

Exploring the Funds of Knowledge with 108 Guatemalan Teachers¹

Una Exploración con 108 Docentes Guatemaltecos de los
Fondos de Conocimientos

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Abstract

Using a reflective exercise designed for this study, Guatemalan educators explored their students' and their own cultural capital. The *cultural capsule exercise* served as a vehicle to bring delicate issues that are difficult to discuss, but that are essential to effective schooling, to reflective conversations. A total of 108 teachers went beyond identifying problems and detailing frustrations, to exploring possibilities for action. Participants converged in sharing perspectives that Guatemala is a culture of silence, and used examples to illustrate how this perpetuates the limitations of the country's schoolhouse. Findings reveal the teachers were challenged to focus on what can be accomplished. Qualitative data analyzes, conducted using symbolic convergence theory to establish recurrent and idea generation, suggest a need for further examination of how the sociocultural educational mandates delimit teachers' ability to adjust the curriculum in consideration of learners' funds of knowledge.

Keywords: teachers' voices; cultural capital; funds of knowledge; reflective educators; diverse indigenous cultures of Guatemala

Resumen

Docentes de una comunidad de Guatemala examinaron el capital cultural de sus estudiantes y de sí mismos, usando un ejercicio desarrollado para este estudio. El *ejercicio de la cápsula cultural* sirvió de vehículo para aportar a la conversación temas que, aunque delicados y difíciles de aproximar, son esenciales para establecer sistemas escolares efectivos. Un total de 108 maestros compartieron y detallaron sus frustraciones, y comenzaron a explorar cambios que ellos mismos podrían llevar a cabo. Los participantes convergieron en sus ideas para verificar sus puntos de vista que Guatemala es una cultura de silencio. Ellos ofrecieron ejemplos que detallaron el por

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qué, este silencio perpetúa y limita la escolarización. Datos cualitativos, documentados usando la teoría de la convergencia simbólica, se usaron para establecer temas que se repitieron y generaron ideas. Investigaciones futuras han de examinar el contexto educacional y sociocultural que evidentemente delimita cómo en Guatemala los maestros y sus estudiantes se desenvuelven en las escuelas, y consideran sus fondos de conocimientos.

Palabras Claves: voces de los maestros; el capital cultural; educación liberatoria; culturas indígenas de Guatemala

Resumo

Docentes de uma comunidade da Guatemala examinaram o capital cultural dos seus estudantes e de si mesmos, usando um exercício desenvolvido para este estudo. O exercício da cápsula cultural serviu de veículo para aportar à conversação temas que, mesmo que delicados e difíceis de aproximar, são essenciais para estabelecer sistemas escolares efetivos. Um total de 108 mestres compartilharam e detalharam suas frustrações, e começaram a explorar mudanças que eles mesmos poderiam realizar. Os participantes convergiram em suas ideias para verificar seus pontos de vista que a Guatemala é uma cultura de silêncio. Eles ofereceram exemplos que detalharam o porquê, este silêncio perpetua e limita a escolarização. Dados qualitativos, documentados usando a teoria da convergência simbólica, usaram-se para estabelecer temas que se repetiram e geraram ideias. Pesquisas futuras deverão de examinar o contexto educacional e sociocultural que evidentemente delimita como na Guatemala os mestres e seus estudantes se desenvolvem nas escolas, e consideram seus fundos de conhecimentos.

Palavras Chaves: vozes dos mestres; o capital cultural; educação liberatória; culturas indígenas da Guatemala

