the structure of a guide that encouraged teachers to advance in their work for the integral preparation course:

- A contextual recounting of the pedagogical process made until the present, collected in documents (1984).
- Memories of workshops worked regarding the above.
- Suggestions for the development of booklets.

- Study about the cognitive development in Nasa children by psychologist Jorge Jaramillo, member of the PEB team.
- Equally recommended consultation: *El aprestamiento y su evolución* (*The integral preparation course and its evolution*) by Germán Mariño, the MEN's *Cartilla de Aprestamiento Arhuaca*, (*Guide Booklet of Arhuaca Integral Preparation Course*), and *Cartilla de Guatemala* (*Booklet of Guatemala*) (Maya).

As a first step, it recommends developing a guide for research with emphasis on two fields: 1) the child and his surroundings and 2) characteristics, interests, and needs of the child who enters the school for the very first time. Afterwards, it refers to the objectives of a first grade in school:

1. Give the child an environment in the school that allows him/her to continue to his/her process of developing knowledge, observing and managing his/her surroundings, without breaking with his/her familiar environment.
2. Locate the principal cultural elements through relationships: earth-language-work-customs-family-community, etc. This is seeking to strengthen the student's own culture, respecting the cultural diversity of each geographical zone.
3. Prepare the ground so that the child can easily obtain learning through reading and writing. We recommend breaking down the material on what the integral preparation is and working it out with the parents.

The guide continues with methodological recommendations for working in each semester and draws an introduction to principal subject areas. Finally, it finishes with recommendations that deal with some special problematic aspects of interculturality (for example, dealing with the mythical explanation versus the scientific explanation, or management of the concept of time and space for children). A central objective is identified for each part of the guide.

Although a guide exists for each area of knowledge and for each grade, the guides have changed and continue to change in accordance with teachers' reflections and research practices.

These guides normally incorporate pedagogical knowledge that stems from the conventional pedagogy and didactics (for example, the didactic of language), but always filtered through critical evaluation and the teachers' own adaptations through collective exercises.

This pedagogical knowledge, and the knowledge that came from our experience with the flashcards, produced a cumulative experience with which we created more booklets for the children and the teachers.

The meetings, spaces for strengthening identity and the communal duty

"I liked it when April arrived, because we would get together with the children of Guabito, the compañeros of Carpintero would come down. Together with the teachers here [López Adentro], we were all very happy. In my school, we prepared the histories about the business initiatives and land recovery; this is what the children in grade four would do. Others prepared riddles; for example, we would say:

'From all the skirts of the mountain they descended
machetes and rods on their shoulders they carried
they passed the highway and entered
to caress and plant in our land.
That was the flat zone. Of what land recovery do we speak?
It was easy for them to guess...

The children of Carpintero also would tell us the history of their school,
others would sing. We also carried music and we danced.
(Marcela Niquinás, López Adentro School).

One of the challenges our schools always faced was identifying the strategies and ways of learning and teaching that the communities embodied so that the escuela propia could apply to them. From the beginning, we realized that being together gave us great joy and tranquility. We would lose the fear of repression, we felt encouraged to go out and speak in public, we would come up with the ideas that our elders had taught us. Getting together with so many people helped us feel strong; it made us feel proud of ourselves and we no longer felt shame to call ourselves Indigenous. For this reason, we adopted the conferences as a practice in the schools, as a space of learning that was more in line with our tastes and customs. Each school programmed at least two conferences every year and invited the surrounding schools to participate. Food was brought in to share with everyone else; the conference took months of organization and excited anticipation to bring the best of the harvest and the knowledge of the community.

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The topics that were addressed at these events were chosen at the teachers' planning and professional development sessions. Conferences were held to share the histories of the communities, their myths, narrations, beliefs, and the ways that parents taught their children. In others, we would exchange round dances, games, and songs that each of the schools had worked on. People would bring maps which showed sacred sites of great interest, or maps of the entire resguardo with all its crop fields or lands that we still needed to recover. In other cases, we dedicated ourselves to socializing about the way each school was advancing with mathematics, or topics of pedagogical projects such as the development of a written *Nasa Yuwe* language with a unified alphabet, or the history of the school written in Spanish. We would bring a little bit of the life of each school to these meetings, and we would select topics from the study plans to bring into the curricular processes. Several topics and projects would be left from these events that would occupy us for months; after the conferences, we would often meet again to continue developing the proposal for scholastic work.

Similarly, the learning outcomes that developed from the pedagogical visits that we undertook every year outside of our school were very significant. For example, the text *Ampliando nuestro conocimiento, Visita a Juan Tama, escuela Ēeka thë' de Tierradentro (Expanding our knowledge, Visit to Juan Tama, school Ēeka thë', from López Adentro)* (March 23 to 25, 1987 page 10) describes the visit to the lagoon at Juan Tama. For us, touring our land is a way of appropriating our territory; it is a way of knowing. This is how we identify sacred grounds and historical places; this is how we know plants, crops, and visit people. The cabildos, traditional medicine healers, teachers, and members of the regional coordination would often join these field trips, which provided an opportunity for great reflections, new advice, and new teachings.

The children of the bilingual schools have participated in all the Congresses of CRIC

since 1996. They have also participated in the ONIC. These conferences opened new paths for the educación propia. The conference in Cali in October, 1991, was another conference of particular significance. It was held to coincide with the 500-year anniversary of the conquest of the Americas; more than 1500 Indigenous children from the Colombian southwest attended. We were motivated by the support from working-class neighbourhoods in Cali, as well as schools and institutions. We found that we shared many human values. We were left with a great experience of harmony and solidarity.

In 1994, representatives of the children of Tierradentro got together with the children of friendly neighbourhoods and schools to talk about the avalanche that had caused so many problems in their territory. In the most recent times, we have been creating networks of children and youth; the conferences are paving the way to strengthen youth autonomy. In this spirit, our schools participate in the platform of the Terre des Hommes in the network "Peace-building children." In this way, we have been enriching our knowledge and discovering that communicating our experiences and sharing in these conferences are one of the best mingas⁷⁴ for intercultural and human training.

The student cabildos, a strategy for the autonomy and leadership of boys and girls

The process that we began in the '70s also required that we train children to be critical and have the skills to direct and guide their communities. What type of mechanisms should we implement for the children to acquire an attitude of communal duty and responsibility? Both the school evaluations during the early years and the school directors' offices recommended involving the cabildo in the organization of the school. Although a cabildo is really an elders' institution, the directors saw that if the children appropriated the organizational mechanism from an early age, they would strengthen their participation in the schools. Therefore, we created the student cabildos with the intention that the children should develop their organization skills and the art of guiding a community. The cabildo became an important part of the governance of each school. They were supporting the teacher with school discipline; the intent was for the school to function like a large family and not with hierarchical and rigid rules. Ana Ercilia Collazos, the teacher of the Canoas School in the Munchique resguardo, comments:

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There was a time when the children had become very undisciplined; they did not listen, they arrived late, they barely wanted to work. I called the head of the community cabildo to discuss the problem, and at that meeting we decided that we were going to enthusiastically push the student cabildo, to see if the children could calm themselves down. The next day the compañero governor came to the school as a guest speaker. He told them that they ought to be happy because in this school we teach our own Indigenous teachings, and that we ought to set a good example for the other schools. He also asked them how they felt, and they said they felt good. He advised them to re-elect a student cabildo, so that this cabildo could also help to organize all of the work, and promised that those elected would take office in a large assembly with the entire community one Sunday. That same afternoon the children selected a student cabildo and the main governor, Rodolfo Pilcué, on October 12, 1999, inaugurated them

74 See Glossary for definition.

in front of the entire community, advising them to fulfill their duties, encouraging them to help solve problems and emphasizing that they were the future of the community. This is how we learn among ourselves.

All the boys and girls in the school vote to select the members of the student cabildos. They lead the meetings that evaluate the daily work; they make recommendations, they support the projects in the tul or the school's production projects, and they maintain a regularly updated school dairy. The children thus acquire responsibilities in a natural way and begin to understand the problems and needs of their school.

Encouraging the children to participate was not about facilitating the teacher's work and enforcing discipline, as tends to happen with student representatives and student councils established in all country schools after Law 115. Instead, we aimed to create an attitude towards the shared direction of the school, about which the children had and have much to say and contribute. That is what the governor of the student cabildo of López Adentro School expressed on the first day of the Regional Conference of Children and Youth on Childhood Autonomy, in October of 2000:

Makue pete sxansay. How are you, compañeros? I am glad that you have come... We welcome all of you who are visiting us from Cali, and the people from CRIT (Regional Indigenous Council of Tolima), Pueblo Nuevo, and Guabito. We, the children of this school, and the community, are very happy because today we are going to share with you what we have been doing, that which is our struggle. We, as recoverers of lands, invite you to unite with us to fight for our rights. We are also rescuing Nasa Yuwe language and learning to take better care of our Mother Earth. My calling as the governor of the cabildo is that we all work together and leave here with more autonomy.

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The development of autonomy is one of the objectives of the schools, but this is a very complicated task because, as the cabildo is a space primarily for adults, the children also tended to reproduce not just the positive aspects—such as facilitating the participation of everyone in the communal leadership—but they would also reproduce authoritarian attitudes, the forming of cliques that exclude others, and disregard for the teacher's authority. The autonomy can be interpreted as unbridled license to do anything in some opportunities. The constant tension of having these mechanisms fulfill their functions of developing and strengthening the communities occupied many of the spaces of reflection, accompaniment, and adjustment. It is important to recognize that the adult cabildo acts as a mirror of the type of government that exists in the community, and that the formative potential of these spaces depends on the behaviour of the adult councils. Building autonomy in the schools is a continual task. For the teachers, it means they must facilitate these spaces, revise, and adjust their pedagogical practices. The children appointed to the student cabildo, face a much greater effort than what is required in the formal schools, and some end up tiring out and neglecting their duties. Other teachers have enabled this space in a manner that converted it into a better way of stimulating collective evaluation. The student cabildo contributes to creating spaces of self-evaluation; it collaborates with the valuation of behaviour, communal attitudes, and academic performance of each one of the students, acting as authorities in the school. The implementation of the cabildo as a mechanism for participation in education has been followed in different formative spaces. Maribel Solarte, governor of the participating

teachers cabildo in the Communal Pedagogy degree, stated the following regarding her election in 2001:

I, as a participant from another ethnicity [Afro-Colombian, inhabitant and teacher of the Las Delicias resguardo], have been elected to be your governor. This makes me proud, and it makes me think that I must put in a great effort to give back to the Nasa compañeros and the others who elected me. I shall be attentive and give all my collaboration, but I will also need everybody's will, so that we can move this work forward. Together with the other members of the cabildo, we shall be diligent so that our studies can have good results and that we may give better services to our communities.

