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Abstract

This chapter focuses on the shift from traditionally conservative technocratic educational reform to a more vibrant, engaging and inspiring transformation of an educational system. It examines the radical shift that took place in the educational policy formation and implementation within the context of an educational reform. This radical shift was the result of two major interrelated factors. The first one is the active and meaningful participation of the actors at the bottom, mainly rural teachers, in all the different aspects of the educational reform initiative. The second one was the bottom-up approach clearly stated in the reform initiative. This bottom-up approach was radically different from the traditionally top-to-bottom approach utilized in previous educational reforms. The bottom-up approach gave primacy to those actors whose voices and direct participation in policy formation and implementation had traditionally been overlooked in educational reforms. These actors included the rural teachers, the parents, the pupils, and the other members of rural communities. This bottom-up approach is presented here as a critique and replacement of the traditional top-to-bottom view which focuses on the national elites, experts and government officials. The bottom-up approach focuses on the teachers and emphasizes the dialectical interaction of diverse actors from different socio-cultural contexts.

First, I give a brief overview of *Nueva Escuela Unitaria (NEU)*. Second, I present a general view of the issue of participation at the local, regional and national level. I also address the issue of participation by diverse actors such as teachers, parents, local authorities and other members of the community, which were involved in and affected by the educational reform. Second, I explore the bottom-up approach explaining its different inter-related dimensions. Finally, I examine the physical space, the mental space, the cultural space and the social space. Here, I give examples of the bottom-up approach using teachers’ experiences and narratives to illustrate how it was carried out in the Guatemala case.

Key words: Education, Escuela Nueva Unitaria; NEU, New Unitary School, Guatemala, Educational Reforms, Participation, Appropriation, Educational Policies, Bottom-up. Educación, Reformas Educativas, Políticas Educativas, Participación, Apropiación.