Introduction

In effective schooling systems, teachers' expertise is valued, and social justice paradigms are supported (Daniel, Riley, & Kruger, 2017; Daniel, 2016; Faust, 2016; Kincheloe, 2008; Wertsch, 1990). This research considers teachers' perspectives and insights related to the value that is placed on social justice in Guatemala's school system. Diverse schooling environments such as Guatemala need to recognize the funds of knowledge of all learners' and their teachers' in the school curriculum (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Ruiz, 1984). Guatemala's cultural and linguistic diversity is vast as evidenced in the 23 recognized indigenous languages spoken in the nation (World Fact Book, 2017). Although today many of these languages exist only in oral form, they continue to be used by families in their homes and neighborhoods, and for conducting business in many of the country's communities. A substantial number of the Maya who reside in rural areas, earn their living selling handicrafts and food in the outdoor markets that dot the Guatemalan landscape. Many Guatemalans struggle to meet basic needs. Of those who reside in rural communities, only 49.3% have access to sanitation facilities (Behrman, Murphy, Quisumbing, & Yount, 2009). While 51% of the country's overall consumption can be attributed to those at the top 20% socioeconomic level, 23% of the population struggles with extreme poverty (World Fact Book, 2017). For educators, confronting perceptions that may couch the existence of problems, is beneficial. Using wide angle lenses to examine both sides of problems with a view to honest disclosures will promote identification of unsolved issues and may overturn status quo assumptions of intolerance and social injustice.

The Cultural Capital Exercise, hereafter known as CCE, developed for this study, was based on the idea that teachers and students need to examine their backgrounds, and the influences that led them to become who they are, in order to grasp what they bring to the classroom context. The word *capsule* was selected instead of the word *baggage*, because it positively highlights the contributions of families' cultural norms and the strengths of communities. Participants were to envision an expanding capsule that, once opened, would allow the individual to engage in an ongoing reflection of the items selected for inclusion, and to share these key pieces of themselves in a thoughtful manner. Instructions were to create a visual representation using only drawings of people, places, and objects, and the use of letters or words was forbidden in the idea sharing. The CCE asked teachers not to worry about the size of the capsule that they were creating, because it would hold everything they identified as the heart and essence of their being. The goal of the CCE was to identify memories, events, and interactions with significant people that, from our formative years on, make each of us unique, using art to imprint the memory system (Daniel, 2017, Daniel & Huizenga Mc Coy, 2014). After

participants prepared the drawings for their capsule, they shared what they discovered during the process in small groups prior to giving their drawings to the researchers. The steps of the CCE served as a scaffold to examine the funds of knowledge in the school community.

This study explored 108 Guatemalan teachers' understandings of their students' cultural capital, and their perceptions of how this impacts schooling practices. In this work, the researchers examined educators' attitudes and how their perceptions support or oppose frameworks that reflect a sociocultural theory of learning (Freire, 2002). Participants began an exploration of the concept of the funds of knowledge within their communities of practice (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Participants participated in workshops in which they first explored their cultural norms and their students', and then considered what they might wish to place in a cultural capsule to share the wonder and uniqueness of their communities. The qualitative exercise ensured anonymity of the participants so that they would feel free to express their positive and negative opinions.

Literature Review

Liberating Education

In his work Freire (2002) was concerned with education that is *dehumanizing*. The CCE used in this study was intended to tug at the humanity of the teachers who participated. Freire used conversational circles with peasants in Brazil to facilitate conversations. He wanted them to grasp that maintaining silence would perpetuate existing conditions and frustrations. His efforts centered on creating citizens who could contribute to their communities in peaceful and skillful communication (Faundez, 2001). This required that he teach the peasants ways to question the status quo, and learn ways to stand up for their rights. This involved breaking long standing cultural habits, with the most important one being acquiescent behaviors ingrained in children's upbringing.

Freire (2002) proposed situational contexts need to be examined in collaboration, research, and advocacy efforts that consider all individuals' acts and attitudes central to the validation of humanity and democratic citizenship (Daniel & Riley, 2018; Jakar & Milofsky, 2016). Guatemala's history of domination of the indigenous and a lack of appreciation of their languages continues (Guadarrama, 2013). In this study we looked at life and schooling in Guatemala in consultation with educators currently employed in Guatemala's public school system. These educators followed our lead to reveal truths that they struggle with daily, such as childhood hunger and abuse, and to validate their struggles and recognize non-schooled knowledge and community

networks (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). The CCE was used in an effort to unearth evidence in the participants' minds of the ways that their communities of origin, and their students', evidence jeweled stores of funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

Challenges to Schooling in Guatemala

Guatemalan educators want to create environments that give students a framework to discover new ideas and create visions of satisfying lives. They struggle to do so given that in Guatemala many schools are buildings without potable water, with sanitation facilities that are not hygienic, and do not have libraries. These circumstances apply to schools in remote rural areas and to many in the capital city.

