Honouring Cultural Differences in Early Childhood Education and Care: Participatory Research

with a Colombian Embera Chamí Indigenous Community

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Abstract

Honouring cultural differences in early childhood education and care: Participatory research with a Colombian Embera Chamí Indigenous community

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Cultural diversity is largely accepted as something that enriches societies, and it is often identified as a government priority in national programs. Nevertheless, there is institutional resistance to transforming education practices in order to ensure their cultural responsiveness. This study explores participatory research with parents and other community members in the development of an Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programming framework as a way to create room for a meaningful inclusion of local knowledge, language, and traditions in education practice. We used a de-colonial conversational research methodology based on *Mingas de Pensamiento*, which is a way to collectively construct and transmit knowledge in some Colombian and Latin American Indigenous communities. Through this participatory and de-colonial process, we planned with the Wasiruma, a Colombian Indigenous community, a pedagogical program based on local traditions, such as respect for Mother Earth, spiritual life, Jaibanismo (local customs based on a form of Shamanism), and the Embera Chamí Language.

In this manner, we found that a participatory de-colonial research approach is an effective way to propose an ECEC program that is culturally responsive, inspired by the local conception of childhood, and preserves the local language and social organization, as well as local ways of knowing. The recognition of ways of knowing and dialogue among different kinds of knowledges created room for the co-construction of a new ECEC program. In this sense, the research makes a theoretical contribution, in terms of the necessity to embrace local knowledge through conversation. This process involves a decolonizing perspective that allows the dialogue

among different knowledges to exist. In this way, the research overcomes perspectives based on

the simple addition of some local features to a predesigned program.

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To the Wasiruma community and to all the Indigenous peoples who have taught us, through struggles to maintain their cultures, ways of living based on respect for nature and community life that invite us to construct a more humanized world.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ancestors are the spirits of dead people who, according to the Embera Chamí tradition, remain part of the community.

Alive and non-alive beings are all the animate beings that can transmit knowledge. In the Embera Chamí communities' understanding of the world, all beings that belong to nature are animate and transmit knowledge to human beings. For example, a stone is animate and can transmit knowledge to people. Alive are all alive beings (humans, plants and animals), and they are all animate; non-alive beings are both the spirits of dead people and the spirits of rocks, and mountains. All of them are transmitters of knowledge and as such are part of the community.

Constitutional *Auto* is a Constitutional act to ensure compliance with the Laws. In Colombia, the National Constitutional Court is a governmental agency in charge of ensuring that the decisions or rulings issued by the local government representatives are in line with the National Constitution. This court makes decisions about citizen requests and extracts the most relevant principles in the form of Constitutional Judgements, which become Laws. The National Constitutional court also follows the proper and full execution of the rulings and issues Constitutional *Autos* (specific laws) in order to ensure that the government institutions implement and enforce the Law.

Indigenous authorities and governors are the representatives of the Indigenous communities or reserves. In Colombia, Indigenous peoples and communities have always had their own leaders. These people are called Indigenous Authorities, and the way they organise themselves is part of the culture of each community. In the case of the Wasiruma Reserve, these traditional authorities are the *Jaibaná* (defined bellow) and the *Partera* (midwife), who are the natural leaders of the community. However, the State, in its need to generate an organizational framework for the

national territories, and to ensure that Indigenous communities and organizations registered and had legal status, asked them to organize their reserves and elect governors, who represent them in the dialogues and in the establishment of programs with the national government.

Jaibaná is one of the main leaders of an Indigenous Embera Chamí community. This person has connection with different worlds of the Embera Chamí culture and has healing powers. Embera Chamí's worlds are: one above, which is the creator Karaby's world; the world of the land where the Embera people live; the world below, where ancestors live.

Karaby is an Embera Chamí God. According to the history of the Embera Chamí population, the Karaby is the creator of the Embera people. The Karaby inhabits one of the three Worlds of this culture.

Minga de Pensamiento is a traditional Colombian Indigenous meeting in which local communities discuss and make decisions together about a specific concern. A *Minga* is a meeting to achieve community goals.

Law of Origin is a Law based on traditional Indigenous knowledges. Colombian Indigenous peoples consider this knowledge as the main Law to follow; therefore, it is called Law of Origin. This Law guides the management of all material and spiritual matters of each Indigenous community. From the Indigenous perspective, compliance with the Law of Origin guarantees the balance and harmony of nature, the organization and permanence of life. The Law of Origin also regulates the relationships among alive and non alive beings, from the stones and mountains to the human beings, in a perspective of unity and coexistence in Indigenous territories.

Origin Story is also called Creation Story. I use the name origin story as it corresponds well to the Spanish name, *historia de origen*. Different Indigenous cultures transmit their stories about the origin of the world as well as the origin of their specific population. The Embera Chamí

communities transmit these stories through storytelling, painting, weaving, and dancing. These stories of origin transmit the cultural sets of values from one generation to the next one; thus, they are an important part of the Law of Origin and are a key element for the construction of the Indigenous *Planes de Vida* (life plans).

Partera is one of the main leaders of any Embera Chamí community. The *Partera* takes care of pregnant women and guides them in a process to realize what it means to have a child. In the Wasiruma community the *Partera* used to help women in childbirth, but currently, children are delivered at the hospital and they are assisted by a doctor. Therefore, the *Partera* now help mothers to take care of children through early childhood, specially during pregnancy and the first months.

Wasiruma Indigenous reservation is an Embera Chamí community located in the Valle del Cauca. A Colombian Indigenous reservation is a community or a group of communities that share a specific land. These communities have a special autonomous Indigenous jurisdiction and make their own decisions. The local Laws must, however, be in line with the national Constitution.

CHAPTER I
Orientation to the Study

The idea of culturally responsive Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is accepted worldwide by the academic community of educators and most government organizations (Ball, 2004). Nevertheless, many governments and educators embrace Western norms for quality practice based on universalistic perspectives of developmental psychology, ideas which frequently permeate the discourse of public policies as valid knowledge applicable everywhere.

Latin American scholars such as Mignolo (2010), Escobar (2010), and Walsh (2006), warn us about the coloniality of knowledge, pointing out that Western knowledge conceived as universal denies ways of knowing and living that do not fit in with what is considered as the norm (Quijano, 2000). These authors challenge the logic underlying Western civilization that is grounded on the objectivity of the Enlightenment (Quijano, 2000) and denies ways of knowing and living that are different from those of European thought. They argue that colonizing stories of power subjugate people economically, politically, and culturally. In order to resist colonization through knowledge, these de-colonial scholars propose an inter-epistemic communication that challenges colonizing relations based on knowledge power (Mignolo, 2010). They further suggest that all intercultural dialogue should be interpreted as inter-epistemic communication, in order to decolonize relations, otherwise based on the imposition of Western knowledge over people (Mignolo, 2010). A de-colonial approach thus counters the ways in which imperialism is embedded in disciplines of knowledge and traditions as 'regimes of truth', positioning the Indigenous as 'Other' (Smith, 2012).

Through participatory research with Wasiruma, an Embera Chamí Indigenous community located in the Colombian Department of Valle del Cauca, the co-researchers demonstrate that to

be culturally responsive, ECEC programs need to recognize local knowledge and practices in relation to children's development. This recognition entails a de-colonial perspective of research that ensures a space for local ways of being, knowing, and doing. Across cultures, children's development varies according to their relationship with society. Consequently, there is not one 'childhood', but many childhoods, and one program will not fit all cultures (Ball, 2004; Cleghorn & Prochner, 2010; Ritchie, 2010). Often, specific geographical factors as well as cultural parameters for raising and educating children have long term effects on their physical coordination and on the way they relate with others in the community and with nature. For example, some Colombian Indigenous peoples who live near rivers encourage children to swim as a part of their basic safety, important within that particular culture. However, allowing young children to swim in rivers is perceived as a dangerous practice for the Colombian majority culture. Some cultures discourage early walking, while others promote it. In some cultures, the use of medicinal plants to strengthen the spirit is key for children's development, while others may think it is superstition. Some cultures promote solidarity and community life, while others focus on individual competences. In this study, we take the position that the expansion of Westernized ECEC programs and their adoption in Indigenous communities interrupts the transmission of local traditions, ancestral languages, and wisdom, thus disrupting the enormous variety of existing ways of life (Ball, 2004; Cleghorn & Prochner, 2010).

The issue at hand is compounded by popular, but mistaken, ideas that Indigenous families 'are at risk' (i.e., that parents lack interest in their children's education). In order to develop culturally responsive programs, these misconceptions need to be dispelled; this can be done through decolonizing dialogues in which different kinds of knowledges are recognized as valid (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernández, 2013; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

The main goal of the research with the Wasiruma people was to engage and collaborate with parents and other community members to develop an ECEC programming framework that included their knowledges, their traditions, and their language. Through a conversational research approach based on *Mingas de Pensamiento*, which is a traditional means of discussion and local construction of knowledges, we analyzed the past, the present, and the future of early childhood education in the Wasiruma community. Further, we planned a potential pedagogical program that included key local values such as attachment to the Mother Earth, spiritual life, Jaibanismo (a form of shamanism of the Embera Chamí culture), and the Embera Chamí language. The intention was to make a theoretical contribution concerning the necessity to embrace local knowledges through dialogue, which included a decolonizing perspective that allowed different knowledges to co-exist. The aim of the project was to see ECEC programs based on local knowledges about childhood and traditional methods of education, ultimately enriching the lives of young children in Colombian rural-Indigenous communities.

The dissertation is organized into seven chapters. The first chapter presents an orientation to the research problem. It describes the advances in the ECEC Colombian public policy, which is informed by postmodern theories that understand childhood and children's development as locally situated and culturally shaped. The chapter also describes existing tensions between these public policies and the realities of making them possible in everyday practice. Following this orientation to the study, the path to the definition of the research question is described. Chapter two explains the theoretical framework of this process, emphasizing the conception of parental and community involvement in education institutions and the conception of childhood from a perspective of de-colonial thought. Chapter three presents the story of the Wasiruma community which is key to understand the political meaning of this research. Chapter four defines

participatory research methodologies as a way to address the tensions between administrative and cultural considerations. The chapter describes the community participation in the design of the methodology as well as the de-colonial perspective of the research. This de-colonial position states that in order to carry out research with Indigenous communities, it is necessary to recognize their epistemologies and their ways of being and doing in the world. Both the participatory design and the de-colonial perspective entail the creation of a conversational space, which in this research was the Mingas de Pensamiento, and thinking together for the construction of community ideas. Finally, the chapter explains the data analysis process that led the Wasiruma leaders, some mothers and me to engage with the whole community in the design and implementation of a wall painting. This painting created room for a vivid dialogue between different kinds of knowledge, one coming from the public policies and theories, and the other from the ancestral traditions of the Embera Chamí culture.

Chapter five describes the results of the research, the local conception of childhood, particularly among the Wasiruma. It describes how local knowledges —regarding the origin or origin story, Mother Earth, seeding, the spirituality of Jaibanismo, and storytelling—is the basis for the construction of a pedagogical program with this community. Then, the sixth chapter describes specific aspects of the national guidelines for the construction of pedagogical programs. Together with the fifth chapter, this sets the stage for a discussion of the tensions between local knowledges and the requirements of the institution that leads the implementation of educational programs at a national level.

The last chapter presents the conclusions suggested by the research project. It emphasizes the tensions between the written knowledge coming from government organizations such as the National Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF) and the National Ministry of Education (MEN), and

local oral traditions. It argues that in order to transform educational approaches so that they recognize and implement local practices and knowledges, a decolonizing position is necessary. Otherwise, the public policy and its claims for the recognition of diversity become empty words. The chapter also presents implications of this research to the global debate about the urgency of critical re-conceptualization of early childhood theory, research, policy, and practice.

Coming to the Research Question

During the last several years, I have been involved with the field of ECEC in Colombia. I have worked in different contexts and positions with community members, including parents, teachers, and other educators and caregivers, as well as with policy makers. In these experiences, I observed tensions between government requirements for quality control and local knowledges about early childhood development and care. Even though Colombia has embraced the perspective of cultural diversity in current public policy and laws, there is tension between the rhetoric about cultural congruence and actual implementation in real ECEC settings.

The evaluation of the state public policy "From Zero to Forever" (Departamento Nacional de Planeación [DNP], 2018), carried out by the national government after five years of this policy implementation, found a number of cultural barriers preventing young Indigenous children from accessing national services for under five-year-olds. Some of these cultural barriers were, among others, the lack of recognition of the role of midwives and traditional healers in the care of pregnant women and young children. This makes it difficult to create intercultural programs for ECEC. Another cultrual barrier was the lack of civil registration, which continues to hinder Indigenous children's access to basic rights. This civil registration document is not culturally important to Indigenous people, but it is the only valid document for government institutions.There is an important gap between their access to health, nutrition, and

early childhood education programs, and that of non-Indigenous children. The evaluation points out that the historical exclusion of Indigenous and black children, which are considered as minority ethnic groups in the public policies, is still evident. To this point, the appraisal concludes that if the programs do not respond to their needs, these children quit (DNP, 2018). There are specific national directives to address cultural differences in social programs for minority ethnic groups. Nevertheless, many tensions remain because these programs fail to recognize the contexts and ways of living of these groups.

The Colombian Ministry of Culture states that cultural diversity is an essential characteristic of humanity, expressed in the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of each community (Ministerio de Cultura, 2010). Following the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) guidelines, the Ministry of Culture (2010) states that this cultural diversity should be appreciated and preserved to enrich human life. Furthermore, the Colombian Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Culture state that there are many ethnic groups and cultures scattered throughout the country: 65 different Indigenous groups; Afro Colombian groups, that mainly inhabit the Pacific and Atlantic coasts; Raizales, a cultural Afro-Anglo group that inhabits San Andres, a Caribbean island; Palenqueros, who live in the first African American town liberated from the colony during 15th century; Rom, a group of gipsy peoples that live in various municipalities; peasant communities in rural areas, whose people are less Westernized than those living in the cities; Mestizos, a mix of Indigenous and Spaniard descendants; and, immigrant groups coming mainly from Venezuela, other South American countries, and even from other continents (Ministerio de Cultura, 2010). This acknowledgement of cultural differences, however, needs to move from public policy statements to institutional action that reflects real acceptance (Ahmed, 2012). The administrative standards and the search

for quality in ECEC, as defined by the national government, frequently lead to standardized practices that jeopardize cultural diversity.

ECEC has become increasingly important at the international level. UNICEF, the World Bank, the Interamerican Development Bank, and other organizations that influence the design of social policies in the so-called developing countries advise the inclusion of programs for early childhood in national policies. Therefore, there is a significant increase in governmental economic investment for young children's wellbeing. The Colombian government, for example, tripled the budget for ECEC programs between 2011 and 2014, and the increase was maintained until 2018 (DANE, 2018). In the recent public policies and investment in ECEC, institutional services prioritize young children and their parents, and there is a stated effort to ensure and monitor children's rights, a process Dalberg and Moss (2005) refer to as the institutionalization of childhood. This institutionalization could be a space for innovative approaches and opportunities for children, families, and communities. At the same time, there is a risk that it could become an effective way to regulate and control children's and communities' lives (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Foucault, 1975).

The latter possibility of regulation and control is more likely to happen if early childhood institutions and practices are understood as places for the application of uniform practices, shaped by standards to produce predefined outcomes on children's development (Ball, 2004; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Urban, 2017). This modernist perspective of early childhood institutions, that uniformizes ECEC practices, is grounded in a universalist understanding of children's development and well being, conceptions based on Euro-American research and cultures (Ball, 2004; Cleghorn & Prochner, 2010; Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991; Göncü,

Tuerner, Jain, & Johnson 1999; Nsamenang, 2006; Okwany & Ebrahim, 2016; Pence, 2013, Prochner, Cleghorn, Kirova & Massing, 2016).

In Colombia, cultural diversity is accepted as an asset and as something that enriches societies. It is identified as a government priority in most national policies. Nevertheless, there is institutional resistance to change (Ahmed, 2012). As Ahmed (2012) affirms, many professionals in social work and education who work to ensure culturally diverse approaches encounter difficulties that other practitioners in the same field do not perceive, given the priority of uniform quality that leads their practices. Working with diversity implies assuming complex and multiple ways to interpret the world and to relate with people (Ahmed, 2012).

Colombian public policy states that ECEC programs should be adjusted to allow for diversity. The "From Zero to Forever", 1804 Law which establishes the public policy for early childhood (Presidencia de Colombia, 2016), observes gender differences, stating that "girls and boys as subjects are built and live in different ways" (p.3), and adds that in order to ensure integral care, public policy must be "sensitive to children's particularities because of the diversity of situations, conditions and contexts, and act intentionally on the environments to transform situations of discrimination due to differences" (p.3). Nevertheless, administrative requirements (including guidelines for supervision of ECEC projects and competence requirements for educators) and the search to ensure quality make the programs progressively rigid and unable to respond to the communities' cultures and to the *pluriversal* characteristics of childhood.

Recognizing pluriversality as the opposite of the modernist conception of universality entails a political act of epistemological disobedience (Mignolo, 2010). That is, one must understand that a universalist conception of human beings stems from colonization through knowledge. This epistemological colonization is linked to the colonization of human beings.

In the case of research for the design of local social programs, a decolonizing position requires questioning many of the current global statements about childhood. There is a widespread idea that society should ensure the realization of universal rights of children. This affirmation of children's rights is fair, but it inspires the implementation of universal approaches to health and nutrition, as well as universalist ideas of childcare, to ensure rights. For example, the education perspective of human capital that prepares people for the improvement of a country's capacity to compete in international markets is the foundation for the investment in education under children's rights perspectives (Schaub, Henck, & Baker, 2017). These universalist ideas do not fit every culture.

Early childhood and childhood are key moments for the transmission of native languages, worldviews, and the meaning of community life. Therefore, the provision of social services that do not recognize these local ways of living affects both children's personal lives and their cultural survival. The conception that all children, no matter their cultural origin or where they live, are entitled to universal rights, which are not contextualized or locally understood, affects the traditional function of families and communities. For example, starting schooling at young ages could disrupt the transmission of some languages and cultural values related to nature that are taught in community life, not in a school program. In this way, well intentioned actions to promote socioeconomic progress or children's development could cause cultural damage (Schaub et al., 2017).

Most Colombian policy documents and technical guidelines for ECEC suggest working together with local communities and adapting strategies to make programs culturally appropriate. This is not enough, however, due in part to the guidelines' parallel concern with the Western notion of 'best practices', and in part to the widespread ideology that there is only one way to

achieve quality in ECEC programs and to ensure children's wellbeing (Prochner et al. 2014; Schaub et al., 2017). In this framework, professionals working with young children consult the communities in order to design programs adjusted to local customs, but, even though some 'choice' is offered to local communities, it is still a 'top down' process with the technical advisors imposing their vision of how things 'ought to be', limiting choices to preconceived 'norms and parameters'.

This kind of consultation ignores the analysis of existing relations of power among different kinds of knowledges and knowledge production. Published guidelines command more institutional recognition than local customs and cultures because there is a tendency to consider that which is written down as valid knowledge, while oral traditions tend to be disregarded as superstition (Balanoff & Chambers, 2005; Gee, 1996; Jimenez Estrada, 2012). In this way, the Colombian ECEC practice only legitimizes one way to educate children, the one defined by the technical guidelines, while local knowledge on child rearing based on oral traditions and embodied knowledge is disregarded (Alvarez Torres, Pemberty Sepúlveda, Blandón Giraldo & Grajales Crespo, 2012).

Preserving worldviews, cultural traditions, ancestral languages, and local knowledges in ECEC requires the creation of a participatory space for its design. It entails reflecting critically on peoples' conceptions of childhood, child development, and quality services, as well as on dominant assumptions associated with current models based on best practices, e.g., that play is critical for child development (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot, & Sanchez, 2015). It also involves challenging mistaken ideas that Indigenous families lack interest in their children, in education, and therefore their children are 'at risk'. This stereotype is anchored on the social construction that people who are at the margins of middle-class values and privileges have

impairments caused by socioeconomic disadvantages. This approach, which categorizes people as deficient, gets in the way of social programs seeking to build from the strengths of people and prevents the possibility of addressing the structural social factors that situate people at the margins (Swadener, 2010). This persistent tendency creates room for pathologizing cultural differences and for the construction of the 'Indigenous other'. From a political perspective, this tendency hinders the analysis of social exclusion and oppression, and therefore prevents taking action with the participation of families (Swadener, 2010).

In order to ensure meaningful community participation in the development of culturally responsive programs, combating prejudice and stereotypes is key. The idea that people who do not follow the majority culture's prescriptions for parenting need parenting education must be dispelled. This can be done with sensitive communication and dialogue so that the knowledge and values of parents and community are respected, informing the basis of collaborative planning discussions (Baquedano-López, et al., 2013; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

In this dissertation, I present the results of a participatory research carried out with the Wasiruma community. The research created room for the co-construction of counter-hegemonic knowledge through dialogue between different ways of thinking (Kovach, 2010b). This experience enabled us to explore the main research question: What does culturally responsive ECEC mean from the perspective of an Embera Chamí Indigenous community? It also permitted us to engage in the questions concerning the adults' perspectives about children's development, the knowledges that must be transmitted to maintain the culture, and the community perceptions about the current ECEC programs.

The Colombian Context of ECEC

In this section, I present a discussion of the current Colombian public policy on ECEC and the theoretical perspectives that inform it. I will show that its conception regarding children's development is inspired by Vygotsky's theories and, therefore, considers cultural and other differences. However, as previously stated, this conception conflicts with other ideas in the guidelines for implementing the policies regarding best practices and expected outcomes, which tend to promote uniform, Westernized services for all children, including those who belong to Indigenous cultures. To demonstrate the tensions between policy and its implementation, I will analyze the various conceptions of childhood, the recognition of cultural differences, and the role of parents. Later, I present how a decolonizing perspective on parental and community engagement opens up room for possibilities to transform ECEC practices in Colombia.

Colombian Public Policy on ECEC: Advances and Impediments in Moving Towards an Inclusive Perspective.

Conceptions of childhood are not static. They are social constructs and, as such, change over time. These transformations shape and are reflected in both public policies and social practices (escobar londoño, gonzalez alzate, & manco rueda, 2016). Therefore, to better understand the current colombian public policy on ecec, it is important to describe its changes over time. I present a summary of the current public policies and, later, i analyze how some of the conceptions have changed over time. I also analyze tensions between the conceptualizations of public policy and its actual practice: on the one hand, there is a tendency to recognize that the provision of services and the design of pedagogic strategies should be culturally responsive; on the other hand, the pressure to meet internationally defined conceptions and practices of ecec and

to ensure effectiveness as defined from a human capital perspective, prevents implementation of a culturally responsive approach.

In the human capital perspective, acquisition of knowledge is understood as capital for the individual and for the society in which the person lives. For the individual, it is a way to achieve economic success, for society, a way to compete in the global market. For both the individual and society, education is an investment that must produce economic outcomes (Bouchard, 2006). Ultimately, it is expected that the investment in ECEC will produce economic returns for the state, such as long-term savings on remedial social and educational programmes. These expected outcomes shape practices and lead local governments to prioritize administrative considerations in order to ensure results, without taking into account the characteristics and needs of the population.

The current public policy: "From Zero to Forever". In 2012, the Colombian government established a cross-sectoral commission to define and promote the implementation of plans, programs, projects, and actions to ensure young children's holistic development according to their age, context, and socio-economic conditions (Presidencia de la República, 2014). This commission defined four models of ECEC: (a) an institutional program that takes place on a daily basis; (b) a once-a-week program, called Early Childhood Development in Family, for remote and rural areas; (c) Community Homes (Hogares Comunitarios), which is ECEC provided in the homes of community members; and (d) a program called Own Way of Care (Modalidad Propia para la Atención a la Primera Infancia), which is designed to meet the cultural requirements of rural Indigenous communities and other minority ethnic groups.

This public policy also recognized environments for the provision of services and care in early childhood, mainly health institutions, early childhood care centers, homes, and public

spaces. All stakeholders, including families, state institutions, and communities, were urged to work together in these environments to ensure young children's rights. These programs were established to guarantee that children:

- Grow in environments that facilitate their development.

