BOLD VISIONS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Designing Critical and Creative Learning with Indigenous Youth

A Personal Journey

Donna DeGennaro

SensePublishers

Designing Critical and Creative Learning with Indigenous Youth

Bold Visions in Educational Research
Volume 51

Scope:
Bold Visions in Educational Research is international in scope and includes books from two areas: *teaching and learning to teach* and *research methods in education*. Each area contains multi-authored handbooks of approximately 200,000 words and monographs (authored and edited collections) of approximately 130,000 words. All books are scholarly, written to engage specified readers and catalyze changes in policies and practices. Defining characteristics of books in the series are their explicit uses of theory and associated methodologies to address important problems. We invite books from across a theoretical and methodological spectrum from scholars employing quantitative, statistical, experimental, ethnographic, semiotic, hermeneutic, historical, ethnomethodological, phenomenological, case studies, action, cultural studies, content analysis, rhetorical, deconstructive, critical, literary, aesthetic and other research methods.

Books on *teaching and learning to teach* focus on any of the curriculum areas (e.g., literacy, science, mathematics, social science), in and out of school settings, and points along the age continuum (pre K to adult). The purpose of books on *research methods in education* is **not** to present generalized and abstract procedures but to show how research is undertaken, highlighting the particulars that pertain to a study. Each book brings to the foreground those details that must be considered at every step on the way to doing a good study. The goal is **not** to show how generalizable methods are but to present rich descriptions to show how research is enacted. The books focus on methodology, within a context of substantive results so that methods, theory, and the processes leading to empirical analyses and outcomes are juxtaposed. In this way method is not reified, but is explored within well-described contexts and the emergent research outcomes. Three illustrative examples of books are those that allow proponents of particular perspectives to interact and debate, comprehensive handbooks where leading scholars explore particular genres of inquiry in detail, and introductory texts to particular educational research methods/issues of interest to novice researchers.

Designing Critical and Creative Learning with Indigenous Youth

A Personal Journey

Donna DeGennaro
Founder and Director of Unlocking Silent Histories, Austin, Texas, USA

SENSE PUBLISHERS
ROTTERDAM/BOSTON/TAIPEI

A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: 978-94-6300-305-6 (paperback)
ISBN: 978-94-6300-306-3 (hardback)
ISBN: 978-94-6300-307-0 (e-book)

Published by: Sense Publishers,
P.O. Box 21858,
3001 AW Rotterdam,
The Netherlands
https://www.sensepublishers.com/

All chapters in this book have undergone peer review.

Printed on acid-free paper

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

SITUATING STRUGGLE, AN ACADEMIC JOURNEY

Academic journeys are often fraught with internal struggles. My personal struggle relates to the enduring outside perception that scholarly work sits in isolation from the "real" world. My education taught me not to stand outside, separate, or over others, but rather to work with them. In doing so, we gain perspectives and see new possibilities. The concept of marrying the Ivory Tower with the practical world was solidified more profoundly on the day of my graduation from the University of Pennsylvania. On that cool windy day, U2's front man Bono addressed our class reminding us of our civic responsibility in obtaining our newly minted degrees. "*Because we can, we must. ... go forth and build something with it* [your degree]." His words echoed the sentiments of nearly all my conversations with my doctoral student peers. These discussions continually centered on our desire to resolve the tension between theory and practice, especially given that our doctoral program emphasized social justice and cultivating agency along side underserved and under-voiced communities. Creating new knowledge is only a start; using this knowledge for social change is truly the core of our work. In terms of "schooling", this meant generating educational inclusion and equality. However, employing this vision would continuously meet seemingly impenetrable walls. This minority culture of considering education as liberating and emancipating endeavor is continuously challenged by entrenched and unwavering historical systems and structures that perpetuate education as something utilitarian.

It may seem unexpected to open this book with an image that exudes negativity. I assure you, however, that beginning this way is not meant to be pessimistic. Struggles certainly can be seen as inhibitors of our future, but they can also be generators of possibilities. Taking the words of the youth with whom I now work, holding true to these laudable goals "*no es fácil, tampoco es imposible* [is not easy, but neither is it impossible]" (Ana, Chuacruz, Respetar). Learning with these youth, I am reminded that struggles are not meant to be detrimental. Rather they motivate growth, visions, reflections and most of all enable us to become agents of our own lives. In light of this, I invite you to consider this term as something cathartic and invigorating. In fact, from this point forward, I will interchange the word "struggle" for its Spanish counterpart: "luchar". The significance of this word, for me, takes on a positive interpretation, used to emulate the "fight" to achieve something. A simple change of the word reorients the emotions felt in my experience from a drowning desperation, to ascending contentment.

My lucha against the currents that continually attempt to wash away the efforts of *doing something* or *doing with others* to create new forms of education for all has become a source of emancipation. This leap toward liberation officially commenced in the fall of 2012 when I decided to take a leave of absence from my tenure track position. After much angst with political barriers surrounding my progress, I recognized the need to detach myself. It was time to ask myself some very profound questions about what I was doing and how I could work simultaneous against and within the system.

The majority of my family, friends, and colleagues viewed this departure as risky. Yet, as my ever-brilliant son has continuously taught me, "the biggest risk is not taking one". And this risk has been the greatest reward, not only for my career, but also and more importantly for holding true to my vision of what my academic guidance has taught me; that education is fostering platforms for equity and social justice. What will become evident throughout this book is that for each of us, my students and myself, confronting, realizing, and embracing "struggle" is central to our stories. For me, and I believe for my students, *la lucha* results in seeing and living more promising possibilities. Personally, this obstacle is exactly what motivated my journey into my PhD, changed my view of the world, provoked my move to another country, and eventually reignited my passion for my work.

JOURNEY TO MY PHD

My journey to academia and to my current existence began with the "decision" to become a teacher. At about the same time that I completed my Physics degree, I became pregnant. My original dreams of being an astronomer quickly slipped away. Working long hours and mostly at night didn't seem like a viable possibility anymore. Taking on the new responsibility of being a mother was the most important focus of my time. The inferred confining circumstances of being a single mother set me on a path of pursuing a certificate in science education. The certainty of work and the consistency of a schedule made it seem like the "right" thing to do. The irony of this was that the absolute last thing that I wanted to be was a teacher (I now purposefully call myself an educator). I did well in school and I loved to learn, but I never really felt connected to school. Perhaps this began when the "system and its measuring devices" told my parents in kindergarten that I would never be able to attend college and these standardized tests continued to suggest that I could never study physics let alone obtain a PhD. More than that, school seemed artificial to me, disconnected from my life, from a purpose, and more than anything from how I learned. The structures and learning rules made me feel unintelligent and uncreative, and made me question my abilities and talents. I did my assignments within the imposed constraints, but internally felt that there was something dramatically missing. Being a teacher within an assembly of inflexible rules and regulations, made me feel as if I were trapped. Yet, the words of past influences echoed in my mind, "education is the only way to succeed". I did not have the resources to question such rhetoric at the

time, rather, I simply tried to find a way to feel more comfortable and connected to the profession called education, to which I was now committed.

In my continued quest to find a love for this profession, I stumbled upon a masters program in Technology and Education. The courses focused on organizational theory and exposed me to visions and projections of constructivism, progressivism and innovation. These tenets informed our learning as we drew on these theories to think about the organization of schools, from administrative structures to the design of learning environments. We incorporated these theories with concepts such as socio-cultural learning theory (Vygostky, 1978), social constructivism (Glasersfeld, 1989) and distributed expertise (Hutchins, 1995). In our program, these ideas of integrating organizational theory with learning was not simply espoused it was practiced. The learning "structure" was fluid. It built on student's cultures, experiences, and knowledge (Bransford, 2000). We were expected to play a role in our learning. Thus professors became learners as well as teacher. I worked not separated from my classmates, but rather learning in conjunction with them (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006). For the first time in my education, I felt that I was truly learning. I was contributing to my understanding, not simply taking in and restating information. I was part of creating goals and purposes within myself and for myself along with my peers. It seemed so clear to me, learning was organic and organizational structures that fostered true learning would need to be as well.

For the first time in my life, I felt comfortable with school and really began to understand myself and flourished as a learner. There is something more here that I had not seen before, I thought. I was beginning to find a niche for myself. Hope and possibilities for staying within education emerged along with a better language to articulate how to and why we should organize learning environments in a way that fostered connections to the real world and yielded meaningful experiences for learners.

I returned to work in the educational system with my freshly minted MS degree and was armed with theory, hope, and visions of change. Influenced by the values I inherited in my upbringing that were saturated with conservative and individualist ideals, *I pulled up my bootstraps*, worked hard and expected to succeed. In this moment, I was awarded the position of Technology Coordinator, working with teachers at every level and discipline to help inspire imaginative classrooms supported by, with and through technology. Through my experience, technology integration was never about the technology, but rather about learning theory and curriculum. Technology made visible the ways in which learning happened – interactions between students and students as well as students and teachers. When looking through the lens of learning, technology leveraged fluidity and activated student engagement in and around the content. Yet the historical foundations of schools have brought about solidified structures that were nearly impenetrable, inhibiting new ways of seeing how learning might look. "Success" and the path to it, I've found, is not about working hard nor is about coming prepared with a theoretically supported vision. It was about adhering to the existing system and the culture and not trying to change either. My resistance to fit into the existing system was propelled by the tension

that I felt between old ways and new possibilities. My "job" and vision to introduce and inspire generated by theoretically-informed transformations in learning design compelled me to fight again and move outside the system instead of work within it.

At this point, I had transitioned to a position called Team Leader. I worked for IBM, a leading organization in innovation at the time. This had supposedly given me the "authority" to make changes. We consulted mostly in inner city schools, where a whole new set of challenges arose. The identification of external forces that have power over schools and its structures was increasingly evident. Schooling was even more structured and didactic than I had remembered, particularly in classes where the majority of students were labeled as minorities. What was more, I was finding the machine larger and with more inertia than one might imagine. IBM was trying to change this, and even in my new "leadership" position, change was squelched by the tendency of teachers to respond – *we have no time; we have to teach to the curriculum; theory has no place here*. The "business" of ensuring that students were learning was held captive to deep operational binds. Innovation needs structural and cultural changes, and nothing was budging. This in spite of the growing concern that many students were increasingly becoming more disconnected from education than I felt as a child.

Aside from the outside organizational impositions that maintain the one-size fits all vision of education for many youth, what I saw inside was tragic. The lack of resources was evident and many teachers would treat students very poorly. Students whose cultures did not fit behavior norms, including they ways that they acted or they ways that they spoke resulted in negative consequences for the learners. What was more, teachers would quickly resort to authoritative or power tactics including raising their voice and making students feel inferior. It was easy to see how children who might once have had an interest in learning quickly lose that desire. I was beginning to see that this struggle was not simply a personal fight for implementing a novel learning design. I had to keep moving forward to understand how to find the position and language to create better educational experiences for youth. I had to find a different strategy.

Fate and perhaps a little luck helped me secure my position as a consultant in the midst of a group of educators at the University of Pennsylvania. I had met my "soul mates" there that articulated visions similar to my own, citing learning theories and teaching strategies that foster innovative learning practices. What is more, they challenged my thinking and stimulated my intellectual appetite. I was thrilled when one of the professors inspired and invited me to apply to the PhD program; it felt like perfect timing to begin this stage of my career. Of course you might guess that sliding into Penn would not be easy especially for the girl who was never suppose to go on to college. The system and those measuring mechanisms struck again. The GRE swiftly became an obstacle and gaining admittance resulted in grand efforts to convince the department to take me. I wrote letters pleading my case and after another fight, I was admitted into their PhD program.

It was a sincere privilege to be admitted into one of the most elite educational institutions in the world. I had often felt like I didn't belong, but looking back, in reality I did. I remember thinking; *Finally, I will have the language, credibility and education to be taken seriously and to move educational practices toward more connections to life, community, and personal significance*.

I could not have prepared for or anticipated what was ahead of me and how this fight to find a "home" in this profession would change me. It was perhaps the most difficult fight of my life, yet one that was worth the pain and effort. In all sincerity, I have always been fortunate enough to have access to a decent education, but no other educational experience compared to my education at the University of Pennsylvania. Penn was a life changing experience for me that initiated an internal fight that in a way liberated me. Perhaps a desire to be free of constrictions was always a part of my personality, but it was that experience that afforded me opportunities to understand why.

CHANGED WORLDVIEW

The classes and conversations at Penn opened my world, or more appropriately they took it apart. They were disruptive and earth shattering to this middle class country girl. I am White (though I now joke that I am olive to alter the concept of externally imposed and generalized indentifyer) female raised by a doctor and his wife, both of whom were conservative Roman Catholics. My very narrow view of the world was shaped by an overly protected and extremely isolated upbringing in small, comfortable, safe, White rural Pennsylvania. Some areas served by my school district might be considered economically disadvantaged, yet any broad worldview was still quite constricted. The entire student population was homogenous in culture and race. My exposure to people from other cultural backgrounds consisted of introductions to people through my father. As a doctor my father worked in a field that transcended the monoculture that we grew up in. Through him I met one Indian family and one Black family. I thought that I was being introduced to "diversity", but in fact, both families were traditional, upper class, and hierarchal. The fathers were doctors, the mothers stayed home, and the children went to school. There was financial security and privilege all around me. Rhetoric consisted of espoused independence through education and success that inevitability follows. In other words education and working hard was the ultimate path to success.

By the time I entered Penn I had been separated from my small town for quite some time. I had traveled to different countries, worked in several different schools, and my son, now 10, attended a private school in Philadelphia. Despite leaving the nest, my existence was still very narrow. My travels, my studies, and my son's universe still were all connected to a very elite world. I had travelled to other countries, but had always been in the "safe" neighborhoods, barely interacting with people outside of my socio-economic class or cultural background. With the exception of my short time with IBM, my son and I were continuously working in or attending private

schools. I was always inspired by learning about new cultures, their histories, and their ideas, but in reality I had no experience with actually living in another culture let alone understanding what it was like to come from one – especially one that was impoverished or underrepresented. I recall the definition of "underrepresented" as being described as those youth and communities effected by the historical trends of colonialism. This primarily translated into conversations related to students of color.

At Penn, situated in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Philadelphia, our studies and focus, was on underserved communities. Namely, we analyzed and deconstructed the social injustices or oppression inherent in education and in the broader society. We read scholars and theorists that caused us to question our belief systems and our own experiences. Each new view shook the core of our conditioned notion of education as a fair and equal opportunity for all. The studies and analyses illuminated the ways in which education reproduced injustices, economic disparity, and stratification in society – in other words, unconsciously or consciously maintaining society as a functioning machine. In enlightening this, we came to challenge the very notion of the perpetual hierarchal mechanism. At first this was difficult for me to embrace. Echoing through my mind were the voices that raised me, challenging me not to believe this "liberal nonsense". I resisted and resisted and resisted. I kept finding ways to work around and create alternative answers to what was increasingly evidenced unwarranted inequality.

My goal of finding a language to articulate why innovation was important dramatically changed. This focus shifted as I wrestled with my own worldview that finally gave way to confront the realities in front of me. During our fieldwork at Penn, I observed and interacted with the culturally rich and diverse communities, in places where education was failing, I saw the theories that we had been reading come to life before my very eyes. I was in the Philadelphia schools and the more time that I was there, I was no longer thinking that these youth were fighting only for a relevant education; they were also fighting for voice, position, and recognition.

The fight at this time for me was that of the drowning man. I kept finding myself falling back to my original worldview and looking for safety of my past. I remember a conversation with one of my colleagues. *Maybe oppression really isn't real*, I said as I stared at this Brown face, head covered in a scarf. *Maybe people just do need to work harder*, I continued. My colleague was ever so polite and just responded perhaps you are right, looking down at her plate. I'm embarrassed by that conversation. I realize now that it was me who just did not want to accept the fact that I come from a long lineage of people who have taken advantage of, oppressed, and exploited people to work toward "a better, more civilized world". Identity is important, and I could not identify with being genetically connected to this past. This, perhaps, was the most severe growing pain of my journey. It is a difficult thing for us to confront and become conscious of our histories and how those inform us. We might find ourselves easily slipping back into them, but the consciousness of this is critically important to eliminate the *la lucha* to continue growing and achieving new levels of understanding, seeing, and being.

I slowly released my internal resistance to see the world through multiple eyes and began to embrace the changed world view emerging and reshaping my understanding a different reality. Envisioning my future in education now consisted of rethinking the dominant class and the regulated methods of deciding what norms, values and rules are essential to social order and how education should instill them (Durkheim, 1995). More than anything, I saw a need to release and reconsider the notion of control of learning and of the learning process, still present even in my ideas of "innovation". Instead, I gained tools to facilitate the agency of others in order to cultivate structures that emerged and evolved with input from all those involved in the educational process. Leadership, we recognized, is not held within the power within the held power of one dictating individual, but rather comes from individual and collective agency developed by "leaders without followers" (Dede, 1993), which can be visualized as hooks (1998) describes in Engaged Pedagogy as an environment where one facilitates, participates, connects, and collaborates rather than dictates. I began to see that education is not just about creating innovations to connect learners to learning. Education and the core of successful learning institutions are the grounded in principles of social justice, equity, emancipation, conscientization, critical conversation, and the quest of humanization (Freire, 1970, 1973).

My doctoral preparation informed the design and analysis of my dissertation work in North Philadelphia. It was here where theory and practice are united. In this work, I collaborated with a local youth organization to design a digital divide initiative. The ensuing program materialized into a web design class that engaged suburban high school students as teachers of urban middle school youth in the construction of their cultural artifacts, and the reorganization of participation through their employed agency in the classroom. The plan and implementation of this course brought mindfulness to the unconscious racially biased assumptions that these suburban, high school aged teachers had about their middle school youth learners in urban communities. Moreover, the web productions and technology-mediated interactions within this course, made local knowledge and culturally responsive learning designs visible. These abstract theories that we imagined in class, were working themselves into forms where valuing youth voices and their cultural practices translated into forms of learning that transcended the traditional structures that often inhibit the successful participation of underrepresented youth became agents of their own learning, gained confidence in their voices, and were more readily connecting learning directly to their communities.

TENDING TOWARD MY LEAP

My dissertation research inspired me to continue doing similar work. I adjusted this original implementation in many different contexts. The first was a private school, where dominant class issues quickly surfaced. I redirected my career from K12 institutions and moved into higher education. In my first position, I focused my research on technology-mediated learning and youth-directed learning. I was

inspired to continue working in community centers and out of school locations where youth came from a variety of backgrounds and who were struggling in school. In these contexts, I had more flexibility to examine how history, culture, and social interactions inform youth-directed learning, and allow youth to teach us what works for them. However, my Dean forbade me from doing this work insisting that my research must be connected to the University's focus on teacher preparation requirements. In my second position, I was charged with creating an innovative certification in educational technology. The program was also peripheral from the "mainstream" teacher preparation courses. This meant it was impossible to engage in discussions of re-visioning teaching and learning with youth in this 21st century. In both academic positions, the omnipresence of the inflexible barriers holding K12 organization models static, were slowly paralyzing and conforming teacher education programs. The combination of higher educational impediments and the gravity of federally mandated and externally driven educational formulas quickly deflated *mi lucha*, my fight, to recognize and argue for more culturally and timely educational learning experiences for underrepresented youth.

The consciousness of how and why these particular teacher education programs (not always schools of education) are compelled to limit emerging visions of learning and maintain the status quo was sobering. The distance between my work and the federally mandated directions of K12 education was increasing apparent. We have, I thought, unconsciously become worker bees contributing to an educational system and organization that does not reach the culturally diverse and often silenced voices of youth who do not fit the current standards-based model of learning. With this realization, I attempted to foster conversations about social justice, equity, and potential alternatives. I challenged every educational discussion that reflected the behaviorist models that restricted learning, thinking, and creativity, and denied culture. I disputed the structures that reproduce inequitable educational models, the same structures that tried to pull me into their normative practices. I always challenged them, always asking why. I fought against conversations that elicited compliance to the dominant direction of education. In doing so, I quickly became "othered". I struggled to balance trying to exist in the impenetrable structures. Being othered, not surprisingly led to politics since I was vocal about my refusal to conform and about the research that supported my dissonance.

A voice from my past echoed in my mind. This former colleague, a respected teacher of my son said, "*Teachers are visual; we have to see*." With this in mind I attempted to take an alternative route and create "lab sites" where my colleagues as well as practicing and future teachers could experience and live what I passionately described. I drew on the integration of research and practice to create programs in the Dominican Republic and one in Dorchester, MA. Similar to past work, the youth used technology to analyze and construct their worlds and show what they know. The learning process was emergent and grew out of the decisions that youth made to create their stories.