The research projects that are being developed by the students of the Communal Pedagogy degree have embraced the cabildo as an instance of increasing autonomy and student organization. The cabildos are paths that point to the collective feeling and responsibility in the boys and girls, supporting the types of relations that the school needs to improve its operation. This has allowed for girls' participation in leadership, and today many girls are elected as governors, deputies, treasurers, and secretaries, contributing to a generation of new social spaces where women assume greater responsibilities.

The school diary, a tool for memory and pedagogical reflection

One of the mechanisms that came out of building our educación propia was the establishment of strategies to visualize the development of each school and ensure that each person carries a critical registry of its activities as a formative resource. The school diary was implemented from second grade onwards. In some cases, it was done in each class, and in other cases, the secretaries of the school cabildos were in charge of it. The secretaries would then share the diaries at the general school assemblies every day. Let us look at some examples:

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El Chimán School (Guambía)

"Tuesday, September 11 of the year 1984

Today we had to punish two children [Gerardo Tunubalá and María Cecilia] and teacher Esteban [Tunubalá]. When we arrived to class, we got together during the recess [and] we criticized that these students and teacher were bothering too much during the road. They were throwing rocks and they were frightening the *duende* spirit, and this one could mistreat us all."

"For this reason we had to impose a penalty. We made them circle the school ten times. In the afternoon, the compañeros Graciela and Abelardo came from Popayán. They asked us how we felt in the school, and we sat down to tell the story. The teacher was very angry, but Teacher Abel accompanied us. Afterwards Teacher Esteban said that he was sorry and all of us [went] home."

The young people of CEFILAM⁷⁵ wrote the following in their school diary:

⁷⁵ Proyecto Educativo del Centro de Formación Integral Luis Ángel Monroy, or Educational Project of the Centre for Integral Formation Luis Ángel Monroy

“Pueblo Nuevo, August 11 of 2003,

Today is Monday; we worked in different subjects which are: organization and politics, communication and language, community and nature, administration and accounting, and artistic expressions. As usual, when it is our turn to make breakfast, we got up at three in the morning; first we bathed, then we got the breakfast ready for everyone. At six-thirty we served the food very warm, which was enough for seventy people, plus the animals that are dogs and cats.

“Having finished serving breakfast, we returned the kitchen clean and in order, besides the utensils that we had used, so that the rest can go use it to prepare lunch.

“At 8 in the morning, we went into the class; we all went to our classrooms where the guides of the previously mentioned subjects were waiting for us. We all greeted each other and the guide tells us about the work that we need to get done this week. We establish the work schedule. We select the committee that is going to prepare lunch. During the break we go with another student to make sure that the animals have food, that the chickens and pigs have water, verify that the rabbits have grass; if they do not have enough we speak with the rabbit committee to see what happened. Well, all the animals were fine. It is time to go back to classes. In my course, which is seventh grade, we are continuing with the topic of reading and writing in Nasa Yuwe. Today we learned about the lagoons and their meaning to the Nasa culture, reading and performing oral exercises with the words so that one may learn Nasa Yuwe. The time again passes; it is now twelve o'clock, lunchtime. During this time we have lunch, then we wash the laundry, we feed the animals because they also need their lunch. It was also the time for me to do my chore of chop the firewood for later. The rest are playing soccer while some others are also handling other responsibilities. In the afternoon: all the courses get together to exchange ideas about who we are. We remember that the Pueblo Nuevo Indigenous resguardo is located to the North-East of the Department of Cauca, and that we are also in the high part of the head Municipality of Caldon.

“Finally we think that we would like to go to other schools to know how they work. We write this all down to share with the other schools.” Ansar Tintinago (Secretary)

The diary as a pedagogical resource was also employed in the teacher's professionalization. Some used it as a research aid. But it has not been easy to maintain the habit of writing every day. Some schools continue to encourage it, although it is more difficult to maintain at a personal level. Many teachers and students will do it; they say that the diary is like the best of friends to record their hopes and concerns, and to see in what fields they have made advances or overcome problems. This diary is of vital importance for the leaders and students who have attained the good habit of reading, writing, and recording their actions, thus giving strength and recognition to their identity, self-esteem, and feeling of improvement.

The cultural bases of propia didactics

In the 1980 proposal, there was already a desire to start from the “motivational systems used in the family setting” (page 14), but this idea was deepened by the afore mentioned

“integral preparation” course, and the research about traditional practices of socialization of girls and boys.

By 1990, we characterized our ways of learning and teaching found in the traditions of the communities as: orality, visions and dreams, symbolism and personification, analogy, and experience and observation.

“Knowledge emerges from and is appropriated through oral communication” (*Elaboración de currículo en las comunidades indígenas paeces, Elaboration of a Curriculum in Paeces Indigenous Communities*, 1991, p. 18). Many of the knowledges about sexual life, emotional life, the norms of behaviour, and the development of language have been continually acquired by the boys and girls from their everyday lives from the stories told by the aged, the advice that the elders would tell around the bonfire on the ground, and the beliefs and myths that regulate social life. In the previously quoted document, we similarly said:

...the visions and dreams, which refer to an image that is received in one moment. Through them, we come to know destiny, life, and the future goals of the community. The visions and dreams are not circumstantial imagination, nor merely individual, but rather their meaning and production has a collective character. The entire community participates in them; the community defines its characteristics through the dream or vision, which confers on them the gift to be *tut'bahisa* [midwife male or female] or *thë'wala* [male or female traditional medical practitioner]. Through the dreams, this person knows what medicinal herbs he or she should subsequently use.

This same document also refers to symbolism as one of the ways to represent knowledge. This is how we found out that the Nasa feel signs in the body by which they interpret information that helps guide their daily lives. The same thing occurs with the clouds, with the voices of animals, and with the diverse phenomena of nature. Symbolism goes from everyday data to information of a political character; such is the case with the staff of the cabildo authority. In current times, shields and flags carry such importance, resignified by the organizational processes.

In the same manner, there is a personification of surrounding elements in the language of everyday life, creating mechanisms of representation that include different beings of nature in dialogue. This way of knowing, and in some cases of conceptualizing from analogy and personalization, has the property of humanizing nature, naturalizing man, or blurring the boundaries between man and nature. For example, the flowers speak, the waters run, and the animals feel and communicate among themselves and humans in the same way that humans speak with them.

The myth of the *siska*, told by the elder Martina Pacho Toconás, is evidence of the broad relationship between nature and knowing:

They say that the Siska awakes without sleeping, cooking *mote*.⁷⁶ At dawn the *mote* was ready, and just as the day was beginning, she served the food to her husband. Afterwards she bathed, put her white jigma bag on her back, and would go out to the fields. She was the greatest worker. One day she went out looking beautiful, dressed in a very black skirt-style tunic that was as dark as a black bird. Her hair was arranged well, with a new chumbe belt (a belt handmade with thread) wrapped around her tunic.

⁷⁶ “Mote” is a dish generally made of boiled corn.

Afterwards, her mother-in-law thought...“She ought to come back now, because she left very early” – Regardless, the daughter-in-law could not be seen in any direction. So the mother-in-law left to look for her in the cornfield, calling “Siska...!” But she did not see her return to her home. And she thought “yesterday I looked for her too, and I did not find her.” She looked for a trace of Siska again, searching in the fields, but she did not see her. At midday the mother-in-law looked for her again and said “Siska!” – “Aaah...!” was replied. But she could see nothing, and so the mother-in-law looked for clues, but there was nothing. Again she said: – “Siska!” – “Ooooh...!” a high-pitched voice replied. Meanwhile, the mother-in-law was going in circles through the fields, searching and wondering: “Where could she be, that she is only answering me like that?” Her search was futile, because only one large person came out of the house, but when it reached the field it turned into a little worm, to go inching forward from one cornstalk to the next. The mother-in-law needed Siska to help her with other duties. The mother-in-law returned to the fields again and called out insistently – “Siska!” – “Aaah...!” She heard the reply calling from above. “Where is that lass? I need her!” thought the mother-in-law. “Why is she answering me from above? Surely she is in a corn cob.” She looked up, opened the corn, and called out again; a reply came back “Aaaah...!” The mother-in-law believed that the sound was coming from people. Siska was zigzagging around the circle of the edge of a corn cob. The surprised mother-in-law exclaimed “What is happening and why is she removing just a few corn kernels?” However, she saw that the worm had a bagful of threshed corn in a *jigra* that was so white, about a cupful and of the size of a little *tmin jigra*. The mother-in-law said “I’m really going to kill her. I thought that she was people, and all this time she was a worm.” When she was about to rip the worm’s head off, Siska exclaimed – “You’re killing me! My husband plants small corn stalks that I can only take a little here and there, saving him a lot of money. You kill me, but afterwards another woman will arrive at the house carrying lots of husks. All that food will not last you even though the cobs will be bigger. Instead I take only the kernels so that it will last longer. You will get hungry.” So the mother-in-law replied, “You’re only saying that because you don’t want to move quickly!” And she squished Siska with her nails, and Siska died. Siska was dressed in an extremely fine skirt like tunic, as thin as a tree leaf with a very elegant *chumbe* belt. She was going to eat the corn, starting at the edges and ending in the middle; that is how we eat.

The Indigenous cultures have the content to design efficient methods of learning, drawn from the natural order and the procedures that sequentially mark the changes. In this tale, we find the aesthetic conceptions, the art (quality of the textiles). The economy – *fxiin*, *fxiin*. The meaning of work, of health, and of morality (beliefs and cultural practices that are part of the *propia* Nasa worldview). In fact, these themes constitute ethnic and philosophical nuances. They teach from a social and communicative perspective, in an amusing way. In this text, we see Siska, personified in a woman... not the female: “She cooked during the entire night...”; she was very clean, but this condition is not reduced to *asepsis* ... She leaves her home, very clean, early in the morning... she is an administrator... she saves, she organizes the consumption of the corn harvest, preventing food shortage and taking advantage of the simple kernels (small, weak), beginning from the outer part of the cob, ending with the strong and vigorous kernels... In the end, the text suggests many possibilities for themes that have multiple pedagogical

uses, which we will find if look carefully. We can strengthen many values and behaviours from this text, but we can also address learning approaches, art skills, and services that go beyond the knowledge of growing corn that appears at first glance. (Abelardo Ramos, in the Diploma of PEC, Río Blanco, November 2003).

