



## **Language education policy and teachers in Puerto Rico: implications for identity, sovereignty, and community in a context of displacements**

## **La política educativa y los docentes en Puerto Rico: implicaciones para la identidad, la soberanía y la comunidad en el contexto de los desplazamientos**

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**Abstract**

In the post-hurricane María Caribbean, Puerto Rico presents a unique case for teacher educators and policymakers. The article offers a critical reflection about the experience of the colonial non-autonomous U.S.-imposed school system, and contributes to teacher education and language education policymaking (LEP) by exploring the effect of displacements, schooling on identity, and the role teachers can play. The article is based on an analysis that broadened the notion of language and education policy to include standards, textbooks, and teaching practices. The research question is about indigenous identity in a context of not only colonial schooling but conflicting visions of history, and loss of oral tradition in lieu of standardized school-sanctioned knowledge. The article suggests that community and indigenous models and educational autonomy would be more sustainable, practical, and just than standardized notions of school.

**Resumen**

En el Caribe post-huracán María, Puerto Rico presenta un caso único para educadores de docentes y formuladores de políticas. El artículo ofrece una reflexión crítica sobre la experiencia del sistema escolar colonial sin autonomía impuesto por los EE. UU., y contribuye a la educación del profesorado y la formulación de políticas de educación lingüística (LEP) explorando el efecto de los desplazamientos, la escolarización en la identidad y el papel de los docentes. El artículo se basa en un análisis que amplió la noción de lenguaje y política educativa para incluir estándares, libros de texto y prácticas de enseñanza. La pregunta de investigación trata la identidad indígena en un contexto no solo de educación colonial sino de visiones conflictivas de la historia y pérdida de la tradición oral en lugar del conocimiento estandarizado sancionado por la escuela. El artículo sugiere que los modelos comunitarios e indígenas y la autonomía educativa serían más sostenibles, prácticos y justos que las nociones estandarizadas de la escuela.

**Palabras clave:** Política educativa; Migración; Conocimiento indígena; Educación comunitaria; Sostenibilidad

**Keywords:** Educational policy; Migration; indigenous knowledge; Community education; Sustainability

## 1. Introduction

The article offers lessons from an extreme example of colonial schooling, and how these lessons can be useful to many marginalized cultural groups that lack control of their own education policies and institutions. In the wake of disaster, it extends a study about the indigenous identity in Puerto Rico, the role of U.S. schooling in erasing this identity in the early 20th century, and documentation of its erasure in the early 21st century; in effect a study of the implications for assimilative, standardized schooling on identity and traditional, place-based knowledge (Harrison, 2016)<sup>1</sup>. In the context of a century of migrations, the island was nowhere near self-sufficient, in massive debt. The extension of the study focuses on the importance of language education policy and teacher preparation for community, sovereignty and identity.

Puerto Rico exists now in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma and especially Hurricane María, which devastated many Caribbean islands in September of 2017. As a recent article suggests, it was a man-made disaster: the issue is why Irma and María were so devastating and why rebuilding so difficult (Schwartz, 2017), made more difficult given the lack of political and economic autonomy. The hurricane is causing another massive displacement of Puerto Ricans to the U.S.—whereas 89,000 people had left in 2015 due to economic or other reasons, between late September and early December 2017, at least 200,000 people fled the island (Matthew, 2017) in the wake of a lack of electricity, death, and destruction. However, hurricane relief has been hindered by lack of political autonomy.

Puerto Rico is not on the United Nations' list of 'non-self-governing territories'<sup>2</sup>, because since 1952 it has its own elected officials. However, the island lacks autonomy and self-determination: the U.S. maintains a stranglehold on its institutions, affecting the economy and education. After being colonized by Spain from 1493-1898, a second colonial period began. Spain lost the island to the U.S. in the Spanish-American war, during which the Dominican Republic and Cuba became independent (McCoy & Scarano, 2009; Mintz, 2010). In 1899 just a few months after the U.S. invasion, Hurricane Ciriaco caused over 3000 deaths, the destruction of most agriculture, and great loss of homes and infrastructure. The U.S. had military control of the island at the time, and helped with recovery. In fact the 1917 Law of Cabotaje or Jones Act means that only U.S. ships can transport anything to the island. Since 90% or more of the island's food is imported, when Hurricane María hit, donations and supplies from or via the U.S. only sat in the ports for other unknown bureaucratic problems. Trump still has not lifted the Jones Act, despite many calls to its effect.

