

“They Don’t Tell It”: Indigenous Social Studies Teachers Transforming Curricula in Post-conflict Guatemala

Beth C. Rubin, (beth.rubin@gse.rutgers.edu)

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Abstract: This analysis considers the complex ways that attempts to create a liberal, democratic Guatemalan national identity through policy-driven curricular reform were taken up, engaged with, contested and transformed at the local level by Indigenous social studies teachers. While post-conflict education initiatives aimed at civic reconstruction proliferate globally, this investigation draws on qualitative data collected in a variety of school settings to provide insight into the complexities of moving from policy to practice, highlighting the significant part played by social studies teachers in this process.

“Now here in Guatemala it is said that Rios Montt¹ committed genocide against . . . our Indigenous culture. Our Maya culture . . . But we all don’t know this because they don’t explain it, they don’t tell it.”

Social studies teacher, El Básico,² a village public middle school

In 1996, 36 years of violence between army and guerilla forces in Guatemala came to an end with the signing of the Firm and Lasting Peace Accords. These UN-brokered accords included a promise by the government to “design and implement a national civic education programme for democracy and peace, promoting the protection of human rights, the renewal of political culture and the peaceful resolution of conflicts” (Seide & Wilson, 1997, p. 55). Embedded in these documents, as in many post-conflict settings, were policy directives centering national civic reconstruction on the creation, through education, of a new Guatemalan citizen, one devoted to peace, human rights, multiculturalism and democracy. Part of a broader global emphasis on educating for democratic citizenship in post-conflict settings (Freedman, Weinstein, Murphy, & Longman, 2008), these ideas can be understood as *policyscapes*, globalized messages “projected across educational spaces and translated in ways that resonate in particular contexts” (Carney, 2009, p. 69).

¹ During the time of this data collection effort, former president and general Efraim Rios Montt was on trial for genocide of the Ixil Maya people in the western highlands of Guatemala during in the early 1980’s. He was convicted in May 2013, but the conviction was overturned later that month. The trial resumed in January 2015, and was suspended one year later.

² Pseudonyms are used for the names of all people and places in this manuscript.

This recasting of contentious political problems in abstract, globalized terms (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982) diverged from Indigenous³ teachers' interpretations of national history in the social studies classrooms of post-conflict Guatemala. In El Básico, Profe⁴ Pedro, the school's social studies teacher, critiqued the national curriculum for its glaring silence on questions of violence and cultural annihilation. Explaining the purpose of his class, he told his middle school students, "We don't know this [historical and contemporary atrocities committed against Guatemala's Indigenous population], because they don't explain it, they don't tell it. We are here, we come to form ourselves bit by bit, and this is what this course is about". Presented with a curriculum they felt did not meet the needs of their communities, the teachers in this study innovated, creating curricula that explored the country's painful history and interpreted its contentious present.

Drawing upon qualitative data collected in two schools serving Indigenous students and one serving a Ladino⁵ population, this paper considers the complex ways that attempts to create a liberal, democratic Guatemalan national identity through policy-driven curricular reform were taken up, engaged with, contested and transformed at the local level by Indigenous social studies teachers. While post-conflict education initiatives aimed at civic reconstruction proliferate globally, this investigation provides insight into the complexities of moving from policy to practice in such settings, highlighting the significant part played by social studies teachers in this process.

Situating the Study

The Guatemalan Context

Guatemala's history stretches back thousands of years to a pre-colonial Mayan civilization marked by astounding artistic, astronomical and engineering accomplishments, a brutal Spanish conquest and colonial period, in which the area's Indigenous inhabitants were forced to work their own appropriated lands. This was followed by independence from Spain, largely benefiting the wealthy creole (Spanish descendants) class; liberal reform; U.S. intervention; military dictatorship; and a 36 year-long armed struggle between populist guerilla groups and the country's military regimes, broadly recognized as vastly uneven in the relative power of and consequences for the two groups (Perera, 1993; Sanford, 2003).

³ *Indigena* (Indigenous) is the term commonly used in Guatemala to refer to people of Mayan ancestry. Between 40 and 60% of Guatemalans consider themselves to be indigenous, many speaking one of the 21 different languages that evolved from a common language spoken about 4,000 years ago (French, 2010).

⁴ *Profe*, short for *Profesor*, is a commonly used honorific for male teachers.

⁵ *Ladino* is the term commonly used in Guatemala to refer to people with European (mainly Spanish) or mixed ancestry. Unlike the term *mestizo* (commonly used in Mexico), it does not reference ethnic mixing, but rather language assimilation. Hale notes, "Ladinos are heterogeneous but generally dominant in relation to the Indigenous majority" (2006, p. 3).