- Construct their identity in a framework of diversity.

- Are provided space to express their feelings, ideas, and opinions and are listened to.

- Can rely on a mother, father, or other caregiver who embraces them and promotes their development.

- Enjoy the highest possible level of health.

- Have good nutrition.

- Grow in an environment that promotes and respects their rights.

For the programs to be considered holistic, they had to include the following main structuring activities: working with parents; ensuring education; recreation; promoting children's participation; health services; and nutrition.

In 2016, the government approved the "From Zero to Forever" policy, requiring every government development plan, at national and local levels, to include resources that ensured the services provided would guarantee the best conditions for the rights and holistic development of children under five years old. The new policy included the gestational period of child growth and development (Presidencia de la República, 2016). In the next paragraphs, I will present some of the changes that this public policy included, as compared to previous policies, and the key concepts, explicit and implicit, behind these changes.

The concept of childhood. One of the most important and recent changes in Colombian public policy is the conception of children as competent, knowledgeable, and active agents. This

recognition was stated by the Law 1098 of 2006 (Presidencia de la República, 2006), and it is in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It represents an important change in the way society perceives children, who in the previous Law were depicted as passive receivers of services without voice, and as immature human beings in the process of becoming adults.

This conception of children as incomplete adults did not consider children and their needs in the present but focused on their future performance. ECEC was then conceived as ensuring school readiness (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007). Different from the previous concepts, the current public policy clearly states that young children are citizens holding specific rights (Presidencia de la República, 2016). Consequently, they are conceived as having voice and being co-constructors of knowledge.

Another important element of the new policy is the idea of child development as culturally situated (Myers,1992; Presidencia de la República, 2014). This concept is totally opposed to the aforementioned discourses of a universal child in the process of becoming an adult. The new policy for young children states that children's development is a non-linear process. This is in line with Vygotsky's perspective, which also states that a child's development emerges from the cultural, ethnic context and takes place in relation with others and with the environment. In this sense, "From Zero to Forever" also assumes a postmodern perspective which suggests that there are many childhoods, which coincides with the assertion of Dahlberg et al. (2007).

As shown, there are very important and positive changes in the current public policy. Nevertheless, as I will discuss in the next sections, the implementation of "From Zero to

Forever" is still rigid, which creates problems in the enactment of culturally responsive programs.

      The recognition of cultural differences. Colombia is a very diverse country. According to the last census, four ethnic groups are differentiated from the majority population: indigenous, black, raizales, and rom. Together, they speak more than 63 amerindian languages and a number of dialects (departamento administrativo nacional de estadísticas, 2005). Cultural differences between rural and urban areas, and between provinces, exist. Some areas are more westernized in their customs than others. Minority ethnic groups have fought for territorial rights, cultural recognition, and differentiated education policies that respond to their cultural and language needs. In response to these demands, the colombian ministry of education decreed at the close of the 1970s that indigenous peoples had the right to an education that encourages the maintenance of their culture (ministerio de educación national, 2009). In 1991, the country adopted a new national constitution that recognized colombia as a pluricultural and diverse country, and established the right of minority ethnic groups to safeguard their cultures. The new constitution also stipulated that government agencies should create strategies to empower these groups and facilitate the survival of cultural diversity (constitución nacional, articles 7, 8, 10, and 70). In line with this constitutional mandate, the decree number 1953-2014 (ministerio del interior, 2014) states that indigenous peoples may have their own education, including ecec, which is called semillas de vida (seeds of life).

Given this normative context which recognizes minority ethnic groups and their rights to adjust every program before implementation with them, it is possible to say that the current national policy for ECEC recognizes cultural diversity. The idea behind the policy is that "child development is shaped by the dynamic and continuous interaction between biology (genetics) and

the experience of the individual interacting in social and cultural environments" (Colombian Presidency, 2013, p.106). Thus, the theoretical foundation of public policy maintains that every child is unique, and that child development is culturally, historically, and locally situated (Colombian Presidency, 2013; Myers, 1992; Vygotsky, 1986). Children's interactions with those around them and with their environment lead to the progressive construction of their autonomy within a particular context. A child's development is prompted by their social interaction and, therefore, it cannot be accomplished without the support and care of others (Colombian Presidency, 2013; Perinat, 2006; Vygotsky, 1986).

Besides these ideas about cultural differences, and as previously discussed, there are many written handbooks, checklists and guidelines for the planning, establishment, and supervision of ECEC information systems. These circulate through the country as neutral sets of orientations to ensure quality. Most of these documents suggest adapting practices to the local cultures, but established procedures and managerial conceptions of ECEC prevent these adaptations from materializing. The idea that education is the path to social mobility and that it will lead individuals and the country to economic success also has an enormous influence on the actual practices. This idea is not expressed in "From Zero to Forever", but it is clear in other national documents. The human capital framework, which understands education as training to produce, guides the holistic attention to early childhood in the national plan of development (Presidencia de la República, 2014).

Another existing difficulty in the application of "From Zero to Forever" is that even though Colombian laws require consultation with ethnic groups before implementing programs or projects, applying the 'best interests of the child' principle in the context of children's rights has complicated local decision making. For example, the idea of individual rights sometimes

clashes with an Indigenous culture's collective conception of rights. As Morgan (2013) states, the universalistic concept of individual rights put forth by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child easily dovetails with individualistic Western values. In some Colombian Indigenous communities, which hold collectivist values (Tenorio, 2011), children might be seen as having responsibilities in their community which constitute collective rights. Additionally, in some communities, collective rights might well be conceived as more important than individual rights. In these cases, there is a need for a simultaneous analysis of the cultural rights of the communities and the children's rights, which sometimes involves a very complex analysis. In some territories, the complexity of the task discourages local administrators from consulting the communities before implementing ECEC programs.

The conception of family participation. In Colombia, the idea that parents should participate in the schooling of their children has changed over time and has been highly influenced by the views of childhood and education. During the first decades of the twentieth century, family was still a key actor in the process of socialization and education. At that time, Colombia was mostly rural, and children were mainly educated within the family and the community (Cajiao, 2004). The increasing industrialization and urbanization of the country as well as the migration of peasants to the cities, looking for better opportunities and social mobility, called for social policies that were applied from the 1960s through the 1980s (Cajiao, 2004). For example, the educational system focused on the expansion of access to different levels of education to support the industrialization process (Cajiao, 2004; Hoyos Vivas, 2008).

Young people's access to basic and secondary education (five years for elementary and six for the secondary level) reached 90% in 1985, after a steady increase of 7% annually from

1950 onwards (Cajiao, 2004). In this new social context of greater access to education, the role

of the family changed, and education became institutionalized. At the end of the twentieth

century, however, the national Constitution called for the involvement of families in the

education process in order to ensure that education responded to local realities. The Ministry of

Education, in line with this Constitutional mandate, issued guidelines for parental involvement

that were clearly oriented by Epstein's (2011) perspectives on family participation in education,

mainly defined as supporting the schooling process. Epstein's theory defines some typologies of

parental involvement that point out a set of domains in which school actors (such as teachers,

family, and the community of students) might collaborate. The framework designed by Epstein

describes a variety of practices that work very well when the goals, missions, and perceptions

about the responsibilities of all the actors converge. As I will show, this perspective, which

entails a school-centered approach to participation, becomes problematic when the school agenda

does not fit with that of the parents. This is especially likely to be the case when working with

parents from non-dominant backgrounds (Baquedano-López, et al., 2013).

In the case of ECEC, the Colombian national public policy emphasizes the importance of

parental engagement. One of the guides designed to ensure the quality of programs was

originally issued as part of the "From Zero to Forever" strategic plan, which later became the

public policy. This guide defined the process of training and mentoring parents as an extended

dialogue in order to construct knowledge (ICBF, 2014). This dialogue starts with the recognition

of people's existing knowledge. The guide extensively describes different ethnic groups within

the country and how their cultures influence their upbringing practices. Nevertheless, there is

still room for a deeper understanding of cultural differences and parental engagement. Even

though the guide states the importance of community work and describes a variety of Colombian

cultures, when it explains the activities for families' participation, these activities are limited to the consultation for the definition of the themes to address, not mentioning the possibility for families to participate in the definition of the kind program they need. Additionally, when it describes children's daily routines, which are the basis of training activities for parents, all the actions described are those of urban middle-class families. Thus, parents' participation is conceived from an institutional perspective, and local cultures are disregarded.

It is a conclusion of this research that the program called Own Way of ECEC, one of the four models defined in "From Zero to Forever," allows communities to choose one of various predesigned possibilities within Own Way. While, the approach to parental engagement entails extensive information exchange between institutional and community actors, it is very limited in the possibilities to transform the objectives and intentions of the program. In all of these programs, the community should be allowed to select the model that best fits their needs and to adjust the whole model to the local culture, not just to select the themes for parents' training. Therefore, the questions involve a way to ensure meaningful participation in the development of a culturally responsive ECEC program with one specific Colombian Indegenous community.

Research Questions

The main research question addressed in this research was: What does culturally responsive ECEC mean from the perspective of the Wasiruma, a Colombian Embera Chamí Indigenous community?

The subsidiary research questions were:

1. What does it mean to be an Embera Chamí person?

2. How do parents and other community members view their children's early experience and development?

3. What are the main knowledges to be transmitted to young children in their community? how that knowledges should be transmitted?

4. According to parents and other community members, what cultural (local) knowledge might inform ECEC programs and policies?

5. What are the gaps between current ECEC programs, and what parents and other community members consider to be key cultural practices?

6. How might a locally designed ECEC program, where parents and other community members have voice and control, accomplish the dual aims of: (a) sustaining local values and worldviews, and (b) preparing children for the inevitability of the "globalized-modern" world?

Researcher Positionality

All enquiry processes are embedded in the social context of the research. The personal characteristics of the researchers shape their perspectives, and their biographies influence the investigation (England, 1994). Therefore, researchers should be accountable to their ancestry, their personal history, and the characteristics and intentions of their scholarship, not only in the establishment of the research goals, but throughout the whole enquiry process (Ball & Janyst, 2008). To that end, I explain my positionality within the research project.

I recognize myself as a Mestiza. I was raised in Palmira, a Colombian village; thus, I have a mix of Indigenous, black and white ancestors. Through the research process, it was very important for me to recognize the mixture of cultures that I hold. This recognition of my own culture and origins was helpful in setting the goals and stating the terms of my relationship with Indigenous peoples, as well as my commitment to Indigenous Research. I am perceived as a

white woman, yet I am also part of a community that has worked with Indigenous peoples in the search for ways to design more meaningful education programs in the country.

The recognition of my Indigenous and Afro Colombian cultural background is a political act (Jimenez Estrada, 2005). The denial of our ancestors' identity is part of the current expression of internalized racism in Colombia, my country. This is a consequence of the Colonial history in which Spaniards and their descendants looked down on non-Spaniards on the basis of race, depicting them as backward and savage, a process of subjugation which started with the European conquest and is still reflected in the unequal relationships among Colombians of different origins. As a Mestiza, I hold multiple identities involving the experiences of a culture in which local knowledge and Western knowledge coexist. I have a very close relationship with land and nature as well as with the academic world. Linked to the field of ECEC, as an advisor at different government institutions and at different levels, I have felt and shared the concerns about colonization through education with colleagues, with other Latin American authors, and with informal groups.

When thinking about doing research with Indigenous peoples, some questions about the research-researcher relationship arose. During the research, I was an insider because I am Colombian, I had been studying and working on the topic of early childhood and, especially, because I had been working with different groups —including Indigenous peoples— searching for the recognition of diversity in the Colombian public policy implementation of ECEC. I belonged to a community searching to decolonize dialogues. I was also an outsider, because I am not Wasiruma Embera Chamí, I have been educated in a very Westernized environment, and I have had the privileges of the middle class, endorsed by society. However, McNess, Arthur and Crossley (2015) challenge the dichotomous definitions of outsider—objective and detached from

reality—versus insider—culturally embedded. Both individual and cultural group identities are multiple, flexible, unstable, and changing (McNess et al., 2015). Thus, in carrying out the investigation, the researcher is not a static outsider or insider. I was always in a fluid space that some authors call the third liminal space, a place that created room for the encounter with different kinds of knowledge.

CHAPTER 2
Theoretical Framework of the Researchd Project

Meaningful Parental and Community Engagement in Education

Freire (1970) warned us that education is not a neutral process. Education and parental involvement might be aimed at ensuring people's adjustment to existing social arrangements by promoting citizenship and unquestioning obedience, or it might look for social change and transformation. Each educational philosophy has underlying assumptions about human nature, society, social justice, and the role of education in human life (Spencer & Lange, 2014; Welton, 2013). Some educational philosophies see the role of education as creating the conditions for everybody's unquestioning inclusion in existing social structures. In this perspective, the goal of the education process is to provide the tools and skills to those socially excluded because of class, gender or race in order to facilitate their successful insertion into the social order.

These approaches do not address issues of power; in fact, they tend to reproduce the dominant power structures (Samoff, 1996). Seeking to create social change, other approaches aim to affirm human agency and challenge existing relations of power by promoting critical thought and working collaboratively with the stakeholders. This involves a critical analysis of the relations of power and knowledge, as well as the social structures rooted in these power relations (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015).

Envisioning parental engagement as an ongoing space for the co-construction of knowledge is key to the search for social justice in education. In ECEC, it involves looking for new ways to transform universalistic pedagogical approaches and to recognize implicit power issues in education settings (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). The recognition of social inequities and issues of power present in ECEC daily activities has inspired critical educators to challenge taken-for-granted practices in the field of education for young children. These critical educators

propose an approach in which the role of parents in the construction of knowledge about childhood is a key ongoing action. This perspective might create room for the analysis and transformation of Colombian ECEC practices towards the recognition of Indigenous knowledges.

This recognition of Indigenous knowledges in the design of ECEC programs implies engaging with a critical social perspective and questioning assumptions of westernized conceptions of knowledge, particularly those concerning children's development. In the next section, I present some conceptions of parental involvement discussed in the education literature. First, I refer further to Epstein (2011), who is one of the most prominent exponents of the traditional model, and then I introduce other perspectives that critically analyze this conception, specifically "funds-of-knowledge" and post colonialist approaches that shed light on the kind of parental involvement needed to transform ECEC practices into culturally responsive ones.

Epstein Model of Parental Involvement

One of the best-known models of parental involvement is Epstein's (2011) framework. From Epstein's perspective, schools should understand children as belonging to a family and a community instead of seeing them just as students. From this assertion, Epstein proposes that educational institutions must consider the context in which children live, and that their families must be involved in those considerations. That is, in order to guarantee the wellbeing, learning, and development of children, educational institutions, parents, and community should work together. To achieve that goal, Epstein proposes a structure for parent-school partnership with specific practices structured in six types of parental involvement. The six main school practices are: (a) to advise families about the creation of a supportive home environment; (b) to propose ways for exchange and communication between schools and families; (c) to promote

volunteering for school activities among parents, (d) to involve parents in helping children in school tasks; (e) to promote leadership and strengthen parents' ability to make decisions; and (f) to work together with other institutions for the inclusion of community services in the school.

This model is widely recognized and used both for the design of parental involvement programs in educational institutions and for the measurement of parents' participation in education studies and research (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Kroeger, & Lash, 2011). Nevertheless, authors adopting a critical perspective underline that the participation proposed by Epstein (2011) works well only for parents who belong to the same culture as the school. These critics find that where there are families whose cultures are different from the dominant culture, their points of view are not listened to. They explain that the ideologies of dominant power which underpin the organization of the larger society are the paradigms behind this approach to parents' participation (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Kroeger & Lash, 2011).

These ideologies of power are commonly expressed and reproduced through different means, including educational institutions, and they create or increase social disparities (Kroeger & Lash, 2011). Baquedano-López et al. (2013) present as an example of these kinds of problems the case of some ECEC programs in the United States, in which parental involvement is designed to ensure that parents engage with their children's education as "first teachers." The authors point out two assumptions of this program. One assumption is that to ensure school readiness, parents need to educate their children in the same way that schools do. Baquedano-López et al. suggest that this kind of education might clash with parenting customs of immigrant families, and that the imposition of one way to educate children at home becomes very problematic. It assumes that there is one valid way to rear children and becomes an imposition of the dominant culture on the families (Baquedano-López et al., 2013).

The second assumption that Baquedano López et al. (2013) highlight is that education starts at birth and children need a school-like experience very early in life. This understanding of raising children is not universal, and it is another imposition on parents of how-to-parent. The main idea behind this assumption is that parents and their knowledge are welcome in the educational institutions as long as they are compliant with and follow the rules of the school. A real participation of parents in school would validate parental knowledge by inviting them to set the goals for their children's education, to be agents of change, and to resist the imposition of the education institutions over them (Baquedano-López et al. 2013).

Funds-Of-Knowledge Approach

In contrast to the assumptions pointed out by Baquedano-López et al. (2013), the funds-of-knowledge approach (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992) recognizes that children bring to educational institutions important knowledge and skills that they learn in the multifaceted social networks in which they participate and that enrich their lives. For example, children might learn about agriculture, carpentry, and bilingual and multicultural activities from their parents. The transmission of knowledge related to these occupations and abilities is commonly intergenerational. This transmission of knowledge includes embodied knowledge such as habits and routine tasks, as well as language and cultural practices which are different from those of the school, and consequently, are usually overlooked, under-utilized, and even devalued in educational settings (Moll, et al. 1992).

The types of relationships, at home and in the community, also differ across cultures and might be different from those of the educational institutions. For example, Coppens, Alcalá, Mejía -Arauz, and Rogoff (2014), González Mena (2011), and Serpell (2008) find that in some cultures, adults perceive childhood learning as an activity that takes place in the natural

environment of the community. Adults do not create special learning situations for the young. They simply exist in situ. For example, environments specially designed for children, with scaled-down versions of adults' tools such as miniature carpenter sets or cooking utensils, do not exist. Children learn behaviours and cultural practices from being around adults using adult tools and in relationships with community life and activities.

These practices contrast with those found in many school classrooms in which the roles of children and adults are predetermined; the relationships are mainly between same-age peers, and between students and educators. Moll et al. (1992) propose an educational perspective that values family and community knowledge as well as relationships with community life and includes these in the curriculum and school activities as a way to enrich them. In this same regard, a study carried out by Serpell and Jere-Folotiya (2008) in Zambia suggests including competencies learned at home (such as multilingualism and personal-social abilities) in educational testing to improve educational equity across gender, class, and provenance.

The funds-of-knowledge perspective claims that household and community resources can enrich education practices. The recognition of the value of these local resources and their inclusion in school programs and activities not only improves the children's performance in school but also makes it more meaningful for children, especially those coming from non-dominant backgrounds. Thus, the idea that parents need to learn from the educational institutions how to educate their children and how to support school tasks is no longer accepted. Instead, parents are seen as knowledgeable and as agents and potential transformers of educational institution practices.

Post Colonialist Perspective

Baquedano-López et al. (2013) also critically analyzed Epstein's (2011) and other models of parental involvement. They point out that although Epstein's approach constitutes an advance in terms of the inclusion of families and communities in the educational institution activities, it is problematic in that these activities are limited to following institutional projects and agenda. Since the educational discourse mainly fits the norm of dominant groups' values and expectations, family beliefs and experiences that do not meet these characteristics are not represented in proposals for family engagement with school. These exclusionary proposals impose normative practices into the home and attempt to shape parents' behaviour in ways that might not align with or may even undermine cultural practices of these groups. In this way, they construct the image of adults in need of guidance (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Likewise, deficit approaches about students and their families perceive those coming from minority groups as lacking and in need of support because they do not share dominant knowledge and values (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

Baquedano-López et al. (2013) describe some of the roles prescribed to parents by a variety of educational programs, which implicitly position them as first teachers, learners, partners, or consumers. The authors critically analyze these programs and highlight their assumptions as follows. Parents as first teachers is characteristic of programs that recognize parents as key actors in children's socialization. This perspective includes parents as participants, but simultaneously imposes practices to prepare their children for school. These approaches consider one pattern of childrearing as 'the model' and design interventions for all families who do not show the expected patterns.

The notion of Parents as learners is implicit in top-down programs. In these kinds of programs, children's family members are considered knowledgeable people and as such, they are invited to participate and engage in educational institution activities, like helping children with school tasks either at school or at home. Nevertheless, their knowledge and participation are only considered valuable if they support school activities such as literacy or maths. Their role is that of school support, helping children to read at home or do activities that are important in order to do well at school (Baquedano-López et al., 2013).

Parents as partners is an idea implied in programs in which parents are viewed as collaborators who help schools to achieve predefined goals or standards. Parents are expected to participate in the institutional programs; the schools might consult and collaborate with them, and they share responsibilities, but their expected participation must follow the institutional agenda (Baquedano-López et al., 2013).

Parents as choosers-consumers refers to parents' participation in their child's education through choosing the educational institution their child attends, based on the institution's performance. Parents are expected to be informed consumers.

All the models of participation described above expect parents to engage in activities assigned to them. They are participatory processes that are blind to equity issues that affect children, parents, and communities, which are not only problems within educational institutions, but are also representative of larger social matters such as social class, ableism, racism, and gender issues. In response to that, Baquedano-López et al. (2013) propose a decolonizing approach to parental engagement that recognizes the injustice of school practices that silence and marginalize children and their families based on race, class, or gender. Their approach entails questioning the practices that homogenize people through the imposition of dominant

knowledge. The inclusion of community cultures and local knowledges in educational institution activities is a political act in terms of recognizing power differentials in cultural practices and of moving towards parents' full engagement in education (Baquedano-López et al., 2013).

Inspired by this decolonizing approach that recognizes local knowledge as a key in the design of educational programs, I proposed to the Wasiruma community that we carry out a participatory research project: together, we would reflect upon and design collectively an ECEC program that included their knowledge, language, and values. This process, inspired by Baquedano-López et al. (2013), would recognize and work to counteract the violence of the imposition of one universal way of life on everybody and everywhere. It called for meaningful participatory spaces for the co-construction of an ECEC project that dovetailed with the local culture.

The participatory research process requires a commitment to local knowledge and values (Hughes, 2007; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015), and entails the creation of a space in which people engage in a collective co-creation of knowledge (Sumner, 2013). In this collective process, as suggested by decolonial and postmodernist thinkers, the researcher should identify their positionality and resist the certainties of modernist universalistic discourses (Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2012). The research also should assume critical perspectives that identify the social, political, and economic context in which education processes take place. This includes ECEC, which must recognize children's and their families' realities as the center of pedagogical programs (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015).

Childhoods or One Universal Child

Currently, there is a tension among different authors about the conception of childhood that must lead educational sytems. From a postmodernist approach, some authors point out that

childhood and children's development are locally situated and historic. Therefore, they recommend the analysis of local realities and the adjustment of pedagogic proposals for specific communities. At the same time, the preoccupation with the quality of services, the need to ensure outcomes, and the pressure to obtain revenues in terms of human capital led to the creation of corresponding documents based on an idealized, universal conception of a child. This is the case of "Basic Learning Rights," in Colombia (MEN, 2016), which defined expected outcomes for the transition from preschool grade. The document states, for example, that children must establish relationships and interpret images, letters, objects, and characters found in different types of texts. In a bilingual oral community, like the Wasiruma, this objective does not make sense at preschool level.

Other studies, like the ELCA (Encuesta Longitudinal Colombiana de la Universidad de los Andes—Longitudinal Survey of Colombia), carried out by one of the most important universities of the country, state that in order to design effective public policies aimed at increasing household income in the long term, it is necessary to know the dynamics of poverty. According to the study, this knowledge allows policy makers to design programs that promote the accumulation of assets and generate favourable conditions for the development of human capital (Universidad de los Andes, 2017). Under the conception of human capital, the university implemented in 2017 an evaluation of children's development, using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (TVIP), to analyze gaps in the results among different segments of the population. The study concluded that the gaps in child development were explained by socioeconomic and regional disparities, which became, then, an underlying mechanism of intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequality (Universidad de los Andes, 2017). However, the TVIP and other comparative children's development tests are based on the

assumption that there is only one healthy way for human beings to develop. These tools have been criticized for failing to recognize cultures and different ways in which children develop within their community's social organization. The TVIP was created in the United States, and it is mainly used to infer levels of development based on the analysis of the scope of vocabulary and other language competencies. The test was problematic even in the United States because it was used to analyze children coming from different cultures and, as a result, for example, many Latino children failed to meet average levels (Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba,1991).

