

Agents of resistance in Indigenous schools in Baja California: the case of cultural promoters

Agentes de Resistencia en escuelas indígenas de Baja California: el caso de las promotoras culturales

Agentes de Resistência em Escolas Indígenas da Baixa Califórnia: O Caso dos Promotores Culturais

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Abstract

This paper is part of a larger project that examines how indigenous primary schools in Baja California, Mexico, managed and operated as they returned to in-person classes. Here we delve into the distinctive roles and activities of three Yuman indigenous women, who work as cultural promoters in these schools. The data was collected through in-depth interviews with the participants between 2022 and 2024. To interpret the data, a qualitative content analysis was used, using categories from Freire's work on critical consciousness and Giroux's theory on the resistance of school agents. The results indicate that the participants are aware of how hegemonic conditions derived from Western culture (and other types of domination, such as organized crime) affect their communities. They also recognize the urgency of preserving their cultural elements and see themselves as vital transmitters of these aspects. It is noteworthy that the participants engaged in critical reflection on their roles within the community, as well as the roles of authorities in preserving Native communities and the policies implemented to this end. The participants also describe how they carry out their work, which often occurs in situations of disadvantage related to being Indigenous in northern Mexico and living in rural areas.

Keywords: Indigenous education, cultural promoters, theory of resistance in education, pedagogical management, school community.

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Resumen

Este manuscrito es parte de un proyecto más amplio que analiza la gestión y operación cómo las escuelas primarias indígenas en Baja California, México, al regresar a clases presenciales. Aquí, se profundiza en roles y actividades distintivos de tres mujeres indígenas yumanas, quienes trabajan como promotoras culturales en estas escuelas. Los datos se recopilaron mediante entrevistas a profundidad con las participantes entre 2022 y 2024. Para interpretar los datos, se empleó análisis de contenido cualitativo, utilizando categorías del trabajo de Freire sobre la conciencia crítica y la teoría de Giroux sobre la resistencia de los agentes escolares. Los resultados indican que las participantes son conscientes de cómo las condiciones hegemónicas derivadas de la cultura occidental (y otras formas de dominación, como el crimen organizado) afectan a sus comunidades. Reconocen la urgencia de preservar sus elementos culturales y se consideran transmisoras vitales de estos aspectos. Las participantes reflexionaron críticamente su rol dentro de la comunidad, el papel de las autoridades en la preservación de las comunidades nativas y las políticas implementadas para este fin. Asimismo, se describe el cumplimiento de su labor que, en situaciones de desventaja relacionadas con el ser indígena en el norte de México y ubicarse en ruralidad.

Palabras clave: Educación indígena, promotoras culturales, teoría de la resistencia en educación, gestión pedagógica, comunidad escolar.

Resumo

Este manuscrito faz parte de um projeto maior que examina a gestão, a organização e a operação de escolas primárias indígenas em sua transição para aulas presenciais na Baixa Califórnia, México. Aqui, nos aprofundamos nos papéis e atividades distintivos de três mulheres indígenas Yuman, que trabalham como promotoras culturais nessas escolas. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevistas em profundidade com as participantes entre 2022 e 2024. Para interpretar os dados, utilizou-se uma análise de conteúdo qualitativa, utilizando categorias da obra de Freire sobre consciência crítica e da teoria de Giroux sobre a resistência dos agentes escolares. Os resultados indicam que as participantes estão cientes de como as condições hegemônicas derivadas da cultura ocidental (e outros tipos de dominação, como o crime organizado) afetam suas comunidades. Elas também reconhecem a urgência de preservar seus elementos culturais e se veem como transmissoras vitais desses aspectos. Destaca-se que as participantes fazem reflexões críticas sobre o papel das autoridades na preservação das comunidades nativas, bem como sobre as políticas que têm sido implementadas para esse fim. As promotoras elaboram propostas de interesse para a preservação, apesar de suas propostas não sempre serem bem recebidas.

Palavras-chave: Educação indígena, promotores culturais, teoria da resistência na educação, gestão pedagógica, comunidade escolar.

Introduction

This writing aims to describe and analyze the experiences and insights of three cultural promoters working within Indigenous schools. It delves into the social, political, and community contexts that shape their efforts. The study is part of a larger project that explores the dynamics of organization, management, and evolution of elementary schools serving Yuman ethnic groups in north-west Mexico during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The participants' discourses were analyzed using the constructs proposed by Freire (2013), particularly the concept of Critical Consciousness. Additionally, Giroux's ideas (2013; 2006; 2002; 1998) regarding resistance practices and the limitations that arise in the context of the dominant culture as a reaction to that resistance were also used for the analysis.

But who are the cultural promoters? The *Instituto Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas* [2020] on its official website stated that a cultural promoter must be an "Indigenous or Afro-Mexican person of legal age, who maintains links with the community cultural processes relevant to his or her native town, preferably bilingual, a Spanish speaker, and preferably a speaker of an Indigenous language" (INPI, 2020b, requirements section).

In the same document, INPI outlined several requirements for candidates aspiring to be cultural promoters: (a) The candidate must identify as an indigenous person and be an active member of their community. (b) They should be fluent in both Spanish and their native language. (c) The candidate must have experience in community work. (d) A deep respect for their community's culture is essential. (e) It is preferred that the candidate has completed relevant studies. (f) They should be able to meet INPI requirements and effectively engage with both their own community and others. (g) Lastly, the candidate must have time available to fulfill the role. (INPI, 2020b). Candidates can be proposed by their community, and INPI will select individuals based on these criteria, as in the case of the participants in this study.