The U.S. also brought an education army in 1898, and began the work of educating what the U.S. administration viewed as an illiterate people who did not even speak correct Spanish. For example, at the 25th Lake Mohonk Conference for Indian and other Dependent People<sup>3</sup> in 1907, Mrs. Samuel McClune Lindsay, the wife of the 2nd education commissioner said;

*When we first went down into the island, the first problem was to put a public school system into Porto Rico with the greatest possible speed; to enlist as many of these children as we could in school armies; to import from America the best, most highly trained teachers we could obtain, and to bring up in Porto Rico a generation of native teachers who could eventually take charge of those schools. That was done. And it was very well done. (Lake Mohonk, 1907, p. 165, italics mine)*

Mrs. Lindsay also spoke about how to adapt and apply "*our own system of education*" to tropical races. Indeed, the schoolteacher followed the soldier who already had experience with the indigenous Americans (P. Navarro, 2006) of the U.S. "*Our own system of education*" meant progressive education goals to americanize and teach English (del Moral, 2013; Negrón, 1977),

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<sup>1</sup> The author lived in Puerto Rico from 2013-2017

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/nonselgov.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> These conferences had started a few decades before. The "*other dependent people*" part would have been added after 1898 when the U.S. acquired Puerto Rico, Guam, Hawaiian islands, Phillipines, and Guam

using the same model of cultural and linguistic assimilation practiced with Native Americans (del Moral, 2013; J. Navarro, 2002; P. Navarro, 2006; Torres, 2002; Adams, 1995), whose resources, land and lives were being displaced through the boarding school system. This system physically removed children from families, cultures, and languages, stripping them of these rights and resources.

Puerto Ricans have had U.S. citizenship since 1917<sup>4</sup>, so migrations and its effects are a huge topic in Puerto Rican studies, given the political and economic climate (see Duany, 2002). After the 2017 hurricane, the most exact number available a few months later was that in Florida, 10,324 Puerto Rican students had been enrolled in schools (Sesin, 2017). Physical displacement precedes another layer of displacement: cultural and linguistic, because afterwards they must learn English, which for Puerto Ricans has been a complex, even strange, political issue since U.S. colonization began (see Pousada, 1999; L. Torres, 2010). Puerto Ricans are very patriotic and their puertorriqueñidad or Puerto Rican-ness is a source of pride. However, this identity—beginning in the 19th century as a separateness from colonial Spain, then becoming assertiveness vis a vis colonial U.S.—was then in the early 20th century forged into a simplistic and democratic mixture of African, Spanish, and indigenous by the Institute of Puerto Rican culture, without serious scholarship to solve the dilemma of language; and who the jíbaros, the majority of the rural population, represented (see Castanha, 2011; Curet, 2015; Nieves, 2014; Pedreira, 1935; Scarano, 1996); nor how long the indigenous people had survived after 1492. The latter is a huge debate in Caribbean historiography, with many scholars demonstrating survival (see Castanha, 2011; Delgado, 2006; Forte, 2006) in rather large numbers until the middle of the 19th century, and in smaller numbers beyond. Survival is evidenced by language, phenotypes, social and spiritual practices, worldview, oral tradition, song, music.

Issues of identity, schooling, and education policies may indeed be interconnected with rebuilding after a hurricane. Education policies are part of governance, within a larger picture that includes self-sufficiency and relations with other countries. These effect migration, outside aid, and humanitarian efforts to stem the death toll after a hurricane.

The school system before the hurricanes was considered a failure. In the century of U.S. administration, the school curriculum replaced community knowledge tied to the land, and various displacements such as from home to school culture and language, from rural to urban areas, from local languages to standard Spanish, from Puerto Rico to the U.S., from Spanish to English (in U.S.) have occurred. All of these have effects on identity as well.

After describing the study that investigated the role of U.S.-created schools in erasing the rural indigenous knowledge base and identity formation, the discussion will return to the two ideas laid out in this introduction: 1) the role of colonial schools and identity imposition, 2) how community models of local schooling and subsistence would have put Puerto Ricans in a better situation to survive and rebuild from a devastating hurricane after a century of U.S. control, and 3) what lessons the experiences offer policymakers and teacher educators.

The next section gives a context of 'schooling' by describing Puerto Rico's earlier rural characteristics.