The idea of universal stages in children's development, which does not recognize the significant importance cultures play in children's development, has misled some research and policy evaluators into claiming that certain groups are at risk and that belonging to these groups has damaging consequences for child development and long-term productivity. Delgado-Gaitán and Trueba (1991) showed how some authors attributed differences between the performance of Latino children in these kinds of tests to genetic and environmental conditions (Delgado Gaitán & Trueba, 1991). They, as well as Göncü et al. (1999) and other researchers, have criticized the assumption of universal developmental processes as being based on middle class European and North American children.

These critical researchers have exposed the importance of understanding cultural differences as a key element for an accurate and comprehensive approach to children's development. They propose analyzing children's development within a given community and social organization, rather than trying to understand or fit all children into the features of the dominant social groups. Cultural differences involve different perspectives of childhood and different kinds of family interactions and processes of socialization (Delgado Gaitán &Trueba,

1991). These differences have a strong influence on a child's development and consequently are crucial for the design of culturally responsive programs for children.

Nevertheless, the search for certainty and statistical data for policy making processes leads to the application of standardized tests, even though these tests have been criticized by social scientists for their conception of childhood and child development as a universal process, and for denying the existing multiplicity of social organizations that shape children's development. The search for public policy accountability based on the idea of economic investment and measurement of outcomes, strongly influences these kinds of decisions (Papatheodorou, 2012).

Economic expectations have pushed the increment of government investments in young children's education and wellbeing. Therefore, ECEC public policy and its implementation are projected to produce determined outcomes that respond to these economic dictates (Papatheodorou, 2012). One of the most important reasons for the government's investment in ECEC is that it is considered a way to help children who live in disadvantaged socioeconomic environments and to prepare them to be more productive in the future. It is also understood as a preventive action against possible impairments caused by these socioeconomic disadvantages (Papatheodorou, 2012). In this way, the program assessments of ECEC guide the practices in the field. The goals of the practices are adjusted to prevent children from dropping out of school, improve their academic outcomes, and ensure that they become productive adults.

Heckman's (2006) research encourages these economic expectations. Through economic longitudinal studies, Heckman concludes that children who receive good ECEC services are less prone to drop out of school; less likely to be involved in antisocial behaviour; and in the long term, in adulthood, tend to have access to better jobs. These ideas create expectations that all

children need to receive the same education to produce the same outcomes, and to become productive adults. The 'one childhood' approach subordinates the existing understandings of 'multiple childhoods', and the expectations of social mobility and productivity guide the education practices and evaluations. These perspectives about early childhood suggest a utilitarian approach to social programs, particularly to education. They consider educational practices and outcomes decontextualized from the understanding of local social organizations and worldviews, and ECEC becomes a way to institutionalize children that uniformizes and standardizes practices everywhere.

The ideas of competencies and international evaluations that lead education processes impose one homogeneous way of thinking (presented as unquestionable truth) on people. In this regard, Foucault (1979) questions the regimes of truth and suggests that social scientists analyze the historical origins of what is considered true knowledge. He points out that these regimes increase the power of some human groups to the detriment of others (Foucault, 1975). MacNaughton (2005), inspired by Foucault and post-modern thought, states that there is a connection between the way we think and the politics of knowledge. These politics are evident not only in our conceptions about institutions but also in the way we live our subjectivities. These politics of knowledge also influence the decisions about which stories count and what is silenced or subalternized in a given society (MacNaughton, 2005). To question which concept of child development or childrearing is recognized as valid knowledge is then a political decision and act. These conceptions constitute epistemological bases, and therefore influence the research methodologies and the evaluation approaches of public policies in the field of ECEC, as well as the way societies think about childhood.

In order to transform the status quo, universities, as the main transmitters of professional scientific knowledge, need to commit to engage in the analysis of social realities and redirect the mainstream ideas about education (MacNaughton, 2005). Government institutions must also re-examine their use of universalist discourses and allow local decisions based on people's actual needs. Educators should build relationships with communities and engage in critical dialogues that challenge dominant discourses on early childhood. Only once these social transformations take place, challenging the country's internal racialization and questioning hegemonic ideas on education and childhood wellbeing will it be possible to envision other kinds of programmes that prioritize local knowledges (MacNaughton, 2005).

CHAPTER 3
The Wasiruma Reservation

The first time I arrived in the Wasiruma Reserve, I saw a peasant community that was different from my preconceived images. They spoke Spanish; their traditional paint, characteristic of the Embera Chamí culture, had disappeared from their bodies; they wore the same clothes as the majority Colombian culture. I also noticed that they had access to mass media, that children played with tablets, and that other technological artifacts such as cellphones were part of their everyday life.

The indigeneity of this community only became apparent to me when I understood what being part of the Embera Chamí peoples involves. It is more than a series of objects or ways of dressing: it means sharing the story of the ancestors; it is a way to relate with Mother Earth; it is a relation with spirituality. In sum, it is a worldview that shapes their way of life. It is not a fixed and static identity, but rather it changes with time and experiences.

When I listened to the history of the Embera Chamí peoples, I found that this history is an account of colonization not only for this community but for most of the Colombian Indigenous communities. During this inquiry, I felt that this process of colonization had also been part of my own life. This allowed me to confirm my commitment to resisting colonization and taking action towards change in relations of power, which according to Freire (1970) is the way towards humanization. However, following Fernandez-Mouján (2012), I would say that action is not liberation from one kind of social oppression as proposed by Freire, but a dislocated and non-universal process that looks at multiple power relations traversed by multiple intersecting links and not only colonized-colonizer power relations. This conception implies assuming an anti-essentialist and reflective position on the cultural consequences of colonization at individual and collective levels (Fernández-Mouján, 2012).

I will present, the history of the Wasiruma Embera Chamí community. This will be narrated in a sequential and linear style, which is mine. It takes information from my conversations with Wasiruma community members and from my readings about the Embera Chamí population, which I considered findings of the research as they came out from very local sources.

The Wasiruma Embera Chamí Story

The Embera population existed before the European invasion of Abya Yala, which was the name of the land currently called South America (González Henao, 2013). At that time, there were many different populations with different ways of life, and huge linguistic, cultural, and political diversity. There were conflicts among some groups, but they were able to deal with differences (González Henao, 2013). The Spanish colonization abruptly changed the social configuration of the communities of what is now known as Colombia. Since then, the history of the Indigenous peoples has been characterized by colonization, violence, and displacement. There has also been resistance, and a search for a place to live where Indigenous peoples could preserve their ways of being in the world. The first colonization assault was by the Spaniards, in the XVI century, and devastated native people; afterwards, the wars of independence strongly affected Indigenous peoples and their lands. Later, in the 1850s, the political struggle between liberals and conservatives, as well as the extractive economies of gold and platinum, displaced Indigenous peoples from their homelands. And currently, the national, internal conflict among guerillas, self defence groups, and the government army is a large issue that disturbs aboriginal lives to the point that the Embera cultures and lives face extinction (González Henao, 2013).

Displacement, the consequence of these wars and conflicts, has significantly affected the Embera populations, which are organized in various groups: Embera Chamí, Embera Katío, and

Embera Siapidara. The names of these groups vary according to the place of origin and the language (González Henao, 2013). The Embera Chamí is the group to which the Wasiruma community belongs. It has been profoundly affected by displacements and, given the significance their culture gives to their land, and the spiritual meaning it has for them, this is particularly serious. Land and place are key for an Embera Chamí person and community, and the name shows it: embera means person, chamí means mountain. Embera Chamí means mountain people (González Henao, 2013).

Displacements, hopes, dreams, land, spirituality, and nature have all played a part in the story of the Wasiruma Reservation. When we began the research in Wasiruma, people mentioned that their original land was in Pueblo Rico, a territory located between the Colombian Departments of Chocó, Risaralda, and Antioquia. There, they were gatherers, hunters, and fishers. They had a particular way of planting seeds, especially corn, which is still used and recognized as an Embera Chamí tradition. Some co-researchers explained that they were forced to leave this Sacred Land many years ago, when armed groups arrived in Pueblo Rico and displaced them. One of the Elders of the family Guasiruma, who belonged to the Embera Chamí people, sent a group of adults to look for new land (Henao, 2015).
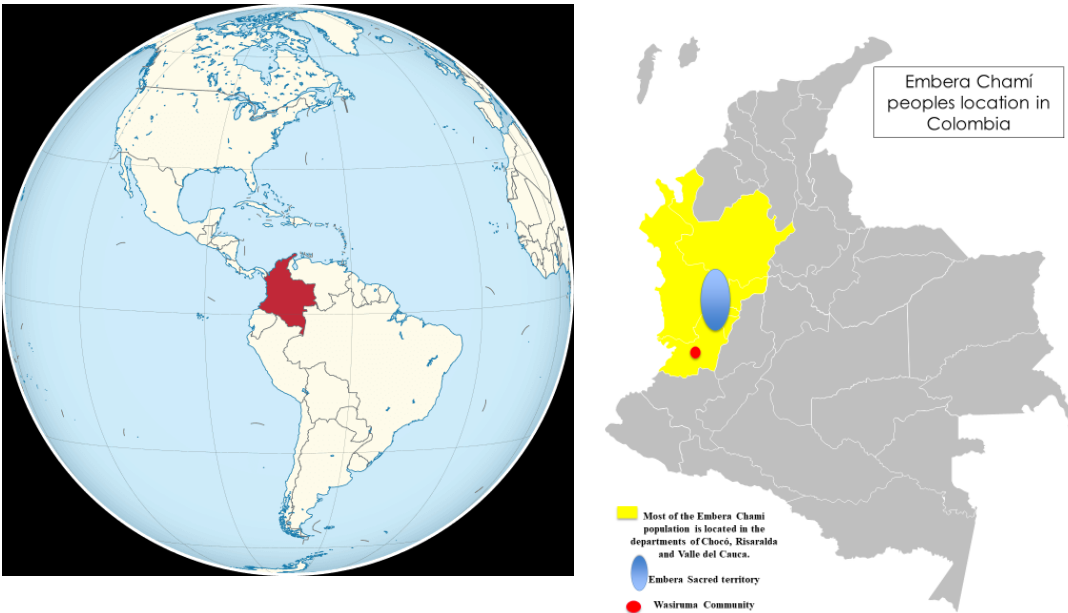
Colombia in South America   Embera Chamí territories and the

Wasiruma community

Figure 1. The location of Colombia in the continent (https://mapamundi.online/america/del-

sur/colombia/) and the Embera Chamí Wasiruma community in Colombia

The exploration party found a territory in the Valle del Cauca, and a complete family

group decided to settle down in this place. They lived there for about 16 years, until the

government developed a project for a hydroelectric dam (Henao, 2015). Through a consultation

process, the Guasiruma family agreed to work for the government preparing the land for the

flood. This decision was not accepted by the whole community and it divided them (Henao,

2015), creating a conflict in which Indigenous peoples and other peasants from the region got

involved. The Guasiruma community was forced to leave, in the midst of violent events such as

burnt homes (Henao, 2015). There was death and despair.

Once again, the Guasiruma family had to search for another land in which to live. In

1986, one of the elders of the community heard about the Office of Indigenous Affairs. He went

there and pursued the community's right to inhabit the original Sacred Land. The community wanted the national government to recognize their Law of Origin. In the conception of this Law, nature does not have owners. Karaby—the Embera Chamí God—created the land and ground, to be cared for by people. Human beings were created to be the Earth's caregivers, not to buy, sell or exploit it (Henao, 2015). This argument was not accepted as valid by the Colombian authorities and the Embera Chamí were not able to recover their territory.

In 1991, when the new Carta Magna recognized Indigenous self-determination as a right, the Guasiruma family group constituted the Wasiruma Reservation, honouring the last name of the founders. Even though the family name is Guasiruma, the group took the name Wasiruma, as it is spelled in the written version of the Embera Chamí language. The group received money from the government to buy a plot of land. The family believed the Reservation should be in Darien, near the first place that they lived when they moved from Pueblo Rico to the Valle del Cauca. However, they were not able to find a person who wanted to negotiate with Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, local peasants did not want to have an Indigenous reservation nearby, arguing that the Embera Chamí peoples belonged to the Quintin Lame guerillas movement. In the meantime, the government broke the promise to give them land, and they had to restart the land claim process (Henao, 2015). Finally, the Wasiruma group managed to find and purchase land in Vijes, a municipality of the Valle del Cauca, and claimed again its status as an Indigenous reservation.

As a reservation, the Wasiruma community has a collective property title for their land, and they are governed by the Indigenous jurisdiction, an autonomous regulatory system that operates under the national Constitution (Ministerio del Interior, 2013). They have their own Law system that, according to the national Constitution, should establish ways for coordination

between the regular national system and their special jurisdiction. Currently, the Wasiruma community is made up of 36 families (126 individuals), 70% of which are under 18 years old (Alcaldía de Vijes, 2016). The community is bilingual (Embera-Spanish) and children are educated bilingually in a local elementary school.

They Wasiruma Reservation has a *Plan de Vida* (*Life Plan*), which is a plan that all Colombian Indigenous peoples have in order to negotiate projects with the State. There is also a *Plan de Salvaguarda* (Safeguarding Plan), a Constitutional Mandate that requires government representatives to work on special plans with Indigenous communities that have been displaced, whose cultures are at risk of disappearing, or who are at risk of being exterminated in the context of internal armed conflict. This Constitutional Mandate was organized under a Constitutional Court's Resolution called *Auto* 004-2009. The purpose of this *Auto* 004 is to protect the rights of Indigenous and other displaced people affected by internal armed conflict in a way that is against the National Constitution. The *Auto* 004 states the obligation of the government and its institutional representatives to protect the right to life and to design programs adjusted to the Indigenous cultures to ensure their cultural survival.

In this Wasiruma community there is a Community Home, a daycare established by the government, which implements the ECEC program for 12 children under five years old. The community mother is the person who leads the activities for the children and their parents. This person is recognized in the community for her solidarity, leadership capacity, community work, and values (ICBF, 2019). Community Homes in the country aim to promote the integral development of children, with the participation of qualified people who are responsible for planning and managing actions intended to guarantee children's rights (ICBF, 2019). Community mothers are in charge of developing pedagogical programs to generate opportunities for

expression and communication with parents, and of promoting social and territorial agreements that allow a diversity of experiences for children's integral development (ICBF, 2019). According to the National Handbook for the Implementation of Community Homes (ICBF, 2019) the Community Homes emphasize community work, meaning that the community contributes to the care and protection of childhood.

The Wasiruma community and the ICBF often disagreed about the organization and administration of this Community Home that, according to the community, did not meet their expectations and did not consider their cultural needs and characteristics. In 2014, the ICBF took the Resolution from the Constitutional Court (*Auto* 004) as an opportunity to negotiate with the Wasiruma Reservation to establish the characteristics that the Community Home should have (Henao, 2015). This was an opportunity for the community to take ownership of their own project and administer it, and it was a perfect convergence for this analysis of the ECEC program with them. As a part of this process, of our research results and the Wasiruma's ongoing dialogue with government, the community negotiated with the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF) to create a schedule for the comprehensive care of children, which was a better fit for the Embera Chamí cultural traditions than the one suggested by the ICBF. Currently, children attend the Community Home one hour a day instead of 8 hours. However, there is still room for more political consensus and more research to develop the framework of the Colombian ECEC public policy.

CHAPTER 4
The Research Methodology

In this section, I describe the methodological approach that guided the research, which was inspired by Indigenous perspectives.

The Methodological Approach

Colonial legacies affect both education and academic research, as a Western model of inquiry has been imposed and applied worldwide (Battiste, 2008; Smith, 2005, 2012). This ignores a multiplicity of worldviews, ways of knowing and living, and means to transmit knowledge. The imposition of Eurocentric traditions promotes cultural assimilation and, consequently, erodes Indigenous knowledges (Battiste, 2008). In this context, Indigenous peoples have been studied by outsiders who have created 'expert knowledge' that otherizes its subjects (Smith, 2005). However, Indigenous researchers have been actively studying and constructing ways to disrupt the exploitation and prejudice that have historically led traditional research on Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2005, 2012). These current Indigenous perspectives include research methodologies that privilege Indigenous worldviews, knowledges, and analyses of their own lives (Battiste, 2008; Smith, 2005, 2012). In these perspectives, Indigenous peoples are active co-researchers and producers of knowledge instead of passive objects of research. This new active role in research implies becoming activists and engaging in counter-hegemonic struggles over research.

Indigenous inquiry challenges the power of research, academia, and education systems that impose universal interpretations of the world and human development (Smith, 2005). This questioning of the implicit relations of power in academic domains involves a variety of challenges to the dominant paradigm of research and its epistemic basis. Among others, feminist and decolonial studies, as well as critical theory, share these concerns about the epistemic basis

and the implicit relations of power in research, and they have developed different approaches to knowledge and investigation (Smith, 2005). In particular, feminist research has questioned the patriarchal and classist basis of Western knowledge, creating new spaces for critical analysis of epistemological differences. For example, Chicana women have studied the intersections of race, class, gender, and capitalism in research, raising questions that are inspirational for de-colonial thinkers who propose doing research from the margins (Smith, 2005). These alternative approaches have created room for different perspectives on research, which question the notions of truth and knowledge. They state that there is not one reality to be grasped, and they recognize the interpretative nature of reality (Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2012; Kovach, 2010a; Smith, 2005).

In this same line of thinking, Indigenous Research methodologies create room for new constructions of knowledge and research alongside Western paradigms (Kovach, 2010a; Smith, 2005). Kovach (2010a) states that Indigenous Research might be considered both qualitative and non-qualitative. It is qualitative research given its interpretative approach and that it involves concepts of phenomenology. It also shares some characteristics of Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Kovach, 2010a), which is attached to local realities and search for change. At the same time, Indigenous Research differs from traditional qualitative research in that Indigenous knowledges does not always fit into the same epistemology and sets of values (Kovach, 2010a; Wilson, 2008). It takes into account local knowledges and the ways they are transmitted, such as experiencing, weaving, oral transmission, and others that are not usually considered as valid sources of knowledge in European conceptions. Kovach proposes to situate Indigenous methodologies as inside/outside qualitative methodologies (Kovach, 2010a), suggesting a flow between these spaces.

Smith (2005) points out that some academic researchers and Indigenous communities have joined together in a political struggle for decolonization, and describes this connection as important for the fight against colonization. According to Smith, the individualistic interpretation of the world and the social disconnection that neoliberal thought creates reaffirm the colonialist approach to education and to the world, which is divisive and destructive. Even though the relationship between researchers and Indigenous communities might be turbulent and uneasy, working together creates room to challenge and transform the status quo of research and the underlying structures that have been taken for granted in the social sciences (Smith, 2005).

Mestiza feminist researchers have also been inspirational for this decolonized research. They propose putting their own perspectives and cultural practices at the center of inquiry, examination and analysis (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008). Using different methods and epistemologies, Mestiza feminists focus on and analyze gender, class, and race questions that have not been addressed by dominant ideologies, discourse, and research. This creates room for a critical understanding of the world and invites us to challenge and transform it. Mestiza feminist researchers also question binary thinking and welcome ambiguity (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008). In this respect, Anzaldúa (1987), Mignolo (2014), and other Latin American thinkers state that decolonial thinking involves a broader epistemology that is on the edge of different worldviews and ways of knowing (Mignolo as cited in Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014). In this sense, decolonial thinking and what Mignolo (as cited in Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014) refers to as edge epistemology complement each other (Mignolo as cited in Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014).

Indigenous epistemologies are also embedded in local ecologies, experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and memories (Battiste, 2008). The transmission of these kinds of knowledges from one generation to the next happens through socialization processes,

ceremonies and traditions. For many of the Colombian Indigenous communities, knowledge comes from a relationship with the spirits of non-living ancestors, with elders who are the keepers of knowledge, with mother nature and earth (Levalle, 2013; Wasiruma community, 2011). These knowledges are collective and are part of the local traditions. Therefore, knowledges are fluid and change in the transmission, and in relation with others and with spirits (Battiste, 2008).

For decolonial research to be conducted successfully in these communities, it should be carried out under their epistemology, on local terms. An effective decolonial study must clearly address and challenge the processes of colonization that are based on Eurocentric perspectives rooted in the Enlightenment and that impose a universal interpretation of the world. This colonialist uniformity devalues and even denies the existence of certain human beings, ways of knowing, and ways of living in the world (Mignolo, 2014). According to Mignolo (2014), decolonial studies involve processes of de-identification and re-identification; that is to say, a process of de-linking oneself from modern thought. Battiste (2008) defines this process as a challenge in which it is necessary to make clear whose knowledges are privileged and what research outcomes are expected.

The understanding of these decolonial perspectives requires a rupture both with the dominant paradigm of science at the academic level and with personal prejudices at the individual level. In the academic domain, it requires overcoming dominant cognitive barriers and assuming knowledge that comes from the connection with others. In the personal realm, it involves connecting with different languages and types of communication (Fals Borda, 1987; Levalle, 2013). It requires engagement in a participatory process that creates space for intercultural encounters and ensures a culturally situated perspective.

Therefore, this research took a participatory approach that, from a culturally situated perspective, created space for the construction of knowledge as a product of dialogue. The constructed knowledge emerged from and was part of the local worldview and ways of knowing; therefore, it was not an imposition of external expert knowledge or an extraction of parts of local perspectives (Jimenez Estrada, 2012). This Indigenous participatory research approach recognized Indigenous peoples as knowledgeable. It also required me to play a double role. On the one hand, I was a researcher and a citizen who had participated in ECEC; on the other hand, I was a part of a social reality and I shared a political commitment with the other co-researchers (Jimenez Estrada, 2012).

Research Design

Scholars from Canada (Kovach, 2010a, 201b; Wilson, 2008), New Zealand (Smith, 2005, 2012) and Latin America (Jimenez Estrada, 2005; Menzies, 2001) inspired this research that required applying culturally situated worldviews, epistemologies, and local sets of values to engage in a process for the co-construction of knowledge on ECEC. The right to self-determination of the indigenous community members and their understanding of wellbeing provided the framework for the research (Jimenez Estrada, 2005). For the methodology, I drew from my own experience working with Colombian Indigenous communities and from the protocols of Jimenez Estrada (2005) and Menzies (2001), described in the next paragraphs.

The Indigenous Protocole. In order to create a space for dialogue about knowledge, I followed a journey that respected the protocol of the Indigenous community. I borrowed the protocol steps proposed by Menzies (2001) and Jimenez Estrada (2005) when working with Mayan Indigenous communities, but I introduced some adjustments based on my own experience. The steps were:

1. Get permission from the local authorities.

2. Establish a conversation with the Indigenous community.

3. Redefine the research objectives and the research field work plan in agreement with the community.

4. Carry out the research with the participation of community members as co-researchers.

5. Analyze the information with community participation and in their own terms.

6. Review and disseminate information with the community, following their own way of researching and transmitting knowledge.

7. Maintain contact with the community after finishing the research to ensure that the information is disseminated; that, if possible, transformative action takes place; and that friendships established in the course of the research are sustained. (Jimenez Estrada, 2005).

When we started the research, the governor of the Wasiruma community said that rather than "researching", the people engage in conversations about a topic or a concern: "Embera Chamí people do not do research, we walk the words." As a result, we decided to work on a bicultural dialogue about the ECEC program. The Wasiruma community had identified the necessity to establish a dialogue about education with the government organizations in their *Plan de Vida* (Life Plan), a document that the Colombian Indigenous communities write to negotiate programs with the State. In this instrument, the result of a participatory process, the Wasiruma community stated that there is a need to strengthen their *Sistema de Educación Propia* (Own Education System) (Wasiruma, 2011). The Life Plan defines Own Education as a process that maintains unity within the community and preserves local customs and habits while also maintaining relationships with nature, other cultures, and the majority society. This education,

based on local knowledges and wisdom, must be gained in an experiential way with the participation of the whole community, including elders, parents, and other Indigenous authorities (Wasiruma, 2011).