The work brought me further and further away from traditional Teacher Education initiatives and closer and closer to living and working inside the worlds of youth. No matter what my work and my direction seemed disparate form the majority of those around me. I felt alone. I felt that there were too many *luchas* and I was losing strength and most importantly passion for my work. I had choices in front of me. I could continue to fight from within, quit, or conform to the surrounding culture. The safe thing to do would be to conform. The fear of losing my job, my career, all that I had worked for should have compelled me to do so. After all, "dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity" (hooks, 2003, p. 197). But instead, I felt the urge to break free. I took a deep breath and I jumped.

REFERENCES

Bransford, J., Brown, A., & Cocking, R. (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school committee on developments in the science of learning*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press [Online]. Retrieved from http://books.nap.edu/catalog/6160.html

Dede, C. (1993). Leadership without followers. In G. Kearsley & W. Lynch (Eds.), *Educational technology: Leadership perspectives* (pp. 19–28). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Teaching Publications.

Durkheim, E. (1995). *The elementary forms of the religious life*. London, England: Allen and Unwin.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: The Seabury Press.

Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York, NY: The Seabury Press.

Glasersfeld, E. V. (1989). Cognition, construction of knowledge, and teaching. *Synthese*, *80*(1), 121–140.

hooks, b. (1998). *Engaged pedagogy*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hutchins, E. L., & Klausen, T. (1996). Distributed cognition in an airline cockpit. In Y. Engeström & D. Middleton (Eds.), *Cognition and communication at work* (pp. 15–34). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Scardamalia, M., & Bereiter, C. (2006). Knowledge building: Theory, pedagogy, and technology. In K. Sawyer (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of the learning sciences* (pp. 97–118). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

CHAPTER 2

FOUNDING UNLOCKING SILENT HISTORIES

Steadfastly committed to my decision to jump, my new journey began. The presumed risky pause from academia to go into the unknown perhaps was inevitable given years of fighting the internal struggles of how to rectify the seemingly polar dichotomies between theory and practice, between traditional and innovative schooling, and between the academy and the field. I did not know exactly where this journey would take me, but I knew that I had to follow my passion to remedy these binaries and my urge to work more closely with youth. This jump however was not only about my break from the academy; it was about concentrating, without distraction on a novel and interdisciplinary pedagogical model that I have been developing with youth over my 9-year academic career.

In these years, I had spent significant amounts of time working with youth in Philadelphia, Paterson, NJ, Dorchester, MA and the Dominican Republic, learning a great deal from and with them along the way. In each of these locations, I had two focal points: 1) examining learning as a space for cultivating the voices and identities of youth with and through media creations and 2) exploring how technology makes visible the cultural ways of knowing and learning of underrepresented youth (who more often than not are seen through a deficit lens). Both in turn translated into gaining a better understanding of how to facilitate youth directed learning engagements.

FOCUSING ON MEDIA

While the following chapter addresses the theoretical rationale and the findings behind why my work, a brief introduction to why I place importance on developing youth voices through media representations is worth mentioning. It serves, in particular, as a way to better situate why media was important to the work and why it continues to be a focus in Unlocking Silent Histories.[1]

As noted in other work that I have written, one of the inherent strengths of youth driven media productions is that it starts from who the youth are and where they are situated (Chaves & Soep, 2005). Critical Media Literacy experts view media as a powerful pedagogical tool to place importance on sociocultural practices of students as well as what they already know about themselves, their communities, and their cultures (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005).

When looking across initiatives that use media as a way to highlight youth voice, the focus tends to center on the use of media to "re-image" culture (Riecken, 2006), self, and community (Hull & James, 2007). The deconstruction of these aspects of marginalized groups is grounded in the historical racialized representations of them.

The intent of representations of minorities in times when overt racism polarized groups (i.e., colonization of Tribal nations in the U.S., slavery) was to exasperate the perception and villainization of particular differences was an effort to privilege Western culture, and ostensibly westernize the "other". This powerful force of media distribution continues to attempt to unconsciously shape our perception of particular groups of people.

More recently, media is viewed as a way to appreciate and celebrate cultural difference. This effort aligns with a growing body of literature that aims to privilege difference not as dissimilar per se, but as an acceptance and awareness of the simultaneous existence of valued cultural ways of being and knowing (Appiah, 2006). Media, whose etymological meaning is "intermediary" or "measure" (as in content, milieu, or culture), has the potential to not only communicate an individual or collective identity, but also to mediate the actor's consciousness of those representations (Davis & Gandy, 1999). In cases of oppression, consciousness is hidden, often times prohibited from being known much less critically analyzed.

In using media to document one's environment, youth have the opportunity to deconstruct the political, social, and institutional structures that intersect and yield an oppressive and racialized view of "other". They have the opportunity to for the first time see history and its relationship to the present through new lenses. Subsequently, these same tools can be used to create new representations, which can also be used to analyze and (re)present/(re)construct particular views, including ones' own view.

In putting media in the hands of youth, the power presumably shifts to them. Yet the tool alone does not ensure that youth immediately have the power to tell their own stories, their own "truth" about their cultures, themselves, and their communities. If the structures that engage them do not allow for the freedom of exploration; if these structures unconsciously continue to script and strip history from them, the narratives that they tell will continue to be mere shadows of the education historically designed to assimilate them. The possibility of having agency in their own narrative is tightly coupled with the ways in which they are pedagogically engaged. Unlocking Silent Histories aims to create a pedagogy of the oppressed, where local voices, knowledge, and traditions are not only valued, but they shape the direction of learning. Media is a conduit of sorts, to make local practices and learning visible and to externalize the ideas and visions that come from within. This leap away from the structures inhibiting me was dually to explore this pedagogical philosophy in practice and to continue raising my own consciousness of myself as a mediator of this initiative.

FINDING THE SPACE AND PLACE

I knew that to fully implement what I had been learning would require being situated in the cultural context of the youth with whom I work, as I had previously done in the Dominican Republic. With this in mind, I began searching IDEALIST.org.[2] This search for an appropriate location for this leave led to my committing to an opportunity in the rural highlands of Guatemala. The region is rich with both traditional local economies

supporting various small communities speaking a handful of Mayan languages and Spanish. I first agreed to implement and study my pedagogical model in a progressive international school that promoted itself as working with impoverished indigenous youth. However, upon my arrival, it was immediately obvious that the school served an elite demographic and was aimed at educating privileged youth. This would not work as a context for my research.

Serendipitously, Marcelle, who was then the director of the Maya Traditions Foundations (MTF)[3] a Guatemalan based non-governmental organization (NGO), heard about the digital story and video ethnography work I had been doing in the Dominican Republic. She invited me to meet with her to discuss my work and what I hoped to accomplish while in Guatemala. My son was visiting at the time and joined our meeting. He and I were simultaneously working on the concept for a non-profit, which would be based on the learning design research that I had done in the Dominican Republic and Dorchester, MA, locations where my son contributed his knowledge of filmmaking and photography. At the time our overarching concept was focused more broadly on underrepresented demographic since this had been the historical trajectory of my work.

Marcelle, my son, and I sat in the second floor of the pristine MTF office. I explained the concept of creating youth-driven and youth-directed pedagogy supported by video technologies. Marcelle listened intently as my eyes lit up during my explanation of how I put youth in charge of directing their own learning. I continued with stories demonstrating the transformations that I have seen both in terms of creativity and identity have been overwhelming, not to mention the ways in which youth appreciate the opportunities often not open to them. Marcelle could sense the passion emanating from my description and thus her response positive. What was more, her statement made me feel as if MTF was just the kind of organization with which I wanted to partner. She expressed that the MTF philosophy was to build programs with the families and not for them. The vision resonated with mine. That is, as foreigners, our work is not to impress upon the communities our way of viewing the world, but rather that the programs are an outgrowth of the communities themselves. I sat on the couch next to Marcelle elated that I had found a symbiotic colleague.

The final part of our conversation that day was to discuss the program's potential for longevity. I communicated to Marcelle that I had one additional stipulation. I wanted assurance that this initiative would not be a "hit and run". I requested a commitment that we would make every effort to build sustainability within the country by developing youth leaders to continue this work. Marcelle also shared this vision. She explained their leadership program and that it too has similar goals. I left the meeting, immediately turning to my son. "This is exactly who I should be working with," I said to him. My son agreed.

We arrived at my apartment in Panajachel and together my son and I began organizing the concepts that underlie the pedagogy that I had been. My son has always been an invaluable resource in keeping my feet on the ground and helping

to make my ideas and visions accessible to a broader audience, not just an academic one. We continued to outline the model of the program including its aims, goals, and a description of what a flexible and emergent pedagogy entails. The materials revealed the balance between hands on activities that integrates writing, analytical, critical, creative, and ethnographic skill development. The concept itself aims to develop the youth as both critical ethnographers and media producers.

Marcelle received the documents and we exchanged a few more emails answering each other's questions. She was enthusiastic about bringing the opportunity to the youth associated with their education program and offering leadership avenues for the youth. After our additional dialogues over the coming weeks, we collectively decided to move forward. My focus quickly transitioned to working with MTF and facilitating learning with youth in small indigenous communities with little or no access to technology and with meager educational resources.

We had the idea and the drive, but now we needed funding. The Maya Traditions Foundation is a small organization whose focus is to empower and improve the quality of life for Maya women artisans and their families. They achieve this through education-driven social programs and provide market access to International Fair Trade and artisan networks. Their limited funds were already dedicated to other programs when we decided to move forward with this new idea. Maya Traditions was not in the position to financially support the concept, nor to pay me to facilitate the program. I agreed to volunteer my time to build this and in exchange, Marcelle offered me access to critical resources such as support staff, translation support, office space and introductions to the youth and families. This final aspect was of course most important. Without such profound relationships with the families and youth, walking into these communities and gaining their trust to have youth use video cameras to document their worlds would take years of development. Maya Traditions began as, and continues to be, an invaluable partner to Unlocking Silent Histories (USH) (see additional information below).

Yet financing this endeavor would be my responsibility. With overwhelming determination and profound conviction in this educational concept that I had been developing inspired me to hold a crowd funding campaign.[4] I called the campaign Unlocking Silent Histories,[3] the name I had selected for this initiative and for the non-profit that my son and I were conceptualizing. The goal of raising $5,000 was successfully exceeded, that in the end gave us just over $7,000 with which to work. This campaign provided financial support and flexibility to fund cameras and transportation for the youth. Inclusive in the campaign were the building blocks to copyright my pedagogical model and its associated materials through the establishment of Unlocking Silent Histories as a United States based 501c3, an incorporated nonprofit organization.

This unplanned concentration on indigenous communities compelled me to consider the underlying aims and mission of Unlocking Silent Histories. In my past work, I had more broadly worked under the umbrella of working in "underrepresented communities". Here, the population demographic would narrow more specifically to

indigenous youth. What will become obvious later in this book is that the youth were unconsciously capturing indigenous languages. These two important factors caused my son and me, and later my board, to determine that USH would close the broader category of "underrepresented" to narrow its target demographic to indigenous youth. More candidly, when we started to see youth capturing indigenous languages, we quickly realized that USH was not just a platform to youth voice and learning that stemmed from local knowledge. It would also be about the youth decided for themselves what in their cultures was valuable to preserve, along with the preservation of their language.

It was all happening very fast. The uncertainty of how I would continue to build the emergent pedagogy that I had been developing with youth I arrived with, rapidly developed into a solid reality. My decision to temporarily liberate myself from academia began only six months prior to the ensuing events. A situation that would potentially allow me to focus on reconciling the divisions between what is and is not recognized as academically rigorous was in front of me. I arrived in Guatemala in late August 2012 with the expectation that I had a site in which to do this work. However, what materialized in the meeting between Marcelle, my son and I in October 2012 became much more plausible. Together, we created a space that put the attention of building learning engagements with underrepresented youth and jointly we created a plan to introduce the concept in November 2012. We launched our first workshop in December 2012. The kickstarter was funded by February 2013. The vision I had been developing for nearly 10 years now was a reality. It was unfolding with all the right ingredients: an invaluable partner, enthusiastic youth, and the financial resources to make the idea a reality. All feet forward, we began our journey.

INTRODUCING UNLOCKING SILENT HISTORIES

I remember being introduced to the youth for the first time as if it were yesterday. On November 12, 2012, Marcelle and I introduced the concept of Unlocking Silent Histories to youth from six different communities. The introduction took place during an annual meeting that takes place at the Maya Traditions Foundation sala in Panajachel (Pana), Guatemala. We distributed a paper describing the program to approximately 40 students ranging from age 12–20 who came to Pana from six different communities around the highlands region of Lake Atitlan. The long narrow room, beautifully constructed with fireplaces, hardwood floors and an updated kitchen, was filled with chairs all facing the longest contiguous wall. There, Marcelle stood over the students, her tall stature softly illuminated by diffused light coming through the windows. Marcelle began to introduce USH and the concept. The words describing the program flowed with sincere excitement. Like myself, she was certain that the youth would jump at the chance to have cameras and create films. Yet as she spoke and when she finished, the youth stared in silence and with an unresponsive gaze.

In the United States and in the Dominican Republic, the youth that I invited to participate immediately almost without fail beamed with eagerness at this idea. Today, I tried to read the faces of these youth. I looked around and some of them just stared back at me. Today, I could not read anything on the expressionless faces. Instead I began to imagine what they might be thinking. As I reflected upon my own personal struggle in coming to terms with my positionality in this world and the implications of power imposed in places where people come to assimilate others, it occurred to me that they might be wondering what to make of me, the *gringa* girl coming in and sharing video cameras, asking them to tell their stories. Who is she and why does she want our stories? People always come here to do projects; here comes another one. I wonder how long she will stay? I wonder what she wants from us. These were thoughts that I only imagined and had no way of knowing for sure what they were thinking.

When the eyes did look back at me, there were not glares of distrust, nor were there glances that embraced me, just stoic silence. The silence was broken by one voice. A young man, perhaps one of the oldest students in the room, spoke. His voice was strong yet filled with question. He asked Marcelle about the cost and the expected time commitment. He began to talk about the many responsibilities that they have (home, school, the youth program with MTF, etc.) and the limited free time to commit to something like this. Marcelle assured them that there was no cost. She turned to me to get clarification on the second questions. I answered with the format that I envisioned, but was quick to clarify that this is a project that they own and decide. We told them that we have ideas, but in the end, they were going to tell us their interests, when they could meet, what time they could commit, and what direction that they wanted to take. I could only imagine that my hasty explanation of a youth-driven initiative left the audience with increased ambiguity. This is a concept that I knew would not easily be voiced, it would need to be practiced.

The meeting ended with no confirmation from anyone in the group. Rather, some of the older students said that they preferred to take the descriptions and talk amongst themselves. More specifically, they discussed the paper with peers from their communities. This gravitation toward members of their own community is something that I would come to learn is common across the groups of students with whom I worked. The youth in the communities are for the most part very tight. They make it a practice to huddle together and make decisions together, usually having one person be the spokesperson for what is discussed and what questions they might have.

Marcelle closed the meeting and told the students that they could ask me questions. When I heard her say that I froze a bit. It was not that I was not ready to answer any questions, but rather my language abilities at this time were limited at best. I had a handful of words, but was so incredibly timid about using them, because I had no knowledge of grammatical structure. I knew that all I could do was smile and gently encourage the youth. Smiles and gestures of encouragement would have to do for now. I pulled whatever words I had in my restricted vocabulary and tried to tell

them that this would be fun and this would be their project, an opportunity to teach me. Even if I had the language, I would not have wanted to direct the spotlight on me. I wanted to create a message that I was here to learn with and from them and together we would move forward. Standing over them telling them how great of a job that they would do, how great of an opportunity this is for them would reproduce the conscious or unconscious message that I come from afar and know what is best for them and their future. It was not a message that I desired to replicate. This consciousness of my role and my goal in working with these youth was something that would continue to be challenged, by my own history and equally by many of the youth.

I hoped that I made them feel comfortable with me. I hoped that Marcelle got them excited about the idea. But all we could do was wait. On November 27, I received great news from Marcelle. She wrote to tell me that seven students from a community called Chirijox were interested in participating. There were two other students interested, yet they were from two different and distant communities. I was thrilled to receive the email and excited that we'd soon begin. Marcelle and I exchanged more communications as we discussed the pros and cons of either beginning with a focus in one community or opening it to all who were interested. Weighing these, we agreed that starting in one community was best. This would afford us the opportunity to center our attentions on finding what worked with the students and with our collaboration. This would help us more successfully extend opportunities to other communities. The decision was made. We would begin with the group of youth from Chirijox.

What transpired next was a series of workshops in the Maya Traditions sala, but more frequently meetings in the homes of the youth. Due to the fact that the nature of the interactions in USH are emergent, it would be nearly impossible for me to recount every step of the processes. Insights that capture the essence of these moments reveal themselves in the upcoming chapters. These chapters, which are dedicated to individual students in the program, bring to light the activities and the interactions that illuminate the spirit of Unlocking Silent Histories.

That we have this opportunity to share these stories is ultimately made possible because of the aforementioned invaluable partnership with the Maya Traditions Foundation. Specifically, the youth with whom we work come to us through this very special organization. Through their generous support, the time was ripe to take this vision and establish it as a non-profit organization.

DEFINING UNLOCKING SILENT HISTORIES

Ready to formalize my developing pedagogical model, I began the process of applying to make Unlocking Silent Histories a non-profit organization. I constructed a board of three members to meet and discuss the vision and trajectory of USH. We met several times via Skype in order to construct the elements of the organization, including the mission, how the board functions, and our plan to move forward. After

we came to an agreement on the elements, I submitted to material to the appropriate office in Texas. My permanent residence at the time was Guatemala and my son's was Austin Texas. Without an address of my own in the U.S., my son and I decided that Austin would be the home of Unlocking Silent Histories. USH received its official status as an incorporated non-profit organization in Austin, TX on March 25, 2013.

Mission and Philosophy

In founding this organization, I – along with my board – defined its mission as follows:

> *Unlocking Silent Histories* is a non profit organization that provides opportunities for indigenous youth to critically analyze how they are represented in the media and create documentaries to present their world from their perspectives. It also contributes to the promotion of cultural understanding by connecting youth across geographical boundaries. We foster a learning environment that is constructed with our students, which facilitates youth leadership.

Over the course of our two years in practice, we have altered our mission slightly. It now reads as follows:

> Unlocking Silent Histories sparks the potential of indigenous youth to critically analyze how they are represented in the media and creatively express their worlds from their perspectives through documentary films that contribute to cultural preservation and understanding across generational and geographical boundaries.

While the theoretical underpinnings and the philosophy of the organization is outlined in Chapter 3, it is important to take the time to express the underlying rationale of the work itself.

Rationale

USH is founded on the belief that formal education and its associated instructional strategies have acted as a mechanism by which to assimilate and reform marginalized youth. This has contributed to creating an unconscious belief that the diverse set of cultures and knowledges with which students enter the classroom is not valued or is "incorrect". As a consequence, many marginalized youth experience a jarring disconnect between their education and their every-day lives. This has been particularly prevalent in the schooling of indigenous youth. Learning has been – and often continues to be – consciously or unconsciously organized to attempt to erase, fetishize or villainize their historical pasts.

The negative implications are significant both for the indigenous demographic and for our broader global citizenry. First and foremost, indigenous youths' knowledge

and experience remains unrecognized as a resource for learning. Instead "how to" and "banking" forms of instruction persist as acceptable tools to fulfill the undertaking of "catching them up" or "conforming them". This approach to education has forcefully distanced indigenous youth from their cultural and linguistic heritages, although both of which have been empirically proven to positively contribute to learning. Moreover, these instructional devices have silenced indigenous youths' voices and obstructed efforts to counter movements and ongoing applications of oppression, portraying such endeavors as adverse resistance to becoming "civilized".

Western media has played a significant role in justifying a need to reform indigenous peoples. These harmful renditions and negatively biased narratives have included illustrating this group as savages, alcoholics, and extinct, to name a few. Misrepresentations of indigenous peoples have amplified a damaging Western collective memory and accelerated the disappearance of languages and their associated cultural knowledges. Further, the reproduction and dissemination of such erroneous depictions have aided in the continual loss of a significant piece of its united ancestry as well as the diverse customs and practices that enrich our tapestrical world.

An educational approach that combines critical pedagogy and technology-mediated learning assists in addressing the issues of culturally connected learning and indigenous representation. Critical pedagogy asserts that oppressed cultures advance when provided with the tools to both question and change their situation (Freire, 1993). Using technology as one of these tools affords youth various levels of critical inquiry. Moreover, technology has the affordance of making thinking visible and subsequently yields engagements that are closely connected with cultural ways of knowing. Additionally, digital tools have the capacity to facilitate authentic authorship, inspiring conversations that are fertile grounds for cultivating viewing the world through multiple lenses.

Despite what we know about technology's potential for learning, it is more commonly used as modern mechanism to more rapidly integrate and amend underrepresented youth into the larger normative narrative. While programs using technology as alternative learning designs for underrepresented youth exist, these designs more often than not continue to stay in the control of the inventor. The result is that youth remain disconnected from learning and from their cultural knowledge.