Throughout the 19 and 20th century, Guatemala's indigenous population suffered disproportionately and systematically (Grandin, Levenson, & Oglesby, 2011). Indigenous Guatemalans were exploited for their labor, lived in poverty, and had limited access to resources and opportunity. Of the 200,000 people killed during the armed conflict, 80% were Indigenous (Rothenberg, 2012). However, in contrast to many other regions in the Americas, and despite consistent oppression, these communities have remained intact, maintaining language and traditions. Today, in this country of 15 million people, up to 60% of Guatemalans consider themselves Indigenous, speaking 21 languages, wearing distinctive clothing, following syncretistic religious traditions, and often maintaining particular forms of local governance and justice (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, n.d.).

Guatemala's Indigenous citizens continually shift, improvise and craft hybrid practices and identities amid the rapidly changing local and global context (Goldin, 2009; Seider, 2002; Way, 2012). This includes a new sense of a pan-Mayan identity emerging over the past several decades, *el movimiento Maya*, around which many Indigenous Guatemalans have mobilized politically, (Fischer & Brown, 1996). As party to the development of the 1996 Peace Accords, Indigenous groups organized under this framework successfully advocated for a wide swath of rights and recognitions to bring their disenfranchised voices into the national conversation (Hale, 2006).

Post-conflict Educational Policy in Guatemala

The Guatemalan Peace Accords explicitly tasked post-conflict healing and the development of a culture of peace and democracy to the country's educational system. This emphasis on democratic civic education is part of a broader Latin American trend over the last two decades, in which "civic education in schools has been reconceived as a space for fostering democratic citizenship" (Levinson & Berumen, 2007, p. 1). Much of the language around democratic citizenship education in Latin America can be traced to international bodies, such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos (OEI), and U.S.-based non-profits such as the Center for Civic Education (p. 8). In societies seeking civic reconstruction after violence and genocide, these Western-devised educational programs "are directed at building independence of thought and an orientation to democracy . . . developing tolerance, diminishing stereotypes and promoting reconciliation" (Weinstein and Freedman, 2007, p. 43).

In Guatemala, the 1996 Peace Accords were seen as a primary vehicle for the development of a "more tolerant, peaceful and just Guatemalan society" (United Nations General Assembly, 1997) A complex set of documents developed over 7 years of negotiations, the Accords consisted of 13 agreements containing more than 300 commitments and recommendations. These agreements, with mandates for education scattered throughout (Cojtí Cuxil, 2002), placed a challenging and extensive task at the feet of Guatemala's poorly functioning educational system.⁶ Developed by local and foreign experts and completed in 2004, the *Currículum Nacional Base* (CNB) was built around four *ejes* (central ideas)—democratic life and culture of peace, unity in diversity, sustainable development, and science and

⁶ At time of the Peace Accords, indigenous literacy was 28%, with extremely low levels of schooling: an average of 1.8 years for boys and .9 years for girls. For non-indigenous Guatemalans schooling was better, but still inadequate, with an average of 4.5 years for boys and 4 years for girls (Poppema, 2009).

technology (Ministerio de Educación, 2013), firmly framing the country's educational reform efforts amid global policy discourses.

These mandates for democracy, peace, diversity and progress found expression largely within the social studies curriculum, through its emphasis at every grade level on multicultural education, human rights, and the development of "a culture of peace" (Ministerio de Educación, n.d., n.p.) This globalized framing lent a generalized feel to the language of the CNB, reflecting what Shamsie (2007) called "the OAS broader peace building paradigm of liberal internationalism" (p. 419). Larger questions of justice and responsibility were sidestepped in the curriculum by positioning the armed conflict as a step on Guatemala's inevitable progress toward peaceful democracy. As Oglesby (2007) notes, "In the recent textbooks and in material produced by both human rights groups and international institutions, the inclusion of material on the war is a brief prelude to a much longer elaboration of other topics related to civic education and citizen formation" (p. 183).

This focus on democratic citizenship is apparent in the treatment of the armed conflict in state approved social studies textbooks. Despite its role as the impetus for curricular change, discussion of the conflict is buried amid pages devoted to human rights and conflict resolution (Oglesby, 2007). In one textbook, a scant paragraph on the internal armed conflict is eclipsed by four pages devoted to painstakingly elaborated details of the Peace Accords (Fundación para el Enaltecimiento de la Herencia Cultural de Guatemala, 2012). In an approach heavy on international and regional themes and light on the specifics of Guatemalan history, another textbook dedicates almost 20 pages to describing the UN's human development index, with one page on the armed conflict wedged between a page on Central American armed conflicts and the end of the Cold War, followed by five pages detailing the Central American peace processes, the Guatemalan Accords, democracy strengthening measures, globalization and regional economic development (Santillana, 2010). Curricula regarding Maya history and culture reflected multicultural discourses focusing on the "preservation and valorization of Maya culture, especially in a folkloric sense" (Hale, 2002, p. 519) rather than directly engaging with historical and contemporary injustices experienced by the country's Indigenous population.