We agreed that we would work together with the whole community and that the methodology should be conversational. We confirmed that *Mingas de Pensamiento* was the best way to start the conversation. Another key activity in the conversational process was storytelling by the elders, the *Partera*, and the *Jaibaná*, who know the Indigenous worldview best and are the main transmitters of knowledge.

After holding several *Mingas de Pensamiento*, we realized that a wall painting would be the best way to "walk the words" in the epistemological *edge* of the research. That is to say, in the edge that allowed us to have a dialogue between two kinds of knowledge, the Embera Chamí traditional Indigenous knowledges and the knowledge coming from public policy and academia about childhood education. Some of the co-researchers in the initial *Mingas de Pensamiento* (the traditional authorities, some mothers, and the educators) and I were thinking about the best way to share with the entire community what we had found so far. We thought that it should not be a presentation of conclusions but a dialogue about: (a) what being an Embera Chamí person means; (b) what Embera Chamí knowledges should be transmitted to children; (c) how those knowledges should be transmitted. The dialogue became alive in the wall painting, which is now part of the Wasiruma community landscape.

As a PhD student, I write the text that summarizes the research conclusions in academic words, but the wall that remains in the community is the strongest expression of the Wasiruma's Embera Chamí conception of the world, childhood, and the knowledge that must be transmitted to children to preserve the Embera Chamí worldview. Though this written version of the research

results respects local knowledge, its sacred meaning, and the value of Embera Chamí ways of living, these unique elements are best represented in the mural.

It is important to underline that I set a methodology in my dissertation proposal, but recognized that during the research journey, there might be shifts in approach that came from the relationships with co-researchers. Indeed, although the actual journey began with clearly defined stages and methods, I understood the fieldwork process as contingent, fluid and unstable (Roberts, 2008). The most fundamental change was in my data analyses method. I intended to engage with community members in a conversational gathering of data, which I would analyse, and from which I would draw and share conclusions through some participatory activities. What arose from our engagement, as a critically important contribution to the research methodology, was the idea to create a wall painting. In the next chapter, I will describe this painting that became the core of the research data analysis and the sharing of results.

Methods for Data Collection. As stated, the methodology is a learning journey. Nevertheless, the research process requires the initial setting of goals and stating of an itinerary that guides the process. To set the itinerary and following Kovach (2010a; 2010b) and Jimenez Estrada (2005), I used conversational methods, consistent with Indigenous Research and with Indigenous ways of knowing and of sharing knowledge (Kovach, 2010b): Mingas de Pensamiento, story telling, formal interviews with institutional representatives and co-observation. I describe these in the next paragraphs.

Minga De Pensamiento. In most of the Colombian Indigenous communities, knowledge is not individual; rather, it is part of the community, and it is linked with everyday life (Levalle, 2013). In line with this concept of knowledge, Minga de Pensamiento is a custom in which Colombian Indigenous peoples make local decisions that are key for their community lives, in

congruence with their local worldviews. These community decisions involve their emotional and

spiritual life in a holistic form. It is a way to weave knowledge together and it is part of quotidian

community practices. Even though Minga de Pensamiento is similar in ways to a focus group, I

prefer to maintain the local name of a cultural tradition, as did Samoan academic researchers

Suaalii-Sauni and Ma Fulu-Aiolupotea (2014). These authors used the traditional talanoa and

faafaletui research methodologies and methods to decolonize research, in order to ensure they

followed the local customs on sharing knowledge.

Using the local name preserves the meaning of collective construction that *Minga de

Pensamiento* has. Elders are usually those who understand and interpret the messages coming

from nature and land and transmit this knowledge to the community. Therefore, the *Mingas de

Pensamiento* are intergenerational and require the presence of the whole community, including

children and elders. Even though the research methodologies of this inquiry stated that adults

were the main co-researchers, it is important to make clear that following the local protocols and

customs, children were always around during the implementation of the *Mingas de Pensamiento*.

Children also participated actively in the painting activities when we were designing and making

the mural, especially because they and their families enjoyed this activity that dovetailed with

local customs and ways of knowledge transmission.

My role in the *Minga de Pensamiento* was to engage with the community in the process

of weaving together an intercultural space for the construction of knowledge about early

childhood. It was a dialogue between ancestral wisdom and knowledge coming from outside. In

this process, interculturality is understood as a dialogue among different worlds and different

kinds of knowledge (Levalle, 2013). In Appendix A, I discuss the prompt for the *Mingas de

Pensamiento*. This prompt was very useful to guide the conversation and maintain the focus and

objective. As part of the participatory research process, however, it changed and became more fluid; it gave space for the mural painting I mentioned above. The *Mingas de Pensamiento* were carried out in Spanish since this community is completely bilingual in Spanish and Embera Chamí.

In total, eight *Mingas de Pensamiento* took place (see Table 1 in Appendix C that shows the complete list of research activities and the dates they took place). In the first *Minga de Pensamiento* on September 10th of 2017, in which the whole community participated, we agreed to work together. As is usual in this Embera Chamí community, the governor called for a meeting, and those who were interested attended. Later, after some conversations with the *Jaibaná* and the *Partera*, there were three other *Mingas de Pensamiento* in which we discussed the Colombian public policies of ECEC which took place between September and October of 2017. The co-researchers were five mothers whose children attended the Community Home; the community mother, who is the educator of 12 under five years children in the Community Home; and the school educator. Finally, in the last four *Mingas de Pensamiento* that occurred between January and February of 2019, the whole community worked on the mural. Again, the governor called for a meeting and the community members who were interested engaged in the activity. The details of the process will be described in the next section.

Storytelling. The research process involved a storytelling activity to gather information from the elders. I had foreseen that this activity would take place after some Mingas de Pensamiento. However, after the first Minga de Pensamiento, the governor suggested it would be better to start the conversations with some elders because they were the main transmitters of knowledge and, therefore, it was key to speak with them. The elders were the Jaibaná, a person who has shamanic knowledge and is a leader in the community; the Partera, the older midwife in

the community; the schoolteacher, a woman leading an educational activity with families, and the Community Mother.

At that moment, I felt disappointed because I wanted to carry out a more participatory type of research and, in my view, the Mingas de Pensamiento were the main source of information from the community. Yet, I accepted the suggestion because from my experience working with communities, I understood that I had to accept the authority's advice in order to maintain a good rapport with the community. Later, through the discussions and the relationship with the community, it became clear to me that the *Jaibanás* and the *Parteras* are the keepers of knowledge in the Embera Chamí culture; hence, before going to a *Minga de Pensamiento,* it is important that they are consulted and to see how the research would benefit the local culture. The participation of the authorities and the discussion with them before approaching the whole community did not impede the participatory process of the *Minga de Pensamiento*. My Westernized conception of participation was hindering me from understanding the rituality and the sacred content of knowledge in this community.

During the semi-structured interview with the *Jaibaná* in September of 2017, he narrated his childhood as described and analyzed in chapter three. Later, in the follow up interview, the *Jaibaná* narrated the sacred *Historia de Origen* (Origin stories) of the Embera Chamí community. I had read about the rituality that this transmission had among the Embera Chamí people (rituals are part of the relation with Mother Earth and as sacred knowledges their transmission is ritualized), but it was the first time I received this knowledge and I felt it as a gift. It had nothing to do with an interview because it is a ritual with spiritual meaning. Though I audiotaped and transcribed the interview, I later understood that it was inappropriate, given the sacred content and storytelling, to include this information in the data analysis. Storytelling is a

way to share knowledge that has been produced collectively, historically, and cumulatively as a result of different everyday life activities and on different occasions in direct relation with Mother Earth. Only a *Jaibaná* or a *Partera* can transmit certain kinds of knowledge like these stories. This experience was for me the first step in the path to understand what it means to be an Embera Chamí person.

This interview also led me to understand that certain types of knowledges cannot be institutionalized. Though they should still be recognized by ECEC spaces and schools, they cannot be transmitted as Western knowledge or as part of a curriculum. They must be transmitted as originally intended, as oral tradition. I asked if there was a way to write the stories in Embera Chamí language and the governor explained that there is a written version of their language, but it was developed by Western people. The Embera Chamí language is oral and Embera Chamí do not use their language in written form in everyday life.

Florez Alonso (2008) explains that indigenous knowledges, such as the origin stories, constitutes a complex whole based on tradition and observation and inspired by the relation of the community with land and nature. It is nurtured by stories, rituals, oral narratives and practices linked to the management of the environment, and rules relating to health, as well as the interaction with local and external communities. These kinds of knowledges are transmitted as a legacy from generation to generation by spirits of non-living ancestors and elders and belongs to the entire community. The person and the community who receive this knowledge are expected to assume the responsibility to take care of other community members and of their land. The knowledge is then linked to the community and to the land and is a heritage that should be respected (Florez Alonso, 2008). It is sacred and its transmission is ceremony. For me, accepting this ceremony as part of the local set of values was a political act I made, in that it recognized

that there are different epistemologies and ways of life that must be respected (Wilson, 2008).

Interviews. In order to know the perspective and experience of different institutional representatives, I interviewed two people from the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (in November 2017) and a person from the Cross Sectoral National Commission for Early Childhood (in August 2018). I also interviewed some mothers and educators from the community, given their important role for the design of the locally situated ECEC perspective; this interview turned into a Minga de Pensamiento.

I audiotaped and transcribed the interviews (see guide questions, Appendix B). Though it was helpful to have predesigned interview protocols, some changes were necessary in order to go deeper into the topics discussed. For example, the topics of discussion with the five mothers in the *Minga de Pensamiento* remained open to what they had to say, but we kept in mind the original objectives and topics to address. The interviews and *Mingas de Pensamiento* were all conducted in Spanish, which is my first language and is understood by all the co-researchers interviewed.

Observation. I went to the community about twenty times and most of the times, I remained there two days, spending the night in the Wasiruma Reservation. As a part of the research process, I observed the activities of children in the community daily life and shared the observations with the co-researchers in the Mingas de Pensamiento. In this sense, observation, could be called co-observation (Ortiz Acaña, Arias López, Pedrozo Conedo, 2008). I was not an observer detached from the reality of community life and the research activities. Instead, I engaged with the community in a research conversation guided by the common objective of designing a local ECEC program. To be able to talk about something, one must observe it through eyes and ears, and assign meaning to what one observes by sharing and conversing with

others (Ortiz Acaña et al.,2008). These conversations took place in the Mingas de Pensamiento in which co-researchers expressed what they observed in their quotidian life. Through this approach, we challenged the traditional conception of observation in research. The Mingas de Pensamiento were a space in which we shared observations, and constructed meanings and knowledge together. Reflexivity was part of my research from the very beginning of the process. I kept a diary to write about the observations and my reflections on the process. Some of my observations and reflections are shared in Chapter five.

Data Analysis Methodology

The assumption that knowledge is embedded in the lives and experiences of individuals, their cultures, and their communities is the basis of participatory research. Therefore, in this approach, social research should be conducted through collaborative processes (Borg, Karlsson, Kim, Hesook & McCormack, 2012), as knowledge is generated in a relationship between the investigator and co-researchers. Data analysis becomes, then, a process of co-construction of meaning (Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2012) that requires co-researchers to find ways of making sense together throughout a sustained and cooperative relationship (Borg et al., 2012).

I had planned that in this research, the data analysis would involve a reflective process to identify themes present in the conversational data. These themes would come both from the knowledges in the community and from the experience and theoretical perspectives of the researcher (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The process was as anticipated; to identify themes, we used my notes and interview transcriptions from the first Minga de Pensamiento. We first read the notes and transcriptions together with community members (mothers and educators). Then, following Ryan and Bernard (2003), we organized the main topics into clusters. This process

took place over three *Mingas de Pensamiento* that took place between August and November of 2018.

When we finished this data organization process, the co-researchers and I felt that there was something missing, and that presenting this information to the community would not have the strong impact or convey the meaning we wanted. We needed an activity to mobilize the community around the topic—not just a conversation, but an activity that would enable us to incorporate Embera Chamí identities and their conceptions of childhood and education, from a holistic perspective of community life. We decided that it had to be something visual. The idea of painting a mural together gained strength and we planned the activity.

I invited a painter friend to the following *Mingas de Pensamiento*, and we worked out the idea with the whole community. The community members who had participated in the interviews and the first Mingas asked the rest of co-researchers what it meant to be an Embera Chamí person and what was the main knowledge to be transmitted to young children in their community. Following the local traditions, the governor invited the whole community, and the participants were those who attended the meeting and they became co-researchers. There were approximately 15 to 20 community members at each *Minga de Pensamiento.* We worked from January to February of 2019.

The Mingas were the inspiration for the design of the mural. Co-researchers first drew the main images on paper and then decided together which images they wanted on the wall. They discussed authorities, Mother Earth, home, family, gods, spirits, and their relationship with nature, both living and non-living beings. Through their dialogue they put ideas together, and then designed and painted the wall, in a process that took four consecutive weekends to complete, from January to February 2019. The painter friend , who had experience executing

participatory designs, helped us by guiding the whole process. A photographer also helped us to implement the activities. For example, when the community decided that they wanted to represent the authorities in the mural, the painter and the photographer gave us the idea of projecting photos onto the wall that the community members then used to portray the lineaments of the leaders.

Figure 2. The mural design process.

In line with the decolonial perspective of the research, the idea of the wall painting came from and was implemented by the community. It was a collective exercise that created room for a local expression and holistic perspective on community life and childhood, recognizing the multiple expressions of human experience. It was also a path to reflect about the multiple identities and meanings of being Wasiruma Embera Chamí peoples. As such, in many senses, the painting represented the history of the Wasiruma community, which is not a linear narrative, but one that interconnects past, present and future. It was a decolonizing practice.

The ancestors, the founding members of the community, the spirits which are alive and guide the community, and the future they expect for their children are all represented in one whole intricate image. An important aspect of this representation was that instead of breaking knowledge into categories or disconnected parts, it combined different issues in a way that is

more consistent with the Embera Chamí thought, which represents the multiple realities and perspectives together. The creation of the mural was then a space for the dialogue between two ways of knowing, Embera Chamí and the public policy and its theoretical grounds. The painting was a way to present all the ideas together and to share knowledge not just in the present, but in the future. It was also a way to represent the Embera Chamí conception of time which embodies past, present, and future as a spiral instead of a linear timeline. The entire story of the community—its relationship with nature in daily life, the traditional medicine, the worldview, the world of the spirits, and the sacred stories —are all represented in the mural.

Table 1, in Appendix C lists the activities described in the text above to give the reader an idea of the chronology of the events.

In the next chapter I will discuss the research process and the conclusions about the conceptions of childhood in this Embera Chamí community which, as I have said, is presented in both this written form and in the painting. The painting in Figure 3 represents the authorities, the medicinal plants, the music, the spirit of ancestors, the sun, and the moon. Living and non-living beings are part of this image, as they are all part of one world in the Wasiruma community view.

Figure 3. Main image of mural created with the Wasiruma community

The image represents the Partera; the Jaibaná, one of the founders of the community who is dead; and two of the community members who are being taught about *Jaibanismo*. On the bottom, there is a mountain and some of the plants that have good spirits and bring wellness to the community.

CHAPTER 5

The results of the research

The stories gathered during the process of research, and represented in the mural, reflect resistance. The history, the social organization, and the living and non-living beings of the Wasiruma Embera Chamí community are present in this image. The mural expresses what community members told me in the first *Minga de Pensamiento* while discussing what the steps for the research would be:

"walking the words going back to the past with the elders, analyzing the present, and projecting the future with the community" (*Minga de Pensamiento,* September 10, 2017).

It reflects the sacred stories that, according to the community members, must be transmitted to children for cultural survival. These are the stories of the Embera Chamí Gods, the foundation of the culture and an important part of the transmission of moral values. The images of the mural also represent the past, the present, and the future as a spiral of life.

In the next sections of this chapter, I will describe and discuss the main results of the reflections in the Mingas de Pensamiento, which are:

1. The conception of childhood in the Embera Chamí culture, according to parents and other members of the community. In this section, I describe the strong influence that education has in the construction of conceptions about childhood. I also present the community members description of their own childhood. This reflection sheds light on the need for a local design of an ECEC program, given the cultural characteristics of the Embera Chamí people.

2. Then, taking into account the strong influence that specific cultures have in the way they rear children (Prochner, Cleghorn, Kirova, & Massing, 2016) as well as in the expectations that local communities have on children's development (Rogoff, 2007), I focus on which local knowledge is key to preserve the Embera Chamí culture and to inform the ECEC programs. The

community pointed out the relation with Mother Earth and with the spirits as key elements to preserve their traditions.

After each description of the results, I reflect on the findings. This is important because it distinguish between my point of view coming mainly from academia, and the community's point of view coming from their experiences and traditional knowledges. These reflections on the meaning of childhood and on the main cultural treasures lead to Chapter 4, where I discuss existing tensions between local conceptions of childhood and government guidelines.

The Concept of Childhood in the Wasiruma Community

In order to contextualize the participatory research about ECEC and its meaning for this Embera Chamí local community, I present first a brief historical account that shows how, in addition to displacement, education has played a role of acculturation and colonization, in what Mignolo (2010) calls the coloniality of knowledge. The Colombian education system has tended to deny local cultures' knowledges, and to ignore that there are multiple childhoods and identities. Therefore, the questions about the conceptions of childhood and knowledge, and about the transmission of culture in the Wasiruma community were key in this research journey.

The Colombian education system has been conventionally considered by the State as a uniform imposition of a Western interpretation of the world, and a way to maintain a very stratified society. The first Colombian education institutions were openly intended to evangelize and to impose the European way of life on Indigenous peoples. European culture was supposed to be an avenue for civilization and development; it was imposed on Indigenous peoples. Since the creation of the first schools, many educational reforms have taken place, but there has always been a tension between change and maintenance of the status quo. The current school system aims to prepare people for the workforce. The form of education has changed through time, but

the goals remain the same: to instil, homogeneously, a Westernized culture and to maintain existing social structures (Hoyos Vivas, 2008).

During the Spanish conquest, Indigenous peoples were considered less than human. Later, during colonial times, a Catholic priest named Las Casas recognized Indigenous peoples as humans but considered them to be uncivilized because they did not know the values of Catholicism. Consequently, the first schools were created to 'correct' the Indigenous way of life. In these schools, Spanish and Creole people were educated to govern, while Indigenous peoples were infantilized, considered handicapped or needy (García, 1998), and received only Catholic indoctrination and training for manual labour. Until 1930, the Catholic Church had the role of educator and the constitutional right to make the population follow the precepts of the Christian Gospel (Hoyos Vivas, 2008).

Simultaneously with their fight for territorial rights and cultural recognition, Indigenous peoples have demanded that the education policies respond to their cultural and language needs. Law 21 of 1991, the National Constitution (1991), and subsequent laws state that Colombia is a multicultural country. The country signed and adopted the Agreement 169 of the International Labour Organizations in 1989. However, the Colombian government did not sign the United Nations (UN) Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, arguing that it was at odds with some Colombian laws. The Colombian representatives impugned the articles 19, 30, and 32 of the UN Declaration, related to the prohibition of military intervention and the need to recognize the consultation for projects in Indigenous territories. These two rights clashed with the Democratic Security, a key policy for both the government at that time and for big mining projects that were considered important national investments. Economic and warmongering goals were prioritized over Indigenous human rights (Barrios Giraldo & Zapata Cardona, 2009).

In the field of education, the Carta Magna (1991) and other subsequent laws recognize the right of ethnic groups to have their own education, but the wide-spread belief that Westernized education leads to better life conditions has prevented these laws from being applied. The idea that Indigenous peoples will have access to better social conditions if they have a better education continues to shape educational practices. In fact, in our research interviews, most community members said they needed good Western education because this knowledge was important for survival in Colombian society. The question for them was when education should take place, given that the conceptions of the world usually transmitted in schools clash with the local Wasiruma cosmogony. The prevailing Westernized education instils individualism, competition, and the perception of land as a resource. These ideas are in contradiction to the Wasiruma way of life.

As a researcher, reflecting on these Embera Chamí community assertions about education, I realized that in school I had been taught to identify differences among kinds of knowledge and to objectively evaluate them in order to differentiate among mythical assertions and truths. Myths were described as beautiful, ancient stories narrated by our Indigenous ancestors, whose societies were portrayed as early and rudimentary. On the other side, there was the knowledge of geography, biology, history, and maths, that is, scientifically proven knowledge, and therefore, unquestionable truths. At school, I also learned that we had inherited from Spaniards Catholic values and the Spanish language, and that Spanish was the only language spoken in Colombia. In fact, every October 12th, we commemorated the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas (today called the Castilian Language Day); every year, we celebrated the Feast of the Sacred Heart to confirm our values as Catholic students.

As the Wasiruma governor expressed it, in order to think about a culturally responsive ECEC, which entails thinking about education as a whole, we had to walk the words to the past and see what and how an Embera Chamí child learned. Then, we were to walk to the present and analyze what knowledge is essential to maintain. We started the dialogue thinking about what it meant to be a Wasiruma child in the past, and what they learned as part of their culture. This conversation started with the governor and continued with the *Jaibaná* and the *Partera*.

The first idea that arose when we started the conversation was that, in the past, early childhood as a concept did not exist in the Embera Chamí culture. Time in this culture was conceived as a spiral, attached to land and everyday life. Therefore, the individual development of a child was not conceived of as split between their own course of life and community life. That is, there was not a conception of an individual life fragmented into periods, stages, or moments; rather, the conception was of a continuum in the relationship of the person with the community and the territory. From their memories, the *Jaibaná* and the *Partera* said that in the past, in the Sacred Land, when children were born, they were in a close relationship with the mother.

The umbilical cord was buried in the ground, to thank Mother Earth for life. This ritual was also a commitment for children, their families, and their community to take care of the land. At that time, the child and mother stayed together in a closed space until the baby was safe. The mother cared for the child while the whole community, especially the child's grandmother, took care of the mother and child, providing food and ensuring their wellbeing. Later, the mother took the child everywhere with her, sometimes on her back, sometimes on the breast, using *parumas*, woven fabrics used to carry babies. This way, the child was always learning from the mother and the community. When the child had gained enough autonomy to remain, share, and play with

other children, they started to engage in activities with them. Other children took care of the toddlers. Little by little, children participated in family and community activities such as cooking, fishing, gathering, taking water from the river, and other typical daily tasks. As soon as a boy was able to work without adult supervision, or a girl had her first menstruation, they were ready to form a family, marrying early in life. The Partera expressed it in these words:

> The mothers took care of the babies, and when they [the babies] were older, one [of the older children] helped to take care of our siblings [the toddlers]. The mother already had other children, so we took care of the little siblings who had grown up and she took care of the baby. (Partera, September 17, 2017).

She added:

> We liked to play with the river sand. Our parents allowed us to do that when we were very young. Then, they taught us to work, to collect corn. We took the corn and did chores such as grinding the corn, but at that time we used stones to grind, no grinders, and we made chicha [a fermented beverage prepared from maize]. (Partera, September 17, 2017).

Territory and community were the source of learning. The *Jaibaná* and the *Partera* described that parents made toys of wood and clay for the children to play with; however, some other community members said they did not play when they were children. There was no concept of play as an isolated activity; it was just part of life. Children joined in community life, contributing at their own rhythm. This way, in relation with the rest of the community, the ancestral knowledge and language were transmitted to children in the present. Past and present were part of the same time, related with the future. This was the spiral of time.

Another characteristic of this spiral of time was the storytelling and rituals. The *Jaibaná* and the *Partera* are connected with the spirits of the past and present. They deal with Aribara, the spirits of the ancestors that might either protect from or bring illness to the community. Health was ensured by maintaining good relationships with nature and spirits. In rituals led by the *Jaibaná* and the *Partera*, the spirits of the plants, the moon, and the sun were called upon to ensure that children had a good development (they learned to walk, to speak and to engage adequately in community activities). The children's bodies were painted with special vegetable pigments and wood charcoal. The rituals involved the whole Embera Chamí community as members engaged in music and dance. The Partera described it as follows:

> At that time, when a child was born, we planted the umbilical cord, and then, we used plants to bathe them [the children]. There was a plant called "hueque" that protected them from the Jais [the spirits], so they did not get sick. For the child to learn to walk before they were one year old, we took plants and bathed the child when there was a full moon. We also had ceremonies with chicha and painted their bodies with plant-tinctures. We danced the whole night. This is all part of our ancestral knowledge to ensure that children grow healthy (Partera, September 17, 2017).