Pedagogical Approach

To counter this history, USH applies an educational approach that honors local customs, traditions, and language. Our pedagogical concept aims to explore the complexities surround indigenous education by drawing on various notions of knowledge building that begins with the local context. More specifically, we use video to connect youth with community-driven inquiry, promote critical and creative expression, invite participation, construct learning with the youth, and support youth-directed ethnographic studies.

The learning design draws on various research genres, including Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970), Cultural Sociology (Sewell, 1992), and Media Studies (Hall, 1973), The underlying belief of these integrated theories asserts that oppressed peoples advance when provided with the tools to both question, analyze, and change their situation. Youth take ownership of their learning by exploring aspects of their world that they find most valuable to investigate, discuss, and transform.

We aim to create a framework for interpreting a particular context with youth and building a case for applying critical pedagogy on the ground. In other words, in each context learning will emerge differently, yet the foundational principles and rigorously identified outcomes that guide the engagement will remain tried and true. This locally engaged process allows youth to have a significant voice in directing their own learning. Our research explores the relationship between theory and practice in communities that are often disconnected from the larger educational discourse.

This model, in short, aims to:

1. Value cultural knowledge: Youth begin by identifying community-connected interests that they investigate and research through critical media analysis and a video ethnography process. They draw on their cultural heritages and languages to understand the self-identified themes they aim to investigate.
2. Foster innovative learning designs: With participants, we co-create emergent learning designs, mediated by technology, that begin by honoring local cultures, knowledge, and customs and are continually directed by youth. Youth navigate their learning in unique ways and thus youth (working in teams or individually) are compelled to drive their own learning and production processes. Learning with, through, and around technology leverages the ability for youth to forge their direction and to recognize and draw on the value of their diverse knowledges, cultures, and perspectives,
3. Develop critical media literacy and production: We cultivate critical media literacy dispositions by inspiring and equipping youth to critically analyze media representations and to creatively express their lives. In analyzing how they are represented in the media, youth become inspired to tell their own stories. In the process, youth learn videography, critical analysis, digital technology, and interview skills to examine their topics and find their emerging stories. Further, it cultivates a space to empower youth to tell their narratives from their perspectives. The implication is that youth can be pioneers in reframing negatively associated narratives.
4. Strengthen cultural understanding: Our model designs physical and virtual venues whereby youth share their ideas and their knowledge across generational and geographical boundaries. Dialogues between youth across communities and cultures foster awareness of unified histories and similarities, while intergenerational dialogue contributes to youths' understanding of and connection to their own cultures.

Participants and Process

Youth involvement in this project is completely voluntary. The process in which they engage will be further illuminated in the chapters that more expressly describe the aspects of our philosophy and methodologies. Briefly, the iterative process in which they participate is one that includes various stages of both an inquiry and a production process. For example, the youth critically analyzing how they are represented in the media. We watch films about their histories or about other indigenous communities in order to deconstruct the social, political, and cultural messages associated with different groups of people. This, it has been my experience, motivates the students to tell a story in a way that they see the world. They identify their stories, loosely, at this point. I use the term "loosely" intentionally because as the youth interact with their communities, they come to understand their themes in a new light.

Their topics range between exploring aspects of their cultural histories or concerns that they might have within their communities. They engage in a video ethnography process to create documentaries to produce representations of their communities and cultures from a local perspective highlighting aspects of their cultural knowledge and belief systems that they would like to understand further. This process does not have a linear trajectory; rather it emerges from where the students are and what they define as the direction.

Another activity that assists in directing the process is interviewing members of their community. The youth develop open-ended questions to incite conversations that capture local knowledge and perspectives and provide youth the opportunity to decide what topics they want to explore and further investigate.

When the students have their films, they look for themes and identify the emerging story. While editing, they might find that there are gaps in the story and that more interviews or footage is necessary. When they determine this, they develop more questions and/or obtain more footage and b-roll. The writing, editing, and producing process becomes a dialogue between what they students are seeing and what they construct on the screen. This manner of working in and out of a finished product illustrates the ways in which it is emergent. As they interact with analyzing theirs and other ideas, interviewing neighbors, finding patterns, constructing the story, and pulling together a finding product, they learn to become writers, researchers, and directors of digital media productions.

They do not undergo this iterative process independently. That is, we foster a social learning environment where they youth learn from their peers, their community, and us. They are continuously in conversations with their peers, interacting with and providing feedback to each other. We offer feedback, but in a way that makes every effort not to impose our own ideas. Instead, we ask questions that facilitate student reflection, without leading the student to a story that reflects our voice, but rather maintains their own. In addition, the youth present their films in small and larger

audiences. In these presentations, they listen to other perspectives and consider critiques that will assist in making their work better.

When the students settle on a "final" product, they share them with other youth in nearby communities to receive more peer feedback. This stage provides an opportunity for showcasing previously ignored or marginalized indigenous youth voices. Here, they share their stories with other youth from similar backgrounds. This platform supports a distributed learning model where peers teach and learn from each other. Next, the students have the opportunity to make revisions. Following this, they present their films in their local communities, again receiving feedback and inspiring discussions. Finally, the students showcase their work in a larger venue to an audience of both Guatemalans and *extranjeros (foreigners, or the x-pat community)*.

Urgency

There are two particular underlying urgencies associated with this work. First, it is estimated that over half of the 6,000 existing languages worldwide (UNESCO, 2015) are in danger of disappearing by the end of this century. As unwritten, undocumented languages disappear, humanity not only loses a piece of its united ancestry, but also the associated cultural knowledge and diversity that makes our world so fascinating. Mobilizing youth to reconnect with their histories is critical to the preservation of the unique legacy of their peoples. USH engages students in self-directed, technology-enabled education that provides the confidence, skills and most importantly, opportunity to document the aspects of their own cultures they find most valuable.

Second, in today's technological world, indigenous voices are largely absent from the burgeoning digital landscape. Having youth broadcast aspects of the cultural milieu that shape their identities through digital documentaries is an effort to close this gap. By self-directing their inquiry and deciding how they choose to participate in a digital world, the students joining USH develop an enhanced sense of identity, agency, self-awareness, and community leadership.

MAYA TRADITIONS FOUNDATION: A FORMALIZED PARTNERSHIP

When I founded Unlocking Silent Histories, I created a bi-law that requires that USH form partnerships with existing organizations. The reason for this is two-fold. First and foremost, gaining trust in communities takes an inordinate amount of effort. In partnering with organizations that have worked tirelessly in fostering and sustaining these connections, USH has increased chance of creating and maintaining successful relationships with the youth and their families. After we are introduced to the youth and the families it becomes our responsibility to cultivate the trust bestowed to us.

Second, established support structures within a country and community support USH in creating longevity. Without these partnerships, USH cannot reach its goal of

developing a sustained chapter in a given location. With that said, the organization partnership is selective. The underlying philosophy of USH is that partnerships are critical, particularly with those who live by the same values. Maya Traditions not only espouses, but also lives, the goals of empowering and cultivating capacity of sustainability with and from the people with whom they work. Like USH, the staff of Maya Traditions listens to local voices and honors local customs to drive and direct the work that we do.

In partnership with Maya Traditions and with the communities with whom they work is where I would begin this new chapter of my career, this new chapter to seek to illustrate the theoretical concepts in practice, a practice co-constructed with not only the youth, but also with the explicit and welcome voices within the Maya Traditions Foundation. Prior to moving into the next section of the book, I introduce the Maya Traditions Foundation, written by the current director of FTM, Erin Kökdil:

> In the fall of 1996, a woman named Jane Mintz was trying to convince Antonia, an indigenous female artisan from the community of Chuacruz, to keep her son in school. Unfortunately this was and continues to be far too common in Guatemala, the inevitable decision that parents and families must make—send a child to school and cause a great financial burden on the family, or send the child to work and contribute to the family's income. Jane was inspired and soon after founded Maya Traditions Foundation, known locally as Fundación Tradiciones Mayas, to address the extreme poverty faced by indigenous Maya people, specifically women, in Guatemala. Her strategy in doing so was to partner with talented indigenous female artisans, the majority backstrap weavers, who althoughcreated beautiful weavings, lacked access to a fair market where their work was valued and they were paid adequately. Through the partnerships that Jane established with over six cooperatives, artisans were able to produce high-quality weavings that were then sold within the international market, guaranteeing the artisan a fair wage for her work while also allowing her to work from her household, take care of her children, and continue to practice her ancestral art.
>
> Yet it was at that moment in Chuacruz when Jane realized that there was a need to support the artisans and their families beyond just a fair payment for their work. In 1997, we offered the first financial scholarship to the son of weaver Antonia from Chuacruz, and our Youth Education Program was born.
>
> Over the years, Maya Traditions has seen more than 2,000 indigenous students work towards their education and a better life. Today the Youth Education Program has grown not only to offer financial support to the children of our artisans, but also personal support, workshops to strengthen formal and informal knowledge and educational opportunities, and an annual community service initiative to teach our students at a young age the importance of giving back. Through working with the children of our artisans for over a decade, we

have seen our relationships with the cooperatives and communities strengthen. We look at our partnerships with the artisans as much more than a working relationship, we look at them as family. [written by Erin Kökdil]

SETTING THE STAGE

After one year of successful implementation, participation, and production of documentary shorts, Maya Traditions was able to successfully secure funding to dedicate the funds to keeping USH as part of its Youth Education Program and extend the USH program to more youth. While this book focuses on the first iteration of USH, I am compelled to bring attention to the fact that USH has grown roots in Guatemala and continues to grow. Youth who completed the first year program have gone on to become program leaders. These leaders are taking on roles and responsibilities to teach other youth the craft of asking deep questions to members of their community and expressing their views creatively. I am personally proud to have Maya Traditions as our first pilot and now our trusted partner to continue the work. In 2014, we officially branded this partnership as Unlocking Silent Histories: Maya Traditions Chapter. As we move forward to tell the stories of a select handful of the youth participating in this program, we emphasize again the critical role that partnerships play in achieving and growing a collective and burgeoning vision that is locally informed.

I have organized the remainder of this book as follows. Chapter 3 frames the theoretical foundations of USH and the trajectory that has given way to those paradigms. Chapter 4 sets the historical context of Guatemala and presents the two communities where our work started. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 tie cultural insights about Chirijox, the first community with which we worked, and then follows with the students' stories. Chapters 8, 9 and 10 follow the same format, only this time introducing San Juan La Laguna and three of the students from our second community. Chapter 11 presents our philosophy of youth as teacher|leaders. Finally, Chapter 12 closes with my personal experiences and continued lucha to do this work in a way that reflects what I have gained from my long journey and my continued commitment to building learning opportunities along side these youth.

NOTES

1 The name Unlocking Silent Histories emerged in conversations with my colleague Jorgelina Vaughn Abbate and my son Drew. Following a long series of possibilities that would reflect this concept, we settled on this as being most provocative and reflective of the mission.

2 A portal that connects "idealists with opportunities for action": www.idealist.org

3 Unlocking Silent Histories and Maya Traditions formed a partnership in 2014, under the name Unlocking Silent Histories: Maya Traditions Chapter. This partnership serves as our model of collaborating and implementing USH.

4 https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/ 640642237/unlocking-silent-histories

REFERENCES

Adaptation Fund Board Program. (2012).

Appiah, K. A. (2006). *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co.

Chavez, V., & Soep, E. (2005). Youth radio and the pedagogy of collegiality. *Harvard Educational Review*, *75*(4), 409–434.

Davis, J., & Gandy, O. (1999). Racial identity and media orientation: Exploring the nature of constraint. *Journal of Black Studies*, *29*(3), 367–397.

Duncan-Andrade, J., & Morrell, E. (2005). Turn up that radio, teacher: Popular cultural pedagogy in new century urban schools. *Journal of School Leadership*, *15*(1), 284–308.

Hall, S. (1973). *Encoding and decoding in the television discourse*. Birmingham, England: CCS.

Hull, G., & James, M. (2007). Geographies of hope: A study of urban landscapes and a university-community collaborative. In Peggy O'Neill (Ed.), *Blurring boundaries: Developing writers, researchers, and teachers: A tribute to William L. Smith* (pp. 250–289). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Riecken, T., Conibear, F., Michel, C., Lyall, J., Scott, T., Tanaka, M., … Strong-Wilson, T. (2006). Resistance through representing culture: Aboriginal student filmmakers and a participatory action research project on health and wellness. *Canadian Journal of Education*, *29*(1), 265–286.

Sewell, W. H. (1992). A theory of structure: Duality, agency, and transformation. *American Journal of Sociology*, *98*, 1–29.

UNESCO. (2015). *Endangered languages*. Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

> *...education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.*
>
> (Freire, 1970)

I promised myself when I decided to write this book that I would not make it theoretical. Using theoretical language in and of itself creates a power dynamic between those with whom you wish to work and those who might identify with the nature of the work you are doing. That said to deny theory would be irresponsible. It would again create the dichotomy between the academy and the field. It would also negate the role of theory in assisting us in analyzing both our position, our presence, and self, moreover the implications each of these and in informing the design of learning. Theory is a way of seeing ourselves as much as it is a way of grounding practice. Thus the use of it is not to ostracize readers, but rather as a conversation toward why Unlocking Silent Histories (USH) works in the way that it does.

Rest assured, that USH is a practical application of the theoretical foundations that have informed my personal growth and inquiry as well as my academic trajectory. This concept is equally influenced by what I have learned along the way with youth and their communities. In what follows I outline how I position myself within the context of doing this work as well as the theories that underlie it. Making visible my journey, and the theories that informed it will help the reader frame the interpretation of the upcoming chapters. These descriptions set the stage to USH as based in the notions of critical pedagogy, which in turn makes clear that my goal with USH is to stay as peripheral to the activities as possible – without completely being absent – in order to ensure the grassroots nature of this organization. Perhaps the most critical aspect of our vision is that students drive their learning and the production of their stories. Ensuring that the youth retain this authority requires both a reflection on my positionality and a construct that synthesizes a theoretical grounding to sustain such a pedagogical model.

WHO AM I ANYWAY, WHAT GIVES ME THE RIGHT?

Who am I to do this work? This is a question that does and will continually be an internal and external dispute. The question confronts a sustained attention on my own identity, my history, and what has shaped me along the way. It also requires

raising my own consciousness throughout each and every step of my work asking myself to analyze and challenge the very power, cultural, and historical structures, a practice that I assert is embedded within the pedagogical philosophy of USH.

To begin, the first and foremost question I receive is something to this effect: "Are you concerned that you are White and doing this work." This is a fact that I cannot erase. No matter my experience and my raised level of consciousness about what this means for me to be the White privileged woman acting as a program designer, educator, and researcher for underrepresented youth, is never something that I can change. In my life, I have experienced judgments related to my gender and status as a single mother, but not anything that compares to the racial and ethnic discrimination that plagues the histories of the youth with whom I work. I cannot truly identify with being the subject of a colonial history or to be judged by my heritage. While self-identifying as ancestrally Italian and Irish, I am White, which affords a blending into the larger Anglo-Saxon pool and more easily navigate networks of power because of this classification. I am placed into this Caucasian category, one the strips me from identifying more closely with particular historical customs and practices, which at one time were also ridiculed and discouraged from continued practice. Yet today because of the assimilation into one definition of Whiteness, I have the luxury of choosing any identification within Whiteness that almost ensures my privilege. Because I am White, I enjoy a freedom from most forms of discrimination.

At the same time, my personal, pedagogical, and sometimes political viewpoints have resulted in being placed on the periphery. For one, I am an unmarried mother of a "fatherless" child, a clear taboo for a Catholic girl. Further, as described in my opening chapter, my vocal rejection of the norms of education both in and outside the academy seeing them as reproducing social inequality and destroying the ignition of equity, innovation, and creativity. Finally, I outwardly question the academy's espoused mission of social justice when injustices continue to plague the internal politics in our institutions, and most surprisingly by people who have themselves been subjects of oppression. With these decisions that I have made in my life, I have endured a degree of what it feels like to be "othered". I have experienced particular effects of blatant discrimination and overt attempts to destroy my integrity, progress, vision, and beliefs. Yet I am still a White U.S. citizen with a degree from an Ivy League establishment. I enjoy the freedom of taking this leap, of escaping the "normal" path of academia to explore other cultures and countries and examine new pedagogical practices. Within this experimentation, I have the comfort of knowing that at any time I can return to the U.S., to my family's support, and even to the academy. I realize that there will always be someone who will have appreciation of and a connection with my work and I can always find employment.

Where does this leave me? How do I legitimize my right to do this work? If I do not fully understand what it is to be oppressed, to be "othered", who am I to be heard? I believe that the recognition of who I am in relationship to the context in which I work does not give me authority to this work, especially not alone. It requires that I have the responsibility to be continuously conscious of how the learning designs that

I facilitate unfold. The work necessitates that I embrace the world as fluid, reciprocal and ever changing. The fluidity and change materializes and continually redefines my sense of self as I listen and learn through human interactions contextualized within the emerging design (Steinberg, 2007).

SITUATING MYSELF AS A RESEARCHER

While I may have abandoned my academic title for the two years that I created USH, it is nearly impossible to strip research from my identity, particularly since it has became simultaneously a conscious and unconscious aspect of myself. In the realm of research, I identify as an ethnographer and qualitative researcher. This may seem to be a departure from my original training as a Physicist, but in fact the ways that I see patterns in the field are heavily influenced by my understandings of chaos theory and quantum theory. That said, I will not attempt to bring this theoretical base into the conversation.

Regardless of how I self-identify, I recognize that my identity and position influence my interpretation of the world. I acknowledge that being aware of this is an important aspect of my work and needs to be brought to the surface and questioned as I collaborate with youth to build USH. While we are encouraged to separate the individual from the researcher, we recognize that this is nearly impossible and thus unfeasible to be completely neutral in any given space. As such, my presence in the field influences the nature of the context and the endeavor.

These acknowledgments are crucial to my work with USH. The aim of USH is to create a youth-driven learning space designed to be a platform for indigenous youth to tell their stories from their own perspectives. The goal of providing a "neutral" space where stories emerge from local knowledge and with local context is based on my understanding that these communities have been historically silenced. Connected to this interpretation is the exposure to and adoption of the political interpretation that colonialism has imposed particular cultural norms on these communities and oppressed them to a degree that they are unable to confidently express their stories and histories without a fear of criticism or even harm. My awareness of bringing this politically charged view into a learning space is particularly important. I recognize that my cultural identity, my mere presence, is a part of shaping the collective learning environment. Even the norms that my own cultural background imposes on me in terms of, for example, what dialogical or literary elements make a compelling narrative, need to be put in check. As a researcher, I work to constantly be aware of my own assumptions and positions about a political past and to keep this conscious present as to not impose my realities, linguistic assumptions, and worldviews on their media productions. This makes this kind of work exhilarating yet challenging.

As much as I would like to abandon the terminology of theory, I find it would be irresponsible and ultimately impossible. Most importantly, it is the constant interplay between theory and practice is what guides the evolutionary, unfolding and emergent learning environments of our practice. In the following chapters the use

of theoretical language is diffused in the form of the stories that tell the journey of Unlocking Silent Histories, in Lake Atitlan Guatemala.

GROUNDING UNLOCKING SILENT HISTORIES IN THEORY

Our work is grounded in the tenets of Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970). We draw on these foundations to explore and expand on our understanding of how indigenous youth perceive and experience their community. This is inherently complex as indigenous youth attach meaning to context as well as translate their continuous intersections with people outside their communities. That is, Indigenous knowledge is not something that is frozen in time; it is a multifaceted interplay of relationships and interaction within and across cultures (Grande, 2004).

Our pedagogical concept aims to explore this complexity by drawing on various notions of building knowledge that begins with the local context. We use various research genres that include video to promote literacy (Goodman, 2003), invite participatory (Braden, 1999) as well as constructivist research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), and support youth-directed ethnographic studies (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998).

We aim to create a framework for interpreting a particular context with youth and building a case for applying critical pedagogy on the ground. The process allows youth to have a significant voice in directing their own learning. Our research explores the relationship between theory and practice in communities that are often disconnected from the larger educational discourse.

An ultimate aim of critical pedagogy is to engage learners in raising critical consciousness (Freire, 1973). Critical consciousness is defined as providing opportunities for people within communities to question norms that are often silenced, but play a role in shaping their lives. We facilitate conversations with youth to help them become aware of social, political, and economic situations and how these influences perpetuate poverty and community-related issues, inviting the local voices of youth and adults to be part of this conversation.

Methodology

How we enact this idea plays out within our methodology. Our methodology centers on how video captures:

- The language and cultural knowledge of Indigenous youth.
- How analytical tools assist in dissecting social, cultural, and political realities?
- How youth shape their own social environment?

