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**Weaving Experiences: A Study of the Learning Experiences of Two
Maya Weavers in Guatemala**

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parent and grandmother. Thank you for supporting me and believing in me no matter what. Thank you for encouraging me to follow my dreams. You are my inspiration. Without your sacrifices, love, and support I would not be where I am today.

Dedico este tesis a mi papa, mi mama, y a Mama Rebe. Gracias por siempre apoyarme y por creer en mi. Gracias por animarme a seguir mis sueños. Son mi inspiracion. Sin sus sacrificios, amor, y apoyo no lograria estar donde estoy hoy.

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Abstract

Weaving Experiences: A Study of the Learning Experiences of Two Maya Weavers in Guatemala

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This thesis is an autoethnography that explores the informal learning and teaching experiences held by two Maya weavers from Guatemala. I traveled to Guatemala where I conducted interviews and made observations in order understand how weavers learned to weave, as well as how they maintain the tradition alive by passing their knowledge on to younger generations. Through this research, I began to see the significant role ancestral and familial connections played within the weaving experiences of the Maya weavers. Culture and tradition were at the center of the weaving process, but the creativity and ingenuity of the weavers allowed for changes to occur within the weaving practice allowing it to stay alive. The experiences and perspectives of Maya weavers are often overlooked, but through this research I share how learning more about their informal learning and teaching experiences influenced my personal art educator pedagogy. Exposure to multiple perspectives and experiences can help art educators, like myself, create more inclusive art curriculum, as well as learn about different forms of teaching art that can potentially apply to the art classroom.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There is something wondrous about Mayan textiles and the process behind their creation that seems to grab people's attention. Since my very first introduction to this art form, I have found myself under the spell of the textiles' patterns, texture, color, and history. From an artistic standpoint, I have wanted to learn all I can about the technique, methods, and material that go into creating the textiles. After years of wondering and theorizing, I was finally able to visit a weaving cooperative in the spring of 2018. I entered a space that was covered in intricate and delicate patterns, filled with textiles of various natures, from blouses to backpacks to blankets. It was like walking through a colorful maze of fabric. In this maze, I was able to catch a glimpse of textile creation. I was able to see the cotton transform into yards of thread, with its light tan color morphing into a warm pink as it boiled in a pot full of natural dye. Once dry, the transformed thread joined the complicated web on the backstrap loom, where it underwent its final transformation into a scarf. It was a fleeting experience, but one that continues to reel in my curiosity.

While the entire journey was about the process of creating the object, I couldn't help but wonder about the weaver's personal journey and experiences in learning the art of weaving. My curiosity began to shift from the textiles as object towards the female artists creating them. The vignette I experienced at the weaving cooperative cemented my desire to hear the personal stories and experiences of the weavers as they learned how to weave and as they passed their knowledge onto younger weavers. This research study is about the Maya weavers and being able to listen to and learn from their personal learning and teaching experiences within their weaving practice.

CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

What is weaving education like for Maya weavers in Guatemala? What types of learning and teaching experiences have two weavers, from different regions in Guatemala, experienced?

PROBLEM STATEMENT

When visiting Guatemala, one of the most exciting parts of the trip is seeing the bright colors and intricate designs of the handwoven textiles, either on sale in the markets or worn by locals. It is exciting to see the weavers create their beautiful work, but without the proper perspective and lens it can become very easy to see the weavers as “tourist attractions” who are stuck in the past instead of as artists and educators. But, the weaving cooperatives in Guatemala are creating successful artists who are not only able to support themselves by creating art, but who have been able to preserve and transmit their knowledge of weaving from one generation to the next. They maintain and honor traditional methods from the past, while infusing ideas, designs, and techniques from the present. Through informal art education, centered in both past and present, they have been able to keep an art form alive.

There is a lot that formal educators can learn from how art education and teaching are approached in other countries and communities, especially those that are normally forgotten and overlooked, like the Maya communities in Guatemala. Within Maya communities “painters teach one-to-one and consider the mentoring relationship to be of paramount importance when learning art” (Staikidis, Rex, Alusia, & Lim, 2009, p. 20). Therefore, learning from the weaver’s teaching methods has the potential to add to the research being done by Staikidis and others concerning Maya and Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy. The weavers’ knowledge can provide new perspectives on how teaching

can take place, which may have applications in a classroom setting. Exposure to new perspectives and experiences can disrupt how teachers view Indigenous communities and allow them to engage in decolonization through multicultural pedagogy. These changes in perspectives can then transfer to students depending on how educators choose to engage with the knowledge.

As stated by Staikidis, there have been “many years of misrepresentation and harm caused to indigenous cultures across the globe” (2017, p. 49). By approaching this project as a mentee and student of the weavers, as well as a researcher, power will be given back to the weavers. As a participant-observer, I will learn from them and be able to experience their teaching methods, following Eldridge’s “[call] for acknowledging the importance of learning experientially in creating knowledge” (as cited in Staikidis, 2017, p. 51). The project no longer becomes one of distant observation, me vs. them, but instead one of interconnection in which knowledge is created through experience and through getting to know the weavers as people and educators instead of as “subjects”. Wilson states, “Indigenous epistemology is all about ideas developing through the formation of relationships. An idea cannot be taken out of this relational context and still maintain its shape” (as cited in Staikidis, 2017, p. 53).

The creation of a strong relationship between student and teacher leads to successful learning and the creation of a strong relationship between the researcher and Indigenous guide leads to a decolonized research study. What I learned from the weavers can not only help me develop my personal pedagogy, but it can also change the perspective from which non-indigenous people view the weavers, their practice, and their community. The purpose of this autoethnography was to learn about the type of informal teaching and learning experiences had by two Maya weavers throughout their weaving practice. The

informal teaching and learning experiences will be defined as experiences that take place within their weaving practice, either at home or at the weaving cooperative.

PERSONAL MOTIVATIONS FOR RESEARCH

My family, on both my parent's side, are from Guatemala. I grew up listening to stories from my parents and grandmother of their lives and experiences there. Our Guatemalan heritage was a part of my daily life; it was present through stories, cuisine, and radio. During my early childhood years, I would look forward to our annual visits to Guatemala during the holiday season. These trips allowed me to experience a different pace of life and develop a curiosity surrounding this new and different environment. As I grew older, my interest in learning more about Guatemala grew alongside me. I yearned to learn more about its history, culture, people, and art.

Visits from family members brought the promise of new stories, treats, and small unique gifts. Through these gifts I was slowly introduced to Mayan textiles. As a child, my appreciation of these objects mostly revolved around their bright colors. It wasn't until I reached high school and my interest in art began to mature, that I began to take notice of their details, intricacy, and beautiful designs. I became curious about the process and techniques that went into creating these fascinating objects. I looked for ways to expand my exposure to anything related to Guatemala and its Indigenous textiles. Whenever possible, I would make it the focus of research papers and art projects or I would find courses related to Latin America in the hopes that I would be able to gain a little more exposure to the country, its people, and art. As I continued to gather more information and exposure, my curiosity and questions only got bigger. Now that I am pursuing art education, I have discovered a whole new perspective and lens from which to look at the Indigenous weavings, a perspective that not only focuses on the art objects, but on the

women creating them. I believe that the perspectives and knowledge of the Indigenous female weavers has the potential to influence and affect my development as an educator.

My mind was not always set on becoming an educator. Initially, being around young children intimidated me and made me nervous; I did not know how to interact or speak with them. I had limited experience working with school aged children, and it wasn't until I was twenty-two and completed a year of service with AmeriCorps at a local elementary school that I realized I enjoyed teaching and interacting with students. I returned to school in the attempt to learn about and get a better understanding of education in art. But, going into graduate school I lacked the teaching experience that some of my cohort mates had. Whenever they would tell stories of their time in the field I would hang onto every word in the hopes of collecting every valuable piece of information on teaching in the classroom as possible. This act led to the development of my interest in learning from other educators and using their experiences to begin to develop my personal teaching style. These stories and recollections help me formulate an idea of what teaching can be like, as well as the shapes and forms it can inhabit.

Teaching can happen through different formats, interactions, and environments. The sharing of experiences increases my awareness of the situations and experiences that one can encounter in the classroom. It allows me to begin to gain a better understanding of the different layers and complexities tied to the act of teaching. Hearing the stories, perspectives, and experiences of others, mentally prepares me for what is to come in the classroom and school environments. I no longer feel like I am stepping into the great unknown.

PROFESSIONAL MOTIVATIONS FOR RESEARCH

When learning about Indigenous people and their culture “educators often employ a ‘long ago and far away attitude’ that perpetuates an outdated perspective rather than relevant, people or issue driven exploration” (Ballengee-Morris, 2002, p. 243). Although it is unintentional, this perspective allows Indigenous cultures to appear stagnant and inferior to western culture. This viewpoint “tends to exclude multiple perspectives and indigenous epistemologies” (Staikidis, 2010, p. 213). These attitudes depict Indigenous people as uncivilized characters, causing their knowledge to be disregarded and overlooked. I believe this is happening with the Maya weavers in Guatemala. The weavers are being overlooked as important and significant knowledge holders and producers.

Most research conducted about Maya weaving is centered around the effects tourism, globalization, and outside community influences have on textile practices and the operation of weaving cooperatives. For the most part, this research takes place through a cultural anthropological lens, which focuses on “such matters... of social, political, and economic” (Waters, 2013, p. 11) forms. The focus is placed on the textiles as objects or on the cooperative as a business or community influencer. While a lot of important and needed knowledge regarding the weaving cooperatives is generated from these research focuses, very little is known about the teaching methods used by the weavers and their experiences as weaving students and informal weaving educators.

Informal art education is taking place with the Maya weavers in Guatemala that can add a wealth of knowledge to the field of art education as well as education in general. An educator’s method of teaching is constantly changing; their teaching practice during their last year as an educator is different from their first year. One of the influences that causes this growth is the experience and teaching practices of other educators. Darling-Hammond states that “professional community-building can deepen teachers’ knowledge, build their

skills, and improve instruction” (as cited in Stanley, 2011, p. 72). Hearing accounts of other educators and their teaching practice, whether inside or outside of the classroom setting, helps teaching practices evolve and progress. While the weavers’ methods of teaching might not translate completely into the classroom, being aware of how they approach their practices and how they teach those around them can help educators get an idea of different forms of education taking place in a different country and a different setting. This knowledge adds another perspective which educators can draw inspiration from and infuse into their own practice. It exposes them to new ideas, methods, traditions, and manners of teaching.

There is a need “for studies that take place outside of a European model” (Staikidis, 2010, p. 213) of teaching that include the experiences and narratives of indigenous people, like the Maya weavers. This research brings a new perspective into the field of art education, which has the possibility of influencing future art educators and their teaching practice. But most importantly, it moves beyond studying objects in the weaving cooperatives and instead focuses on the weavers involved and gives them the opportunity to share their knowledge. Being made aware of a broad range of perspectives has the power to change how people view a certain group of people; it may contribute to changing their perspective from a negative and patronizing view towards one that is positive, accepting, and decolonizing.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Decolonization: “The process in both research and performance of valuing, reclaiming, and foregrounding Indigenous voices and epistemologies” (Swadener & Mutua, 2014, p. 2). Decolonization in research is about changing the way Indigenous people, practices, customs, and knowledge is viewed by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous people alike.

It works to move beyond the continuous use of methodologies that promote colonialism by including Indigenous views and histories within academia. Research is conducted in a manner that places control in the hands of the Indigenous individual or community being studied. It places the Indigenous individual or community's well-being before the researcher's intentions. Decolonization requires reciprocity between the researcher and participant, as well as the establishment of a relationship and friendship between the two. It moves away from treating Indigenous individuals and their communities as inferior test subjects.

Guatemala: Guatemala is a Latin American country located in Central America. Southern Mexico borders the western part of the country and the eastern portion of the country is bordered by Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. Guatemala established its independence on September 15, 1821.

Formal Learning: Learning that takes place in a traditional classroom setting, where a teacher provides instruction to students in a school setting.

Huipil/Corte: *Huipil/Corte* are the names used for the traditional clothes worn by the Maya women made out of hand woven textiles. The *huipil* is the colorful hand woven or embroidered blouse, while the *corte* is the full-length wrap around skirt (Macleod, 2004). The *huipil* and *corte* are decorated with patterns and iconography representative of the women's Maya community; they act as a text (Macleod, 2004). Those capable of reading this text are able to gather information on the Indigenous ethnicity, community of the wearer, economic status, family, and occasion, among other things, that are representative

of the individual wearing the *huipil* and *corte* (Macleod, 2004). The *huipil* and *corte* can act as signifiers of the wearer's Maya identity.

Indigenous/ Indigenous Peoples: “Peoples who have been subjected to the colonization of their lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty, by a colonizing society that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives” (Smith, 1999, p. 7). The term emerged in the 1970s from the struggles of the American Indian Movement and Canadian Indian Brotherhood (Smith, 1999). It is used as a way to bring together the groups of people who experienced and continue to experience colonization, even though those experiences are different from each other (Smith, 1999). When using the term, it is important to remember not to group all Indigenous perspectives and experiences as one, because they vary greatly from each other. It is “problematic [when] it appears to collectivize many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different” (Smith, 1999, p. 6). While they may share being subjected to colonization “there are real differences between different Indigenous groups” (Smith, 1999, p. 7). They must be respected for these differences, instead of being thrown together and seen as the same exact thing.

Informal Learning: Informal learning is the act of learning outside of the traditional classroom setting without the presence of a traditionally certified teacher or instructor. Informal learning can take place in many different environments and can be “led” by different types of people. Some examples of informal learning are: learning from websites and the Internet on your own, learning from peers, learning from guided tours at museums and organizations, and learning from a mentor.

Ladino: A “westernized Central American person of predominantly mixed Spanish and Indigenous decent” whose dominant language is Spanish and wears Western/Americanized dress (Ladino, n.d.).

Maya: One of the Indigenous groups of Guatemala, which makes up forty-two percent of the country’s population (Hallman, Peracca, Catino, & Ruiz, 2007). They are made up of twenty-one linguistic subgroups.

Maya Weaving: The act of weaving continues to be an important tradition within the Maya culture. The act of weaving is connected to the Maya goddess, “Ixchel, the ancient goddess of weaving and healing” (Macleod, 2004, p. 682). “Weaving is related to spirituality and each women’s nawal (familiar); not all women are endowed the gift of weaving” (Macleod, 2004, p. 682) making this a significant and valuable gift to take part in. The patterns and iconography present in the weavings contain knowledge regarding the identity and characteristics of the Maya community of the individual creating the weaving. These weavings are more than just art and cloth to the Maya; the act of creating them carry deep meanings that continue to be a significant component of Maya culture.

Mentorship/Apprenticeship: An educational relationship where the mentor acts as a teacher to the mentee or apprentice and teaches them a specific skill. While the teacher models the skill, the student actively participates in what is being taught, all while the teacher provides coaching. As the student gains proficiency, the teacher begins to diminish the amount of assistance provided to the student. Learning takes place within the context of the community, instead of in a separate space like a school.

Traje: An outfit made up of a *huipil* and *corte* or other traditional garments.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

I will be focusing on the experiences of two weavers from different regions in Guatemala which means that this study is not generalizable to all weavers in Guatemala. The experiences gathered from the two weavers should not serve as a depiction of the experiences of all Maya weavers. The informal learning experiences of the weavers can vary from weaver to weaver within different areas. The Maya of Guatemala are “subdivided into 21 linguistic groups” (Heckt, 1999, p. 323), each containing their own language and cultural customs. The iconography and symbolism present in the textiles changes based on the linguistic group. There are differences between each group so it cannot be assumed that they all share the same teaching styles and learning experiences. The study will also be conducted throughout the span of ten days. This time frame allows for the gathering of many observations and field notes, but not enough to be able to say that it is a complete record of the daily life and experiences of the weavers. These experiences recorded and shared in this study are not representative of the weaver’s entire weaving experience; they are small glimpses and vignettes of their life. It will be like scratching the surface of learning and teaching experiences the women have encountered and engaged in.

BENEFITS TO THE FIELD OF ART EDUCATION

Sharing the narratives of both formal and informal art educators widens the breadth of knowledge and information available to current and future art educators. By sharing knowledge of personal and applied learning experiences, art educators help others see

perspectives different from their own present within learning. Being aware of diverse perspectives and experiences can help art educators build upon their own knowledge and create solutions and adaptations that can lead to better instruction, classroom management, pedagogy, and lesson development, among other things. The inclusion of experiences of informal art educators removes the idea that art education only takes place inside of a classroom with a certified art teacher. Valuable art lessons take place in a variety of environments and are conducted by multiple individuals from parents, to siblings, to peers.

There is much we can learn from Indigenous people, whose knowledge systems are connected with their interaction to the world around them; there is no separation between life experiences and education. “Since pre-historic times, all people have had informal, and at times formal teachers, who have helped the younger generation to understand and create meanings of and for life” (Stuhr, 2003, p. 303). It is important to include knowledge generated by Indigenous communities and “understand culture and cultural diversity, because culture provides beliefs, values, and the patterns that give meaning and structure to life” (Stuhr, 2003, p. 303). What is taught can be applied and translated to life and is learned within the context of a dynamic community. Today’s education is missing this. The focus is placed on standardized testing and meeting requirements, which leads to education and learning being disconnected from the lives of students and the world around them (Stuhr, 2003). Art has the power and capability to bring together education and the events, realities, histories, and life taking place outside the school bubble. Introducing art educators to the teaching and learning experiences of Maya weavers can help initiate the process of including culture and diverse forms of cultural knowledge into art education. This study can expose art educators to culturally sensitive forms of knowledge and perspectives that go beyond those held in mainstream society.

Exposure to Indigenous knowledge, practices, and culture has the ability of changing the way art educators see the world and approach teaching art. It can open their minds to fresh and diverse perspectives that are not traditionally heard of within the western education system; perspectives where learning is not quarantined from life, but instead practiced alongside and influenced by the individuals, events, and community surrounding it. Since educators influence the way students make meaning and view life and the world, these changed perspectives can transfer to students indirectly. This study also has the ability to help art educators and academics view Indigenous communities in a new light. Instead of seeing them through a colonialist lens in which the weavers are “stuck in the past” and patronized by western society, it can help present them as carriers and creators of information and knowledge, like all other academics and educators. It removes the idea of seeing Indigenous communities and artists as relics of the past, disconnected from the world, and victims at the hand of western ideology. This study provides the opportunity to spotlight overlooked and forgotten individuals working within the peripheries of art education, who not only engage with traditional methods, but who also develop new forms of knowledge. Hopefully it can be a start to giving them the authority, power, and platform to share their experiences, whether positive or negative, with the rest of the world and be respected and treated equitably for it, instead of being seen as inferior to Western thought.

SUMMARY

Chapter One provided an introduction to the study. It presented the research questions I investigated throughout the study, why there is a need for this study, and my personal and professional motivations for conducting this research. The motivations were followed by a brief list of definitions, as well as a brief discussion of the benefits and

knowledge this research can contribute to the field of art education. The next chapter will be a literature review, which will dive deeper into the topics that shaped this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Even though I grew up in Texas, surrounded by American culture and lifestyle, I was raised in a Guatemalan household. I spoke Spanish at home, learning bits and pieces of Guatemalan vernacular, words which brought many fits of laughter due to their strangeness, yet appropriateness in capturing feelings and actions. At night, dinner consisted of Guatemalan dishes, like *pollo en crema* (chicken in cream) and *caldo de res* (beef stew), expertly prepared by my grandmother. Topics of conversation revolved around happenings of the day and updates from family in Guatemala, all while the dramatic drone of Latino television played in the background. My parents and grandmother made sure to pass on knowledge about our culture and their experience growing up and living in Guatemala. While I knew a basic understanding about my culture and heritage, it wasn't enough to begin to write about their experiences let alone the experiences of two Maya women. There was more I needed to learn before I could begin to understand the experiences of the weavers and begin to draw connections between their experiences and the world of art education.

Therefore, in this chapter I present the topics that shaped my preliminary understanding of Maya culture, as well as the sharing of knowledge and learning within education. I begin this chapter by diving into professional knowledge sharing to look at how sharing knowledge and experiences benefits teachers. I then move on to look at informal learning in the form of mentorships and apprenticeships as methods of learning different from traditional classroom education. This is followed by women's voice, a look into the ways of knowing of women, and Indigenous knowledge, a look at the importance of including Indigenous knowledge, experiences, and perspectives in education. The final

section focuses on the Maya female experiences gathered from ethnographic studies done on Maya women in Guatemala.

PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Teachers must fulfill many responsibilities apart from simply ensuring that all students are learning what they must know within the given school day. They are responsible for the educational needs of their students, as well as for providing them with emotional support and guidance, since they are with them for a greater part of the school day. With this great responsibility, it becomes easy for teachers to feel they have no choice but to face these challenges alone. While a career as an educator can be a warming and fulfilling experience, there is still a lot of work related stress that comes with having the title of teacher and educator. Stress and workload are common reasons given for abandoning the profession (Ferguson, Mang, & Frost, 2017). According to Ferguson, Mang, and Frost (2017), “work-life stress is likely due to the lack of flexibility in teaching, with teachers indicating significantly less employer flexibility” (p. 65) as well as a lack of support within the work place. When you have thirty students in a given class, each one going through their own unique life experiences and obstacles, it can make teaching an isolating profession (Collinson & Cook, 2004).