Boys and girls learned the appropriate activities for their gender by engaging in the activities and observing the adults; adults would explain if needed. Girls learned to cut firewood, to cook and to collect vegetables. Boys learned to fish, to hunt and to till the soil. This difference in activities according to gender did not reflect power relations. Girls and boys, women and men were considered complementary in the spiral: as complementary as day and night. A community educator said it, in these words:

You [non-Indigenous people] fight between men and women, who commands who. We don´t, we are complementary. We are part of the same, with all nature. We are complementary spirals of life, as the day and the night. (Community educator, January 10, 2018).

Figure 4 shows how the idea of complementarity was expressed in the mural.

Figure 4. Representation of relationships between men and women

This holistic view of life involved a non-Westernized perspective and a different way of being in the world. There were no dichotomies between individual and collectivity, living and non-living beings, past and present. The individual self belonged to the collectivity; they followed the authority of the ancestral spirits and nature as represented in the *Jaibaná* and the *Partera*. Human beings were conceived as related to nature and as part of it. In this view, whether living beings or inanimate objects, all were considered as having a spirit.

The *Jaibaná* and the *Partera*, as the community leaders, narrated the origin of the Embera Chamí population, which is called the origin story. Colombian Indigenous peoples consider this knowledge as the main Law to follow, therefore, it is also called Law of Origin. This Law of Origin guides the management of all material and spiritual matters of each Indigenous community. From the Indigenous perspective, compliance with the Law of Origin

guarantees the balance and harmony of nature, the organization and permanence of life. The Law of Origin also regulates the relationships among beings, from the stones to the human beings, in a perspective of unity and coexistence in Indigenous territories. This is expressed by a community educator:

> Embera Chamí peoples have three worlds and each of them has spirits. This is our story of origin, but to know about these stories you must speak with the *Jaibaná* and the *Partera*. They are the ones who know the practices of transmitting the stories. These stories are our attachment to our peoples. The Law of Origin is our own Law. (Community Educator, September 16, 2018).

> For example, to avoid the destruction of the species, the Law of Origin states which species of fish can be captured and at what moment of the fish life they can be fished.

When we walked the words to the present, we noticed that this Embera Chamí reservation was no longer a community of gatherers. The gatherers became farmers and most of the men worked for the neighbours off the Reservation. Children attended school and the Community Home; there were specialized activities and spaces for education that were not part of their original culture. They use the word early childhood only when taking with non-Indigenous peoples. One of the co-researchers in a Minga de Pensamiento expressed it as follows:

> Embera Chamí culture has not historically been that way. Embera Chamí people, if you research the historical part, they never were cultivators of the soil. They were gatherers, yes? The Embera [peoples] that migrated from there [the original land] are travellers, they arrive in one territory, they get bored, they leave for another, they leave to another land, then they were not like the NASAs that settled in a territory and grew up (...). Now, they

work as farmers with the 'Cafunías' [non-Indigenous people]. (co-researcher in a *Minga de Pensamiento*, October 7, 2017)

Nonetheless, life was still considered as a spiral and therefore, there was no period of life called childhood.

The Wasiruma community practices Jaibanismo and respects the spirits, who are the ancestors, and the land, which is the Mother of human beings. They no longer practice customs such as burying the umbilical cord because they now deliver their babies in the hospital. The Wasiruma are, however, still attached to their land and take care of it because it is their responsibility to the Earth as their Mother. Storytelling continues to be the way to transmit the set of values of the culture. The stories are narrated in Embera Chamí language. The people have resisted acculturation and they have rules to protect the kind of knowledge that enters the community. They are open to exchanging knowledge with the majority culture, but they preserve their worldview.

Any Embera Chamí person or family that wants to live in the Wasiruma community is welcomed, as long as they respect the culture and the *Jaibaná'*s authority. Community custom also requires that the person who wants to join the community not accept charity or alms, which is an expanded custom of Indigenous peoples in the Colombian cities, given the poverty they face. The Wasiruma community has its own school and every child who lives in the community must attend this school until they complete the five years of elementary level. They only attend mainstream schools near the community once they have learned their own culture in their own place. One of the co-researchers in a Minga de Pensamiento stated:

Children [in the Wasiruma community] attend the Community Home, and then go to school here until they finish elementary school [fifth grade]. The school we have

designed is ours, it´s for example, having places to make the orchards, so that all children, for example, in agriculture, [we] could say, they can learn what is our own medicine, the basic things. (co-researcher in a *Minga de Pensamiento*, September 23, 2018).

My reflections on the concept of childhood. The current universal concept of childhood has been part of Colombian public policy for many years. As said, in Colombia, this concept is rooted in the colonial period and came as a part of the Spaniard's 'civilizing' education and health project. However, in Indigenous communities, local knowledge and practices about childrearing, as some historians have described them, were and still are very influenced by shamanism (Ochoa Acosta & Quintero Mejía, 2017), expressed as Jaibanismo in the Wasiruma culture. This has not been recognized by the Colombian schooling system. The ancestral conceptions and practices about childrearing, which were based on rituals and harmonious relations with nature, were changed under the influence of Catholicism. The church considered these shamanic practices as demonic and prohibited them. At the same time, in the search for achieving development, the State started schools to preserve 'good customs'. In this way, children were understood from different perspectives. While the state saw children as seeds to build the future of the nation (Ochoa Acosta & Quintero Mejía, 2017), the Embera Chamí culture saw children as seeds because they come from Mother Earth, as represented when they bury the baby's umbilical cord: they say that they plant the umbilical cord.

Starting in the 1970s and inspired by a technocratic view of education, the Colombian State portrayed children's development in terms of physiological ages and stages, and in many ways, it still continues to do so. This position is based on a European understanding of the world and presented as universal (Ochoa Acosta & Quintero Mejía, 2017), which clashes with the local understanding of children's development. Currently, though the public policy From Zero to

Forever recognizes development as culturally situated, the discourse of ages and stages continues to shape ECEC programs. This discourse, based on a very reductionist interpretation of Piaget, understands children's development as a product of maturation (Vogler, Crivello & Woodhead, 2008); that is, children are viewed as detached from culture and the environment.

Additionally, the international pressure to measure children's development and to compare results between countries confirms that the idea of ages and stages is still a very widespread conception of children's wellbeing and development (Urban, 2017). The OECD has set an international Early Learning and Child Well-being Study (IELS) which measures four 'early learning domains' (emerging literacy, emerging numeracy, self-regulation, empathy, and trust). These tools ignore research that shows how children who belong to non-Western cultures are all too easily labeled as below average (Urban, 2017). In the case of the Wasiruma, literacy might be shaped by the oral characteristics of the Embera Chamí language. The Wasiruma people only have access to written language when they go to school and in very institutional activities. Self-regulation, empathy, and trust might have different expressions than those evaluated. When a child moves freely around the community, following family and community activities everyday, the child might have very different behaviours in terms of self regulation from those expected in a classroom. While they can in time achieve the expected literacy competencies, for the survival of traditional ancestral languages, these children first need to learn their mother language. In order to understand the multiple existing childhoods in different contexts and social organizations, it is necessary to question the colonialist modernist understanding of childhood (Urban, 2017).

Since 2016, Colombia has been carrying out the international Measurement of Early Learning Quality Outcomes (MELQO). Though the scope of this assessment is national, it was

applied to a sample that excluded Indigenous communities. This exclusion shows that there are groups that do not fit this kind of evaluation, which is ostensibly sensitive to diversity yet is still based on the discourse of education investment, outcomes, and financial returns. As discussed earlier, this is a view of education as a technical process, inspired by industry and marketing, which has been leading education since the 1970s (Moss, Dahlberg, Grieshaber, Mantovani, May, Pence, Rayna, Swadener & Vandenbroeck, 2016). Even though postmodern thought has challenged the legitimacy of finding universal truths in the social realm, the policy-making sphere continues to trust only empirical and generalizable studies. There is a persistent idea that good decisions about assigning funds for social programs must rely only on precise testable studies, studies that are believed to ensure better levels of confidence for policy making.

Economists and international organizations committed to promoting economic growth, such as the Interamerican Development Bank and the World Bank, have been said to be the best knowers of social sciences, including education, since they define standards of living. From this perspective of economic growth, social policy relies on studies to determine which are the right ways to ensure development and good governance. In this view, the problems of poverty of the so-called developing countries are local issues, the product of the failure of local policies and social organization (Samoff, 1996), not a result of global neoliberal economics. Education then becomes a way to remedy local failures and to ensure that everybody has the competencies to survive in the global market (Urban, 2017).

In the specific domain of ECEC, different scholars (Moss et al., 2016, Urban, 2017) have called for testing that includes meaningful accountability and contextualized systemic evaluations of children instead of a globalized testing approach (Urban, 2017; Moss et al., 2016). These globalizing testing ideas are inspired by PISA and other international education

measurements and rankings (Urban, 2017) that have been critically studied but continue to lead

education policies at international levels. Moss et al. (2016) suggest three basic questions that,

among others, must direct any research of ECEC policy and practice: What is the local

understanding of childhood? What are the goals for ECEC program? What are the main ideals of

the education system? On this same topic, Alexander (2012) states that "national education

systems are deeply entrenched in national cultures, and therefore, no educational policy or

practice can be properly understood except by reference to the web of inherited ideas and values,

habits and customs, institutions and world views" (as cited in Moss et al., 2016, p. 347), which

point to actual differences between countries and, I would add, among communities.

As a conclusion of this participatory research, I confirm that an ECEC program for the

Wasiruma and other Indigenous cultures must respect their epistemology, their way of living,

their conceptions of childhood, and what the community considers as key local knowledge and

sets of values to keep, otherwise, their culture might disappear. In the next section, I will discuss

what the Wasiruma people consider to be the cultural local knowledges that should inform the

ECEC program to be implemented in their community.

Local knowledges to be kept for the local community and to inform ECEC programs

Local knowledge refers to the perspectives and ways of knowing and being characteristic

of specific cultures (Prochner, Cleghorn, Kirova, & Massing, 2016). These local knowledges,

also called Indigenous knowledges, have a strong influence on the way that cultural groups

socialize and rear children (Prochner et al., 2016). These knowledges are organized in local

epistemologies and local sets of values (Prochner et al., 2016; Wilson, 2008). They are

transmitted as a woven tapestry of meanings that constitutes the cultures (Victorino, 2010).

Specific cultural groups transmit culture in the form of traditions; that is, as ways of doing and

being (Victorino, 2010). In this sense, cultures are alive. They are created, recreated, shared, and transformed by groups of people who have in common a past, a geographical location, or a system of beliefs and values (Prochner et al, 2016). Therefore, cultures are not static or monolithic, but fluid. They change over time and according to context.

Indigenous local knowledges contrast with dominant hegemonic discourses coming from the majority culture and from North American or European research. These discourses, as discussed earlier, come from research and theories inspired by modernist approaches that understand a single conception of childhood. Therefore, ideas entailed in these discourses—about what children must learn and how their families should educate them—must be questioned in order to recognize local traditions and the social norms of particular groups.

This participatory research looked for possible ways to design an ECEC program that resonated with the Wasiruma-Embera Chamí local knowledges. The knowledges that should be protected were identified from the stories, the interviews, and the wall painting. As previously stated, the holistic and spiral conception of time and life of the Embera Chamí peoples makes it impossible to divide time and life into stages or developmental steps. The painting activity showed me that the Embera Chamí culture is based on oral traditions and images. While painting, there were occasions in which the people started to speak in Embera Chamí language. I discovered that there were oral traditions which only made sense in their language and could not be translated into Spanish. For them, the names of the colours and what they represent were more meaningful in Embera Chamí language than in Spanish. It was during the painting activity that we felt most strongly that we were constructing an intercultural conversation. The Embera Chamí knowledges came alive and became vivid in this *Minga de Pensamiento* in which the whole community—including authorities, parents, teenagers, and children—participated.

In order to write about this activity and the painting, I have organized the information in sections, which might not show the intertwined ideas of these knowledges about childhood and community life. I first describe the mural, and then I write about the conversations we had regarding childhood. Figure 5 shows the interrelation of the images.

Figure 5. Images of the wall painting.

The place chosen to paint the mural was a kiosk, located at the entrance of the community. It is the space where Mingas de Pensamiento, community gatherings, celebrations, and frequently, children playing, take place. According to the conversations, this kiosk was the most adequate space for the functioning of the Community Home. The idea was then, to move the Community Home from the closed space where it was presently located, to the kiosk, which is a wide, open place with access to the community.

The mural consists of a central image (see figure 7) that connects to other images in the columns of the kiosk and that make up a circle. The central image of the mural represents the local authorities. The Jaibaná and the Partera are the biggest images; beside them, there is one of the founders of the community, already deceased, and two men who are receiving training from the Jaibaná. They are the transmitters and keepers of local and ancestral knowledges. In the lower part of this main image appears the mountain, which is the sacred place of origin, and

represents nature, Mother Earth, the sacred plants and with them, the entire story of the Embera Chamí people, which is the Origin story and inspires the Law of Origin.

In the columns, they represented the river that is a vital part of the Origin story, the Aribara, the tiger, the mountains, the corn and the rainbow. All of them together represent the Embera Chamí world. In the lower lateral part, next to the columns, there are Embera Chamí symbols that are repeated in necklaces and in other representations. These include the spiral, which represents life and time, and the intertwined spiral that represents the masculine and the feminine. They also represented the symbols of mountain and the sun.

The mural, as a whole, represents alive and non-alive beings that as a weave, intertwined, constitute what the Wasiruma community wants to transmit their children. According to a personal message of one of the authorities of the Wasiruma community:

> The work was very nice because we can see the authorities that are very old in the Reservation and reflect us. We have had meetings with participation of elders, and we have seen that yes, this helps us to think and decide on what we want for the community and for our children. (personal communication, March 17, 2019).

An educator said:

> You, Whites [non-Indigenous people] are so detached from land. Our community life is like this (and he drew a spiral in the air with his hand) (…) everything goes together. Your life is like this (and drew in the air with his hand both a line split into parts and a disorganized image) (personal conversation, March 17, 2019).

Figure 6 shows specific parts of the mural.

Figure 6. Detailed images of the mural: the Aribara, the river, the corn, the rainbow and tiger.

Figure 6 shows the Aribara (the first image on the left), the river (the second image from the left to right), the corn (the third image), the rainbow and the tiger (the last image on the right). At the bottom of the images there are symbols. For example, at the bottom of the Aribara, the red spiral represents time (one spiral alone) and it is attached to land, past and present. At the bottom of the tiger and the rainbow, we can see the sun (the yellow image on the left) and the mountains (the green image at the right) that represent the relation with Mother Earth and nature.

They are intricately woven together to express what it means to be an Embera Chami person and what are the main local knowledges to transmit to children. Nevertheless, I split the images to make it clear for the reader the meaning of the mural as a whole.

Family, community and mother earth. Family and community are the core of the Embera Chamí children's socialization and education. Mother, father, grandparents, uncles, and siblings must prepare children for their engagement with community activities and the transmission of values. Respect, humility, solidarity, wisdom, and Jaibanismo constitute the basis of the local sets of values, which are interwoven with local epistemology. Children learn about the meaning of life from their extended family and everyday life. When children engage in planting, taking water, or harvesting, first with their mothers and later with other children, they

learn from the Mother Earth and discover the ancestors, the creation of men, women, and nature. This is fundamental for the Embera Chamí culture. All these concepts are related to the origin story and the Law of Origin, which are the main knowledge and values to transmit.

Children are first exposed to their culture when they are in the womb. Massages and rituals transmit knowledge about the origin of the cosmos and how to have a good life. A good life is understood as one that benefits Mother Earth; it implies sharing the land, the territory created by the Embera Chamí's God, Karaby, and belonging to all of them.

From   birth forward, through everyday activities with mothers, older children, and community members, a child learns to move through the territory, to share it with others, to participate in community life and production, and not to be lazy. These activities foster sharing and prevent children from stealing. They emphasize that Mother Earth is the home of human beings, and that they must take care of and learn from it.

Seeding. The Wasiruma Embera Chamí community is currently agricultural. It grows corn, coffee, and some fruits. Children learn about these activities early in life, at first not to contribute to the economy of the family, but to learn about the respect and caring relation that human beings should have with land as a source of life, as a Mother.

Another important lesson from the direct relation with land is plant identification, to differentiate between good or bad plants. This knowledge is initially transmitted by the mother who shows and explains the characteristics of the plants to the child. Later, the *Jaibaná* and the *Partera* are the key transmitters of these knowledges. They recognize the spirits of plants and pebbles, mountains and rivers as our siblings in humanity who help humans and guide them by contacting the Jaibaná. It is from that permanent contact with nature and community life that children learn to identify the space of the community, to recognize and avoid what is risky, and

to live harmoniously with other beings, human and non-human. Even though children go to school, they still participate freely in community activities as the school is open enough to allow them to go back and forth, to relate with the community and contribute to farm activities. I observed that while children were taking classes in school, mothers and fathers might go into the classroom to look for their children and ask them to do a chore. Children went out of the classroom to do the chore and then came back to the school. This was part of the community life, very different from a mainstream school in which this might have been understood as a disruption.

Spirituality. The Partera and the Jaibaná are the main transmitters and gate keepers of ancestral knowledge. They tell the origin stories about the creation of life and other stories related to Embera Chamí values. Through these stories, children learn to follow the local rules that constitute the Law of Origin, which is the local Law, based on Indigenous knowledges. The Jaibaná and the Partera are the spiritual leaders of the community and they are in contact with the three worlds of the Embera Chamí culture: the world above inhabited by the Karaby and other Gods; the earth, in which the Embera Chamí live; and the one below, the land of the ancestors and the origin of the Jaibaná. The Jaibaná contact these worlds in the form of dreams, take wisdom from them, and learn how to cure people. The Jaibaná also teach parents and children to follow the guidance of nature.

The *Jaibaná* and the *Partera* are the natural mediators of different knowledges in Embera Chamí culture. They must participate in the design of any educational activity to ensure it is in harmony with community life and to guide how it is taught to the community. The whole community participates in the decision making, but the traditional authorities are the main

guiders and counsellors. Community members might challenge them, but not an external researcher guided by outside understandings of the local culture.

Ceremonies. Rituals and ceremonies contribute to the harmonization of the spirit and body of children to ensure their good development. Medicinal baths, massages for babies and pregnant women, and body painting, for example, are basic activities to transfer local knowledge, as well as to ensure spiritual and bodily health. In the interviews and while walking the words back to the past, the authorities stated that rituals are very important events for an Embera Chamí child's healthy development. For example, the rituals and massages with medicinal plants are key to ensure that children learn to walk. There are also preventive and medicinal doses of beverages created from plants. Face and body painting is not currently part of their daily life but is reserved for special occasions.

Storytelling and Embera Chamí language. The origin story constitutes the foundation of the native Embera Chamí people. It is a living story that expresses the entirety of their traditions and is the basis for the Law of Origin. The spirit of this origin story has been maintained since the creation of the community, and it is a vivid story protected by traditional forces. The origin story is transmitted from generation to generation. The constant relationship with nature, which begins at birth, teaches the right way to live and share with family at home, but above all, to live in harmony with Mother Earth. This story is transmitted in Embera Chamí language in everyday life.

The maintenance of the Embera Chamí language was identified by the community as a key feature for ECEC to sustain the culture. The language transmits the identity of the culture. Its words express life, nature, and cosmos, as well as the names of the creators and the sense of Embera Chamí life. It is like a mirror that reflects the Embera People. It gives the sense of belonging.

In the first Minga de Pensamiento, the community expressed concern because they no longer speak their language in their daily life; the young generation of parents speak the language, but just use it less and less. They said that if it is not taught to children, it is going to disappear, taking with it the Indigenous stories and culture. The challenge is to create room for storytelling in the community daycare. The *Jaibaná* and the *Partera* should be the tellers, but it should not be an institutionalized practice. If it were to become institutionalized, it would easily become a myth and the stories would lose their sacred nature. To avoid this, the community must create a new way for the daycare to exist.

Freedom. One of the concepts expressed by some members of the community when speaking about the Wasiruma understanding of childhood was freedom. From a very early age, as soon as the Wasiruma children can walk by themselves, they move around the community deciding when and how to engage in the daily life activities. They engage in play with other children or around adults. In this way, they grasp the sense of community, learn about spatial limits, plants, animals, and the cosmology, which includes the spirits of the living and non-living beings, by being in contact with the land. They learn to observe, to listen and to pay attention to many stimuli at the same time—as described by Rogoff (2007) in some central American communities—as well as to relate to nature with respect.

Furthermore, children of different ages playing together in a common place is a form of transmission of a collective way of life that is very different from an individualistic culture. I observed that even though there is a local school, it is open and adaptable enough for children to remain in the community environment, in contact with their homes and local activities. It is a flexible multi-grade school in which the community is strongly involved, and it privileges

Indigenous knowledge while also preparing children to go to the intermediate school outside the community.

My reflection on the traditional knowledges to keep. Cultural configurations are diverse and, consequently, child rearing practices differ from one community to another. These practices are in line with local conceptions of childhood and situated pedagogies that respond to the local knowledges to be transmitted (Rogoff, 2007). Hence, understanding the cultural basis of human life is basic for the comprehension of both children's development and local pedagogies. The organization of the community as well as other cultural features have strong influences on the social expectations about a child's development at each age, and the way that adults relate with children (Rogoff, 2007). Cultural and individual characteristics are, then, intricate and integral to human development (Rogoff, 2007).

It is important to understand the dynamics of historical cultural roots and the transmission of cultural practices. Individuals and generations change and adjust these practices in the transmission processes. Understanding this dynamic process of transmission and the changes it involves is a key element for the construction of a fluid notion of culture that overcomes static perspectives that categorically locate and stigmatize people culturally (Rogoff, 2007). It is also key to designing educational programs that are responsive to local social arrangements. Finally, it is important to point out that socialization is a life-long process and to emphasize the agency of individuals in this process. Children are not passive receivers of values and cultural features (Szulc & Cohn, 2012). Rather, children are active constructers of identity and culture. The culture then changes in the process of transmission, in the interaction with other cultures, and through individual and collective reformulations (Szulc & Cohn, 2012).

The Indigenous Regional Committee of Cauca (CRIC), which is an important Indigenous Colombian organization that has worked on the topic of education, explains that there is a relationship between culture, education, and identity (Bolaños & Tatai, 2012). According to the CRIC, education is a process designed for the construction of knowledge, for developing the ability to face problems, to discover personal and collective roots, and to strengthen identity. It is also a space for the construction of community, as well as a commitment to community and personal projects. In this sense, an educational project involves a process that invigorates the culture (Bolaños & Tatai, 2012). These concepts are the product of the collective thought of Colombian Indigenous groups that have worked since the 1970s in the design of the Own Education program, one of the fundamental pillars of their political-cultural claims. It is a program that questions the official school system, which weakens Indigenous identities (Bolaños & Tatai, 2012). Since the 1970s, the CRIC and other groups have continued creating community schools, training teachers, working in pedagogical research processes, and organizing community education projects.

The CRIC states that the Own Education includes Intercultural and Bilingual Education, as well as a project to resist internal colonization and to collectively mobilize Indigenous communities. This kind of education is at odds with the Colombian majority education program that promotes individual improvement and success. The transmission of the local culture is also part of socialization that is an ongoing and life-long process. It is unique to each culture, and occurs during childhood, but shapes a fluid personal identity and flows throughout life. The concept of culture is related to a community's worldview, social organization, rituals, as well as to economic systems (Bolaños & Tatai, 2012).

