

Traditional Mazatec Food and Indigenous Education Schools

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Summary

This article describes an approach taken in schools, classrooms and in the community to raise awareness of the impacts of the production and consumption of chatarra products³, or junk food, products on our health and that of the environment. Our intention in this article is to show how some Indigenous Education schools, located in the Sierra Mazateca Flores Magón highland in the state of Oaxaca, are seeking to implement the Plan for the Transformation of Education in Oaxaca (PTEO)⁴, and the Basic Document for the Education of Indigenous Peoples.

Key words

Basic Document, food, milpa, consumerism, gastronomic festivals.

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3. Chatarra products are those widely available commercial products that provide no nutritional value to people, but rather damage



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Introduction

Climate change and environmental deterioration threaten human existence, as we have been painfully experiencing as of late. We are faced with the challenge of finding solutions in our everyday activities, starting with the daily work of a farmer, a housewife or a student; hence the importance of owning and valuing the natural world around us.

Since 1994, through a thorough analysis of our teaching work, we agreed to recover the social practices of our community life and to carry out dialogical analysis activities within the classroom. In this case, our work was with the Indigenous Primary and Kindergarten Schools of the Sierra Mazateca in the state of Oaxaca.

the health, causing cavities, indigestion, obesity and malnutrition, among other health issues.

[4] Plan for the Transformation of Education in Oaxaca. The PTEO came out of an agreement at the Education Congress in Oaxaca representing Oaxacan teachers at 11 levels of education. This agreement consists of three programs and two systems and attempts to counteract the negative effects that traditional schools have had on communities and on people. Key issues include climate change, violence and the loss of values.

With the active participation of the school community, we were able to identify problems and strategic themes with special attention paid to our nutrition. These later become topics for study in the classroom as we recognized the milpa, the corn field, as the basis of Mazateca agriculture, highlighted the damage caused by the consumption of chatarra products and thought about how we could have an influence on reducing consumerism.

We have worked arduously, inside and outside the classroom and the school, through a series of foundational activities, ranging from the design of didactic materials and the construction of daily activities to the reconstruction and recovery of traditional ancestral recipes and the staging of gastronomic and corn demonstrations.

It was not an easy task, as it implied a broad recognition of the work of teachers and parents. A consultation was carried out to learn the viewpoints of the actors involved in the educational process, and to reach a consensus on the importance of contextualizing classroom work to improve the students' learning.



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In 2016, The Escuelas Unitarias Collective was first created, and over the course of several meetings, we analyzed our teaching work. We came up with the following outline, to work with community issues in the classrooms:

It is also important to mention that the program is open, which means that the educator is responsible for establishing the order in which the competencies will be addressed at their level. They are also free to select the topics or problems that interest the students to encourage their learning, as long as they are relevant to the linguistic and sociocultural context and to the competencies to be developed (2011 Preschool Program, p. 15).

Contextualizing community life

Over the course of several years, we have classified community events into themes and sub-themes. Based on that, we design the activities for each educational

level and grade, adapting them to the current curriculum. We never lose sight of the competencies desired at graduation and the expected outcomes that students must achieve throughout a school year and the different grades that make up an educational level.

It took great effort to get to where we are now. The process of building and rebuilding something that is not written is not simple at all. It requires connecting the context in which the school is embedded with the school's daily activities. A pedagogy of conceptual, procedural and attitudinal analysis that addresses real problems is required.

Themes are developed throughout the school terms, according to the seasonal rhythms of the community. They are complemented with civic, cultural and social activities. The calendar of themes is not fixed, since it is updated yearly according to the conditions and needs of the students, and parents' opinions are always included.

Creation and development of school activities

Once the parents are onboard and we have defined the possible themes according to the context and community life, it is now time for the teacher to use their technical skills to design didactic activities with the use of tools such as software, drawing, design and even presentation skills.

Activities are designed considering the degree of difficulty for each level and according to the community context. For instance, when studying the topic of the milpa and its products, the first graders would color the image of a corn field, the second graders would also order sets of milpas from 1 to 4, cut out the numbers and paste them where they correspond and the third graders would also write the word “milpa” after each number, in Spanish as well as in Mazatec, aside from putting the word together in a movable alphabet.

Since we have never received education and/or training regarding the design of school activities, it is not an easy task. We improvise with the tools at our disposal, and we resort to what we have learned on our own after years of teaching.

Conclusions

Currently, excessive consumption of food that is not favorable to our health is a very serious problem in our society. The lack of awareness and poor nutritional choices of our people have made the development of children, especially in our indigenous communities, very deficient. Because of the importance of and concern around this issue, it became necessary to raise awareness and to have an ongoing conversation with parents about the need to consume our own healthy products.

It is important that teachers increase the quality and effectiveness of education on this matter. Starting from the first levels of preschool education, they need to promote an understanding of and respect for Mother Nature. It is important to instill in children knowledge,

skills, habits, values and capabilities that will stay with them.

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