In this way, the communities' oral traditions are embedded with formative intentionality; they transmit teachings, just like other ways of learning that function from intercultural enrichment. This potential is discovered and recreated according to the attitudes of the teacher and of the authorities in each territory.

Music, dance, and theatrical dramas: other ways of expression

*From Quintín to Benjamín
From Benjamín, fo'ward!
Everyone forms part
of an endless army.
For the expansion of the resguardo,
For defending the culture,
To not pay the terrajé tribute,
the organization grew.*

Chorus:

*Work, Work,
the seed that was given
it was sown with sweat
it was watered with blood
it has spread to all places
always seeking unity,
From Tierradentro to Silvia
from Toribío to Jambaló*

*Our history goes fo'ward,
with labourers, peasants,
students and neighbours
a just world we will create*

*He advised us
to organize ourselves and fight
and to always continue the example
of our elders t'educate*

Chorus...

*May death never reach you
brilliant and shining man
may the men of tomorrow
walk with the stride of giants.*

Recited:

*Because Benjamín is not dead
may his paths be illuminated
like the moon in summer
like the lagoon on the moor.*

Sung:

*You will be always present!
(3 times)*

While artistic expressions are addressed as an autonomous area of knowledge, a specific type of curricular content in the curriculum proposed by MEN, in our project we adopted it as a medium of expression, a creative and cultural cross-cutting medium.

The above song, for example, is a collective composition. It emerged in the context of one of the pedagogical and language training workshops that took place in Paniquitá in 1980. Different forms of expression are used to multiply learning. The problems, hopes, needs, and dreams are sung; they become easier on the heart and on the mind. For this reason, this song was assumed as the anthem of the bilingual schools, in honour of one of the leaders who had distinguished himself the most in the cultural defense of the Indigenous peoples. This very song was sung in Belalcázar on the anniversary of compañero Benjamín's death. We also use music for pedagogical development. With the intention of researching and recovering autochthonous music, we began this process with the compañera María Eugenia Londoño, and it continues with the professor Carlos Miñana.

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In addition, the Indigenous context incorporates popular music and live experiences, and generates compositions that tell the story of the struggle. In the CRIC Congresses and assemblies, musical groups from diverse regions are present, each one with a new contribution and feelings rendered into song. At the same time, PEB intensified its work surrounding music, organizing musical groups in the schools and promoting the importance of recovering communities' uses and customs. From PEB's efforts, the founding of the group *Kwe'sx Kiwe (We are the land)* was of very special significance. This group, with the coordination of the compañero Inocencio Ramos, assumed the development of musical research in communal schools and resguardos.

The presence of music, dance, and the recognition and interpretation of their meanings facilitated the recovery, in some cases, of musical pieces that were already entering the state of definitive forgetfulness. In other cases, they successfully created other songs by changing the lyrics to known songs:

"Song to the Son of Cauca"⁷⁷

*I, who am a son of Cauca
carry the Paez blood in me,
of those who have always struggled
from the conquest until today (bis)*

⁷⁷ Text adapted by Luis Carlos Ulcué and Rosa Elena Toconás, both bilingual teachers of the school at Las Delicias (Buenos Aires). The Father Álvaro Ulcué Chocué was murdered in Santander de Quilichao, on November 5 of 1984. Rosa Elena Toconás was murdered in Jambaló on August 11, 1985.

*We live because we fight
against the invading powers
and we shall continue fighting
as long as the sun endures.*

*Indigenous, peasants,
we carry Paez blood
of Álvaro and Benjamín,
of Gaitana and Quintín.*

*All the people miss him
for their valiant labour
of denouncing the injustice,
he was slain by the oppressor.*

*Their seed will never die,
a thousand Ávaros will be born,
and the path to the struggle
they shall illuminate
Martyrs of our people,
in the memory shall remain
and they will lead the way
in search of liberty.*

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The Music in the School



*Integral Preparation booklet "Path to Knowledge".
UAIIN-Indigenous Documentation Center "José María Ulcué".*

The potential for artistic creation is immense in the communities, and it has a strong incidence within the process of Indigenous awareness and identity. On one occasion, Inocencio Ramos compared the formative effect of music to the relationship with conventional forms: “What is done in a week of talks, I can do in five minutes with a song.”

Music and artistic expression in general have occupied a dominant space in the teacher’s professional development and training. There have been several diverse workshops offered under the coordination and administration of María Eugenia Londoño from the University of Antioquia. Oscar Vahos from the Canchimalos group and the Popular School of Art in Medellín provided us with research tools to recover and create music, chants, poetry, and games. The first activity in this field was exploratory travel involving several teachers and coordinators, to identify and recognize dances from both the Nasa and Guambiano cultures. This is how the *resguardo* of Pueblo Nuevo carried out a workshop where elders danced the Paez *bambuco*⁷⁸, the little angel dance, the vulture dance, and the bowing dance. Similarly, people performed a marriage rite and a dance of the little angel in Chimán (Guambía). During these travels and meetings, we filmed and recorded the most relevant aspects; subsequently, we prepared and developed workshops by using these recordings.

One of the workshops of special significance to Indigenous education, both for its focus and application to everyday experience and teaching, occurred in Manzanal, Silvia, in 1984. At this workshop, they studied the rhythms of the Nasa and Guambiano *bambuco*; their context and choreography were analyzed, as was the relationship between dance and music. Musical rhythms were created based on sounds in nature and surrounding objects. They invented rounds based on what the teachers had been working on with the school and community, reinterpreting and learning from other cultures. These elements contributed to revitalize and recreate the games, the dance, and the music as resources for a communal pedagogy. They were applied to teaching and learning in the schools. Between 1984 and 1991, a yearly workshop was offered that reviewed the latest achievements, revised the new songs if necessary, created games, and related all these resources to the pedagogical processes. Benjamín Ramos elaborated this round:

Klxuum

Kl’uuma’ ü’neça’
Mte üskipa
Klxuuma’s wëse ´na üstha ´w
Luuçtxi pa’yana
Klxuuma’ kima’s peeixga?

Txazsay puutx iweka
Sxaya’s pa’yana
Uweçxa pe’jna ujçxa
Khïçxa suthena
Klxuuma’ kima’s peeixga?

The Duende Spirit

The duende spirit is crying,
where can it be?
while we were listening to
he cries out to the children,
who do you need, duende?

Everyone hold hands
he will call to S’aya,
he will catch S’aya and take you with him,
he will hide you,
who do you need, duende?

⁷⁸ See Glossary for definition

Uma Uma Uma
 Myuh kwe'sx'txi nwe'way
 Kl'uuma' pa'yaça'
 Pe'jna u'jwëçxa
 Klxuuma' kima's peeixga?

Mother, mother, mother,
 come to defend us,
 the duende is calling
 to take me with him,
 who do you need, duende?

Tzazsay pwese'na üste'
 Klxuuma''na 'wki'k we'we
 Ayte pwese'nuwë
 Adxa' pe'jna u'jwe'n
 Klxuuma' kima's peeixga?

While we were playing,
 the Duende say this:
 you should not play here
 because I will take you with me.
 Who do you need, duende?

Although the lyrics might remind us of the theme of the song *We play in the woods (now that the wolf is gone)*,⁷⁹ it refers to the Nasa world, to the guardian spirits that we must respect to maintain a balance between man and nature; the duende gives power and can transform you into a healer. In this sense, the duende is bivalent and the song provokes both fear and desire in the children, invoking both punishment and reward.

With the assessment of Professor Carlos Miñana, rituals and cultural practices were rescued over the course of 15 years while at the same time, Nasa music was being researched. This process also had the support of Jesús Bosque, a television broadcaster. With Miñana and Bosque we made several videos that recorded aspects like the *Kücxh wala (Dance of the Little Black Kids)* in Tierradentro, the cultural and political history of the first 25 years of CRIC, the tu, the worldview, bilingualism, and the teaching of languages.



*Teacher's Guide. Kücxh wala (Dance of the Little Black Kids).
 UAIIN-Indigenous Documentation Center "José María Ulcué".*

⁷⁹ A common Latin American children's game played in a circle.

One particularly important didactic process in the pedagogical research was the linking of a pedagogical unit with the experiential content from the *Kücxh wala* in an integral way. We will speak about this development later when we address the role that didactic materials played in the process.

The didactic work from the cultural expression took form in two senses. In the first, the cultural revitalization and re-creation rooted in collective experience is currently reflected in the ritual of the *sakhelo* (*to empower fertility*), in which approximately 2000 people participate to refresh the seeds, the farmers, and the other inhabitants of the region. Each resguardo in the various parts of the Cauca province are in charge of completing this ritual in the different veredas. They invite the people to participate with their seeds, with their food, and with their presence, to help raise the *sakhelo*, to tell stories, to dance and refresh themselves in a ceremony of communality. Primary and secondary schools in each zone participate in these rituals.

The second form of cultural expression is linked to social drama, which has great relevance in the community and in the school, and is understood as theatrical expressions or dramatized episodes of social life in each village in which reality is replicated in scenes. Such performances promote and facilitate subsequent analysis. Representations of the way cabildos and families act, what they think about education, how the land recoveries were done, what life is like in the city—diverse topics that are interpreted by the boys and girls, teachers, or leaders and other members of the community—facilitate communication and learning.

These dramatizations have played an important role in raising community awareness since the beginning of the eighties and are essential components of every CRIC congress. The public performances about the attitudes of the official teacher, the communal teacher, the landowner, the politician, or the priest almost always stimulate a healthy criticism and develop oral expression and creativity. The socio-dramas also allow us to deal with complex problems as they present themselves, such as contradictions between families and communities, conflict among leaders, and cases of theft.

In school life, these performances have served to strengthen oral expression in languages that communities use less, whether Indigenous languages or Spanish, fomenting balance. The impact is such that, in some cases, the very actors forget that they are performing and begin to live in the performance and feel it as though it was their own reality. Graciela Bolaños tells us:

In the Sixth Congress of CRIC, in Toribío, the communities of the resguardo of San Francisco prepared a drama about the death of the leader Avelino Ul. A group of people of diverse ages, children, youth, adults, leaders, men, and women of the region researched and elaborated on the struggle that led to the compañero's murder by the landowners. They adapted this history into a play. That same week, a theatre group from Cali who also attended the Congress, offered some training in theatre to help the play, and it was presented with anticipation to the satisfaction of an audience of over one thousand people. When the play was about to finish with the death of compañero Ul, the compañero who was playing the part of Avelino Ul disappeared, and the play was therefore frozen for a moment, until another person stepped in to replace him at the impasse; so, the play was finished. When the first compañero appeared two or three hours later, he was asked what had happened and he replied: "It's because I became very afraid, because I believed that they were actually going to kill me, and I ran out to hide myself."