Data documented by the World Fact Book (2017) reveals information useful in understanding contextual factors that affect students' academic success such as the 40% poverty levels of the Maya. Data documents that over 80% of Guatemalans are literate in Spanish, but there are no rates available to indicate biliteracy levels for the indigenous. Expenditures for education in Guatemala equal only three percent of the gross national product. School attendance from primary to tertiary levels is higher for males but more and more females are gaining access to education (World Fact Book, 2017). Half of the country's population resides in rural areas and is under 19 years of age.

In their summative evaluations of learners across the country of Guatemala, the Office of Evaluation and Educational Research, known by the acronym DIGEDUCA, documents that learners' educational problems begin to surface at primary school when children drop out of school to help support their families (2014). This agency reports academic achievement for learners at grade six in reading and mathematics at 40 and 44% respectively, with students from rural areas achieving lower levels of success in meeting national standards. In the long run, the problem affects the earning power and economic stability of both those who never complete a high school education, and of those whose education does not lead to a college degree (DIGEDUCA, 2014).

Teacher Preparation in Guatemala

As of 2013, the Normal School teacher training model was no longer in place. This model involved future teachers in preparatory programs during their last two years of high school. This was cost efficient and produced many teachers with initial licensure without families incurring the cost of a college education (Guadarrama, 2013). When completion of a university degree became a requirement of all future teachers, intensive teacher training programs

began to be delivered on Saturdays. Programs at universities delivered in all day sessions on Saturdays allowed those interested in the profession to work in regular jobs during the week and finance their living expenses while studying.

The changes in requirements were instituted when the Ministry of Education, identified as MINEDUC hereafter, declared that students' academic achievement would be interpreted as a reflection of teachers' expertise. Orozco & Valdivia (2017) documented that changes were not piloted before implementation.

Methodology of Research

The questions that guided this study were focused on an exploration of Guatemalan educators' understanding of their students' and their own funds of knowledge, and the teachers' ability to educate while striving to overcome challenges to schooling in their communities of learning.

Q.1: What challenges to schooling are foremost in the teachers' minds?

Q.2: How do teachers explain the make-up of their students' cultural capital and funds of knowledge?

Q.3: How do teachers explain the make-up of their own cultural capital and funds of knowledge?

Q.4: How do teachers perceive their ability to overcome challenges to education in their schools?

Context and Participants

Participants represent educators from an urban municipality located northwest of Guatemala City, Guatemala. Participants were employed public school teachers at levels K-secondary, some from schools of only 12 teachers, and others represented schools with larger teaching staffs. The teachers ranged in age from 25 to 45 years of age, with four to twenty-five years of teaching experience. All participants completed their initial preparation to teach as part of their secondary curriculum in Guatemala's Normal Schools when this road to licensure was in place. A small number of the teachers were completing the work required for a post-graduate degree after initial certification.

Nine focus groups of 8-12 participants each were held with teachers who volunteered to be part of this study, to establish their challenges prior to participation in the three-hour workshops during completion of the CCE. Teachers were recruited to participate in this research with the assistance of the Guatemalan Literacy Council. Participants were not compensated for their

participation. Data gathered served to compare and contrast the teachers' initial perceptions prior to the workshops, with those they shared after participation in the CCE. Two reiterations of the exercise were completed with each group of teachers, each followed by a debriefing. One workshop addressed identification of students' funds of knowledge, the other was centered on teachers' awareness and ability to examine and discuss the components of their own funds of knowledge. Each workshop involved participants in a conversation about what the funds of knowledge consists of, and why it is necessary that teachers consider their students' cultural capital as well as their own, in lesson planning.

Data Analysis

Across all phases of this qualitative study, emergent and recurrent themes were identified (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In addition, convergence of themes was documented using Symbolic Convergence Theory, hereafter identified as SCT (Daniel, 2010; Bohrmann, 1983).

Recurrent themes for the purpose of this qualitative research, and its examination of teachers' perspectives and what they perceive to be road blocks to students' academic achievement, refer to themes which arise during small group conversations not once but multiple times. Themes which repeat themselves across groups and within a single focus group merit consideration because their reoccurrence reveals that they are uppermost in participants' minds. Recurrent themes were identified as they emerged and then quantified during analysis to answer this study's questions.