The camera, the interactions around it, and the analysis and synthesis of its contents become a powerful tool to alter the position and role of the learner. The youth use this mediating tool to decide what they find is important. It becomes a way to stop, view everyday practices, and reflect on them. It gives pause to the pace

of life, allowing for analysis of what we actually see rather than what we assume. In this way, the tool becomes an agent for putting youth in the center of directing their own learning. Video is a tool for bridging the apposition between insisting the process of learning to affording self-direction and agency within learning. Such an approach positions youth as researchers of their own communities, which provides those of us in the position of "educator" the a unique lens for viewing the world through their eyes and learning with and from them.

For USH, Critical Pedagogy, then, is defined by what it asks – that we embrace a raising of the consciousness and a critique of society as a way of valuing students' voices and as honoring students' needs, values, and individuality. Critical work also invites us to create a hopeful, active pedagogy, which enables students to become true participatory members of society, that they create and re-create as they continually and increasingly gain freedom.

An Evolution of Integrated Theoretical Underpinnings

As I outline the evolution of my theoretical trajectory, I present the growing framework culminating in the creation of USH. The design, implementation and analysis of technology-mediated learning opportunities I have created with youth for the past ten years have been a work-in-progress. The framework for USH is multidisciplinary and includes constructs such as cultural identity, porous boundaries, co-constructed space, and agency. Further, I outline the importance of maintaining a teacher|researcher dialectical dialogue to continuously be conscious of not using a position of power to dominate the learner. The symbol '|' indicates a dialectical relationship between the two given characteristics, where dialectical is defined as 'a mutually constituting relationship between sets of actions' (Sewell, 1992). In releasing authority, learner agency increases, which in turn opens conversations, invites and appreciate new perspectives of seeing the world, and thus yields socially just learning spaces.

Unlocking Silent Histories is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework that arises from many years of grappling with theory that supports the design of technology-mediated, youth-driven, learning engagements. Below I outline the journey to these underpinnings in three different sectors of my career: 1) Cultural Sociology, 2) Media Theory and 3) Critical Media Pedagogy. Each stage builds upon the next to culminate in USH.

Cultural Sociology

> Cultural Sociology is a field that is concerned with culture. Culture here is defined as "the ensemble of standard practices, artifacts, and tools, and agential possibilities that define a particular society or community." (Roth, Tobin, & Ritchie, 2007)

For my dissertation, I began looking at culture as a dialectical, mutually shaping relationship between cultural schema and cultural practices (Sewell, 1999). I applied this framework to analyzing the digital divide[1] engagement that I designed and conceptualized. It took place in the local community center in North Philadelphia and was a web-design course taught by suburban students, with urban youth as the learners. I began this initiative with the mindset of having a focus on the teacher's perspectives and experiences, where the schema of these high school teachers' reflected their religious school values.

What began as an investigation of learning design research from a teacher-educator perspective, emerged as recognition that teacher and student schemas and practices are in constant interface. This juncture of different schema can either clash to distance learners or work in harmony to engage them. The webpage course in the North Philadelphia community was a positive example of what can transpire when the different cultural schema and practices come together, raise consciousness of difference, and make adjustments to transform the learning space. The result was the creation of a unique culture of learning experience, based upon what the given individuals bring (cultural schemes and practices) and tools they can access and use (agency) to co-create the environment.

The theoretical base for my dissertation drew on the cultural sociology concepts and evolved to recognizing a more complex interrelationship of intersection schema and practices of both learners and teachers. My analysis thus shifted from solely looking at learning from the teacher perspective to recognizing the role that culture plays in shaping student engagement. Details in the research outcomes point to how these different cultures intersected to bring about new forms of participation and emergent activity structures (DeGennaro, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b). The data was analyzed along with the participants yielding from our how these analysis informed the redesign of the learning structure. The result was not a design but rather an emergent one, continuously co-creating the space between socially distant teachers and learners.

The findings yielded several iterations that drew upon additional theoretical frames of analysis (i.e.,: media studies, socio-technical theory, critical theory) resulting in various ways in which to organize and make sense of the data. I considered this data as a frame for understanding technology fluency, which relates to youth's ability to be adaptable and flexible to move not only from technology to technology but also from space to space. Yet the frames of race, gender, age and space played a role in what this meant for each of the student involved. This led to a critical analysis of the data, which ultimately highlighted the acknowledgment that the high school boys made toward their own power as integral to the digital divide construct. These boys came to appreciate that the social, culture, and spatial divides where interlocked with limited technology access as well as the assumptions that these "teachers" brought to the table. In applying a sociotechnical lens to the data, the social, cultural, and spatial divides became visible through media productions (the websites) and around technology interactions (discussions and learning guidance).

The culminating piece of that stage of my work resulted in a piece that converged the various theoretical lenses to inform an historical analysis. In this scrutiny, I examined the relationships among history, culture and learning to bring to the forefront how history shows itself. Specifically, that the youth with who I worked projected productions that they walk amongst the shadows of their ancestors as they were actively constructing a present account of themselves. This is perhaps the most salient moment that continues to inform my attention to the relationship among history, culture, identity, and learning in youth media productions and in why youth voice is critical to the design of learning environments.

Media Studies

> Media Studies has its roots in cultural studies and is concerned with the content, history and political effects of various media. For media studies, "there are four ideas that are central to cultural studies: hegemony, signs and semiotics, representation and discourse, and meaning and struggle." (Hall, 1973)

Since my dissertation, technologies became more portable and affordable, which gave rise to the popularity of digital story creations. Digital stories are videos created using a mix of spoken narrative, music, and still images (Lambert, 2002). Unlike websites, digital stories do not require complex programming skills. User-friendly programs, such as iMovie, allowed youth to easily and quickly produce media. The interfaces opened the space for youth to think about their productions while learning, but not being over-burdened by different technologies. This movement led to more studies and increased attention on technology as a hub for making learning interactions and thinking visible (Collins et al., 1991). I chose to follow this movement because of its flexibility. Building on my research in informal spaces, I drew on theories from my dissertation and added lenses that informed the complexity of youth media productions in relation to identity and agency in out-of-school learning spaces. The work related to this frame resulted in more inquiry around youth-based learning with video and other social media.

Many scholars doing similar work cited the potential for using video technologies to promote youth voice, research, and leadership (Goodman, 2003; Chavez & Soep, 2005). At the same time, increased uses of social media illustrated how youth were taking ownership of their learning (Ito et al., 2008) and were decidedly engaged in enveloping, fluctuating, and emerging participation (Tapscott, 2002; Lenhart, et al., 2005). Yet, despite the hope that a) technologies would transform our deficit perspectives of marginalized youth and b) that learning environments would become co-created with and through technology, the inertia of both perceptions about and of learning structures for marginalized youth held their roots. This motivated two actions for my research. The first was focused on the perception of diverse youth populations. Given the realization that youth media productions could not alone transform people's perceptions and stereotypes, I conceptualized

and spearheaded the following idea explored in the manuscript: *"Youth Media Productions: Deconstructing 'difference' or reifying norms?"* (2014). Reading media texts and productions is, by our historically and presently situated social and cultural context (Hall, 1973), similar to the idea of carrying one's identity into a learning space. Second, I was particularly encouraged by the concept of co-constructed learning engagements as supported and motivated by what we as a society were seeing in technology-mediated participation. In my view, these practices needed to be highlighted as important to speak to today's learners and to survive in today's world.

The theoretical frames developing from my research and from my application of it as well as my collaborations with colleagues grew to include cultural sociology and cultural media studies as the major influences with critical interpretations of research coming out of the Learning Sciences Field.[2] These became the foundations for the next stage of my work in the Dorchester neighborhood within Boston, Massachusetts and in the Dominican Republic. Each of them led to the next conceptual frame, again leading me bringing me closer to USH.

Critical Media Pedagogy

> Critical media pedagogy provides students and citizens with the tools to analyze critically how texts are constructed and in turn construct and position viewers and readers. (Kellner, 2000)

The literature related to critical media literacy and new literacies began to take center stage in studies regarding youth culture and technology practices. I took into consideration their most salient findings into the next phase of my research and application of it.

With a critical perspective in the forefront, this literature and its application to learning designs, illustrates that youth are now seen as creating their worlds with and through social participation that becomes embodied and externalized in various technologies. Specifically, Kellner and Kim (2009) explore aspects of this participation that inform new educational structures and how they promote learning through the formation and investigation of, and response to, generative themes (Freire, 1990) that emerge directly from students' lives. The belief is that when people pose questions about issues that they have identified as salient in their communities and then investigate and respond to these issues, learning becomes transformative, since they are 1) invested in learning and creating new knowledge, and 2) empowered to use that knowledge to effect social change in their communities. Various out of school examples utilizing a critical media pedagogy approach is already being applied around the world as people engage in social activity, both online and face-to-face.

With more of attention on the co-creation of learning with youth and the execution of critical media literacy, I designed and facilitated new informal learning opportunities. The first iteration of this was implemented at the Lilla G. Frederick

School (LGF) in Dorchester, Massachusetts. The afterschool program at LFG included a multi-tiered video ethnography design that integrated media-literacy and media productions[3]. The design started with youth choosing a topic, which they wanted to explore. After selecting urban youth as their focus, they analyzed media representations of urban youth and later determined what productions they wanted to create in order to present their view of urban youth from their life views. Both the critique and the production were aimed at examining the ways in which these youth made sense of and participated in critical media literacy.

The second iteration of this design was made possible through a grant I received from the institution where I was a professor. With this award, I traveled to the Dominican Republic to facilitate a similar project. The purpose of expanding beyond the boundaries of the U.S. was to create a comparative case study. I was increasingly focused on developing the learning concept that had been developing from my research since my dissertation. I traveled back and forth from Boston to the Dominican Republic for two years, implementing two iterations of the project.

By the third iteration of the project in the Dominican Republic, the pedagogy that I was developing was more solidified. This concept drew on the frames that I continued to use (cultural sociology and media studies) and borrowed from various other genres. The use of video in this design is a combination of promoting literacy (Goodman, 2003), inviting participatory research (Braden, 1999; Johansson, 1999), and supporting ethnographic studies (Shrum et al., 2005). When these methodological applications involve youth, video becomes a powerful tool for putting them in the center to direct their own learning and to ''challenge the common sense views of reality with which most individuals have grown so comfortable'' (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998, p. 2). These methods position youth as researchers of their own communities. The research enlightened insights into their worlds in a way that helps both researchers and teachers co-construct curriculum with youth. These are articulated in a manuscript called "*Video of the Oppressed: Insights into Local Knowledge, Perspectives, and Interests with Youth*" (DeGennaro & Duque, 2013). *Video of the Oppressed* is not pedagogy per se; it is a philosophy with particular tenets of practice that reflect the foundations of Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Pedagogy as defined more broadly is an instructional method or the art and science of teaching. At USH we do not intend to create a formulaic application to generalize and replicate. Rather, we assert the importance of attending to participate with youth and their communities in a way that enables an intersection of video research models and critical/media pedagogy. These tenets include:

- The Importance of Gaining insight into Local and Cultural Knowledge and Interests.
- The Significance of Including Analytical Tools to Assist Youth in Dissecting Their Social, Cultural, and Political Realities.
- The Principle Of Affording Opportunities for Youth to Impact Their Social Conditions.

These tenets guided the next stage of my work and continue to be the focus of my journey of coming to see learning through the eyes of youth.

My leave in the Lake Atitlán region of Guatemala began in the Fall of 2012. By December of 2012, I had successfully raised funds through a crowd-funding platform, through the name: Unlocking Silent Histories. Part of the funds were used to put cameras, microphones, and computers in the hands of ten indigenous youth from two different nearby communities, under the umbrella of USH's mission. The remaining funds were invested in establishing USH as a U.S.-based non-profit.

Partnering with the Maya Traditions Foundation, the project implemented the "Video of the Oppressed" framework. The success of this implementation inspired me to revise the potential for USH as a much larger project. Thus, USH became an incorporated non-profit. Through Maya Traditions' assistance, I had secured not only the trust and relationships of the families and the communities. With the curriculum successfully unfolding in two communities, I applied for a second year leave. By October of 2013, Unlocking Silent Histories had become a solidly established U.S. 501c3 entity. The youth continued the process of analyzing media, investigating their chosen themes, interviewing members of their communities, and creating and revising evidence based documentaries after receiving feedback from their multi-town presentations. In November of 2013, 9 youth presented 8 films to a larger local and foreign audience, as two students chose to collaborate on the creation of one of the films. Three of these youth now lead new groups of students in their own and neighboring communities.

The theoretical frames, which I have explained, are what ground the work of USH. The tenets of Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970) as well as the concepts of cultural sociology (Sewell, 1999), critical media pedagogy (Kellner, 2000) and media studies are its foundations.

The final essential aspect of USH is that it is youth-directed and driven. The decision to take this direction is based partly on the theoretical foundations of drawing on local knowledge and culture, but is also a result of data emerging from the ways in which youth learning shapes and is shaped by technology use (DeGennaro, 2008a; DeGennaro & Brown, 2009a).

The resulting philosophy of practice is a complex interplay of multiple disciplines that assist in the exploration and expansion of our understanding of how marginalized, non-mainstream urban – and in this case indigenous – youth perceive and experience their worlds.

USH, its mission, its values, and its practice connect with the goal of striving toward cultivating a socially just world, opening dialogues across international boundaries, and being a model for envisioning the future of designing learning environments. Our philosophy asserts that achieving this requires that the design of learning must include local voices to develop social futures with them. In my work, I have observed the educational affordances of critical pedagogy when practiced and lived; the minds and spirits of youth – who are often seen through deficit lenses – flourish. Working in conjunction with students, I have seen the increased possibility

for marginalized youth to find the strength of their voice and identity and leverage both as vehicles for positively impacting their social futures.

NOTES

[1] Identified as the gap between those who have access to new information technologies, the information 'haves', and those who do not have access, the information 'have-nots' (Kvasny & Keil, 2016).

[2] The aim of the Learning Sciences group is to understand how people learn. This community merges educational fields of computer science, cognitive science, psychology, sociology and anthropology and has a significant focus on technology-mediated learning environments (Sawyer, 2014).

[3] http://www.donnadegennaro.com/Projects.html

REFERENCES

Braden, S. (1999). Using video for research and representation: Basic human needs and critical pedagogy. *Journal of Educational Media*, *24*(2), 117–129.

Chavez, V., & Soep, E. (2005). Youth radio and the pedagogy of collegiality. *Harvard Educational Review*, *75*(4), 409–434.

Collins, A., Brown, J. S., & Holum, A. (1991). Cognitive apprenticeship: Making thinking visible. *American Educator*, *6*(11), 38–46.

DeGennaro, D. (2008a). Sociotechnical cultural activity: Expanding an understanding of developing technology practices. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 40*(3), 329–351.

DeGennaro, D. (2008b). Learning designs: Tapping technology fluency of the Net Generation. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, *40*(1), 81–100.

DeGennaro, D. (2010). Grounded in theory: Immersing preservice teachers in technology-mediated learning. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education, 10*(3), 338–359.

DeGennaro, D., & Brown, T. (2009a). Youth voices: Exploring connections between history agency and identity in a digital divide initiative. *Cultural Studies of Science Education, 4*(1), 13–39.

DeGennaro, D., & Brown, T. (2009b). Emergent fields through adaptation and identity: Overcoming social distance. *Cultural Studies in Science Education, 4*(1), 77–87.

DeGennaro, D., & Brown, T. L. (2014). Youth media productions: Deconstructing "difference" or reifying norms? In K. Tobin, C. Milne, & D. DeGennaro (Eds.), *Sociocultural studies and implications for science education: The experiential and the virtual*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

DeGennaro, D., & Duque, R. (2013). Video of the oppressed: Insights into local knowledge, perspectives, and interests with youth. In T. Kress, C. Malott, & B. Porilio (Eds.), *Challenging status quo retrenchment: New directions in critical qualitative research*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: The Seabury Press.

Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York, NY: The Seabury Press.

Freire, P. (1990). Aurora Online with Paulo Freire: Twenty years later: Similar problems, different solutions. Interview with Carlos Torres.

Goodman, S. (2003). *Teaching youth media: A critical guide to literacy, video production and social change*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Grande, S. (2004). *Red pedagogy: Native American social and political thought*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation models*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Hall, S. (1973). *Encoding and decoding in the television discourse*. Birmingham, England: CCS.

Ito, M., & Okabe, D. (2006). Technosocial situations: Emergent structurings of mobile email use. In M. Ito, M. Matsuda, & D. Okabe (Eds.), *Personal, portable intimate: Mobile phones in Japanese life* (pp. 257–276). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Johansson, L. (1999). Participatory video and PRA: Acknowledging the politics of empowerment. *Forests, Trees, and People, Newsletter*, *40/41*, 21–23.

Kellner, D. (2000). Multiple literacies and critical pedagogies. In P. P. Trifonas (Ed.), *Revolutionary pedagogies: Cultural politics, instituting education, and the discourse of theory*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Kellner, D., & Kim, G. (2009). YouTube, politics, and pedagogy: Some critical reflections. In R. Hammer & D. Kellner (Eds.), *Media/cultural studies: Critical approaches* (pp. 615–636). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Kvasny, L., & Keil, M. (2006). The challenges of redressing the digital divide: A tale of two US cities. *Information Systems Journal*, *16*(1), 23–53.

Lambert, J. (2002). *Digital storytelling: Capturing lives, creating community*. Berkeley, CA: Digital Diner Press.

Lenhart, A., Madden, M., & Hitlin, P. (2005). *Teens and technology*. Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project. Retrieved March 12, 2007, from http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Teens_Tech_July2005web.pdf

Roth, W.-M., Tobin, K., & Ritchie, S. M. (2007). Time and temporality as mediators of science learning. *Science Education*, *92*, 115–140.

Sawyer, K. (Ed.). (2014). *The Cambridge handbook of the learning sciences* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Sewell, W. H. (1992). A theory of structure: Duality, agency, and transformation. *American Journal of Sociology*, *98*, 1–29.

Sewell, W. H. (1999). The concept(s) of culture. In V. E. Bonnell & L. Hunt (Eds.), *Beyond the cultural turn: New directions in the study of society and culture* (pp. 35–61). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Shrum, W., Duque, R., & Brown, T. (2005). Digital video as research practice: Methodology for the millennium. *Journal of Research Practice*, *1*(1), Article M4.

Steinberg, S. R. (2007). Where are we now? In P. McLaren & J. L. Kincheloe (Eds.), *Critical pedagogy: Where are we now?* (pp. ix–x). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Steinberg, S. R., & Kincheloe, J. L. (1998). *Students as researchers: Creating classrooms that matter*. Bristol, PA: Falmer Press, Taylor & Francis.

Tapscott, D. (2002). *Growing up digital: The rise of the net generation*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

CHAPTER 4

SITUATING GUATEMALA AND OUR INITIAL COMMUNITIES

Chirijox and San Juan La Laguna

The communities in which we work are situated in the hills and on the shores of Lake Atitlán, one of the most beautiful lakes in the world. The stunning beauty masks the region's troubled and violent history, which still impacts the indigenous people who make up approximately 75% of the population, 76.41% of whom continue to live below the poverty line. Specifically, the impoverished conditions are a direct consequence of oppression brought about by both Spanish colonization and by the more recent armed conflict that took place between 1960 and 1996.

The 500 years of treatment suffered by indigenous communities have affected these citizens' senses of identity and trust. Indigenous identity continues to experience instability, as a result of dominant pressures to leave indigenous identifiers behind. The incessant calling into question of customs, traditions, and language exasperates a "choice" to claim an indigenous identity and weakens already delicate trust relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Guatemalans. Mistrust and suspicion increase amidst the unfulfilled governmental promises to adhere to the 1996 Peace Accords, which were developed to equalize indigenous voice, identity, and rights. Through these actions, indigenous Maya in Guatemala have implicitly learned to keep their histories hidden and have suffered abuse because they have been afraid to express themselves freely and openly without criticism.

Examples of indigenous voices being agents of this history, however, do exist. In response to the internal conflict began, various accounts that narrate and criticize a history of oppression and discrimination in Guatemala have materialized (Menchu, 1983; Monterjo, 1987). More recently, the members of the Ixil community came together in solidarity to provide testimonial accounts of the oppression and genocide during the 30 year armed conflict. Together, these indigenous voices are examples of how the Maya rise up to become agents of history. At the same time, efforts to make the ongoing discrimination visible turn violent. For example, example Father Geradi announced his REMHI project, only to be murdered the next day. Less publicized accounts of violent or discrete acts against Maya-told stories continue to occur in an attempt to silence their voices. A seemingly benign example of this is the closing of Maya radio stations that broadcast in indigenous languages.

Compounding the suppression of indigenous voices during and post-conflict in Guatemala, the Guatemalan education system is widely known to be authoritative, hierarchical, and conventional. The Guatemalan school curriculum does not furnish

the tools to analyze, question, and understand these events and their impacts on their lives. Indigenous children and young adults are taught not to ask questions, share their opinions, nor explore their creativity. This in turn inhibits the ability to creatively problem solve solutions for their own purposes and futures, or to take on leadership roles in their communities. Literacy and graduation rates among indigenous populations are the lowest in the country. Access to exploring problems through critical and creative lenses is crucial to a student's personal development and identity formation, encouraging their natural curiosity and enhancing their problem-solving skills.