According to information provided by an INPI informant in personal communication, each of the five Yuman villages with an elementary school had a cultural promoter in the school year 2024-2025.

This paper provides a preliminary overview of the actions, experiences, and significance of a formalized agent in Yuman educational contexts. In-depth interviews were used to gather data, and responses were registered in field notes, rather than through audio recordings. The data primarily consist of participants' perspectives, opinions, and insights regarding their personal trajectories, teaching practices, and communities. Consequently, the findings and conclusions are limited to this information from the participants themselves, with some theoretically based interpretations by the authors, in order to propose points for reflection and future research. However, this serves as an initial point for more comprehensive exploration of the role of the cultural promoter, a figure that operated and made contributions even before receiving the official support through this governmental program.

According to the 2020 population census, more than 23 million people residing in Mexico identify as members of an Indigenous group; The country officially recognizes 68 Indigenous peoples, each associated with a native language (INEGI, 2020a). However, these native languages are not monolithic; they encompass a total of 364 variants (CONAZA, 2023). This remarkable linguistic and cultural diversity underpins Mexico's declaration as a multicultural nation and shapes its ongoing efforts to preserve and promote cultural plurality (DOF, 2025).

The Indigenous education subsystem was established in 1978 in a more recent version to respect, promote, and preserve the languages and cultural heritage of Indigenous peoples (Pérez-Castro, 2004).

Mexican Indigenous education subsystems exist in 24 out of the 32 federal states, including the state of Baja California (Secretaría de Cultura, 2019). Evidently, each region has contextual singularities involving the relationship between schools and the educational subsystems that may require a particular approach to be understood.

Several native groups still survive and resist in northern Baja California. Each one has a distinctive history and development due to different aspects: (a) The desertic or semi-arid environment, for the most part, although with several spaces of more fertile fields, determined their lifestyles to a great extent. These conditions led them to become nomads rather than sedentary, as they relied on hunting, fishing, and gathering to obtain food. (b) The organization of communities initially resulted from dividing them into families or lineages that supported each other at certain times of the year. (c) Each ethnic group developed specific language varieties and traditions (Garduño, 2019; 2010; González y Gabayet, 2019; Navarro y Cruz, 2015).

The arrival of Western culture in these lands had a limited impact during the colonial era, although there were attempts to instill European ideas and traditions. The nomadism to which the groups were accustomed was a means of resistance (Garduño, 2010). However, in independent Mexico, mainly at the beginning of the 20th century, with post-revolutionary ideals of federal integration, as well as the distribution of lands, among other factors, the Yuman groups were forced to settle in ejidos managed by themselves; these impositions caused changes in several aspects of their traditional lifestyle (Navarro y Cruz, 2015). Furthermore, the discrimination to which they have been subjected, the migrations, and some of the inefficient policies aimed at preserving the cultural legacy of these human groups have reduced the population of these groups and even put their languages, traditions, and customs at risk of disappearing (Camarena et al, 2013; Hurtado-Saa et al, 2013; Navarro y Cruz, 2015; Velasco y Rentería, 2019). These kinds of policies, according to some international organizations, have not focused on each of the indigenous groups, as was seen in the north. Instead, they were designed for the native peoples of southern and central Mexico, who lived under different governance, cultural, and contextual conditions (International Amnesty, 2024; ACNUR, 2009).

Currently, according to the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía* [INEGI] in the census of 2020, the population that uses one of the Yuman ethnolinguistic family's languages in Baja California is: Cucapah: 176 speakers; Kiliwa: 76 speakers; Kumiai: 495 speakers; and Pa Ipai: 231 speakers. Nevertheless, Vinogradov and Sánchez-Fernández (2025) presented a study that considers Ku'hal as an independent language, arguing that it could also be a dialect of the same ethnolinguistic family, due to its grammatical and sociolinguistic characteristics. The people who speak this language are around 20 individuals, and they reside in Santa Catarina, a small town where people mainly identify as Pa Ipai (as one of the participants of this study).

Additionally, the agricultural lands in the north of the peninsula have attracted day laborers from southern Mexico, especially from Oaxaca, Guerrero, Chiapas, Puebla, and Michoacán, among other states. A large number of these people also possess other ethnic identities, including Mixtecs, Zapotecs, Mixes, Triquis, and Purépechas. They and their families have settled in various parts of the state permanently, bringing with them their language, traditions, and customs, which has resulted in great diversity in different social spheres, particularly in the educational system (Garduño et al., 2011).

According to the *Instituto Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas* [INPI] (2020a), in Baja California, over one hundred thousand people identified themselves as members of some migrant ethnic group. In comparison, the Yuman population barely exceeded two thousand people. Besides that, as explained below, not all of them (Yuman, and Indigenous migrants) are speakers of their ethnic language.

In line with the population and housing census conducted by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) in 2020, the number of speakers of an indigenous language in Baja California was 49,130 individuals (including the speakers of Yuman Languages that have already been mentioned in this section). The most spoken language was Mixtec, with 43.2% of speakers, followed by Zapotec, with 11.8%. Migrant populations introduced both of these languages.

Regarding formal education, there are seven school zones for the Yuman children and six that mainly serve migrant indigenous children. The school zone for Yuman groups consists of five elementary schools and six preschools. All of them are multigrade schools³, except for one that is a fully organized preschool⁴. The school zone headquarters is located in the city of Ensenada, and the educational centers are dispersed within a radius of 40 to 287 km from the administration office. Most schools can be found in the municipality of Ensenada, except for two that are located in the municipalities of Mexicali and San Quintin (CEEI, 2021).