SCT is a theory from the communications discipline that has proved useful in examining the development of ideas in exploration of delicate issues in education within small focus groups (Daniel, 2010). SCT has been used to examine consensus across focus group participants prior to initiating business ventures. It was the methodology selected to explore the possible financial success of the riverboat casino trade later established and currently flourishing in the State of Iowa in the United States (Bohrmann, 1983). Daniel used SCT some 18 years ago to investigate foreign language teachers' views of writing instruction in the foreign language classroom in her doctoral dissertation.

148 The power inherent in SCT is its assumption that human beings struggle to accept what they are not able to manage, and thus create dramatic visions or fantasies that will justify their inability to act. SCT facilitates travel beyond the drama that may prevent paths for action. Using SCT, a researcher is able to note themes that recur and that also create excitement in the environment across participants. SCT analysis allows researchers to delve deeper into the reasons human beings act as they do. In focus groups, contrasting comments allowed both the researchers and the participants to view possibilities for

action through clearer lenses. The teachers' evidenced excitement as well as revealed deflated visions of empowerment. When educators in focus group conversations voice opinions, they may begin to develop confidence that they themselves might generate purposeful and effective actions. The end result may be the creation of implementable new visions for improving the schoolhouse. Convergence thus arises when themes generate new ideas and possibilities for action that participants buy into, support, and subsequently use to create new paths for action. In this sequence of convergence and advocacy facilitated during the focus group conversations, one individual offers a thought to the group, another person might add to or disagree with the thought expressed, and as conversations evolve, pragmatic visions emerge. Pragmatic visions are plans for action that educators come to see as implementable and transforming.

Findings

The discussion that follows presents recurrent themes that resulted in convergence, during conversations with practicing teachers that were focused on the contribution of the funds of knowledge to instructional planning and delivery. Data is divided into three categories of information gathered from participants. Teachers' challenges at the start of the CCE are presented in Table 1: Teachers' Identified Challenges at the Start of the Exercise. Teachers' exploration of their students' funds of knowledge is detailed in Table 2: Students' Funds of Knowledge. Lastly, Table 3: Teachers' Reinterpreted Paths for Action, offers a summary of teachers' statements and their re-envisioned perspectives with possibilities for action identified after participation in the exercise.

Teachers' Identified Challenges at the Start of the CCE

Four groups of teachers identified problems they encounter in their work as educators in Guatemala. The problems they described related to themselves and the conditions in their schools. The teachers' comments demonstrated great concern for the welfare of their students. Table 1 includes statements from the teachers that resulted in convergence within the focus groups with issues divided into categories. All statements were translated to English from Spanish.

Table 1. Teachers' Challenges at the Start of the Exercise

	Curriculum	Infrastructure	Didactic Materials	Language	Other changes now in place or needed
The mandated curriculum is a problem because we have to use the books from MINEDUC. What I am supplied for my first grade class is too hard for my students.	X		X		
They want me to teach English but I speak no English. See this mobile. I used the dictionary to look up the colors in English. On one side of each part of the mobile, I have, say yellow on one side and amarillo on the other. I don't know what the students can do with just isolated nouns.	X		X	X	
I know that tourism from the United States contributes to Guatemala's economy, but shouldn't we teach literacy in Spanish and our native languages before English?	X			X	
One good thing is that the children are no longer beaten at school. Well, at least in my class.					X
Meetings with parents that focus on the values identified by the Ministry are short and infrequent. We do not share our goals with parents well.	X	X			X
The books given to us to use are not appropriate for the grade level we teach. Children age five cannot read stories without pictures.	X		X		

