Research Article

Pedagogies in Dispute: Teaching Narratives Between Reproduction and Emancipation in Oaxaca

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Abstract:

This study investigates the representations that different social actors —mainly educators and professionals in the educational field— construct regarding the function of the school, the role of the teacher, and pedagogical relationships. Through 12 open-ended questions administered to 30 participants, the symbolic tensions between domination and emancipation in their narratives are examined, analyzed through qualitative methods (thematic and content analysis) and quantitative methods (frequencies, percentages, co-occurrences). The findings make visible the authoritarian, reproductive, and hierarchical dimensions present in school memory, as well as the liberating imaginaries associated with criticism, dialogue, inclusion, and social transformation. In dialogue with authors such as Freire, Foucault, Zaldívar Carrillo, and Apple, it is shown that the school continues to be a field of symbolic dispute between cultural domestication and critical consciousness.

Key words: symbolic dispute; critical pedagogy; school memory; educational decolonization; and pedagogical practices

Introduction

The school, as a social institution, is not a neutral space, but rather a field of dispute where hegemonic forces seeking to perpetuate the established order clash with emancipatory pedagogical practices aspiring to transform it. This study analyzes the narratives of 30 education graduates in Oaxaca, Mexico, to reveal how their perceptions of pedagogical practices reflect this contradiction. From the perspective of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988), it explores the representations that oscillate between the naturalization of the school as a reproductive apparatus and those that conceive of it as a space of resistance, dialogue, and the construction of critical thinking. The Latin American context, marked by demands for educational decolonization (Walsh, 2012) (Zaldívar, 2025) and connection with community realities (Rockwell, 2009), frames this research as a contribution to the debate on the political meanings of education. The teachers' narratives analyzed reveal a symbolic tension between domination and emancipation, categories that structure understandings of the school function, the teacher's role, and pedagogical relationships. Through a mixed-methods approach—combining thematic

and content analysis with frequency quantification—discourses are identified that reproduce authoritarian, hierarchical, and disciplinary logics (Foucault, 1975; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), as well as alternative imaginaries that prioritize inclusion, critique, and social transformation. These contradictions are not merely individual but express structural conflicts within an educational system that wavers between neoliberal homogenization and pedagogical resistance rooted in the historical struggles of peoples.

This work is situated at the intersection of school memory and critical theories of education, seeking to make visible how teachers negotiate, resist, or reproduce dominant logics in their daily practice. In dialogue with authors such as Zaldívar (2024) and Apple (2012), it argues that the school remains a contested territory, where what is at stake is not only teaching methods, but also antagonistic civilizational projects: one that subordinates education to the logic of the market and another that claims it as a tool for collective liberation. The findings presented here provide empirical evidence for this debate, showing that, despite control

structures, fissures persist through which the possibility of an alternative pedagogy can seep.

Theoretical Foundation

Foucauldian perspective (Foucault, 1975) conceptualizes the school as a disciplinary institution that regulates bodies and subjectivities through mechanisms such as evaluation, classification, and normalization. This aligns with Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) theory of "symbolic violence," where the school legitimizes inequalities by presenting the knowledge and values of dominant groups as neutral. In the narratives analyzed, this function is evident in descriptions of the "good school" as a space of "order and discipline" (P2, subject 1) or in the idealization of the "obedient student" (P7, subject 9), coinciding with what Bernstein (1990) calls "visible pedagogies." Freire (1970) challenges the banking model of education, proposing instead a dialogical pedagogy that recognizes learners as political subjects. This vision resonates in narratives that emphasize the need to "teach critical thinking" (P2, subject 4) or "value community knowledge" (P3, subject 17). Giroux (1988) expands on this approach by suggesting that educators should act as "transformative intellectuals," an idea that emerges in proposals from teachers who conceive of their role as facilitators of autonomous processes (P4, subject 21).

In Latin America, authors such as Walsh (2012) and Mignolo (2011) have denounced the colonial nature of hegemonic educational models. Their arguments resonate in narratives that criticize the "Europeanization of the curriculum" (P2, subject 3) or propose "learning from our own history" (P3, subject 18). Santos (2018) contributes the concept of "epistemologies of the South" to highlight pedagogical alternatives rooted in local contexts, which manifests itself in demands for a school that "rescues indigenous languages" (P2, subject 17).