## 2. The rural context

During the Spanish period the island's population was 80% rural (del Moral, 2013). The people were often called 'jíbaro', described by Melendez (1963) as a mix of various races, who preferred to work and reside in the interior of the island without leaving often:

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<sup>4</sup> Whereas Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship in 1917, Native Americans paradoxically got it in 1924

*The differentiation between the population of the rural zones and the coast of the island is profound and clearly demarked in customs, traditions, methods of harvest and work that polarizes into two social groups that possess their genotype characteristic and particular idiosyncrasies (p. 460).*

Jíbaro<sup>5</sup> was a loosely-defined term for rural people who had preserved almost “*intact, the traditions, habits, and thoughts of his ancestors*”, whose traits had to be eliminated in order to modernize and industrialize (Rodríguez, 1943, p. 16). The term jíbaro is debated in literature, and Delgado (personal communication, 2015) maintains that many different types of jíbaros existed, but true jíbaros had certain characteristics. Living in the mountainous interior of Puerto Rico rather than the relatively flat coast with the bigger towns and cities; jíbaros would have lived locally, place-based, earth-centered (including soil, harvests, and water) or in small communities. Before the U.S. invasion, even fewer formal schools existed in the interior than the coast. Their language (see Alvarez, 1990; Navarro, 1948) reflected traditions and survival knowledge that existed until the U.S. period.

The U.S. education army appointed generals as commissioners of education, declared English and then Spanish as the national language and language of instruction, built eventually 1500 schools with U.S. curriculum (see Lopez Yustos, 1997; Osuña, 1949), contributing to make the “*modern man (who) must learn how to find meaning in many structures to which he is only marginally related*” (Illich, 1971, pdf p. 15).

### 3. Conceptual

I used the indigenous conceptual framework using the indigenous survival knowledge linked to jíbaros of four centuries in the interior. I wanted to find important qualitative analytical tools to “*assess how knowledge production and theories of the past and the present have been shaped by ideas and power relations of imperialism, colonialism, post-colonialism...and racism*” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 46); as well as how the ways of the dominant civilization (epistemology, ontology, axiology) become embedded as “*natural*” rather than historically evolved social constructions (Chilisa, 2012); so strong that whole peoples’ knowledge bases and identities change.

The indigenous conceptual framework includes non-western ways of knowing and being, considers life as a whole rather than many parts, and does not reduce education to school and official knowledge. These principles and processes are epistemological—how to know and learn, to transmit knowledge, ie ‘education’ (songs, stories, petroglyphs, books, memory). The focus is on the relation between parts and the whole in terms of unity or non-separation of parts (for example, language, culture, education, earth, air; subsistence). It is also adaptive and dynamic rather than rule-governed—thus processes and dialogues. Finally, it is place-based: communities where people have roles. Multiple realities between living things, relations and processes co-exist. All of these have importance for identity, belonging, and survival of communities. Studies that have used Indigenous methodology come from many disciplines, and challenge deficit thinking and pathological descriptions of the formerly colonized, to reconstruct a body of knowledge that carries hope and promotes transformation and social change among the historically oppressed (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 1999). The research process itself is social-justice oriented because it seeks to decolonize methodologies and epistemologies that have affected Indigenous people and knowledge about them. It addresses a gap in research methodology because dominant research traditions are founded in Euro-western thought and academic institutions; excluding the knowledge system of the researched, colonized Other.

Since the majority of Puerto Ricans were rural at the time of the U.S. invasion, in conceptual terms, they were also place-based, and their lives and language were tied to the land. If factors such as local history and geography caused Caribbean communities to develop differently

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<sup>5</sup> One of the earliest descriptions of the jíbaro is by Alonso (1849) *El Gíbaro: cuadro de costumbres de la isla de Puerto Rico*



according to island or place (Mintz, 2010); this geographical variance is consistent with the indigenous conceptual framework described in this section and an interconnection between people, land, history, knowledge and language (Maffi, 2001).

Displacement extends the indigenous approach to school issues. I use it as an umbrella concept that covers physical, cultural, and linguistic factors. Displacement, whether from one nation to another or from one region of a country to another, is often caused by violence, wars, natural disasters, and extreme economic hardships. Layers and relations among the various aspects of displacement before and after migration relate to individual, family, cultural, environmental-structural, and historical factors (i.e., roots, heritage, and displacement events) (Coughlan & Owens-Manley; 2006). Displaced persons must adjust their language and customs.