Despite the unsettling history and current conditions, locals and tourists adore the vibrant and spirited Lake Atitlán communities. This adoration stems from the unique artisan practices and the warmth of the welcoming people. In varied ways, each of these ethnic Maya groups is proud of their towns and their Maya heritages.

These communities and their members self-identify that it is importance to raise their voices through documenting, reviving, and sharing their cultures, traditions, histories, and languages. In particular, the Maya of Lake Atitlán include the Tz'utujiles, Kaqchikeles, and K'iches. These groups are derived from the Quiché region of Guatemala, who each migrated from Mexico to the highland region of Lake Atitlán in approximately 900 BC. The groups' languages are respectively named for their Maya Nations. Today there are an estimated 2.3 million K'iche' (Quiché), 500,000 Kaqchikel, and 60,000 Tz'utujil speakers. Though governmental efforts claiming to revive these languages have increased, new generations of youth are not speaking the language and the first-language literacy rates are at a dismal low of 1% of their respective populations. Local communities believe that internal efforts, and particularly the youth-created educational engagements, that result in cultural films, are a powerful vehicle for preserving and revitalizing Maya languages and traditions and for educating their youth.

Although the above describes the context of Lake Atitlán, Guatemala, similar histories, demographics, and statistics exists across indigenous communities throughout the world. Individually and collectively, our native heritage has endured unjust treatment and unequal opportunity. Through this educational model and digital media production focus, USH intends to assist in tipping the scale to open spaces for indigenous voice and participation. In uncovering and reviving their stories, the youth have an opportunity to work through the historical oppression, reconnect with their cultures and languages, and examine the ways that they participate in a technology-rich world.

By providing the following historical account of Guatemala, I offer a disclaimer. Though I have spent two years in Guatemala and have dedicated time to reading and learning about the history through academic and local accounts, I do not claim to be a Guatemala or a Maya expert. My research for this chapter stems from a combination of scholarly articles, Maya Guatemala nationals, and, of course, the accounts of our youth. Thus the presentation of this context is a combined interpretation based upon both traditionally validated and non-traditionally accepted sources.

MAYA CIVILIZATIONS

The term Maya comes from the last post-classic capital Mayapan, an ancient Yucatan city. To be Maya has many local interpretations, yet these people unite their ancestry by ethnicity and language.

Over its reign, Maya civilization spanned a significant portion of Mesoamerica. Their cities were concentrated in a large geographical area covering the Yucatan Peninsula, including its neighbors Quintana Roo and Campeche and reaching the Mexican states of Chiapas and Tabasco. Yet it did not end here, the Maya civilization spanned modern-day Guatemala, Belize and parts of Honduras and El Salvador. The geography is divided into three subsets: northern lowlands, southern lowlands, and southern highlands. Though the Maya never united as an empire, their massive autonomously run occupation of this large area indicates that this group was relatively secure and could withstand possible local invaders.

The earliest documentation of the Maya is 1800 B.C. From this time through 250 AD, the Maya were advanced in agriculture cultivating corn, beans, squash, and yucca. In their peak, they expanded to more than 40 cities reaching a population of nearly 2,000,000. In their cities, archeologists have found artifacts illustrating their ritually and politically informed culture. These artifacts included plazas, palaces, temples, ball court and signs of advanced farming, irrigation, and terraces. More than this, the civilization was creating pottery, symbolic artwork and early writings encouraged by their belief that there was no birth and no death, only a cyclical nature of life.

The classic legends, such as that of the Popol Vu creation story, illustrate their deep religious connections as well as their ritual of worshiping various gods associated with the sun, the moon, and corn. Their rituals, for example ceremonies, were evidence of how the Maya saw themselves as mediators between the inseparable relation of gods, the people, and the earth. Their impressive architecture and their pyramids show their sophisticated scientific and mathematical knowledge, some designs connecting precisely with stars and the seasons. This advanced astronomical knowledge is also evidenced in the creation of the Maya calendar.

A mysterious decline of Maya civilizations took place between the 8th and 9th century. While the Maya no longer lived in the popular lowland cities, those living in the highlands continued to flourish. It is the Maya civilizations living prosperously in the highland agricultural villages that the Spanish invaders would come to know. The rich, cultural Maya cities were now buried under layers of forest (Christenson, 2007; History Channel: http://www.history.com/topics/maya).

THE SPANISH CONQUEST

According to historians, the colonial period spans from 1524 through 1821. In this time period, the Maya populations both became prime targets of or contributors to the Spanish conquests (Restall, 1998). Having previously subjugated other groups,

the Spanish saw the densely populated and economically advanced villages as perfect candidates for labor exploitation. The indigenous people were used for the purposes of the conquests – to settle and control this "new" land.

Hernan Cortes sent Pedro de Alvarado to Guatemala in 1524. Alvardo, infamously brutal, entered the area with approximately 600 Spanish and indigenous Mexican solders. Bringing weapons and animals, Alvardo originally defeated a smaller nation near the Pacific slope of modern day Guatemala and then later a group near Xelajuj noj. There he encountered the K'iche', a prominent Maya Nation. Mexican soldiers acted as translators, and used their Nahuatl language to rename many of the towns. Xelajuj noj, or Xela for Guatemalan locals, would become officially documented and founded by the Spanish as Quetzaltenango. The Kaqchiqueles, another prominent Maya Nation in Guatemala, refused to join forces with the K'iche's against Alvardo's conquest. They instead became allies with the Spaniards against the K'iche's and eventually their other rival the Tz'utujils. However, unsettled by the endless demands of the Spanish, the Kaquchiqueles revolted, stating that Alvarado undermined their alliance. The revolt drove the Spanish out of Iximche', the town that Alvarado declared his capital. Alvarado burned it down and returned to Mexico.

Yet, Alvarado had not conquered Guatemala, instead he left only unrest, devastation and confusion. Jorge Alvarado's later entered to continue what his brother hadn't finished. Jorge found the Maya territories in wars and few Spanish inhabitants. He brought between 5,000 and 10,000 native Mexican warriors. These warriors fought with the Spaniards and sometimes waged their own battles. The few survivors settled in and around what is now known as Antigua. Between 1527 and 1529, Jorge continued to subdue Maya towns, capture the Chimaltenango territory of the Kachikeles, and conquer the K'iches. By 1533 the Spanish King had made the Alvarados governs of Guatemala.

Word of Pedro and Jorge's massive bloody devastation reached authorities in Mexico City. A judge declared that they would need to surrender their governance of Guatemala to Francisco de Orduña. Yet it was not the intention of Orduña to end the violence. Rather he continued the conquests and occasionally sent Jorge and Pedro back to Guatemala to subdue any Maya attempts to revolt. This continued until Pedro's death in 1541. Historians note that the brothers recorded massacring approximately 4,000,000 native Guatemalans, though there is no way to account for the accuracy of this number (Means, 1917; Restall & Asselbergs, 1997).

THE RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

Between 1541 and 1675 the Spanish rule was experiencing success and prosperity in the region. In addition to overseeing general administration, legal procedures, public works, and defense, the Spanish also organized and orchestrated various efforts to convert the Maya to their religion. The Spanish used the already solidified belief in the "purity of blood"[1] (Torres, 2012) ideology to justify not only their God-given right to the land, but also to their conversion of the indigenous peoples to Christianity.

The Spanish declared that the natives of *Capitania General de Guatemala* (a region encompassing various Central American countries and parts of Southern Mexico) needed to change their ways in order to ensure the salvation of their souls. The Spanish saw the Maya practices of paying homage to various gods and icons as seen as pagan and Satanist. In order to be saved, they would need to adopt a monotheistic model of Christianity. Christianity, for the friars, was also a means to their cultural unity.

Yet converting the Maya would not be easy. The Maya were curious about the Spanish God who in their eyes aided the Spaniard's success. The Maya wanted to incorporate this God into their already defined practices rather than abandon them. With limited manpower it became difficult to supervise the forced abandonment of Maya rituals. Without being under continued close and careful watch, Maya inhabitants were able to continue speaking their language and practicing their own traditions. Making it more challenging, the Maya people were dispersed in mountains living near their crops that they maintain. This distance incited the Spanish to devise another plan. In order to "civilize" them, the Spanish declared "town centers" and began to draw the Maya families toward them.

The friars built structures for their living quarters and near their homes were the churches and the altar. They altered the names of the Maya towns by putting a Christian name in front of the Maya name. They additionally assigned a patron saint to each defined ward. To assist in creating a Christian community culture around these towns, the Spanish created festival rituals for each patron saint. Though Maya icons were forbidden, the Spanish permitted the erection of shrines so to increase the likelihood of paying homage to the patron of the town. The Spanish saw these steps as security to increasing the frequency of Maya contact with the religious doctrine. A Spanish law acted as additional insurance. This law required landowners bring their Maya slaves and workers to the church one-hour per day to receive religious teachings (Farriss, 1984).

Maya were both controlled and liberated by religion. The church was a major force in shaping and maintaining colonial rule. The Maya were adopting and integrating religious practices and large sectors the majority of the Maya population identify as Christian. This perceived adoption is possibly why the Maya escaped a fate of a more typical assimilation and integration history experienced in other American nations.

Yet a pure adoption of a religion did not fully materialize. The Maya took aspects of the Christian religion – its rituals, its symbols, and its practices – and wove them into their already complex cultural, social and political traditions. Emerging from the Spanish teachings, two kinds of religious organizations materialized in the highlands of Guatemala, the guachibal and the cofradia. These interpretations of Catholic practices helped to give the Maya some autonomy from the hierarchies of both the central government and the Church (Shea, 2001).

The guachibal was in individualized or private family practice. It required that one person in the family be the guardian of this saint, keeping the image of the patron

saint safe in their home. It also came with the obligation to uphold the Christian celebrations associated with this saint, which included the masses, processions, and festivals. Incorporated also were the Maya traditions of dances and songs. Because this was a private family ritual, the Spanish didn't interfere with the practice. Though remnants of these customs can be found today, the concept of the guachibal ended in the 18th century.

The cofradias can still be found in each department and town across Guatemala. They are religious brotherhoods, modeled after those that existed in Spain. The idea of this brotherhood is that it unites a group of followers to practice the same roles and responsibilities as in the guachibal. However, the distinct difference is that the obligation lies in the hands of a group rather than in one individual. The Maya adoption of the cofradia was not an exact replica of the Spanish model. Instead, the Maya fashioned the concept to meet their own needs during the Spanish conquests. They continued to incorporate pre-Columbian traditions that today are seen by Guatemalan Evangelicals as pagan. For example, in the church the celebration or blessing for the harvest is done through a mass. People offer gifts such as corn, beans, chicken, and eggs with the presence of candles and incense. This emulates Maya cultural practices when the Maya performed ceremonies with similar materials, in which they also gave thanks for the harvest (Christenson, 2007). Yet the interpretation is that these were celebrations of many gods instead of one creator.

The Spanish benefited from these organizations in many ways. For one, since people paid dues to be part of the cofradia, the Spanish were able to use them as sources of income and local control. They also convinced the members to perform unpaid tasks such as propagating the religious message and repairing the church. While the Spanish benefited, from the cofradia, so did the Maya communities. Originally intended to protect the brotherhood; the egalitarian based ideology of the cofradia eventually branched out to social services which supported the sick, the widowed, and the poor. The cofradia enjoys a symbolic message of cohesion and at the same time conflict. With stories of corruption, misuse of funds, drunkenness and infidelity they can be seen as defying the ethics for which they stand.

Catholicism reigned as the primary religion in Guatemala for most of the colonial period. During this time Guatemala as a state slowly develops giving way to increasingly autonomous Maya indigenous communities and Ladino[2] landowners. Another religion that later becomes important to the political and social landscape of Guatemalan events is Evangelicalism. What becomes clear as Guatemala moves into the more recent era of its history is that religion continues to be closely tied to the political and social control from those in power positions.

A LINE OF DICTATORS

In 1821 Guatemala received its independence from Spain and became part of the Mexican Empire. By this time, Guatemala had been stratified into clear hierarchies between the Spanish and the indigenous Maya. For the indigenous in particular,

they were now ruled by the church and by the elite landowners of the nation. A special situation was granted by Spain, captaincy general. In 1823 Guatemala joins the United Provinces of Central American and finally has full independence in 1839, after the captaincy general Francisco Morazán divides the Provinces into 5 distinct independent nations. This occurs at the same time that the obvious power of Rafael Carrera rises in direct support by the indigenous population. Carrera declares himself "president for life", which he retains until his death in 1865.

Justo Rufino Barrios, a liberal leader and opposite of Carrera, takes office in 1873. This liberal figurehead advocated for Protestant religions and opened the door for other missionaries to continue to enter Guatemala. In an effort to modernize the country, Barrios tried to break down the power of the conservative rulers and their Catholic Church. He did this by eliminating clergy, nationalizing Christian schools, deporting foreign clergy and confiscating properties and goods. He is killed in a battle with El Salvador, one that he initiated in order to try to forcefully restore the United Provinces of Central America.

Corruption rises up in the ranks when in Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898–1920), the next president fixes a series of elections keeping him in office while he steals money from the nation. He is forcefully removed from office in the hand of the Guatemala City officials in 1920.

Jorge Ubico (1931–1944), a leader revered by the indigenous peoples, the only candidate for the presidency is "elected" to this position. While Barrios increased the Protestant missionary efforts in the rural indigenous communities, Ubico limited them. Ubico asserts various unrelated brutal tactics and corrupt policies that eventually get him ejected from office in 1944. The uprising that removes him sets the stage for a 10-year revolution.

Guatemala adopts its first democracy in an effort to achieve stability. It's primary election puts Juan José Arévalo in office. While he implemented the much-needed reforms around education, health care and civil rights, he relied on Evangelical missionaries to assist in his projects for the poor, especially in the role of education. Maya traditionalist opposed Evangelicalism stating that its individualistic stance was contrary to the community tradition, its ancestry and its cultural identity as Maya. Unlike Catholicism, Evangelicalism separated itself completely from any historical Maya customs raising the political divisions between social groups.

A candidate in the next election, Francisco Javier Arana, threatens his policies. Arana, however, is assassinated during the election and Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, a collaborator to Arévalo takes office. Arbenz continues the improvement policies that Arévalo began and goes one step further. He also legalizes the Guatemalan Labor Party and leads communists to rule many key government entities and hold government offices. Moreover, he allocates socialist policies and indigenous rights. The Catholic Church is his most vocal opponent.

The implementation the controversial allocation of land to peasants quickly shifts the historical possibility for the indigenous advancement and Guatemala's freedom. This act creates a political suicide given that much of this land belongs to

the United Fruit Company. The U.S., who owns this company, is infuriated. With the help of the CIA, the U.S. organizes a coup of Arenz. This coup includes employing Carlos Castillo Armas to lead an army of Guatemalan exiles living in Honduras. Armas and the army do not meet with Guatemalan military resistance given that the local military does not support the current president's policies. Armas become president and undoes every policy and reform since 1944. This was a significant hit for the Guatemalan poor of which the indigenous populations was the majority. In addition, he takes away voting right from illiterate Guatemalans. In 1957 Armas is assassinated, only three years after he takes his post. Guatemala next finds itself abandoning democracy and returning to violence and turmoil.

THE 36-YEAR INTERNAL CONFLICT

The death of Armas spurs a long string of military control. The first to assume power of Guatemala is Gen. Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, who has strong ties to the U.S. government. During his post, Guatemala begins to experience a number of abductions and violence. A small group of young army officers stage a rebellion that is unsuccessful. The survivors of this same group go into hiding, create strong relationships with Cuba, and eventually organize the Revolutionary Movement, marking the beginning of the 36-year war.

Left-wing guerilla groups emerged and began staging armed attacks and performing acts of economic and governmental sabotage. The militant rule, at the same time, began organizing killings and tortures of anyone suspected of being directly involved with these groups. These included students, professionals and peasants. Religion sees the opportunity to be intertwined in this movement. For example, Catholic activists associated with Catholic Action and influenced by Liberation Theology, view that joining the guerillas will be the only way to achieving social quality.

Between 1966 and 1982, a series of militant governments continued to rule. They staged focused attacks on the guerillas, breaking up those in the mountains. The guerillas retaliated staging counter attacks on Guatemala City; their hits were major government officials.

Leaders use religion as a means by which to lure followers. Specifically, the Evangelical congregation used the devastating 7.5 earthquakes as a scare tactic. They enticed the Maya people to join them by stating that the disaster is a sign of God's rage for forsaking him. In their history, Maya people gravitated toward different gods to seek protection and though the Evangelists mission is to strip Maya of their beliefs, they knew how to use them to their political benefit. The scheme resulted in the exponential increase of the Evangelical congregations. Evangelicals also encouraged the recruitment of women as their view on alcohol and celibacy was strict and very different than that of the cofradias. With alcoholism a problem in many indigenous communities, the women were enticed by the idea of taking up a religion that would yield the sobriety and faithfulness of their spouses.

Yet the position of the Catholic Church gained popularity again for a short time. Upcoming leader Lucas Garcia, elected under perceived fraud, saw Catholicism as an obstacle to communist conversion. He drew on the successful work of Catholics to fuel perceptions and create the assumption that they were radical leftists. The Catholics were working with the Maya indigenous groups in the villages where the guerrillas lived or occasionally visited and now were seen as dangerous. Between 1970 and 1981 government officials organizes assassinations of several Catholic priests and nuns, leading to the evacuation of 91 Priests and Brothers and 64 Nuns after they received death threats.

Unrest and instability continued through Lucas' term. That he was elected under precarious circumstanced caused a massive clash between the military and a Guerilla group. Lucas retaliated and his orders for this military attack leave many indigenous Maya peasants dead and others fleeing for the mountains. Guerilla groups united as did a military group led by General Rios Montt after Amnesty International charges Garcia for using his political power to indiscriminately kill 5,000 people.

Deposed from office and a group of troops, again led by junior offices, organized a coup to prevent General Angel Anibal Guevara from taking office. They instead supported General Rios Montt, now a general and a minister in the Evangelical church. Following in the footsteps of his predecessor Garcia, Montt played an important role in using Evangelicalism to conjure up fear and help to introduce the Evangelical followers into the internal conflict. It was under Rios Montt's term that militarization increases as does the organized military massacres of civilians, the largest during this time. To be sure, Rios Montt was convicted of two counts of genocide on April 19, 2013. The first was in relation to 15 massacres in the Ixil region of Quiche between 1982 and 1983. The charges include 1,771 counts of death, 29,000 counts of forced displacement, 8 counts of sexual abuse, and 14 counts of torture. The second is in relation to 201 deaths in the Peten region in 1982. The case was deemed "illegal" and a retrial has been ordered.

Citied for being a religious fanatic creating a corrupt government, Minister of Defense, Gen. Oscar Humberto Mejia Victores organized a coup to overthrow Rios Montt in 1983. This same year, the publication of *I Rigoberta Menchu, An Indian Woman in Guatemala* helped to raise consciousness of the corruption in Guatemala. Mejia advocated for a return to democracy. In 1985, the elected leader Vinicio Cerezo drafted a new constitution and Guatemala experienced 2 years of quiet under his term. Yet failures to create a successful and stable Guatemala led to accusations of corruption ensued. It was also a time of increasing social hills such as a decline in literacy, malnutrition, and infant mortality brought on by funds being allocated to social services. Violence was again increasing and with it an unstable Guatemala. The Evangelical dominated the religious majority until 1986.

The next democratically elected leader, Jorge Serrano Elias (1991), had little if any documented success bringing Guatemala closer to stability. His policies were not supported and his corruption was discovered. He fled the country after illegally dismantling congress and the Supreme Court and attempted to take away civil rights.

An elected the Human Rights Ombudsman, Ramiro De Leon Carpio in 1993, who completed Serano's term and unleashed a vigorous anticorruption campaign. In the pursuant years, the Catholic Church, the UN and later a handful of countries played roles in initiating and supporting a peace process. In December 1996 a Peace Accords[3] is signed, 36 years after the beginning of this armed conflict. At the close of this conflict, the statistics related to it are astounding. More than 200,000 the total fatalities were unnamed Maya indigenous victims. Moreover, hundreds of thousands were either displaced or gone missing.

MAYA TODAY

For nearly 500 years the Maya people endured a number of social, political and religious policies that have attempted to extinguish them or at the vary least abandon their beliefs and customs. They have been historically denied sharing in any economic growth or prosperity. For years, they were ridiculed and out of fear of losing their children, parents and grandparents would hide children and keep them from going to school. Today, indigenous communities still struggle to escape this history and remain the targets of racism and marginalization, and most of all injustice.