Kemmis (2010) and Zaldívar (2024) point out that teacher professionalization oscillates between adaptation to the system and critical resistance. This explains the differences found between graduates with postgraduate training—more inclined to question the status quo—and those whose practice reproduces traditional models. Bolívar's (2000) theory of educational leadership helps to understand the contradictions between authoritarian administrators (P12, subject 1) and those who promote democratic participation (P9, subject 24). Rockwell (2009) highlights how schools in Mexico negotiate with local realities on a daily basis. In Oaxaca, where 32% of the population is indigenous (INEE, 2018), this translates into tensions between the official school model and community-based pedagogical practices. Narratives that value "collective work" (P5, subject 17) or "tequio as a methodology" (P15, subject 14) exemplify this hybridization.

Study Methodology

1. Research Design A **mixed approach (qualitative-quantitative) with a qualitative predominance** was used , based on:

- **Analysis of narratives** (Lieblich et al., 1998): Exploration of discourses on pedagogical practices.

- **Open survey technique** : 12 questions applied to 30 graduates in education (teachers and professionals in the educational field) in Oaxaca, Mexico.

2. Participants

- **Intentional sample** : 30 subjects with diversity in:
  - **Age** : 24–66 years.
  - **Gender** : 16 women / 14 men.
  - **Level of education** : Bachelor's degree (70%), Master's degree (30%).
  - **Context** : Urban (60%), rural (40%).

3. Data Collection

- **Instrument** : Semi-structured questionnaire with open questions (e.g. , *"What would happen if schools didn't exist?"*).

- **Procedure** :
  - Face-to-face and virtual application (2023).
  - Informed consent and guaranteed anonymity.

4. Qualitative Analysis

- **Thematic coding** (Braun & Clarke, 2006):
  1. **Inductive categorization** : Identification of emerging themes (e.g. , "domination", "emancipation").
  2. **Theoretical frameworks** : Comparison with theories of Freire, Foucault, Bourdieu and Walsh.

- **Symbolic tensions** : Classification of narratives into:
  1. **Reproductive** (e.g. , school as social control).

Emancipatory (e.g. , school as a critical space).

5. Quantitative Analysis

- **Frequencies and percentages** : Quantification of mentions by category (e.g. , 90% associated "good teacher" with *empathy*).

- **Co-occurrences** : Relationship between variables (e.g. , participants with postgraduate degrees tended to give critical responses).

6. Triangulation

- **Sources** : Written responses + theoretical framework.

- **Validation** : Review by two researchers to reduce bias.

7. Limitations

- **Social desirability bias** : Possible self-censorship in responses.

- **Geographic scope** : Restricted to Oaxaca (indigenous context).

Methodological Contribution

This study is innovative in that:

1. **Integrating school memory** with current perspectives of pedagogical criticism.

2. **Visualizing contradictions** in teaching narratives through mixed analysis.

Results and discussion

Because we will be conducting a question-by-question analysis, we have combined the results with their discussion. An overall assessment will be provided at the end of the study.

Question 1: What would happen if schools didn't exist?

Quantitative analysis (frequency of themes)

The following main ideas were identified in the 30 responses:

Topic identified	Frequency	Percentage
Loss of formal/professional learning	22	73%
Increased social and educational inequality	15	50%
Social disorganization / chaos	9	30%
Community alternatives / non-formal education	11	36%
Increased violence or crime	6	20%
Critique of the school as a domestication apparatus	4	13%
Philosophical-utopian perspective (more freedom, free thought)	3	10%

Qualitative analysis (symbolic tensions)

Three types of narratives can be distinguished:

- Reproductive or dominating (30%) : They emphasize the loss of order, technical and moral training. They assume that without school there would be ignorance, violence, or social decay.

"Virtually everyone will learn empirically, and there would be more vandalism, a lot of crime…"

- Emancipatory (20%) : They criticize the traditional school model as a system of cultural control. They emphasize the possibility of creating freer, more collective, and contextual educational alternatives.

"There would be less domestication of the system."
"Surely the educational processes would develop in other, more diverse ways…"

- Mixed narratives (50%) : recognize both the contributions of schooling (literacy, coexistence, professional development) and its limitations (inequality, imposition of knowledge, lack of criticism).