The Own Education program is not just meant to invigorate the local culture and knowledge, but also involves exchange with knowledge coming from outside. This results in the strengthening of the local through the selective appropriation of external tools and knowledge that enable people to move easily between the community and the surrounding society (Bolaños & Tatai, 2012). The Own Education entails the capacity of each community for self-government and the construction of education projects from a critical perspective (Bolaños &Tatai, 2012). Thus, the conception of Own Education is not just that it includes internally generated knowledge, but also that it is pertinent, in line with the local culture. Own Education projects are directed by the local community, which critically analyzes and takes control of its own education. It is a double challenge to critically analyze what is coming from outside and to establish harmonious relationships with other social groups and sectors. This involves an intercultural process that entails a dialogue.

Participatory research is a way to study in depth local cultures, traditions, and pedagogies for the design of Own Education programs that dovetail with them (Bolaños & Tatai, 2012). In this study, the participatory research shows that young children's education in the Wasiruma community encompasses observation of and involvement in a range of community events. When some members of the community pointed out the importance of freedom, they referred to this tradition. It is very close to Rogoff's (2007) concept of intentional community participation found in some Mayan communities. There is a local social expectation that at a very early age, as soon as they can walk, children observe and engage freely in activities with their siblings or other relatives. Freedom is a very important local value that must be considered in the design of the ECEC program. The local design should promote the outdoors and nature. This is also the appropriate place to transmit and learn Embera Chamí language, which is related to the land or

Mother Earth. The outdoors should be considered the best setting for the ECEC program. This idea dovetails with the Embera Chamí community claims that ECEC should have a holistic perspective that includes a relation with nature.

Home and land are key spaces for the project. Mothers, fathers, the *Jaibaná* and the *Parteras* are key actors and main transmitters of cultural values, identity, and knowledge. As nowadays the community does not speak the Embera Chamí as the main language in everyday life, and it is one of the concerns expressed by community members, they proposed to have locally produced books with Embera Chamí images. By encouraging families to engage again in the transmission of oral traditions, the books might facilitate the reinvigoration of the language. This might be done through intergenerational encounters at home, in the Community Home, or in other community spaces. Another important feature of the ECEC program, underlined by the community, was to bring in mainstream Colombian children's literature, so children have contact with written Spanish and are motivated to learn about Spanish and other cultures.

The community also pointed out the concern about children's nourishment. In their view, this was very important; they had already reached an agreement with the state about the kind of meals to be provided that were in line with Embera Chamí food traditions.

CHAPTER 6

National Pedagogical Guidelines and Perspectives from the Wasiruma Community

In order to analyze agreements and tensions between the Embera Chamí knowledges and practices and national public policies, we had a discussion with mothers and educators of the community during some *Mingas de Pensamiento*. The participants of the three *Mingas de Pensamiento* at which this topic was discussed were five of the 12 mothers whose children attended the Community Home, the community mother, and one educator. All the mothers were summoned by the community mother, but only the ones who wanted and had time to come participated. This is the way that the community usually organizes meetings. I had designed interviews and they became a *Minga de Pensamiento* in the sense that the interviews were conversations guided by a community objective.

We discussed the four activities identified by the Ministry on Education as the key activities that should guide the pedagogy in ECEC settings: literacy, play, arts, and exploration of the environment. In this section, I present the reasons for the Ministry of Education choosing these key activities, I then describe the results of the conversations with the Wasiruma community. Finally, I discuss my conclusions. When I discuss the results of the conversations that took place with the Wasiruma community, I translate into English some quotes which are very approximate given the difficulties of translating literally from oral assertions expressed by some bilingual (Embera Chamí-Spanish) community representatives.

The Ministry of Education explains in the "Curricular Bases for Early Childhood and Preschool Education" (2017), that child development is a process by which children construct their identities and make meaning of the world. For this construction, children absorb all the symbolic, physical, social, and cultural resources available to them (Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN], 2017). These resources stem from the context and the interactions children

establish with adults. Therefore, the interactions are two-way. That is to say, although the social environment influences a child's development, children also have the ability to influence the social environment, and hence, their own development (MEN, 2017). Children are agents of their own development, and as such, they transform their environment, for example, by focusing on one element more than another.

From the gestational period on, families and communities weave cultural meanings about pregnancy and childhood. This fabric of meanings constitutes the path that children travel from birth onward, impacting the place and the role that they play in their society (MEN, 2017). Feelings, words, songs, and oral traditions welcome children to the world and, in certain ways, organize their introduction into the community. This is the beginning of oral literacy and artistic experience, as well as exploration of the environment. The environment, the places where children go, the objects that surround them, as well as their relationships with adults and other children, play a role in the organization of a child's development (MEN, 2017). From these experiences, children use different forms to create their own meanings and express them in different ways, through play, arts, and symbolic creations (MEN, 2017). For example, they use objects and materials that they find in the environment, such as blankets or mud to create play homes, or pebbles to produce sounds.

The definition and unfolding of these four key activities (literacy, play, arts, and exploration of the environment) are thoroughly discussed in the national guidelines, because they offer experiences for children to express themselves, in their own way. They create room for children to bring their own cultural heritage to the ECEC settings, and to discover the local norms as well as social arrangements (MEN, 2017). Through these four activities, children can

express their understanding of their surroundings. In the *Mingas de Pensamiento*, we analyzed each of these activities. as follows:

Literacy

The "From Zero to Forever" technical documents understand literacy in a broad sense. Literacy encompasses written and oral traditions, as well as illustrated books that depict the world through written and visual pictorial symbols (Presidencia de la República, 2014). The expression of experiences through written, pictorial, and other symbols is inherent to human beings and present from an early age. Words are a way to inhabit different worlds, and children's experiences are enriched by this variety of expressions. Songs, playing with words, rhymes, lullabies, storytelling, as well as children's books are key to children's development (Presidencia de la República, 2014).

The wasiruma conception of literacy. During the discussion, the community members expressed that literacy, as defined above, is a very important activity for Embera Chamí children. Oral stories have a strong influence in the construction of their cultural identity. It is a way to be in contact with the spiritual life, values, and beliefs of the Embera Chamí people. Storytelling also transmits the spiral conception of time, the recognition of the authorities in the present and the spirits they bring from the past. Storytelling is also in line with the cultural tradition of transmitting the stories of the creators, the community's origin. A mother stated it in her words in a Minga de Pensamiento:

> For a child to be an Embera Chamí, they must grow within their culture, they must see their culture, their origin from the point of view of our worldview. This is taught by the elders, and it is through our stories that the most basic language is transmitted (...) These stories transmit the spiritual part, our beliefs. We have many traditional beliefs and here

[in Wasiruma] we practice all of them. That is the basis of our tradition (...) (Participant

in a *Minga de Pensamiento*, September 16, 2018).

Thus, storytelling is an avenue for maintaining Embera Chamí values:

- Obligation to Mother Earth, with family and community.

- Recognition of the territory and the basis of the Embera Chamí life in it.

- Protection of seeds and other species.

- Importance of collective knowledge.

- Respect for authorities.

- Respect for oneself and for others.

- Being an upright person, a good worker, and not lazy.

The community also pointed out that in addition to the Wasiruma oral traditions,

children's books could be included in the local pedagogic program as an intercultural project,

bringing interesting stories for the children and a way to have contact with written Spanish, to

which they wanted their children to have access. They said this:

It would be ideal if, for example, we could give support to the Community Mother with

materials. It would be, for example, a book written by us with drawings made by them

[the community]. We would show [to the children] the Aribara and all those stories in our

Embera Chamí language, so that they would know the stories, the animals and all of that.

But we also would like that they learn the stories of you [the nonindigenous culture], that

they also have books from you (...) so they learn the two languages [Spanish and Embera

chamí]". (…) We love the stories that teach something. (Co-researcher in a Minga de

Pensamiento, September 23, 2018).

The community members participating in the analysis confirmed that children were interested in and liked literacy activities. In fact, I observed this interest when we were painting the wall. Children naturally engaged in the activity, and all of them knew the stories that were on the wall. They showed very special interest in painting the Aribara, who are amongst the spirits of these stories. The story of the Aribara is very important: the spirits of the ancestors live around the Embera Chamí communities and they are the Aribara. As Embera Chamí peoples maintain a close relationship with their forefathers, who can protect or attack the territory, the story of Aribara is key in the transmission of local knowledges.

The Embera Chamí community's cultural wealth is in their spiritual world and storytelling is an important way to transmit it. Mothers, the *Partera*, and the *Jaibaná* are the main transmitters of cultural wealth during the first years of daily life. They narrate the stories, but these stories are also represented in objects such as necklaces, fabrics, baskets and other tools. The images in the necklaces represent the Cosmos and the Embera Chamí worldview. Therefore, children are very familiar with images representing stories. The *Jaibaná* has relationships with the spirits and teaches children from early ages to learn and read the signals of nature and of the sprits, through representations such as rhombuses and spirals. These stories are key elements for the transmission of local values and for the maintenance of the culture. The community expressed this concept of the spirits:

> Actually, a child must learn about plants. A child must learn that plants are spirits. It is from this learning that one begins to understand the culture. The child learns that the plant does not work if they do not dialogue with it; plants are alive and are spirits. And not only plants, for example, when we say that 'the rainbow came out', what does it mean? That I cannot go out (…) (…) children must also learn what rituals and harmonisations are for,

they must be told what a harmonization is, what kind of harmonisations there are. The Jaibaná teaches all these knowledges. (Co-researcher in a Minga de Pensamiento, September 23, 2018).

Play

The document "Play and Early Childhood" (MEN, 2014a) is one of the most important guidelines for Colombian ECEC programs. This document defines play as inseparable from the concept of childhood, and it highlights the unique value of play for children's development. Following authors such as Bruner (1995) , Caillois (1986), Malaguzzi (2001), Vygotsky (1982), and Winnicott (1982) , as well as Latin American scholars such as Fandiño (2001), Sarlé (2006) and Reyes (1993), the document states that children's play is vital for the emotional and cognitive development of an individual. The document describes, for example, the importance of physical interactions and verbal play in the form of nursery rhymes for the strengthening of emotional bonds between a child and their caregivers. These emotional bonds are the basis for the building of self-identity and self-confidence (MEN, 2014a).

Following Winnicott (as cited in the MEN, 2014a), the document recognizes that children's play is a reflection of the culture and society where children live. By playing, children represent the world surrounding them, and in this representation, they make meaning of the world. Using Winnicott's viewpoint (as cited in MEN, 2014a), the document explains further the process of children's insertion into the culture, defining playing as the capacity to create an intermediate area of experience between the external reality and the internal world. In this same line of thoughts, play is described by the Ministry of Education (2014a) as the symbolic space between the child world and their caregivers as well as the society that surrounds them (MEN, 2014a).

Another important feature of the guideline is that it assumes a critical position against pedagogical approaches that conceive of play as a teaching strategy, as well as those that state that adults should not engage in children's play. The first pedagogical perspectives introduce games directed by educators as a way to train children's senses or to motivate children to work. Against this, the document asserts that for an activity to be play, children should initiate it, not an adult; otherwise, it is not play (MEN, 2014a). It argues against the idea of educators introducing play in ECEC settings as a way to train children's senses or to motivate children to work or learn through manipulating objects. Such models see ECEC as preparation for school, which is not the goal of the Colombian national policy. An additional critical position of the document is against approaches that claim that adults should not intervene at all in children's play. The Ministry of Education (2014a) proposes that play be initiated by children in a structured environment. This requires the organization of the space in a way that invites children to unfold their creativity and play. The role of the educator is to listen and to be empathetic in order to accompany children's play (MEN, 2014a).

Six kinds of children's participation games are defined by the Ministry of Education in the Guideline "Play in Early Childhood Education" (MEN, 2014a):

Body games, which are the kind of games that involve movement and gestures. These games start early in children's lives when they play with their mothers. This kind of play includes babbling, laughing, and all later playful embodied experiences such as running, equilibrium challenges, competing, and negotiating rules with others (MEN, 2014a).

Exploration games, according to Bruner (as cited in MEN, 2014a), have three characteristics: they are a means for exploration; they are an activity for the player, not for others; and they are a

motive for the creation and invention. Exploration involves contact with objects, assigning a meaning to them, and transforming their meaning or their functions (MEN, 2014a).

Imitation and symbolic games include the exploration and performance of phenomena that occur in children's daily lives. Symbolic play is described as "make believe" and, it is explained as an active engagement with the culture and performance of adult roles (MEN, 2014a).

Construction games are those in which children construct new objects to represent such as a forest or a village, and therefore are usually linked to symbolic games (MEN, 2014a).

Traditional games are those transmitted by oral tradition and, in Colombia, are usually associated with body movement and rhymes (MEN, 2014a).

Games with rules, require children having previous experience playing symbolic and movement games. These kinds of games involve cooperation and decentering from themselves. They entail the possibility of understanding the other, designing strategies, and solving problems (MEN, 2014a)

In relation to the spaces in which play takes place, the document points out the importance of space as part of the pedagogic proposal (MEN, 2014a). It suggests that educators carefully select materials, textures, colours, light, shade, forms, and aromas as well as open, empty spaces. Everything has a meaning and helps to leverage the pedagogic program. The space must reflect the cultural environment and help create room for different identities. It must be flexible and invite play. It also must be safe and aesthetically pleasant in order to enable children to explore without risks and to create enjoyment of beauty (MEN, 2014a). One suggestion is to create corners inviting children to different activities. Following Bonastre (as cited in Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2014a), the guidelines suggest the creation of soft (hammocks, cushions,

rag dolls) and hard (balls, loops, etc.) corners as well as spaces for symbolic play and plastic or graphic representation.

The role of the teacher in this environment is to engage in children's play, taking into account the following five principles:

- Be sensitive and responsive to embodied language and expression.

- Observe and participate without disrupting the game.

- Interact with children and assume roles in symbolic games if pertinent.

- Observe the meaning of the game and to create meaningful spaces for children.

- Create situations inviting play that respect the autotelic character of playing (MEN, 2014a).

To create a playful environment, the document suggests considering this progression: From sensorimotor play to imitation, from imitation to symbolization, from symbolization to more structured roles, from role playing to games with rules. The document makes it clear that this suggestion is only meant to be a guide to observing and promoting the creation of games, or to enriching environments, as the kinds of games might overlap or change (MEN, 2014a).

The Wasiruma conception of play. The Wasiruma community stated that in the past, when the community lived in the mountains, children did not play because they were always working and participating in home or community activities. They said, for example, that girls had to cook, look for water, and search for firewood. One of the co-researchers said it in this way "When a dad went to the river, he went with the boys, and so, children learned what fishing was like. The boys said 'dad, give me a rod for fishing' and they fished. They caught their little fishes, and thus [they] learned. With the mother, the girls learned to gather the food, bananas,

and corn. The girls walked with the mother and she said, 'Daughter, this is the food we have to cook. Let's take it home." (participant mothers in a *Minga de Pensamiento*, September 16, 2018)

However, the participating mothers clarified that they would like their children to have this experience of playing and that it was not against their current cultural values because children went to school and attended the Community Home. Currently, children participate in doing house chores, but girls do not cook because using stoves is considered a dangerous activity; boys do not have to learn to hunt or fish because the community members buy the food in the local market.

The mothers see play as an important activity to introduce in ECEC, because children share with other children and might learn from these activities to live in community, which is one of the main values of the Embera Chamí. A mother said:

> We know that nowadays we have to adapt to how the ICBF is. They split children into ages. So, we can't tell children, 'Let's play arrows'. It's dangerous at this early age, right? Or we are going to play to see who are the strongest. Then, those games do not fit with children's lives now. But at least some games from you [nonindigenous people] such as playing singing games, playing games like ring-a-ring-a-roses are good…things like that ..., children can learn to share with others. This is what Embera Chamí need. (Community Mother in a *Minga de Pensamiento*, September 16, 2018).

What the co-researchers made clear was that they did not want their children to be in a closed space eight hours a day. A mother concluded in a *Minga de Pensamiento*:

> Then we said, in addition to the Community Home, there are other spaces that can be opened and that can be adapted for children to have outside activities. It is what best fits our culture, and it is not something like a child being locked up here [in the Community

Home] having some kind of classes for 8 hours (Mother, participant in a *Minga de Pensamiento*, September 23, 2018).

From my observation and field notes, I can say that currently, in this Wasiruma community, play involves the enjoyment of body movement and exploration of space, making sounds and singing, playing with the rhythm of words, exploring the visual arts and creativity with activities such as painting, the animation of objects, the imitation of adult activities, among many others. They use their bodies to create rhythm through their voices, singing; they use sticks, pebbles, and mud for pretend play and to create forms. They also play with dolls, tricycles, and tablets. Children of different ages play together. Their activities take place in adult-free spaces and encompass running, climbing trees, and laughing. Children engage in spontaneous play in a natural, joyous environment. ECEC games for this community should take place mainly outside, including elements such as free, independent mobility and safe places to participate in the processes of planting, weaving, and being in contact with nature.

When speaking about the intercultural approach, the co-researchers were enthusiastic about children having contact with other Colombian oral traditions associated with body movement and rhymes such as round dances, a type of movement and songs in line with their own culture. These activities create a path for children to develop the agility, strength, and bodily dynamism that are key to performing vital activities of the Wasiruma culture.

Exploration of the Environment

The document, "Exploration of the environment in Early Childhood Education" (MEN, 2014b), inspired by Malaguzzi (as cited in MEN, 2014b), states that children learn by interacting with their environment. Children's interaction with their environment transforms their relations with adults and with their contemporaries as well as with objects (MEN, 2014b). In this way,

children are active participants in the construction of their own identity as well as the identities of others. These experiences of acting and relating in time and space with people, objects, situations, events, and contexts also enable a process of constructing meaning of the world, as well as the meaning of inhabiting it (MEN, 2014b). In this meaning construction process, children use their innate abilities; at the same time, the experiences shape them as subjects of the world and of the specific society in which they live (MEN, 2014b). The document states that children explore the world with their bodies, using their sensorial and perceptual capacities. When they acquire greater autonomy in their movements, they go further in the exploration of spaces. It is from the interaction with objects that they begin the recognition of object properties such as colour, size, texture, etc. They touch, smell, taste, hear, and shake objects; in sum, they act upon the objects. Later, they compare these objects and find similarities and differences among them. Through these comparative activities, children start to order, classify, and count objects. In this way, after an initial manipulation, children construct experiential knowledge. This constitutes the basis of representation, symbolization, and more complex mental operations (MEN, 2014b). Through this process children come to understand the characteristics of objects as well as their meaning in the social and cultural context that they inhabit (MEN, 2014b).

When explaining the role of environment exploration in ECEC, the Ministry of Education (2014b) asserts that children are born with the ability to make sense of the world, but that relationships mediated by adults enhance this ability. Therefore, it is the role of educators to encourage children's curiosity. This also involves foreseeing and arranging conditions for their safety and protection. It is necessary that the adults who accompany the children's development promote environments and experiences that encourage a genuine interest in investigating, experiencing, knowing, and understanding the world. It is also indispensable that teachers and

other educators recognize that part of their role is to accompany and strengthen children's curiosity and initiative. This entails fostering the observation and organization of reality; supporting and encouraging children exploration; motivating children to ask questions; and, equipping them to check and contrast their actions in the world.

The document about exploration (MEN, 2014b), following authors such as Decroly (1961), and Freinet (1996), invites teachers to create educational proposals that favour children's opportunities to explore their environments. The guideline encourages teachers to discover the physical-natural-anthropological aspects of local cultures so that children can explore the community in which they are immersed. The idea that "life goes to school and school goes to life" (MEN, 2014b, p.16) suggests that in the educational environment the events that take place in surrounding spaces are to be kept in mind. In this way, pedagogical actions consider everyday life beyond school and invite children to explore it. An example mentioned is that when a child shares with their group that their mother is going to have a baby, this event might create room to share experiences following the interest of the child or of the group (MEN, 2014b).

Wasiruma's analysis of children's exploration of the environment. The co-researchers stated that in their community, young children explore their natural environment by being in contact with their mothers and with the land. In their view, this type of exploration would be a very meaningful activity for Embera Chamí children in the Community Home. For example, the Community Home could have an orchard for the program, so that mothers and children could work together in contact with the plants. One of the co-researchers in a Minga de Pensamiento expressed this:

We would like to sow some plants that would be used to extract dyes, medicinal plants. The two things are done. For example, for exploration, this can be in the orchard, in the

outdoors, all the time outside, and using a combination of graphic art, paintings and

materials from the two cultures, from your culture and ours. (Co- researcher in a Minga

de Pensamiento, September 23, 2018).

The co-researchers also pointed out that providing some craft materials and engaging in

typical community activities such as weaving, and making baskets or necklaces, might be an

opportunity for parents and children to engage in meaningful local activities. Incorporating these

activities could even revitalize some cultural practices that have been lost during contact with the

mainstream culture. The Embera Chamí traditional production of baskets and other objects is key

to the transmission of the language, which has special words that can only be used and

transmitted in this kind of vivid experience. For some of these activities, the participation of the

community is vital, because the knowledge is transmitted inter-generationally.

They expressed this concept:

When we talk about community or territory, the child is supposed to have freedom, to

fish, to bathe, to have fun, to stay with the family, to share. The child should have

experiences about crops. (…) In our community home, a mother can leave their child for

one hour there, but after this time the child requires their mother. If the mother is

knitting, the child is watching what the mother is doing. It is fun to watch what mom

does, what dad or siblings do. So, they learn their culture and their language, because

language is learned in the community. We learn the Embera (language) doing our things.

(Co-researcher in a *Minga de Pensamiento*, September 23, 2018).

Therefore, grandparents, the *Jaibaná*, and the *Partera* must be part of the activities, for

example, perhaps participating weekly in the daycare activities.

Arts

The document, "Art in Early Childhood Education" (MEN, 2014c), states that arts are part of human nature. Arts enables people to communicate and express ideas, thoughts, and feelings through symbols and codes. The arts organize a diversity of meanings through, for example, musical notations and colours, in order to assist in the expression of perspectives on life and feelings (MEN, 2014c). Therefore, as a means of active human expression, art is key in early childhood. Used within their cultural context, arts can lead children to establish numerous connections, within themselves, with others, and with their environment (MEN, 2014c). Arts constitute an important way to be in contact with cultural legacies (MEN, 2014c), as evidenced by the wall painting described earlier. Arts in ECEC also aims to promote an ongoing contact with artistic creation. Dramatic arts, literacy, and music are all vital parts of ECEC experiences, because they promote the construction of identity and are integral to children's development (MEN, 2014c).

Based on Colombian Tita Maya's successful creation of places for young children to explore different arts starting with music, the Ministry of Education (2014c) states that experiencing different art domains constitutes an opportunity to enhance children's sensitivity. It is a way for children to discover the world and, through aesthetic creations, transmit their own understanding of it. Arts gives opportunities for children to take initiatives, use resources, and build self-confidence to solve problems (MEN, 2014c). The guideline makes it clear that the arts in ECEC are not about teaching artistic disciplines, but about enabling children to explore ways of communicating and express themselves through different means.

Regarding dramatization, the Ministry of Education (2014c) states that children spontaneously engage in drama as part of their processes of self-knowledge and daily play. In the case of initial education, these kinds of communication are present in sociodramatic play (MEN,

204c). Children enjoy pretending to be fishers, teachers, and so on. These are the first approaches to dramatic expression, through which children not only convey wishes and emotions, but also communicate with others through gestures, voice, and body movements (MEN, 2014c). The guideline invites teachers to research the cultural repertory of each community in terms of lullabies, circle dances, and the variety of local activities linked to drama that enrich that culture.

With regard to music, the document states that it comes mainly from the cultural and social legacy of each community, and that family enriches it. Music is also complemented and enriched by the other artistic expressions. Accordingly, the guideline invites people to look for the cultural origin of different expressions and models of representation and transmission from generation to generation. It invites teachers to bring into the classroom traditional dances, songs, word games, and rhythmic sequences, among other things (MEN, 204c).