Most recently, the Peace Accords promised improvements for Maya indigenous populations. To name a few, reforms to education, human rights violations, and land rights were to be addressed. Whether the Peace Accords have kept their promise is a topic of debate. A 2014 report form the World Bank states that there has been significant progress. They report that Guatemala has "made progress in strengthening institutions and opening international trade". They go on to declare that there is stable economic growth and potential for speeding up economic growth. Given that chronic malnutrition and mother-child mortality rates are still among the highest in the world, poverty rates still hover around 50%, and that crime rates are still staggering, indigenous citizens still feel the challenges of staggering statistics:[4]

- 75%: The illiteracy rate in many rural areas of Guatemala
- Two-thirds: The proportion of Guatemalan children living in poverty
- $4 a day: The average daily earnings of a rural, Guatemalan family
- Nine out of ten: The proportion of schools in rural Guatemala that lack books
- One out of ten: The proportion of rural Guatemalans who attend middle school
- 1.8: The average number of years an indigenous Guatemalan woman stays in school

Despite any efforts to exterminate the Maya, they did not vanish. This vibrant citizenry still exists today with rich interpretations of ancestral practices and rituals, which are clearly echoes of and a continuation from the past. This indigenous civilization continues to captivate the imaginations and curiosities of many. Their civilization has brought about significant inquiry about these

people and their history. They were an extremely advanced civilization of mathematicians and scientists. At the same time, they evoke echoes of mystical existences.

OUR INITIAL COMMUNITIES

In the first iteration of Unlocking Silent Histories, we entered two communities whose histories are couched within this turbulent Maya chronicle. Yet vistors to the community would not necessarily feel the profound effects felt by these communities. These peaceful, hardworking, and welcoming people, never discuss their trials and struggles they ensure to survive. They smile and continue working day to day. Their appreciation for opportunities to learn and to share their ideas, knowledge, and dreams emanate in the ways that they have taken us in and taken on the challenge of Unlocking Silent Histories. In what follows, I offer a window to the current contexts of the two villages, where our chance to learn from and with these amazing people began.

Chirijox

Chirijox is an aldea (very small town) that is nestled in the Guatemalan Highlands, yet accessible directly from the Pan American Highway. The unwieldy terrain and long distance between Panajachel and Chirijox make our travels long and sometimes difficult. This map shows the distance (calculated by google maps to be 40 minutes), but it does not capture the reality of the journey. In a combination of buses, pickups, and microbuses, traveling over windy roads and nearly vertical mountains make this trip as long as two hours.

This rural and remote village lies within the Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán Municipality and is bordered by the tree-lined mountains. Hints of Maya traditions are seen in the weaving culture, the temacales, as well as the pure indigenous language, K'iche'. The youth here have simple lives, which distances them from tourism or its persistent influence of the outside world. Yet, these youth are not isolated as one might imagine. They have cell phones, facebook, and television, embracing Western cultures and philosophies that began to generate through the influence of religion.

According to the Adaptation Fund Board Program 2012 report, Chirijox has a population of 2,005. 1011 of these are men and 944 are women. Their report includes Chirijox in its data as part of the larger municipality of Santa Catarina Ixahuacán, with a population of 40,653. Within this region, 99.91 % of the population is indigenous. 44.7 % live in extreme poverty and 90.01% live in poverty. The literacy rate in this town is at 58.62 %. The population of children is 19,108 (ranging between the ages of 0 – 14).

When we started, seven youth volunteered to participate in the program. These students included, Marcos (19), Carmen (17), Emilio (13), Fabiola (14), Catalina (13), Edgar (13), and Isreal (20). Israel chose to remove himself first. He was outside our targeted age range and his responsibilities as a husband and father caused him to decline participation after the first workshop. Marcos was also slightly outside our targeted age range, however, he brought significant voice and leadership to the group. It was disappointing and difficult to see him go, however, he felt the pressure of helping his family and work replaced the time he had to dedicate to this project. He hopes one day to finish his video. Finally, Edgar felt similar pressure that Marcos did. His time quickly was consumed by schoolwork and responsibilities at home. He hopes to one day rejoin us as well. Our remaining four students are featured below with their names, their topic and a link to their film.

	Catalina Nacasia Sheep and Weaving https://vimeo.com/81058914		Carmen Tzoc Portillo https://vimeo.com/84079635
	Emilio Tzoc Portillo Alcoholism https://vimeo.com/89448824		Fabiola Tambriz Sheep and Weaving https://vimeo.com/81058914

San Juan La Laguna

San Juan la Laguna rests on the shores of Lake Atitlan, encompassed within the hills and mountains of the Guatemalan highlands. The mostly indigenous population around the stunningly beautiful Lake Atitlán region is deeply affected by historical events that still impact the indigenous people who make up approximately 75% of the population and many of whom continue to live below the poverty line. The impoverished conditions are a direct consequence of oppression brought about by both Spanish colonization and intensified by the many human rights violations committed during the more recent armed conflict that took place between 1960 and 1996.

Nearly 7,000 people inhabit this resilient indigenous community, 99.66% being of Tz'utujil decent. The Tz'utujiles, originating from Mexico, are one of three Maya groups descending from the Quiche region of Guatemala. San Juan la Laguna is one of six communities still speaking Tz'utujil. The language is also spoken in the surrounding communities of Santiago Atitlán, San Pedro la Laguna, San Lucas Toliman, San Pablo la Laguna, and Chicacao. UNESCO reports that an estimated 63,237 Tz'utujil speakers remain and that the linguistic variation between the villages is significant.

The statistics note that 38% of the San Juan indigenous community lives in extreme poverty and 76.41% live in poverty. Conversely, an impressive 90.48% of the town is considered literate. Despite the dismal poverty rates, locals and tourists adore the vibrant and spirited San Juan la Laguna. This adoration stems from San Juan's unique ability to maintain a balance between its historical roots and modern amenities. Due to its aquatic and land accessibility, many tourists visit the unique town. Yet, locals consciously resist the seemingly imposing infiltration of western ideals.

San Juan la Laguna is specifically known for maintaining important aspects of cultural heritage that other Tz'utujil villages have lost. These villagers live harmoniously with nature, drawing on it to maintain practices of plant-based/natural textile dyeing, backstrap loom weaving, traje típico, traditional community healers and shamans, medicinal plants, agricultural practices, and Maya spirituality. The Tz'utujiles of San Juan are proud of their town and their Maya heritage, and go to great lengths to sustain their values while being receptive to visitors.

San Juan's pride and commitment to maintaining culture is explicitly evident as one walks through the streets of the community. In the pathways, passersby witness the abundant murals illustrating Maya traditions and Spanish influence. The artisan spirit permeates external walls, reaching internal spaces. Men and women make their living painting and weaving. Both practices have a signature unique to and identifiable as coming from this Tz'utujil community. These citizens, and the community library especially, express a vested interest and deep commitment to cultural preservation and revitalization efforts.

Because of its accessibility, many tourists visit the unique town. Walking up the hill after disembarking from the boat, one is immediately struck be the artwork. Painting and textiles line the small storefronts all the way up to the top of town. The murals are hard to miss with their representations of a Maya past. Paintings of traditional Maya practices as well as those depicting the cultural hybrids of Spanish and Maya cultures tell stories of the timeline that sets the history of this proud Tz'utujil community. The intersection between Western world progress and Maya cultural traditions is visibly evident. Along with traditional dress and spoken language, ceremonies and other historical customs infiltrate conversations.

In San Juan, we began with seven students as well. In our seven month with them, only one left the group. These included Chema (17), Carlos (18), Elias (17), Norma (18), Pedro (16), Lucila (14) and Juana (15). Juana, the sister of Lucila and Norma,

	Lucila Mendoza Traditional Dance https://vimeo.com/89500801		Norma Mendoza Maya Baths https://vimeo.com/85623980
	Elias Ujpan Weaving & Traditional Dress https://vimeo.com/81043195		Pedro Quic Maya Ceremonies & Pelota Maya *Link still to come*
	Jose (Chema) Vasquez Fighting Women https://vimeo.com/81062150		Carlos Vasquez Success https://vimeo.com/81130771

Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán municipality[5]

Category	*Population*			*Households*					
	Indigenous	*Non indigenous*	*Total*	*Area*		*Literacy of household head*		*Gender of household head*	
				Urban	*Rural*	*Literacy*	*Illiterate*	*Men*	*Women*
Above poverty line	10,026	11	10,037	342	1,995	1,274	1,063	1,809	528
Below poverty line	16,004	10	16,014	454	2,335	1,419	1,370	2,347	442
Below extreme poverty line	17,300	–	17,300	901	1,735	753	1,883	2,188	448
Overall Population below Poverty/ Extreme Poverty	33,304	10	33,314	1,355	4,070	2,172	3,253	4,535	890

San Juan La Laguna municipality

Category	*Population*			*Households*					
	Indigenous	*Non indigenous*	*Total*	*Area*		*Literacy of household head*		*Gender of household head*	
				Urban	*Rural*	*Literacy*	*Illiterate*	*Men*	*Women*
Above poverty line	2,167	7	2,174	171	311	386	96	421	61
Below poverty line	4,199	27	4,226	474	335	632	177	725	84
Below extreme poverty line	2,624	6	2,630	252	197	292	157	404	45
Overall Population below Poverty/ Extreme Poverty	6,823	33	6,856	726	532	924	334	1,129	129

cited her increased interest and occupation with sports and dance as her reason for leaving.

According to the Adaptation Fund Board Program 2012 report, the population of San Juan is 8,149. Of this number 49.92% are women, 99.66 % are indigenous and 3617 are children. The statistics note that 38 % of San Juan's community live in extreme poverty and 76.41% live in poverty. An impressive 90.48 % of the town is considered literate.

LOOKING FORWARD

The following chapters capture the experiences of our initial implementation of Unlocking Silent Histories in these two Maya communities. Each Chapter begins with an excerpt from my personal journal. This account has two purposes. It allows the reader to enter the Guatemala context through my personal experience. In additions, it is an effort to connect that context to the topic that they student chose. The chapters then begin to describe each of the three foundational tenets of our work (Chapters 5–7) and three methodological principles that guide our emergent learning designs (Chapters 8–10). Our work is ever growing and changing though our participation with our communities. The book then, is an insight into how we engage in practice together and how that work continues to transform yet maintains philosophical principles that are our foundation.

NOTES

[1] Purity of Blood is a concept used during the conquests. It is still highly debated as to its exact meaning, however, it is most widely associated with the Spanish elite's memberships in what was considered to be defined by one's purity, cast, color, and quality.

[2] Indigenous and European or criollo-mestizo citizens that associate their origins to Europe instead of indigenous ancestry.

[3] https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/site_media/media/accords/Guatemala_1997_CPA_and_Annexes.pdf

[4] http://www.coeduc.org/guatemala/poverty.html

[5] National Statistics Institute (INE) – Municipalities Census (pp. 116 & 177 of the Adaptation Fund Board Report).

REFERENCES

Christenson, A. (2007). *Popol Vuh: Sacred book of the Quiché Maya people* (A. J. Christenson, Trans., & Commentary). (Electronic version of original 2003 publication). Retrieved from http://www.mesoweb.com/publications/Christenson/PopolVuh.pdf

Farriss, N. M. (1984). *Maya society under colonial rule: The collective enterprise of survival*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hering Torres, M. S. (2011). La limpieza de sangre en España: un modelo de interpretación. en N. Böttcher, B. Hausberger, y M. S. Hering Torres (Eds.), *En El peso de la sangre. Limpios, Mestizos y Nobles en el Mundo Hispánico* (pp. 23–54). México: El Colegio de México.

History Channel. (n.d.). *Maya.* Retrieved from http://www.history.com/topics/maya

History of the Spanish Conquest of Yucatan and of the Itzas, Volumes 6–7. (Eds.), Philip Ainsworth Means, Andrés de Avendaño y Loyola, Alonso Cano.

Menchu, R. (1983). My name is Rigoberta Menchú and this is how my consciousness was raised. *Testimonial Biography.*

Montejo, V. (1987). *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan village*. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone.

Restall, M. (1997). *The Maya world: Yucatec culture and society, 1550–1850*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Restall, M. (1998). *Maya conquistador*. Boston. MA: Beacon Press. (Paperback 1999)

Restall, M., & Asselbergs, F. (2007). *Invading Guatemala: Spanish, Nahua, and Maya accounts of the conquest wars* (Latin American Originals #2). University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Shea, M. E. (2001). *Culture and customs of Guatemala*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Thompson, J. E. S. (1970). *Maya history and religion*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

PERSONAL JOURNAL, FEBRUARY 2013

It was another Thursday morning. I walk from my home with two heavy backpacks, computers, chargers, cameras and recorders inside. I meet Marisol[1] at 8 AM in front of the coffee shop in the center of Panajachel to commence our journey to Chirijox. We board what appears to be a school bus, yet it has been transformed and spruced up into colorful artistic interpretations and expressions. The *extranjeros* call these *camionetas* "chicken buses". I do not have an exact history on why this is, but it seems to me that perhaps chickens were seen on one of their journeys. Or perhaps, they felt as if they were livestock stuffed and shuttled across the country. I won't ever know for certain, but I would find myself riding in this local public transportation many times.

I never thought I would be back on a school bus, let alone one converted into a flashy form of public transportation. That experience ended when I was 16. It was at that age that I could drive to school. Yet here I was stepping up into this bus and these new adventures would soon overtake any semblance of a memory I would have from my early school travels.

In the U.S., when I was growing up, school buses were a symbol of safety. They were always yellow and black with lights that would flash yellow then red to let traffic know when they were slowing down to stop to pick up a child. The flashers begin early enough for cars to slow down and then the red signified cars should stop and wait. Children would quietly step up with backpacks and lunch boxes in hand, their parents often watching from the roadside, and the bus would not move until every body was safely seated. Small children would wave goodbye to their parents as the bus slowly drove forward. Traffic was free to move as well.

Inside the bus, rules were posted on the side of the large mirror that the bus driver used to look back and monitor our behavior. The signs read, "stay in your seat", "no food and drink", or "keep your voices down". I don't have distinct memories of every moment on those buses, but I do remember the driver's eyes looking back at

passengers to be sure that each of us stayed in our seats and behaved. The seats fit two people or maybe three if the bodies were small. Modernized buses, I believe, are now also equipped with seatbelts. Here in Guatemala, these icons of safety dissolve in the colors that camouflage the Guatemalan *camioneta*.

Marisol and I stand on the side of the road and the bus slowly comes to a halt. A man steps down from the bus and pushes Marisol and me up the stairs. As I step up, his voice echoes in my ears, "Sololá! Sololá!" The man does not enter behind us. Instead he runs to the street, directs the driver around traffic, and then climbs the ladder on the back of the bus. Any familiarity I associated with the school bus shatters as we speed away.

The bus begins to move as we struggle through the crowd of people and eventually find a tiny sliver of material to sit on. I find a space, but one cheek is on the seat and one hovering in the aisle. When I do sit, I look up at the front of the bus. There are signs in the same places that I remember though these all have a religious theme. They include scriptures from the bible, calling passengers to ask for God's protection. My attention is drawn to the open door, when the man who shoved us on the bus appears from nowhere. He has climbed over the top of the bus while we were at full speed.

I look around at the vaguely familiar representations of the "school bus". The mirror to gaze back on the passengers was still present but looking back really has no ritual here. Missing also from the safety routine is the yellow and red signals to stop. Instead, the bus comes to a screeching halt and often it takes off before people find a place to secure themselves. There are three or sometimes four people sitting in one seat. If those spaces fill up, it doesn't matter, more pile in. This is despite the fact that the bus is jam-packed. Passengers stand in the aisles all the way to – and sometimes on – the stairwell, prohibiting the door to close.

The bus driver shifts in an effort to struggle up the steep and windy roads. He whips around each curve, throwing passengers from side to side. Although I am on a seat, I don't feel secure. The forces pull me rapidly from right to left and back again. Marisol and I look at each other. I'm using every muscle in my body to try to keep myself centered. I laugh, thinking this is quite a workout. I feel anxious as I look around to see if others feel the same. I get a small sense of security because the locals look completely at ease. Given that this is the local transportation, I imagine that many of these people travel this route everyday. I suspect to them, that this all likely feels normal.

The challenge of staying calm in this crowded and unstable ride is amplified by the loud music. It is hard to concentrate on keeping our balance. The music blasts from the newly installed yet second-rate speakers. Every bus plays different music. The genres include U.S. softrock and easy listening or Spanish influenced salsa and bachata. Today, however, it is religious music.

This music takes my mind to my current destination and my work with Carmen. The population of Chirijox (Evangelical, Mormon, and Catholic) is made up of citizens of Chuaxajil (25% Evangelical, 72% Catholic, 1% Mormon, 2% without an

affiliated organized religion). The influence of religion here has altered the customs and practices of its population in this area. The people in Chirijox do not practice Maya traditions, nor can they describe with much detail the past cultural practices. Aside from weaving and their language, the connection to this history is nearly lost. At the time of this ride, I did not know that religion would become a part of Carmen's theme that would emerge as a point of contention. It seemed to happen by accident. Religion is a topic not necessarily proudly explored here in this indigenous community. Rather, religion is deeply integrated into every day practices, without analysis or question.

My thoughts return to the bus in an instant. We near our stop and the ayudante (person who collects the money) yells, "Chirijox!". His hands move with purpose motioning us to hurry to the front of the bus. We squeeze through people and I try my hardest not to hit people with my backpack with three computers and my cameras, my bag with another computer and my tripod – all of which I carry to the community every week. We are rushed off the bus when we reach the blue *tienda* [small store] at the entrance of this small town. We barely have our feet on the ground and the bus takes off. The crisp morning air and the stillness of the rural community welcomes us, and assists in recovering our composure and calming our nerves. We appreciate the good fortune of again arriving safely. The gradual hill in front of us leads us to Fabiola's house, just a few meters away. It is here that we meet each week and it is here that Carmen experiences the unfolding process of connecting with local voice and knowledge to shape the direction of her learning.

NOTE

[1] Marisol is the program coordinator at The Maya Traditions Foundation. She and I traveled together to Chirijox each week for the first six months of the project.

CHAPTER 5

CARMEN TZOC PORTILLO, 17
CHIRIJOX, NAHUALÁ

"La Naturaleza"
[Nature]

CONNECTING WITH LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND VOICE AS CENTRAL TO LEARNING

Aprendí a no ser una conformista. Por que soy asi. [I have learned not to be a conformist. Because I am this way.]

(Carmen, documentary voiceover)

This chapter introduces and explains the first tenet and foundational principle of Unlocking Silent Histories (USH): the importance of local knowledge and voice as foundational to authentic learning. Local knowledge is defined as the ideas, practices, and norms associated with the given context. Voice reflects the expression of local knowledge as well as indicates the opportunity to speak and express oneself freely in participation of, in the case of USH, the design of learning environments (content and participation).

The focus on local knowledge, voice, and its connection to learning is largely in response to the historical events surrounding the education of indigenous youth. Specifically, colonial domination played (and continues to play) a role in formalizing education as a mechanism by which to dismantle and degrade indigenous knowledge and voice. This has contributed to an unconscious belief that the diverse set of cultures and knowledges that these students bring to the classroom is not valued or is "incorrect". Further, this enduring hegemonic practice, occurring for more than five centuries, has brought about the devaluation and deculturalization of indigenous existence.

What is more, such an approach to education forcefully distances indigenous youth from their cultural and linguistic heritages, both of which have been empirically proven to positively contribute to learning. Consequently, many marginalized youth experience a jarring disconnect between their education and their every-day lives. Learning has been – and often continues to be – consciously or unconsciously organized to attempt to erase, fetishize or villainize their historical pasts, making it difficult if not impossible to connect their knowledge to learning.

In an attempt to counter this history, USH creates learning from within the local context – defined and led by youth's exploration of uncovering local knowledges and in asserting their voices. However, our work cannot be solely about stating an intention to value indigenous knowledge and voice. Attention to this tenet also requires realizing that young people will traverse and grapple with the oppressive structures that have diminished indigenous existence. The recognizing of and operating through this dilemma, in order to accept that they can draw on local knowledge and voice, is a continual process in doing this work.

INTRODUCING CARMEN

Carmen (K'iche' Maya) is a 17-year old whose charisma is intoxicating. She is one of four youth who participated in the initial pilot of USH. Carmen is the fourth of five girls in her family. Ahead of her are five sisters and after her is her younger brother Emilio (also in this project – Chapter 6). She had an older brother as well, who tragically died of alcoholism at the age of 20.

Penetrating Carmen's core is the persistent message that education is critical to overcoming her local impoverished conditions. To be sure, Carmen's father demands that she receive an education prior to her having even one thought about marriage or children. As with other economically depressed villages, Carmen's father views education as "the way out" of poverty. His dream for his fourth daughter meets obstacles as Carmen struggles to receive the best education that she deserves. The schools that she and other youth in her indigenous village attend are under-resourced and over-crowded. They experience didactic teaching models that do not encourage them to think critically or creatively. Rather, they are asked to accept the delivered knowledge and to conform to the hierarchically established rules. Compounding this is that fact that Carmen has only attended school for 4 hours a day. When she was younger, she attended in the afternoons and in the mornings while in "high school".