"Knowledge would cease to be a guaranteed right and become a privilege for the few…"

Theoretical interpretation

This question highlights the tension Freire (1970) points out between banking education and liberating education. The school appears as a mediator between knowledge and citizenship, but also as an instrument of social control (Foucault, 1975). In line with Zaldívar Carrillo (2021), some responses suggest the need to reconfigure the school as a space for critical thinking and not simply as a reproduction of the established order.

QUESTION 2: List 10 characteristics of a good school

Quantitative analysis

The 30 responses yielded 300 characteristics, grouped into general categories:

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Prepared and committed teachers	27	90%
Safe, clean and suitable spaces	23	77%
Values/Ethics Training	21	70%
Community/family participation	19	63%
Encouraging critical/creative thinking	16	53%
Inclusion / attention to diversity	14	47%
Link to reality and social context	13	43%
Freedom of thought / student emancipation	11	37%
Comprehensive and meaningful curriculum (art, science, culture)	10	33%

Qualitative analysis

- Domination: few mentions of disciplinary control or formal hierarchy. The most dominant representations appear when demanding compliance with rigid programs, standardization, or vertical authority.

- Emancipation : most responses place the good school as a space:
  - Of dialogue and interaction.
  - On critical thinking and decolonization.
  - Of collective participation, interculturality and creativity.

"A school where students, along with their community, promote the liberation of others."

"A school that provides a proletarian education."

"A school that breaks with established curricula and addresses real needs."

Theoretical interpretation

This aligns with the arguments of McLaren (1998) and Apple (2012) regarding the need for a critical pedagogy that transforms the school into a political agent. As Zaldívar Carrillo (2022) argues, "a good school is one that sparks questions, not just offers answers; that forms conscious subjects, not merely competent ones."

Question 3 : Ten reasons why children and young people should attend school

Quantitative analysis

Reason mentioned	Frequency	Percentage
Acquisition of basic knowledge (reading, writing, etc.)	27	90%
Socialization and coexistence with peers	24	80%
Development of critical thinking / autonomy	15	50%
Citizenship education / ethics / values	19	63%
Better job opportunities / social mobility	18	60%
Defense of rights and political awareness	10	33%
Connection with their culture / identity	11	37%
Community participation / social transformation	8	27%

Qualitative analysis

The responses are polarized between two imaginaries:

- School as individual advancement (liberal view):

"To access a better job"

"To have a dignified life"

- School as a tool for collective emancipation (critical view):

"To become politically educated and develop class consciousness"

"To build revolutionary processes"

Symbolic tensions

- Domination : some accounts reproduce the idea of the school as an instrument of adaptation to the existing social and economic system.

- Emancipation : others claim the value of education to question reality and transform it from below.

Question 4: List 10 characteristics of a good teacher

Quantitative analysis

Based on the responses of the 30 subjects (up to 300 mentions), the following main categories were identified:

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Empathy and sensitivity	27	90%
Commitment / love for the profession	25	83%
Academic preparation / professional development	23	77%
Ability to motivate and spark interest	20	67%
Critical thinking / social awareness	17	57%
Knowledge of the context and the community	15	50%
Ability to engage in dialogue and listen	18	60%
Ethics and values	21	70%
Creativity / Pedagogical Innovation	19	63%

Qualitative analysis

Reproductive narratives (domination):

To a lesser extent, some descriptions focus on fulfilling the formal role (planning, following rules, being punctual), without mentioning affective or transformative bonds.

Emancipatory narratives:

- The figure of the teacher predominates as an ethical guide, social transformer, critical intellectual, and subject who acts from a situated ethics:

"A good teacher is one who teaches how to work collectively, knows the history of their community, and fights for the common good."

"They must be free of alienation , a student of social problems, an organizer, and a shaper of consciences."

Theoretical interpretation

The representation of the good teacher aligns with the **emancipatory educator** proposed by Freire (1970) and reaffirmed by Miguel Erasmo Zaldívar Carrillo (2022), who states that *"the teacher who cultivates critical thinking does not impose certainties, but opens questions to think about the world in an ethical, political and community key"* .