Wasiruma analysis of art and childhood. The co-researchers stated that artistic expressions are important for the Wasiruma Embera Chamí culture, particularly music and dance. Some dances constitute rituals, but others might be part of playing or the daily activities in an ECEC setting. The co-researchers suggested that children could participate in making musical instruments, particularly drums. Other activities, such as knitting, clay modeling and creating baskets for the collection of coffee, could be integrated into ECEC activities as forms of artistic expression. They expressed it in these worlds:

> We like a lot to weave. For example, I love knitting and I, in my free time, weave earrings, handles, and necklaces. Sometimes we gather in the community to weave, and we look at the fabrics of the others, and we share. So, as you said, making baskets and handicrafts is very good. (…) My mother-in-law knows how to build baskets, so she could be one of those who teaches us. Children would observe and engage in the

activities. (…) We also need children to learn our traditional songs and dances. Children can learn to make our drums. (co-researchers in a Minga de Pensamiento, October 7, 2018).

Among the Wasiruma, the production of handicrafts is usually geared to agricultural and other daily activities. When we spoke about possible intercultural activities, co-researchers mentioned music, poems, word games, and other singing traditions of the mainstream culture. During the design and painting of the mural, I noticed that painting was meaningful for children. They immediately joined in and enjoyed drawing their own stories; later, they also enjoyed painting the wall. In sum, the children engaged easily in this activity and participated in the Minga for the collective creation of the representation of what being an Embera Chamí person means.

Daily routines of selfcare. Even though this topic was not on my initial agenda for the research, the community educators and participating mothers stressed the importance for children and families in the community to work on daily routines for self care. As discussed above, the Jaibaná and the Partera are the community leaders in terms of holistic wellbeing, including physical and spiritual health. However, in the view of the community educators and the participaiting mothers, it was important to create activities with parents and children that would promote health care following some of the customs from the dominant culture. They expressed:

It would be good, for example, in the education of children [to include] the area of hygiene. That would be a thing to copy from Whites, because in this area they are very strict. Children must be taught to wash their hands before eating any food and brushing their teeth. Those little things are important for health (Co-researcher in a Minga de Pensamiento, October 7, 2017).

In this regard, the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (2019) states that promoting care actions are part of the pedagogical process, aimed at generating intentional experiences with children, families, and caregivers that encourage healthy lifestyles in relation to self-care, self-help skills, and good treatment of children. To promote these lifestyles, it is necessary to create safe and welcoming environments in the Community Homes so that the co-researchers reflect on their experiences of caring for children (ICBF, 2019). Furthermore, the operational handbook of the ICBF makes it clear that the successful design and incorporation of learning programs concerning healthy lifestyles and care actions depends on these elements being recognized as important parts of the everyday family routines. Therefore, the introduction of these activities into the daycares requires making room for interaction and exchange with families, centered on respect, affection, and sensitivity (ICBF, 2019).

During the discussions, the community co-researchers identified some key practices for the daycare:

- Promoting hand washing and tooth-brushing routines.

- Ensuring access to safe water to drink.

- Participating in making workspaces tidy and clean.

- Recycling and taking care of the environment.

These and other activities related to selfcare were identified as key for the community, and community members stated that these activities should be implemented not only in the daycare but by all the community members, in line with the community activities and customs.

Working with parents about childrearing practices. Both educators and participating mothers were concerned to create a space for an ongoing reflection on childrearing practices and daycare activities. After discussion, we agreed that although parents and other

community members had their own way to educate children, and although the cultural meanings and methods of transmission were clear, there was still room for reflection on the daily activities to be carried out with children, both in family life and in the daycare. The community educators and participating mothers had concerns about their children's education, and they had questions about children's development and care. The activities of the daycare also needed to be discussed on an ongoing basis, and questions about them could arise once the implementation of the program took place. Therefore, having a formal process for these discussions was necessary. They suggested that periodic Mingas de Pensamiento would be a good approach.

Community Dissent from Institutional Perspectives

Most community members participating in the *Mingas de Pensamiento* disagreed with the institutional position regarding quality as expressed in the handbooks for the implementation of the programs, the standards, and the administrative requirements. In their view, the institutional definition of quality as defined by the mainstream institutions would hinder the implementation of a culturally responsive program.

The schedule. According to the handbook for community homes, children should be cared for 8 hours per day, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar, 2019). The community members participating in the Mingas de Pensamiento expressed that, in order to preserve the Embera Chamí culture, children needed to be in ongoing contact with their mothers, home and land. Thus, the proposed schedule did not fit with the local mores and customs.

As previously explained, Colombian public policy specifies four different models of ECEC to ensure early childhood education and holistic care for children: "community daycares," "institutional services," "child development at home program," and "Own Program."

The participants of the *Mingas de Pensamiento* analyzed the handbooks in which the characteristics of each service were described, but none of them fitted the community's needs. The "institutional services" require children to remain in a daycare 8 hours a day. The schedule of the program called "at home program" was a better fit for the community's needs. In this program, children and their caregivers go to a space once a week to discuss childrearing practices. They participate in group activities, called pedagogical encounters, led by practitioners such as teachers, nurses, and psychologists. In addition, a professional team visits the participant families once a month. Unfortunately, the implementation of this service requires a minimum of 300 children in order to be administratively feasible. As there are only 12 children under age five in this community, the program would be unsustainable. Additionally, this form of ECEC service is organized by institutions that do not know the Embera Chamí culture; it is known that the "at home program" has not performed well within Indigenous communities. The Wasiruma community members did not want this service because it might clash with their worldview.

The Own Way program, though meant for Indigenous communities, has a series of requirements that the Wasiruma community did not fully meet, especially the number of children. The program is implemented by a group of practitioners and the community has had negative experiences with these services. Service providers usually go to the communities to impose practices that are considered the most appropriate for children, without taking into account the culture and local customs of childrearing.

In this regard, one interviewee from an institution said that even though the institutions are decentralized, most of the decisions are made at the national level, and people working and overseeing the programs at departmental and local levels are afraid to change what is written. Although the handbook might recommend making changes based on local needs, if it suggests

one kind of organization, practitioners at the local level might take what is written as the norm. What is written down is often perceived as more valid than the local realities (interviewer, August 16, 2018)

With regard to written versus oral knowledge and power, it is important to point out that working with Colombian Indigenous peoples from a decolonizing perspective implies a recognition of the oral characteristic of most of their knowledge. Fortunately, this oral knowledge has been passed from one generation to the next, resisting the process of colonization that started 425 years ago and that still affects Indigenous communities. Colombia's national independence from Spain was declared from a legal standpoint more than 200 years ago, but colonization is not just about governance (Garzón López, 2013): it entails a logic that operates on the basis of political and economic power, epistemic and scientific power, and subjective power over individuals and the collective. These power relations still exist in Colombia. Justified on the grounds of social organization, they perpetuate a form of colonization by Othering people on the basis of ethnicity, gender, abilities, cultures, and epistemologies (Garzón López, 2013).

In this context, the imposition of scientific knowledge as the only kind of valid knowledge is a form of colonization, and the power given to written knowledge over oral knowledge erases local ways of being and doing. Beginning in the Enlightenment period, any kind of knowledge that did not fit the European perspective of science was considered inferior and described as mythical or prescientific (Garzón López, 2013). Written knowledge has been considered the only way to meet the requirements of objectivity and abstraction required by science. Under the human capital and neoliberal conception of the world, knowledge is also viewed as an individual possession; this clashes with conceptions of collective Indigenous knowledges transmitted in community activities and life (Garzón López, 2013).

Local knowledge is composed of local values, understandings, and experiences that organize people's ways of living. Embedded in the culture and usually transmitted intergenerationally, this kind of knowledge, and the ways of living and transmitting it, are manifested clearly in the manner that families and communities relate with children and the ways that these children develop (Nsamenang, 2008; Rogoff, 2007). In this sense, children from different cultural backgrounds learn and develop differently, and there are a wide range of developmental trajectories (Nsamenang, 2008; Serpell & Jere-Folotiya, 2008).

Safety protocols. The handbooks establish safety protocols for children's off-site activities with teachers and Community Mothers (the educators of Community Homes). According to the Handbook for Community Homes (ICBF, 2019), the protection of children against physical dangers is a right of early childhood, therefore, it is important to take into account that accidents are not the consequence of fortuitous events or of events associated with chance; accidents in early childhood are preventable because, although they occur suddenly and independently of human will, they are the consequence of identifiable risk factors that can be reduced (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar, 2019, p. 133). Therefore, the Handbook states a series of protocols to follow to go out of the daycare. These clash with Wasiruma customs as nature is considered a source of spiritual enrichment and children must be in contact with it in a very quotidian manner. The daycare activities must be mainly outside, and these protocols do not make sense for them.

The perception of what constitutes risky situation is culturally defined. In the Embera Chamí culture, children learn while in contact with their community environment. When the community lived in the mountains, children played in the river with other children. Nowadays, although the community has incorporated some of the mainstream customs, it is very difficult for

them to accept that children must remain in a closed space in order to be safe. It does not make sense for them to establish protocols for children to move in a restricted space as they rely on children's ability to learn in an open space.

Didactic material. The implementation of a pedagogic proposal that makes sense for the Wasiruma Embera Chamí community requires a flexible conception of didactic material, one that includes objects such as shovels, picks, and hoes to create an orchard.

Other materials would include materials for handicrafts, such as string beads and nylon to make necklaces. The Purchasing Manual contains security norms and lists of suggested materials that should be adapted according to the sociocultural characteristics of the region. The Handbook for Community Homes list of recommended materials states that materials would need to be in line with what people can buy (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar, 2018). The focus, however, is on the safety of children, the perception of which is very different in the community from that of the majority culture. Therefore, tools such as picks, and hoes do not fit into the category of what is permitted for children. The Purchasing Manual says that there is flexibility, but, in this case and once again, what is written down is considered more valid than local knowledge, driving the locus of power in decision making.

Perceptions about practitioners' work. When we were analyzing the possibilities of the "Own Education" program, we learned that all care models included mandatory professional support teams. The community co-researchers stated that they did not need either psychologists or other professionals to teach them what to do with their children.

This community assertion about professional practices in ECEC shows the community perceptions of outsiders who had come to teach them what the theories say about children's development and parents' childrearing patterns. Community members expressed that intrusive

professional interventions in the Wasiruma Community Home had been the source of disagreements between the community and the ICBF.

As described in the first chapter, the national evaluation of the "From Zero to Forever" public policy found that practitioners from different areas tended to ignore local knowledge concerning children's development and rearing practices (DNP, 2018). This professional predisposition to disregard or be blind to local knowledge might be explained by the fact that teacher education tends to use a 'one size fits all' approach, which does not address cultural diversity or social inequalities. There are also unresolved tensions between school logic based on individual exams and academic standards, and the logic of pedagogies based on local knowledge production, ways of learning, and means of assessment that, in many Indigenous communities, are rooted in observation and mutual help, not in standardized training. Teacher education is far from local realities. This creates a weak relationship between the contents of training and the real local conditions for professional practices (Cabra Torres & Marin Díaz, 2015).

Technical requirements. Other tensions between national programs and community preferences have involved institutional technical requirements. Particularly problematic are the design of pedagogic proposals and the national system implemented to monitor children's rights. The problems with designing pedagogic proposals are that Embera Chamí knowledges are holistic and oral, and the local conception of time does not dovetail with the design of a pedagogical plan. Writing a program proposal in Western terms contributes to the difficulties.

The national system to monitor children's rights requires uploading digital information monthly. This system was designed to ensure that each child has the opportunity for the realization of their rights; the ICBF is responsible for reviewing the information and set alarms when children's rights are not guaranteed. The Wasiruma members pointed out two difficulties

with this system. Firstly, it requires a better technical system than the one they can afford. Although they have access to computers, tablets, and cellphones, Internet access is unstable. Secondly, when Embera Chamí families from other remote Colombian places come to the Wasiruma community to settle, searching for better living conditions, they are accepted and engaged in the Community Home. However, as these newcomers did not have access to institutional health services in the remote places they come from, the ICBF creates unnecessary alarms. The community views the parameters used to measure and ensure children's human rights as too rigid.

As explained in Chapter One, the conception of children's rights is not understood in the same way everywhere. In this particular community, the collective rights recognized by the culture clash with individual rights. For example, as the international convention on children's rights establishes that the States Parties will adopt appropriate measures to reduce early childhood mortality, the Colombian government establishes as one of the basic actions to fulfill these rights, the health promotion and primary prevention that is achieved through vaccination. In this framework, the Colombian State asks Wasiruma community members to have their children immunized as an unquestionable obligation to the child. This is very problematic because children coming from the mountains have been treated with the local medicines based on Jaibanismo, which does not include immunization. When these children come to live in the Wasiruma reservation and participate in the Community Home, it takes time for them and their families to get accustomed to these very Westernized understandings of rights.

There are also a series of environmental and administrative requirements that do not make sense for rural areas or Indigenous communities. The handbook states, for example, that local organizations should obtain from the Municipal Office Planning a certification stating that

the building the children attend is located at a distance from risk areas (ICBF, 2019). Given the state bureaucracy, certification is almost impossible to obtain for a rural area where the local conditions of living apply to the whole community, not just the ECEC building. The whole community might live in a place considered 'risky'. Other requirements, such as evidence of administrative experience, at least three written quotes for all up-front purchase costs, and the implementation of courses, seminars, diploma courses, and workshops for professional development, make it difficult or even impossible for Indigenous communities to administer their own resources.

CHAPTER 7
Concluding Thoughts

In this section, I present first a responsive cultural approach for ECEC for the Wasiruma community that was designed as a part of the research. Then, I present the conclusions of the research. In doing this, I emphasize that the decolonizing and participatory standpoint of this inquiry created room for a dialogue between different kinds of knowledges. This perspective of the research entailed questioning universal conceptions of childhood based on modernist rationalities. Contrary to hegemonic notions of childhood and childhood services, this approach created room for the understanding of childhood as a social construction, and children's development as contextual and local. Therefore, the reflections are based on the idea that there are many childhoods and that there is no value in homogenizing these conceptions in the search for quality or best practice in ECEC (Ritchie, 2008). Finally, I present some implications of this study's results for the global debate about the urgency of critical re-conceptualisation of early childhood theory, research, policy and practice (Urban & Swadener, 2016).

A culturally responsive ECEC approach for the Wasiruma Community

The participatory construction of a local proposal for ECEC entails a challenge. The modernist perspectives of childhood and children's development and learning seek universal consensus about these concepts. In this modernist thought, to be universally applicable the proposal should be detached from time and context (Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000). As a consequence, local knowledge is unrecognized, and written knowledge streaming from science and Western academia is privileged (Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000). Yet, the conception of a universal child based on professional-scientific knowledge is at odds with the understanding of childhood of Wasiruma parents, which is locally situated, oral, and traditionally transmitted (Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000).

In this research, we created a space where, through painting and oral tradition, we negotiated the meanings of early childhood and learning as culturally appropriate knowledge that is changing and in ongoing construction. From this perspective, we transcended guidelines, handbooks, and standards, situating practice as informed by different interpretations of childhood and ways of doing and being. We created a new narrative for the local program that would involve the Origin story, which guides the rules of the Wasiruma community, its relationship with nature, its spirituality, and Jaibanismo at the core of the program. Arts, literacy, exploration of the environment, and play are intertwined with these cultural traditions. The proposal incorporates the perspectives of parents, children, and other members of the Wasiruma community in the best interest of Wasiruma's children.

From our dialogue, a new proposal arose, taking knowledge from the dominant culture and reinterpreting it locally. The following figure 7 represents the general pedagogical approach:
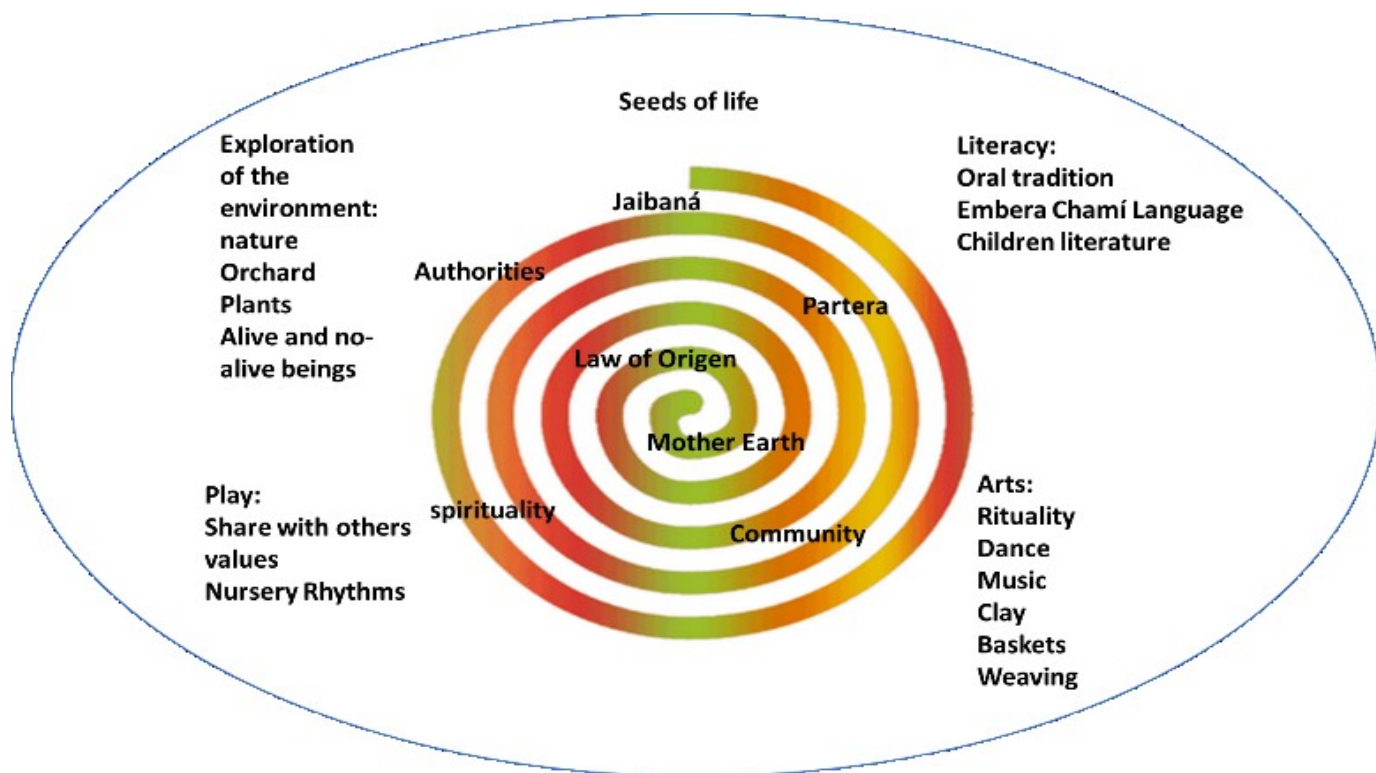

Figure 7. Pedagogic approach for ECEC in Wasiruma graphic display

Seeds of life. The ECEC approach for the Wasiruma community is grounded on the article 41 of the Decree 1953 of 2014 issued by the Ministry of the Interior. This Decree creates a new and transitory special regime to put into operation the Indigenous Territories and allow Indigeous peoples the administration of their own systems, until the Congress issues the law referred to in the article 329 of the national Constitution (Ministerio del Interior, 2014). The 329 Constitutional article states that the Indigenous territorial entities will have provisions of the Organic Law of Territorial Planning from the National Government, which distributes the national budget, with the participation of the representatives of the indigenous communities, prior concept of the Commission of Territorial Planning (Constitución Nacional de Colombia, 991). Eventhough the National Constitution was issued in 1991, in 2014 the Organic Law of Territorial Planning for indigenous communitites was not still issued.

The article 41 of the 1953 Decree states that Seeds of Life is the dynamic interaction between the territory, the community, and the family in programs related to protection, care, childrearing, nutrition, and education during early childhood. It recognizes that these programs and actions must be part of the cultural cycle of indigenous peoples, which begins before birth. The article acknowledges that these programs and actions are key for the transmission of values, worldviews, practical knowledges, and the mother languages of Indigenous peoples. The article makes it clear that Seeds of Life is part of the recognition of ethnic and cultural diversity, and in particular of the conceptions of childhood, family and community that indigenous peoples have. Therefore, it allows the development of processes of caring children according to what is established in the life plans, the Law of Origin, and the national Constitution (Ministerio del Interior, 2014).

Seeds of Life summarizes the agreements established by the National Working Group and

Agreement for Indigenous Peoples Education, CONTCEPI. The article 41 explains that there are many notions to refer to early childhood, according to the worldview of Indigenous peoples. However, the Wasiruma community agree with the main ideas stated in Seeds of Life. Therefore, Seeds of Life is the normative framework for the design of early childhood services.

The spiral thought. Taking into account the research question about what it means to be an Embera Chamí person and what are the main knowledges to be transmitted to young children, we decided to design the program as a spiral which represents the conception of life and knowledge for Embera Chamí peoples. Linear paradigms of thinking break down knowledge into parts, which reduces the possibility of understanding the interactions between the parts (Gavilán Pinto, 2011). Embera Chamí thought, on the contrary, is highly holistic and it is inconceivable to split the whole into parts. For example, the Embera Chamí people consider the individual in their community context and in their relationship with nature. Likewise, the Wasiruma community defines the past, the present, and the future as a spiral in which experiences are interrelated so that knowledges, collectively built from the past, are part of current knowledge (Gavilán Pinto, 2011). In this way, historical processes can be analyzed at any point of the spiral which is not necessarily a line time. Thus, as the Wasiruma community proposed, knowing the past, the present and the future, are part of a single process The best way to represent this kind of thinking is through a spiral.

Local authorities' participation. Another key characteristic of the pedagogical proposal is that it is very articulated with community life and as such, with nature and with other community members such as the local authorities. Contact with the mothers, the Jaibaná, and the Partera is a key characteristic of the program because it creates room for activities such as taking care of the orchard, and being in contact with Mother Land, as well as with activities that are related to the

Embera Chamí language, which are part of community life.

Another source for the design of the proposal was information about how the parents and other community members view their children's early experience and development. Even though the experiences of those who grow up in what they call "the mountain" was different in terms of the proximity of the river and a more natural environment, the co-researchers concluded that the most important characteristic of a culturally responsive pedagogic program should be the relation with nature, with the traditional storytelling and freedom. From this assertion, we concluded that it was possible to create a local ECEC which includes the four activities proposed by the Ministry of Education as long as it includes the local meaning of these activities.

The four activities proposed by the Ministry of Education. This pedagogical program includes activities such as exploration of the environment through planting and taking care of an orchard with medicinal and other kinds of plants. It includes literacy through oral tradition with the participation of the authorities and parents, as well as locally created picture books with Embera Chamí stories, and children's literature written in Spanish. Arts include Embera Chamí music, dance, and the creation of handcrafts for domestic use such as baskets and necklaces. These leading activities are partly inspired by the national guidelines; at the same time, they are all centered on local traditions, respect for nature, and recognition of authorities and values.

In this manner, the participation of children in the education system through the local daycare might be part of the education process of the Wasiruma children and still be culturally relevant, to the extent that education does not control the entire life of children and as long as there is a balance between ideas and materials that belong to the community and those that come from outside. This follows what the CRIC proposes (Bolaños & Tatai, 2012).

The participation of Wasiruma children in institutional education, whether school or daycare, can then be understood as an additional source of knowledge that children can access, while they continue to be "free" to maintain their contact with community life. I observed this kind of approach in the community school, and the Community Home should have the same perspective. The children in the school are not locked up, nor are they receiving knowledge that is unrelated to their reality. The context of the home and the community are considered essential for the education of the Wasiruma. Here lies the true importance of the institutional recognition of these educational spaces, and of making the Community Home more flexible.

This is how education institutions can achieve the principle suggested by the Guideline for Exploration of the Environment (MEN, 2014b): opening its doors to the community life, and the community being open to the school. The Community Home would bring Western knowledge, but the community would be attentive to ensure that what happens there is in line with their own pedagogies and does not disrupt community life. Meanwhile, children would continue to learn from the environment, from observation, by engaging in activities under their own initiative.