Carmen was forced to speak and learn in Spanish. This is the case despite the fact that speaking native languages in the home is the norm. While the government mandates that Maya language be taught in Guatemalan schools, Carmen would receive very little exposure to her language or her Maya history. Instead, she receives the message that Western languages are privileged, as are their associated histories and ideals. One example, as Carmen shares with us, is that Spanish colonization is a myth and that the Spanish were forever in power over indigenous Maya peoples.

Creating an even more complex educational problem is that Guatemalan teachers complete their degrees at an early stage of education. For example, Carmen finished her elementary certification to teach at the age of 18. Many Maya young men and woman obtain this degree in their last two years of what we in the U.S. would call secondary education. This government-recognized degree allows citizens to obtain a teaching job at the age of 18. During her studies, Carmen is exposed to theories and practices that include education visionaries such as Maria Montessori and Paulo Freire. These models challenge the norms of didactic and conditioning learning models currently practiced in indigenous schools. Yet Carmen learns about these theories in the very structures that oppose the innovative foundations of these models. Namely, she receives lectures and recalls the information in the form of written exams.

Carmen tells me that she has never been asked to assert her view or to connect her daily life to her education. Instead she is taught to follow the provided directions and accept the more widely accepted standards. If she complies with these ideals, she is implicitly told, she will achieve success. In some ways, Carmen embraces this normalized way of looking at the world. Yet she alternatively expresses that learning and curiosity are at the core of her existence. A self-proclaimed geek of sorts, she asserts, "I always loved to learn. It never mattered what the subject was, I always had a curiosity about everything" (fieldnotes, translated from Spanish, 06/12/13). Carmen challenges cultural gender norms and asks critically profound questions. She has a thirst for learning, being educated, and completing her college degree.

This bright and vivacious young woman is not your average burgeoning indigenous female. Boys and the consideration of marriage are of interest to her, but these local trending goals are the least important achievement on her list. This vision of education before anything is not a common foresight of the local women of Carmen's hometown. Carmen is high-spirited, vocal, assertive, opinionated, and walks through life with unwavering confidence. As I come to know Carmen through the first iteration of USH, I see her struggle with what counts as "truth" and "knowledge". As she traverses her indigenous life and the modern world, she both gravitates toward and away from the unconsciously lived colonial norms dominating her world. This is perhaps in spite of and a result of her vacillation between competing worlds.

"Inside" World

Carmen was born and raised in the *aldea* (very small town) of Chuaxajil. The literal K'iche' translation is "in front of the mountains". This docile community is a 20-minute walk from the *caserío* (small town) of Chirijox, where the youth convene each week to participate in Unlocking Silent Histories. Most of the people one might meet in this village are quiet and reserved. Moreover, they are occupied with simply existing.

Carmen currently lives with her mother, father, and younger brother in a modest home that faces the mountains. Like many Guatemalan homes, theirs is a combination of indoor and outdoor spaces. The first time that I visit her home, Carmen enthusiastically greets me with a smile and a hug. She opens to the door and I enter into an enclosed dirt courtyard. In this courtyard, is where corn is milled, wood is cut, and weavings are created. Over the high fences the property looks out on mountains and cornfields. On the floor around the perimeter, her grandmother is sitting on the ground. She is removing pieces from the ears of corn, while behind her a man is swinging a mallet to crush the corn.

I look around taking in the surroundings. In front of me is there is long adobe building that meets another structure. The adobe quarters create an L shape that acts as one corner of the property. Just beyond the smaller part of the L is another entryway. Below this is the kitchen, adjacent to the door that I just entered. Tall aluminum panels act as fences, setting the other barriers of the large square that I stand in.

Carmen generously welcomes me into the larger living quarters. We greet her mother as we pass her sitting on the ground weaving. I enter see find beds, a dining table and chairs and some weaving materials. The tour continues into the smaller room, where there are three additional beds, two dressers for clothes, and much more weaving material.

A Guatemalan custom, Carmen offers me coffee. I follow her into the kitchen and as I enter the light quickly dims. Inside a wood fire is burning, heating the *plancha* [a traditional wood burning stove]. The water for the coffee is boiling and we wait a few more minutes. I look are the room and see a very humble collection of dishware and a set of stools. We grab the stools and sit for a moment until the coffee is finished. Carmen pours a cup and offers it to me. We leave the space. In front of me, just past the *pila* [two basin sink] and a stack wood, I recognize the *temascal* [Maya sauna or bath].

Carmen, and her family's, daily practices are ones that harmoniously integrate the terrain within and just beyond her home. Each day, her family rises at 5 AM and begins to work. This work includes starting the fire in the kitchen, gathering materials from the mountains, and preparing the weaving textiles. Carmen and her mother are also found preparing *masa* [corn dough] and other food, washing dishes, tidying the living quarters, and readying the sauna. Later, Carmen's mother will be busy creating *tejidos* [weavings] for the fair-trade market supported by the Maya Traditions Foundation. Meanwhile, Carmen's brother Emilio and father set out into the mountains and to gather wood for cooking. Her brother returns to the house at approximately 8:30 AM in order to attend school, while their father continues to work in the fields.

What I witness in Carmen's home is similar to those within households across this community. Their days are filled with manual labor that does not end until well past dark. The endless hours of working and supporting each other seem to be one of their weapons against being defeated by abject poverty. With daily struggles dominate

their survival, the luxury of leveraging and asserting local knowledge and voice to create learning opportunities is conceivably the last thing on their minds. The opportunities to include their voices in the larger political structure are perhaps even farther from their expectations of what is possible. This is amplified by the fact that the voices of the Maya people were suppressed through colonization, coercion, and fear.

Yet this history and current reality provides the very reason to include the valuable everyday knowledge and practices that are the roots of centuries of resilience and potentially can influence the positionality of indigenous voices in shaping their educational and social futures.

"Outside" World

Outside Carmen's home existence, she participates in various activities. Perhaps the most prevalent are her active involvement in the community and with Maya Traditions Foundation.

When not at home helping the family, Carmen can be found assisting with various community initiatives and organizations. She supports and administrates assistance to various groups. For example, she serves lunch to loggers or assists with finances at a community service organization. In addition, she is actively involved in her church. Carmen self identifies as an Evangelical Christian, one of the two prominent religious groups in her community. She attends church with her family. The role of the church in Guatemala has an extensive history (Chapter 4). Carmen views the Christian religions as integral to Guatemalan life, and at the same time articulates that they are not native to the Maya history that existed prior to Spanish colonization.

At Maya Traditions Foundation (MTF), Carmen participates in various youth education programs that the foundation offers. In fact the first time that I met Carmen, she was teaching concepts of nutritional health to a group of mothers. I actually thought that she was at least 20 because of the way that she presented herself with such confidence. The workshop she led was part of one of the social education programs that MTF offers to members of their communities. Young ambitious youth like Carmen travel significant distances to the MTF office to learn the content, and then return to the communities to share that knowledge. The content integrates indigenous practices and contemporary, or Western, science.

In addition to these examples, Carmen is an avid technology user. Most of the times that I was with her, her phone was in her hand. Occasionally she would receive phone calls that would interrupt her thoughts or conversations, but mostly, she was busy texting on her phone. The fact that the phone was actually attached to her body became an ongoing joke between Carmen and myself. Carmen and I also communicate through Facebook. Her posts include photos of herself, her family and friends, her participation in Unlocking Silent Histories, and reposts of religious quotes.

In most of her outside world, as with her education, Carmen is primarily interacting in circles that are highly influenced by Western ideals. In nearly every arena of her participation, the legitimatization of Western values, practices, and lifestyles are unconsciously reinforced. The exception to this is her involvement with the Maya Traditions Foundation. MTF exposes Carmen to Maya knowledge and rituals and thus to the possibility that different forms of "truth" and "knowledge" are imaginable. With experiences such as with MTF, Carmen witnesses people or groups celebrating historical Maya practices, rather than trying to make their existence fictitious or malevolent.

Throughout the USH process Carmen vacillates between past and present efforts to create the unwritten assumptions of knowledge and reality. Carmen tells me that she has always tended towards conformity of what she is taught. Yet Carmen's inquisitiveness accelerates her active negotiation of conflicting social structures of indigenous and Western ideals, bringing her to be increasingly open to the notion of what counts as local knowledge and what it means for her, and her community, to assert voice.

Understanding Carmen's struggle between worlds is critical to opening spaces for Carmen, her peers, and our future students to confidently participate in USH and adopt its principle of the important place of local knowledge and voice in the design of learning environments, determined by youth inquiry.

ENGAGING IN THE USH PHILOSOPHY

With the Chirijox group, we introduce our work to the youth in an intense two-day workshop. During that time, these eager learners receive their cameras, experiment with filming and editing, and watch examples of documentary shorts. Following this, we meet each Thursday morning for four hours in one of the youth, Fabiola's home. The topics of the weeks depend upon where the youth are and what goals they define. Specifically, we might work with them on solidifying a theme, strengthening their interview questions and techniques, reviewing films, or writing stories. The youth do not experience USH as mandated curriculum or as a series of lectures and content delivery. Rather they engage in participatory work from the first time we meet them.

Carmen is one of four youth from the Chirijox group who complete our first iteration of USH. The others are Emilio, Fabiola, and Catalina. Carmen quickly rises up as the leader of the group. Namely, she takes on many of the decision-making and organizational responsibilities. For example, she coordinates all our meetings in both the Chirijox or at the Maya Traditions office in Panajachel (Pana). Carmen also manages the finances when we reimburse the youth for their trip to Pana. Carmen diligently makes sure that each of them is adequately reimbursed for their fare.

The cohesiveness in the Chirijox group is unmistakable. This team makes decisions, travels, and works closely together. Their affinity toward working as

a unit leads this group to initially interpret and desire to create a team-produced documentary. In the end, however, they make a decision to separate to make multiple films. There are three completed films that result from the work in this group. Carmen's film is "Nature". How this groups comes to this decision to complete individual films and how Carmen's path toward her final film unfolds is set forth by our premise of building learning from the local visions and opinions of the youth and of the Chirijox community. In continuing to follow Carmen through her USH experience, we explore the ways in which local knowledge and voice is drawn upon, negotiated, and emphasized and how "collectively" we push the boundaries on the inner/outer world dichotomy.

Framing Shots

In keeping with our emergent philosophy, we encourage a hands-on and social learning approach. Carmen's first experience with the camera is in the two-day intensive workshop we hold in the Maya Traditions Sala. When we distribute the cameras, the youth take them in their hands and begin playing, experimenting, and recording video through their own lenses. This play is not solitary, but rather through peer learning. We watch this enthusiastic, smile-filled social learning process, where the four of participants share what they learn and film. Carmen exemplifies the spirit of this philosophy as she quickly learns the functions of the camera in tandem with the others. The four share the functions and settings they discover and then practice filming. It seems that the most fun is playing interviewer/interviewee and then watching their films on the camera viewfinder.

After the group captures their first videos, we introduce the computers. We guide the youth through downloading the files and viewing them through a video player. Later we project the video clips on the wall for everyone to see and comment on. As the short clips project, the youth began to talk to each other about the quality of the work. They discuss focus, framing, light, and stability of the shots. In the process, they begin to develop language of filming that is their own. It is then that we develop a discussion about the "rules" of artistic framing. We share the "rule of thirds", long, medium, close ups and detailed shots. We give terms to concepts that emerge through the conversations rather than beginning with a definition of "what" and "how to" record video.

We acknowledge that our learning approach does not resonate with the educational approach to which Carmen and her peers are accustomed. As I observe the youth participating in this amorphously structured play approach, there is no visible evidence of discomfort in a model that clashes with the structures they participate in during their "outer" world experiences. Our purposeful invitation for discovery introduces an alternative "outer" world concept that affords learning digital technologies though play and with peers. The structure that emerges is one that results from participation, which Carmen, Emilio, Fabiola, and Catalina shape.

Dialoguing about Film Interpretation

An important part of our "curriculum" is viewing examples of documentary shorts. The examples that we use are both professionally- and youth-created. We take a critical media pedagogy approach. As a reminder, Critical Media Pedagogy (Chapter 3) is a strategy by which to engage participants in conversations around media texts. Specifically, this approach involves unpacking the social, political, economic, and cultural meanings that producers might assert in creating media. Further, we discuss potential alternative interpretations of the intended meaning as well as the implications for shaping the social world.

In one of our critical media analysis sessions, Carmen and her peers sit around a large table in the Maya Traditions Sala watching the films. After each documentary short, the youth have an opportunity to share their perspectives. To assist in framing the conversation, we ask open-ended questions such as *who is the author*, *what is the message*, *who is the audience*, *whose perspective is told, and what perspective is not told*. We are not looking for the youth to tell us the right answer; rather we encourage and explore the source of their opinions. Since the dialogue is broadly framed, we collectively unpack what draws their attention and how they connect the films with their own experiences. The different expressions introduce that deconstructing interpretations yields multiple, potential, messages.

As the conversation unfolds, there is an implicit realization that film in and of itself is a language. Yet like any language, there has been a dominant way of "deciding" what certain symbols and forms have been used to determine meaning. Despite the fact that there is a belief that film techniques carry universal meanings, it is proven that local context plays a role in how audiences interpret meaning. As a result, in our dialogues around examples of different media texts, we are careful not to define "the" media language. Thus in facilitating conversations around media productions, we ask flexible questions to elicit the interpretations of meaning of common filming techniques such as light, angles, voice, messages. Later, we can offer "textbook" versions that exist as a means of presenting alternative languages. We are conscious of creating a media language with the youth, keeping in mind how Spanish has historically mandated schooling and distancing indigenous youth from learning.

Our attention to developing this media language with our participants is another example of challenging the "outer" world messages that Carmen and her peers absorb from Western-influenced models of participation. To reiterate, our resolute design is emergent, reinforcing that the "structure" of learning flows from the discussion and arises from youth interpretations. In their "outer" world, Carmen, Emilio, Fabiola and Catalina have come to accept that learning is led and directed by an adult who more often than not flows a step-by-step method. Our design employs a distributed learning model, creating a sense that we are all experts in the room. Carmen and her peers appear to embrace this model, feeling free to share their ideas without receiving criticism or looking for the "right" response. Their dialogues are open,

natural and unrehearsed, which we assert is an important step in fostering a sense of valuing local knowledge and voice.

Participatory Learning

Fostering a participatory and emergent learning engagement continues in every aspect of the implementation of USH. Each activity is constructed in collaboration with the youth. One example of this is when I arrived in Chirijox, ready for the youth to create video introductions. The youth created these videos to introduce themselves and why they were in the program. They were broadcast on our USH Facebook page and blog during the time that we launched our Kickstarter Campaign.

This scenario takes place when Marisol and I arrive in Chirijox to work with the youth on our regular Thursday morning time. The purpose this morning is for the youth to practice interviewing each other with the purpose of creating personalized introductions. I am carrying a list of sample questions. It is my way of being be prepared with ideas that we can discuss and build upon. Before I arrive, I translate them into Spanish so the youth could comment on them and/or change them. The discussion never took place. Carmen sees the paper and without hesitation she grabs the list from my hands. She laughs and bounces up and down and she carries the paper to the group. They huddle up in a circle and collaboratively rewrite the each of the video introduction prompts.

I cannot help but smile and laugh as I witness their unbreakable concentration and conversation. In the intense energy coming from the group, I can hear each of them offering suggestions and ideas. This event took place not long after the two-day workshop. I had hardly begun working with the youth and already there was a culture created that these youth were leading the charge. I had a moment recalling how on the first day I met them; I looked out onto faces that projected as stoic and shy. These youth, I thought to myself, though deceivingly shy, have a quiet confidence their ideas and opinions.

I enjoyed the honeymoon period of this seamless acceptance of a distributed learning model as long as it lasted. Like everything else there is a instant that deflates the blissful harmony. The shift occurs when there is a collision between the USH

model and the internalized and normalized model of learning. In these beginning activities, there is little evidence that the outer worldview penetrates their comfort in participating in this new model. Each of them experiences it. Yet tracing Carmen's journey through this reveals many factors that play into the degree to which she, in particular, accepts this model and subsequently directing the learning path within her participation with USH.

TRAVERSING "COMPLIANCE" AND "AGENCY"

Following the activities of learning the cameras, watching films, and introducing themselves to the world, the group begins engaging in discussions about what they might focus on. In their expectations, and following the youth-created films from my work in the Dominican Republic, they were to develop a film as a group. Moreover, they believe that they have been instructed to focus on a problem in their community. With this in mind, the group divides responsibilities and begins to test out their ideas. Two of them, in particular, set out to do practice interviews with educators in the community. In our meetings, the group sat in tight circles throwing around ideas of what problems within their community that they are interested in investigating.

The smooth sailing that we are experiencing quickly meets rough waters. What follows is an impact between various competing visions of how youth programs function and more aptly the perception of "the purpose" of USH. This catalyst for the "storm" was instigated by the workshop we held at the Maya Traditions office. At an early stage in our process, we show a famous documentary entitled "When the Mountains Tremble". This movie portrays the 30-year Guatemalan armed conflict between the military and the Maya Population. We select this movie because it is about Guatemala, and more specifically represents an indigenous view of the war. While indigenous directed and produced movies are on the rise, we acknowledge that non-indigenous populations have largely been the producers of indigenous content and media representations. As the subject, not the producer, of the film, representations can be less than authentic. This documentary allows our youth to assert their perspective on the validity of the representations form their vantage point.

During this workshop we created the plan to discuss When the Mountains Tremble and to focus on building their story ideas. We were fortunate to have Pamela Yates, the co-director of this film, join us via Skype to converse with the youth about the filming, directing, and producing of the movie.

Regressing to Compliance

As Pamela explains her process of filming Carmen stares at the computer screen with an entranced focus. Pamela recounts her time in Guatemala in the 1980's and the events that she videotaped. She tells the group that she filmed in Guatemala for over a decade. She shares that she continued to film, archiving an enormous amount of footage without a clear vision of the exact story she was capturing. Through her

voyage and very close to her own films, Pamela had her own vision of what story was emerging. However, there was a point in her process that she felt very strongly that this story needed to be told from a Maya perspective. Serendipitously that is when she came to know the story of Rigoberta Menchú. She contacted Rigoberta and discussed having her as the center point or the thread of the story. After she describes her process she spends time answering questions.

Pamela and I close her presentation with a message for the students. We encourage the youth to find stories about which they are passionate. Further, we inspire them to find themes that connect to their communities and their histories allowing the story to emerge from the interviews and the context. We say goodbye and thanked her for her time. From my perspective, I could not have hoped for a more perfect conversation. The process that Pamela explained in her presentation, emulates the ethnographic process in which we prepare to engage our participants. Pamela filmed, found the themes emerging within her abundance of recorded clips, and strove to present the story through an indigenous voice.

The youth's minds however did not gravitate to embracing an uncertain path toward creating their films. This becomes obvious after we closed the discussion with Pamela. I emphasize the point about finding a topic that impassions them. I next ask the youth to take a moment and contemplate what they were this about and write some ideas in their journals. Though they take their notebooks and move outside to prepare to engage in this activity, they huddle up in a group on the grass and begin chatting with each other. The energy of this dialogue was different than before.

Before long Carmen speaks for the others and exposes the agitation surfacing within the group. Her words express the unsettledness that they are feeling. "En principio ella [Donna] nos dice que fuéramos en una dirección y luego nos dice algo diferente. [One week she tells us we are doing one thing and the next week, she says we are doing another.]", Carmen states.

At first, I look puzzled trying to decode the words as my language limitations left me temporarily in the dark. I did not completely comprehend what she was saying, however, I did sense the simmering uneasiness. I ask one of my co-workers, Marisol, to join us. She listens to them and explains their anxiousness. Carmen expresses the frustration of the mixed messages that they feel they are receiving. In the beginning they planned to work on a problem in the community as a group and now they hear that they can select any topic of their choice.

After Marisol mediates many back and forth clarifications between the group and me. I realize that they had taken my past conversations to be directions of what to do. I am somewhat dismayed. Our sessions had been participatory and involving the decisions of the youth. I had assumed that the message that I carried was that I was eliciting ideas from them and not imposing a specific set of directions on them. Yet at the same time, this reaction was not a complete surprise. I have encountered this "problem" many times while working with youth. Students expect teachers to direct what to do, when, and how. As described when introducing Carmen, this educational custom is present in Guatemala, especially for indigenous youth. Learning in

oppressed and underrepresented communities is more often than not scripted and disconnected from culture and community. Moreover, there is little room for creativity or critical thinking that draws upon and capitalizes on the knowledge within the context. Until now the youth were embracing the participatory pedagogy during our creative and conversational activities. Yet when a moment of unsettledness regarding details arises, they find comfort in an adult-driven and defined path and goal.