Learning by playing

When we began our search for our own pedagogy, the first thing we pointed out was that children are the best teachers. They are always looking to discover the why and how of each thing; their questions lead us to contemplate deeply before we answer them, and sometimes we adults cannot even respond. Through games, the children replicate the way that they live with their family, the parties, the work in the fields, the markets, and the diverse acts that surround them. This is how they learn in a natural way. In López Adentro, for example, the children playing at being in the fields showed that there were fourteen varieties of cassava in their community. The game demonstrates one of the best pedagogical strategies for the children to feel happy at school and successfully learn. Of course, it was not about only playing during recess but about turning the class time into a recess. So, the teacher needed to integrate himself with the children's game and support their learning from there. However, not all the communities were convinced that games were important for the cognitive development of the boys and girls. During evaluations the same comment was often repeated: "The children should not be allowed to play in class because it makes them lazy," or "in the bilingual schools the children and the teacher spend all day playing, they waste too much time." In other cases they would affirm: "It is not advisable that the teachers play so much with the children, because then the children won't respect them." The following indicates how some children feel about learning by playing:

Question: *How do you like to learn?*

Antonia: "I like it when the teacher doesn't yell at us and joins our games. I really like teacher Benilda's games because we go outside, we make stories, we play games, and we laugh while drawing ourselves."

Juan Alirio: "I like it when the teacher lets me play; I do my homework quickly, and we go outside and we learn to count by irrigating the kernels of corn which in our game are chickens, and if each chicken lays six eggs every week, that are like grains of rice, and if we sell these little eggs at fifty pesos (\$50) then we can buy the groceries. We will have to have more than 20 hens in the house so that in a week we will have what we need to buy the groceries we need weekly." (Cayuce 2)

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The act of playing is an important resource for children. It was necessary to undertake a process with the adults to persuade them about the value of games as a resource for cultures; children internalize values, skills, habits, and knowledge through play. To overcome the parents' suspicions, we decided to play the games that integrated the children, parents, and teachers at the pedagogical development workshops and at the evaluations. Afterwards, we analyzed and extracted the teachings collectively. In this way, many of the parents felt that they really learned and that the games were necessary for the children to have a positive attitude towards the cultural investigation.

All the schools have invented many games and circle rounds. In the López Adentro School they created the following round game by adapting the melody from *The Bridge of Avignon*. The children, while they are singing, act out the movements that the song indicates:

*Grind, grind, trapichito
grind, grind, without stopping,
we must get the panela⁸⁰ ready
for the community
Movement 1: Like this, like this go the sowers!
Chorus: Grind, grind
Other movements: like this, like this, like this they cut... they prune...
the horse driver... the collector of sugar cane juices... the bakers... the collector
of sugar cane waste... the packers... the consumers...*

In some of the schools they changed the music for the game, or they would add more actions or change the basic activity to something like raising cassava or corn. Adolfo Ulcué Taquinás, the teacher of the Cónдор School (in the resguardo of Canoas) comments:

For a long time, I observed the children, and I noted that they really enjoyed the pastimes, the games. So I dedicated myself to finding the most common games that they played, and together with the children and the teachers of the area we were able to develop several materials. We invented the Kwe'sx fxi'zenxi (Our Way of Life) game.

The games have allowed us to also properly address some of the problems that arise from the contact between Spanish and Indigenous languages, but this is how we have dealt with confusion between "o" and "u" sounds, because the Nasa and Guambiano children cannot hear the difference between the "o" and the "u," since that difference does not exist in their own language. For this reason, they might often say "burrar" instead of "borrar," "currer" instead of "correr," "natorales" instead of "naturales," "cochara" for "cuchara"... With the matching game, it is about learning to differentiate the sounds by focusing on paired up words: rosa and rusa, sucio and socio, etc.

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Drawing: from petroglyphs to the notebook

Children write using lines, drawings, and scribbles during the first years of learning. In the process of literacy, many little ones will draw lines and say: "Here it says: Rosalía Quiguanás." By the same principle several diverse cultures have developed ways to symbolize their world; that is, to communicate. Countless samples of pictographs and petroglyphs that exist in the Indigenous communities illustrate similar processes.

Drawing plays a decisive role in cultural reshaping for Nasa and Guambiano children. Drawings, games, ideograms, and other types of graphics are all forms of the same process that, once they are related to each other, present differences and diverse levels of abstraction. In the experience of PEBI, drawing constitutes a valuable procedure in the way towards writing, and furthermore permits the children to express themselves in a diverse manner, reacting to the situations of life. Drawing thus becomes the first process of the recording of cultural feeling in the school. However, it is necessary to recognize that there was resistance from parents and even some teachers in the beginning, because they considered art to be secondary in teaching. When we advanced with the development of a methodology for teaching

⁸⁰ The Colombian style of a block of raw cane sugar, similar to Indian jaggery.

reading and writing, this resistance was overcome. In 1983, there was an exposition of more than two hundred drawings by Indigenous children in the bookstore of El Zancudo of Popayán as part of the VI Congress of CRIC in Caldoño. One article by Germán Mendoza Diago, in the Cauca newspaper El Liberal published on December 5, 1983, describes the exposition in the following way:

The children of the Guambiana or Paez communities are aware of the difficult historical era that we had to live through. Through their paintings, they raise the problem of land, the difficulty of the crops, the inconveniences of the excessive climate change and, overall, the situations that burdened daily life. In fact, some paintings go further and compel the children to halt, by any means, the barbaric destruction of natural resources. Drawings belonging to children of 7 or 8 years of age are already speaking of the usefulness of forests for soil conservation, and the usefulness of certain animals for controlling agricultural blights and pests. They address the need to work hard and efficiently so that everyone in the community can be well fed.



The children of Juan Tama's drawings. Graciela Bolaños' Collection.

The children's drawings have also been central to all of the materials produced in the Program. In this way, we have recovered and spread their points of view, their perceptions of what has happened, their needs, and their interests.

The Booklets and the Educational Materials

At the time of writing this book, we have produced and published more than one hundred booklets and materials both for and from the schools (examples later in this section). At the end of chapter one, we had shown how this process was started, and how the community participated in its development. Now, we want to tell the story of how this labour has become more complicated, how new topics have been introduced, how new technologies have been incorporated. We shall also refer to the issues and difficulties that arose from using didactic materials in the *escuela propia*. For this, we must trace the general path back in a chronological manner, and, at the end, we will deepen this understanding with an example, in a collection of materials that were developed in the nineties and mutually complement one another.

The first written educational materials were, as we mentioned previously, the “flashcards.” They were hardly using any materials at the time because the sources of knowledge were found in oral tradition, observing nature, and analyzing the issues that we were living. There was no linear approach to reading and writing, there was no sequential plan; we posed a “natural” process of learning.

The first “booklets” were small works that were born from within the schools themselves. They revolved around a specific topic and were results of the application of a collection of “flashcards” and the articulation of some “guides” for the teachers. The communities needed to produce their own texts. From the Program’s perspective, people could collect information without it being predefined, nor being assigned explicit educational objectives. In this way, there arose booklets such as *Así Trabajamos (This is how we work)*, from the Guambiana school of El Chimán (1984), or various booklets from La Laguna like *La Historia de nuestra comunidad (The History of our community, 1985)*, *La experiencia de nuestra huerta escolar (The experience of our school garden, 1986)*, or *Conociendo nuestras plantas (Knowing our plants, 1987)*, which was a result of the collective work among the children and the community, coordinated by the traditional medical practitioner Benigno Collazos and the teacher Roberto Chepe. *Ampliando nuestro conocimiento (Expanding our knowledge)* was a booklet written about the López Adentro school’s visit to the Juan Tama lagoon (1987). These booklets were initially printed in the same school; later, some—such as *Conociendo nuestras plantas (Knowing our plants)* in 1991—were published and disseminated by the Program. The booklets produced by the schools during these years were normally in Spanish, although they included vocabulary and some phrases in the Indigenous language of the community.

From the Program we wanted to strengthen the processes of reading and writing in the Indigenous languages. For this reason, the first booklets that were written by the leadership of the Program were directed towards literacy. *Ets tengia ipikitaú (We invite you to read)*, 1983, presented a case in which there were two edited versions: one in the Nasa dialect of Tierradentro and another in the dialect of Toribío. It is apparent that this booklet originates from the “flashcards” by its structure of units that revolve around a small group of questions, and the influence of Paulo Freire with its “generating” phrases. The themes included the earth, the home, the school, the school garden, the animals, the communal work, the shop, the music, the clothing, the Indigenous medicine, the trees, and the cabildo. The booklet also included some songs invented by the children. The following year another booklet on literacy appeared, *Kuesh iuwe (Our language)*, which was not implemented widely because its graphic design was criticized from the beginning.

There were difficulties in defining a form of writing that was more consistent,

but would allow us to incorporate regional diversity, and that was simple and at the same time faithful to the phonetics of the language. These difficulties led us to stop publishing any more bilingual booklets or booklets in Nasa Yuwe until we had answered these problems through research. But we needed those booklets. Therefore, we published a series of three books, with a teacher's guide that had no text, only images of daily life of the communities that served as motivators for strengthening the use of the Indigenous language in the school, drawn from orality, and to address the problems of the community: *Conociendo nuestra vida No. 1 (Knowing our life Vol. 1)*, *Escuela, comunidad y trabajo No. 2 (School, community and work Vol. 2)*, and *Representando nuestro mundo No. 3 (Representing our world Vol. 3)*, (1986). These were the booklets for the integral preparation course that we referred to earlier. By the end of the eighties, the linguistic research and the meetings to reach an agreement were giving their results. In 1988, a text appeared for reading and writing in Nasa Yuwe, initially directed towards teachers: *Nasa yuwete piisan f'i'n'i* (The Nasa Yuwe Alphabet) (120 pages). This text gives an account of the four dialect variants—Toribío, Caldono, Tierradentro, and Pitayó—and was the result of the Seminar of Unification of the Nasa Alphabet in San Andrés de Pisimbalá with the support from the Colombian Institute of Anthropology (*Memoria*, Cuaderno número 2, *Memory*, Notebook Number 2, ICAN).