Therefore, “professional isolation among teachers presents a barrier to collegial interactions and dialogue” (Collinson & Cook, 2004, p. 313). Inhibiting the dialogue between colleagues obstructs the dissemination of knowledge between educators. It creates an environment where educators, whether veteran or novice, do not feel comfortable asking their colleagues for assistance, support, and best practices on how to handle obstacles that present themselves in the classroom. The educators must resort to overcoming these obstacles with only their personal knowledge and trial-and-error experiences to guide them,

even though a wealth of knowledge is present in the school by way of personal experiences and practices of fellow teachers. This isolation denies them the opportunity to learn from the ideas and experiences of their colleagues (Collinson & Cook, 2004). But through collaboration, the initial isolated nature of the profession can be eliminated and lead to the development of teacher skills (Mawhinney, 2010) as well as the formation of a community and the feeling of support among educators.

Professional knowledge sharing provides social support and it has three functions for an individual. “They are a source of acceptance and intimacy” (Ferguson, Mang, & Frost, 2017, p. 66) due to the interpersonal nature of the relationships that result. These types of relationships provide emotional support for the individual to fall back on when facing difficult circumstances and challenges. It is also a form of informational support providing “useful information, advice, and guidance” (Ferguson, Mang, & Frost, 2017, p. 66). Social support creates the opportunity for the sharing of best practices and new knowledge among colleagues. The third function of the social support, which comes from knowledge sharing, is that it provides instrumental support. Individuals “may assist with instrumental problems by providing financial assistance, goods, or services” (Ferguson, Mang, & Frost, 2017, p. 66) that can act as resources for others. Apart from just providing an opinion or knowledge, physical assistance can be given through different means. These functions are examples of why “the most common method of coping with teacher stress is relying on the relationships of friends and family” (Ferguson, Mang, & Frost, 2017, p. 65), as well as the individuals who make up the teacher’s social support at school.

The little research conducted so far on professional knowledge sharing shows the impact it can have on educator confidence and readiness, because “only other teachers can relate to the stress, [workload, and obstacles] that [educators] experience in their jobs” (Ferguson, Mang, & Frost, 2017, p. 71). Learning to be a teacher is a complex process

therefore providing educators with resources that help them learn within the profession can increase their effectiveness as teachers (Harfitt & Chan, 2017). One of the more effective ways to assist teachers, not only through the transition of becoming teachers but well into being a veteran teacher, is by providing opportunities for and encouraging professional knowledge sharing between each other. This “has the potential to lead to meaningful, engaging, [and] enlightening co-construction of knowledge” (Sakamoto & Chan, 2006, p. 225) amongst teachers at various stages in their teaching career. This impact doesn’t just serve a purpose for one group of people; it can serve a purpose for both veteran and novice educators.

Through professional knowledge sharing, veteran educators find themselves adapting the best practices used by their colleagues in their own classrooms and using the dialogue that takes place between different grade level teachers to gauge whether their students are on target or behind (Mawhinney, 2010). Professional knowledge sharing between veteran and novice educators creates mentor-mentee relationships, which allows novice teachers to develop their skills as an educator. Mawhinney (2010) states, “professional knowledge sharing...[helps] teachers informally learn and understand the practice of teaching, spontaneously collaborate and create projects, and collectively share information” (p. 974). Teacher preparation for the educational environment and professional development revolves around focusing on what the educator can do as an individual, but more of an effort should be made in promoting professional knowledge sharing as a means of educator development.

The limited research available on professional knowledge sharing shows that when conducted amongst formal educators it is beneficial to all, no matter how many years in the field they have under their belt. By including the experiences and knowledge of informal educators, the knowledge base can expand even further. Casual conversation can

become “a source of insight that has the power to act as a catalyst to further support collaborative inquiry and the exchange of information” (Sakamoto & Chan, 2006, p. 226). Through professional knowledge sharing, the voices of teachers and educators can receive validation and lead to the development and creation of new ideas, thoughts, methods, and insights (Sakamoto & Chan, 2006).

Sakamoto and Chan (2006) state, “collaborative dialogue among...teachers is vital for the development of knowledge” (p. 226). Two types of knowledge educators engage in throughout their studies are academic knowledge and experiential knowledge (Payne & Zeichner, 2017). Academic knowledge is the in-classroom instruction teachers receive as they are training to become educators, while experiential knowledge is the knowledge gained through experience, like student teaching and observations. It is the experiential knowledge that plays a significant role in how educators approach their own teaching methods and solve problems within their classrooms, because “our own histories and assumptions shape our ability to make sense of the world” (Sakamoto & Chan, 2006, p. 218). There is a connection that can be forged between experience and the educational theory received within the classroom that can help not only the individual teacher, but other teachers working around them (Sakamoto & Chan, 2006). It can be argued that “all individuals possess tacit individual knowledge” formed from their own individual and unique experiences (Sakamoto & Chan, 2006, p. 218). Teachers can use this available knowledge to supplement their own knowledge. This sense of community also has the ability to expand beyond the local and include teachers and educators working in different regions around the world and working within different educational settings.

Isolation within the work place environment can lead to a loss of interest in work, but the development of professional knowledge sharing can lead the individual to feel more connected to the school’s culture and increase their feelings of self-worth and belonging

(Mawhinney, 2010). When the lives of teachers are impacted in negative and stressful ways, their performance suffers and this in turn impacts student learning (Ferguson, Mang, & Frost, 2017). But through professional knowledge sharing with informal educators, like the weavers in this case study, formal educators can gain exposure to different teaching practices engaged by those who are normally overlooked. This may facilitate an awareness of broad learning practices, which have the possibility of finding their way into the classroom either directly or indirectly. The act of including this knowledge can not only benefit the educator's teaching style, but it can show students how culture influences knowledge and that there is more than one way to learn.

INFORMAL LEARNING: MENTORSHIP AND APPRENTICESHIPS

Learning and education manifest themselves in many different ways. Education can appear as the more commonly recognized style of formal education, which takes place in a traditional classroom setting. Typically, in the U.S, one professional teacher is present to educate and look after a classroom of around thirty students. Through this positivist learning model the majority of the knowledge is passed on from teacher to student, with the exception of a few occasions where students might tutor or guide each other in group activities. It can also take the form of informal learning or learning that takes place outside of the traditional classroom setting. Informal learning comes in many varieties, whether it is learning something new while getting lost down the rabbit hole that is surfing the Internet or learning a new dance from fellow peers. They are everyday instances and happenings where learning takes place either intentionally or unintentionally. The teaching moment is not led by a professional teacher whose job it is to teach, it is led by fellow peers, family members, colleagues, and friends. Informal learning is everyday learning.

There are two common forms of informal learning: mentorship and apprenticeship. According to Hayes and Koro-Ljunberg (2011), a mentorship is a “personal relationship in which a more experienced (usually older) faculty member acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and a sponsor of a less experienced (usually younger) student” (as cited in Unrath & Ruopp, 2016, p. 434). Similarly, an apprenticeship is “preparation and ongoing learning arising mainly through active and interdependent engagement by apprentices in their work rather than their being taught or directly guided by more experienced practitioners” (Billet, 2016, p. 613). Both modes of learning involve having the learner, whether mentee or apprentice, take an active role in the process of learning. These relationships involve the teacher modeling the task, letting the student perform the task, coaching them through the process by providing feedback, and gradually removing the support of the teacher as the student begins to gain mastery (Stalmeijer, 2015). It is a two-sided interaction where neither the educator or learner is a passive participant.

In this approach, direct teaching from the educator is still present, but there is also more room for the mentee or apprentice to explore and “discover methods that are genuine for their style” (Bain, Young, & Kuster, 2017, p. 32). The learners are active participants and are engaged in an interdependent manner (Billet, 2016). Since these modes of learning take place outside of the traditional classroom setting, learning is placed back into the context of the everyday life, so “as individuals engage in everyday thinking and acting they are also learning” (Billet, 2016, p. 614). Through apprenticeship and mentorship, learning becomes connected with daily life and previously formed knowledge and experiences. And so, “there is no separate and distinct process of learning that humans engage in other than ...constructing what they know, can do, and value through and from [everyday] experience” (Billet, 2016, p. 614). Everyday life is filled with mini learning experiences that supplement knowledge formation and understanding. The individual’s previous

knowledge formed through daily learning becomes a foundation for making sense of new knowledge brought by the educator. While the educator may act as “keeper of important traditions and [information]” (Unrath & Ruopp, 2016, p. 434), the individual still holds the power of deciding how they use and interpret that information to create new knowledge. There is reciprocity present between the interactions of the two individuals where both are seen as producers and receivers of knowledge.

These learning relationships are “transformative and can change the course of [the mentee’s] life” (Kantawala, Hochtritt, Rolling, Serig, & Staikidis, 2009, p. 42). They remove the act of separating education and learning from the real-world environment and acknowledge that the development of the apprentice’s identity within the community and acquiring skills are part of the same process and should not be kept separate (Cole, 2010). The learning that comes from earlier experiences in the individuals’ lives “generate what individuals know, can do and value, which in turn shapes how and what they learn through subsequent experiences” (Billet, 2016, p. 615). While these relationships can take place in an individual setting, they can also take place within a small group setting. This provides an array of levels of expertise that can then be shared amongst all those present, creating a collaborative learning community (Cole, 2010). The learner’s experiences and the interactions they have with other members of the community shape how they learn and process information. The social aspect of learning is highlighted and used to its full extent as individuals at different levels in their learning interact with each other and naturally teach each other. Learning isn’t separated from its context, it is integrated with it. Through this integration the learner can apply new knowledge in different forms and contexts.

These types of informal learning interactions don’t normally take place within U.S. classrooms due to the structure of public education, but these are the type of individual and group based learning experiences that take place amongst Indigenous groups in and out of

the U.S., like the Maya. For example, “relationships between mother and child and father and son and among siblings, teachers, and students are the primary shapers in all fields of Mayan education” (Staikidis, 2006, p. 125). These relationships, these interactions show the trust and friendship that must be present as the foundations of education (Staikidis, 2006). They also showcase the important role community takes place in educating its members. Education and learning are not solitary experiences that detach the learner from the world, but instead places the learner’s experience into the mix. In some way, shape, or form, these influences of mentorships and apprenticeships can find their way into the classroom if more is done to learn from the practices of often ignored groups. Culture influences how knowledge is produced and understood which means that “mentoring across cultures has the potential for communicating unique aspects of cultural ways of knowing” (Staikidis, 2006, p. 125). Cross cultural communication about teaching and learning experiences can provide educators with new knowledge that can be used in the classroom or which can supplement an educator’s existing knowledge on the acts of teaching and learning. A reciprocity between educators from different cultures can occur through engagement in cross cultural communication, in which both sides can learn from each other’s learning practices and benefit from the experience.

WOMEN’S VOICE

Knowledge can be imparted through many different ways. As discussed in the past two sections, it can be shared through telling stories of personal experiences or it can be divulged through traditional means where the knowledge holder imparts the knowledge to the learner. Just as there are many ways in which it can be shared, there are also many ways in which it is received and processed. Experiences and surrounding factors can influence how an individual receives and interprets knowledge and information. How an individual

sees themselves and how they interact with others plays a big role on the individual's ways of knowing. This is especially true for women.

Women's ways of knowing differ greatly from that of males, because the realm of education and learning present in today's world was created by a male dominated culture (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). The characteristics of education and the manners in which it changed and transformed through the centuries were done through the male lens and perspective. It was created by men for men. By "drawing on their own perspectives and visions, men have constructed the prevailing theories, written history, and set values that have become the guiding principles for men and women alike" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 5). These ideas fail to take into consideration the female perspective and experience. They are male centered and male dominated views and ideals that contain their own idea of what should be expected of women. They create environments in which the male individual can feel comfortable and free to voice their opinion and independence, while the female individual is made to feel the exact opposite (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986).

Environments of education and learning "do not adequately serve the needs of women" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 4). On the contrary, in many instances "women often feel alienated in academic settings and experience "formal" education as either peripheral or irrelevant to their central interests and development" because of how the structure of educational systems are male centered (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 4). At a young age, boys are encouraged to be outspoken and curious about the world around them; they are pushed to be analytical and think critically. They grow up in a world in which what they say is heard and valued from the very beginning. Girls on the other hand are taught to be quiet, soft spoken, and passive. It is expected for them to be in touch with their emotions, be polite, and keep their thoughts

and ideas to themselves. Due to these deeply engrained expectations “girls and women have more difficulty than boys and men in asserting their authority or considering themselves as authorities” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 5). It makes it difficult for women to be able to express themselves in public, gain the respect of others, and feel heard. In many cases most women can recall an incident where, either they or a female friend, were discouraged from pursuing some line of intellectual work on the grounds that it was “unfeminine” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). Even if they were never discouraged from pursuing what they wanted, at some point in life every woman has felt unheard or incapable of expressing their ideas due to the presence of dominating male voices surrounding them. Likewise, when women do express their thoughts or make themselves known they are labeled as angry, aggressive, boisterous, man hating feminists.

The educational experiences of women are different from that of men, making it important to take into consideration the many ways women receive knowledge and learn. Every woman has a different idea of how they view themselves as knowledge producers and as learners (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). These views are shaped not only by patriarchal society’s general expectations of women, but by the type of environment and relationships they encounter on a daily basis. For many women, valuable lessons grow from relationships with friends and teachers, life occurrences, and involvement within a community. Women who saw themselves as silent without a voice felt this way, because they grew up in “socially, economically, and educationally deprived” environments that stifled their ability to see themselves as learners and knowledge producers (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 24). From their perspective, there was always an individual who had the authority, in many cases a male figure like a father or partner, who had all the power. The voice of the male authority was law and led

these women to see the use of words as a dangerous, troublesome act (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). Environment and expectations shaped their learning and processing of the knowledge and information around them.

As a result, the social dynamics of a woman's family plays a defining role in shaping who they are, how they present themselves to others, and how they see the world (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). For example, the environments in which underprivileged women find themselves "are likely to be very hierarchically arranged, demanding conformity, passivity and obedience", factors which inhibit intellectual growth and positive self-esteem (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 156). The environments privileged women find themselves in "are more likely to encourage active, creative thinking, and lifelong intellectual development" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 156); they see themselves as producers of knowledge and as active participants within the academic and educational world. While these scenarios can also be reversed, the common thread is that the treatment a women experiences in daily life, whether positive or negative, from family or friends influences who they are.

Therefore, women who are exposed to supportive environments are able to exercise and develop their voice without the fear of an authority figure tearing them down. They no longer see themselves as insubordinate listeners in the academic environment and they begin to see themselves as producers of knowledge. Women exposed to supportive environments realize their voice matters and that they have the power to question any information given to them based on their acquired knowledge and experiences. Furthermore, they develop the comfort and ability to move beyond their personal knowledge and place themselves into different perspectives (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). They no longer have to rely heavily on others to tell them how things are or how and what to think; they are able to think for themselves. All women

have the capability of being able to listen to others, create their own knowledge from what they learn, and teach others. Even if it isn't taking place directly in the academic field, they are still able to play a role in knowledge production and knowledge receiving as long as they are provided a place alongside men within all social spaces where they can be heard and aren't stifled.

There are studies on gender and language use that suggest the world is split into speaking and listening categories where women are the listeners and men the speakers (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). The feminine voice and mind is dismissed as soft and naïve, better for listening than speaking. But when the learning styles and experiences of women are taken into consideration within the academic field, an equality can be established where women can also develop their voice and no longer have a fear of speaking up and speaking out. And more voices can mean the contribution of more thoughts and ideas that lead to a more inclusive and thoughtful society.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge comes in many forms and is created through an infinite number of processes and experiences that vary from one another. It is created when a mother says *luz* and the child looks towards the light. It is created between two friends discussing the best survival strategies in a hypothetical zombie apocalypse scenario. It is created when an artist ventures into the wilderness and draws the mountain valley, as gusts of wind make the blades of tall grass bow. Knowledge is knowledge, no matter the means taken to create it. But there are times when people and society establish certain forms of knowledge, perspectives, and methods of thinking superior to others as if they were the only valid forms present.

Throughout history, the western perspective and worldview has been the dominant force suppressing all other diverse forms of thinking; the knowledge system more commonly suppressed is Indigenous knowledge. It should be noted, that western society strives for progress and modernity. And in its eyes, any form of thought or knowledge that falls outside of these “aspirations” is considered “non-progressed, primitive, underdeveloped, and non-literate” (Maurial, 1999, p. 60). Western society views knowledge and thought as a linear progression that moves forward, never looks back, and becomes more civilized as it creates new ideas, technologies, and epistemologies. According to Maurial (1999), it “isolates human beings from nature” and passes itself as the superior truths denying the validity of non-western knowledge as a knowledge form (p. 59). Unlike western knowledge, Indigenous knowledge does not see knowledge production in a linear trajectory. Instead, it is the “dynamic way in which the residents of an area have come to understand themselves in relationship to their natural environment and how they organize that folk knowledge of flora and fauna, cultural beliefs, and history, to enhance their lives” (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 3). Indigenous knowledge is created and used within the context of the community and the surrounding environment. It does not separate itself from the culture or practical life, they work together and influence each other. While western knowledge tends to be about the individual, Indigenous knowledge is about the community, both past and present. It relies on the thought of the individual as well as the knowledge created by the generations that came before.

Due to the prominence of western culture and knowledge, there is a tendency to look at Indigenous people, cultures, and practices as if they were living representations of centuries old cultures and lifestyles. It is as if their practices have stayed exactly the same for over hundreds of years without being influenced by outside forces or generations of new thoughts. Western ideology, while labeling Indigenous knowledge as ignorant and

backwards, continues to push the idea that Indigenous knowledge has remained pure throughout the centuries. As if the traditions and experiences practiced today are the same ones practiced since before the onslaught of colonization. It is important to avoid looking at Indigenous knowledge, or any part of Indigenous cultures and lifestyles for that matter, as a romanticized depiction of the past. Indigenous knowledge cannot be treated as “a historical artifact far removed from contemporary life” (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 22). By doing so, an illusion is created causing any Indigenous knowledge or practice that falls outside of the narrow boundaries set by western ideology to appear inauthentic and fake (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). The romanticization of Indigenous knowledge makes it appear stationary, prehistoric, and helplessly naïve and innocent. It separates Indigenous knowledge from reality and the influences of outside cultures and “non-indigenous information” (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 22). When in actuality Indigenous knowledge is exposed to various factors that help shape and transform it, just like all non-indigenous cultures.

Furthermore, “far from being static, Indigenous people and their knowledge continue to evolve” and change as new generations introduce new forms of thinking and new ways of doing things (Maurial, 1999, p. 69). Even before the invasion of colonization, different Indigenous communities and groups influenced each other; they weren’t isolated in a perfect bubble that maintained all their knowledge and practices free from the “tarnish” of outside forces (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). Exchanges of knowledge were occurring between communities that were separated by thousands of miles of wilderness, making it impossible for Indigenous cultures to return to a pure pre-colonial state (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). Denying the complexity and organic change Indigenous knowledge takes part in, invalidates the experiences of Indigenous people and their history and in turn

adds validation to the perspectives created and imposed by western knowledge, ideologies, and experiences.

Indigenous knowledge is like a living organism that is influenced by the factors surrounding it. It has a strong connection between the surrounding environment, the community, and locality. These factors can easily introduce new characteristics and thoughts that build upon the knowledge already present. Within Indigenous knowledge, all knowledge is connected in some form; it isn't categorized into smaller units that do not appear to overlap. The individual and the community are considered one. Everything is connected and interrelated: "the individual is connected to the group, the group to nature, and nature to the domain of the spiritual world" (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 42). The relationships that take place within these interconnections influence the knowledge produced and created. This differs from western knowledge which tends to separate and isolate the different parts of knowledge without any thought as to how the compartmentalization "[undermines] our ability to make sense of social, physical, and human phenomena" (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 42). Western knowledge places the focus on the individual, while Indigenous knowledge places the focus on the group and the individual's role within it (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). Indigenous knowledge is culturally grounded. It is local, a part of the whole culture, and reconstructed through generations. There is no separation between ideas and practices and the knowledge is transmitted through oral traditions instead of written down (Maurial, 1999).