The Yuman groups have been the subject of various studies with different approaches. Some recent studies, from an anthropological, historical-sociological, and cultural revitalization perspective, reveal the complex nature of their societies. They describe their cultural elements and the forms of transmission amidst tradition and innovation. They analyze processes of resistance and negotiation in the face of colonial prerogatives and the ongoing efforts for their recognition. This brief empirical review provides an overview of the contexts to which the participants of this study belong, where they were trained, and where they carry out their functions.

García-Gutiérrez's study (2024) focuses on describing some basic features of the mobiliza-

3 Multigrade schools in Mexico "are those where all teachers instruct students in more than one grade level" (Garfias, 2019). Each multigrade school has two or three teachers; in unitary schools, there is one teacher and one group of students of different grades. These types of schools are primarily found in rural areas, with the main reasons being the number of students, the dispersed population, and their distance from the municipal headquarters. A notable feature of these schools is that there is no formal headteacher; instead, one of the teachers must assume management responsibilities in addition to their teaching duties.

4 Fully organized schools (elementary or preschools) are educational centers with at least one teacher and one student group in each grade; besides, there is a formal headteacher who leads the school management (DOF, 2024a).

tion of the Cucapah people throughout their known history, always around the natural changes in the aquifers of the Gulf of California Delta, as well as their demands for these lands and their cultural practices that recent economic and environmental trends have limited.

An approach to members who stand out and are recognized within their communities for their knowledge of the language, history, and tradition of the Cucapah, Kiliwa, and Pa Ipai peoples was the study of González and Gabayet (2019), who, through dialogues with the so-called custodians, recount symbolic elements related to the cultural landscape shared by these peoples.

Garduño, in 2001, carried out a study to analyze how new social networks have been configured in a border context to create forms of organization that resist assimilation or extinction, despite the diaspora they have suffered.

In 2010, the same author presented a study about the Yuman's peaceful resistance to colonization through practices such as mobilization or nomadism and temporary permanence in the spaces of the old missions, which passively prevented the forced integration into the Western culture.

Later, in 2024, Garduño also analyzed different cultural practices of the Yuman peoples and the role in their preservation by the younger populations, who, at the same time, are bearers of innovation and transformation.

Navarro and Cruz (2015) analyzed the dispossession processes of lands that have historically belonged to two of this family's ethnic groups, as well as the struggles they have sustained for their recognition and claim in recent years.

In a project to rescue the Kumiai language in a community variant, Acosta (2021) described the experience as a self-reflection exercise practiced by its native speakers to enhance their agency in preserving their own language, the explicit manifestation of their linguistic rights to recognize and raise their awareness on the need for their intervention to attain those aims.

An analytical and evaluative study regarding a Yuman language seeking recognition was conducted by Vinogradov and Sánchez-Fernández (2025). Their work involved a phylogenetic comparison of two variants using statistical methods, along with grammatical and sociolinguistic analysis, to argue for recognizing Ku'hal as a distinct language within the same ethnolinguistic family. Consequently, efforts are needed to bring it to visibility.

In the educational field, Tinajero et al. (2024) analyzed the state of indigenous education in Baja California. The research focused on Yuman and migrant communities, highlighting key characteristics of the educational services provided. One notable finding is that there were only 150 primary school students from Yuman communities, out of more than 7,000 children enrolled in indigenous schools. Consequently, the five elementary schools in Yuman towns are structured as multigrade, clearly reflecting the unique characteristics that this entails.

And, about an educational policy, Castañeda-Sánchez and Tinajero (2020) studied how a management-oriented national policy is recontextualized in the elementary schools of Yuman

communities. The generic guidelines associated with vices and poor administration from both the promoting organizations and the schools themselves have more clearly highlighted the inequalities and difficulties of these centers.

As can be seen, the interest in these communities in the Mexican northwest has produced research with different approaches and for different purposes. This has contributed to the understanding of their subsistence processes over the centuries, as well as their struggles and adaptations to a globalized and globalizing world.

The cultural promoter in Yuman schools fulfills the function of teaching the ethnic group's mother language to preschool, elementary, and, in some cases, middle and high school students who are part of the community. The INPI recognized their role in 2020 and has granted them financial compensation for their work, in addition to supporting them in the schools where they work.

Theoretical concepts for analysis

The main conceptual foundations offered by the perspective of the micropolitics of organizations, proposed by Ball (1987), explain that this type of space—schools—develops its own dynamics, forms of organization, and functioning that, unfortunately, tend to be endemic. This perspective explores concepts such as power, control, influence, and the diversity of personal and collective interests of educational actors within and around each school establishment: Each school has its own micropolitics.

Similarly, Ball et al. (2012) offered a set of tools to analyze the implementation of policies or official provisions in each educational establishment, where there is a unique micropolitics. The regulations are recontextualized and interpreted by the agents of the center in their particular context, which determines to a great extent how they will result in particular actions. The agents play the role of narrators of the policies and communicate the policies to other educational community members. Given that, some can be enthusiastic and go further to convince others of their benefits, but others can be critical and take different positions regarding the regulations, their forms of operation, their benefits, and their specific relationship with the group.

Cultural promoters, being part of the community and, in some cases, such as those reported in this text, fulfill their work within the schools themselves. Thus, they are also agents of the recontextualization of the policies dictated by the high levels of the educational system. Therefore, in the face of these policies, they position themselves in any of the aforementioned roles.

To understand their role, the interviews conducted with the participants were analyzed by using a perspective considered to hold a more pedagogical tone: the Theory of Resistance.