A continuum begins where physical displacement proceeds through a transition to a new life. Individuals adapt differently to the new life and school: some remain attached to home culture, language and memories; others may be more adaptive and assimilate quickly. The different degrees of assimilation vary between generations (Nibbs & Brettell, 2016). Though some try to retain their core beliefs and cultural elements, these may fade according to an individual's attitudes, strengths, beliefs, and capabilities. Children are especially vulnerable to pressure to assimilate, acculturate and acquire hybrid identities. Thus identity and the physical displacement continuum co-exist dialogically. Identities may also be displaced (Harrison, 2018).

Whatever the reasons for massive displacement, schools play a very important role in shaping young people's experiences and identity through education policies, teaching practices, content knowledge taught and learned, and language of instruction. These two concepts—indigeneity and displacement, intertwine in the discussion below.

#### 4. Method

The research question was: *In the construction of knowledge and identity related to the Indigenous presence in Puerto Rico, how does curriculum act as language education policy; and how do teachers act as policymakers—translators and mediators—of the language education policy?*

The Indigenous principle of interconnectedness and interdependence is intertwined with the study's methodology, an Interpretive Policy Analysis (Yanow, 2000) that entails ideology, assumptions, and numerous actors and stakeholders at various levels in the policy process. Between the written texts of policies to the curriculum and teaching practices, policies are mediated. Thus it is a complex and challenging way to analyze. The use of the term "*policy*" is theoretically broadened in this study. Three bodies of language education policy data were analyzed, namely: (1) policies at the federal (U.S.) and Puerto Rico Department of Education (DE) level; (2) curriculum—including standards and textbooks, and (3) interviews with 28 teachers to see how they teach this part of history and identity. As a chain of interpretation each layer of 'policy' is an implementational space (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007) or process by different actors along the way between policy to classroom. The use of an Interpretive Policy Analysis (IPA) in this study is grounded in the Indigenous framework that stresses Indigenous principles and seeks to uncover meanings and values.

IPA was appropriate since the U.S. has governed the island politically, constantly using policy to govern the daily lives of its "*problem populations*": Native Americans, immigrants, and other politically-conquered people like Puerto Rico and Guam (Adams, 2014). Just as it was with Native Americans in the U.S., after territorial or political conquest, policy entered the realm of culture and the home with the goal of assimilation—erasing traditional practices, language. The result has been a myriad of changing policies. IPA also seemed most appropriate for a non-Puerto Rican and non-indigenous researcher, in order to not undermine anyone's voice by speaking for people about their school experience, knowledge of indigenous history, and personal identity.

**Table 1.**  
Summary of data

Language Education Policies	U.S. and Puerto Rico: For example, federal (No Child Left Behind) and Puerto Rican (Organic Law, Circular Letters)
Curriculum, including standards and brief curriculum history	1. Previously used textbooks 2. Current standards and objectives related to research question 3. Textbooks—in use now
Teacher Interview Data	4 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> grade Spanish and Social Studies Teachers

In summary, the research design was a chain of interpretive analysis. The policy framework included how policy shapes school language and culture, and how policies encourage the orientations. It addressed the role of policy and policy language, including curriculum as policy and teachers as policymakers; in other words, three sets of “*policies*”. The interpretation addressed (the threefold) policy-generated categories, and the consequences of (the threefold) policy language as a perpetual and dynamic process. Beginning with the federal policy, policymakers interpret into the laws by the territory (not state) in the Puerto Rico Department of Education (DE), writers interpret these into the curriculum, which teachers interpret and enact in the classroom.

## 5. Results: policies, curriculum, teacher interviews

The “*LEP*” governance of the previous section means the Language Education Policy(ies) govern the question at hand, and show how the policies reach the classroom. Puerto Rico has 7 educative regions each with 4 school districts; each district has from 2-5 towns (larger ones are divided); with a total of 1499 schools, before schools started closing in the last decade<sup>6</sup> and more after the hurricane. The “*local*” interpretations of the policy are in two steps: first, the Puerto Rico curriculum and standards as interpretation of the U.S. and Puerto Rican policy (including ideology), and second the teachers’ interpretations.