Broadly speaking, while Indigenous knowledge is about the creation of knowledge within the context of community and culture and bringing together thought and life experiences to create knowledge, it is important to remember that all Indigenous knowledge is not the same from one Indigenous group to the other. It should be known that "Indigenous knowledges are as diverse as Indigenous peoples themselves" (Jacob et al.,

2018, p. 158). There is variation between people's life experiences, and due to the dynamic nature of knowledge creation, those experiences affect the knowledge created. Indigenous identity is not the same for every Indigenous group on the planet; it is not "fixed and stable" (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 23). They do not all share the same characteristics, experiences, histories, practices, and traditions. As a whole, Indigenous communities and cultures have experiences of colonization and oppression in common. They have seen and experienced their knowledge being treated as inferior to other forms of knowledge. But just because they have these general experiences in common, it does not mean they are all exactly the same. There is tremendous amount of "diversity within the label, Indigenous people" (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 24). This diversity means that they do not all share the same knowledge or same ways of producing knowledge. The circumstances of their experiences might be the same, but the way they produce knowledge from those experiences and in relation to their cultural variation will differ from individual to community to Indigenous group. If all Indigenous knowledge is grouped together as being the same without taking notice of the nuances and unique differences provided by the diversity present within Indigenous groups, then there runs the risk of continuing to perpetuate the idea that there is only one pure Indigenous culture. Indigenous culture and knowledge are not all the same. They vary from each other based on the experiences and thoughts of the individuals practicing the culture; it is in constant flux.

While it is important not to see Indigenous knowledge as "another resource to [exploit] for the economic benefit of the west" (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 44), the diversity in perspective and thought that comes with Indigenous knowledge enrich society and broaden the idea of what knowledge is. Indigenous perspective and thought can help change the consciousness of Western academics. It creates a fresh vantage point from which Eurocentric education and knowledge can be analyzed (Jacob et al., 2018). The

value placed on process instead of the final product can provide fresh perspectives that can lead to the creation of new ideas and outlooks. The fact that Indigenous knowledge is based within culture and community allows it to be a knowledge system that all students and people can relate to and draw from in some way. It allows people to see that their way of knowing is only one of the many cultural perspectives present in the world (Semali and Kincheloe, 1999).

MAYA FEMALE EXPERIENCE

Throughout history, “within any sphere of Latin America...women have been viewed through the patriarchal lens of an oppressive imaginary” (de la Torre Amaguana, 2015, p. 85). Through the progression of time, they have been continually confined and restricted to the domestic sphere and have been given few opportunities that allow them to break away from that arena (de la Torre Amaguana, 2015). Due to the “systematic processes of racism, domination, exclusion, and annihilation of her identity as a sociopolitical subject, she has been limited to those private and domestic landscapes” that engrain ideas of what the role of a woman should be (de la Torre Amaguana, 2015, p. 85). While Indigenous people are seen as subordinate in the eyes of western ideals, Indigenous women are placed further below their male counterparts on that ladder. Their role and value is to their household and domestic duties alone, giving them little authority and presence. The histories of Indigenous women have been omitted from the larger picture. The exclusion of their narratives prevents an integral part of Indigenous society from being seen and heard from. This is true for the Indigenous women of Guatemala.

The Indigenous demographic makes up 42% of Guatemala’s population (Hallman, Peracca, Catino, & Ruiz, 2007); a large part of that demographic is made up of the Maya. The Maya are a group of people that have been heavily studied by anthropologists over the

years, but there are many holes present in these anthropological studies that largely exclude the female experience. Past studies, which focused on the male experience and perspective, found that Maya communities “thrived because all members of the family work together pooling their energies and income for household consumption purposes” (Ehlers, 2000, p. xxxv). The female experience reveals something completely different. The economic well-being of the entire family relied heavily on efforts of women, who received little to no recognition or proper compensation for their labor and sacrifices (Ehlers, 2000). When the expenses for the two genders were broken down by Ehlers, they revealed that the little money Maya women made went towards the household, food, and child expenses, while the majority of the money Maya males made went towards personal expenses (Ehlers, 2000).

In many cases the small amount of income generated by Maya women comes from the “female family business” (Ehlers, 2000, p. xxxvii), businesses run by the related women in order to assist the family financially. In order to make these businesses work as best they can, female kin are taken on as helpers. Depending on the situation, these businesses can work differently, where all the money made goes to the mother for domestic expenses or, “similar to collectives, [where] all work and monies are divided evenly” (Ehlers, 2000, p. 61). While female family businesses may provide enough financial security, especially if each female established their own *tienda*, they are still not recognized as entrepreneurial pursuits. The profits generated are small, in some cases a profit is narrowly missed or barely made (Ehlers, 2000).

Unlike the businesses of their male counterparts, the female family businesses are rarely able to expand due to the inequity present. They are unable to invest the profit, if any, that they make into the business, because it all goes towards the upkeep of the family. Maya women “cannot afford the luxury of long term planning nor the risk necessary to

grow business”, so they choose to maintain their business at “a very low and stable level” (Ehlers, 2000, p. xxxviii). The viewpoint of the society specifically, the patriarchal nature of society, views the contribution of women as lying solely in the domestic sphere. Female entrepreneurship and independence are regarded as misguided. They are seen as lacking the needed talent and drive required when establishing a commercial venture, even though there are many Maya women who show those characteristics and potential. The gender structures present within the society places the Maya women in a state of dependence, even though they are more than capable of being independent.

The poverty present within Indigenous communities prevents Maya women from being able to get a complete education. In Guatemala “only 39% of 15-64 year old Indigenous women are literate” (Hallman, Peracca, Catino, & Ruiz, 2007, p. 146) and, according to Hallman, Peracca, Catino, & Ruiz (2007), the most disadvantaged group are poor Indigenous girls. Their education is seen as a luxury not a need. The education of a woman is not seen as a priority, compared to that of a male, because the women’s future role lies within the household and maintaining and caring for children and the husband. In the eyes of society, an education is not needed in order to be able to maintain a household; on the contrary, it can be seen as a distraction that takes away from their availability in completing household duties and assisting the family. Indigenous females are only allowed to go to school for a couple of years before being pulled out so they can begin to contribute to the family income, either by working in the family business or caring for siblings and household duties while their mother tends to the family business (Ehlers, 2000). Within these relationships, “daughters act to free mothers of the sole responsibility of cooking, cleaning and childcare, thus opening the way for mothers to concentrate on developing market relations and entrepreneurial activities” (Ehlers, 2000, p. 60). It is expected of younger females to provide assistance to their mother and grandmothers. They are seen as

a resource and as having a function within the role of the household and within the maintenance of the family business.

Yet in recent years there has been a wave of change taking place within communities advocating for the continued education of girls. Education in Guatemala is expensive, but parents are “choosing to invest in [the] education” of their daughters as it presents another opportunity for the daughter to be able to contribute to the family (Ehlers, 2000, p. 84). But with the increased education and knowledge, these contributions start to move away from the realm of the female family business and into other careers such as becoming a teacher, starting their own business, or semi-industrial employment. While parents have a sense of pride in saying their daughter is a *maestra* (teacher), the “deprivation of women’s daughters and their monetary gains” (Ehlers, 2000, p. 88) has an effect on the running of the female family business and the assistance the mother receives. A focus on education and the acquiring of skills, while giving the daughter options and opportunities, has also led to a decline in the presence of *lo tipico*, the traditional textiles and clothing of the Maya. It affects identity, as young women start to make the decision not to immerse themselves completely within their culture. They begin to prefer Western style of clothing and influences to traditional Maya clothing and customs as it allows them to fit in better and feel more comfortable within mainstream society (Ehlers, 2000). When placed in these situations, young Maya women have to make complex decision on what is important enough to become a part of their identity. They have to traverse a difficult line between familial cultural identity and personal identity.

Maya women are the backbone of their family and of their community. They play a significant role within their society in that they are the active agents in maintaining traditions, customs, and processes alive, especially when it comes to *traje* (outfit) and processes like weaving. There are many methods making their way into communities, like

commercial textile mills, which have the machines to create replicas of traditional *traje* designs faster and at a fraction of the cost compared to the traditional handmade form. But the presence of Maya women maintaining and practicing their weaving process helps keep the art form and tradition from becoming extinct. While the processes and designs are not the same as they were one hundred years ago and while its prevalence might have decreased throughout the years, Maya women have still been able to keep their weaving practices moving forward. They continue to show younger generations the weaving process and its importance within their culture. The Maya weavers are keeping culture alive and from being overtaken completely by westernization. This is another form of evidence of the significant role Maya women play in Guatemala and why their presence and voice are needed.

Change is taking place in Guatemala; like every country and every culture, it is evolving and changing based on outside influences and the lessons learned from the happenings of the past. The country is going through a period where it is healing and moving forward from the atrocities of the thirty-six-year civil war. While the opportunities and expectations for Maya women have improved, they still continue to face inequity and disparity simply because they are females required to fill specific societal roles. Society's expectations continue to place them in positions of dependency through a combination of multiple factors that are difficult to get rid of quickly; it takes time. But by being aware of the experiences and perspectives of Maya women, these realities can begin to change for the better. Western society can start to be more inclusionary of their narratives and voices. The presence of successful female weavers is significant. These women are living in a society riddled with *machismo*, an exaggerated sense of masculinity that promotes the idea that women are inferior to men. And yet surrounded by *machismo*, the weavers have found a way to not only establish a business in which females can take part in and generate some

income, but in which some of the money made goes to helping the entire community succeed. It is important to take the female perspective into account when conducting studies about a culture or community different from one's own, because those perspectives can tell a different story and shed new light on the experiences faced by the community and its members.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the literature that helped shape my basic understanding of the Maya culture within Guatemala as well as the types of learning present and the benefits of including overlooked perspectives. It explored professional knowledge sharing, informal learning, women's voice, Indigenous knowledge, and the Maya female experience. Chapter 3 describes the methodology, and will explore how I went about conducting my research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I will present my methodology and how I went about conducting my research. For this research, I conducted an autoethnography, while drawing from literature on Indigenous research methodologies. I also write about the changes that took place in my research plan and the role my researcher positionality played in conducting this research. The chapter ends with the presentations of my data collection methods and the steps I used to conduct my data analysis.

A TALE OF CHANGE AND FLEXIBILITY

Research, like many things in life, is in constant motion and change; with the addition of new layers of information, thoughts, and experiences it continues to evolve. In some instances, it follows the researcher's targeted path, but in the majority of qualitatively oriented situations it deviates away from that path down unknown trails. My research took me down a trail that I did not see myself trekking. I started this project with a plan and vision of how my research journey would transpire and all the information and memories I would collect in the process. I planned to go to San Juan La Laguna, Guatemala, where I would interview two Maya weavers, of different age levels, to learn about informal weaving education. I imagined myself staying with them in their beautiful village by Lake Atitlan, observing their day-to-day life while learning how to weave. I saw myself conducting a mini-ethnographic case study to learn about Maya culture and weaving practice, all while developing friendships and reciprocal artistic connection with the weavers. For the three months leading up to my travel date, this is what I saw happening on my research journey, exactly as I had imagined. But once in Guatemala, my research journey followed a new trail.

Going into the project, I didn't have an established contact with a weaver. I knew of the weaving cooperative Casa Flor of Ixcaco from the trip I participated with the UT art education department in March of 2018 and that was it. Very early on I made initial contact with a weaver at Casa Flor of Ixcaco through email in an attempt to share my research intentions, but through the long months I failed to keep contact with them. As the weeks leading up to the trip became days, I made the decision to simply travel to Guatemala and attempt to reach out to weavers once in the country. So, I developed a very broad schedule that included a visit to the textiles museum, Museo Ixchel in Guatemala City, a visit to San Juan La Laguna, and a visit to Antigua. In Guatemala City, I stayed with my family members for ten days and they were kind enough to take me wherever I needed to go. This also meant I had to plan my research schedule around the schedule of my great-aunt and uncle, so my visits to the towns I had chosen were reduced to one to two days. Due to my decision to follow a broad plan I was unable to shadow a weaver, learn how to weave, or spend ten days in San Juan La Laguna as I had imagined. Initially, I felt lost not being able to follow the path I laid out for myself.

But, as I began to reflect on my trip and all I experienced, my research revealed a new trail. These visits, my stay in Guatemala City, and my ventures to my father's former hometown, amongst other experiences, provided me with wonderful learning opportunities. I was able to see new sides of the country I only knew through my childhood memories of visiting with my family. In the process, I was able to gain a new perspective on the role Maya textiles and the Maya weavers play in the culture of Guatemala.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

As stated in the previous section, my initial chosen methodology for this research was a mini-ethnographic case study. This methodology would allow me to embed myself

into the daily life of a Maya weaver as a participant observer for a shorter amount of time than in a traditional ethnography. My goal for my thesis was to focus on the Maya weavers in order to present their experiences and share their voices in an ethical and decolonizing manner. But as I made multiple visits throughout Guatemala and conducted my two interviews, I began to wonder if my research truly fit within this methodology. While I had spent ten days in Guatemala, I didn't spend them embedded in a single specific community shadowing two Maya weavers. My role as a researcher was more of observer than participant observer. I also had cultural and familial experiences that weren't tied with my research on weavers, but influenced my perspective as I began reflecting on my journey.

But the biggest concern that kept appearing in my mind was: do my participants truly want their stories and experiences shared with the world? And is it ethical for me to be the one to share their stories instead of them? As I conducted my interviews, these thoughts were at the forefront of my mind, they were always there. The two weavers consented to participating in the interviews and were happy to share their stories and experiences with me, but I couldn't help but wonder if sharing their stories about weaving was what they truly wanted or needed, or if it was just an everyday act they had to do for all the academics and tourists who visit them. Furthermore, as an outsider, I still didn't feel like I had the right to share the experiences of other women and show other art educators what it is like to be a Maya weaver or to represent their informal weaving education, especially since it is part of a culture that I don't belong to and have never personally experienced. My biggest fear with this thesis project was to be a researcher that unintentionally engaged in colonizing research assuming the role of "white savior". So, the best methodology to situate this project is autoethnography. Instead of using my voice to present the experiences of the Maya weavers, I present my own learning experiences from this research journey to Guatemala.

An autoethnography is a blending of autobiography and ethnography. According to Ellis, Adam, and Bochner (2011), an autoethnography is “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experiences (ethno)” (p. 273). The researcher is able to draw upon their personal experiences as a way of understanding the sociological and cultural phenomena taking place around them. Unlike other methodologies, like ethnography, that require the researcher to remove their voice and perceptions from the study, autoethnography uses the researcher’s experiences, emotions, perceptions, and thoughts as important pieces of data that lead to an understanding of what is being studied. This methodology allowed me to use my personal experiences, learning moments, and observations as a way to understand the role the weavers and textiles play in modern day Guatemala. It also gave me the opportunity to validate experiences unrelated to weaving, like my family visit, into my data. Even though these happenings were not related to weaving or the experiences of the weavers, they were still significant moments within my research journey that contain important information for analysis and which provide context for this research. They are a part of the rich cultural experience I had in Guatemala.

Even though autoethnography includes the personal accounts and experiences of the researcher, it doesn’t mean the individual is only writing about themselves and simply retelling what they encountered or felt. It is important for the researcher to systematically analyze those personal experiences in order to add meaning that extends beyond the individual (Wall, 2008). This research project isn’t simply a retelling of my research journey; it is an analysis of what I experienced out in the field and what those experiences taught me about informal weaving education at this moment in time in Guatemala. I need to include analysis and reflection of those experiences or else I risk transforming a potentially informative experience into a self-indulgent and narcissistic study that doesn’t

contribute knowledge to the field of art education. This research journey to Guatemala was an eye-opening experience that provided me with a lot of learning moments. When further analyzed, it has the potential to provide new and transferable knowledge to other art educators that can influence them in some way.

Personal experiences have a way of providing valuable and insightful information within a research project; who better to understand the learning taking place than the researcher themselves (Ellis, Adam, Bochner, 2011). But one argument brought up against autoethnography is how can the reader be certain that the accounts they are reading are accurate portrayals, especially when all the data is coming from the researcher. There are claims that data can be manipulated or invented to reflect what the researcher wants (Méndez, 2013). In order to combat this, multiple forms of data collection are used during the research process and later on triangulation can be used during data analysis. For my data, I collected two semi-structured interviews with two female weavers, maintained a field notes journal, and documented a visit to a weaving museum, Museo Ixchel. I will use all three data sets during data analysis. Details describing how I conducted my data collection and data analysis are reported towards the end of this chapter.

INDIGENOUS RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The relationship between Indigenous communities and research has not been a smooth one. In the majority of cases “research is haunted by the destructive trail left by 20th century researchers who cruelly objectified, misrepresented, and harmed Indigenous cultures around the world” (Ballengee-Morris, Sanders, Smith-Shank, & Staikidis, 2010, p. 3). It has been filled with inequality, maltreatment, and disregard of the rights and consent of Indigenous people. In the past, researchers viewed Indigenous people as subjects

and specimens to be used for their studies without having to comply with ethical treatment. Researchers in the past exploited Indigenous people.

Colonization “brought complete disorder to colonized people, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations, and their own ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting with the world” (Smith, 1999, p. 28). Efforts were made to strip them of their culture and identity in order to turn them into the colonizers’ vision of an ideal citizen. These were acts of cultural elimination and cultural violence that occurred within every context, including that of academia. Within the field of anthropology, many researchers took advantage of Indigenous communities by conducting experiments and studies that were harmful to native people. Even when it was not the intention of the researcher to enact harm, damage still took place through the form in which the researcher presented the Indigenous communities to the rest of the world. They were represented as backwards, primitive, stuck in the past, un-evolving, and naïve. For this reason, many people today still maintain a closed perspective and mind when it comes to Indigenous communities and cultures.

After centuries of damage and misrepresentation, researchers involved with Indigenous communities are making an effort and taking steps towards conducting decolonizing research that places the interests of Indigenous people ahead of the interest of the researcher. While there is no set manner or concrete guidelines for conducting decolonizing research, Indigenous scholars, like Linda Tuhiwai Smith, have created criteria for researchers (Swadener & Mutua, 2014). There are “distinctive hallmarks of decolonizing research [that lie] in the motives, concerns, and knowledge brought to the research process” (Swadener & Mutua, 2014, p. 34). Researchers must remove themselves from the place of power in order to get rid of bias, preconceptions, and the “tendency...to speak in absolutes and to be heard as an authority and representative” (Ballengee-Morris,

Sanders, Smith-Shank, & Staikidis, 2010, p. 12) for all Indigenous people. This authority must then transfer to the Indigenous people participating in the study, they must be the ones who guide the research. By doing this, the researcher begins to move away from studying about Indigenous people to studying with Indigenous people (Staikidis, 2014). When the researcher's authority is removed, opportunities for establishing authentic relationships with the community and individual increase. It is no longer about entering the community and using them for research purposes, it transforms into the act of developing friendships and connections that transcend a study.

Decolonizing research removes traditional research methodologies that “work to invalidate Indigenous culture”, practices, and creation of knowledge (Eldridge, 2017, p. 30). It recognizes “Indigenous ways of producing knowledge, [prioritizes] research benefits to Indigenous communities...and [involves] marginalized [groups in order] to control potential biases...and decrease the perpetuation of common misconceptions” (Eldridge, 2017, p. 30). It is about reciprocity and ensuring the self-determination of Indigenous people and their communities. It gives them a voice, and by making their narratives and experiences heard, the stereotypes and misconceptions held towards them can be reduced. Seeing Indigenous cultures as an active and important part of contemporary life removes the fog that keeps people from seeing them as dynamic, diverse, and in constant change.

Art education research has an obligation in changing the way it approaches Indigenous people and culture, by not falling into the stereotypes and misinformation pushed forth by mainstream culture (Eldridge, 2014). It must work towards disseminating the narratives of Indigenous people's art experiences in a manner that benefits this group. By applying Indigenous research methodologies, it has the power to show that all Indigenous cultures are not the same and that every individual has their own experience

which plays a role in the overall collectives of experiences. It brings awareness to forms of knowledges often overlooked and ignored which can provide new perspectives and learning opportunities different from the ones provided by mainstream society. Indigenous research methodologies can provide art education researchers with the opportunity to conduct respectful and reciprocal research that leads to “unlearning stereotypes and replaces them with reality based images and understandings” (Eldridge, 2008, p. 3).

Throughout my research travels in Guatemala, I had to traverse between two dual roles. On one end I was a researcher, observing and recording everything I saw and heard, while on the other I was a tourist getting to finally experience my familial roots and the “motherland”. While these two roles were different in nature, they were still the perspective of the outsider looking in. From the initiation of this research journey, I knew that I had to be careful of how I behaved and what I said, but also of the thoughts and ideas I projected onto what I was experiencing. I had to make sure not to let my bias and my own idea of how I should behave as a researcher get in the way of experiencing life in Guatemala and hearing the weaver’s stories. Learning how to traverse the thin line between conducting research and conducting decolonializing research was a difficult process and continues to be an area of personal learning. I am sure that I made mistakes along the way to conducting decolonizing research and that there are areas for future growth. The reality is that no matter how aware someone is of the injustices of the world, they still have to learn how to avoid adding onto those injustices unconsciously.

Throughout my whole time in Guatemala, as well as before and after the trip, I continued to think about how I could conduct this research and write about the weavers’ experiences without belittling them or turning them into objects. I wanted to make sure to place their needs and work before my own. While I was conducting my interviews, I was aware of the fact that they were taking time out of their work day to talk to me and share

their story. I tried to be conscious of their time, so I wouldn't take up too much of it, especially since these interviews were not pre-scheduled. When anyone walked by their stall or into their store, I paused the interview in order to let them take care of their customer or fulfill their responsibilities. When they were ready to continue I resumed the interview. For much of my interactions with the weavers I was always conscious of the time they were giving me and made the attempt to be as little of a burden as possible. I wanted to make sure I wasn't interrupting their work day, because selling textiles is their livelihood and they had no obligation to talk to me. I gave them full authority as a sign of my respect for their work and generosity.