The discussions would continue, and we had to wait until the nineties for a significant number of bilingual booklets on literacy to be produced. We appreciated the more formal structure of these booklets, they were didactic, with pedagogical objectives, a sequential approach, and a high level of thinking about the native languages: *Sa't Üus (The Thoughts of the Cacique)* (1991) with its teacher's guide; *Generalidades del Nasa Yuwe. Material de trabajo (Generalities of Nasa Yuwe. Work material)* (1993), directed to the teachers; *Ec ne'hwé's' (Constitución política de Colombia, Political Constitution of Colombia)* (1994), a translation of the national Constitution of 1991, which we have already commented on previously; *Kwe's nees'n'i ec (Our booklet to learn)* (1996), a booklet for first grade; *Küc'h yuuya' u'hwectha'w (De correría con los negritos, Running with the little black kids)* (1996), a bilingual booklet about the Nasa parties and Nasa music with a teacher's guide; *Yuwe fxucu*, a Nasa-Nasa dictionary (2001); *Namuielan asha isup p rkun* (2001), a booklet on Namuy Wam literacy; and *Sa't luuçx (Son of the Cacique) 1 and 2* (2003), with their respective teacher's guides.

By the end of the nineties, we can begin to see the fruits of the process of literacy in the languages of the communities, but a new problem also arose: the teaching of Spanish in bilingual contexts. Booklets were also produced to address that issue, such as *El árbol de las palabras. Castellano 1 (The tree of words. Spanish 1)* (1996), with its teacher's guide; *Construyendo nuestro mundo 1 y 2 (Building our world 1 and 2) (Kwe's pekühna kiwe's ya'jijyuna)* (2003), with their respective teacher's guides. The latter texts were the updated proposal for the integral preparation course that years earlier had been called *Conociendo nuestra vida (Knowing our life)*.

Besides the texts about different topics (including the history of the schools themselves and the local communities) that were written in the schools, we had also been publishing compilations of the traditional stories that we recorded from our conversations with the elders. At the beginning, we translated them to Spanish for their publication. Afterwards, as we advanced in Indigenous writing skills, we published them in languages of the communities or as bilingual copies. These texts were books that transmitted the tales and histories of the elders: *Nasa Oral tradition* (1983); *Tata wala we's'a' na'h'i't'* (*What the elders tell us*) (1987), stories in Spanish; *Nasa Yuwete piisan f'i'n'i (The alphabet in Nasa Yuwe)* (1988),

with several traditional tales; *Mpakac'yupa Uusameta'* (*Beings that never die*) (1992), tales in Nasa Yuwe and in Spanish; *Cuentos (Stories)* (1992), stories illustrated by the children of the Los Monos school; *Quizgó: tradición oral y territorio (Quizgó: oral tradition and territory)* (1991), an ethnohistory of the resguardo of Quizgó; *Pickwe thä' sa't Juan Tama yata'* (*La casa de Juan Tama*) (1996) about the lagoon at Juan Tama; and *Khuuç (cooking place)*. *Recogiendo y compartiendo experiencias (Collecting and sharing experiences)* (2003), written by the students of CEFILAM about their research and conversations with the elders. The research about the processes of socialization, besides being published in the form of documents and of becoming a pedagogical proposal with the booklets, was also published as a biography in *Historia de Ana Julia (History of Ana Julia)* (1991).

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"What the Elders Tell Us" Tata wala we's'a' na'h'i't'. Bilingual Education Team, 1987. UAIIN-Indigenous Documentation Center "José María Ulcué".

Nuestra experiencia Educativa (Our educational experience) (1991), a booklet that integrally compiles the elements that were essential to the educational model that was put forward, was dedicated especially to the cabildos and teachers for their reflection and knowledge. We also published the children's own stories, about their trips and outings to different places in the territory, even Cali or Bogotá: *Como vimos Tierradentro (How we saw Tierradentro)* (1985); *Nuestro viaje a Bogotá (Our trip to Bogotá)* (1987); *Niños y Jóvenes por la vida. Memorias de encuentros de comunidades negras, indígenas, campesinas y urbanas (Boys and Youth for life. Memories of conferences with black, Indigenous, peasant, and urban communities)* (1991); and *Nasa Yuwe* (2001). All these stories are published in Spanish with beautiful colour illustrations.

Aside from cassettes with songs, we also published songbooks like *Cantemos a la vida* (*Let us sing to the life*) (1987), booklets on mathematics like *Isan'i we'a 1* (*Mathematics 1*) (1996), a magazine that compiles the teachers' experiences, didactic materials (card games, for example), and pedagogical approaches, and *C'ayu'ce*, a trilingual magazine that was started in 1997. It has since published 8 numbers (one per year). Equally, we have published numerous program and work documents, evaluation results, and national and international event presentations.

In all cases, we believe that the process of writing the material itself, whether it was a document or a booklet, was more important than the result, as we shall discuss shortly. We want to show the complexity of the processes of developing the materials with an example. It is a collection of materials that were produced between 1993 and 1999 that complement each other, but that are based on a systematic research process that we began in 1986:

1993. *Küc'h wala, el baile de los negritos* (*Küc'h wala, the dance of the little black children*), implemented by Jesús Bosque, script and production by Carlos Miñana and Inocencio Ramos; documentary filmed in December of 1992 in Betacam 2000 and edited in 1993; 32 minutes.

1996. *Küc'h yuuya' u'hwectha'w. Travelling with the "little black children"*, Popayán, CRIC Educational Bilingual Program, 60 pages. Bilingual Nasa Yuwe-Spanish graphic comic.

1996. *Küc'h yuuya' u'hwectha'w. De correría con los "negritos", (Küc'h yuuya' u'hwectha'w. Running with the "little black children")*. Teacher's book, Popayán, CRIC Educational Bilingual Program, 120 pages. Spanish, with summaries of the chapters in Nasa Yuwe.

1998. *Nasa kuv'. Fiestas, flautas y tambores nasa, (Nasa kuv'. Nasa festivals, flutes, and drums)* audio CD/cassette and booklet, Fvndacion de Mvsica –Ministry of Culture – CRIC, 58'42", 36 pages.

1999. *Myuh wëseya'. (Come and listen)* Didactic bilingual audio CD/cassette, UPN–CRIC, 90'.

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Note the variations in types of media: a booklet for the child, a book for the teacher, a documentary, a CD and cassette with musical recordings of the field, and one didactic CD and cassette. Since they were filmed and/or recorded in professional formats, they raised the self-esteem of the musicians and the Nasa people in general. They had been used to only disseminating their music and culture in home-recorded cassettes of very poor quality. The video has widely circulated in schools, congresses, festivals, and teachers' training events. The CD already has two editions, and it has been copied in several homes; it forms part of the radio programming in the majority of the Andean radio stations in Cauca, and is included in the allocation of schools.

The other three materials have been designed specifically for the school but in reality form a single unit consisting of the book for the child, the book for the teacher, and the illustrative CD/cassette that develops a series of exercises and auditory and musical activities. In other words, the materials have a didactic intentionality for use in formal education.

We shall refer to these three materials a little bit more.

Given the cultural diversity and the diversity in dialect and festivals that exist among the Nasa, given the complexity and diversity of the situations that schools have and still live in, and given the impossibility of reaching all of the teachers and children, we opted to create a series of materials that were intended to motivate, drive, and enable an experience and a reflection of the festive and the musical in the schools. We began to develop the material for the children who were going to become the triggering nucleus of a series of activities within and outside of the school.

We made certain considerations from the beginning; first, the materials must be bilingual, because there were schools that consisted of only Nasa speakers, Spanish speakers, and mixed languages. Secondly, the materials should account for and respect the cultural diversity of the Nasa, and present not an idealized, eternal past, an ideal of the festive and the musical, but should instead reflect the contemporary contradictions and mixing. For example, the booklet briefly and respectfully discusses the conflict that the traditional festivals provoke with the Evangelicals.

117 Thirdly, the children's material must have a narrative structure, because the stories are better suited for conversation, dialogue, and cultural negotiation; they present everyday situations that are real, but that always incorporate the imaginary as well, if possible – the present and the past. They narrate occurrences, but they also indicate what the people say and think about them. The story, furthermore, must be told and looked at from the perspective of the children, positioning them as the centre of the history, and should have the possibility of triggering reflections about Nasa culture in general, and not only about the festive or the musical. The story must, in addition, centre itself on one festival or rite, with the goal of giving coherence to and deepening the booklet. We chose the festival of *kücxh wala* (*harvest celebration*) for the richness of elements, for its complexity, for its mestizo character, but, above all, because it is the festival in which the children participated as protagonists, as "little black children" or "little cats", with a specific and precise role, not as an extra (furthermore, the symbolic centre of the festival is a baby, the boy Jesus), and for the importance of music in the festival. We originally planned to realize a didactic video, but not all the schools had access to electrical energy (at times we had to take a gasoline-powered generator to watch films), television, VHS or Betamax. In addition, we wanted materials that the children could touch, colour, read, and observe, which resulted in a booklet. Furthermore, we had a video that we had filmed in 1992, where we could observe the festival in action. The booklet had to be sufficiently clear and open so that it could be used in the diverse school grades, for the children who could not read yet and for the children who were developing their reading abilities. For that reason, the booklet was developed as a graphic story that even the smallest children could follow by simply looking at the pictures.

This is how we wanted to portray the various ways to celebrate and understand the festival: the story ought to take place somewhere, and that place was Vitoncó (*çxha'b wala*), the heart of Tierradentro. Regardless, the route of the little black children to the edges of the resguardo allowed the inclusion of "encounters" between them and processions from other border regions, such as the region below Tierradentro (where the boy Jesus is carried by a godmother). The comparative view between the remote regions was facilitated by introducing the visit of a cousin from the Toribío zone. The confused look of a child from another region is a good pretext for explanations and giving an account of the feelings about what is happening.

The story, in summary, tells the travels of a boy from Toribío to Tierradentro around

December, accompanied by an uncle. The boy is staying to enjoy the festivals in the house of a cousin in Vitoncó. A procession of “little black children” visit the house of the cousins, and the boys integrate themselves into the circuit. They get to know the organizational structure of the group from the inside; they enjoy the festival, they have some exploits and adventures, they express their fears—away from their home—in the dreams, they practice playing the instruments, they receive advice from their elders, and they meet up with other processions from other places. At the end of the grand gathering in the *resguardo* of Wila, the festival is over and they return home. Finally, the children say goodbye to one another and the visitor returns to his land.