One of the leading exponents of this theoretical approach was the pedagogue Paulo Freire, whose theory of critical consciousness responded to the type of analysis required to work with

part of the information collected in this work. Critical consciousness implies a sophisticated form of reflection of the individual about his own environment, what happens at the moment when he lives, and the role he must play (Freire, 2013).

Another proposal that has been useful for approaching the information obtained is that of Henry Giroux, who proposed that there are processes of resistance on the part of individuals, specifically within schools, against the dynamics of social and cultural reproduction imposed by the ideological apparatuses within which the school is found. There, an elite or hegemonic culture establishes a system of values that allows the perpetuity of lifestyles (Giroux, 1998).

Giroux (1998; 2002; 2013), Korol (2006), and Matos de Souza et al. (2018) warned of the danger of the invasion of the mentality of public management, market reasoning, and supply-demand in the functioning of public institutions that include education, under the arguments of economic growth proposed by neoliberalism. Such propositions promote, in sum, the generation of individuals at the service of the needs of the global, competitive, and wealth-producing imaginary. This entails the establishment of alienated minds assimilated to the ideal of large corporations, under selfish competitiveness that admits only that way of thinking, coupled with the loss of the common and collective good for one, replaced by greater and global good (the economic), changing the identity and values.

Certainly, the theory of resistance emphasizes the potentially emancipatory role of learners in the face of potentially alienating pedagogical dynamics. It also emphasizes the role of educators who have conceptions and meanings that, under ideal conditions, can generate reactions that confront said dynamics, along with their discourses, resources, and structures, to carry out processes of deconstruction and reconstruction, that is, resistance (Villamizar, 2020).

As Giroux (2006) mentioned, the positions of resistance evident within educational spaces may come not only from the teachers or the students themselves but are observed in all the agents involved in multiple ways since the forms of power and their structures are multiple.

The theoretical tools proposed from the different perspectives of the Theory of Resistance are helpful in making evident the systems and mechanisms of oppression presented in the contexts. Above all, they allow an interpretive approach to the forms of coping and more. Still, in the author's words, "they offer paths with which to articulate knowledge for practical purposes, interposed by the imperatives of social justice and by sustained forms of education" (Giroux, 2006, p. 31). The approach can go beyond interpretation through an intervention that seeks to transform spaces (Hirsch & Rio, 2015; Villamizar, 2020).

A category observed in the reading of the texts and that serves as a reference for the analysis presented here is that of critical consciousness. Through this, the subject delves into the intentions behind the official and the visible at first, to unmask later the intention of the action itself, where its work is directed, and what its scope is.

Freire (2013) proposes this form of consciousness, in which the individual has transcen-

ded the consciousness of the merely biological, as well as the “naive” consciousness, which simplifies realities and gives them controversial and comfortable explanations. According to the author, critical consciousness implies having gone through a critical educational process (which does not always refer to the official institution’s offer). Instead, it allows a reading of the historical and social context and a dialogic interpretation so that the person not only remains in it but observes him or herself as part of that space and with the capacity to influence it.

Faced with the above, a second category adopted here is that of resistance practices. Such practices are not necessarily frank and open struggles but actions that aim for individual, collective, and social emancipation aimed at how subjectivity is involved in social life. They offer the possibility of a change concerning what is institutionalized by hegemony or a dominant group, even when these show incipient productivity in this regard (López & Olivar, 2024).

Besides that, some facts oppose resistance, such as accommodation and conformism, which, as the author defined, are “oppositional behaviors that suppress contradictions and simultaneously merge with the logic of ideological domination, instead of challenging it” (Giroux, 1998, p. 146).

Methodological approach

The project to which this study belongs was developed from a qualitative approach. It involved contact with three school communities belonging to the Yuman groups which are part of the same school zone, as previously mentioned.

Study context

The study selected three cases based on the following conditions: a) They represent different Yuman ethnic groups (Cucapah, Kumiai and Pa Ipai); b) They work in schools located in towns with a similar population size; c) These schools are situated at a significant distance from school zone headquarters office they belong to; d) Their schools are considered of incomplete organization (multigrade or unitary schools). The information reported in this section was obtained during visits for the research field work and corresponds to the school year mentioned.

School A is an elementary school located in a Kumiai village of 110 residents (INPI, 2025) that is approximately 62 km away from the municipal seat and the school supervision headquarters. The establishment is situated within an old school community shelter constructed during the Echeverría administration in the mid-1970s of the last century, as part of a policy of bilingual education and Hispanicization aimed at indigenous populations (Chávez, 2022). In addition to the school’s classrooms, kitchen, and dining room, one of the spaces in the old community shelter serves as a community multipurpose room. In the 2022–2023 school year, there was a single group with 20 children from first to sixth grade (unitary school). The school received food support provided by the INPI and was affiliated with the “School is Ours” (LEEN) program. This program provided resources for activities during the extended schedule, which is three hours longer than the regular schedule (SEP, 2024).

The headteacher of this school belongs to the Pa Ipai ethnic group, which is different from the people of that village. She was responsible (without official designation) for managing the community school and overseeing the administrative functions of a school extension located 15 km away in an agricultural camp. She then had thirty years of experience as a teacher. Additionally, two mothers of the village also worked as support staff for the community kitchen; both were Kumiai. One of the ladies also served as the teacher's assistant during the extended day. Furthermore, it had the presence of the cultural promoter.