Civic Education in Post-conflict Settings

Over the past several decades, the implementation of democratic civic education has become a common prescription for the civic reconstruction of post-conflict societies (Freedman et al., 2008; Levine & Bishai, 2010; Quaynor, 2011). Across the globe, educational changes are seen as fundamental to the creation of peaceful, tolerant and democratic civic identities, the key to "social reconstruction, a better future, and a lasting peace" (Levine & Bishai, 2010, p. 663). Intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations and the World Bank, have been at the forefront of the global promotion of democratic citizenship, evidenced by the similar language employed in civic education documents of various nations (Cole & Barsalou, 2006; Quaynor, 2011). Literature examining these efforts describes tension, in many settings, between the desire to create a "usable past" (Fullinwider, 1996, p. 222) that might help move the society forward into a post-conflict future, and the equally pressing need for an honest reckoning about the country's difficult history.

This "clash between the needs of post-conflict . . . societies and the accurate depiction of a negative past" challenges those crafting curricular approaches, as with the ongoing dispute in Guatemala over which version of the history of the internal armed conflict to include in the new national curriculum

Corresponding author email: beth.rubin@gse.rutgers.edu

©2012/2018 International Assembly Journal of International Social Studies

Website: <http://www.iajiss.org> ISSN: 2327-3585

(Cole, 2007, 19). Discomfort with digging into the historical specifics of conflict, combined with the influence of international actors, can translate into curricula and practices designed to avoid controversy (Cole & Murphy, 2009; Joseph, 2005; Niens & Chastenay, 2008; Quaynor, 2011). Closely related, is the difficulty of designing a curricular approach to healing identity-based conflicts embedded in longstanding structural inequalities (Ben-Porath, 2006; Niens & Castenay, 2008).

Finally, teachers and their pedagogical choices can complicate the enactment of civic education policy. Teachers may not be committed to a revised curriculum, may choose to ignore a new textbook, or may face political and social pressures to avoid controversy (Cole, 2007; Cole & Barsalou, 2006; Cole & Murphy, 2009). Pedagogies that encourage dialogue, debate, inquiry and discussion to develop democratic citizenship may be out of their reach, either through lack of training, inadequate resources, political climate or personal choice. Although civic education policies depend upon teachers to transform society through their practice, their goals, preparation and constraints are seldom considered in these edicts (Robertson, 2012).

Social Studies Teachers as Policy Interpreters

As these efforts demonstrate, many policymakers conceptualize educational policy as an effective lever for democracy promotion (Levinson & Doyle, 2008, p. x). Policy, however, is enacted locally, amid the varied historical, cultural, economic and political contours of particular settings. “Globally circulating discourses” about educational practice can be far removed from what teachers actually do within their classrooms (Varvus & Bartlett, 2012; Paine & Zeichner, 2012, p. 574). Social studies teachers, responsible for operationalizing policies targeted at post-conflict civic development, played a key, yet undertheorized and understudied, role in this process.

Based upon data collected at a number of Guatemalan schools, this manuscript describes how Indigenous teachers in Guatemala reinterpreted policy, creating curricula to educate their students about the historical and contemporary injustices they felt were neglected within the CNB. Seeing national history and contemporary civic and economic inequalities as manifestations of a “coloniality of power”—the present-day persistence of European colonialism in the form of vast disparities of wealth, opportunity and justice (Quijano, 2000)—these social studies teachers recast educational policies aimed at post-conflict civic reconstruction by shifting the focus from democratic citizenship education to issues of structural and historical injustice.

Methods

This qualitative, vertical case study investigates, in the Guatemalan setting, post-conflict education aimed at civic reconstruction. It considers this policy, as it moves from the national level to local enactment, illuminating the complex and situated nature of this process (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2014). This analysis draws upon policy documents, curricular materials and data from classroom observations, focus groups and interviews, taking the interpretive approach that is most appropriate for a study investigating the meaning of complex phenomena.

Research Sites

Part of a larger study of civic identity development in post-conflict Guatemala, this analysis focuses on data collected at three schools. Selected because of their relevance to understanding how Indigenous

Corresponding author email: beth.rubin@gse.rutgers.edu

©2012/2018 International Assembly Journal of International Social Studies

Website: <http://www.iajiss.org> ISSN: 2327-3585

social studies teachers implement post-conflict educational policy, their salient characteristics are described in Table 1.