I need more light in my classroom. The students can't see the board.		X			
Our schools do not have libraries.	X	X			
I share my secondary classroom in the afternoon with the fifth grade teacher who is assigned to the same room in the morning session. So we have two schools in one building. We cannot put anything on the walls or it will be gone the next day. We have a small locker to keep our supplies. We have to buy our markers, erasers, and paper.		X	X		
I am supposed to teach in kacchiquel (one of Guatemala's indigenous languages) but I really don't know the language. Sometimes I have students who have moved to this area who do not speak Spanish. They learn but it is a struggle.	X			X	
I worry about the children who come to school without having eaten breakfast. Many of them have not had supper the night before. We feed them in the middle of the morning and we can see how they do not pay attention because they are hungry.		X			X
The one bathroom in our school does not flush. We fill and pour a bucket of water in the toilet because we can't flush. There is only one stall for the teachers and the students! We have to bring our toilet paper. Of course, there is no seat on the toilet. There is no light in the tin cubby hole that is our bathroom.		X			

Learners' Cultures and Funds of Knowledge

As part of workshops centered on culture and its impact in teaching and learning, participants were asked to focus on the students in a class they were currently teaching, and to think about the culture of the entire group, and the differences across individual learners. At the beginning of the first workshop, an explanation of the meaning of cultural capital was shared with the teachers in a conversational question and answer format.

Cultural capital was explained as consisting of the knowledge present in the world views and cultural norms of students' families and communities, and in the danger inherent in societal frameworks that reproduce inequalities (Webb, Schirato, & Danager, 2008). Participation in this research composed the first time that the teachers had been exposed to the concepts of the funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). The teachers went beyond generalizations that might have their roots in the perception that all members of a community might have similar or somewhat identical world views. Explanations shared by the teachers included examples of components that influence the daily lives, traditions, customs, languages, and their habits as people from Guatemala. An exact definition of culture was not shared in this research.

The teachers understood the idea of having a culture, and were eager to share examples of the diverse cultures of Guatemala. Their examples related to indigenous languages, the music of Guatemala, and the traditional hand-woven clothing that through its design and color, identifies members of different areas and regions of their country. They also brought up *El Conflicto Armado*, Guatemala's Civil War, and its part in the people's history. The Civil War was a time of repression for Guatemalans, when atrocities occurred on the part of the Guatemalan army, when families were displaced and large numbers of women were widowed. The effects of the war can still be felt today, long after the Peace Accords were signed (United States Institute of Peace, 2007).

Exploring what may make up the Guatemalan culture served as a link leading to a discussion of schooled and non-schooled funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). It was appropriate to highlight for the teachers that learners arrive at school with knowledge that can serve as a scaffold for the curriculum. The schoolhouse has to provide learners a path back to real life and economic underpinnings. The lecture conversation format also lent itself to address family networks as a key support system for learners. The family and the community in which an individual resides consist of persons who offer support and share their expertise with students, be it how to prepare a tortilla to leading a conversation in the town's colonial park.

Participants appeared to understand, yet there was hesitation in their faces and voices. Their uncertainty was couched, but revealed in the questions they asked, and how these demonstrated they were beginning to walk in unknown territory. This part of the workshop fulfilled the intent to provide a baseline of knowledge to

lead the teachers to collaborate in small groups of no more than three, to explore and identify the uniqueness of the cultures of each of their students.

Recurrent themes that resonated in teachers' small group work and whole group debriefing are listed below in Table 2: Students' Cultural Capsule. Information in this table reveals the teachers' struggles to identify the positives in students' lives. Table 2 includes both the positives and the negatives identified by the teachers. Their words, during this part of the workshop, document the teachers' grave concern for their students' safety and future.

Table 2. Students' Cultural Capsule

Walls in Students' Lives	Positive Aspects of Students' Funds of Knowledge
There is great poverty in the homes.	Traditions of the Maya; dress, music, foods, religious observances, languages.
Parents work at night and leave the young children with older siblings.	If children attend school, teachers can support their critical thinking.
Malnutrition	The Maya continue to fight for their rights.
The indigenous feel ashamed of their roots.	Parents are hard working
Unhygienic living conditions	Parents pass down ways to make a living, these may be limited to selling handicrafts on the street but we recognize that it is an art to weave and embroider.
Students are often aggressive and sad as a result of the abuse they witness in their homes. They come to school with bruises.	Children are colorful slates that must be recognized through a culturally responsive curriculum. They love unconditionally. For many, the love they receive at school is all there is.
Children are not encouraged to share their ideas. They are to keep quiet.	Guatemalan society is highly indigenous and there is an awareness that the Maya need greater educational support.
Children are afraid. They live witnessing injustices in their	Bilingual educational models in Guatemalan validate students' roots.