School B is situated in a Cucapah community of 147 inhabitants (INPI, 2025), 59 km from its municipal seat and 280 km from the school supervision headquarters. It is located next to a state highway, near the bus stop. The community museum, the health center, the *telesecundaria*⁵, and other communal spaces are in front of School B. It was also founded under the policy of bilingual education coverage. During the 2022–2023 school year, there were 33 children in the school, divided into two groups. The establishment also has the INPI community dining room, which *telesecundaria* students attend as well. The school was also part of the LEEN program.

The school's teaching staff consisted of two regular teachers (multigrade school). One of the teachers, of Cucapah origin, had been unofficially in charge of Principal activities for 28 years. She also served a group of children from first to third grade. The second teacher, of Kumiai origin, had been working at the same school for 20 years. In addition, another teacher came to the campus three days a week during regular hours to support the reading improvement of some children during the school year 2022–2023. Three people collaborated in the dining room, and, of course, a cultural promoter was present.

School C, serving the Pa Ipai community, is located about 105 km from the municipal seat and the school supervision headquarters. This town is nestled in a large desert area between the San Pedro Martir Mountains and the Juarez Mountains. The population is 190 inhabitants (INPI, 2025). The school is also situated in an old school community shelter, created under the same conditions as the shelters of School A and School B.

The elementary school's population consisted of 33 children and a teacher at the start of the 2024–2025 school year. A retired teacher assisted with some activities until another teacher was assigned to the school in October 2024. At the time of the interview, there were two official elementary teachers for that communal setting. The INPI community dining room was at the school, and there, students from primary and secondary schools received their daily food allowance. The Pa Ipai school was part of the LEEN program, which provided an additional food ration for children (mid-afternoon).

5 In Mexico, Telesecundaria is a pedagogical model in which classes are supported by 15-minute television programs for each subject. After watching the programs, a teacher supervises the learning activities. These schools are usually located in communities with small populations. Unlike traditional middle schools, where a different teacher lectures each subject, in Telesecundaria, a single teacher teaches all subjects (DGA, 2020).

Method, technique, and instrument

The research method used is the case study, which, according to Stake (1999), has the following characteristics: a) it is collective, as it there are three educational centers; b) it is intrinsic, since there is interest in understanding the contexts and circumstances of each of the cases; c) and it is instrumental as the aim it is to identify and describe how the normative processes given are recontextualized, in this case, to schools of the educational system of this type that have included or intended to include the figure of cultural promoter as part of the organization and pedagogical management of schools.

The information analyzed and reported in this text was obtained through in-depth interviews (Guest *et al.*, 2017) conducted between May 2022 and November 2024.

The interview script that was used included questions that explored the following aspects: a) trajectory: the origins of the promoter were explored, along with their previous work in favor of the cultural promotion of the community to which they belong; b) training: inquiry about the learning acquired for teaching the language, as well as the customs and practices of the community; c) experiences as a cultural promoter: discussion about the work done with INPI, the resources used for teaching students, and the time dedicated to these activities; d) the relationship with the school and the community: functions performed within the establishment, collaborative work with the teachers, and involvement with students' families.

The interview sessions of case A and case B took place in the homes of each informant. In both cases, they did not permit the conversations to be recorded, so the corpus recovered and analyzed corresponds to log notes prepared during and after the meetings. In case C, the interview occurred in a public place in downtown Ensenada; in this case, the informant permitted the conversation to be recorded; however, notes were taken during the dialogue so that the corpus analyzed was in the same conditions as the other two cases.

Likewise, a professor and INPI official with a long history of working with the Yuman communities was consulted for the purpose of confirming certain historical and social information about the towns where the cultural promoters live. In this case, log notes were also taken.

The data was processed using the qualitative content analysis technique (Mayring, 2014), based on the categories already explained by the Theory of Resistance.

Results

This section is organized as follows: Initially, the trajectories of the informants are described. Then, the codes in the field notes are presented according to the categories identified a priori in the revised texts of the theory of resistance. Then, the information provided is narrated and discussed, considering the theory, and some final considerations are presented.

Trajectories

Cultural promoter of School A: Verónica (pseudonym) is a Kumiai woman. She is a mother and grandmother who has lived in the town all her life. Her house is located one kilometer from the campus, where she has a small farm. Since 2020, she has worked for INPI as a cultural promoter in the multipurpose room, and she also used her home for teaching meetings with other children who do not attend the village school. During the pandemic, she herself was responsible for creating brochures and distributing them to her students.

Veronica not only worked as a cultural promoter at the school, but she also held other roles as an artisan and a legal translator of the Kumiai language. Her efforts had earned her recognition within the community, and she had received requests from INPI to translate documents. She wanted to emphasize that her work did not begin when INPI hired her, as she had been promoting the cultural legacy for a long time prior to that.

Veronica did not possess a teaching degree, but instead had empirical teaching knowledge. Her own community selected her to fulfill this role for the benefit of the school and village.

Cultural promoter of school B: Laura (pseudonym) is of Cucapah origin. She mentioned that although, she is of Cucapah descent, she did not consider herself fluent in the community language; for this reason, about ten years ago, she had approached a community of the same ethnic group in Sonora to improve her language skills and feel qualified to pass on the cultural legacy. Although she did not have full command of the language and did not hold a teaching degree, she declared that she had learned most of the uses and customs and made an effort to impart them to the younger generations. After being hired by INPI, she began to carry out her work in the school cafeteria during regular class hours. She taught elementary and middle school students.