Table 1. *Data Collection Sites*

Name	Type	Location	Level	Population	Size
El Básico	Public	Village	Middle school	Indigenous, low income	Approx. 500
El Colegio	Private	City	K-12	Ladino, middle to high income	Approx. 500
Nuestro Futuro	Public	Rural	High school	Indigenous, low income	Approx. 400

Data Collection Procedures and Participants

The principal investigator, assisted for a period of time by a research assistant, collected data through classroom observation, focus groups with students, interviews with students and teachers, and analysis of curriculum documents. Data collection took place over the course of 6 months.

Data Analysis

This analysis employed a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), “an inductive strategy for generating and confirming theory that emerges from close involvement and direct contact with the empirical world” (Patton, 1990, p. 153). In practice, this meant that multiple readings of this complex data set generated a large number of codes (103), which I then organized into broad analytical categories (civic learning at school, government and politics, identity, national history, problems facing the country, social class, civic stances). The online data management system, Dedoose, was used to manage the coding, categorization, and generation of analytical memos on emerging themes. This analysis draws upon a subset of data from the larger study to consider how Indigenous teachers interpreted the new national curriculum.

The Researchers

The principal researcher in this project is white, North American woman who is fluent in Spanish and has spent a number of years in Central America. A graduate student, also a white, North American woman fluent in Spanish and with experience studying and conducting research in Latin America, assisted her with data collection for several weeks and with data analysis over the past 12 months. The study was limited by not having the insight and understandings that a Guatemalan researcher could bring to the inquiry and the power disparities between North American academics and working class Guatemalan youth and educators. I attempted to mitigate these shortcomings through careful and attentive and data collection and analysis emphasizing the experiences and ideas of people whose perspectives are not often reported, soliciting feedback on protocols from participants and a Guatemalan scholar, discussing findings with interested participants and local scholars, and attention to secondary sources.

Corresponding author email: beth.rubin@gse.rutgers.edu

©2012/2018 International Assembly Journal of International Social Studies

Website: <http://www.iajiss.org> ISSN: 2327-3585

“We remember this so that a scar doesn’t remain”

Indigenous Social Studies Teachers Reinterpreting National Education Policy

Guatemalan post-war education policies were developed amid the influence of a global educational policyscape of human rights, democratic and multicultural education. Produced through a painstaking, multi-partied peace process, these policies reflected an attempt to weave past events into a narrative of national progress. Youth and educators in different Guatemalan communities appropriated, interpreted, resisted and transformed these policies in varying ways. These findings describe and interpret how, in a variety of settings, Indigenous social studies teachers transformed the national curriculum to meet what they felt were the needs of particular communities.

Nuestro Futuro

Traveling slowly on the country’s battered rural roads, the 117 kilometers between the capital city and *Nuestro Futuro*, a rural public secondary institute serving several hundred Indigenous students, took me 7 hours to complete. A wooden sign affixed to the chain link fence surrounding the school compound welcomed visitors in both Spanish and the local Maya language.⁷ *Nuestro Futuro* consisted of two rows of one-story cinderblock buildings, some set up as classrooms, with plastic picnic tables and chairs for students, others with beds, housing the school’s *internados*, boarding students who hailed from even more distant rural villages. A roughly built outhouse, buzzing with flies and containing two primitive outdoor toilets, provided the sanitary facilities for the entire school.

At *Nuestro Futuro*, educators deviated from the national curriculum, infusing curriculum and pedagogy with locally fashioned Indigenous connections. Sonia, director of the non-profit organization that ran the school, explained their approach to teaching rural development as “learning about their ancestors’ ways of caring for the earth”.

This connection to Indigenous ancestors suffused the school’s teaching methodology. In the school’s hot and dusty classrooms, young people sat in groups of four—two girls and two boys—around worn plastic picnic tables. Profe Rolando told me that the seating arrangement came from Maya cosmology, with four students representing four directions, four different elements, and they balanced each other out. “We each have our own way of thinking,” a boy explained. “We all have our own perspectives and can learn from each other,” affirmed another. When Profe asked the students to explain the school’s values to me, “Respect for the *ancianos*” (elders), was the first one proclaimed.

Nuestro Futuro’s social studies curriculum focused on remembering injustices suffered by the Indigenous community over time. “They teach them about the political situation,” said Directora Sonia, explaining the emphasis in the history curriculum on “how people, to keep power, used mechanisms to pacify the population from very early. They took grandparents to work on farms, indebted them, then they had to work on the farms. The role that other states have played in financing this situation. This year” she said, “they used two texts, one in [the Indigenous language], about the Maya community, the

⁷ One of the smaller of Guatemala’s 22 indigenous language groups, I have not named the language spoken in this community so as not to identify the school.

history of [the community].” These materials were locally created, supplanting a national curriculum that the school’s adults did not feel met their students’ needs to learn about their history and ready themselves for their futures as rural, Indigenous citizens.