The first sub-question was: *How can language education policy be conceptualized as a current and historical interpretive frame for Indigeneity in Puerto Rico?*

I analyzed both federal and Puerto Rican language and education laws. The U.S. federal laws include: No Child Left Behind (NCLB): 2000; Plan de Flexibilidad 2014 (Flexibility Plan for the ESEA of 1965). The local policies included: Ley #149 (1999)- Ley Orgánica para el Departamento de Educación Pública de Puerto Rico; two Cartas Circulares: Español: #10 (2013-2014) and Social Studies #3 (2013-2014); and the 1993 Spanish language policy. Federal testing mandates the testing of Math, Science, and language, but in Spanish. The Ley #149 (1999)- Ley Orgánica para el Departamento de Educación Pública establishes the rights and obligations of educators and students. It has a few relevant parts, such as community or local orientation:

<sup>6</sup> A report and plan by economists (Boston Consulting Group) in 2015 was for up to 580 schools to possibly be closed by 2020. In 2014, one day people were protesting in front of the Secretary of Education’s office, claiming that even “*Escuelas de Excelencia*” were being closed. Besides the alleged migration of people off the island and especially in rural areas where the distances are greater, and economics, the federal testing requirements cause schools to close. See for example <http://www.telemundo52.com/noticias/puerto-rico/Sugieren-cerrar-mas-de-500-escuelas-Departamento-Educacion-Puerto-Rico-Boston-Consulting-Group-282946581.html>.

*The school should promote activities that enrich the life of the community, help to understand its problems and offer solutions; identify situations and/or necessities of the community that affect the school* “p. 6). (also in 2.04c). *The community is a “dynamic entity”* (p. 7)

Nevertheless, the curriculum is standardized rather than local. Despite that Social Studies is not tested, “*The Secretary will reorient the curriculum of all public schools in the course of history of Puerto Rico, including the teaching of the history of the municipality where each public school is located.* (aa. 28)<sup>7</sup>”. While teaching history is becoming contested and is not tested, and does not bring federal money, this local interpretation mandates teaching local history, something none of the teachers interviewed reported.

Art. 3.03 is about the pertinence of the studies “*The programs will be adjusted to the necessities and experiences of the students*” (p. 16). “*They should be pertinent to the social, cultural and geographic reality of the students*” (a., p. 16). History in 1.02 C#1 is “*to develop a dynamic notion of historic time and geographic space in which they live*” (p. 5). Identity is mentioned in Article 1.02: a. education for everyone “*for the full development of his/her personality*” (p. 5), and in c. #8: “*To develop a positive and healthy consciousness of his/her identity in multiple aspects of his/her personality and to develop attitudes of respect toward his peers (semejantes)*” (p. 6).

Therefore, in policy the teaching of local aspects related to identity is established, which would require knowledge of local history. However, the indigenous history, identity, and people (past or present) in Puerto Rico are not recognized or mentioned in policy, and I found very little related to the research question of indigenous identity. What governs teaching more than the policies however may be the curriculum, both textbooks and standards:

Sub-question #2: *How is and how has curriculum acted as policy in the construction of Indigeneity in Puerto Rico’s Department of Public Instruction/Education curriculum, and what are the implications for identity formation?*

After analyzing the policies as an interpretive frame, this part of the study focused on the curriculum. I first analyzed the content standards, grade expectations and curricular maps—including teacher responses—for Spanish and Social Studies to demonstrate how they act as policy. I chose 4th and 7th grade Social Studies and Spanish curriculum, materials, and teachers; and policy that would affect the teaching of indigenous identity; because Puerto Rican history is taught in 4th, 7th, and 10th grades. In 7th grade, students begin to read Puerto Rican literature whereas the stories they could read in 4th grade are literature as well, but are more elementary “*stories*” or “*reading comprehension*”. I added Spanish for both grades because of the language and literature aspect.

Using the current standards, teachers could address processes of culture, identity, history and society. The teachers only named cultural identity (Standard 4), and sometimes “*people, places, and the environment*” (Standards 1). Teachers furthermore reported that culture and history is not given any importance by the Department of Education (or ‘government’). Many said that the standards are a burden, especially because they have to align the standards with the content or resources/materials they find themselves and without curricular maps. The Spanish is not “*supposed*” to include the Indigenous history, since disciplinary thinking means the subject belongs to the latter. The Spanish standards are skills, and a little different because they also have curricular maps. The teachers reported the same as the Social Studies, but perhaps a bit more frustration with the requirements in the curricular maps. They also have to align the content with the maps. Some of the teachers reported that they did not teach the Indigenous element at all, while others said it was an integral part of their responsibility to teach the culture and identity (even history as it appears in literature).

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<sup>7</sup> El Secretario reorientará el currículo de todas las escuelas públicas para en el curso de historia de Puerto Rico, incluir la enseñanza de la historia del municipio donde está localizada cada escuela pública.