Teachers' Funds of Knowledge

Rather than identifying their funds of knowledge, the teachers focused on their work responsibilities. Their concern was the learners' affective and academic needs. They demonstrated feelings of frustration sharing perceptions that what they were doing was insufficient. Their instincts were to interpret their exploration of their funds of knowledge in terms of what they felt the children needed, as they evaluated their ability to support the learners in ways parents do not. They began the CCE examining their strengths as teachers to deliver MINEDUC's curriculum, and their words suggested that they were not crediting their efforts to adjust the curriculum.

Table 3: Teachers Cultural Capsule, provides information compiled during the first debriefing of the CCE with the teachers. It includes recurring comments grouped by theme that the teachers identified to be substantive elements to include. After this, the teachers continued the CCE in small groups, after participating in a whole group conversation. The larger group debriefing used their ideas as a starting point, to clarify the ways the teachers' funds of knowledge could be influencing their goals and objectives for the curriculum. As the teachers envisioned that there were possibilities for action, they dared to propose small ways to overcome challenges. It took them a bit of time but they began to present the problems and possible approaches to supporting the learners. See Table 4: Teachers' Reinterpreted Paths for Action.

Table 3. Teachers' Cultural Capsule

Recurrent Themes	Teachers' comments
The mandated curriculum	We follow MINEDUC's curriculum. We teach the students values. Our curriculum is heavily focused on the values of respect, love, honesty, tolerance, and loyalty.
Teachers recognize their efforts	We teach more than the curriculum. We teach solidarity, to love nature, to take on responsibility, that it is possible to live in harmony. We encourage the students to compete in good ways. We teach them table manners.
Work with parents	At our school we have meetings for the parents. MINEDUC asks us to teach them about values but what we do is not enough.
Home environments	We need to teach the children respect because they are not learning this at home. They see their fathers disrespecting their mothers. The mothers tell the children to be quiet. We are teachers but we must be psychologists!
Learners' affect	We are aware of the conflicting emotions that children bring to school. We teach them, or we try to teach them, that you do not have to live fighting.
Diversity	For many years now, the indigenous students and teachers have felt some respect. It used to be that they could not wear their woven clothes to schools.

Table 4. Teachers' Reinterpreted Paths for Action

Difficult Hurdles	Reinterpreted Challenges
Living conditions in the homes interfere with learning at school.	We can create comforting spaces in our classrooms.
The children are short of sleep. They go out to sell handicrafts with their parents at night and the next day they are tired.	Even when the learners are older, we can implement a 15 minute period put your head down on the desk naptime.
We only see the students a few hours a day! There is too much to do.	What we do may make a difference that we cannot see immediately.
We find the workshops from MINEDUC are not helpful.	Could we ask for time to share lessons with each other?
Many of our students are saddled with responsibilities that they should not have to handle.	We can recognize students' babysitting efforts so that they will feel appreciated. If the parents do not do this at home, we can at school.
The lack of respect that children receive at home is the knowledge that they bring to school.	We must not accept disrespectful behavior from students towards us or their classmates. Time talking about important issues is not a waste.
We have had students bring guns to school.	Our schools are in a dangerous neighborhood. We need to talk with students about being safe.
We feed students a snack midmorning but it is not substantial enough. It's often atol, a drink made from corn. What we give them at school is not nutritious! They wait for what we give them but they are still hungry after what they get here with us.	We know the students cannot learn if they are hungry. We see this every day. They hang out waiting for the snack which we know is breakfast for many of them. Could we ask the town's mayor for help?