Study of the armed conflict was an explicit part of the school’s curriculum. The school itself was founded by a survivor of a local massacre during the worst years of the war, and was intentionally designed to provide secondary education to the Indigenous descendants of small agricultural villages particularly impacted by the conflict. The school’s unique *carrera* (curricular focus) in community and rural development was coupled with an equal emphasis on *memoria historica* (historical memory) of the armed conflict and cultural preservation. On the second morning of my visit, the school held a ceremony to commemorate a massacre that occurred during the armed conflict. Students convened on the playing field, standing in a circle around a central altar. Each grade came forward to share a different reflection, commemorating the 1991 Spanish embassy burning in which Rigoberta Menchu’s father was killed. Directora Sonia explained that they did not want the kids to forget “the history. It is painful but important.” Historical memory, she said, is “knowing the historical truth. State sponsored education never gives it.”

In interviews and focus groups, students reaffirmed their school’s commitment to historical memory. “Here we study it a lot; there are books and readings where we can read everything that the massacre victims have narrated,” a student explained. The school’s self-produced textbook was boldly direct, concretely outlining the role of the state controlled electrification institute and foreign investors in the massacre of protesters and subsequent flooding of a local community in order to develop a hydroelectric plant. A first hand account by the school’s founding benefactor of his family’s murder by the armed forces was illustrated with pen and ink drawings, followed by a detailed recounting of the traditional life disrupted by the armed conflict. Over the course of the school year, students participated in commemorations of massacres that occurred in the area, including an arduous, 2-day field trip to the site of this destroyed community. Student Linda told me of her desire to keep these memories alive. “We remember this so that a scar doesn’t remain; by narrating it from generation to generation, everyone understands what happened to other people.”

El Básico

At El Básico middle school, located in a village of 10,000 inhabitants near a larger city inhabited by a largely Kaqchikel⁸ population, students kicked soccer balls across the dusty concrete plaza in front of the school’s mint green classroom buildings. Modestly outfitted with worn wooden desk-chairs, smudged windows, inadequate lighting and sparse resources, El Básico was still a step up in comfort from the bare bones conditions of Nuestro Futuro.

⁸ Twenty-one Mayan languages are spoken in Guatemala. Kaqchikel, spoken in the El Básico community, is one of the larger linguistic groups, with around 450,000 speakers. The linguistic group served by Nuestro Futuro is quite small, and therefore I have omitted its name to preserve the anonymity of the participants.

El Básico's social science teacher, Profe Pedro, described the town as "a highly Indigenous community, where the people are descendants of the Maya-Kaqchikel culture." Highlighting the impact of Spanish conquest on the original inhabitants of the area, Profe Pedro of El Básico, told his class a version of history distinct in tone and perspective from that found in state approved textbooks. Connecting his students directly to the region's pre-colonial Mayan population, he lectured that, "sadly, they [the Spanish] came to assassinate all our culture. They came and they killed, they assassinated, they raped the Maya population. And as part of this, they took our territory."

In focus groups, students identified strongly with the vanquished Maya, equating them with Guatemalans. Student Josue, in an interview explained that one of the worst moments in Guatemalan history was "When the Spaniards came. What they did, they stole everything . . . in Santiago there were mines of gold, they went in and they were bad the Spaniards, they came here to rob. They took everything." Cesar concurred, attributing Guatemala's current poverty to the trickery of the Spanish. He explained, "When Spain came here to Guatemala, Guatemala wasn't poor. Because they say that before there was gold and silver, everything, but the Spaniards when they came they say that they subordinated the people of Guatemala, they made them think that a little mirror was better than gold and silver."

Students expressed pride in Indigenous resistance to the Spanish. Students in El Básico, when asked to select images of things that made them proud to be Guatemalan, choose an image of Tecún Umán, Guatemala's official national hero, thought to be the last ruler of the K'iche' Maya people. Although difficult to substantiate historically, the popular legend that appeared in textbooks was that he was slain by Conquistador Pedro Alvarado while resisting Spanish conquest. They chose him, "Because he defended us against the Spaniards." Expressing direct identification, students said they were proud because, "he was Indigenous . . . [and] we also are Indigenous." Students at Nuestro Futuro also selected Tecún Umán as a symbol of Guatemalan pride because "he is the king of the Maya and he fought until the end with the Spanish, but he couldn't, and what they did was kill him, and for this we will always remember him." Students identified Conquistador Pedro Alvarado as one of the worst parts of Guatemalan history "because he invaded Guatemalan lands."