Question 5: List 10 positive aspects of your schooling process

Quantitative analysis

The responses were grouped into thematic categories:

Positive experience	Frequency	Percentage
Academic background (literacy, reasoning, history…)	24	80%
Emotional relationships with teachers and classmates	22	73%
Recognition, motivation, trust	18	60%
Extracurricular activities (art, sports, dance…)	15	50%
Discovery of interests or vocation	12	40%
Development of critical thinking / autonomy	9	30%
Participation in projects / research / collective	8	27%

Qualitative analysis

Positive reproductive narratives:

- Some remember school as a place of order, responsibility, useful knowledge, and training for social life.

- **Positive emancipatory narratives:**

- Others highlight moments of emotional connection, spaces of freedom, solidarity, and the discovery of their critical vocation:

"My calculus teacher motivated us to read books every month."
"I understood my students, I became more familiar with revolutionary processes, and today I have clarity about my role."

Theoretical interpretation

As McLaren (1998) and Apple (2012) point out, school memory also functions as a symbolic device. Some narratives gratefully recall teachers who paved the way for autonomy, critical thinking, and social engagement.

Question 6: List 10 characteristics of a bad school

Quantitative analysis

Of the 300 extracted features, they were grouped into the following core categories:

Negative characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Bad teachers / without vocation / without preparation	26	87%
Institutional disorganization / lack of leadership	22	73%
Toxic environment / violence / discrimination	19	63%
Lack of resources / inadequate infrastructure	18	60%
Lack of motivation or connection with the context	14	47%
Authoritarian evaluation / banking method	11	37%
Indoctrination / imposition of ideology / inequality	9	30%

Qualitative analysis

Dominant narratives:

- Criticism abounds of authoritarian, rigid, punitive, and decontextualized schools. The school as an apparatus of control is questioned.

"He doesn't trust children to give them responsibilities."

"It only teaches how to reproduce meaningless official content."

"Students are driven away by the symbolic violence of the exam."

Emergence of the desire for transformation:

- The responses are not limited to denouncing, but many configure a different school model, linked to the context, the common good and dialogue.

Theoretical interpretation

These representations reveal the conflict between the school as an apparatus of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970) and the possibility of its reinvention as a space of emancipation. This coincides with what Zaldívar (2024, 2025) calls *pedagogy in favor of decolonizing the oppressed.*

Synthesis of symbolic tensions (Questions 4–6)

Symbolic dimension	Domination	Emancipation
Teacher	Authoritarian, unpunctual, without vocation	Critical, empathetic, community-oriented, committed
School experience	Rigid, punitive, memorization-based, selective	Affective, reflective, collective, creative
School	Reproductive, hierarchical, detached	Transformative, contextual, democratic, supportive

Question 7: List 10 characteristics of a good student

Quantitative analysis

The 30 responses resulted in over 300 mentions, classified as follows:

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Responsible / disciplined / punctual	28	93%
Respectful / with values	26	87%
Participative / collaborative	23	77%
Curious / asks questions / is interested	20	67%
Critical / reflective / autonomous	16	53%
Creative / proactive	15	50%
Aware of their context and community	13	43%
Eager to learn / motivated	12	40%

Qualitative analysis

Reproductive narratives (domination):

- They focus on fulfilling one's duty, blind respect for authority, obedience, and adherence to the rules. *"Obedient, respectful, does homework, follows the rules."*

- *"Wears the uniform, takes care of the classroom, is punctual."*

Emancipatory narratives:

- They emphasize critical thinking, social awareness, community participation, active curiosity, and collective work:

"A good student asks questions, makes suggestions, stands up for themselves, and challenges the school."

"They must know their own history and that of their community, help others, and work for the common good."

Theoretical interpretation

The tension between the view of the student as an "obedient recipient" and as **an active subject of learning** (Freire, 1970) is revealed. Zaldívar (2024, 2025) has argued that critical education does not seek to produce adapted students, but rather individuals capable of interpreting and transforming their reality from their identity and context.