The story, besides being a narrative structure, succeeds in planting a thematic structure in a subtle and non-mechanical manner. This structure consists of twelve “units” and is converted into the base of the *Teacher’s book*. The themes refer to the territory, the Nasa toponymy, hospitality, oral tradition, how the festivals were held in antiquity, the organizational structure of the festival, the responsibilities and their relationship with the organization of the Nasa politics, constructive and interpretive processes regarding musical instruments, music and percussion, dances, and obviously, the festival of *kücxh wala* in its different regional styles in addition to the Nasa festival system.

Producing the same material in two languages brought up a series of practical problems in its creation which would affect the final results if left unaddressed. We began by producing a booklet for the children (*Küc’h yuuya’u’hwectha’w*). First, we needed to respect the logic behind both languages (Nasa Yuwe and Spanish), which meant that we could not simply write the booklet in Spanish and translate it into Nasa Yuwe afterwards, because meaning is often lost in translation. To solve the issue, we developed a collective work strategy in which we first discussed a series of situations or “scenes” (for example, a boy arrives from another *resguardo* with an adult, they meet up with their families and greet their family members). Next, we imagined each scene with its characters and actions. Then, and without coming to an agreement about it beforehand, a Nasa Yuwe-speaking teacher and a Spanish-speaking teacher would each draft the dialogues for the situation separately. In this manner, we avoided both a direct translation and the predominance of one language and its underlying logic over the other. Finally, we would enter a process of negotiation to unify the global aspects of the scene, so that the texts would approximate each other as much as possible, although neither would be a direct translation.

Given that this was a booklet in which music occupied a central place, the CRIC Education Program showed much interest in ensuring that the booklet would strengthen phonetics and be particularly useful to the integral preparation course. For this reason, we carefully controlled even the smallest details, and some onomatopoeia and transcription of everyday sounds are included in the booklet. But, even for that, we needed to be bilingual. The drum, the bell, and the rooster all “sound” different in Nasa Yuwe and in Spanish. For example, the drum does not make a “*tum*” sound in Nasa Yuwe as in Spanish, but rather goes “*tu’g*”. The bell does not ring “*tilín tilín*” as in Spanish, but “*tlin, tlin, thin na’w*” instead. One of the exercises that we proposed to the teachers is to continue the exercise of “sounding out” the booklet, including the onomatopoeia of the sounds that are present in the different scenes.

The biggest problem was the transcription of the dialogues into Nasa Yuwe. It took more than a year of work, and even then we were not completely satisfied with the results. As a standardized spelling did not yet exist for Nasa Yuwe—not even a standardized Nasa Yuwe—we had to make a decision, and since the story would be taking place in Tierradentro, we adopted a transcription that was most similar to the Tierradentro people’s spelling.

Before it was published, the children's booklet was worked on in various events by teachers and children in a systematic manner over several days in three workshops (Miraflores 1994, Segovia 1995, and Toribío 1995). These workshops were useful not only to correct and improve the booklet, but also to explore, validate, and gather pedagogical and didactic elements that would be included in the Teacher's Book.

The musically-interpreted sounds, particularly the flute, were the hardest for the teachers, although the majority showed great interest. This led us to design a third kind of complementary material: a CD or cassette intended to support traditional music practices for children and youth. The recording was converted into an auditory resource, a practical one, that was a great help to the teachers in general, but especially for those who worked in places where the older musicians had passed away and the practice of autochthonous music had stopped. The recording was called *Myuhwe wēseyá'*, which means something like "Come and listen." It lasts about 45 minutes and, given that is intended for children as well as teachers, is also bilingual.

These materials, both in the process of their elaboration with teachers' collectives and in their use by the children, have had an important impact and generated significant progress. Regardless, we must also recognize that this resource is being underutilized. In some evaluations and follow-ups, it has been detected that one of the factors that is affecting the use of these materials the most is that they appeared during a time of transition of the politics surrounding materials in CRIC. Before, the booklets and books for teachers were free because they relied on external funding from foreign institutions. The changes in the politics of the financial entities and the Colombian State's allocation of these funds directly to each resguardo (Law 60) caused an economic crisis in the CRIC programs, which were left completely unfunded and without resources. On the other hand, materials and booklets that are freely given to the schools are frequently not used or even lost, because "they don't cost anything...". Due to all of this, booklets and educational materials produced by CRIC began to be sold to both teachers and children; that way, the printing costs were covered, the goal of creating funds for reprints and new editions achieved, and the attitudes toward free materials were transformed. The salaries of the teachers, with a very low scale, are minimum wage, and frequently, due to the bureaucratic difficulties in transferring the funds from the central administration to the region, will delay three or four months. In synthesis, the materials have not been able to circulate as widely and be converted into a resource that teachers and children can depend upon. Recently, some cabildos that have administered the resources transferred by the government have set aside a specific sum for the resguardo schools and have begun to buy booklets for the children.

We also perceive that some of the teachers have a difficult time using materials that are non-linear, flexible, or optional, like those that we have just mentioned. These teachers have indicated that the criteria of the materials are not clear, and that they do not have the experience to select, program, or adapt some of these activities to the "curriculum." In this sense, they want the material to be organized linearly, like this: introduction, first week, this activity and that type of evaluation, and so on and so forth, week by week, in a fragmented style.

Without a doubt, the best results of all these processes were the learning and research processes involved in creating these materials, and the fact that teachers have put forward a reflection about music and festival. They have deepened our knowledge of the feelings and cultural values embedded in music and festivities, they are validating them, and they are beginning to incorporate them in their pedagogical work from a more conscious and critical

perspective. Thinking and living the festive and the musical has opened new paths for understanding the schools' relationship with cultural tradition and its most recent transformations.

Finally, we want to point out that, while these materials were designed and elaborated by Nasa people for Nasa people, most of them have proven adequate to develop a series of activities in the context of multicultural education proposals, stimulating a recognition of Nasa culture between Cauca children and teachers and the rest of the country. Although the experiences are preliminary and isolated, we have already received positive comments from teachers from Cauca and Bogotá who have used parts of the booklets and materials (including recordings and videos). We have also been informed that our CD-ROM materials about Indigenous peoples are being circulated in the Spanish-based schools.

The Evaluation, a Collective Process of Permanent Reflection and Self-Transformation

As we have seen previously, from its beginning CRIC has been involved in critical analysis and proposals to confront problems, the development of methodological strategies, and program design. These reflections, in periodic meetings, included all the activists of the collective. Each Program or fundamental hub of the organization presented a report of its functioning. Recommendations for future implementation come directly out of these reports. This approach has always been an essential component of the organizational dynamic. The assessment of every action and development of each program is a fundamental tool for the constant reframing of the process. For this reason, we use the critical evaluation of the behaviours and actions of the "official school" as a reference point to establish what should be done and what should not be done in our education.

In CRIC Congresses, we examine the achievements accomplished by our educación propia in terms of its pedagogical, cultural, and political impact. Here also we discuss the problems, needs, and predictions of the education. From the founding of PEB, teachers have participated in diverse committees that are held in the congresses and that specialize in coordinating the committee on education. The children equally participate with their own inputs. For example, in the Sixth Congress in Toribío (March 1981), the committee of children coordinated by the bilingual schools convoked more than 200 participants from all around Cauca. Its sessions were held alongside adult ones, and its conclusions were presented with the conclusions drawn by the adult congress. These contributions expressed their perceptions regarding the school, their needs, and their desires; they recommended that their teachers truly behave like partners or collaborators, that they provide guidelines about the use and learning of Indigenous languages, and that they master organizational history issues. The children express happiness with their educación propia and bilingual schools, and recommended that this right be extended to all Indigenous children in the Cauca province. After this event, the school children prepare for each Congress and treat these Congresses as deeply formative spaces.

Every six months, PEBI as an entire program conducts an analysis of the bodies and mechanisms that it uses in relation to its political, pedagogical, and administrative perspectives. The entire coordination team, the delegates of the geographical zones, the advisors, and the special guests are convened in this space. For us, participatory evaluation has always been the most efficient political strategy to ensure that the road our education

is taking is sustainable and consistent for the future. In this manner, we cement the community's guidance and control as the organizational foundation. These open spaces of evaluation contribute to release and qualify the central points of the Educational Project. This is not an evaluation to blame people for their specific responsibilities in a destructive manner, but rather to analyze the problems embedded in the process that involve distinct actors and committed bodies. Of equal importance is an evaluative procedure of identifying successes in order to enhance them, which is similar to the revision of negative aspects or difficulties in order to overcome them; but the dynamic of the processes is in charge of contextualizing these aspects. It is very common that something that was negative in one specific time or space becomes positive in another, or vice versa. Some examples from around the years 1981-1982 include the pedagogical discourse of the national New School, the relations with the State, and the relations with national and international spaces.

One of the obstacles that we have faced at various levels of development of our educational experience was the lack of ideological training to understand the complexity of the problem areas and the appropriate ways to address them. This is an inevitable condition of our methodology, which constructs education out of the findings of its practice. At the beginning, we viewed culture as a sum of elements that could be rescued, enumerated, rejected, or accepted – but without a dynamic and intercultural vision like the way of life, which is something that we cannot give up today. Although many years have passed since then, there are still many perceptions and discourses of this mechanical view of cultures that persists today. Equally, in the pedagogical field, we found ourselves needing to deconstruct the concept of “school” to define the role that it would play in Indigenous communities. From 1983 onwards, given the importance of channeling the emerging pedagogical project of the school, we decided to create the **communal evaluations**. These consist of an assembly or seminar to analyze the developments of each experimental school. The protagonists were the children and the teachers who shared their learning and their educational visions with their community. This is what Alvaro Tombé told us about his experience as a student of the El Chimán school:

The day that I liked best in school was when the compañeros from Popayán [the Program coordinators] would gather to meet with the community, because that's when we would cook chicken, organize games, they would teach us songs, we would tell stories. I remember that one time, we made a storybook told by ourselves; we presented it to the community and they applauded us. We were so happy. To prepare the stories, each one of us researched with an adult and presented his or her story in class; each one had to draw a picture of the story, and the best drawing would appear in the storybook. In these meetings, they would also ask us how the teachers were getting along with us. And about the teachers' way of teaching, and what they would have us work on; it wasn't just about books and memorizing the books, but also about what we had learned in those readings. They would examine how our little school garden was coming along. For example, Professor Miguel would send us out to find the names of the little birds in the region and to find out their characteristics, the ways that they lived, and there were some birds there that were unknown; not everybody knew about them. Many kids brought the names of the birds that we had never even heard about, and some that don't exist anymore, that have disappeared now, like the *mamunguá* for example. We would share these findings with the community and the community would discuss them. And here was some material about that, and we also invented some

songs about them, and we even recorded a cassette of those songs. Here is how one of the songs we invented goes:

Tutuben miranben delenpeleben meran men dan [bis]

Chumbalazen ayunbuleben kezebe ichimendan [bis]

The frog was singing, and the cricket was listening to him [bis]

The sky was clouding over and the moor was falling [bis].