Addressing current issues not touched upon in the national curriculum, Profe Pedro spoke to his class about the Guatemalan Supreme Court's recent genocide conviction of Efraín Ríos Montt, president during the bloodiest years of the armed conflict. "The theme is genocide," Profe said. "What would genocide be? To kill, exploit, but a human culture. For example, we've heard tell of a German, of the Nazis, of the famous . . . Hitler," offered Jose. "Adolf Hitler," confirmed Profe, "the one that committed genocide against the Jews. Now here in Guatemala it is said that Ríos Montt committed genocide against . . ." "The Indigenous," said Inez, completing the sentence. Taking a stand where state approved textbooks held back, Profe continued,

Our Indigenous culture. Our Mayan culture, but many say that it wasn't genocide. But there are three important things that we know to declare genocide: 1. They killed boys and girls, they eliminated them, why? Because they saw that in the future they would be defenders, they could go against them. 2. They killed the mothers of the family. Those that generate life, because they were going to procreate, they were going to have more children and these children could fight for their rights. And 3. They killed old people. They killed people in the third age, who were

maintaining the customs, the traditions, then with these requisites we can say that there was genocide in Guatemala.

In focus groups, students expressed outrage about Rios Montt's crimes during the armed conflict. "What do you think about the trial?" we asked. "That it is good," said Jose. Pedro added, "It is good because he is going to pay for the bad he did to the Indigenous." Then, again connecting indigeneity with being Guatemalan, "He is going to pay for what he did to the Guatemalans for the massacres that he did."

El Colegio

El Colegio, a private K-12 school serving affluent Ladino students, was a marked contrast to the two other schools. Tidy buildings with sparkling windows and well-resourced classrooms were arrayed around the manicured, verdant campus. Periodically the uniformed security guard swung open the main gate to allow expensive automobiles, often driven by chauffeurs, to enter the grounds.

The school's lone Indigenous educator was brought in monthly to instruct students in Indigenous culture. Rather than teaching the local Indigenous language, as required by the CNB, El Colegio instead offered a monthly Indigenous culture workshop to its students. As the director explained, "our students come from various places; the majority of them don't have an ethnic origin, so we think it isn't necessary to learn the language". Señora⁹ Hortencia, a university educated teacher from an Indigenous village not far from the El Colegio campus, taught the workshop, although, as she pointed out to her students, "In the CNB right now it says that everyone has to study the language of this place".

Dressed in her village's vibrant purple, pink and green *huipil*,¹⁰ she started class with a Maya spiritual invocation, thanking the land and the ancestors. She then directly confronted the room of neatly uniformed 14 year olds, aiming to make visible a history she felt was little known. Maya documents were destroyed and lost in the conquest, she explained. "If we had all of these documents, we'd have a different story, not of the Niña, Pinta, Santa Maria, but that the Spaniards came and a mountain of people died." She connected the architectural remnants of the Spanish conquest that had earned nearby Antigua its World Heritage designation to the enslavement of the Indigenous population, querying "Why do you think there are majestic churches in Antigua? Whose work was that?" Resting her hands on her chest, she challenged her community's erasure with her own, clearly Indigenous presence. "Many people say the Maya don't exist. If they don't exist, then what is the knowledge I bring to you?"

Señora Hortencia critiqued the national curriculum for its shallow treatment of Indigenous history, explaining, "many write about the Maya, you've noticed. They talk about the calendar, about polytheism. They talk about a lot of things, but the main idea is not there". With her class, she reviewed an article she had assigned to them on Indigenous resistance to Spanish conquest. Concluding her discussion of Spanish conquest, she told the students, "This is the history, and no book is going to tell it to you".

⁹ "Seño," short for "Señora," is a commonly used honorific for female teachers.

¹⁰ A hand loomed and embroidered blouse that is part of a woman's traditional dress in indigenous Guatemalan communities. Villages have their own colors and patterns.

Students at all of the schools were quite familiar with the Peace Accords. In a focus group, Nuestro Futuro students chose a photo of the signing of the Peace Accords as an image of one of most important moments in Guatemalan history. “We chose the signing of the Firm and Lasting Peace Accords,” students in a Nuestro Futuro focus group explained, “because this was a new concept for Guatemala . . . because before them, there were a lot of wars, there were genocides.” Students credited the Accords for bringing an end to massive, state sponsored violence, saying, “since they signed it everything has changed.”