Laura mentioned that before the pandemic and before she started working with the INPI, she gathered a group of children at the cachanilla arbor (a special space used as a social and ceremonial meeting center for the people of this community) in her house to teach them Cucapah songs and dances. However, the COVID confinement restricted this activity. The Cucapah community selected Laura to fulfill the cultural promoter role.

Some of the aspects of her teaching included using simple materials to help children pronounce Cucapah words. Laura also maintained communication with the community where she had gone to improve her knowledge of the language. Using the WhatsApp application, she sent them audio files of the children's pronunciation to evaluate and improve their elocution.

Cultural promoter of school C: Josefina (pseudonym) is of Pa Ipai origin and began working to promote the community's language and culture several years earlier, thanks to the encouragement of family members.

Josefina completed her Law degree in 2024 and intended to pursue a master's degree in Education, which would allow her to improve her skills in promoting the cultural elements of her community. She also mentioned that she has sought to stay up to date, learn new teaching strategies, and discover resources and teaching materials through online resources. This has been a

greater effort for her, but she has felt very motivated to do so, unlike people of her age, she said, who have been content with completing only primary education.

Regarding her work as a cultural promoter, she indicated that the INPI provided her with financial compensation; however, it could not be considered a salary because she did not receive social benefits. She accepted because it is something she enjoyed; it allowed her to teach children so they would not forget or lose their own culture, but rather carry it with them for life.

She also said that she has sought out online tools (for example, videos) to help her students learn about and remember various cultural elements, such as dances and songs in the Pa Ipai language, and even audiovisual materials with a strong connection to the children themselves, such as documentaries featuring their relatives or people they knew.

There were 76 children in her Pa Ipai language and culture teaching group, as they were not only from the community itself but also from nearby villages with diverse ethnic origins, including Triqui, Mixtec, and Yaqui, among others, the children of migrant agricultural workers. She described it as a multicultural group.

Mariana (pseudonym), the person who collaborated in confirming some data from the Yuman communities mentioned here, has been an INPI official for nearly 40 years. During this time, she has worked closely with the Yuman communities and has developed strong relationships with their members. The INPI, initially established in 1948 as the National Indigenous Institute (INI), underwent a name change to the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI) in 2003, and it was retitled again in 2019 to the current name. Since its inception, the INPI has been the government agency for engaging with indigenous populations nationwide. Its policies have evolved from seeking the integration of native people into the concept of “Mexican citizenship” to recognition and attempts at inclusion under the right of self-determination guaranteed in the national constitution (CDI, 2012; INPI, 2018).

Analytical level based on categories

As already mentioned, the information was analyzed using specific categories derived from the perspective of the resistance experienced within school establishments. These categories included: a) signs of critical consciousness, b) resistance practices, and c) accommodation and conformism.

The first category is called “signs of critical consciousness.” Critical consciousness, as defined by Freire, involves more than just a perception of the context; it requires abstraction, understanding, analysis, recognition of the role being played, and consideration of the potential for generating change within it. This conception led to the naming of the corresponding codes.

The category has two dimensions: one reflecting the participants’ environment and the other self-critical reflection. This is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1.
Category "Signs of Critical Consciousness"

Dimensions	Codes
Reflection of the environment	Awareness of the extinction of the cultural legacy The commodification of cultural legacy Government disinterest in ethnic groups Contradictions of the Dominant Ideology Failure of Indigenous education Absorption of crime
Self-critical reflection	Self-perception as a promoter of change Need for improvement in teaching Self-perception of a fighter for the rights of the people to which she belongs

Source: own elaboration

The practices of resistance carried out through pedagogical action become apparent through reflective consciousness. This awakening does not remain confined to oneself but is communicated to others, particularly learners, to encourage them to explore their reality with the goal of collective emancipation as a community (Ortega, 2009).

On the other hand, accommodation and conformism are present in adverse scenarios, such as those threatened by the absorption of great generalizing and alienable structures (economic, political, social). Faced with these discouraging conditions, it can be tempting for people to simply give up and yield (Santamaría-Rodríguez et al., 2019).

Table 2 presents the codes corresponding to each of these categories described above.

Table 2.

Categories "resistance practices" and "accommodation and conformation"

Categories	Codes
Resistance practices	Promotion of cultural legacy
	Proposals for educational practices
	Demonstration of injustices
Accommodation - Conformation	Fear of retaliation
	Events that interrupt actions
	Waste of paperwork and bureaucracy
	Disengagement from the community

Source: own elaboration

The codes served as a guide for narrating the findings, which are described in the following section.

Descriptive level

Concerning the three categories, the three participants reflected on their roles as cultural promoters within the school. They discussed their personal journeys before becoming cultural promoters and were also asked about their thoughts on the function they perform and their work within the educational establishment. Three promoters, Laura, Verónica, and Josefina, elaborated on their responses. The limited information in the codes mentioned in the previous section is described below.

Signs of Critical Consciousness

Laura talked about the cultural heritage of her community. Much to her regret, she considers that the ancestral knowledge of the communities has often become a commercial commodity. Even though some people in the community have a good understanding of the language and traditions, there is no genuine promotion. Instead, they are exploited for other purposes, such as obtaining resources in exchange for showcasing cultural elements.

Verónica reflected on the traditional practices of Indigenous communities, such as the ball game called *piak* and the songs and dances of the Kumiai people. She believes that these practices are sometimes incorporated into educational or government programs aimed at preserving native cultures, but they are not always carried out with the original sense of honor and solemnity intended by the ancestors. Veronica feels that instead of offering a real representation of these cultural elements, distorted interpretations are presented, merely to fulfill an external cultural agenda.