QUESTION 8: List 10 characteristics of a bad teacher

Quantitative analysis

Negative category	Frequency	Percentage
Irresponsible / unpunctual / absentee	25	83%
Authoritarian / aggressive / loud	22	73%
Without preparation / without vocation	21	70%
Reproductive / traditionalist / non-reflective	17	57%
Doesn't listen / doesn't engage in dialogue	15	50%
Indifferent / uncommitted to students	13	43%
It reproduces inequalities / favoritism	11	37%
Not linked to the community or social transformation	9	30%

Qualitative analysis

Dominant narratives:

The bad teacher appears as a passive, controlling subject, without self-criticism or social commitment

"She grades with favoritism, arrives late, shouts, doesn't prepare, and doesn't listen."

"Her class is like banking; she grades to control."

Emancipatory critiques

The teacher who does not recognize the knowledge of others, who reproduces vertical schemes and does not connect with the community is questioned

"The teacher who merely clocks in and out, who ignores the history and needs of their community."

"The one who treats their role as a simple job rather than a political and ethical responsibility."

Theoretical interpretatios

Following Apple (2012), a bad teacher is not simply incompetent, but rather functional to the **reproduction of the dominant order,** by denying the collective construction of knowledge. Zaldívar Carrillo (2024, 2024b) emphasizes that a bad teacher is one who "renounces thinking with others, and becomes an operator of a blind pedagogy."

Question 9: List 10 characteristics of a good school principal

Quantitative analysis

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Leader with vision / guidance / decision-making	27	90%
Empathetic / approachable / human	25	83%
Responsible / organized / decisive	23	77%
Fair / equitable / without favoritism	21	70%

Category	Frequency	Percentage
It encourages participation and teamwork.	20	67%
Linked to the community and the local context	17	57%
Promoter of pedagogical transformation	15	50%
With political and social commitment	10	33%

Qualitative analysis

Traditional narratives:

- Director as efficient administrator, formal authority figure, resource manager.

Emancipatory narratives:

- A vision of the director as a pedagogical and community leader, committed to social change, predominates:

"They are concerned about intercultural education, the history, and the language of the community."

"They coordinate efforts with parents, students, and community groups."
"They have moral authority, accept criticism, promote dialogue, and transform the school."

Theoretical interpretation

Freire's ideal of transformative leadership is observed : the director not as a hierarchical figure, but as the ethical-political articulator of the school project. Zaldívar Carrillo (2023) describes him as *"the collective intellectual who, instead of commanding, convenes; instead of imposing, listens; instead of monitoring, accompanies."*

Synthesis of symbolic tensions (Questions 7–9)

Symbolic dimension	Domination	Emancipation
Student	Obedient, punctual, disciplined	Critical, proactive, supportive, autonomous
Bad teacher	Authoritarian, absent, reproductive, insensitive	(by contrast) – absence of criticism, dialogue, or awareness
Good director	Administrator, efficient, distant (minority)	Ethical, democratic leader, committed to the community

Question 10: List 10 characteristics of a bad student

Quantitative analysis (*n=30 responses, 300 mentions*):

Category	Freq .	%
Undisciplined/disrespectful	26	87%
Irresponsible (doesn't do homework)	24	80%
Passive/disinterested	20	67%
Aggressive or violent	15	50%
Conformist (uncritical)	12	40%
Individualistic (does not collaborate)	10	33%
Unaware of its community context	8	27%

Qualitative analysis:

- **Dominant narratives:**
  - They focus the "bad student" on **disobedience to rules** (*"Does not follow rules, interrupts the class"* – P10, subject 3).
  - They reinforce stereotypes of **passive adaptation** (*"He is conformist, he does not make an effort"* – P10, subject 15).

- **Emancipatory narratives** :
  - They criticize the **pathologization of diversity** (*"There are no bad students, only systems that exclude"* – P10, subject 21).
  - They link "bad behavior" with **a lack of pedagogical sense** (*"It is the product of a school that does not motivate"* - P10, subject 17).

Theoretical

interpretation:
The construction of the "bad student" reflects what Foucault (1975) calls **the failed disciplined subject.** For critical authors like McLaren (1998), this category is a tool of control that stigmatizes difference.