When conducting the interviews, I didn't just walk-in, record the interview, and walk out. I wanted to avoid taking their information away from them to use for my own benefit. So, I gave each weaver who participated a little lotion bottle, as a gift, and purchased a textile related product from their stall or store. Going into the interview the weavers did not know that I would make a purchase and present them with a gift. I wanted to keep it a secret until after the end of the interview so as not to influence how they acted towards me or the types of answers they gave to my questions. I gave them a gift and made a purchase as a small form of reciprocity and appreciation. I understand that the Indigenous research methodology guidelines' use of reciprocity usually means to provide a service or assistance that is long term. It involves acts of assistance that establish a continued mutual relationship between the two parties, like helping the Indigenous weavers establish a website or connecting them with people abroad that can provide beneficial services or clientele, for example. But, being a graduate student with very limited connections, I wasn't able to provide them with a large gesture of long-term reciprocity like that. My hope was that through the small gifts and purchases, I was showing how grateful I was for their participation and the opportunity to hear their stories and see them weave. These were acts

done as a way to show my appreciation and support of their talent, art practice, and the inclusion of their voices.

I am a firm believer that everyone has a story and that everyone should be given the opportunity to share that story if they wish to. While this research project is written through my perspective, the information that I was able to collect from these two weavers is only scraping the top of the surface of what it means to be a Maya weaver. It is a start to sharing their narratives and experiences with the rest of the world. Narratives that deserve to be heard and included within history in a respectful, ethical, and decolonizing manner.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

As stated in the personal motivations section of this thesis, I am Guatemalan-American. Both of my parents were born and raised in Guatemala and lived there until they decided to make the long and difficult journey to the U.S. in the summer of 1992. My Guatemalan roots and heritage hold an important place in my personal identity, even though I never lived in Guatemala and have only been able to visit a handful of times. As I have grown older my desire to learn more about Guatemala and its people and culture has grown alongside me. But, while I hold a deep appreciation for the traditions and practices of the Maya, especially their textiles, it is important for me to state that I, nor anyone in my family, is Maya or a part of the Maya community. In the demographics of the nation we would be considered Ladino, a “westernized Central American person of predominantly mixed Spanish and Indigenous descent” (Ladino, n.d.), whose dominant language is Spanish and uses Western dress. Furthermore, my being born and raised in the U.S adds to my ties with Western culture more than it does to that of Guatemalan culture. I am unable to identify where the Indigenous descent in my family comes from, but based on what I know of my family tree it is not present within the more recent members.

The reason I bring up my descent and not being Maya is because I do not want anyone who reads this thesis to read it believing that I have a familial connection with the community or that I consider myself Maya. If I were to say or lead anyone into believing this it would be inaccurate. Indigenous research methodology literature raises these types of instances, where researchers step into the field to learn with Indigenous communities only to end up appropriating and claiming Indigenous culture and practices as their own. These types of research go against Indigenous research methodology and decolonizing research, because they are an act of stealing central practices and traditions from Indigenous communities. By taking away these significant customs and using them within their own lives, out of context and without true connection, appreciation isn't shown and instead the customs are relegated to fad culture. They become disposable "trends" that can be taken by anyone, used, and then discarded when something new comes along. By claiming the culture of a people whom you do not belong to, you run the risk of causing serious damage to communities who have suffered greatly from the influence of dominating western cultures and outsiders. Therefore, my being a Guatemalan-American researcher placed me in a position as an outsider for the entirety of my time in Guatemala.

The line between appreciation and appropriation is very fine one to traverse, especially by someone in my position who has familial ties to the country and wishes to learn everything about it. I can very easily make an ancestral claim to Maya culture, but doing so would make me an appropriator; which I do not want to be. By learning about the culture and processes, instead of just buying traditional textiles because they look nice, I deepen my own experience and appreciation of Indigenous culture. As an educator, these types of experiences and approaches towards learning about Indigenous cultures, and any culture for that matter, can act as a valuable tool.

I cannot claim and do not claim Indigeneity, because if I were to do so it would be just another act of colonization, another act of Westerner coming in and stealing from Indigenous people. But, what I can claim is appreciation and respect for the Maya and their cultures. When it comes to learning about Maya, and any other Indigenous group, I want to play the role of an informed ally. Taking on the role of informed ally creates the opportunity for mutual learning to take place, where both sides learn from each other, and where the perception held towards indigenous cultures can begin to change through informed knowledge.

DATA COLLECTION

In this autoethnographic study, I collected three forms of data throughout my time in Guatemala: field notes, semi-structured interviews, and photographs taken during the visit to Museo Ixchel. While at times it was easy to get caught up in experiencing what was going on around me, these three data collection tools were informative and helped me record as much cultural information as possible.

The first type of data collection were field notes, which are commonly used in ethnographic research. Field notes are “detailed nonjudgmental (as much as possible) concrete descriptions of what has been observed” by the researcher (Corwin & Clemens, 2012, p. 490). These observations are detailed descriptions of the activities and conversations taking place in the researcher’s surrounding environment. The notes go beyond jotting down key words or phrases by including thick description. Through thick description, the researcher provides detailed accounts of the behavior taking place, as well as the context in which the action is happening (Corwin & Clemens, 2012). This is done in an effort to immerse the reader into the research setting; it paints a picture that allows them to see what the researcher observed. Throughout my time in Guatemala, I maintained a

field notes journal where I recorded daily observations using thick description. While out in the field, I jotted down quick notes or made mental notes. Then every night I gave myself time to write down everything I observed during that day before I forgot it. I wrote about everything including the days when I visited family or did things unrelated to research.

Traditionally, the observations recorded in the field notes journal are objective in nature and effort is put into keeping these objective observations separate from the biased thoughts, emotions, and observations made by the researcher. The bias and perspective of the researcher are distanced in order to provide a pure image of daily life experiences of the individual or community under study. But in my journal, I combined my objective observations with my own thoughts and reactions. At night when I would write about the day, even though I attempted to record everything chronologically, I wrote in a fluid and disorganized manner because one thought or memory would make another resurface. My fear was that I would forget much of what happened if I went back and forth from one journal to another; I didn't want to interrupt those thoughts. I also believed that the inclusion of both observations and personal thoughts and reactions were important, because they are part of my perspective; without one the picture is incomplete. Although many researchers believe research should be neutral and impersonal, "autoethnography...acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research" instead of hiding it (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 274). It uses personal experience as a way to present culture in a way that outsiders and members of that culture can connect with (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). These experiences were filtered through my lens and it is important I include that lens when recording data or else I risk eliminating half of the picture and experience.

The second data collection tools were two semi-structured interviews conducted with two Maya weavers that lasted about twenty minutes each. Before I left on my research

trip, I created an interview protocol, which consisted of sixty questions, translated in Spanish, that I wanted to ask my participants. Even though I arrived at each interview with sixty questions, I didn't ask them all. I used the interview protocol as a guiding framework, but left room for flexibility to let the conversation flow as naturally as possible. I didn't want to treat the interviews with the weavers like a study, but instead like a conversation, especially since they were taking time out of their day to speak with me. I didn't want to start off our meeting with a hierarchical structure where I was looking down on them as research subjects.

In both of my interviews I used two recording devices, an audio recorder and my phone. The use of two recording devices was preventative, in case one of the recordings didn't work or failed to record the entire interview (which it did at one point due to user error). Since these interviews happened on location in a weaving cooperative and an artisanal market, they captured the sounds of the environment as well as the conversations the weavers had with other people. When listening back through the recordings, these ambient noises were helpful in painting an image of the remembered experience of the interview. The selection of my two participants was an obstacle, because I didn't have an established contact who agreed to an interview beforehand. This is why it was a mixture of both purposeful and random selection. It was purposeful because I set bounds of the type of individuals I wanted to interview. They had to be practicing female Maya weavers. The selection of participants was also random because I interviewed two women I happened to meet at an artisanal market in Antigua and while walking into one of the many weaving cooperatives in San Juan La Laguna. Meeting them happened by chance.

Both interviews were conducted in Spanish, which presented some obstacles. While I am a native Spanish speaker, conducting interviews in Spanish was a bit of a new and strange experience for me. I still have some difficulty using the correct vocabulary, so my

wording changed some of the meaning in the questions I asked, which affected the weavers' responses. During the interviews, I had trouble keeping organized and really maintaining the interviews flow, because I had to switch between thinking academically in English and speaking academically in Spanish. Even with the obstacles it was still exciting to be able to use my Spanish speaking skills for my academic work and be able to communicate with the weavers in a language they are comfortable with. In a way, it acted like a bridge that helped connect me to them.

The last data collection tool I used were visuals I acquired from my visit to Museo Ixchel, the weaving and textiles museum in Guatemala City. During my time at the museum, I was able to take pictures of the textiles on display in the exhibit that showcased a wide selection of designs done by Maya groups throughout different areas of Guatemala. I was also able to capture examples of how different styles changed throughout time. At the end of my visit I acquired a pamphlet that presented more information on the history of textiles and which contained a visual of all the different styles of *huipiles* present in Guatemala separated by language group and location. The photographic data and information I gathered from this museum visit provided me with the necessary background information on textiles that I did not have prior to visiting. The infographics and museum collections served as a visual history lesson on the art of weaving and textiles (see Appendix B).

DATA ANALYSIS

I used coding to analyze data from my interviews and field notes, specifically inductive coding where the codes are developed as the researcher looks at the data. Coding is the process of labeling segments of data “that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data” (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012, p. 44). I transcribed

both the interviews and my field notes and then I looked through the transcripts in an attempt to find common and reoccurring themes. The coding stage began with initial coding, which involves looking at the data and remaining open to themes and information that can surface from it. After initial coding, I moved on to focused coding, which focuses on more frequent and significant initial codes. Instead of having a long list of different codes, it creates categories multiple codes can fall under. At times the codes can fall into more than one category (Thronberg & Charmaz, 2012). I chose to do the coding process manually instead of electronically, because it gave me the opportunity to apply memories and observations I didn't include in my notes or that can't be seen through an audio recording. Throughout the process of coding data, I also engaged in memoing, where I would add reflective notes about what I was learning during the process of data analysis so that it could be used as data.

In order to prepare for data analysis, I went through and transcribed both of the twenty minute interviews and all of my field notes. Since my interviews were conducted in Spanish, I decided not to translate the interviews in English, after transcribing them, in order to avoid losing meaning behind the weaver's responses. My field notes, which were written in English, remained in that language. After transcribing the interviews, I printed them out and read through them. As I read through the interviews, I highlighted words or phrases that repeated or stood out, while also making small notes in pencil of my interpretations. I followed a similar process with my field notes, of highlighting key and relevant observations while jotting down notes and interpretations along the margins.

After conducting the read through and preliminary coding, I moved onto the initial coding stage of my interviews. For this stage I created a chart divided into three columns: quote, significant ideas, and interpretations. I returned to my annotated transcription, pulled out the significant quotes I highlighted or made note of, and added them to the quote

column. Afterwards, I translated into English the significant ideas of those quotes and added them to the significant ideas column. The last step of initial coding was to add my own interpretations of what I thought those ideas and quotes meant. At this point, I turned my main focus toward coding the interviews as the main source of data, while my field notes were only coded up to the preliminary stage.

Once the initial coding was complete, I went through the chart and began to compile a list of themes that appeared throughout each individual interview. From this list, I pulled the overarching themes for my data by selecting the ones that appeared more often (see Appendix C). I identified a total of nine overarching themes. These nine overarching themes served as an umbrella for the smaller themes that remained, but which still played a significant role in the experiences of the weavers. For the final stage of coding I returned to my interview transcripts. I assigned a specific color to each theme and identified quotes within the transcript related to that theme. These were the quotes I used as examples for each theme within Chapter 5. Throughout the process of writing Chapter 5, I ended up combining two themes to other overarching themes that had similar connections. So, I ended up with a total of six overarching themes: *historia*, *passion*, *learning as a process*, *expectations*, *viené en la sangre*, and *obstacles*.

Since I gathered data using three different collection tools I used triangulation as a way to connect together the different forms of data. Triangulation is “an examination of how different sources of data on the same topic [can] complement each other to deepen the understanding of a topic” (Schensul, 2012, p. 99). By triangulating the data, I am able to use them together in order to reach a better and more accurate understanding of informal weaving education in Guatemala. Bringing together these three different forms of data during analysis also validates the data I collected and the results that come from it. It combats the claims of manipulation and invention often held with autoethnographic data.

Due to the personal connections between myself and the research I also engaged in research reflexivity. The creation of knowledge cannot be separated from personal experiences and thought, no matter how much a researcher tries to remove the self from the process; the self plays a role in the creation of knowledge (Berger, 2015). Researcher reflexivity is the “process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher’s positionality...and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome” (Berger, 2015, p. 220). It shows that knowledge and data interpretation isn’t objective, but that it is influenced by the researcher’s bias, experiences, and personal situation. Researcher reflexivity allows “researchers to ponder the ways in which who they are may both assist and hinder the process of co-constructing meanings, it frees them to handle and present data better, and consider its complex meaning” (Berger, 2015, p. 221). Throughout this research journey my personal position, history, and biases influenced the information I observed and heard. This has also come to influence what I include, what I leave out, and how I write about the experiences I had in Guatemala and the experiences shared by the weavers. Engaging in reflexivity made me conscious of my reactions to the weavers’ comments during the interviews and the observations made throughout my ten days in Guatemala. While analyzing and writing my findings, it made me aware of “unconscious editing” (Berger, 2015, p. 221), which gave me a more in-depth engagement with the data and my findings. While my writings, observations, and findings will never be completely free of my bias or lens, practicing reflexivity provides awareness of how my lens can impact the interpretation and meaning of my findings.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I wrote about how I conducted my research. I began by discussing the changes that took place surrounding my initial project plan, and how those changes

ultimately shaped how I conducted my research and the type of methodology I used. I covered what autoethnography is and why I used it as my methodology for this research. I also wrote about Indigenous research methodology and how this influenced the way I approached conducting research with two Indigenous women. Following this, I discussed my positionality as a researcher, methods of data collection, and procedure for data analysis. Chapter 4 presents vignettes of relevant experiences I had while conducting my research.

Chapter 4: Vignettes

In this chapter, I will share my research experiences. I will cover my visit to Museo Ixchel, Antigua, and San Juan La Laguna, on my quest to learn more about the learning and teaching experiences of Maya weavers. Even though some of my experiences were not related to weaving or Maya weavers, they shaped how I processed these experiences and the direction I decided to take this thesis.

ARRIVAL

The wheels of the large red duffel bag squeaked as I dragged it across the shiny linoleum floors of La Aurora airport. As I made my way to the exit, I struggled to maintain control of the heavy duffel bag and my small black carry-on; their combined weight attempting to overpower me. Little by little I inched towards the sliding doors and came to a sudden stop. Ahead of me, a wall of people waited behind a metal barricade shouting, laughing, conversing, and in search of their visiting travelers. I frantically searched for a familiar face, but could not see one through the glass doors. Questions began to bubble in my mind: what if my relatives forgot I was coming? What if they didn't know I was visiting? A pang of panic flowed through me. I pulled my cellphone out to instinctually call my parents, no cell service. I made an attempt to connect to the Wi-Fi, no luck. My only choice was to step outside, before the wall of expecting people and cab drivers in search of a passenger, alone in a foreign country. I composed myself and gathered all of my luggage around me and set forth into a "strange new world". I was ambushed by dozens of conversations going off at once: "*Hola!!!*", "*¿Jovencita, necesita celular?*", "*Bienvenidos!!!*", "*¿Como estas vos?*". Amongst all the conversations and strange faces, I still could not find a familiar face. I waited for what seemed like ages, trying to figure out what steps to take, when all of a sudden ahead of me to the right I saw my great-uncle. In

an instant all the panic, fear, and worry washed away, replaced with excitement, happiness, and curiosity at what returning to my family's country had in store.

This research journey was not an easy one free of obstacles. What I experienced at the airport on the night I arrived in Guatemala City on December 11th, 2018, is an accurate parallel of what my research journey felt like. It was an overload of senses that fluctuated from excitement, to nervousness, to frustration, to excitement once more. But in the end, it led to a myriad of learning experiences all initiated by my interest in Mayan textiles.

MUSEO IXCHEL

The drive from my relatives' house in San Cristobal, a suburb outside of Guatemala City, to Museo Ixchel, in Guatemala City's zona 10, was a long and warm journey. The traffic surrounding us was inconceivable, slowing inching towards the city center. At the rate it was going, it appeared as if we would reach our destination faster if we just walked. But I didn't mind the lag. It was full of beautiful distant views of the volcano, *Fuego* (fire), sending up puffs of smoke, and the canyon sides on either side of the road. As we entered the city we passed numerous people headed on their daily journey. Motorcycles sped by in-between cars without a care in the world. Cars tried to slowly weave in and out of traffic. As we made our way, I couldn't help but wonder what knowledge awaited at the museum. I was ready to surround myself with beautiful, precious textiles and learn more about their history and significance, before setting out to interview Maya weavers.

Once in the city center, *Zona 10* specifically, we made our way to Universidad Francisco Marroquin, the private university where the museum is located. As we entered the campus, we were surrounded by lush green vegetation as far as the eye could see, with the occasional building adding a pop of brick red. There, not far from the gate entrance,



Figure 1: Museo Ixchel entrance, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez

was *Museo Ixchel del Traje Indigena* (Museum Ixchel of Indigenous Dress). The building was subtle and unimposing (see Figure 1). Like all the other buildings on campus, it was made out of red brick. But it was distinct in that the frieze running along the top of the building was decorated with a geometric textile design seen on many *huipiles*. I would later

learn that it is a common symbol used in the *huipiles* of Comalapa, known as *rupan plato* after a plate used in *cofradia* (a Catholic group or organization) rites in church. As I walked up the large steps towards the entrance, excitement surged through my body as I prepared myself for the academic journey I would have within its hallowed halls.

Museo Ixchel is a non-profit institution founded in 1973, with the mission and purpose to collect, register, catalog, conserve, examine, exhibit, and promulgate Indigenous dress of Guatemala (Museum, n.d.). In 1993, the museum's current building, was opened to the public with the necessary exhibition, storage, and conservation space needed to protect fibers and textiles. Many of the textiles present within the collection were donated by private donors and its permanent collection houses 8,000 pieces that come from 147 towns and 34 villages across Guatemala (Museum, n.d.). These pieces date from a large span of time that ranges from the end of the 19th century to modern time. The range in dates allows the museum to show the evolution and transformation the Maya textile tradition experienced throughout time, so that visitors no longer see them as stagnant exact copies of garments created before globalization and colonization. Museo Ixchel has a wide variety of garments and pieces in their collections that range from daily to ceremonial use. Within their holdings, they also have garments used to adorn statues of saints and images of an important religious figure, the Virgin Mary.

The first floor of the museum contains two education rooms, the gift shop, and a large central gathering place that resembles an amphitheater, while the exhibition rooms are located on the second floor of the museum (see Figure 2). All along the wall, works of art created by local artists were on display, leading me to the textiles. As I arrived at the top of the stairs, I was greeted by a docent and given the option to watch three videos they had on textiles. I chose to watch the first, which provided a brief introduction to the textile tradition in Guatemala, and was led to a small room set up as a mini theater. In the cool



Figure 2: Museo Ixchel lobby from the second floor, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez

dark room, I watched footage of women walking around the market in their *traje*, weavers preparing their materials for weaving, and the towns these individuals inhabited; all as a narrator shared information about textiles I would soon be able to see in person. The video ended and the room fell dark, and I made my way towards the adjoining doors into the first exhibition room.

The permanent exhibition is laid out chronologically, exploring the evolution of textile design, creation, and technology through time. As I entered into the first exhibition room, exploring the Meso-American textile tradition, I was met with display cases lining both sides of the wall. The soft glow of yellow light streamed through the fixtures, enough

to see the objects, while still protecting them from light damage. All along the displays and walls, wall text delineated what was taking place in the world of Maya textiles at that time. The goddess *Ixchel*, connected with fertility and the moon, was associated with weaving, while her daughter, *Ixchelbelyaxc*, was seen as the protector of embroidery. *Ixchel* was an important goddess and patron to the Maya during the 14th and 15th centuries, and the museum is named after her. The most important tool for the Mesoamerican textile tradition was the backstrap loom. It allowed for the creation of panels of cloth, which were then woven into garments or decorated with designs to create ceremonial garments. One of the display cases displayed an example of how a backstrap loom during that time period might have been set up. A series of baskets near the loom contained white and brown cotton, as well as agave fibers used to create the threads. Cotton was the main fiber used. The display wall also exhibited some of the ingredients used for dyes like, seeds, flowers, roots, bark, and fruit. As I moved further along the exhibition space, I noticed ceramic figurines, vessels, and codices showcasing textiles worn during that time period.