These evaluations were institutionalized in the different schools; they were conducted every two months in the first years, and they paved the way for organizing different subjects of knowledge. The community evaluated the functioning of the school according to the perception and work of the children, the reports by their teachers, and in some cases, the intervention of the regional coordination. In that way, the evaluation day became a training space for everyone. Currently, these evaluations occur every six months, as it appears we have resolved many of the issues and concerns that had been more difficult to understand in the past, such as learning through play, using drawings, teachings outside of the classroom, and learning to read and write in children's respective Indigenous languages. These kinds of evaluations were not simply executed in any fashion; the coordination team also had to do a follow-up, collecting the information, analyzing the attitude of the community, and coordinating with each school in the area of all pertinent aspects for each situation.

The assessment of each child's learning became important at the insistence of parents, who wanted written reports of their children's performance. It was said that one of the causes of "children's lack of motivation" was not receiving a "report card" like they would receive from the "official" school. We debated this issue for several months and related ourselves with the experiences of those who worked with the same misgivings, and finally decided that, by our conditions, a numerical evaluation determined exclusively by the teacher did not correspond with the educational model that we were seeking. Instead, we opted to create the **bulletin of academic progress**, with conceptual parameters that included indicators such as participation, responsibility, creativity, solidarity, leadership, and investigative interest. It also contained the performance of the student in each subject area.

This step allowed the parents to reflect with us on the role of evaluation in a process of educación propia. Nine years later, the State would change from a numeric evaluation to a conceptual one.

Linking the community to student evaluation was a principle for all formative processes; in fact, even university programs consider this contribution. The Bachelor's Degree in Communal Pedagogy poses that the community ought to produce an analytical report of the actions of each student. This evaluation is worth 15 points of the 100, complementing other fields of assessment. The cabildo of students comes into play in the evaluations of each student, both in secondary schools and in higher education, and a percentage of self-evaluation is also considered.

Evaluations of impact have been very significant in other ways. In 1984, Terre des Hommes conducted an evaluation based on reports and didactic materials that had been put together by the Education Program. The first report generated a request from CRIC to do fieldwork, which ended up becoming a valuable input for the development of PEBI.

Ten years later, in 1994, Terre des Hommes again coordinated an evaluation that corresponded to the development of the Program. Dr. Ingrid Jung managed the project. Aside from having participated in the beginnings of PEB, she had also coordinated the 1984 evaluation. The following excerpt is from her evaluation done from February 28 to March 25 of 1994:

To evaluate in four weeks a program that has been developing for over sixteen years is a feat that can only be successful and reach a level of certainty if the people that put it together have the good grace to accept an external observer and enter into a dialogue that runs the risk of finding out things that they would rather not face, but also of discovering successes that they may not have realized. I thank all the participants of the Bilingual Educational Program for the trust with which they have embarked on this shared process that has allowed us to look at a very sophisticated, innovative, and important program together. This program is important not only for its direct beneficiaries, which are the children of the Cauca bilingual schools and their communities, but also for the development of ethnoeducation in Colombia. I thank them for their hospitality, care, and humour, which have been important human elements during these 4 weeks of shared observation and reflection. (PEB Evaluation Document – 1994).

123 In response to the requirements that the MEN had set for the evaluation of teachers based on their normative framework, we debated and put together a proposal, which was the result of analytical seminars that had taken place over more than five years by the teachers and authorities of different places in Cauca. Our argumentation enriched a national proposal that had been developed by consensus between representatives of different Indigenous organizations from around the country and a commission hired by the MEN. Today, this proposal is an input for negotiation with the State in the National Board for Education. It is about a holistic assessment that involves the contexts of its diverse actors and conditions of performance.

Today, when the national and international politics are directed towards an evaluation based on standards and homogenized international competences, it is important to rethink the evaluation of children's learning from unique ethnic particularities. The educación propia system is working on a proposal in response to this trend.

From the “Training of Teachers” to the “Professional Development” of Indigenous Teachers

In chapter one we discussed how we began the training of teachers, which was necessary for a school that was truly our own – our educación propia. These teacher training processes have advanced, adopting distinct modalities and levels. The more structured ones have been configured around the Professional Degree in Ethnoeducation, first, and later in the Bachelor's Degree in Communal Pedagogy and the project of a Propia University.

The Professional Degree for teachers in ethnoeducation, as we have already mentioned, occurred in response to the State politics to professionally capacitate all teachers who worked both in rural and urban spaces. For the Indigenous communities, the Resolution 2549 regulated the article 14 of the Decree 2762 of 1980 which stipulated that the MEN organize a special process to professionalize all teachers. As reported:

As of 1986, given the normative developments of the MEN towards Ethnoeducation, CRIC began a process of compromise and put together a proposal for training based on 7 years of experience of PEB's operation. During that time, CRIC had already set up the basic criterion of the education that was needed, and counted on a group of Indigenous bilingual teachers in training; it was understood that due to the level of complexity carried out in the processes of bilingual, communitarian, and intercultural education, it was therefore urgent to broaden the training of educators. These debates brought together the Guambiano, Paez, Yanacona, Coconucos, as well as the CEP [*Centro Experimental Piloto*, the Pilot Experimental Centre] and the MEN. Finally, CRIC, on March of 1987, presented the project called "Training Proposal towards the Professionalisation of Indigenous Teachers," which was approved by the MEN in 1988. (Systemization Report, 2001).

Since the MEN did not allocate the requested budget, CRIC managed the funding from other entities. The Colombian Institute for Agrarian Reform (INCORA) partially supported the work for the first two years. Each cohort of the professionalization lasted an average of five years, during which time they passed through ten stages of training. The cabildos began to co-finance the process and, together with PEB, assumed coordination of academic development. The cabildos were, in all cases, responsible for logistics. In the following chart, we will see the cohorts that have graduated over the past 12 years:

Class Name	Beginning	Graduation	Women	Men	Total
1st Cohort Caldono-Tóez	1988	1992	35	36	71
2nd Cohort Toribío (Northern Zone)	1989	1993	48	38	86
3rd Cohort Munchique (Northern Zone)	1991	1995	27	51	78
4th Cohort Segovia Tierradentro	1994	1999	29	34	63
Total					298

The professionalization process put into motion the different pedagogical insights that had been developed. Each cohort became an educational laboratory that would adjust itself progressively according to the dynamics that were occurring at that time. The study plan was adjusted in such a manner that for the last two cohorts, four key subjects were considered: Language and Communication, Nature, Community and Work, and Socialization and Ethnoeducation. The latter served as a link between the other key subjects through a dynamic of conceptual construction and development of political thinking and pedagogical action. These subject areas were simultaneously crossed over by four components: Worldview, Pedagogy, Research, and Politics.

As the reader can appreciate, the key subjects and curricular components of the teachers' training are the same critical foundations that have guided the entire educational process. We have centered our reflection on these themes throughout these pages.

Research, the creation of didactic materials, and the subsequent application of both resources in the spaces of the teachers under training was of special importance. Almost all participants in the professionalization programs were teachers in practice, as we can see

in the assessment of the professionalization of Tóez, which was conducted by the Corporation for the Production and Dissemination of Culture (CORPRODIC) in 1994:

During the course of these different stages, the student-teachers were making diverse materials and written texts (such as signs, newspapers, ceramics, puppets, etc.) related to the contents of the subject matter, with the goal of counting on a future with supporting educational materials for the proposed curriculum.

As an assignment (...) between stages, the student-teachers conducted a case study of the resguardo, of the vereda, or of the municipality in which they worked. Their aim was to enrich their own training and the content of the proposed curriculum of the Basic Primary Education put forward by CRIC's Educational Committee. Furthermore, in the eighth stage, we decided that a requirement for obtaining the bachelor's degree in pedagogy was for the student-teachers to create a pedagogical project that compiled their educational journey. This project should, at the same time, participate in the community in a positive manner, providing solutions to specific problems detected within the school.

Effectively, these pedagogical projects emerged because of the search for didactic mechanisms to work holistically in the content of the curriculum for various grades. The pedagogical projects constituted a fundamental component in the professionalization curriculum because they linked the community's problem areas to the school, becoming one of the best resources for pedagogical work. They connected various cohorts, the parents, and the teachers around topics that one way or another came to characterize and enliven the curriculum and the pedagogical practices. We broadly categorize the projects in the following manner:

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Methodology of bilingual teaching and learning

The following projects of the teachers—chosen among many others—give us an idea of the themes:

- Implementation of written communication for Nasa Yuwe speakers, level one.
- The oral tradition as a pedagogical element, Bilingual School of Santa Rita, Toribío resguardo.
- Reading and writing, a strategy for the recovery of Nasa Yuwe in La Esmeralda school, Páez municipality.
- Difficulties of learning for grade one children in La Inmaculada school, Vitoncó resguardo.
- *Kue's'yuewen uus ki'pc'a we'weka* (Thinking for speaking in our language), Novirao resguardo.

Environmental Knowledge, Recovery and Reassessment of medicinal and native plants

- Recovering and learning about the medicinal plants in our community. Las Mercedes Teachers Centre.
- Medicinal plants as teaching-learning elements in El Trapiche school, Jambaló resguardo.
- Promoting the garden. Potrerito vereda, San Andrés de Pisimbalá resguardo.
- The care and good use of the medicinal plants through the traditional garden. Toribío Teaching Urban Centre.

Nutrition

- Food in the educative process in the Pastales vereda, Ricaurte resguardo, Páez municipality.
- Cultivation and use of *chachafruto*⁸¹ in the educative process. Huellas Vereda Teaching Centre, Caloto.
- Corn [*capiro*], a medicinal plant in the Nasa culture. Estrella, Pioyá resguardo (Caldoso).
- Corn as a foundational base of nourishment. La Unión Risaralda Vereda, Honduras resguardo (Morales).
- Strengthening the cultivation of beans in Riochiquito (Tierradentro).

Conservation of soils

- The water as a source of life and a natural resource. Ethnoeducational Process. Resettlement San José, Cajibío municipality.
- Lunar phases and crops. Ethnoeducational Process. La Calera School, Tacueyó resguardo, Toribío municipality.
- Reforestation of the water eye. La Cristalina. Chichucue vereda, Yaquivá resguardo.
- How deforestation of fields influences the life of the population of Juan Tama. Resettlement. Puracé Municipality.