The Social Studies standards are concepts meant to create the global and capable citizen. The first four standards are pertinent for the Indigenous element—change and continuity, people, places, and environment; personal development; and cultural identity. The Spanish standards relate to language use with transversal themes—I wanted to focus on the literary aspect, even though the ‘logical’ direction for my study would have been Social Studies only. This decision I based on how/what literature affords to teaching culture and identity and language. I asked if standards contribute or complicate the teaching of the indigenous theme. Most teachers reported teaching the standards more than the content, and that planning toward the standards was their main task. Furthermore, one teacher said standards “*make it easier, (but) depend on the importance that the teacher gives to it....there is no way to prove that the teachers master the culture theme/subject; that it empassions them...if they are in love with their culture, there is no requirement for that; if teachers are not passionate and love their culture; one can’t lift up/build a school* (Interview #8, Spanish, 4th-6th grade”.

Next, I looked at the teaching materials. The Social Studies and Spanish textbooks as a source of knowledge for teachers to draw on, and as reflections of the “*official*” ideology, were also considered policy because it is the material teachers have. I analyzed the Department of Education textbooks that the teachers reported using, including stories and poems. After each grade and subject, I put the methods that the teachers reported using. Spanish teachers mostly relegated the topic to Social Studies, except for a few, such as one who said “*the theme is there but must be worked (plow the field) she takes her time, so they internalize their roots. The theme costs her work in Spanish*”. (Interview #12, Cerrote, Las Marias; Social Studies, 4th – 6th grade, & Spanish) What are the roots, in other words the base of identity? The 7th grade Spanish textbook is clear, and reflects national policy:

One of the greatest legacies that, as a consequence of the colonization, we receive from the Spanish culture. For this reason, here Spanish is spoken. Despite the disappearance of the Taino (indigenous) language and the African languages, our Spanish maintains countless semantic elements proceeding from these cultures (Guzmán, 2000, p. 138, italics mine).

About oral tradition, traditional and indigenous knowledge, two responses from teachers were that;

Before (there was a lot of) song and poem, fables, stories, tales of grandparents; the parents of the kids used to tell stories; now they use the book and google; webpages educational like Wikipedia (Interview #7, Social Studies, 4th & 7th grade)

The practices have disappeared; the language (non-Spanish) is the most that they have, the dress and objects they have found in excavations; instruments; (Interview #20, Social Studies & Spanish, 4th grade)

In terms of identity displacement, textbooks in school teach who they are:

- Mix of Borinquen indian,
- White race, airs of Spain,
- Rhythm of blacks in the blood and the dreams
- Puerto Rican, sweet like the sugar cane (Guzmán, 2000, p. 137)<sup>8</sup>

Both subjects—Social Studies and Spanish—present the indigenous people very superficially and stereotypically. The Spanish texts that could be used are stories, usually with the same image. The images of Indians as primitive, and the ideologies of U.S. schooling were and are strong tools in the elimination of the Indigenous element as a lived and living experience. Looking at older textbooks, some textbooks let the Indigenous people hide in the mountains, while others got rid of them in less than a paragraph. Eventually the image is one of

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<sup>8</sup> Mezcla de indio borinqueño, raza de blancos, aires de España, ritmo de negro en la sangre y los sueños. Puertorriqueña, melosa como la caña

archaeological periods, naming them ‘Tainos’, and a rich primitive culture that contributed to the present day racial and cultural mix of Puerto Ricans. Teachers reported using visuals and some storytelling to interest older students, who are often presumed to already know the material from 4th grade. The few Spanish stories that were used deal with mythologized heroes, love affairs, and primitive people; again contributing even in personality traits like kindness. The textbooks create powerful images, none of them linking the rural or jíbaro people to the indigenous at all, nor stressing the rural history. Yet as the teacher above said, the choice of materials and time spent is dependent on the knowledge of the teacher, thus the next:

*Sub-question #3 was: How do teachers make meaning, mediate, and implement the curriculum and language education policy in their classrooms?*

I interviewed 28 teachers in rural mountain schools from 20-60 minutes each. The teachers’ practices and interpretation of the policies, standards, and textbooks was the culmination of the policy analysis. Their power (as well as burden) of mediating the previous curricular issue with the knowledge given to students was perhaps the most important part.