The first exhibition room transitioned into the next, which focused on the arrival of the Spanish conquest and colonization. It showed an even greater presence of change in textile tradition, due to the political, social, and cultural changes brought on by the arrival of the Spanish around the 16th century. During this time period, Mesoamerican elements fused with Spanish innovations. The Spanish introduced new materials, like silk, which became a prestigious fiber, and wool, which became a common fiber found in men's clothing. New tools, like foot looms, spinning wheels, scissors, and needles, were brought over from Europe. Along with new technology, new techniques were introduced as well. Embroidery, crochet, knitting, and the use of ribbon and lace were incorporated to back-strap loomed garments and textiles.



Figure 3: Miniature huipiles with Spanish influences, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez

Each garment on display showcased the syncretism taking place. Within the glass displays, I saw the addition of embroidery designs to men's shirts and pants, as well as a change in fit. While men adapted the changes faster, Spanish influence was heavily present in the women's garments and textiles. The *Olga Arriola de Geng Collection* of miniature *huipiles* are replicas of daily and ceremonial use *huipiles* that show Spanish influence (see Figure 3). Many of the *huipiles* show the use of embroidery to create designs alongside the ones created with the back-strap loom. In others, delicate lace and felt adorn the collar and



Figure 4: Photo-montage created by Alberto Valdeavellano, circa late 19th century, photo taken by Elainy Lopez

sleeves. Miniature ceramic figurines in the display across from the textiles exhibited the addition of new technology, as well as the way garment styles varied within rising towns.

As I entered the third exhibition room, I came face to face with one of the cotton spinning machines introduced during the time of the Industrial Revolution. It stood there silent and unmoving, a reminder of the impact an amalgamation of metal can have on society and culture. I turned and continued walking. On the opposite wall hung a large panoramic picture of a photo-montage created by Alberto Valdeavellano at the end of the 19th century (see Figure 4). The picture was an assembly of Indigenous people wearing their traditional dress from different Highland towns and communities throughout Guatemala. Even though the people are all grouped together and the image is black and white, the range of diversity in textile design and style is immediately evident to the eye.

This photo acted as a welcome, as I stepped into a hall with display cases on both sides containing a variety of hanging garments and textiles. Each one was different from the other, but together they showed the evolution in the tradition brought on by the start of the Industrial Revolution overseas.

Through time, more textile innovations from Europe continued to make its way into Guatemala a few years following the start of the Industrial Revolution. The first spinning and weaving machines were imported and industrially spun cotton was imported from other countries. In 1874, the first cotton spinning factory opened in Quetzaltenango, becoming a popular way to get thread and therefore changing the way textile materials were produced. The textile tradition in Guatemala was further changed by the introduction of chemical dyes at the end of the 19th century, which led to an increase in the range of colors used for textiles. As before, this was a time of continued change within the textile tradition in Guatemala that added to the diversity already present amongst Indigenous dress.

But the museum wants the viewer to know that the change does not stop there, it continues even today (see Appendix for additional images from Museo Ixchel). I exited this exhibit and was met with wooden figurines frozen in a snap shot of life: a man sitting with a laptop wearing western clothing and a baseball hat, a woman standing beside him dressed in *traje* holding a cellphone in her hand, and a girl, standing in front of them both, wearing *traje* and sporting a purple My Little Ponies lunchbox. In one display, a male figure sits in a chair holding an intricately woven cloth in his lap, while behind him several textiles hang in a wooden display. In another display, a group of female figures gather around each other, each one engaging with a step in the textile production process, from spinning cotton to weaving. Amongst the women, two child figures play with the prepared threads. They depict contemporary life meeting tradition. Today, new synthetic fibers like rayon are used to make *huipiles* and garments, while tinsel, beads and sequins are used to



Figure 5: Huipil infographic poster, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez

decorate them. Although, some towns and communities retain their traditional designs due to their isolation, the increased mobility and travel between regions is leading to the practice of wearing garments from other villages. Indigenous women are combining garments from other villages, in what is known as Pan-Maya, as a way to show purchasing power and ethnic sisterhood and solidarity. These are all examples of the influence modern life has on textile tradition, most of which I would later encounter that same day and the days to follow as I explored Guatemala.

As I finished my run through the permanent exhibition, the most stunning thing I saw was a large infographic poster hanging on the final wall showcasing images of *huipiles*

representative of towns and municipalities which fall within the Maya linguistic subgroups found in Guatemala (see Figure 5). Each *huipil* contained the distinct design used and worn within that specific region and language group. Without familiarity with textiles, it is easy to make the assumption that the designs used are all the same and that they do not vary from region to region. It is easy to assume there is no meaning behind the designs created, as my great-uncle did before he came along on this journey with me. But standing in front of this image, I could see each distinct *huipil* design along with the location, material, and technique used. The artistic diversity was evident. Each design was unique and beautiful.

I left the museum with a renewed understanding of the history and evolution of textiles in Guatemala. I understood how technological innovations coming from other parts of the world affected the design, production, and tradition of textiles. And I also understood how each design varied from one municipality to the next. But one thing I was unable to see in the museum was information or stories from the people creating these textiles; there was an absence of their perspectives. Images of Indigenous people wearing *traje* were scattered throughout the exhibits and I was introduced to the sharing of garments and designs across linguistic groups and regions, but the majority of the knowledge I encountered was about the production and design of textiles. It was about the objects as artistic and cultural anthropological material. So, as I left the coolness of the museum and once more felt the warm sun hitting my skin, I continued to wonder about the role textiles play within the make-up of the country, as well as how the experiences of the weavers come into play.

DIA DE LA VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE

The day wasn't over. After visiting Museo Ixchel, my great-uncle drove me to the central park near the National Palace, where a very important festival was taking place that

day. My first full day in Guatemala City, unintentionally, aligned with *el Dia de La Virgen de Guadalupe*, the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which falls on December 12th. This is an important day within the Catholic church, especially in Latin American countries, as it commemorates the day the Virgin Mary appeared to an Indigenous man in Mexico in the 16th century. During this day, Catholics flock to churches to pay homage to the Virgin of Guadalupe and celebrate her appearance. In many regions, including Guatemala, parents dress up their children in Indigenous clothing, as they make their visit to the church and the fairs that pop up in relation to it. This was fortunate for me, because it raised many questions in relation to my research and it allowed me to glimpse at how the country viewed the Maya textile tradition.

We slowly, but surely, made the trek over to the central park. As we started to get nearer and nearer to our destination, I became aware of the scope of this event here in the city. The streets were packed with people making their way over to the two churches on either end of park. The cars were barely moving as everyone had their eyes peeled searching for a parking spot. In the near distance, I could hear the low beats of music playing and the sounds of hundreds of conversations mixing into one. We found a place to park and began to walk over to the festivities. I raced to keep up, while at the same time remaining aware of the mass of people walking down the narrow uneven sidewalk beside me. As I rounded the corner that opened out onto the central park I was met with a surge of activity. At the center of the park, a large artificial skating rink and toboggan ride attracted lines of people, reminding everyone that we were in the dead of winter. The streets along every side of the park were closed to traffic and allowed people to walk freely. Vendors set up their businesses all along the side of the closed road, as far as the eye could see, selling a variety of goods and knick-knacks.

But what caught my attention were the miniature *trajes* hanging from displays and tents; it appeared as if every vendor had textiles to sell or at least imitations of them. Displayed were little girl's outfits consisting of *huipiles* made of satiny cloth with embroidered designs and little cotton skirts stitched to resemble the *cortes* worn by Maya women. For the boys, white cotton pants with red sash belts and long-sleeved shirts waved in the breeze, bringing attention to the colorful patterns woven into each thread. We walked by stand after stand selling these little replica outfits and headed toward a sea of people making their way to one of the churches at the end of a narrow city street. The street slowly became more and more crowded. It was like walking through a packed sardine can. At 5'2, I was often one of the shortest girls in my class, but in Guatemala I was luckily taller than average, so I was able to see above all the people. Everywhere I looked were people headed in all directions. Some made their way to the church, while others headed to one of the many stands selling food along the side of the street. If I walked near enough to the food stands I could feel the heat radiating from their stoves and see the grease bubble as it reached its optimal heat. I made my way through the maze of people and vendors, at certain instances, letting the crowd dictate where I was going. It was almost like fighting a current.

There were people young and old, Ladino and Indigenous, enjoying the activities of the day. But the individuals that stuck out in the large sea of people were the children (see Figure 6). Every child I encountered was dressed in traditional Indigenous clothing. They wore the little outfits being sold along the street, replicas of the ones I saw at the museum that morning. The little boys were carried on their parent's shoulders in the white cloth pants with colorful patterns stitched into the light fabric (see Figure 7). Their long-sleeved shirts were loose and red with stripes running up and down its length. On their feet were little imitation leather sandals, the kind that create blisters after too much walking, running, and playing. On their heads were mini straw hats with a red sash tied around the



Figure 6: Little boy in traje during the Dia de La Virgen de Guadalupe celebration, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez



Figure 7: Interior of the church of the Virgin of Guadalupe, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez

center, while a little eyeliner mustache and beard adorned their faces. The little girls wore miniature *huipiles* made out of a satin-like material with bright embroidery designs stitched around the collar. They wore dark patterned skirts that reached their knees like those worn by Maya women. Their hair was tightly braided either into two pigtails or one single braid, with a little miniature basket adorning the top of their head. Their faces showed the presence of eyeshadow, lipstick, and blush. And like miniature adults, they carried little cross body shoulder pouches with little baby dolls tightly tucked away.

As I saw the little *trajes*, I was immediately transported to a memory I had of my mother dressing my younger brother and I in these outfits when we were young. I remember the feeling of the fabric on my skin and the tightness of my braid with a little basket laying on top. Like the children I saw, I remember us running around a similar fair eating candy and taking pictures. Now as I saw this, new questions began to surface in my mind. I wondered if these children were part of the Maya culture, or if, like me, were simply dressing up because of the celebration's tradition without any cultural connection to the Maya? I wondered how the Indigenous people felt about this tradition, seeing outsiders wear imitations of their *trajes*? Would they consider it appropriation or appreciation? Was it even a thought or idea that crossed their mind, as it did mine? I began to wonder if the school system in Guatemala taught about the heritage and culture of the Maya and if the parents and children, to some extent, were aware of whose *traje* designs they were wearing.

These are all difficult questions to answer and would require another separate research project to be able to explore them, but this experience did provide further knowledge. It revealed a glimpse of the central place Maya tradition and culture holds within the country. While the celebration was a Catholic one unrelated to Maya customs and tradition, people still used Maya textiles as a way to symbolize the meaning and significance behind the event. Apart from children wearing *traje*, I also saw this when a



Figure 8: Dancers in the procession of the Virgin of Guadalupe, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez

small procession with an *anda* (float) carrying the Virgin of Guadalupe passed around the park (see Figure 8). Leading the way were older individuals dressed in Indigenous *traje*, dancing what appeared to be a traditional dance. The role and presence of textiles has a cultural significance within the country. It was also one of the first instances where I saw Guatemalans interacting with Maya textiles outside of the tourism sphere. This experience allowed me to see Guatemalans interact with Maya inspired textiles and garments. And it only increased my curiosity and excitement at getting to hear the perspectives, experiences, and voices of weavers.

ANTIGUA: DOÑA ANACLETA

Two days had passed since my arrival in Guatemala City and I was still unsure of the direction my research journey would take. My visit to Museo Ixchel and the festival increased my knowledge of the textile objects themselves, but I still did not know who I was going to interview. I knew I needed to pay a visit to Maya towns in Lago Atitlan, but that wouldn't happen until the following week; I needed to conduct research in the meantime. I was aware of my slowly approaching date of departure, even though I had only just arrived, and was a little stressed to say the least. But a trip to Antigua settled the uneasiness. Antigua is a town located an hour southwest of Guatemala City. It is a world heritage site that preserves its colonial architecture while nestled near three volcanos. One of which, Volcan Fuego, is currently active and made a point to display that through large grey puffs of smoke ejecting from its peak. Antigua is a tourist site and while it prides itself in its colonial history and architecture, Maya crafts and souvenirs are heavily present throughout the entire city. This made it the perfect place to visit.

We arrived in Antigua in the late morning on a warm, bright sunny day. As I stepped out of the car onto the cobblestone streets, memories of our art department's trip to Antigua during Holy Week the previous year came flooding back. But unlike my last visit, the streets were quieter and the drum of daily life replaced the buzzing activity present during Holy Week. We walked along the narrow sidewalks passing familiar landmarks, as I let my great-uncle guide me towards an artisanal market located somewhere along the central square. Once at the square we walked along one of the walkways with a coffee shop, bank, and electronic store. During my last visit, I walked down this area several times and never saw an artisanal market, so I was a little skeptical that there was one. No sooner had I thought this, we stopped in front of a small little entrance. There was no identifier of this being a market other than the presence of a small sign at the top of the door that said

Mercado Artesenal (artisanal market). I entered and walked through a white tunnel with colorful *huipiles* hanging on either side. All of a sudden, the tunnel opened up into a large warehouse space with high ceilings where muted rays of sunlight streamed through the hard-plastic roof. Inside the warehouse like space was a maze of stalls brimming with textile products, souvenirs, shirts, paintings, and jewelry. Everywhere I turned I was met with more souvenirs than I had ever seen in one single place; there was stall after stall in an almost never-ending loop. The smell of cloth and leather filled the air as Christmas music gently played from speakers.

When we finished a lap through the entire space, my great-uncle being a curious and social man, approached one of the ladies in the final stall and asked if there were any weavers in the market. She replied that there weren't any, as sadly not many women actively practice weaving anymore. Just then a man approached and said that there was one lady who ran a stall further back in the market. He gave us directions on how to get there and we set off in search for the woman Doña Anacleta (Mrs. Anacleta). We reached the area, but we couldn't find her. We walked past the same area at least two times, until finally an older woman asked if we needed help. We told her we were in search for Doña Anacleta, she smiled and laughed saying that it was her.

Doña Anacleta is an older woman of seventy-six years of age, who belongs to the Kachiquel Mayan subgroup. Every day she makes the five miles journey from her hometown, San Antonio Aguas Calientes, to Antigua where she rents the stall in the market and sells her products, something she has done for ten years. But instead of sitting idly and chatting she chooses to weave. She sets up her backstrap loom connected to one side of her stall and sits on her stool at the opposite end (see Figure 9). Around her she keeps a bag filled with all the thread and materials she needs. At the age of six years old she was taught how to weave by her mother, but even before that age she was introduced and surrounded



Figure 9: Doña Anacleta weaving, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez

by weaving as her mother actively practiced it. As I asked her about her weaving she was friendly, proud, and eager to share her experience with weaving and as a weaver. She took out examples of table runners she created and named each symbol present. Each symbol had its own name and story: the birds at the center represented quetzal birds, the two domed



Figure 10: Table runner created by Doña Anacleta, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez

triangles on either end represented the volcanos, the geometric patterns represented Maya symbols, and the horizontal and vertical borders were streets and avenues (see Figure 10). There was story and meaning behind everything she created and there was a meaning behind the experiences she shared.

When we met her on that Friday she had just finished weaving a table runner and was in the process of preparing and setting up materials for her next project; she had woken up at four in the morning to begin preparations. After our conversation, she invited us to

comeback so I could see her weave and conduct my interview. We came back on the following Monday, and after some brief apprehension and unnecessary worry on my part, the interview commenced. Throughout the entire conversation she was open and excited to share her story and that of her family. She spoke about how she learned to weave from her mother, her family duty, and where she gets her designs. There was joy present as she shared about learning a great ancestral heritage. She spoke about her mother's strong work ethic and slowly shifted towards a nostalgic recollection for the humble world her parents grew up in. Talk of family filled up a large portion of the interview, as she talked about her children and husband. When speaking on her own work, pride filled her voice as she continues to use traditional designs which are "engrained" in her memory. A fierce protection for her work surfaced when she spoke about the ongoing machine-made imitation of Maya designs and the need to keep the weaving tradition alive and healthy within her Maya community.

Although our conversation lasted only twenty minutes and was as profound as two strangers can get, it introduced me to some of the cultural and familial factors present within her weaving practice. This conversation barely scratched the surface of weaving experiences Doña Anacleta had and continues to have. It provided me with a glimpse at how she began her practice and how familial community influences her views on the Maya weaving tradition and her connection to it. Her experiences were heavy with personal meaning and illuminated the many aspects of weaving and weavers I had no idea played a key role.

SAN JUAN LA LAGUNA: DOÑA ROSARIO

The following day, my great-uncle and I set off to Lake Atitlan in the darkness of early morning on December 18th. It was a cold and foggy trek as we followed the serpentine

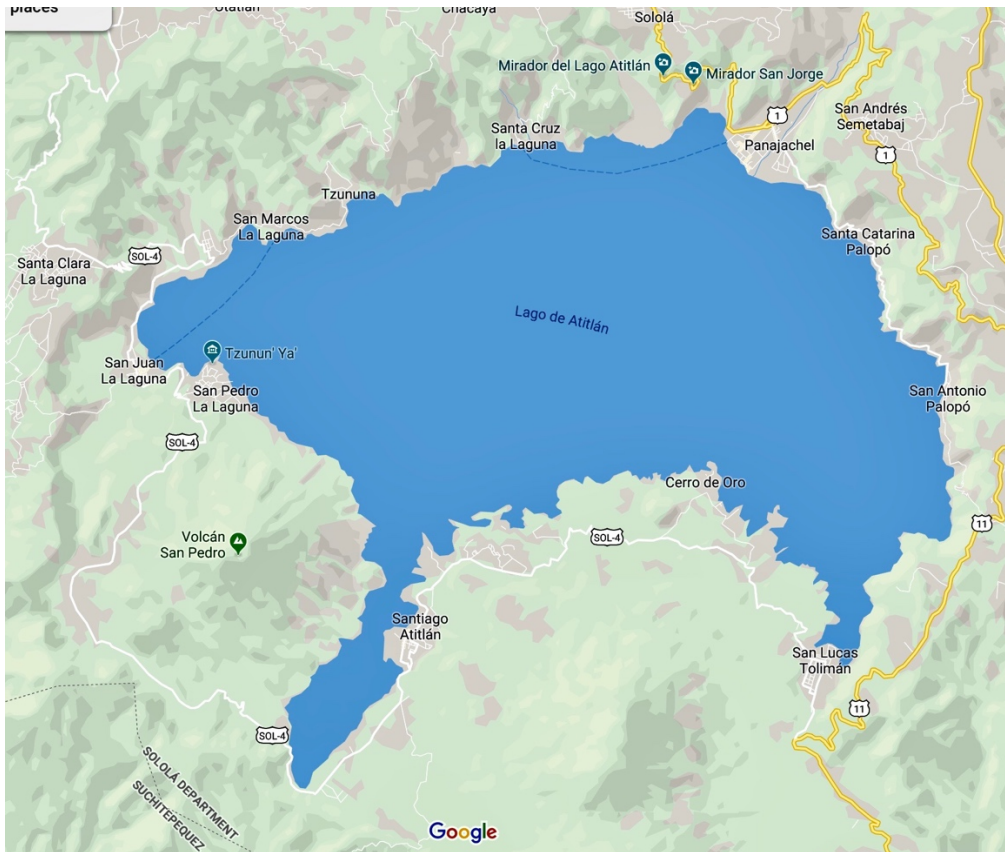


Figure 11: Map of Lake Atitlan, Google Maps

road into the mountains. Fog surrounded the entire car as if the clouds decided to float down from the sky and blanket the earth. I thought of the weather conditions at the lake: Is it going to rain? Is the water going to be tumultuous and unsafe to cross? But as we eventually turned onto the crossroads leading to Panajachel, the city by the lake, the clouds cleared revealing the great expanse of blue lake below, sparkling as the rays of the sun hit the surface of the water.

My initial purpose at this point in time was to visit the weaving cooperative Casa Flor of Ixcaco in San Juan La Laguna, a Maya town located on the other side of the lake (see Figure 11). Once there my ideal plan was to interview one of the weavers. But after two boat rides across the lake, one *tuk-tuk* on bumpy roads, and some lost wandering, that

plan fell through. But before continuing with this recollection, I first want to recount an experience I had in one of the towns I visited before making it to San Juan La Laguna. The first boat took us to Santiago, one of the large towns located across the lake. There we wandered up the main road in search of weavers or weaving cooperatives. We stopped at several stalls selling textile products, but every time we asked the owner about weavers they would ignore our question and instead try to persuade us to make a purchase. We continued walking down the street, where every woman I saw was dressed in *traje*. Finally, we stumbled on a thread shop and I asked the salesladies about weavers in this town. They said that there were weavers, but they worked from home so no one could meet or speak with them. It wasn't until this moment that I finally made the connection of the private nature of weaving. The object is widely showcased and shared with all who visit, but the true act of a weaver working happens within the privacy and, I would imagine, peace of the home; away from the scrutiny and possible thieving eye of observers.