Regarding Indigenous education, Verónica considers that this system has not been successful because it has not encouraged the authentic teaching of the native languages, as well as the preservation of customs and traditions. Her exact words were: “It is a failed system”. In her view, this continues to put the Kumiai cultural legacy in danger of disappearing.

Verónica’s opinion is primarily based on the inadequate promotion of teachers from her ethnic group. Instead, teachers from other ethnic groups are sent to her community’s school simply because they belong to the Indigenous education system; even if they do not speak the language or have knowledge of the worldview and cultural elements of the group, they are teaching, at least not enough to transmit it. In fact, at Verónica’s community school, the elementary teacher is from Pa Ipai group, not the Kumiai group.

Josefina reflected on her motivations for pursuing her career and her desire to promote her community’s legacy. She said she is aware of the “academic disadvantages” of rural communities, particularly Indigenous communities, due to various causes, as is known. This is a violation of their rights as Mexicans, because “even though we are indigenous, we have the same right to that kind of quality education” (field notes, November 2024), she declared. Based on her experience in the education system, first as a student within the bilingual education model more than 20 years ago, and then on the approaches she has taken, such as her work promoting language and culture, she concluded that the deficiencies she has observed in the educational process aimed at these types of communities have not changed.

Concerning what Laura thinks or observes in the children and adolescents from her community, she mentioned feeling great concern about the conditions of insecurity and crime that the community has experienced. She has tried to get closer to the students to reflect with them about the dangers posed by addictions and organized crime. She explained how this has disrupted traditional activities like fishing, an integral part of the Cucapah culture for centuries, which she deeply regrets.

Verónica made another point in her reflection: “the government provides Indigenous communities with what it thinks they need, not what they really need” (field notes, October 2022). She believes that there is no genuine interest in preserving Indigenous cultures, so the communities must continue advocating for their rights and recognition.

Josefina, for her part, expressed that she believes that at different levels of government, they attempt to unify all indigenous peoples into “a unique type of indigenous,” but in reality, each community is different; each has its own form of organization and thought, to name a few elements that distinguish them. These attempts at unification are not limited to education; they are present in other aspects of life.

The policy of preserving the cultural elements of the indigenous peoples of this region has a dual discourse. In the participants’ opinion, the government and communities hold meetings, and agreements are signed for this purpose, but the actions are contradictory.

The statements made by the participants reflect different tensions within the Yuman communities: on the one hand, as in any society, various disagreements and conflicts are present, such as the disagreement they raise regarding practices of cultural promotion, motivated by the meanings that each member of the community constructs (based on their own experience) and which can differ between individuals and collectives, as Garduño (2024) suggested. These tensions are not only experienced within the communities but are also transferred to relations with government authorities, fueled also by a historical resistance and experiences of dispossession (Navarro & Cruz, 2015; Garduño, 2010).

On the other hand, the simulation that the participants referred to is present in the Yuman communities, fit to the concept of performativity, explained by Ball (2014). Certainly, government performance is influenced by its resources, particularly human and intellectual resources. These are limited by the ruling government's political ideologies and conceptions of Indigenous communities, culture, citizenship, power, and utilization, as well as the relationships in and out of the communities. However, that kind of government response could establish a comprehensive system for regulating the affected communities. In essence, these are performative actions that create simulations, gradually shaping behaviors and social roles. Indigenous individuals feel valued, their cultural elements are appreciated, and their aspirations are partially fulfilled. As a result, their behavior adapts.

About teaching practices, the three participants emphasized the need to transmit community knowledge to the new generations. They also agreed on the lack of sufficient support from the institution that invited them to carry out this work.

Veronica mentioned that teaching has been a challenge for her, particularly when working with people of different ages in the community. This participant's work is based primarily on her empirical experience.

For her part, Laura declared that she has been undergoing training with her fellow nationals in the state of Sonora. She has also involved her colleague in her language learning evaluation exercises, as she found her input to be more helpful, especially since she still feels uncertain about the correct pronunciation.

Josefina believed that promoting Cucapah culture requires teamwork; for this reason, she has sought to establish supportive relationships with various educational stakeholders, such as the school district supervisor and teachers from the village elementary school and telesecundaria. She also reflected that the support of digital technologies is a valuable tool for learning and seeking strategies to overcome this lack of support.

Practices of resistance and accommodation – conformism

Resistance can be seen as an action aimed at freeing individuals or groups from a dominant influence. This leads to a fresh perspective on a social issue, moving away from established

norms but not entirely. However, resistance can vary between actions that defy authority and actions that comply with imposed ideas, depending on the historical, contextual, social, political, and collective resources available to the individuals involved (Chávez-Yepes, 2021). As a result, the findings from both categories are combined and described in this section.

In this sense, the cultural promoters interviewed in this study have described their pedagogical action as making known and valuing cultural elements of their own communities that the dominant culture has marginalized. However, they have encountered additional obstacles to those described above.

Laura believes that the school should be a space for cultural expression. She suggested having a day, perhaps Monday, as a day for students to wear traditional costumes and practice dances. Nevertheless, the school's teacher in charge has rejected this proposal, arguing that these are exceptional traditions that the children would not know how to value appropriately.

Verónica said that she has expressed on different occasions, especially to the younger generations, the difficulties they have had in maintaining the school as part of the community for several decades. She mentioned that previously, there were no teachers since the system argued that the population of Kumiai village was small. This led several people to seek out schools outside the village in the largest nearby town. Recently, some families have preferred that their children attend the school there, which is not a Kumiai school. Despite this, she has sought to have these children join her classes at other appropriate times.

