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**Children learn by observing and contributing**

**Maya children's learning to be vernacular architects:  
Will and settling in your eyes**

**María Dolores Cervera Montejano  
Centro de Investigación y de Estudios  
Avanzados del Instituto Politécnico Nacional**

# Studying the learning process<sup>1</sup>

Children contribute to sustain knowledge and practices related to vernacular architecture as they are active participants (agents) in their developmental niche where community knowledge and practices circulate (Cervera 2017; Cervera & Uc, 2014; Super & Harkness, 1986; Qvortrup, Corsaro, & Honig, 2009).

Children learn to *amarrar* (tie, build) the *tablado* (bullring) for bullfights, one of the most important activities of the festivities in honor the patron saint, as they participate with their *palquero* father or grandfather.

*Palqueros* are expert adults who have the right and knowledge to build individual *palcos* (boxes), hence their name (Eastmond & Sánchez, 2014). Together, the set of *palcos* make up the *tablado*.

The learning process is similar to that of other Maya and indigenous populations of the Americas: Learning by Observing and Pitching In, LOPI (Rogoff, 2014). Children observe *palqueros* intently and attentively and collaborate in building the *tablado* by helping under adult guidance until they themselves become experts. Then, they may inherit the *palco* from their father or grandfather.

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# Study sites, participants, methods

Nunkiní, Campeche, Mexico: 47 *palqueros*.

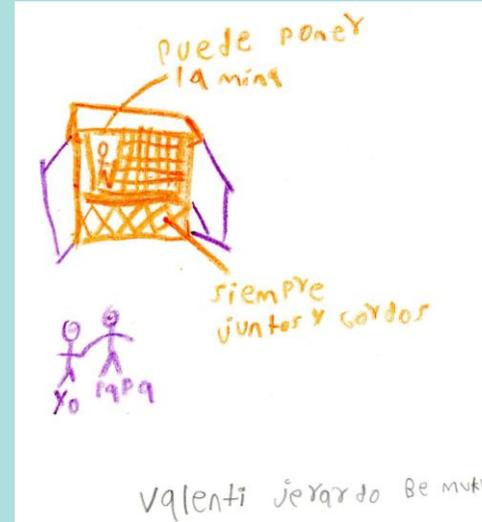
Maní, Yucatán, México: 45 *palqueros*.

Questionnaire Learning, experience, past, present and future.

In depth interviews with selected *palqueros*.

Direct observations and video filming at the time of tying *tablados*.

Children's drawings and questionnaires.



# Learning to be a palquero

Partial results from Nunkiní (but similar results from Maní).

As early as 3 to 5 years of age, children start going with their father or grandfather to help in tying the *tablado*.

Girls do not participate but exceptions were noted both in Nunkiní and Maní.

First, they observe and may try to reproduce what adults are doing, they pitch in and bring materials to *palqueros*, and also play.



Next, children help digging the holes where the wooden poles (*okom*, forked support) are *sembrados* (planted), help holding the poles while the hole is filled with rocks and soil, and help holding the rope to tie the latticework.

They continue bringing materials to *palqueros*, and observing and playing.



As they grow older, children also start tying the wooden poles and sticks, the latticework, and the floor wooden boards. They also start placing the *huano* leaves (*Sabal* spp.).

By 11-12 years of age, children become experts but they are not yet able to carry the largest wooden poles.

By 14-15 years of age, they are able to tie a *palco* without supervision. Never all by themselves as at least two persons are needed for tying.



# How do children learn?

“They are observing like that, they come and help me.”

“I see how its is done, I see how it is.”

“There is no need to tell them what to do.”

“Since your are a child you are observing how it is tied, next year you have already learned, they do not need to tell you. That is how a person learns.”

*“Pues tene’, desde ka tu ts’a ten tak 10 añoose’, oku t’áala tin wich beyo’, oku t’aala tin wich.”*

(So I, since I was 10 years old it had already been settled in my eye like that, it had already been settled in my eye).

*“Na’an u xooki. U yich máak ku meyaj ti’le”*  
(There is no study [formal]. It is a person’s eye that works).

*“Chéen bey u modo beyo’. Porque yaan máake desde ka’apel año; ka bin a wil bixe’, ken e yáax añoe’ tun t’áala ta wich.”*

(It is just his way of being like this. Because there are some who only need to go and observe two years; first year you observe how are you going to do it, next year it is being settled in your eye).

## Do all *palqueros*' children become *palqueros*?

No.

To become *palquero*, one has to like it, has to have helped (pitch in), has to be interested, has to be responsible.

*“Uts tu yich máake, tene’ uts tin.”*

(The person likes it, I like it. Literally, It has to please the person’s eye).

*“Yaan in wóol ti’ k’axíc, yaan in wóol ti’ k’anic.”*

(I want to tie, I want to learn. Literally It is in my will to tie, to learn).

*“Beyo’, paale’ uts tu t’aano’o’, uts tu yicho’obe’, ku t’áala tu jo’olo’o, ku t’áala tu paakato’ob beyo’ bix u meeta’al e tablado’o.”*

(This way, if children like it, if it pleases their eyes, it settles in their head, it settles in their sight like that how to build *tablados*).

## Becoming a *palquero*: Eye, will and destiny

Elsewhere, I have reported that Yucatec Maya mothers believe that understanding (development) depends on children's *de por sí* (way of being) or *suerte* (luck). That is, their destiny. Individual destiny, abilities, occupation, and character may be tied to the *kuuch* ("burden") of the day of birth, but destiny is not inevitable fate. It is a possibility, a potential to be cultivated or avoided by individuals. As expressed among contemporary Yucatec Maya, destiny is a road; when it is opened, it signals possibility (Cervera, 2017).

That may be why children's decisions are respected among the Maya. This rearing style is referred to as responsibility with freedom of choice and it allows children to learn to be responsible, respectful, and cooperative as they participate in everyday interactions, as they observe and pitch in (Correa-Chávez, Mejía-Arauz, & Rogoff, 2015; Mosier & Rogoff, 2003; Reynolds 2008).

Learning an everyday chore or a specialized job as it is the case of *palqueros* requires children (and adults) to focus their attention, their eyes in the task at hand so that it settles in the eye. However, what gets settle in the eye depends on whether it pleases the person's eye (the person likes it). Sight and hearing are the most important senses to the Yucatec Maya, they are “basic verbs of perception [that] also code understanding.” (Hanks 1990: 89).

That somebody likes something may depend on his or her destiny. Not all *palquero*'s children become one. It is the children's *modo* (way of being) that makes them like it, that makes them want to learn. It is their will.

Settling in the eyes and being pleasant to the eye may be considered basic processes of what it may be called LOPI à la Yucatec Maya. What gets settled and what is pleasant may vary according to each person's way of being, maybe destiny.

Integration of the study of the developmental niche, especially parental ethnotheories, and the study of LOPI may help to better understand how indigenous children contribute to cultural change and continuity.

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