In order to implement this local proposal, it would be necessary to engage in a conversation with the administrative team of ICBF. There were a series of technical and administrative requirements that the community did not meet. My involvement with the community and writing this dissertation might contribute to the discussion about and agreement on a more detailed design to be implemented with the Wasiruma community. It is important to mention that the community already negotiated a new schedule for the Community Home, which is currently working from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. The new schedule was agreed under the *Auto* 004,

described previously, which was issued to protect the survival of Indigenous peoples and cultures.

Recommendations and Concluding Thoughts

The research showed that Colombian education has been historically based on the imposition of a uniform perspective on life, rooted in European customs. From the colonial period onward there have been many changes, but the homogenizing approach to education and children's wellbeing persists. In contrast, I described the simultaneous resistance of Colombian Indigenous groups that have created life systems that differ from the discourse of modernity and progress. These Indigenous groups have maintained their epistemologies and sets of values, which emerge from community organization, production, relation with nature, rituals, and aesthetics, allowing them to preserve and reinvent these cultural values in their daily lives (Botero, 2004). Thus, they have overcome the dichotomy of the world as developed/underdeveloped, civilized/savage. They also have reclaimed the right to an education that dovetails with their cultures and ways of life.

The transmitted memories, the collective learning, the oral transmission of knowledge, the maintenance of traditional languages, as well as the struggles for collective rights characteristic of Indigenous communities challenge the modernist rationality of the prevailing education and social programs. Indigenous ways of living call for other kinds of wisdom, different from the rationality of modernism. In the case of ECEC, a type of knowledge that is considered universal underpins the indicators of quality. Under the premise of a science-based approach to children's development it guides ECEC practices (Ritchie, 2008). It stands for one single history, one perspective of life, subjugating the social organizations, stories, and realities that have survived the prevailing order as alternative worldviews (Botero, 2004). These

conclusions arise from the acknowledgement of the above-reported alternative stories of resistance, and from my critical analysis of the existing tensions in the implementation of ECEC public policies in Colombia. These policies recognize the importance of cultural differences and at the same time fail to include local perspectives in the educational practices in ECEC settings. The natural conditions where daily lives take place, and the people's way of living are unrecognized when the programs are implemented.

The Relevance of Participatory Decolonial Research in Parental Engagement

Dominant discourses on social issues hold an erroneous idea: that Indigenous families are poor, unhealthy, uneducated and that, subsequently, their children are at risk of being physically, cognitively, and socially affected. This perception has led many education professionals and social workers to impose their professional knowledge on people classified as at risk (DNP, 2018). Government and NGO practitioners usually see Indigenous and other groups who do not belong to the middle class, white, majority culture as needing to learn how to educate their children (Swadener, 2010). From these prejudices, usually based on studies that measure children's development from universalist developmental psychology as understood in the West, practitioners suggest the design and implementation of activities geared to parents, to teach them how their homes should be and how to take care of their children. In this way, both Indigenous children and their parents have been excluded from active participation in the design and implementation of ECEC. This exclusion has consequences as the national evaluation of the implementation of the Colombian public policy for ECEC demonstrates (DNP, 2018). When parents' and community perspectives are not taken into account, the parents just quit or exclude themselves from the services.

When analyzing the possibilities offered by the ICBF national handbooks for the Own Education, the Wasiruma community and I found in a *Minga de Pensamiento*, that all the integral care models included a professional support team. Immediately, some of the co-researchers stated that they did not need psychologists or any professional to tell them what to do with their children. This shows the community feelings towards external educators, psychologists, and other practitioners. In previous experiences in the Wasiruma community, these professionals had transmitted knowledge about childhood and education, and their practices were based on programs designed without any community participation. Practitioners behaved as 'owners' of this knowledge, which corresponds to what Freire (1970) described as a banking concept of education. In order to transform the feelings of community members towards outsider practitioners, the approach to education and ECEC must change by shifting to an egalitarian way of interacting and communicating. Parental participation does not consist of following the prescriptions of experts on how to take care of children (Ritchie, 2008). Rather, it is to bring their knowledge and customs to enrich the ECEC designs and settings being developed.

In order to change this existing model, in a way that goes beyond the discourse of accepting cultural differences, it is necessary to create new spaces in which local perspectives about life, childhood, and childrearing become legitimate. That is to say, it is necessary to create room for the vindication of the local and cultural particularities, as well as for reaffirmation of the subjectivities of the participants in the ECEC settings (Ritchie, 2008). A new space for participatory reflection and co-construction of knowledge would help to design culturally responsive ECEC programs and ensure their daily enactment, thereby translating policies from discourses into transformative practices.

Participatory research plays a central role in the creation of spaces for dialogue. It goes further than the current practices described by the institutional representatives in interviews conducted during this research. In those interviews, I asked government officials what prevented public policy from becoming practice. They stated that in most cases, the government representatives went to the communities to choose, with the local actors, which of the already defined programs fit the community culture better. Parents' roles were circumscribed to choosing among available programs instead of being active designers and participants. In contrast, a participatory research, based on the recognition of local ways of knowing, being, and doing, broadens the scope of the consultation with communities. It overcomes the constraints of colonizing perspectives assumed by academics and practitioners educated within western frameworks (Ritchie, 2008). It involves a dialogue in which both local knowledges and academic perspectives that support public policies are legitimized and have a place (Ritchie, 2008).

In the case of the Wasiruma Embera Chamí community, the design of an ECEC program that responds to the community needs should include their spiritual meaning of life, as well as their epistemology and set of ancestral values. The freedom and relationship with nature that Embera Chamí people consider key for a child's development, as well as the spirituality of their stories of origin must be placed at the core of the program, grounding relations with the Embera Chamí way of life. The inclusion of these fundamental relationships and local understandings would prevent simple token representations of the Embera Chamí mores and customs within ECEC. When local customs and materials are incorporated into a government predesigned program, without considering the local spirituality, epistemology, and set of values, there is a risk of essentializing the culture (Ritchie, 2008). Placing local traditions at the center does not mean just adding on elements (Ritchie, 2008).

In the participatory research with the Wasiruma community, the ECEC program design entailed an analysis of each of the leading activities proposed by the Ministry of Education. This helped to determine first, if they made sense in the local environment and, second, how they might be implemented to be in line with the local ways of knowing, living and being. We found that all the leading activities were meaningful for the Wasiruma as long as these activities maintained and promoted the sacred meaning of land, the spirituality of life, the relation with living and nonliving beings, and the value of intergenerational encounters. Consequently, the pedagogic program should include the participation of Embera Chamí leaders, such as the *Jaibaná* and the *Partera*; visits to communal places, including the school and open spaces, such as the river; the creation of objects such as necklaces, baskets, and pans; and community activities related to taking care of nature. All these activities are opportunities to learn and use the ancestral language through social interaction, which is their natural way to learn a language.

Key to the design of a culturally meaningful ECEC program is a decolonial perspective in which the local epistemology, the set of local values, and the way of living are at the center of the reflection (Richie, 2008). This is not just to ensure participation, but mainly to challenge unquestioned assumptions about early childhood education and children's wellbeing. Therefore, it involves a co-construction process based on a dialogue between two kinds of knowledges; one coming from the community rearing practices and traditional knowledges, and the other from academia and public policies. For this action to take place, it is necessary for practitioners to break with the idea that only written and Western knowledge is valid and to understand the influence that culture has on a child development.

In the case of the Wasiruma community, the recognition of a local way of knowing, which is embodied and comes from the interaction with all beings—alive and non-alive—in

nature is essential for the ECEC program. Therefore, the ECEC pedagogical proposal should include encounters with peers and the community mothers as well as with other children of different ages and other adults. This includes the active participation of the *Jaibaná* and the *Partera*. The program must include an agricultural space, such as an orchard, intergenerational activities with the participation of elders, and local transmission of stories, as well as traditional activities such as making necklaces and baskets, weaving, and pottery making.

In the Wasiruma reservation, because the community mother (the community teacher who works in the Community Home with children under age five) belongs to the community, she can design with other local educators, pedagogical activities that are in line with the Embera Chamí culture. She is familiar with the local customs and she follows, spontaneously, the local protocols and customs in her everyday life. The community expressed that not all community members are able to speak the Embera Chamí language, and therefore, this might be a characteristic that every Community Mother should have. Additionally, assuming this perspective in the daycare requires the ICBF to respect local knowledge and recognize it as valid. It entails accepting local traditions that ensure the transmission of culture and language; otherwise, institutional interventions would impede this transmission (Ball, 2004; Cleghorn & Prochner, 2010; Richie, 2008; Urban, 2017). Therefore, local knowledges should be considered as valid as knowledge coming from outside, from the institution and the practitioners. Assuming this attitude is a political act, because it changes the relations of power among institutions, practitioners, and community, including children.

The design of the program to make it participatory involves a resignification of the role of all intervening actors. The roles of the community mother, the institutional advisor and supervisory teams, the community at large, and the children themselves should change. They are

all active constructors of knowledge and of a local pedagogic proposal (Richie, 2008). Therefore, there is not one owner of knowledge, but knowledges are collective constructions.

It is only from this understanding and political position that the rituals and the storytelling narrated by the Jaibaná and the Partera can be incorporated into the daily routines of the ECEC activities. This understanding also creates room for the local epistemology, sets of values, and pedagogy to be part of the education and care program. In the local perspective, children learn collectively from participatory experiences in the community activities by pitching in these activities (Rogoff, 2007). Because traditionally children are not split into age groups, the ECEC and the elementary school should cooperatively design intergenerational activities to enable community members and children from the school to participate in the ECEC space.

The pedagogical program for the Community Home should provide opportunities for children to engage in activities such as listening to traditional origin stories, weaving, and planting in the orchard. Thus, they have opportunities for developing learning skills based on the embodied knowledge of the traditional Embera Chamí culture. Mothers, grandparents, and other community members could also engage in these activities so children would learn by observing and participating alongside adults, in line with local customs. By doing these kinds of activities, the Community Home would not only participate in community activities but would also create opportunities for the revitalization of Embera Chamí customs and language in everyday life.

The Community Home would then uphold local customs, ensuring that children have access to an intercultural environment. It would be the community, through participatory dialogues, who would decide which kind of knowledge makes sense for them. The *Minga de Pensamiento* that we used as a part of the decolonial research methodology created room for these decisions. It not only paved the way for a conversation about the meaning of childhood and

ECEC in the Embera Chamí community, but also enabled us to find a means of expression (painting) that better captured the holistic conception of life of the Embera Chamí peoples, as a spiral and a continuum. In this way, early childhood, which is a Western concept, was named, but at the same time, the mural depicted early childhood's connection with the human timeline and with community life. In this sense, we were able to be at the very edge of two kinds of knowledges and to navigate between them.

In order to achieve this kind of construction, the Wasiruma community participated in all the activities of the research. First, they validated the goals and engaged in conversation; then, the conversation led us to a new form of expression that overcame the limits of written language. What it means to be an Embera Chamí person and what is important for children to learn to be part of this community was better expressed in painting. For this Embera Chamí group, individual development only occurs in relation with others; thinking about a child as a category apart from the community and from nature does not make sense. Nature, spirits, and a child's development are intertwined and should not be analyzed as separate categories. We had to find a way for this conversation to happen. The goals of the research were kept but the methodology was adapted in order to be able to walk the locally situated meanings of childhood and ECEC. The Minga de Pensamiento and the collective design and implementation of the mural were the better research methodologies to ensure a meaningful dialogue.

Different ECEC Programs for Different Childhoods

Local conceptions of childhood and children's development and the recognition of these understandings by government institutions create room for new and located perspectives of ECEC, based on the significances of children identities and on the acceptance of their experiences in their own environments. Children actively construct their world, their identities,

and their social lives. And, human development is a process deeply implicated in sociocultural activities (Rogoff, Baker-Sennett, La casa & Goldsmith, 1999). Thus, individual development involves interpersonal and community processes, through contact with the lives of people around the individual as well as the social context in which they live (Rogoff et al.,1999). Therefore, an ECEC program that is culturally responsive should be informed by local mores, customs, and their epistemological underpinnings.

In the Wasiruma community, ECEC involves the understanding of particular values that reflect Indigenous worldviews such as sharing with the rest of the community and respecting nature. The local epistemology involves an experiential transmission of a holistic worldview that is conveyed in oral narrative language. Children engage in the daily life of the community by observing and participating in all the activities. Through these actions, they learn about kinship, social rules, prohibitions, and spiritual life. There is, in this community, a social recognition of the ability of children to learn through observation and experimentation, which coincides with other Latin American communities described by Rogoff et al. (1999). In these relationships with community life, children also live and learn from spiritual experiences, from relations with nature, and community rituals.

Parents and other adults are attentive to children, but they do not engage in play with them because they rely on children's capability to take care of each other. These activities among children create a sense of community, of being tied together by familial and community care. I observed in the Wasiruma reservation that children were frequently running and playing freely around homes and in the community. The school was open enough for them to get into the classrooms, go outside, and come back. Adults were doing their activities, and the care of children was a community responsibility. Children took care of each other, but the whole

community did it too. One day, near the end of my research, when we climbed a mountain near the community, I asked if children were allowed to go there alone; they said that of course, they could. As the limits of the whole community were clearly visible from the high place where we stood, they showed me the limits. I noticed that children did not cross those limits. Though the limits were not evident to me until they pointed them out, children recognized them at a very early age. This ability might require a mental construction of space that differs from that of children living in cities, usually at home in a very reduced space. This example from daily life shows how the notion of what might be risky can vary from place to place. In Colombian cities, children under five are not allowed to wander in open spaces, unless they are under the care of older children or adults. In the Wasiruma reserve, children and adults engage in outdoor activities. The relation with the community space requires children to have an understanding of space that children in the cities do not need. The fact that children from different ages play together is a form of transmission of a collective way of life, very different from an individualistic culture where play groups are often age specific (Cordero, 2002). The Wasiruma way also allows children to be in contact with farm work and with nature, and to learn key abilities to survive in the area. Children's participation in these activities is not simply to meet economic needs, but mainly to ensure that the culture remains alive (Cordero, 2002).

The described experiences show the necessity to design models of ECEC that are culturally responsive. The concept of play, for example, is a key one in dominant developmental theories. Playing is usually assumed as a universal activity that promotes children's development. Scholars explain the important role of parents as promoters of these activities (Göncü et al., 1999). Nevertheless, current research has questioned these assumptions of play as universal, and they have demonstrated that it varies from one culture to another. It also changes through time.

A research study developed by the University of Caldas asked elder adults from different parts of the country about their memories of playing during their childhood. The study focused on types of games and forms of social interaction pertaining to play (Castillo, 2013). Some co-researchers stated that, as children, they were expected to work and, consequently, the time for playing was restricted. The informants in the university study reported that they played anyway and that it was a source of relief for them. Their games involved children of different ages, with the older ones leading the activities. The participants were siblings, neighbours, cousins, and other children who were around the neighbourhood. The researchers concluded that in the analyzed experiences older children represented the adults, and that their role in games had a hierarchical structure. This kind of play and relations might still exist in Colombian rural areas with community arrangements similar to Wasiruma.

The cultural meaning of play as well as its contribution to children´s socialization, which takes place daily, varies from place to place (Gaskins, 2014). Some of these variations are shaped by different cultural factors, such as the engagement of children in the productive activities of their communities, cultural beliefs and values about children and play, and children's representations of the world, among others (Göncü et al., 1999).

The creation of a space for the discussion of childhood, education, and community life is key for the understanding of these cultural features that are the main sources for the design of a culturally meaningful ECEC program. In the Wasiruma experience, having such a space created room for the lively engagement of community leaders, parents, and other community members to be co-researchers and active participants in their children's education. In this sense, the investigation was not mine but ours, thus relocating the ownership of the research, which became communitarian.

This kind of relationship, in which the research ownership is relocated, was key to creating a fair dialogue among different kinds of knowledge. It is only from this dialogue that a culturally responsive program can be created. This, then, shows that in order to design truly participatory programs, the relationship between institutions, education personnel, and community must change. A fair dialogue enables the community to enter into the education space, and the education realm to be open to the community. Thus, knowledge coming from the West might enrich the community's perspectives on childhood and education, without disturbing or hindering local cultures and ways of transmitting knowledge (Richie, 2008).

The experience with the Wasiruma community demonstrates that indeed, there have been great advances in the Colombian state policy, in terms of recognition of the country's cultural diversity, as well as the need for this recognition to be reflected in policies and programs for ECEC. The most important national challenge is to ensure that these practices are effectively implemented in children's care. The research, carried out using a participatory and decolonial approach, demonstrates that this community has its own conceptions of life, of social organization, and of the relationship with nature. These ways of knowing and being in the world must be included in ECEC to ensure cultural survival. This only happens when a true dialogue is established that is free from prejudices and, above all, questions the power relations in existing educational processes and attention to early childhood. It is only from from a decolonial position, in which the researcher leaves the position of power, and is constantly self questioning the academic knowledge and professional background that she brings, that it is possible to establish a dialogue in which the knowledge that is taken for granted can be questioned. Only in this space, is it possible to build a proposal that is effectively culturally responsive.

Implications of this Study Beyond the Local Context

The field of education is mainly a political practice which should start its work asking questions such as, what is the end or goal of education, which set of values should be maintained through educational practices; what is the meaning of childhood in the society in which the educational practices are going to be carried out, and to which conception of social development is the educational system contributing? Therefore, as there is no one universal conception of childhood and social development processes, there are many alternative choices in the field (Urban & Swadener, 2016).

This study demonstrates through one specific case of an indigenous Colombian community, the need for very locally contextualized understandings of early childhood education and care systems. The results show the urgency of critical re-conceptualizations of some ECEC theories, for a better understanding of the policy choices and practices related to these concepts. For example, the findings of this participatory study constitute an invitation to think about the understandings of children's development and education theories. The study shows that the community social arrangements have a strong influence on adults' expectations toward children and that the way children engage in community activities varies from one culture to another. Hence, there is no way to find an ECEC practice able to fit all children independently of their culture, language, customs, and worldviews. From a de-colonial perspective, the research shows that universalist narratives on best practices on ECEC deny local knowledges, which is a way to continue colonizing people.

The traditionalist perspectives of education, held by some international organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank, recognize only one way to understand children' s development and to educate them. These

ideas, mainly based on European experiences and research, endorse the position of power to people who belong to the mainstream culture and undermine others such as indigenous communities and those who pertain to non-dominant groups (Urban & Swadener, 2016). One of the current frameworks in which international organizations play an important role as the leaders of the so-called Global Education Reform Movement (Diaz-Diaz, Semenec & Moos, 2019), aims to apply the same principles of the economy to the education realm, in order to improve the individuals' working capacities and countries' abilities to compete in the global market. From this perspective, schools should be accountable for children's academic achievement, which involves measuring children's and school's performance. In this form, these organizations contribute to an understanding of education and specifically of ECEC as a technical practice to ensure universal results on children's development. These ideas would drastically shift the goal of the Colombian's national public policy from promoting children's development in their own cultural context to one based on cognitive skills and an understanding of children as future sources of human capital.

The participatory inquiry process with the Wasiruma community questions this limiting approach to education and claims for a deeper understanding of the complexities of socio-cultural contexts and the perspectives they should give to early childhood education practices. The Wasiruma co-researchers called for an ECEC able to maintain their traditions, relations with mother earth and with their local set of values. These ideas clash with the proposal of a single universal goal for education inspired by human capital concepts. Furthermore, under the human capital and neoliberal conception of the world, knowledge is an individual possession, it is a part of the market world, prepares people to compete and is learned at schools. In contrast, in the

Wasiruma community, knowledges are collective, they are a way to learn to live in community and as such, they are transmitted in community activities and everyday life.

The OECD proposes an evaluation of International Early Learning Study (IELS) which seems to be in line with international large-scale assessments (ILSAs) and linked to other education outcomes measurements such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The idea of these studies is to help countries to improve their educational performance and therefore their economic growth. The argument is that these tools provide to the countries' decision-makers reliable and comparative information on children' s learning, so they know the competencies children should improve at national levels (Diaz-Diaz et al., 2019). These ideas ignore the need for local approaches to ECEC which not only respect cultural differences but also ensure the transmission of ancestral languages that otherwise will disappear.

This hegemonic discourse entails a conception of one monolithic society with one kind of childhood facing the same needs and challenges. The role of state in this discourse is to ensure wellness for all same-age children through standardized prescriptions for education, and in this way, they would ensure a good future for society (Canella, 1997; Sousa, Grey & Oxley, 2019). This understanding of society and childhood controls children's lives which are limited to achieve standardized goals at certain ages, and the idea of social development is limited to economic growth (Canella, 1997; Sousa, Grey & Oxley, 2019). In this understanding, cultural differences might be recognized but this recognition is pointless because they are not included in the education realm and the only kind of knowledge that goes to educational institutions is the knowledge imposed by the international requirements. As this participatory research shows, the co-researchers felt these kinds of interventions as disrespectful and as the Colombian national

evaluation of the public policy states it, those children who receive these decontextualized services, dropout of ECEC. The system marginalizes them (DNP, 2018).

The discourses of one universal truth about quality services affect the possibility of indigenous communities to design their own ECEC proposals. The idea of promoting good future school performance, expected outcomes, accountability for cost-effectiveness and the ideas of quality come through the higher education institutions, normalizing ages and stages discourses about children's development, and impacting professional behaviors regarding education. In other words, these discourses impose the idea that education must serve economic purposes while discourses of multiple perspectives of children's development and diverse ECEC perspectives remain marginal. As this research shows, the Colombian From Cero to Forever public policy understanding of childhood and development is that they are intertwined with their contextual culture and settings, but it cannot be applied in education practices because the ideas of standards and uniform outcomes are stronger than than the ideas of cultural responsiveness. This fact, ultimately marginalizes the very people it purports to serve because the real practice of participatory approaches and parental involvement result in choosing one predesigned model to ensure expectations of "quality". Real changes in educational practices involve a change in the understanding of education purposes, otherwise the proposed changes become empty words.

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Appendix A

The prompt and questions for the *Minga de Pensamiento* 1

The prompt for the *Minga de Pensamiento* might be to bring an object that represents being a young child.

- What does a healthy child look like in this community?

- What does it mean to be a young child in this community?

- What must a young child learn in this community?

- Ideally, who should be part of raising a child (mother, father, extended family, community)?

- Where and from whom should a child learn and receive care at this age?

- Which experiences should a young child have and is not having now?

- How should a program that is responsive to this concept of early childhood be?

- Which kind of support is required from outside of the community?

Co-researchers will bring the ideas together in a weave that represents the conclusions of the group.

The researcher will track any use of Embera, the local language, and Embera terms used during these sessions, as these are likely to be relevant to local views and epistemologies and would be important to discuss with community members.

Appendix B

Questions for the institutional representatives' interview

- What is your opinion about the current public policies with regard ECEC for Indigenous people?

- What are the achievements and the challenges that the institution faces for the implementation of the public policies for ECEC?

- Do you feel that there is any tension between the Indigenous communities' knowledge on ECEC and the government programs for ECEC? Please explain.

- How to achieve the best agreement for the implementation of a program that responds to conditions of quality and at the same time is culturally responsive?

- What would you suggest for the Indigenous communities to do in order to bridge the tensions between the Indigenous communities' knowledge on ECEC and the government programs for ECEC?

- What would you suggest for the institution to do at national level in order to bridge the tensions?

- What would you suggest for the institution to do at the regional level in order to bridge tensions and face challenges concerning designing ECEC projects and implementation?

Appendix C

Main research activities and dates

Table 1

Main research activities and dates

Main Research Activities	Dates
First Minga de Pensamiento	September 10, 2017
Interview Partera	September 17, 2017
Interview Jaibaná	September 18, 2017
Interview ICBF (regional level)	November 7, 2017
Mingas with mothers and educators	September 24, 2017
	October 6, 2017
	October 13, 2017
Mingas for the data analysis	September 16, 2018
	September 23, 2018
	October 7, 2018
Meetings for the mural planning	November 27, 2018
	December 9, 2018
Mingas for the implementation of the mural	January 27, 2018
	February 3, 2019
	February 10, 2019
	February 17, 2019
Other visits for non-programmed activities	December 12, 2017
	March 18, 2019
	September 8, 2019