After this encounter, I entered *Casa Flor of Ixcaco* with this new thought in mind. But once there, due to poor communication on my part I was unable to speak with a weaver there about their experience. I left the cooperative dejected, stressed, and pressured. But, because it is San Juan La Laguna, there are several weaving cooperatives. As I walked through the maze of streets I stumbled upon the *La Asociacion Utz Batz'* (the association Utz Batz'), a weaving cooperative established five years ago. I entered the shop where I was once more surrounded by textiles in various iterations as far as the eye could see. There sitting at the table that serves as a checkout counter was Doña Rosario. After a brief introduction and explanation of my intentions and project, she agreed to speak with me.

Doña Rosario is a native of San Juan La Laguna part of the Tz'utujil Mayan subgroup. She is a middle-aged woman who, like Doña Anacleta, learned to weave at a very young age from her mother and grandmothers. She was reserved and didn't speak

much about herself in a personal voice, but instead spoke collectively, as if speaking not only of her experience, but of others as well. She is passionate of her weaving and spoke often of the pride she felt in being able to partake in a great ancestral inheritance and tradition. She was protective of her work when it came to sharing it and her process with people outside of her community. Like Doña Anacleta, she believed it was important to maintain the tradition of weaving alive within her community, and often saw that even though the younger generations were pursuing an education they still practiced and learned to weave. Along with speaking on her own experiences, she also spoke of the importance of the cooperative and how it was established.

Even though Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario were working under different circumstances and in different regions, they shared some similar experiences in learning and teaching weaving. Their stories and manner of speaking were centered around family and community. They spoke of their work with pride and their ability to weave as being an inherent talent that runs in their blood. While that joy in being able to participate in a generational activity was present, they still talked about the many obstacles and difficulties they face on a daily basis. Even then, they were aware of the importance of passing on the weaving tradition to younger generations and keeping it alive.

As we drove back up the winding road, I thought about my conversations with both Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario, as well as the weaving tradition within Guatemala. It was the late afternoon and the sun was still shining brightly over the mountain tops, its light shifting through the car windows as we continued to wind along the main road. The road was busier now, every little shop and stall open for business. Situated along the side of the road was a woman weaving with her backstrap, her children or grandchildren sitting beside her playing and waving at the cars zooming by. Her colorful threads shown in the

sun as they slowly built an intricate and beautiful design among the thin web of thread. A closure to my visit to Lake Atitlan.

MISCELLANEOUS HAPPENINGS

My time in Guatemala wasn't only spent in the pursuit of research. It also ended up turning into a familial trip, a return to the motherland, in a way. Before this trip and the one I took with the Art Education department during Holy week, I had not set foot in Guatemala in about thirteen years. During those years I developed a strong desire to visit and learn more about the country my family is originally from. This desire, while motivating, also allowed for childhood nostalgia to set in. I viewed the country as the one I experienced at eleven years old, full of happiness and positivity. I remembered it as a place of happiness and free of cares, where I could wake up in the morning and see the sunrise over the volcano and in the evenings, sit on the curb with *Tortrix* (a brand of chips) and an ice-cold Coca-Cola in a bag. As I got older, these were the images and feelings that remained when I thought of Guatemala. This trip did not do anything to change my love for the country or pride in my heritage, but the experiences I had did update my perspective of it. I was finally able to see and experience things through an adult perspective moving beyond romanticizing life there. My childhood nostalgia is present, but it no longer dictates my entire perception of the country.

While doing research, I was able to visit the museums of natural science, anthropology and ethnology, as well as the modern art museum. I was able to see some of the cultural artifacts that lie at the heart of the history of Guatemala, while at the same time being able to take notice of the museums' structure and how they chose to present their history. I toured the national palace, which now houses the ministry of culture, and was able to see murals depicting the history of the country. It was interesting to hear the manner



Figure 12: Driving to the coastal region of Guatemala to visit relatives, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez

in which the tour guide spoke of this history, as well as how the artist chose to depict it. I now realized that it all appeared very glazed over and romanticized. As the saying goes, history is written by the victors, and this was the case in Guatemala just as it is in the U.S. At night, I would sit in awe watching the local and national news, as they delved deep into the good and the bad taking place within the country. During the day, I became privy to the daily life of the city, the traffic and activity surrounding the capital.

I was also able to take a journey, outside of the hustle and bustle of Guatemala City, into the coastal region of the country where my father grew up (see Figure 12). There I was exposed to beautiful landscapes of never-ending fields framed by volcanoes. Here, instead of tall concrete buildings, small villages lined the side of the road with shacks made from reclaimed wood. Cars zigzagged across the road in an attempt to avoid large potholes,

while people stood on the roadside selling all sorts of treats. As we crossed bridges over tranquil rivers, I saw people jumping from small rocks into the gentle waves of the cool water. The street my relatives lived on, bustled with activity as people headed out to eat or visit friends. In the early morning, five a.m. to be exact, firecrackers burst alerting the arrival of the birthday of a neighbor across the street. During my visit, I was able to re-meet relatives I had not seen or spoken to in over a decade, as well as meet newer editions to the family. I rode through the streets of the town from my memories, the houses and size of the roads appearing significantly smaller and more worn than I remembered, but just as, if not more, busy. I was able to see my parent's little plot of land, standing as a blank canvas awaiting the building of a home. A reminder of the open possibilities of the future.

These, and many unmentioned experiences, shaped my perspective and introduced me to another side of Guatemala. I was able to update my vision of it, which ultimately ended up changing how I reflected on and began to analyze my research journey. I no longer saw this trip through childhood romanticization and nostalgia, but through the perception of who I am today: an art educator interested in representation and cultural sensitivity. While a form of nostalgia will always envelop my memories of Guatemala, I am now beginning to understand and see the complexities lying within the country, its people, and its culture.

CONCLUSION

These vignettes are just a small collection of the experiences and events I witnessed while conducting research in Guatemala. And the vignettes about Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario are only a small glimpse into their weaving experiences. In Chapter 5, I use these observations and the interviews to identify themes significant to my research. I will present

each theme and discuss its presence within what I observed and what the two weavers shared during their interviews.

Chapter 5: Data

Chapter 5 is a presentation of the data I collected while conducting my research. This data is presented in the form of overarching themes, that act as an umbrella, with smaller related themes falling underneath. These themes were gathered from analyzing my interview transcripts and the field notes I gathered throughout my research journey. There were six overarching themes in total: connections through *historia*, passion, learning as a process, expectations, *viene en la sangre*, and obstacles. In this chapter, each section will cover one of the themes and its relation to the experiences of the two weavers.

CONNECTIONS THROUGH HISTORIA (HISTORY/STORY)

Within the Maya tradition, weaving moves beyond simply being a craft and art form. It is a physical representation of history. It acts as a tether between the present and the past. At the start of her interview, Doña Anacleta stated *todo eso va llevar una historia muy buena* (all of this will carry a really good history/story). At first, translating the term *historia* was a bit difficult because there can be two meanings: story or history. But through the process of speaking with both Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario, I realized it was a mixture of both meanings. The experiences they shared with me were both personal stories and histories that related to what they were experiencing and what other women experienced before them. Participating in weaving was more than just a personal artistic practice and journey, it was a connection to their past and their ancestors. It was a connection to family, multiple generations, and, most importantly, to female relatives.

Throughout the progression of the interviews, both women continuously brought up the idea of ancestral inheritance. Doña Rosario referred to it as *una gran herencia* (a great inheritance) and *trabajo ancestral* (ancestral work), as she described learning to weave from her grandmothers at a young age and the reason why they continue this work.

Doña Anacleta described weaving as coming from *nuestros ante pasados* (our ancestors), as she shared how she passed the tradition on to her daughter, who passed it on to her daughter, in a never-ending link. Even though both women used different terms or phrases, the experiences they described fall under the idea of ancestral inheritance. For them, learning to weave isn't just an act of learning an art form, but of learning a tradition that is strongly rooted in the past. It is an inheritance that provides them with a living and connects them to a larger ancestral history, as well as a personal ancestral history. My visit to Museo Ixchel allowed me to see how far back in time the tradition of weaving extends. It showed that even though designs and materials might have changed throughout the centuries, the process and presence of meaning within the textiles remains the same. By participating in this process as a member of this community, the weaver is given the opportunity to connect to that history and to the individuals that participated in it a year, a decade, or a century ago.

These stories and *historias* that come from the practice of weaving, play a significant role in connecting the weavers to ancestors and past relatives. But the strongest connection is the one developed between the weaver and the female relatives surrounding them. Both weavers recounted the role these female figures played in their lives. They learned how to weave from their mothers and grandmothers. The way they spoke about these women shows the importance they hold within their lives and the bond created. Very early on in the interview, Doña Anacleta brought up her mother. Doña Anacleta's mother passed away three years ago at the age of one hundred and two years old, and the manner Doña Anacleta talks about her shows the great role her mother had on her life. When she spoke about the generational aspects of weaving, she mentioned the photo of her then ninety-four-year-old mother weaving that she keeps in her stall. She used words like *valiente* (valient), *trabajadora* (hard worker), and *no se quejaba* (she didn't complain) to

describe her mother. She shared how her mother broke her hip in the later years of her life, but would still ask her daughters to set up her backstrap loom, because she was bored and wanted to work. She spoke of how her mother was strong and healthy; how she died seeing, hearing, and walking, without suffering from common western diseases, like diabetes. One the first day I met Doña Anacleta, she showed me a light blue weaving her mother created long ago, demonstrating how the act of weaving allowed her to remain close to her mother, even though she had passed away.

Similarly, Doña Rosario learned how to weave from her grandmother who lived with her family. She talked about learning the process from her *abuelita* (grandmother) as a young girl. While she said there were some bad memories from learning, the good memories involved her female relatives. She said the beautiful memories were *aprendi con ellos y la experiencia es que yo aprendi un trabajo que es de los abuelos* (I learned with them [grandmothers] and the experience is I learned the work of the grandmothers). She felt pride in having the opportunity to learn from and work alongside her mother and her grandmothers, as well as in being able to carry on the work that they did. *She felt muy feliz de aprender el trabajo de mi mama y de mi abuelita* (happy to learn the work of her mother and her grandmother). Both women formed strong relationships with the women who taught them. I could see the joy and hear their pride in speaking about the role their mothers and grandmothers played in the weaving experience.

And so, their mothers and grandmothers held a significant place within the *historia*. Family, in general, tended to have a significant role as well. The act of teaching how to weave, within the Maya tradition, is generational. It is the passing down of tradition, skills, and stories from one generation to the other. Even though this inheritance happens most commonly between mother and daughter, sons still appeared within the *historia*. Doña Anacleta found a way to include a telling of the jobs held by all her sons and her daughter.

As she shared the work practiced by every one of her children, I could hear the mother's pride within her voice. Her children played a significant role in her practice of weaving and in the responsibility of transferring knowledge to the next generation. Unlike Doña Anacleta, Doña Rosario was more private about her personal life and her children, but just as expected she taught all of her daughters how to weave. She continued the practice of passing down that *historia* and was able to experience the act of teaching, the way her grandmother experienced it when teaching her how to weave at a young age.

For these two women weaving was more than just a livelihood or an artistic practice, it was a thread that connected them to a larger spool of culture, tradition, ancestry, and family. It connected them with ancestors of the past and a larger encompassing history of their people. It allowed them to remain close to the memories of their mothers and grandmothers. It gave them the opportunity to bond with their own children, while continuing the cycle of passing along a great ancestral inheritance.

PASSION

When creating a work of art, no matter how simple or complex it is, an artist always feels a sense of ownership and pride over their creation. They feel the need to protect it and defend it, display it, and share about the trials and tribulations of its journey into existence. It is no different with the weavers. Throughout my conversation with both women I heard a sense of the passion they felt for the work they were doing and the tradition they were keeping alive. I saw pride, jealousy, and protection for the work they created, the process they engaged with, and the cultural heritage engrained within this tradition.

The weavers spoke about their experiences with weaving, their work, and their practice with pride. As could be seen in the previous theme, when Doña Rosario talked about how she felt when learning to weave from her grandmother, she said she felt *muy*

feliz (very happy). She was happy because she was able to learn an important tradition from her grandmother. She was happy about the sense of accomplishment she felt in learning to weave. She said *uno se pone feliz porque dice yo ya logre hacer esto* (one is happy because one says “I was able to do this”). She was happy and proud at her accomplishment, because she was getting to practice *el bonito trabajo que las abuelas nos dejó, nos an dejado* (the beautiful work the grandmothers left us). Backstrap loom weaving is an art form that isn’t learned in a short period of time. These weavers dedicated their lives, since they were six years old and younger, to learning the art of weaving. Giving so much time, effort, and perseverance to a craft, much less a craft passed down from generation to generation, leads to the development of pride and passion felt for the work. At one point in the interview Doña Rosario said *eso es una gran herencia y para mi eso es un bonito trabajo; yo lo quiero este trabajo* (it is a grand inheritance and for me it is a beautiful work; I love this work). The love for the work is present not only in the words they say, but in the fact that they even spoke to me at all.

These women did not have any obligation to speak to me about what they do, they had the right to say no. But they made the choice to share about their experiences, because they love speaking about weaving and the work that they do. As I stated in the previous chapter, I met Doña Anaclea at a random artisanal market in Antigua without having met her and without any prior knowledge of her. I didn’t even know I was going to meet a weaver let alone meet a weaver who would allow me to interview her. But as soon as Doña Anaclea met us and realized we were interested in learning more about weaving, she was like an open book. She explained the different designs present within the table runners and what they represent. She showed me different examples of the work she created, as well as one her mother made. She presented her experiences, the obstacles and the positives, with weaving and spoke on her family as well. As she spoke, I couldn’t help but feel the pride

in her work and her tradition, radiating from her being. She proudly stated how *para mi y mi familia, yo les digo mantengamos nuestra cultura, costumbre, y traje y mis hijos, mis hijas, mis nueros no son de pantalon ellos con su traje* (for me and my family, I tell them let's maintain our culture, custom, and dress and my sons, my daughters don't use western cloths they use traditional dress).

The passion and pride these women held towards their practice and tradition of weaving naturally led to the presence of what Doña Rosario called jealousy. When asked if she felt it was important other people learned the tradition of weaving she began her response with *uno tiene que ser celoso de su trabajo* (one has to be jealous of their work). She felt that when sharing the tradition and practice of weaving with people outside of the Maya community, the intentions of that individual played in important role. She claimed people from outside of the community and outside of the country would take weaving lessons, with the intention of starting their own business or using Mayan designs in their own products. In the end, this would lead to more competition for the her and other weavers, as well as the presence of cheaply made textile souvenirs sold for far less than the handmade products.

One of the topics that appeared to spark a flame within Doña Anacleta was the increasing presence and preference for machine made Maya textiles produced overseas. On several occasions throughout my meeting her, she stated how outsiders *traen exactamente nuestros desenos, exactos, no son a mano eso es lo que a mi no me gusta* (bring our exact designs, exactly, they are not done by hand and that is what I do not like). She did not like the increasing practice of selling machine made “Maya” artisanal products made overseas. She takes notice of how they use the same images, cuts, and product styles, that are then sold cheaply and abundantly. She doesn't like this because she is *celosa de su trabajo* (jealous of her work).

This jealousy, which is almost like a selfishness, acted as a shield of protection for the tradition. For them, this protection wasn't just about maintaining a tradition alive, but of keeping it safe from outsiders who seek to profit on what they are creating or producing. As I walked through the different markets and shops, especially in tourist areas like Antigua, I noticed the machine-made products that angered Doña Anacleta so much. These products were sold everywhere and constantly purchased by tourists, because of their lower price. In many cases, the people selling these "authentic and handmade" products weren't Maya. I saw a perfect example of this when I visited an artisanal market in Guatemala City located near the airport. Every individual I saw there was dressed in western clothes and appeared to be non-Indigenous.

So, these observations along with the interviews made me aware of the weaver's desire to protect their weaving tradition. This also became apparent through the information they decided to share with me, as well as the information they decided to keep to themselves. I didn't receive the entire set of experiences these women went through; they were picking and choosing what they wanted to share with me. They did this because I was a stranger within their community. It was their form of protecting not only themselves, but their weaving tradition, process, and practice from the harmful intentions of outsiders. Their passion for this process, its history, and the ancestral connection behind it led them to feel pride in their work, while at the same time exercising caution through jealousy and protection.

LEARNING AS A PROCESS

The process of back-strap weaving is extensive and requires a lot of hard work and dedication to complete. As Doña Rosario and Doña Anacleta mentioned several times, it isn't an easy process to learn. It isn't a process that is picked up through the span of a few

weeks; it requires years of practice and exposure to master. Even though the weavers kept saying their ability to weave ran through their blood, they still took part in a unique learning process. Both weavers started their weaving journey at a very young age. Doña Anacleta learned to weave at the age of six years old, while Doña Rosario learned at the age of seven. They didn't immediately start off on a loom creating their own designs. It was a learning process, a progression that had them taking baby steps, making observations, interacting with and within a close proximity to the weavers around them. It was through this learning process that they were able to advance and master the art of backstrap weaving.

When seeing these women create such intricate and beautiful designs it is often easy to forget that they were once child learners, making mistakes while slowly improving and honing their skills. But being able to produce beautiful and colorful textiles requires taking baby steps that slowly progress and get more advanced with time. At the moment, Doña Anacleta is able to create long detailed table runners, but when she first started to weave she started with something much smaller. The first textiles Doña Anacleta wove was *servilletas pequeñas* (small napkins). Since these were the first textiles created by children, she said that these *tejiditos* (small weavings) were used as cloths to clean the *comal* (tortilla griddle). With each new weaving, she continued to improve and progress, finally getting to the point where her mother began to sell her work to local shops. As she progressed in her learning, the size of the weavings got bigger and bigger. Because of that progression she is now at a point where she can create table runners that take her three to six weeks or *huipiles* that take her nine months to create.

Doña Rosario also experienced a similar learning process when she was a young weaver. Her mother had her create *un telar muy pequeño* (a small loom). She would use this small loom to practice and create smaller weavings, like the napkins created by Doña Anacleta. As she began to take steps in the learning process she learned how to create the

designs and incorporate different techniques. An important part of the weaving tradition in San Juan La Laguna is the process of preparing the thread from scratch. The weavers harvest the cotton, they spin the cotton fibers into thread, and use natural ingredients, like plants, to dye the thread. Apart from learning to weave, Doña Rosario also had to learn and master the material preparation process. For her, learning these methods involved taking baby steps and slowly building upon her repertoire.

Progressing in their learning didn't just involve actively participating in weaving, it also involved a lot of observation. Doña Rosario spoke of how *nosotros miramos todavía como trabaja nuestra abuelas y entonces por medio de eso nosotros aprendiamos* (we still saw how our grandmothers worked and so through this we learned). She learned by observing what her mother and grandmother were doing. These observations allowed her to become familiar with the practice, techniques, and designs. Their observations didn't start at the age of six or seven when they picked up their first loom, it started at a far younger age when they were toddlers. Doña Rosario explained how at the age of three years, girls *ya estan con la mama* (are with their mothers). They spend their day at their mother's side, not only as she goes about fulfilling her responsibilities, but as she sits and works on the loom.

From a very young age, girls receive exposure to the practice by playing, watching, or even helping their mother as they weave. They grow up with an intimate familiarity with the practice that Doña Rosario credits with allowing them to participate in weaving with ease, mastery, and skill. She felt that *porque las mamas también haci trabajaban por eso no nos costo aprender lo por que ya lo traíamos* (because the mothers also worked this way it was not hard to learn because we had it within us). The early exposure and observation of female relatives weaving gave her familiarity with the work that allowed her to progress through the learning process. She had proximity and exposure to the

practice in an intimate and close way that made her feel as if it was a talent naturally present within her being.

EXPECTATIONS

Through this research journey, I was reminded of the complexities that make up the process and characteristics of backstrap weaving; it is an art process that takes a long time and dedication to master. The process of learning to weave, as well as many other weaving related experiences, were also made up of expectations. These women not only had familial expectations as daughters, mothers, and grandmothers, but they also had to fulfill the cultural expectations required of being a Maya weaver. There were characteristics heavily present within the personal character of the weavers that allowed them to be successful in their practice. As weavers, they showed a strong work ethic, responsibility, and duty in regard to family contribution.

I only met with Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario for a brief amount of time, not nearly long enough to understand them on a personal level. But through the fleeting moments I spent with them, I was immediately made aware of their strong work ethic. At the age of seventy-six, Doña Anacleta made a daily journey of twelve miles round trip in order to sell her products at the artisanal market in Antigua. She made this daily journey with no guarantee that she would make a profit, much less sell a single item in her inventory. But her need for work called her. At the time of the interview, she disclosed that she was suffering immense knee pain and discomfort. While in pain, she found the strength and determination to continue her weaving every day.