The Indigenous element when taught is seemingly reduced, simplified, and frozen in the past as extinct, blended into an ambiguous and unknowable mix. Teachers must comply with standards and document compliance in daily and weekly lesson plans, according to stipulations in No Child Left Behind and based on the U.S. content standards<sup>9</sup>. Perhaps because of the nature of my questions alternating between questions about the Indigenous and Department of Education standards and teaching practices, some teachers focused more on the standards themselves than the Indigenous theme. Many were not very specific about their teaching method, although many had something to say about Puerto Rican history and people and identity. I noticed the frequency of archaeological words when referring to indigenous, accompanied by the concept of “heritage”, that often felt (to me, as an outsider) very contemporary and near, at times more of a presence than something that would be in a museum.

About the indigenous identity a few teachers said:

*(There are a) great many (un montón) that resemble them (the indigenous) and they talk about it (too); (about) grandparents that are (indigenous) and tell stories; (for example) in las Marias more than in this town – about a “great grandfather (that) was indigenous”; there was oral history (Interview #19, Social Studies 7th grade)*

*The heritage that they left (is a) contribution to Puerto Rico; many think that they were simple; nude, uneducated; with no contribution at all but it was the opposite; (there was) a great contribution; (especially in the) towns of the countryside (Interview #14, Social Studies 7th-9th grade)*

and another said:

*It (the indigenous element) makes the base (of)—important—history, they start with that; from there the race arises (de allá sale la raza); of what we are (Interview #3, Social Studies & Spanish, 4th grade)*

but another said:

*It (the indigenous knowledge) has been lost...only on holidays and at school; (this is) the reality; in the process of colonization; progress and what happened they don’t know (Interview #26, Social Studies & Spanish, 4th grade)*

Teachers reported a range of time between two days and two months spent on the indigenous theme. What teachers reported was how they want to teach Puerto Rican history but it is not

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<sup>9</sup> The same types of standards have dominated for over a hundred years, but now they are tested or more accurately excluded to favor science, math, and Spanish (language)

tested, how they motivate kids; how they deal with lack of resources and interest; how it is not given priority except during the week of Puerto Rico (Semana de la Puertorriqueñidad in November); how some teachers skip it assuming it is taught in earlier grades, or refer the question to other grades when students would have learned it. Teachers confirmed that knowledge is found in the books, because oral tradition and family stories are much less than previous generations, or non-existent, and the link was not apparent between the knowledge and oral tradition. They confirmed that non-standard varieties of Spanish still exist today, and existed much more in the past; and that the role of the school is to standardize language. The teachers almost unanimously agreed that local history is given little importance, and in general Puerto Ricans do not know (or are not allowed to know) their local history or culture; even though they are using a different knowledge base (the 'official' history) than the one I used. As part of their identity, some give the indigenous element a great importance, and others very little. However, even the former have the archaeological view. A few teachers stressed that the teacher decides where and how the importance is applied, it could be given to the African element instead, and that there is no requirement to value and be passionate about Puerto Rican history and culture to become a teacher.

In sum, the requirements create a situation where according to the knowledge and ideology of the teacher, the indigenous element is either skipped or emphasized; and according to the teachers' knowledge. The teachers who gave it the most importance still relegated it to the remote past, a paradox given the poem that teaches about the democratic mix of "*Borinquen indian, White race...of Spain, and Rhythm of blacks in the blood and the dreams*" (Guzmán, 2000, p. 137).

## 6. Discussion-focus on teachers

The discussion returns to lessons about 1) the role of colonial schools and identity imposition; and 2) how community or local models of education—in the sense of education according to the indigenous parameters and Ivan Illich's notion of traditional education—would have put Puerto Rico in a better situation after the hurricanes.

Ivan Illich was a philosopher, priest, and critic of western institutions. He spent time in the 1950-60's with Puerto Ricans both in New York and in Puerto Rico; "*very much attached to Puerto Rico*"<sup>10</sup>. The years in Puerto Rico were "*pivotal*" (Hartch, 2015, p. 124). He grew dissatisfied with the Church; and became a member of the Council of Education. Illich concluded that Puerto Rico had been schooled, but not educated, and that "*Puerto Ricans can no longer conceive of life without reference to school*" (Illich, 1969); likening education to a new religion, actually even more onerous than the Church rituals, because all levels of society "*from Governor to jíbaro*" (p.2) had grown to accept the ideology of teachers as before the theology of priests.

How did Puerto Ricans become so attached to schools, school knowledge? How could this have been different? The historical background of early policies in the U.S. administrative period was a crucial step in demonstrating the significance of the transition from a rural and agricultural, subsistence economy to an urban and industrial one, with massive migrations off the (is)land, simultaneous with compulsory schooling. Illich also maintains that school leads children away from community, while most knowledge is acquired outside of school. In contrast,

*traditional society was more like a set of concentric circles of meaningful structures... Education did not compete for time with work or leisure. Almost all education was complex, lifelong, and unplanned... In the village, language and architecture and work and religion and family customs were consistent with one another, mutually explanatory and reinforcing* (Illich, 1971, pdf p. 15).