Josefina mentioned that she has developed various teaching materials: poems, manuscripts, and audiovisual supplies. She detailed that she intended to register many of her teaching materials as her work and obtain a patent, as she was aware of copyright and had created and conceived these works herself, which is part of a resistance practice, since there were no sufficient specific methods and resources to teach about Yuman cultures (Mojica, 2024).

In contrast, the promoters have expressed frustration with the amount of paperwork they have to complete for the institution that employs them. This has prevented them from dedicating enough time to preparing teaching materials. Additionally, cultural exhibition events related to their community responsibilities often disrupt their school sessions. While they understand that promoting their communities is important, they struggle to balance these obligations with their work.

Among the difficulties Josefina highlighted most were the lack of outreach and the lack of compliance by educational authorities and those related to the Pa Ipai community. She mentioned that promises are made but not kept, which can be demotivating, as they continue to fight to prevent the extinction of their people's language and culture.

Laura has reported other forms of resistance when discussing aggressive behavior at school, which she attributes to exposure to violent environments at home due to crime, including drug use. Although her efforts have been limited, she has warned the children about the consequences of such behavior and emphasized the importance of not remaining silent. She has also ap-

proached the school management to advocate for the presence of trained personnel who can support children in higher-risk situations. However, there is a fear of retaliation from organized crime groups both in the school and the community at large.

Concerning the last point, Laura's actions, although incipient, can be considered practices of resistance. This is because criminal behavior, despite being harmful, has become deeply ingrained in the culture of various nations, such as Mexico. It has been passed down through generations and has taken on a dominant and influential role due to its control and use of violence (Aguilar, 2024). Because of this, it is important to reexamine the components of this system for the purpose of liberation, a task that is fundamentally linked to education.

Josefina reflected on the way that Western culture has seen the Indigenous peoples: she stated that ignoring and discriminating against Indigenous peoples is a perennial occurrence. She mentioned that "some people" believe Indigenous people are people who do not think, know nothing, but, on the contrary, they are communities with their ancestral knowledge; they still preserve their forms of organization, language, culture, songs, dances, traditional medicine, traditional food, clothing, etc. She wondered if, seeing all this, those who think this way cannot realize that they are subjects of law, that they should be visible and not suffer discrimination or obstacles in what is theirs.

She has heard this type of prejudice since she was a child. However, in a clear example of accommodation, when they hear this kind of contempt, they prefer not to respond so as "not to upset" others; this is real, she said.

Indeed, the practices of resistance in the pedagogical work of the promoters aim at emancipation from the hegemonic culture, as supported by Article 2 of the Mexican Constitution, which indicates that the self-determination of indigenous peoples is a collective right (DOF, 2025).

Now, these traditional cultural practices have gained new significance in today's historical context (Fernández-Puig, 2018; González & Gabayet, 2019; Garduño, 2024). They offer alternative approaches to current needs based on their worldview, relationship with the environment, and traditional economic activities. It is essential to break free from official or oppressive practices imposed by powerful groups, such as organized crime, and allow these ways of thinking, understanding, and relating to nature, others, and oneself to be options for diverse contemporary lifestyles rather than condemning them to disappearance. This enables an analysis of the environment and the systems in which they operate, promotes acts of resistance, and guides towards transformation. (López & Olivar, 2024).

In September 2024, a reform to Article II of the Mexican Political Constitution was enacted, granting recognition to indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples as "subjects of public law, with legal personality and their own assets" (DOF, 2024b, article 2). This reform ensures that they have full autonomy to make decisions based on their regulatory systems. It also emphasizes

the obligation of both the State and Indigenous peoples to preserve, promote, and disseminate their culture, languages, and education under their traditional teaching methods.

According to the DOF's text, this reform responds to the demands of diverse Indigenous communities across the national territory. It was obtained after five years of consultation and dialogue. However, it is important to closely monitor how these constitutional texts will be implemented as specific instruments to address the situations that cultural promoters (the focus of this study) have emphasized.

Some final notes

The reflections and testimonies offered by the cultural promoters are evidence, at least in the discourse, of how, in educational centers such as those described here, resistance occurs that implies the awareness of minority groups about a social reality in which there exists a hegemony willing to maintain the bias and dominance that favors it and, consequently, there is an agency of individuals for liberation.

Ideologies established at higher levels of a system are not only transmitted unilaterally or passively; they are also deconstructed and configured within schools, where micropolitics occur and agents of resistance exist.

Even more, school organizations' agents are not passive in the face of a dominant ideology or system. There are examples, like those we have just described. There are many ways of resistance. Pedagogical action can be an effective form of resistance when the individuals involved in the teaching and learning process (students and teachers) are aware of their own identities, the societal expectations placed upon them, and the potential roles they can fulfill.

Giroux (1998) suggests a closer analysis of the hidden curriculum that occurs in the interaction of teachers and learners. This aspect of the project is still pending, as it aims to demonstrate the non-verbal actions of cultural promoters as educators, guiding resistance and radical change while seeking recognition.

Some areas of opportunity identified in this study from a methodological perspective include the need for a focused study on the work of cultural promoters, expanding it to include all Yuman communities where this figure is present. Furthermore, with the support of ethnographic techniques, it is necessary to gather more information to achieve triangulation of the three participants' discourse.

This study is a first approximation of the work of cultural promoters. As a project based on a qualitative research approach, the aim was not to obtain information for generalization, but rather to understand the participants' experiences and processes and the contexts in which they occur. This inquiry provides insights that can be used to develop assumptions guiding future projects.

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