From a very young age she learned the concept of work. She said she *fui aprendiendo el trabajar, trabajar no me canso, no me siento mal, yo tengo que estar trabajando* (I learned work, with work I am not tired, I don't feel sick, I need to work). Her

fulfillment comes from her work. This she said was also true for her mother. At the age of ninety-seven her mother broke her hip. But this injury did not stop her from wanting to work on her backstrap loom. She asked her daughters to set up her materials, because she was bored and needed to work. Doña Anacleta continuously brought up her mother's work ethic and she reiterated that her mother *fue bien trabajadora* (she was a hard worker). Doña Anacleta exhibited this characteristic as well. Similarly, Doña Rosario displayed a sense of work ethic as well. The process of backstrap weaving within her practice contained additional steps that dealt with the preparation of materials. She had to hand pick the cotton for her yarn and create dyes from the natural ingredients around her like plants and vegetables. Even though this process was labor intensive, she continued to practice it, because those were the expectations she had for her weaving practice. She mentioned feeling *un gran logro* (a great accomplishment) being able to engage in the same practice her *antepasados* (ancestors) did, being able to have a trade, and in knowing it is all possible because of her *esfuerzo* (effort).

The expectations the two weavers had for their practice also included responsibility, both for the self, the family, and the community. They were not only responsible for keeping the practice of weaving alive, but they were “unofficially” responsible for being the voice of Maya weaving and the community. Apart from only working as a weaver, Doña Rosario's membership in the *Utz Batz Weaving Association* meant that she had to act as a representative of weaving and the association. While speaking with her, there were many instances where it felt as if she was speaking for the association as whole, not just for herself. She retold many of the general experiences held by weavers, including herself, but not outright making her own experiences the central focus. As a member of the association, she held the responsibility of representing the association and sharing its history with people outside of the community. As we spoke, she found ways to weave in

the history of the association, how it was founded, how the women worked, and the experience of being part of a collective of female weavers.

The majority of the idea of responsibility centered around family and in continuing the tradition of backstrap weaving in younger generations. Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario both mentioned how they taught their own daughters how to weave, and in some cases their granddaughters. Doña Rosario stated *como yo le dije es un trabajo ancestral que uno lo tiene que enseñar a las hijas* (like I was telling you it is an ancestral job that one has to teach their daughters). They weren't forced to do it. They did it because they felt their role and responsibility in continuing the tradition they held so dearly within their heart and life experience. During the interview Doña Anacleta dove into a discussion of the responsibility all mothers had *de enseñar a su hija* (teach her daughter). The learning process did not occur in a group setting with a group of students viewing one teacher, it happened between mother and daughter.

The close interaction present within mother and daughter creates the expectation of duty towards family contribution. The weavers are expected to contribute to the family in many ways. When Doña Anacleta's weavings began to improve they were used in a manner that was functional and contributed to the family. She said *mi madre cuando yo hice ya los mejores bonitos tonces mi madre las iba a dejar en las tiendas* (my mother when I created the prettier ones then she took them to the stores). There her mother would sell the textile for fifty cents or one quetzal. She explained how her mother *no me daba a mi [ese dinero] es para ella para comprar maiz, frijol, pan, sal, azucar* (didn't give me that money, it was for her to use to buy corn, beans, bread, salt, and sugar). Any money Doña Anacleta made as a child was used to buy food and goods for the entire family. At a young age, she was already expected to contribute what she made for the good of the whole family.

The family contribution was also seen through the function present behind every piece of textile they produced. Doña Rosario stated that *aprendemos hacer para fajas si por que tejido no es para tirar lo eso nos sirve para hacer un faja de el hombre o la mujer* (we learn to make sashes because the weaving is not to throw away we use it to make sashes for a man or woman). There is an expected function to every textile created by a weaver that provides a contribution to the family. They find a use for everything they create. Doña Anacleta stated that the first weavings she created as a child, although not perfect, were still used to clean the *comal* (tortilla griddle). The textiles created are not only created to sell, but also used to clothe family members. Doña Rosario's grandmother made the *trajes* for her husband, her children, and her grandchildren.

The contribution Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario made for their families extended beyond monetary contribution. It involved taking part in a strong work ethic and fulfilling many responsibilities that extended beyond self-responsibility. These women had expectations for themselves and the community expected a lot from them as well. Meeting those expectations and exhibiting those strong and significant characteristic traits contributed to the experiences they had with backstrap weaving.

VIENE EN LA SANGRE (IT COMES IN THE BLOOD)

Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario both viewed the practice of weaving as a natural talent they carried within them. It is an ability that *corre en la sangre* (runs through the blood). Weaving was as much part of them as their own blood was. When it came to discussing their knowledge of weaving and designs, they took pride in stating that it came naturally to them; it was and always been a part of them. For Doña Anacleta, the designs she created in her table runners were done without the use of a preconfigured pattern or stencil. She stated that *solo nos enseñaron y ya se nos queda grabado en la mente, en la*

mente lo tenemos (they just taught us and it stayed recorded in our minds, we had it in our minds). For Doña Anacleta, knowledge of the designs appeared to be innate within her mind and were awoken when her mother taught her the process or design at a young age. It was a knowledge that remained dormant until called into action. Being in close proximity to their mother's backstrap weaving and having the expectation of continuing the tradition when they reached the age, created the belief that the ability comes in the blood; they are born with it. Doña Anacleta mentioned that weaving *viene engendrado porque las mamás también hací lo trabajan* (comes begotten because the mothers also worked this way). Backstrap weaving is a natural talent these women feel runs through their veins and is a part of them.

This knowledge wasn't the only thing that held a place in their mind, creativity also resided there. For Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario, creativity was something that varied from individual to individual and was determined by the natural talent present within the person. When talking about the different products and designs created by the weavers, Doña Rosario said *eso solo viene de la cabeza de la mujer, si eso depende de la creatividad de la mujer como hace su producto* (that comes in the women's head and depends on the creativity of the women how they create their product). Doña Anacleta mentioned a similar thing where she said it depends on the creativity of the person. The creativity was a characteristic or ability carried by the individual within their mind and blood, similar to that of weaving knowledge. It is a part of them and flows through them.

Although they provided classes on backstrap weaving to people outside of the tradition, they still believe there is a level of difficulty in learning when the individual comes from outside of the tradition. These women remain patient, encouraging, and friendly when teaching outsiders, but they still believe it doesn't come as easy to unfamiliar learners as it does to community members. Doña Rosario referred to this when telling me

of the difficulties of weaving. She said *todo eso es muy difícil para uno que quiere aprender en tres meses o dos meses dependiendo de la creatividad de quien lo quiere aprender* (all of that is really hard for one to learn in three or two months depending on the creativity of who wants to learn it). She ended this statement with *cuando uno ya lo trae de niña es muy fácil porque lo trae en la sangre* (when one has it as a little girl it is easy because one brings it in the blood). For the weavers, these are processes heavily engrained in tradition, family, and culture, making it difficult for people outside of this culture to quickly grasp the knowledge. Having the proximity and intimacy that comes with a significant cultural tradition, makes it easier for them to learn and remember it because it is in their blood.

OBSTACLES

Although the weavers are performing important cultural work and preservation through weaving, the practice isn't without its obstacles. There are many barriers the weavers have to face and overcome. Some of these obstacles are more expected than others. They have to worry about competition at the local and global level. They have to worry about keeping their tradition alive, as younger generations are presented with better opportunities through modern education. While the world marvels at the beauty of their weavings, they have to protect their traditions from individuals with devious intentions or risk losing their traditional practice. Yet, with the presence of such formidable obstacles, the weavers still find a way to continue practicing not only what they love, but what links them to their family and culture.

One of the first things Doña Anacleto mentioned on the first day I met her, was the struggle of global competition within the field of weaving. This competition was not due to the presence of different traditional styles of weaving around the world, but the presence of machines that reproduced Mayan designs. Doña Anacleto exhibited anger and frustration

in her voice as she said machines *estan sacando nuestro trabajo, traen exactamente nuestros diseños* (are copying our work with exactly our designs). She said these machines and factories *nos han robado* (have robbed us). Doña Anacleta observed how those machine-made Mayan textiles and products were then sold at a cheaper price than the handmade products. In some cases, they were marketed as being handmade, when they weren't. Doña Anacleta, as well as the other vendors in the market, felt the effect of this obstacle within their business. Not many people visited the market, often opting for the purchase of "souvenirs" and "handmade" products at the airport or artisanal markets in downtown Guatemala City. Those days I visited the market, not much activity took place in Doña Anacleta's artisanal market, even though Christmas was less than a week away. Even when machine-made products weren't around, they still affect the weavers. In San Juan La Laguna, Doña Rosario had to deal with the continuous bargaining of foreign customers. She couldn't sell handmade products for their worth, she had to sell them at discounted rates because travelers expected cheap prices. In some cases, this hand of global machine-made competition was present.

Furthermore, the weavers also face competition at the local level. As Doña Rosario shared *no hay oportunidad donde vender* (there is no opportunity to sell) and *uno aprende y todao va pero donde se vende* (one learns and everything, but where does one sell). There are no artisanal markets, or specific locations for that matter, that outright state "weavers can sell their handmade work here". They have had to get creative about developing their own space to sell their products. For Doña Rosario, this is where the weaving cooperative fits in. *Utz Batz'* was established by an elderly woman who noticed this obstacle and decided to create her own space, where weavers could sell their work. In order to make this happen, they had to meet with people from Guatemala City in order to learn the ropes of business, but also learn how to read and write. This ultimately provided them with a space

where they are able to sell their work together. But this, as well, doesn't come without obstacles. Doña Rosario mentioned that the only way to make an income within a cooperative is by making a sale. She shared how many women enter the cooperative thinking they will start getting paid the day they join, but the reality is that the women must sell her work before she can get paid. For many women, this process disillusioned them and they move on in search of another form of income.

In relation, another prevalent obstacle is maintaining tradition alive within a modern world. With the availability of better educational opportunities and shifting mindsets, it is becoming more and more difficult to maintain backstrap weaving as a source of income instead of just a hobby. Doña Anacleta was aware of this obstacle. She said many don't want to learn because *para hacer un trabajo de nueve meses y venderlo y ganar para nueve meses entonces saben tejer pero mejor se dedican a el trabajo donde gane mejor, entonces muchas ya no quieren tejer* (to make a work of nine months and sell it and make a profit for nine months from it, girls instead decide to dedicate themselves to work where they make more money, so many do not want to weave anymore). It is a difficult business to be in. The weavers put a lot of time in creating their textiles, but the money they make off of them does not reflect the time and effort spent on the product. It is much lower. This causes many young women to select different work or careers instead of weaving, due to the financial security that can come from other work. Doña Rosario's daughters were some of the women who ended up choosing to dedicate themselves to a more formal job and career, while continuing their weaving practice on the side.

The idea of financial security through a more formal job is only possible because of the increase in educational opportunities for younger generations. Doña Rosario stated that interest in backstrap weaving *se esta bajando porque el estudio, se estan preparando mas los jóvenes que nosotras las mamas* (is going down because of education, they are

preparing themselves [academically] the young than use the mothers). Young adults are seeking educational opportunities and focusing on their education more than they are on traditional weaving practices. When asked if younger generations are interested in weaving, Doña Rosario said *ya es menos porque ahorita ya los jóvenes tienen la oportunidad de ir a la escuela* (it is less because now young adults have the opportunity to go to school). Back when they were young, Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario were not given the opportunity or the chance to go to school. So, they instead decided to dedicate themselves to artisanal art, to backstrap weaving. The increased availability of opportunities for young women is causing them to either never learn to weave or view weaving as a past time instead of as a career choice.

Due to the decreasing number of young women choosing not to pursue backstrap weaving fulltime, the weavers today are having to find ways to not only make a living, but also keep their tradition from dying out. They take part in spreading information and serving as representatives of their practice. Doña Anacleta mentioned she was featured on one of Antigua's tourism sites and centers as an example of the cultural traditions taking place in Antigua today. Within the *Utz Batz'* weaving cooperative, Doña Rosario serves as a representative who shares the history as well as the process of weaving with those interested in learning more about this beautiful tradition. They both find ways to speak about their practice and spread awareness about their heritage and tradition. But with these solutions to keeping the tradition alive, more obstacles appear; one of them being the presence of devious learners. When talking about how Doña Rosario teaches non-community members to weave, she mentioned that learner intentions play a key role in her idea of teaching others about weaving. While it is important for her not to be *egoísta* (selfish), she has to be careful who she teaches, because of the intentions they might have. Either from experience or observation, she has encountered learners who have devious

intentions for learning to weave. *Ahí clientes que ellos tambien saben tejer y solamente quieren un poquito de enseñar* (there are clients who know how to weave and only want to learn a little), depending on the client's intentions this can be harmful for the weavers. These types of clients, who end up having bad intentions, can take that knowledge shared by the weavers and use it to start their own business. This ends up creating even more competition for the weavers. Or if they don't end up starting a business with close proximity to the weavers, they simple steal the weavers designs to create "designer" clothing with exotic designs on them. This appropriates culturally significant designs for the sake of fashion and style. There has to be a balance between how much a weaver shares to keep tradition alive and how much they defend their practice.

From what I was able to briefly observe, very few women know how to backstrap weave. The nature of Maya backstrap weaving is a protected and private practice that happens within the confines of the home. While in Guatemala, I saw a handful of women weaving out in public. When Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario spoke about what they wanted other people to know about their weaving tradition they said that they wanted to share that it is still done. That women, like themselves, are continuing the tradition despite the obstacles they have to face in order to keep the tradition alive. The obstacles presented in this section only scratches the surface of the difficulties weavers have to face. There are many more obstacles they have to face and continue to face within their experience that I was not made privy to. But despite these obstacles Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario continue to work and create.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I presented the six themes that emerged from my research. I explored each theme and discussed the manner in which the theme manifested itself either within

the interviews or observations. These themes fed my understanding of the experiences held by the two weavers and provided a look into some of the themes that are significant and important to their weaving experiences. Now that I have presented the themes as I saw or heard them, Chapter 6 will dive deeper into understanding the significance of these themes while exploring their significance to art education. I will end the chapter with a discussion of the implications for further research and with a final reflection about my research journey.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

I started this journey with an imagined vision of what my research journey would look like. In many ways, this vision represented an idealized version of my research project and research travels; the perfect image of what would happen in a perfect world. I would travel to an exotic country, reconnect with my familial past, speak with talented weavers, and learn to weave. As time passed, the logistics and details of my vision changed, but my overall goal remained the same; to learn more about the Maya women participating in a weaving tradition. I set out to gain a better understanding of the experiences of Maya weavers, both as students and teachers of weaving. My desire was to learn more about what they experienced as informal educators of a cultural tradition that spans across the years and which is heavily tied to the ancestral past. I wanted to hear their stories and learn from their knowledge. While this research happened a little differently than what I imagined, my conversations with Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario opened my mind to their approach to backstrap loom weaving and the components heavily present within their tradition and practice, as well as how their viewpoints can be applied throughout art education.

In this autoethnography I asked two questions: what is weaving education like for Maya weavers? And what types of learning and teaching experiences have two weavers, from different regions in Guatemala, experienced? In the process of answering these questions, both through my travel observations and conversations with Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario, six overarching themes emerged that linked closely to informal weaving education. *Historia* (history/story) represented not only the interwoven stories and narratives present within the textiles created by these two weavers, but the ancestral history present within the practice. Passion showed the immense pride the weavers had in the work they created and in their act of keeping tradition alive, especially through the onslaught of

changes brought by modern times. Learning as a process, covered how Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario started with smaller weaving projects, like *servilletas pequeñas* (small napkins) and worked toward larger weavings as their mastery increased with age. Expectations showed these women's strong work ethic, sense of responsibility, and duty to their family as key components to their experiences. *Viene en la sangre* (it comes in the blood) stands for the idea that their weaving ability was due to natural talent flowing through their veins. Finally, obstacles represented the struggles they must face in the form of competition or keeping their weaving tradition alive. Being a weaver, either in a market or weaving cooperative, is no easy feat, but Doña Anacleta and Doña Rosario keep on weaving.

Although my conversations with them were only twenty minutes each and singular occasions, I was still able to gather a lot of knowledge from the experiences they shared with me. I was able to get a glimpse at a perspective other than my own held towards a traditional art form. Within the last chapter of this thesis journey, I will dive deeper into the themes presented in Chapter Five, explore the significance of this knowledge has for art education, and the implications for future research. Following that, I will conclude this chapter with a reflection of what this research journey means to me and the many things I learned from this process.

HISTORIA (HISTORY/STORY)

The practice of weaving in Guatemala spans many centuries. And through that time, it has come to develop a significant cultural importance, not only within the country as a whole, but specifically within the Maya community. The stories woven within the practice of weaving extend beyond the narratives present within the designs and colors of the textiles; it is a historical and familial connection that runs deep within the practice. It is

strongly rooted in culture, tradition, the ancestral past, and family. Due to this, the experiences held by the weavers are heavily connected to the history and story found at the center of the Maya weaving tradition.

Even as weavers set off into their own practice as adults, their weaving remains linked to their *historia*; acting as a tether to both their direct familial ancestry and their Mayan ancestry. Backstrap weaving isn't just a hobby or a trade they pick up to pass the time as they do "housework". It is a cultural gift they have the honor and privilege to inherit and later pass on to younger generations. It is viewed as a physical representation of their history that connects them to the past and their ancestors. There is something special felt in engaging in a process that women centuries past participated in. It is an experience that fills the heart with belonging. Knowing that within the large expanse of the universe, there is a place of belonging and connection. For the weavers, it is the experience of being a part of a larger community and larger history where, no matter what, they play a role.

Furthermore, *historia* also holds true on a more direct and personal level. The experiences of the weavers also centered around their family, especially the relationships with their mothers and grandmothers. Maya backstrap weaving is a female activity, so strong bonds were formed between mother, daughter, and grandmother. This allowed feelings of pride to form during the process of learning to weave. The weavers felt proud at being able to continue and partake in the work their mothers and grandmothers masterfully engaged in. The majority of their learning experiences involved the presence of either their mother or grandmother or both. A girl's first exposure to weaving came in the form of observing their mother weave as they played or provided a helping hand. Being able to learn directly from such a significant family member created the opportunity for close bonds to develop.

A young girl's first hero and role model is their mother; it is common for little girls to say, "I want to be like my mom when I grow up". In many ways, it is the same with the weavers. They see the work their mothers do and in the process, learn about the cultural significance of what they are doing. It makes the weaving experience special, because it is tied to a greater purpose; it is tied to an *historia* that is specific to the Maya and that no one can ever take away from them.

PASSION

Artists are protective of the work they create. They defend it when it is attacked, nurture it as if it were a baby bird, and develop maternal feelings for it, even when everything turns out wrong. The weavers don't act any differently. They show an immense passion for the work that they do. This is the type of passion that can only develop from honing and mastering a skill throughout an entire lifetime. It is further amplified by the cultural and familial significance fueling their weaving practice.

Maya weavers receive exposure to backstrap weaving at the start of a very young age. They grow up watching their mothers and grandmothers weave beautiful intricate designs out of simple pieces of thread. Once they reach the age of six or seven, they dedicate their lives to learning the process and continuing the tradition as grown women. Their years of hard work and perseverance shows their love for the tradition and the work they do. There is a sense of pride present within the weavers as, not only artists and working women, but as protectors of tradition. These are the women helping keep a culturally significant practice alive in the face of modernity's takeover. They are proud of having learned the work that their mothers, their grandmothers, and all other Maya women, past and present, engaged with. They are proud of being able to pass on that tradition to their daughters and continue the generational chain started so long ago.

History has shown that westerners are not kind or understanding of Indigenous practices, customs, and traditions. They normally use what they can to their advantage and attempt to eliminate the rest as a form of forced assimilation. So naturally, with this pride and love for the work that they do, jealousy and protection appear as a component of their passion. In particular, Maya textiles have garnered a lot of interest within fashion as desirable patterns and styles. The typical souvenir selected by tourists, when visiting Central America, has some connection to Maya textiles. While many individuals show appreciation for the work done by the weavers, others only see it as a new business venture or the next big thing. Weavers must watch out for the intentions of those interested in the work that they do by having a sense of jealousy and protection for their cultural practice. As with any artists, they want to protect their practice and tradition from the harms of the outside world.

LEARNING AS A PROCESS

Weaving is an intricate art form that requires time, focus and patience to complete. Whenever I saw a weaver weave they did it with such ease and familiarity. They made a complex process look natural. When observing masterful cultural artists, it is often easy to forget that they were once novices going through a learning process requiring dedication and focus. While the weavers believe their ability is an intrinsic gift that runs through their veins, they must still go through the process of learning how to weave and how to create all aspects of their traditional designs. This process is an essential component to their weaving experience as learners. They must engage in a learning process that uses progression, observation, and proximity as some of the key methods of learning.

While the weavers see their ability as a natural talent already present within them, it doesn't mean that they are born weaving. As with any skill, they have to take baby steps

that lead them to complete mastery of said skill after a long period of learning. Their first steps in actual weaving involves the creation of small weavings the size of napkins that allow them to learn and practice basic techniques. Even though these beginning weavings are not perfect, the idea that every weaving has a function is instilled in them. Each progressive baby step introduces them to a new technique, skill, or design. As they slowly progress through this process, their weavings get better and more complicated, until they reach the stage where they have complete mastery of Maya backstrap weaving practices. The learning process is an experience of progression and working towards a complete understanding.