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<sup>10</sup> This anonymous blogger (June 24, 2013) quotes two interviews that Illich gave: one in 1972 with "*Domenach*" and another with David Cayley in 1988 (Cayley, 1992). See also Fitzpatrick (1967).

Meaningful structures would relate to everyday needs, social and family relations. Mass and compulsory schooling is designed according to deficit thinking and backward planning. The variations of educational models by culture or language groups that still exist are marginalized, homogenized, and/or do not count, and are even erased in favor of standardized forms of 'knowledge' with controlled outcomes. This happens when families cannot maintain language, knowledge and traditional practices in the home; and communities lack resources; and migrations are constant—effectively displacements. A 45-year old rural man told me about walking to school barefoot, and being made fun of for being a *Jíbaro*.

The teachers were not exactly the kind of mediators I hoped to find, at least in terms of indigenous knowledge. I thought I would evaluate the present curriculum as "*official*" knowledge that may conflict with local beliefs and practices, and the teachers own stories of teaching. I realized that 117 years of schooling had been very thorough. However, a few were a motivation and made me realize the other ways they can contribute to positive identity. Thus, the discussion shows the importance of teachers. The policies and curriculum culminate and show how the burden of an important aspect of identity falls on teachers. The teachers have their own knowledge and experiences, and choose the materials. They interpret the policies in their classrooms, thus they are the 'policymakers'. Teachers mediate and implement the curriculum through their meanings, thus demonstrating how/if curriculum acts as policy. They are held responsible when students fail. Even if the home culture teaches a certain identity, the school knowledge is often given more weight. This process deserves attention in teacher education programs—the home/school clash that many children face.

Community models of education as stipulated in the Ley Orgánica tied to the land could lessen the pushes to migrate. For example, in the first decades of the 20th century, the curriculum in the rural and urban areas was not the same. By 1928 the rural education was adapted to be practical for living in the countryside for the rest of life (Lopez Yustos, 1997). The "*Segunda Unidad*" (Second Unit) was a school adapted to the needs of rural communities, that "*commanded the attention of educators*" (Rodríguez, 1943, p. 62) in solving the problem of rural schooling in the U.S. and Latin America. It was community center that was a combination of vocational and academic activities schools. Rather than closing schools, perhaps the *Segunda Unidad* (Second Unit) schools could revive their original purpose. They could become what they were built for. After the Hurricane, people needed bridges, water, food—if the plantain, mango and breadfruit trees were not already rotting or did not blow down, surely other possibilities could have been found other than food donated in the U.S. and brought on a ship, sitting in the port, unable to be loaded on a truck without gasoline or a driver, or a road or lights to see.

## 7. Conclusion

In the colonial years since 1492, Puerto Rico has never had complete control of their own institutions, from society and community to national levels. When Hurricane María arrived in September of 2017, the island had 117 years of U.S. colonial schooling. The people had been schooled in the sense of having school buildings and education policies to administer their lives, imported notions of curriculum and a forged identity. Many people had migrated to the U.S. mainland: five million Puerto Ricans were living off the island, facing the issues of being English speakers or becoming English Language (ELL) learners in the U.S. At the time of María, the 3.5 million living on the island faced an enormous debt, and crumbling infrastructure. In post-María Puerto Rico, healing is in order—the island is broken. Many rural areas, months later, lack electricity; bridges are collapsed; there is little running water and the many streams that were already contaminated are now more so causing risk of infections; and many dead. Puerto Ricans are extremely proud and resilient but the situation has become extreme.

The study described in this article illustrates what happened to the indigenous identity through the years and especially through U.S. school; and the role the indigenous identity could play for communities. The Indigenous paradigm has a cyclical nature, a medicine wheel. Native American worldview integrates various factors. The four seasons and four cardinal directions represent this way of thinking, each representing a different aspect of life and experience. The



east is Spring and spiritual aspects of experience, the south is the summer and the natural world, the west is autumn and bodily aspects of knowing, and the north is winter and the mental process of balancing intellect with wisdom (Chilisa, 2012, p. 183-184). Community and place-based approaches, interconnection between humans, the water, the earth, and food are ingredients for indigenous models of education: educational autonomy rather than educational imperialism.

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