However the curricular approaches to build a new Guatemalan citizenry that were mandated by the Accords did not easily intersect with Indigenous teachers’ desires to promote historical memory of the past wrongs suffered by Indigenous communities and understanding of the connections to current inequalities. “They don’t explain it. They don’t tell it,” said Profe Pedro, seeing the curriculum as inadequate, despite its focus on democratic citizenship education. “State-sponsored education never gives it,” echoed Directora Sonia , expressing her sense of the insufficiency of the CNB’s emphasis on multiculturalism, tolerance and a culture of peace. By discussing the Spanish conquest in personalized terms, writing their own textbook and engaging in blunt conversation about the treatment of Indigenous Guatemalans during the armed conflict, these social studies teachers crafted their own approach to civic learning rooted in their sense of belonging to a community longing to reconcile historical and ongoing injustices with the promises of democracy.

Conclusion

Although Guatemala’s civic education policy, as instantiated in the Peace Accords and the CNB, is dominated by “ideologized discourses, such as those of globalization, democratization, and privatization” (Wedel, Shore, Geldman, & Lathrop, 2005, p. 43), this analysis depicts the ways that social studies teachers reshaped curricula within the classrooms that are the target of these policy edicts. In Indigenous schools, teachers diverged from the national curriculum to speak openly and frequently of the terrible past that marked their community, innovating educational practices to preserve historical memory, connect indigeneity to new forms of learning, leadership, development and environmental stewardship, and confront Ladino students with the country’s Indigenous past and present.

Post-conflict civic learning cannot help but be deeply embedded in the contours of the preceding conflict. Although in Guatemalan educational policy, the political problem of discussing the armed conflict was recast as a discussion of human rights, the Peace Accords, and the values of democracy and tolerance, these Indigenous social studies educators were not satisfied with this approach. Grappling with the legacies of conquest, structural inequality, and violent conflict, the teachers in this analysis insisted on connecting their classrooms and their students to Guatemala’s specific historical legacies, as a way to more fully understand the present.

The civic reconstruction of societies torn by conflict and deep inequality is of great international concern (United Nations General Assembly, 1996). Education is frequently envisioned as a key tool for civic transformation in such nations. Social studies teachers are on the front lines of this policy implementation, playing the key role in translating policy into practice. This analysis indicates that their ideas and commitments reflect the perspectives of specific communities, the needs of which must be considered in the construction of curricular mandates in societies emerging from violent conflict.

Corresponding author email: beth.rubin@gse.rutgers.edu

©2012/2018 International Assembly Journal of International Social Studies

Website: <http://www.iajiss.org> ISSN: 2327-3585

References

- Bartlett, L., & Vavrus, F. (2014). Transversing the vertical case study: A methodological approach to studies of educational policy as practice. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 45(2), 131–147.
- Ben-Porath, S. (2006). *Citizenship under fire: Democratic education in times of conflict*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Carney, S. (2009). Negotiating policy in an age of globalization: Exploring educational “policyscapes” in Denmark, Nepal, and China. *Comparative Education Review*, 53(1), 63–88.
- Cojtí Cuxil, D. (2002). Educational reform in Guatemala: Lessons from negotiations between Indigenous civil society and the state. In R. Sieder (Ed.), *Multiculturalism in Latin America* (pp. 103–128). New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Cole, E. (2007). *Teaching the violent past: History education and reconciliation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Cole, E., & Barsalou, J. (2006). *Unite or divide? The challenges of teaching history in societies emerging from violent conflict* (Special report No. 163). Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace. Retrieved from: <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/sr163.pdf>
- Cole, E., & Murphy, K. (2009). *History, education reform, transitional justice and the transformation of identities* (Research brief). New York, NY: International Center for Transitional Justice.
- Dreyfus, H., & Rabinow, P. (1982). *Michael Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*. Brighton, UK: Harvester.
- Fischer, E., & Brown, R. (1996). *Maya cultural activism in Guatemala*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Freedman, S. W., Weinstein, H., Murphy, K., & Longman, T. (2008). Teaching history after identity-based conflicts: The Rwanda experience. *Comparative Education Review*, 52(4), 663–690.
- French, B. (2010). *Maya ethnolinguistic identity*. Tuscon, AZ: University of Arizona Press.
- Fullinwider, R. (1996). Patriotic history. In R. K. Fullinwider (Ed.), *Public education in a multicultural society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fundación para el Enaltecimiento de la Herencia Cultural de Guatemala. (2012). *Ciencias sociales y formación ciudadana*. Social sciences and citizenship formation. Guatemala: Fundación para la Cultura y el Desarrollo.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Goldin, L. (2009). *Global Maya*. Tuscon, AZ: University of Arizona Press.
- Grandin, G., Levenson, D., & Oglesby, E. (2011). *The Guatemala reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Corresponding author email: beth.rubin@gse.rutgers.edu

