

“Cartonero” books: a collaborative pedagogical alternative for revitalizing indigenous languages

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ABSTRACT

Teaching indigenous languages in early childhood education, preschool and elementary school is challenging, particularly due to the lack of specialized didactic resources and materials. Typically, they do not correspond to communities' language, their language varieties, the students' proficiency level of language or their sociocultural context. However, teachers from different indigenous communities in State of Mexico face this difficulty by creating their “cartonero” books. They are crucial for revitalizing their languages: Matlatzinca, Mazahua, Náhuatl, Otomí and Tlahuica, thanks to their unique characteristics. They are the result of a collaborative process involving the collection, writing and illustration of traditional or new communities' narratives and stories, as well as creating handmade books. Thus, these materials support language teaching within the learners' own cultural and social framework, strengthening the link between linguistic knowledge and local context. This pedagogical practice is one of the most significant findings from the diagnostic, which is the first stage of a Participatory Action Research project conducted with teachers of indigenous education. To develop part of this stage, twenty-five teachers participated in focus groups to talk about their main challenges, needs and alternatives solutions they had implemented. Collected data were analyzed and discussed with teachers, highlighting the potential of “cartonero” books as a relevant didactic material for language revitalization and grounded education.

Keywords: didactic materials; indigenous education; language teaching; language revitalization; Participatory Action Research