Discussion

The teachers' initial struggles to identify students' funds of knowledge beyond language, music, dance and foods might at first suggest a token understanding of culture, which is an inaccurate assumption. An examination of the themes evident in comments, suggests a deep level of caring and reveals the teachers' ongoing efforts. Comments evidenced that the teachers focused on the learners, rather on looking for their strengths as educators. They did not easily recognize the many ways their life experiences and non-traditional schooling were providing them access to the difficult realities that they strive to help their students overcome. The teachers needed prodding to expose their fears and to reinterpret their challenges. Two stories shared in the

small groups, while the researcher listened to participants engage in the CCE, elicited symbolic convergence across the participants, first in each group, and later when presented in the whole group debriefing. The following anecdotes exemplify teachers' funds of knowledge and encapsulate their level of caring. We might conclude that the teachers do not hesitate to act when they see their students' affective needs.

A teacher listened cautiously as the researcher sat and talked to his group during the continuation of the CCE. He opened his heart to share his funds of knowledge. His words revealed that he was coming to understand that he accomplished more in his work than he realized. He admitted with a shake of the head, and wide-open eyes that demonstrated surprise, that he had not considered that when he noted his childhood experiences replicated in the lives of his students, he would step in and become the person he wished he had had as a teacher in middle school. Martín (a pseudonym) and his two siblings grew up in the outskirts of Guatemala City. He was a lucky child because he attended school on a regular basis, but after his school day ended, he was in charge of his younger sisters. His mother made handicrafts during the day and had no choice but to sell these at night to cover basic expenses at home. She would leave him in charge of children almost half his age. His father was not part of the picture and it was his job to feed and put his sisters to bed.

This next story is Javier's (a pseudonym), a 26 year-old secondary school teacher. He shared his story in the whole group debriefing, after having done so in the small group work. When he spoke one could hear gasps from participants, nods of agreement, voices recognizing the speaker, and at the end, thunderous clapping for the storyteller. Javier fondly remembered a student who always spoke of a father he had not met. The young man harbored the hope that his father might come home one day, and remained optimistic in spite of evidence that there would not be a meeting. Throughout the high school years, the teacher encouraged the student and their friendship blossomed over small triumphs and moments of support. The student worked hard and remained enrolled in school with the goal of becoming a teacher. Finally, as the day of graduation approached, the student voiced his last desperate hope that his father might surface. He shared with his mentor that if the father did not come for graduation, he would lose all hope of ever meeting him. His last hope was dashed but then a clearing became visible. The student spoke to his teacher after the graduation ceremony, and thanked him for his role in his success. He admitted that he had never had a father related to him by blood present in his life, but that he now realized that Javier had fulfilled his need to have a father.

Limitations of Study

This work contributes to the body of literature about education in Guatemala, and to understandings of the inter and intrapersonal experiences that frame educational frameworks in the country. However, its generalizability is limited for several reasons. First, all 108 participants taught in the same community of schools, and might hold perspectives that best mirror the needs of that specific area of the country. Secondly, the teachers were initially trained in the Normal Schools so none would evidence experiences or training that reflect recent changes in teacher preparation. Lastly, the teachers represented educators teaching at all grade levels, from pre-K to secondary school. Given the number of participants, it is impossible to state that sufficient generalizable data was gathered to make assumptions about the challenges faced by teachers and students at any one grade level of the community where the study was conducted.

Final Reflections

This investigation documents some of the challenges and frustrations that teachers and students in Guatemala's schools confront and how these worry the educators who were part of this study. Recurrent themes that demonstrated convergence, revealed in the data analyzes, suggests that teachers' self-esteem continues to be jeopardized by curricular mandates that are implemented without consultation with the country's educators.

This work offered a venue for Guatemalan educators to voice the reasons they and their students merit recognition for their efforts (Orozco & Valdivia, 2017), and validation of their communities' funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Findings document that Guatemalan teachers care deeply about their students.

In envisioning a better future for schooling in Guatemala, the country's educational community might recognize that it will not be until each stakeholder is free to identify that which supports or extinguishes individuality, independent thinking, and visions of change, that it will be possible to redesign a vision for how the environment addresses or denies paradigms that support democratic citizenship (Daniel & Riley, 2018; Jakar & Milofsky, 2016). A process of evaluating schooling practices and societal attitudes from a funds of knowledge philosophy is needed, to allow democratic ideologies of literacy to emerge and become sustainable. Teachers in the trenches need avenues to meet to discuss their work, and then design a plan to change an educational system that to them appears to present a series of closed doors.

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