©2012/2018 International Assembly Journal of International Social Studies

Website: <http://www.iajiss.org> ISSN: 2327-3585

- Hale, C. (2006). *Más que un indio* [More than an indian]. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
- Hale, C. (2002). Does multiculturalism menace? Governance, cultural rights and the politics of identity in Guatemala. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 34, 485–524.
- International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs. (n.d.). Indigenous peoples in Guatemala. Retrieved October 8, 2014, from <http://www.iwgia.org/regions/latin-america/guatemala>
- Joseph, S. (2005). Teaching rights and responsibilities: Paradoxes of globalization and children's citizenship in Lebanon. *Journal of Social History*, 38, 1007–1026.
- Levine, D., & Bishai, L. (2010). *Civic education and peacebuilding: Examples from Iraq and Sudan* (Special Report No. 254). Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.
- Levinson, B., & Berumen, J. (2007). Democratic citizenship education and the state in Latin America: A critical overview. *Revista Electronica Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, 5(4), 1–15.
- Levinson, B., & Doyle, S. (2008). *Advancing democracy through education? U.S. influence abroad and domestic practices*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Ministerio de Educación. (n.d.). *Área de Ciencias Sociales y Formación Ciudadana, Curriculum Nacional Base, Guatemala*. Social Sciences and Citizenship Formation, National Base Curriculum. Retrieved May 17, 2016, from http://cnbguatemala.org/index.php?title=%C3%81rea_de_Ciencias_Sociales_y_Formaci%C3%B3n_Ciudadana_-_Bachillerato_en_Ciencias_y_Letras
- Ministerio de Educación. (2013). *Ejes de la reforma educativa y su relación con los ejes del curriculum* Framework for educational reform and its relationship with curricular frameworks. Retrieved May 17, 2016, from http://cnbguatemala.org/index.php?title=Ejes_de_la_Reforma_Educativa_y_su_Relaci%C3%B3n_con_los_Ejes_del_Curr%C3%ADculum
- Niens, U., & Chastenay, M. (2008). Educating for peace? Citizenship education in Quebec and Northern Ireland. *Comparative Education Review*, 45(4), 519–540.
- Oglesby, E. (2007). Historical memory and the limits of peace education: Examining Guatemala's Memory of Silence and the politics of curriculum design. In E. Cole (Ed.), *Teaching the violent past* (pp. 175-202). Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield.
- Paine, L. & Zeichner, K. (2012). The local and the global in reforming teaching and teacher education. *Comparative Education Review*, 56(4), 569-583
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Perera, V. (1993). *Unfinished conquest: The Guatemalan tragedy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Corresponding author email: beth.rubin@gse.rutgers.edu

©2012/2018 International Assembly Journal of International Social Studies

Website: <http://www.iajiss.org> ISSN: 2327-3585

- Poppema, M. (2009) Guatemala, the Peace Accords and education: A post-conflict struggle for equal opportunities, cultural recognition and participation in education. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 7, 383–408.
- Quaynor, L. (2011). Citizenship education in post-conflict contexts: A review of the literature. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 7(1), 33–57.
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1(3) 533-580
- Robertson, S. (2012). Placing teachers in global governance agendas. *Comparative Education Review*, 56(4), 584–607.
- Rothenberg, D. (Ed.). (2012). *Memory of silence: The Guatemalan Truth Commission report*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Sanford, V. (2003). *Buried secrets: Truth and human rights in Guatemala*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Santillana. (2010). *Integral área humanística*. Integrated humanities. Peru: Empresa Editora el Comercio S.A.
- Seider, R. (2002). *Multiculturalism in Latin America*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Seider, R., & Wilson, R. (Eds.). (1997). *Negotiating rights: The Guatemalan peace process (Accord series)*. London, UK: Conciliation Resources.
- Shamsie, Y. (2007). Moving beyond mediation: The OAS transforming conflict in Guatemala. *Global Governance*, 13, 409–425.
- United Nations General Assembly. (1996). *Impact of armed conflict on children*. UN Doc A/51/306.
- United Nations General Assembly (1997). *Procedures for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace and progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development*. UN Doc A/50/956. Retrieved from https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/sites/default/files/accords/Guatemala_1997_CPA_and_Annexes.pdf
- Vavrus, F., and Bartlett, L. (2012). Comparative pedagogies and epistemological diversity. *Comparative Education Review*, 56(4), 634–58.
- Way, J. T. (2012). *The Mayan in the mall*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Wedel, J., Shore, C., Geldman, G., & Lathrop, S. (2005). Toward an anthropology of public policy. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 600, 30–51.