Cultural and historical practices

- Teaching through playing. Rural Mixed School of San Francisco, Toribío.
- Coca in the Nasa culture. Nature Subject Area, La Calera, Tacueyó.
- Recovering the history of the vereda of Guayope and applying it in the ethnoeducational process. Jambaló resguardo.
- Strengthening autonomous music in the El Cuartel vereda. Tierradentro.
- Recovery of communitarian values in Monte Cruz vereda, Vitoncó resguardo.
- Knowing the symbols and meanings of the *cuetanderas*⁸² in the Nasa community of Quiguanás. Inzá Municipality.

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Many of these projects, as well as others, continue developing today and are taking on greater importance in the communities where the Communal Educational Project (PEC) is consolidated. In addition, these pedagogical projects contribute to the socio-cultural strengthening of the communities and likewise feed back into the Educación Propia System. Working for these projects has also become an educational strategy that fosters completeness in the schools, as well as learning by doing, participation, and research.

From “Awareness” to “Research”

We have finally come to address a pedagogical reflection. Only recently, we have begun to ask ourselves: What has been—and continues to be—teaching and learning for us? This concern of asking ourselves about these definitions of teaching and learning from within our culture is the result of the professionalization processes of the teachers, with the understanding that this professionalization is not only training but specialization. The strengthening of

⁸¹ The name of a local tree that grows a type of beans.

⁸² Kwetad era o jigra, a traditionally woven bag previously used only by traditional healers.

cultural identity and the specialization of these teachers has sparked a greater interest in what a teacher does and has inspired a specific reflection about the teacher's daily practice, their knowledge, their know-how, and their teaching processes.

As we have seen previously, when the Program was initiated, the schools in the region passed down knowledge that was disconnected from everyday life in the *resguardos*, and they tried to inculcate traditional Christian values and form specific hygienic habits. Even into the mid-eighties, some teachers and leaders thought that putting the school to the service of the process consisted simply of changing the content, leaving the approaches for "learning" and "teaching" intact. Those leaders believed that education was about **indoctrinating**, giving repetitive courses of political training, memorizing rights and indigenous legislation, and teaching "the class struggle."

The PEB proposal, however, adopted a good portion of the ideas from popular education and the ideas of Brazilian Paulo Freire (1921-1997). Teaching was primarily about **raising awareness**—countering naïve and estranged thinking—to make way for critical ways of seeing. To learn was to unlearn, to change consciousness. But this change was not simply a mental change; rather, it implied taking a stance and committing oneself to a social and political process. Paulo Freire's method of raising awareness, with its generating words extracted from the same issues that the communities were living, was the guideline in this field: "The earth is our mother, that is why we must recover her"; "The rich make us pay *terraje*"; "We work to improve our economy." These and many other ideas were the fruit of daily experiences; they were the "generative phrases" that supported the creation of another way of thinking, and at the same time motivated us to know our rights.

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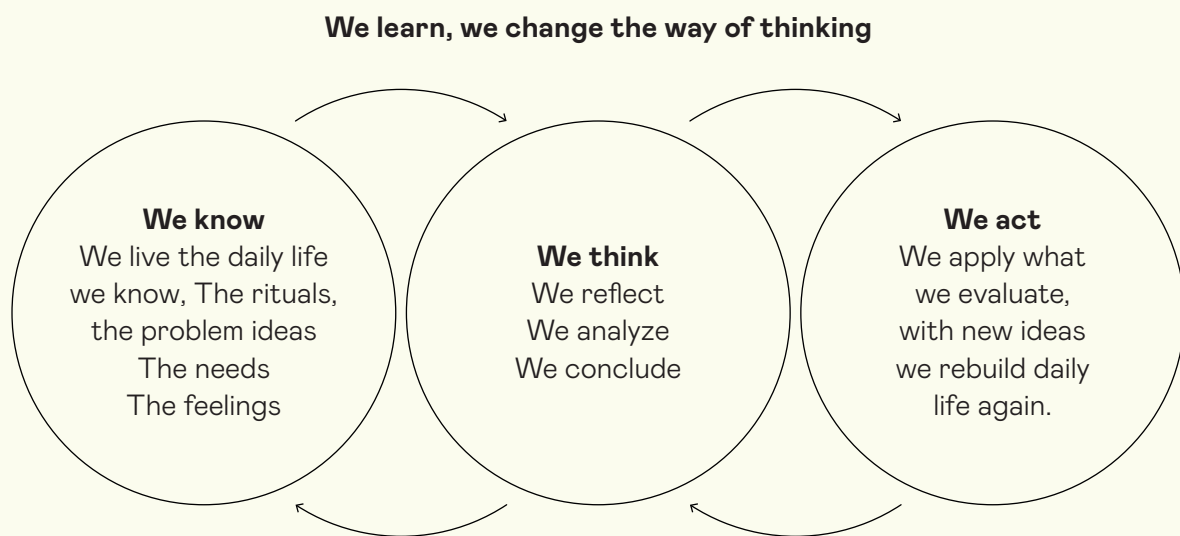
We also took the teachings of the "Active school" pedagogical movement into account, especially the proposals of Frenchman Célestin Freinet (1896-1966). Here, the child is seen as an active subject, and learning is based in experience, in practical things, and in living. Like for us, manual and productive labour is very important in Freinet's proposal for the "popular" school.

We soon realized at the Program that culture and education do not exhaust themselves in politics. Midway through the eighties—and continuing with cultural "recovery" and land "recovery" slogans—teaching and learning became only one thing: research. We teachers were given recorders and we went to speak with the elders, sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied by the children. The purpose was to recover, to collect, and especially to accumulate oral tradition, our culture. We recorded hundreds of hours on cassette tapes and on video, and we took thousands of photographs. We listened to the elders respectfully, but we were not prepared to systematize, organize, process, and analyze this great cluster of teachings. A large part of the collection efforts was lost as well because we did not take advantage of external contributions for systematization, and, on the other hand, we felt that the systematization work that external collaborators were doing was impoverishing the analysis. The children also learned "researching" by going along with the adults, carrying a small questionnaire of two or three questions on what we called "the cards". Teacher and student were not very different before the true teachers, the elders.

One of the elders that we "listened to" was Manuel Quintín Lame (1880 or 1883-1967) by reading his writings. In his writings, we learned to observe, listen, work, and contemplate Mother Nature. "Everybody speaks about their educational faculties. For that reason, I also must speak about the faculties where nature educated me" *Los pensamientos del Indio que se educó dentro de la Selva Colombiana (Thoughts of an Indian who was educated inside the Colombian Jungle)* (1939).

Today, we have not abandoned any of these ideas. Rather, we have matured and refined them. For example, research continues to be the pedagogical foundation of our schools, but now it is not simply about recovery and collection; instead, today we emphasize processing the collected data, confronting it, connecting it, and turning it into didactic material.

For us, knowledge is not purely an individual action. It is given in a communal context and it is for the benefit of the community. Thus, exchange and social support has grown (the PEBI counted on the support of organizations, NGOs, governmental entities, and national and international personalities), and we have also discovered and strengthened the links that unite use with nature. Each process that is started brings a consequence and a development in such a way that the end of today is the beginning of tomorrow. This constant dynamic configures a circular conception in the construction of knowledge. To illustrate this approach, we present the table of the magazine *Cxayuce* (No. 1, 1997 page 21):



From the beginning of the eighties we have concerned ourselves with recognizing our ways of teaching and learning and, based on these forms, understanding what it is to teach. Today, that reflection has begun to draw nearer to a propio concept of learning with the help and study of the language. The linguists Abelardo Ramos and Tulio Rojas developed the ideas that we follow and presented them in the 51st International Congress of Americanists (Santiago, Chile, 2003).

In Nasa Yuwe, learning is *piya*. *Piya-sa* is the person or animal that learns; *ka-pya'j-sa* is the person that teaches or the teacher that has the abilities to distribute knowledge or the arts of the culture. In Nasa Yuwe, the teacher builds himself up on learning, he is the one who makes learning possible.

Cultural life is like a web that intertwines different threads and paths that go in different directions and are related with knowing. *Um* (to weave) is a knowledge that one can access through the learning process; *mji* (work), as a manifestation of one form of knowledge is also a *piya* process; both, *um* and *mji* imply the demonstration of a skill or knowledge of a person, and it can be asserted about someone who is already an *umsa* (weaver) or *mjisa* (worker). They can, in turn, say "*umya'jiith*" ("I know how to weave"), "*mjiya'jiith*" ("I know how to work"); "knowing" in this sense is having the knowledge or the skill (A. Ramos and T. Rojas).

In another sense, a person who has carried out a ritual to gain knowledge is *nasa yuwe'sa*, and this *nasa yuwe'sa* should be accompanied by a *kapiya'jsa* (*wise Elder*) who will guide them on their process of learning. Explanation must be accompanied by example (in the sense of practical application in daily life); in fact, it is often more important to teach with an example than with the explanation itself. This companionship of an elder or *thé'sa* will guide them to *neesnxi*, which is learning that goes beyond what is sufficient or satisfactory (*âh*), a true growth or complete formation.

Today, we find ourselves facing the challenge of finding the most appropriate way for the two peaks of Nasa knowledge (*neesnxi*, *piyanxi*) to contribute to education and growth of the Nasa themselves in a balanced and harmonious way. We stand before four categories of the formative process that gives us language and culture:

<i>piyasa</i>	the novice / he who learns
<i>âlisa</i>	the enabled / he who attains efficacy
<i>thé'sa</i>	the mature / the older
<i>neesnxisa</i>	the fully formed ⁸³

These four categories are not a type of scale of knowledge or a linearity with prerequisites. These are elements that must be considered in an indigenous scholarly project, drawn from a vision of cultural richness (A. Ramos and T. Rojas).

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For the Nasa people, the way that life is conceived is symbolized in the language as *uus kaya't'i'sa*, “feeling and thinking of life with the heart”. *Uus* “identity” is also developed over this concept. In the same way, *umna* is the action for “weaving” and makes the memories, putting the *uus* (heart) in this action of thinking, of developing ideas, and permanent reflection of life. This action of feeling, of creating thoughts, of making history, working, weaving, living together, communicating – all are the very essence of our education, like the process of life. This assertion implies that all spaces and times we live in have the possibility to be transformed into formative moments, which are the foundation for building a propia pedagogy.

⁸³ “Fully formed” in this context refers one who is both physically and intellectually at the end of this process, having attained ancestral knowledge and wisdom.

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