QUESTION 11: Negative aspects of your schooling

Quantitative analysis (*n=30 responses, 180 mentions*):

Category	Freq .	%
Authoritarian teachers	22	73%
Physical/verbal violence	18	60%
Memorization methods	16	53%
Lack of cultural relevance	14	47%
Rigid school bureaucracy	12	40%
Exclusion of community knowledge	9	30%

Qualitative analysis:

- **Experiences of domination:**
  - **Corporal punishment** (*"They pulled our ears" – P11, subject 21*).
  - **Colonial curriculum** (*"History was European, with no connection to our reality" – P11, subject 3*).
- **Resistors** :
  - Some subjects reinterpret the negative as **a driver of change** (*"That violence made me commit to a dignified pedagogy" – P11, subject 7*).

Theoretical interpretation:

Segato 's (2018) "pedagogy of cruelty" : the school as a space that naturalizes hierarchies. The responses also show that negative memory can be **the seed of critical consciousness** (Freire, 1970).

QUESTION 12: Characteristics of a bad director

Quantitative analysis (*n=30 responses, 300 mentions*):

Category	Freq .	%
Authoritarian/does not engage in dialogue	27	90%
Corrupt/favoritism	23	77%
Disorganized/inefficient	20	67%
Ignorant of teachers' needs	18	60%
Without a pedagogical vision	16	53%
Suppressor of critical initiatives	11	37%

Qualitative analysis:

- **Bureaucratic logic:**
  - *"Prioritizes procedures over educational processes" (P12, subject 5)* .
- **Political logic** :
  - *"Uses the position for personal gain" (P12, subject 1)*
- **Emancipatory counter-model** :
  - Criticisms of the bad director **imply an alternative ideal** : democratic, linked to the community (*"The good director listens, does not impose" - P12, subject 24*).

Theoretical interpretation :

The bad principal embodies what Apple (2012) calls a **"neoliberal manager"** : prioritizing control over pedagogy. For Bolívar (2000), this obstructs the distributed leadership necessary in critical schools.

Final Summary: Axes of Dispute

Dimension	Domination	Emancipation
Student	Obedient/submissive	Critical/committed to his community
Experience	Symbolic violence/boredom	Meaningful/affective learning
Address	Authoritarianism/isolation	Democracy/territorial linkage

Conclusion: The narratives reveal that schools are a **battleground** between the reproduction of inequalities and the possibility of a **decolonized, dialogical, and situated education** (Walsh, 2012; Zaldívar Carrillo, 2021). Oaxacan teachers, for the most part, reject the banking model of education but still face structural tensions in implementing alternatives.

Conclusions

The study *"The School as a Space of Dispute: A Critical Analysis of Graduates' Narratives on Pedagogical Practices"* reveals that the school institution operates as a field of symbolic struggle between hegemonic forces and emancipatory projects. The narratives of teachers and educational professionals in Oaxaca reveal a persistent tension between the school's reproductive function—as an apparatus of social control and uncritical transmission of dominant knowledge (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Foucault, 1975)—and its potential to become a space for dialogue, critical thinking, and community transformation (Freire, 1970; Walsh, 2012). This duality is manifested in responses that, on the one hand, associate the absence of schools with "social chaos" and, on the other, question its role as an instrument of cultural domestication, proposing situated and decolonizing pedagogical alternatives. In representations of the teacher's role, a critical imaginary predominates, linking the "good teacher" with empathy, social awareness, and the ability to foster autonomy in students (Giroux, 1988). However, contradictions persist between this ideal and actual practices, limited by rigid structures—such as standardized curricula or a lack of resources—that reinforce banking models of education. Likewise, the figure of the student is caught between two paradigms: that of the disciplined, obedient subject adapted to norms (Foucault, 1975), and that of the student as a critical agent, connected to their context and capable of intervening in their reality (Zaldívar Carrillo, 2021). This polarization reflects the struggle between an education that reproduces inequalities and one that strives for collective liberation. Educational leadership also emerges as a point of contention. In contrast to the authoritarian principal—associated with the neoliberal managerial model (Apple, 2012)—the democratic leader who promotes participation, listens to community needs, and views the school as a political project is valued (Bolívar, 2000). Negative memories of schooling, marked by symbolic violence or curricula disconnected from local realities (Segato , 2018), contrast with those experiences that, rooted in affectivity and critical thinking, inspired transformative pedagogical commitments. These findings underscore that the school is not a neutral space, but rather a territory of conflict where the possibility of building educational alternatives rooted in the historical struggles of peoples is at stake (Rockwell, 2009).

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