This learning process isn't just hands on. A large component of the experience involves learning through observation and by simply being within close proximity to the practice. Weavers grow up in close proximity to their mothers and grandmothers weaving. They receive exposure to the practice at a young age by being around and observing their mother's work. In many cases they provide assistance by organizing or gathering materials. In the end, this close proximity and observation creates familiarity between the young girl and the practice. Through the observations they are able to familiarize themselves with the movements and workings of the material. They are able to observe as a group of threads transforms into the design of a quetzal or volcano. The comfort and ease adult weavers exhibit while working stems from having grown up with the practice.

EXPECTATIONS

Expectations also played a role in the weaving experiences had by the weavers. In many ways, these expectations were a driving force for the weavers, similar to the theme of *historia* (history/story). Even though the act of weaving a textile is an individual and personal experience, there are still characteristics and actions expected of the weavers.

These women are expected to have a strong work ethic and sense of responsibility and duty for the self and family. They are expected to contribute to their family unit and recognize the functionality present within each textile piece they create. These expectations don't just come from the community or society, it also comes from the weavers themselves. As cultural producers and artists they have high expectations for their weaving practice. For them, it is a serious investment not a pass time.

At first glance, the work ethic exhibited by the weavers is highly visible. Weaving is their area of expertise, the craft they have chosen to pursue. In a sense, it is their life's career choice. So, they dedicate their time and effort in order to continue their practice. They travel far to sell their handmade products. They use their creativity to develop new products and designs based on what they see is popular, while still maintaining a link with tradition. They continue to weave even when they reach an age in which one would assume they would seek retirement and rest. This work ethic isn't something that develops as an adult. Part of the experience is cultivating it at a young age and seeing it modeled within close relations, like mothers and grandmothers. This work ethic in itself is fueled by the feeling of accomplishment at taking part in a greater community. It is fueled by being able to say they are continuing and fulfilling the work done not only by their direct female relations, but by the Maya weavers throughout all of time.

Furthermore, there are expectations that center around the responsibility and duty held towards family, community, and self. As weavers, they are the representatives of their practice and in some ways the Maya tradition; they are a voice of their community. They are the voice of the backstrap weaving practice. They must speak on their experiences as weavers and about the tradition overall. Within the family grouping, they are responsible for passing on their knowledge and the weaving tradition to the next generation. As a weaver, it is seen as their responsibility to continue the practice and keep it alive. This is

done by sharing it with their daughters and granddaughters, and then giving them the opportunity to do the same. It is like a never-ending weaving, where new threads are added making the weaving longer and stronger.

Continuing with the familial expectations, the weavers are also expected to act as contributors to the family unit in many ways. The money made by selling their weavings as children doesn't go back to them, but to the family. That money is used to buy necessities for the family, like groceries. Part of their experience was playing a role in contributing to their family no matter how small that contribution was. With each contribution, the functionality of the textile also played a role. When a small textile was created by a seven-year-old, it wasn't left aside without use. It was used in the household, even with imperfections. This instilled the idea and expectation that they had a role to play in the overall scheme of the family, no matter how small that role was.

VIENE EN LA SANGRE (IT COMES IN THE BLOOD)

As stated earlier, the ability to weave was seen by the weavers as a natural talent that ran through their veins. As much as they were required to go through a learning process, weaving was still a part of them. It is seen as a talent that came naturally to them. They were born with the ability to weave. It was a part of them as much as their own blood was. They took pride in being able to say that weaving was something that came naturally to them. It gave them an intimate familiarity and sense of closeness with the practice, that can only come from confidence.

This belief doesn't exclude others. It isn't a statement meant to say that weaving is something only Maya weavers can learn. There are many Maya weavers in Guatemala who set up workshops and classes, so that interested individuals can participate in the learning process, whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous. By saying that weaving is a

“natural talent that runs in their blood”, the weavers are stating that the practice comes easier to them. Being born into a family and community where an art form is practiced by every generation, creates this feeling of intense familiarity, comfort, and love for the practice. The weavers believe that non-Maya people can learn to weave if they are dedicated enough. But they also believe the process will present as more of a challenge to those individuals due to the lack of lifelong exposure and connection.

This practice comes easier to the weavers, due to the exposure and generational characteristic of the practice. They are able to remember and retain the new weaving knowledge faster because of their familiarity and comfort with the practice. The ability is deeply rooted within their being, due to the closeness present between the individuals who weave and the cultural significance behind the practice. Understanding and knowing that the ability is inherent within them gives them the confidence to be able to produce the work they do. They are able to face it without the fear of pleasing others. Even though their practice is a business where they must create for others, they don't have to go through the interpersonal trials all other artists experience. All artists experience moments where they aren't confident in what they create or feel it falls short of what society expects of them or wants. But the weavers have a cultural and familial purpose that holds them up in the face of such obstacles. It is a confidence and belief in the work they are creating that stems from their ability running through their veins. It is a part of who they are, their family, and their community.

OBSTACLES

While Maya weavers do not have to face the same obstacles that artists participating in the “fine art” realm do, they must still face many great obstacles. In some instances, these obstacles threaten the existence of Maya backstrap weaving. Being a weaver isn't

easy. There might be individuals out there who romanticize what they do. Who see it as a simple natural life, creating beautiful handmade art; a return to a simpler past. They place their own idealization for the work the weavers do and fail to see the realities of what the weavers are truly experiencing. Maya weavers must face competition, on both a local and global level. They have to face changing perspectives which threaten the livelihood of their weaving practice and tradition, among other obstacles.

Maya weavers don't have stability or security within their practice. They must compete not only among themselves, but with non-Indigenous people selling machine made textile products. In the majority of occasions, they are selling their work for less than it is worth due to the presence of competition on many levels. Days go by in which they don't sell a single item, even though the bills and expenses continue to add up. In order to combat this, they are made to search for solutions, whether it is joining a weaving cooperative or giving up their practice as a career entirely.

Apart from the competition, which is common in every business, they are having to face shifting perspectives held towards their practice and work. These perspectives are coming from two different fronts. On one side, there are tourists and non-Indigenous people visiting the weavers with an interest in their practice and designs. While the appreciation of their work is very important and key to its survival, the intentions behind these individuals isn't always benign. Many are only in search for design and products ideas. They "borrow" the designs they like, make them cheaply, and then market it as the next big trend, completely disregarding the cultural context and significance behind the design. Then on the opposite end they are having to deal with a shift in perspectives of their community's younger generation. The obstacles of this work aren't hidden, so many younger individuals opt to search for better opportunities. Specifically, these opportunities can be found through education, which is becoming more and more accessible to Maya

communities. Even though the younger individuals have a love and knowledge of weaving, many choose to forgo practicing it.

But, even though the weavers are faced with these and many more obstacles as yet unknown to me, they still continue to weave and maintain their tradition. The duty they feel for their culture, tradition, and community keeps them from abandoning their practice. They see the importance in maintaining the Maya backstrap weaving tradition alive. Not just because they must rely on it for their own living, but because they know of the cultural significance those woven threads hold for their culture. They understand that a lot of their practices and customs have been erased through colonization and forced/invisible assimilation. Keeping the weaving tradition alive maintains their ancestral history and keeps another cultural component of the Maya heritage from disappearing forever.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR ART EDUCATION

Perspectives range greatly across individuals; shaped by the experiences, culture, and surroundings around them. Hearing from perspectives that aren't similar to our own has the power to provide wonderful learning experiences that would otherwise be missed. Through this thesis, I hope I was able to present the perspective and experiences of Maya weavers in Guatemala, at least the ones they shared with me. There is a lot that the field of art education and art educators can learn from the Maya weavers.

Learning about Maya textiles in general can help students see an example of artmaking that carries meaning; art that is deeply rooted within the lives of several individuals. It is an opportunity to present art as more than just a painting in a museum or a sculpture in a gallery. Exposure to Maya textiles and the works of Maya weavers can show them that art is present and a significant part of the daily lives of Maya weavers. It has a significant cultural meaning and power behind it that stems from the generational

characteristics of the practices and the links that connect the present with both the past and the future.

Educators constantly tell students it is important to learn about others and their differences, but in many cases, that never spans outside of the local level. When it does move towards other cultures, it often focuses too much on the past, creating a romanticized vision of a culture that doesn't reflect what it looks like in today's time. This research makes an attempt at presenting a more updated view of Maya weavers. While the experiences and information is filtered through my own perspective and biases, the words spoken by the two weavers is still present. I was able to present some of the important threads within their experience. Sharing this with students gives them the opportunity to learn more about unrecognized artists, especially underrepresented females, who continue their cultural tradition in the face of change.

It is an attempt at making unrecognized perspectives known and allowing them to share their knowledge, which can have an impact on how art educators approach education. A lot of what the weavers stated can be transferred into the classroom as good practices to help students engage with art and feel a connection with it. Their way of approaching art and weaving is linked to something greater; there is purpose behind what they create. It is done as a way to preserve their tradition, as well as to identify their place within the Maya community. The weaving process has cultural significance that links them to their past, their community, and their family, which is an important part of their identity. If art education is approached in a similar manner it has the power to increase the effects it has on students. In many art programs, students are being taught to create art for the sake of creating art. While fun and enjoyable, it still creates the opportunity for students to see it as a random subject they have to take in school. By establishing art as an important component of not just culture in general, but the students' culture and identity, then art

educators give them the opportunity to see it as a gift and ability they can use. Just as the weavers see their weaving as an ability that runs through their blood, students can grow up with a similar familiarity with art as a resource readily available to them.

If, like the weavers, educators increase the exposure students have to art instead of removing it, then they can begin to create a familiarity with it similar to the one created by young weavers. This exposure and proximity to art can help increase the confidence in their ability as artists and empower them to see art as a resource instead of as a burden or obstacle. Having this resource present, even if they don't become artists, can be beneficial to the development of their character. As seen with the weavers, it can also create an opportunity for developing important characteristics, like responsibility, work ethic, and duty. There is a lot that can be learned from how weavers approach their weaving practice.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research provided only a glimpse at what the weaving experiences are for Maya backstrap weavers. There is a lot left to explore about art within this important cultural group. In conducting this research, I was only able to speak with two weavers in brief interviews without having established a relationship with them. I didn't know them and they didn't know me. While the information I received was very enlightening, there is a lot that I wasn't made privy to because I was a stranger. An area to explore would be to conduct this research with a Maya weaver who knows the researcher and has a prior established relationship with them. This can create the opportunity to dive deeper into those personal weaving experiences, which might be able to cover areas and themes I missed.

Furthermore, I conducted my interviews with two older women. Different perspectives can be gathered by interviewing weavers part of younger generations. This would be able to really show the difference in perspectives between the younger and older

generations. It would also be interesting to learn more of how academic opportunity is shaping the decisions younger generations make concerning their weaving practice or lack thereof. It means the addition of another overlooked perspective. Stemming from that, this research can also extend towards learning more about male weavers, either those who engage in the male dominated foot loom weaving or who engage in the female dominated backstrap loom weaving.

There are many areas this research can extend to including Museo Ixchel. Before conducting this research, I was unaware of the presence of an Indigenous textile museum in Guatemala. It would be interesting to see if they have an education department and the manner in which they engage with visitors, especially school groups and the larger university campus. They also have weaving workshops in which weavers teach backstrap loom weaving to visitors which can provide the opportunity to explore the experiences of these weavers as museum educators. Extending toward the physical textiles, studying the *huipiles* and garments within the permanent collection archive can present the opportunity to explore the textiles as material culture.

THE END OF ONE THREAD, THE BEGINNING OF ANOTHER

Words cannot describe the feelings I have in reaching the end of this research journey. This has been one of the greatest learning opportunities I have had throughout my life and it will shape who I am as an art educator. The significance behind it will never dwindle, because it gave me the opportunity to explore a side of Guatemala's culture that I appreciated but didn't really understand. Speaking with the weavers and exploring the Maya weaving practice, although scary at times, showed me a different side of art education I didn't know. It allowed me to see how Maya weavers regard their art within a cultural context, that adds weight and meaning to the beautiful works they make. Their textiles

move beyond simple aesthetic beauty, they represent ancestry, tradition, connection, and belonging. The experiences of the weavers extend beyond simply creating beautiful works. It is a network of memories. It isn't the creation of art in an isolated state, but the creation of culture in a web that links it to family, ancestry, past, present, and future.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introductory Questions

1. How long have you been weaving?
Cuanto tiempo lleva tejiendo?
2. What is your daily schedule like? When do you weave?
Como es su horario diario? Quando teje?
3. Do you enjoy weaving?
Le gusta tejer? Por que?
4. Is there a part in the weaving process that is your favorite?
Hay un parte del proceso de tejer que es su favorite?
5. Is there a part in the weaving process that is your least favorite?
Hay un parte del proceso que no es su favorite?
6. Do any of your family members know how to weave?
Hay alguien mas en su familia que sabe tejer?
7. How do you come up with weaving designs and colors?
Como forma la ideas de sus diseños y los colores que va usar?
8. Is there anything you look at for inspiration?
Hay algo que le da inspiracion para sus diseños?
9. Do you think more people are learning to weave now?
Creé que mas jente debe aprender a tejer?
10. Do you think exposure to weaving and learning to weave is increasing? How?
Creé que mas jente se esta enterando de los tejidos y en el proceso de tejer? Por que o por que no?
11. Do you think it is important for people to learn how to weave and continue the tradition?
Creé que es importante que la jente aprenda a tejer y continue la tradicion?
12. What is the process of weaving?
Como se teje? Cual es el proceso?
13. Is weaving taught in schools? Do you think it should be taught?
Enseñan como tejer en las escuela? Creé que lo deben enseñar?
14. What impact do you think weaving has on the younger generation?
Creé que el tejer tiene un impacto en las generacions mas jovenes?
15. What do you wish non-weavers knew about weaving and being a weaver?
Que quisiera que los que no saben tejer supiera de el tejido y las tejedoras?
16. What is your favorite thing to weave?
Cual es su cosa favorite de tejer? Por que?
17. Did you ever want to do something else, other than weaving?
Siempre queria aprender a tejer o habia otra cosa que queria hacer?

18. Do you want to weaving tradition to continue in your family?
Quiere que la tradicion de tejer continue en su familia?
19. Are younger generations interested in learning to weave? If not, how do you make them excited about it and interested?
Estan las generaciones mas jovenes interesados en appreniendo a tejer? Si no, como los hacen interesarse en la tradicion?
20. What are you currently working on?
Que proyecto esta hacienda ahorita?

The Learner:

1. When did you learn to weave?
Quando aprendio a tejer?
2. Who taught you to weave?
Quien le enseño?
3. What was your experience like learning to weave?
Como fue su expeperiencia en aprendiendo a tejer?
4. What are some memories you have of learning to weave?
Que memorias tiené de aprender a tejer?
5. How were you taught to weave?
Como le enseñaron a tejer?
6. Were you taught individually or in a group?
Le enseñaron en grupo or individuo?
7. How were you introduced to weaving?
Como fue introducida a el tejido?
8. How did you know you wanted to be a weaver? Did you always want to be a weaver?
Como supo que queria ser tejedora? Siempre quiso ser tejedora?
9. Was there a step in the process of weaving you had difficulty learning? How did you overcome that difficulty?
Uvo una etape del proceso que se le hizo dificil aprender? Como lo supero?
10. What was your weaving mentor like?
Como fue su maestra de tejer?
11. How did they teach you?
Como le enseñaba ella?
12. How did learning to weave affect you, if in any way?
Hay una forma que le affect el appreniendo a tejer?
13. What was the first project you weaved?
Cual fue la primera cosa que tejio?

The Teacher:

1. Have you taught other people to weave?

- Le ha enseñado a otras personas a tejer?
2. When did you begin to teach others how to weave?
Quando empeso a enseñarles a otras personas a tejer?
 3. How do you teach others how to weave and about the process?
Como les enseña usted a otras personas? Qual es su metada?
 4. What is the easiest part of teaching?
Qual es la parte mas facil de enseñar le a alguien tejer?
 5. What is the most difficult part of teaching?
Qual es la parte mas dificil de enseñar?
 6. How has teaching affected you in any way?
La ha affectad enseñarle a otras personas? Lo de ser maestro de tejer la ha affectado en una forma?
 7. What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn to weave?
Que consejo le daria a alguien que quiere aprender a tejer?
 8. Do you have any advice to people who want to teach kids art?
Que consejo le daria a alguien que quiere ser maestro para niños?
 9. Do you teach new weavers based on how you were taught? Have you added new methods or techniques?
Le ensena a nuevas tejedores usando los metados que uso su maestro? Hay otras tecnicas que ha usado?
 10. How has your teaching changed through time?
Sobre el tiempo, como ha cambiado su estilo de enseñar?
 11. To you, what is the most important thing new weavers should know about weaving?
Qual es la cosa mas importante que todas las nuevas tejedoras deben de saber?
 12. What is the first thing you teach future weavers?
Qual es la primera cosa que les enseña a nuevas tejedoras?
 13. What is the hardest step in the process to teach? What is the easiest?
Qual es la parte mas dificil de enseñar? Qual es la parte mas facil?
 14. What happens if a student gets discouraged after a mistake?
Que pasa si una estudiante se disanima or comete un error?
 15. Do you teach individuals or groups?
Enseña individualmente o en grupos?

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL IMAGES FROM MUSEO IXCHEL



Figure 13: Miniatures of traditional dress at Museo Ixchel, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez



Figure 14: Miniatures of traditional dress at Museo Ixchel, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez



Figure 15: Spanish influences, like lace and embroidery, in huipiles, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez



Figure 16: Textiles on display at Museo Ixchel, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez



Figure 17: Textiles on display at Museo Ixchel, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez



Figure 18: Figurine display at Museo Ixchel, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez



Figure 19: Figurine display at Museo Ixchel, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez

APPENDIX C: IMAGES OF DATA ANALYSIS

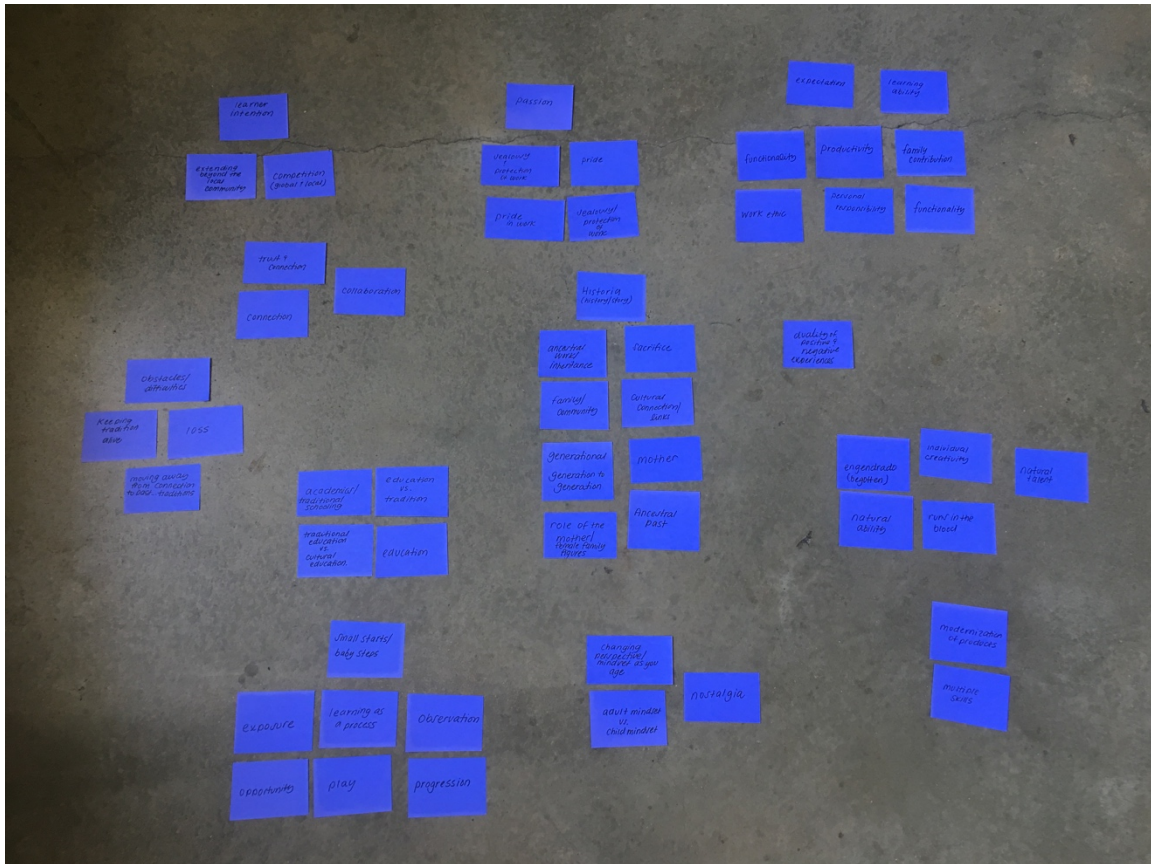


Figure 20: Initial themes sorted into categories, December 2018, photo taken by Elainy Lopez

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