Carmen's statement referring to my confusing words reflect the colliding worlds of normalized education's approach of telling students what to do and USH's approach of cultivating a space for youth expression and ideas. Carmen speaks for her peers in what seemed to be a resistance against this seemingly new and ambiguous approach in which they were engaging. More specifically, this juncture marks the first of many events that bring to light the inner/outer world dichotomy, which potentially deters acceptance in reviving and relying on local knowledge and voice.

Advancing Agency

As we work through this tension, the emotions that Carmen and others feel seem to be channeled through Carmen's gaze. This is uncharted territory for all of them. Being put in the position to decide an educational journey is not something that they are commonly asked to do. I personally feel her uneasiness and cannot shake the worried feeling that I have when I absorb the tension in Carmen's "cross" stare.

It is in these moments that educators and program directors might consider abandoning this first tenet: the importance of drawing on local voice and knowledge. In actuality these moments are exactly what we must embrace. Frictions such as these are in fact seeds for catalyzing new ways of viewing learning and one's role in it. It is in these unsettled times that we awaken unconsciously assumed ideas of striving toward what is "right" and who determines "the way" to do something. Further, for USH, we view these moments as opportunities to restate that this process and these films are in the direction of the youth. Moreover, it is an occasion to speak

to the youth about the nature of our educational aims – who are the films for and to what end?

Carmen listens, debates, and challenges me as we recount our different takes on the "purpose" of this project. The others look on saying very little. Following this, the group huddles up without Marisol or me. Several minutes later, they reconvene us to inform us that their decision is to do individual stories. Carmen and the others accepted and acted upon the freedom to decide for themselves which direction they will take. The presentation of this stance is accompanied by a stronger sense of understanding that they are the driving force behind what shape this program takes and what decisions are made.

Their comfort in asserting their opinions about the purpose is the first major step in advancing their agency in the project. Determining their direction is the second. These youth have accepted the ownership of the project in taking on the opportunity to decide for themselves what how they would participate in this project. With this determination, a new challenge presents itself. Specifically, the youth now open themselves to listening to their inner voices to define what is personally meaningful and what is important to them to investigate further.

DISCOVERING FOCUS, KNOWLEDGE, AND VOICE

Carmen's lead on broaching this subject of who defines the direction of the learning takes her into uncharted territory. She now finds herself in limbo between what she had learned (to conform) and what we ask her to unlearn (to define her own direction). At USH, she is no longer expected to concur with the expectations set for her. Rather she is encouraged to find her way and explore her ideas and her voice. In the new space, Carmen is compelled to find her own focus and consider the community knowledge around her.

Finding Her Focus

Her first task she approaches is to find her topic. Carmen reveals to us that she has no shortage of ideas. As she writes, her list of interests and concerns grows ever larger. I glance at her curiously and she looks at me through the corner of her eye. A captivate giggle and a smile follows. It is as if she knows that I am wondering if this list will go on forever. She readjusts her body and raises her arm as to push me away. She returns to her list and begins reorganizing her ideas by the priorities that she identifies.

She seems content settling on the topic of nature. I am not surprised that she selects this topic. Early on, Carmen shared with me that she plans to study farming and agriculture. Her concern with nature is obvious as she shares the various possible subcategories that she might include in this topic. Such items include water pollution, garbage, fires, and trees.

For the next few weeks, Carmen and I meet several times as she works on her story. In between our meetings, Carmen takes it upon herself to film scenes in the

woods. Her shots include waterfalls, streams, landscapes, live trees, falling trees, tree stumps, loggers, forest fires, and much more. As we review her films, she watches them intently and tries to organize a thread. In doing this, she quickly realizes the topic was overwhelmingly large and too much to tackle in one focused film. Still Carmen appears determined to cover it all.

I watch her grapple with connecting this immense topic. The task in front of her seems laborious, time consuming, and somewhat taxing. I struggle with my own urge to make her job easier. I feel a desire to interject and tell her to choose one thing, but I refrain this impulse. To intervene would not allow her to connect with her inner dialogue and problem solving strategies that she employs to make this decision. It also would risk my undermining her role in finding her voice that she would use to rationalize why she went in the direction that she did. In time, she wrestles with her own ideas and thoughts to determine what is most salient to her. This would later become strikingly evident when she talks about her process with outside audiences including presentations to her own community and to outside groups interested in her experience in USH.

Her process of coming to a decision involves an intermingling of strategies. These include personal writings in her journal, respectful conversations and sometimes heated debates with Marisol, her peers, and me. Carmen cites deforestation in her community and the importance of trees as the concentration. I recall her ever positive and logical attitude in making this decision.

> *Pensé es mejor enfocarme en algo mas especifico si quiero terminar mi proyecto!* [I thought, it better to focus on something more specific if I want to finish my project!]

She announces this to us with an energetic shrug and a smile, and turns toward her notebook to continue outlining her new ideas of how to proceed. Moving toward this focus, she comes even closer to something more personally meaningful. From this point on, when I ask what her topic is, she says, "*La tala de árboles*. [The cutting down of trees.]" The opinions and assertions about local beliefs and practices around cutting down tress that she expresses gives a clear indication of her primary focus. What Carmen continues to uncover is that her primary concern is with the disconnection between her community and nature. This perhaps was salient to her given that her inner world was so harmoniously connected to the natural world.

Considering Knowledge

Carmen, as mentioned in her introduction, is confident, inquisitive, and intelligent. Not uncommonly aligned with the characteristic is an adherence to one's own convictions. Namely, Carmen's character can sometimes inhibit her ability to let go of her strong convictions. During her participation with USH we are interested in fostering her ability to see the world through multiple lenses. Nurturing such

an openness to explore possible truths outside her internally developed on will initially prove to be a challenge. Carmen admits this. As she as stated, she tends to conform.

Carmen enters her investigation with profound assumptions and theories about the community's disconnection from nature. She names a lack of respect as the reason for this detachment. She claims that people do not have respect for nature anymore and that they do not see the importance of it for their future. Before Carmen sets out to interview the people in her community, she engages with us in an activity that introduces interview techniques.

This activity centers on the difference between open and closed questions. This is an attempt to deter our participants from finding the answers they seek. For example, we discuss the different kinds of responses one might elicit between these two similar questions:

- *What food do you cook?* vs. *Describe your style of cooking?*
- *Name your favorite meal to prepare?* vs. *What is the source of your inspiration for your signature recipe?*

We encourage the youth to make a list of what is relevant to the topic and a list of people they feel are the best to answer these questions. Carmen understands the difference between the different types of questions and yet she seems to create questions that lead her subjects to support her ideas. Moreover, Carmen first interviews people that she knows and who likely will have similar opinions to her own. It is not clear that she is conscious of this. In fact, it might be the case that she is not purposefully seeking people who will fulfill her assumptions. Despite this Carmen's first set of interview questions lead her interviews toward articulating similar beliefs to her own.

Another drawback of Carmen's interviewing technique is that her first attempt replicates the style of a reporter. Carmen asks questions and the person answers. Carmen then moves onto the next questions. When Carmen and I review the interviews, talk about the strengths and weaknesses of this approach. I ask her, does the particular question/answer format 1) reflect the style of storytelling in their communities 2) assist in eliciting local knowledge and 3) help you pull together a compelling documentary? Viewing and deciphering theses interviews is one way of illustrating or modeling a conversational dialogue around these questions. Carmen assess if there are different types of responses, who conveys them and why.

Our conversation points to the fact that there is a conflict in how stories unfold in her community and how her schools teach students to obtain information, yet another examples of "inner/outer" world dichotomy that emerges from within our work. Inside Carmen's world, her grandparents, parents, and other elders are storytellers. These storytellers converse, share images and happenings contextualized in rich descriptions. The reporting style to which Carmen is exposed, however, is about "getting the facts". The more widely adopted Western practice of capturing these

"facts" in black and white (or a hard copy format) is considered to be scientific and validated. It is reflective of a scientific method where the reporter has an idea that they want to find answers and then formulates questions in order to get those answers. In indigenous communities, storytelling takes on a less didactic form. Youth often unconsciously adopt "modern" approaches to inquiry as they are increasingly exposed to media forms such as television, newspapers, and now the Internet.

Carmen prides herself on challenging norms and yet there are many examples where she unconsciously gravitates toward those imposed upon her. We converse at great length about her ideas and possible countering theories. This assists Carmen in realizing that her assumptions alone will not suffice to provide evidence that would represent the perspectives of the community. We concur that connecting with local knowledge does not equate to presenting one "truth".

Carmen agrees that her inquiry needs to extend beyond herself as the expert of analyzing this situation and beyond those who think like her. In order to create a more complete representation of what people know, she commits to interviewing people that she doesn't know well, but who also live in her community. Improving the interview process assists Carmen and her peers in drawing on multiple resources to establish the pattern of viewpoints and practices that run through her community.

Carmen's final film still primarily represents her position. There are various reasons for this. For one, Carmen is in the early stages of questioning knowledge and truth. Next, she is new to the investigative process that invites a social science approach rather than a scientific method approach. In addition, this process of filming and interviewing in her indigenous community is new not only to Carmen but to others around her. Finally, asking her neighbors to share their opinions and knowledge is equally lacking. The quest for local knowledge is not simply a process of going out and asking, it is also about coming to see one's place in the construction and contribution of knowledge as valid.

DEVELOPING VOICE

The practice of uncovering new perspectives on topics in the community opens spaces for Carmen and her peers to strengthen their voices. This also causes them to question the origin of their beliefs. It is not our intention to change Carmen's beliefs or to tell her how to think. What we are interested in is that Carmen develops her own voice and is able to support it with access to a diverse set of information and knowledge. One of our objectives at USH is to encourage the youth to solicit information from their circle of family and friends as well as become comfortable with seeking a wider representation of ideas from the community. This occurs incrementally and with an increased confidence. Despite Carmen's attempt to initially reinforce her beliefs, Carmen begins to engage in an inner dialogue that opens herself to alternate forms of "truth", and to new realizations about her identity.

Debating Inner Voice

As described above, when developing her initial interview questions Carmen seemed more focused on solidifying her original ideas rather than attempting to uncover local knowledge. Most of her interviewees were people close to her, who helped to solidify her personal beliefs and not on new ideas.

What Carmen did not elicit from her community she extracted from her reflection on her videos and her personal dialogue about the content. One of these moments came when Marisol and I were urging her to ask more profound questions about what she was seeing in her interviews. Somehow the conversation turned to religion. In a pivotal moment about midway through our discussion, Carmen stated, "*Mis antepasados pedian permiso para cortar arboles, pero cuando llego la religión, dejaron de hacerlo.* [My ancestors used to ask permission to cut down trees, but when religion came we stopped doing that]". It was the first time that Carmen positioned Maya traditions in the forefront of her conversation. The statement suggested that Carmen was opening herself up to uncovering a past that she has been previously denying. Prior to this, Carmen had defended her religious history, stating that these practices had not played a role in changing the relationship between her community and nature. In fact, she went to great lengths to reject any connection with Maya rituals and ceremonies.

This juncture represents Carmen's interchange with the idea that her inner/outer worlds are not necessarily dichotomous belief systems but instead might influence each other. Carmen tackles this idea fully as Marisol and I listen. Carmen openly talks through what she knows of Maya practices and the reasons why many of her community members abandoned them. We stand there as Carmen begins a monologue now assessing their potential significance. In this soliloquy I can almost see rusty wheels loosening their grip on an "outer" worldview that engulfs and calls into question Carmen's "inner" world. The opportunity to freely and openly interact with her own voice is perhaps one avenue for amplifying the core of an identity

that she is negotiating to construct. Moreover, this dialogue begins the foundation of developing a worldview that includes multiple perspectives. In this quest for learning more about a Maya past, Carmen more readily releases her grip on her "outer" world to make space for an expanding "inner" world.

Opening Up to Other Possible "Truths"

In connecting with her inner voice, Carmen is positioned to open herself up to other possible definitions of knowledge and truth. Embedded in nearly every ensuing conversation, Carmen raises questions related to her history. For example, she begins to inquire about the nature of Maya ceremonies.

Carmen has been taught that Maya Ceremonies and those who perform them work to bring about bad things. "*Tengo miedo a las ceremonias* [I am afraid of ceremonies]," she nervously laughs, "*Porque me dicen que esas ceremonias evocan a los malos espiritus* [Because I am told that they evoke evil spirits]." While this is only one example, it illustrates the ways in which Carmen's ability to articulate any details about Maya beliefs was informed by they way that they were presented to her. Namely, she has been taught that these are false.

Marisol explains her struggle. "Until now," she told me, "Carmen might question some ideas that she is wresting with, but without hesitation returns to the foundations of her religion. Before she always stated something that was immediate follow by '*this is possible, but my religion says…*' Today Carmen feels confident that her religion expresses what things "are" and how they are "seen". Yet, in recognizing that the cultural practice of asking permission to cut and plant tress as something that held her community responsible to nature, Carmen begins to become open to a history once closed to her.

Over the next year, Carmen continues to show a profound interest in reading about her Maya history. She explores stories she now recollects about her grandfather who had Maya symbols and statues in his house. As he aged, his family took these and threw them away. Their religion had told them to remove these. She now questions the meaning of Maya practices and engages in conversations with Maya spiritual guides.

Later Carmen's inquiries expand to include questions related to other contested historical events that have changed her very nation. These include analyzing the Spanish inquisitions and whether they were real. "*Hay algunas personas que dicen que no es real*. [There are some people who say that it is not real]," she tells me. Yet her personal readings and investigations continue to this day. As they do, she discusses and views more possibilities that limit her and her people from advancing – theories she expresses she hopes to investigate that topic in our next generation of film making. She again was magnifying her desire to know and learn everything.

Articulating Her Identity

Toward the end of her participating in the first iteration of USH, I ask Carmen to tell me about herself. More specifically, I ask her to tell me what it means to her to be indigenous.

Carmen's description of how she defines herself and her community, similar to those of her Chirijox peers, incorporates both past and present.

> *Estamos en lugares como aquí se ve, en el bosque. Somos de aquí, del pueblo. Por ser Indígena esto significa muchas cosas. Tenemos nuestra vestimenta, y un idioma Maya. Tenemos muchas costumbres y tradiciones. Ya que nuestras costumbres son como antes, las rituales, por ejemplo, son costumbres idigenas. Tenemos un gran respeto por la naturaleza. Pero estamos conformando con el tiempo...cambiando y dejando de practicarlos tanto…como el idioma Maya, pero a la vez, algunas personas se estan adaptando y adoptando las culturas porque debe a sus interacciones con otros paises. Y estamos hablando de muchas cosas que estan asocionadas con otros paises y otras ideas. Algunos hablan español y otros en K'che. Pero, por mi parte, es muy bonito tener mi idioma Maya y mi traje, eso nos identifica como Maya.* [We are in places as we see here in the forest. We are here in the village. To be indigenous means many things. We have our traje (customary dress) and a Mayan language. We have many customs and traditions. We have customs of the past, rituals is an indigenous custom. We have great respect for nature. But we are conforming with time ... changing and not practicing them as much... like the Mayan language, but at the same time some people are adapting and adopting cultures because of their interactions with other countries. And we're talking about many things that are associated with other countries and other ideas. Some

speak in Spanish and others in K'che'. But to me it is very nice to have my language and my Maya dress, it is how we identify as Maya.]

When asked to clarify what she meant by customs and traditions, Carmen without hesitation described festivities associated with *Semana Santa* (Easter) and *feria* (celebrations dedicated to the patron saints assigned to each community in Guatemala). Each of these customs has deep religious influence, attachment, and significance. These traditions have been appropriated and adapted into what has become a seamless part of the indigenous culture here in Guatemala. These answers illustrate that Carmen aptly describes her life as existing simultaneously in two worlds. Moreover, she shares that her culture – as with all culture – is in constant flux.

We see Carmen's identity in her participation throughout USH, through her struggle between worlds, and in the way she describes herself. We also see it through her film. Yet, her identity, like her culture will continue to change through her experiences in both worlds. What we at USH aim to achieve is that Carmen has the tools to recognize these worlds and make decisions about how they choose to navigate them.

EMBRACING THE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND VOICE

Building learning engagements that draw on and value local knowledge and voice can be challenging. It requires building trust with your learners and within yourself. As the facilitator, developing an assurance that you can navigate what comes requires an ability to be open to the unknown. Embracing the undetermined and unmapped learning trajectory is an essential part of the design process.

This begins with opening yourself to realizing that there is much that we do not know. When we enter cultural contexts other than our own, we don't know and can't assume that we know what the local knowledge and practices are. Moreover, we cannot assume that we will quickly understand or truly identify with those participating in our program. Thus we cannot optimize a path for learning without engaging those in the local context. To draw from Freire (1970), educators must come to understand the structural conditions in which the thought and language of the people are dialectically framed. Carmen's experience is an example that reminds us that to realize the relationship between local context and learning is a continual process of listening, inquiring, adapting, and moving forward only through the collaboration with her.

In paying attention to this relationship this became a design where Carmen could explore her ideas and have the open architecture to question what rose up as interesting and important to her. There were times with Carmen and the others thought it would have been easier for me to take the reigns, tell her what I think, and move her through this process more quickly. However, we at USH had done that, then Carmen would not have had the opportunity to have the central moment

that motivated her to begin questioning and connecting to her past. A traditionally scripted and structured learning environment cannot afford the students to wait for the "ah ha" moment that becomes the very personal burning question to emerge and drive the student's ongoing inquiry.

One might assume that we have the luxury of unlimited time to allow this "ah ha" moment to occur. The truth is however that we at USH do not have unlimited time to work with these students. It is quite the opposite. We get just four hours a week with our students and sometimes less. The youth have various home and school responsibilities that constrain our time with them. Then what was it in the design that allowed Carmen to find her inner question? We can ask Carmen about her experience and what she learned to allow her to tell us what is different about USH and why we continue to see amazing growth in her. Carmen says,

> *Estamos ampliando nuestras ideas, muchas veces tenemos ideas y no sabemos como profundizarlas de mejor manera con nuestras investigaciones. Para mi el maestro esta ahi para ayudar y estimular a los estudiantes a pensar mas profundamente.Este proyecto ha sido muy especial para mi. Y creo que es una buena oportunidad para que nuestros jóvenes puedan luchar por lo que estamos perdiendo y siguen manteniendo nuestros lugares hermosos.* [We are amplifying our ideas. Because sometimes we have the ideas, but we don't necessarily know how to go deeper with our investigations. For me, the teacher is there to help push their students to think more deeply. This project has been very special for me. And I think it is a good opportunity for our young people to fight for what we are losing and continue to maintain our beautiful places.]

I ask her what she has learned from this process. She said words I would not have even imagined:

> *Aprendí a no ser una conformista. Por que soy asi.* [I have learned not to be a conformist. Because I am this way.]

Perhaps it the ongoing confrontation of conflicting worldviews (Traditional vs. USH education; Western report vs Indigenous storytelling; or Separated from or One with nature) that stimulated the question Carmen began to ask. This is not something that we easily can measure or quantify. That Carmen is traversing and challenging which structures provide her with the agency to question – is the aim and is the evidence of why attending to local voice and knowledge is an important place to start. Carmen's account of her participation here is one example of how she is learning to navigate her worlds and opening spaces to let multiple knowledges and voices in.

Carmen's final documentary on Nature is a culmination of decision-making about which videos and interviews best depict what she interpreted to be the integrated community message. She also included Spanish subtitles as her interviews are mostly in Maya K'iche'. Though the question about religion arose for her, she did not go significantly deep in her investigation of the role religion has played

in the current culture. Yet her journey in USH has created an opportunity for her to learn more about historical ceremonial practices in her community. As for my personal learning, I have come to recognize a great deal about how far to challenge cultural boundaries in a first experience of touching on something as delicate as this. Carmen's experience is perhaps one of the most profound in helping me understand the complexity of bridging theory and practice to create opportunities that draw upon local knowledge and voice. The constant attention necessarily placed upon recognizing the competing worlds have deep roots in inhibiting a realized freedom to do so for more lifetimes than we can count.

REFERENCE

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: The Seabury Press.

PERSONAL JOURNAL, MARCH 2013

We arrive early in the morning in Chirijox in the house where we normally meet. All of the youth are present this morning. It is a pleasant surprise, because it is not always so. There are times we arrive and one, two, or none of the students are here. When this happens I feel a wave of disappointment. For one, I have taken what is a not so comfortable journey weighed down by heavy equipment only to find that there was one reason or another that the youth didn't show up.

Second, I feel an historical voice nagging at me, one that has raised me to believe that when one makes a commitment to something, they assume the responsibilities along with it. This thought is shaped by the punitive consequences of missing or being late for school or work. To avoid any associated punishment we have developed a custom of communications – calling in, writing, or now texting to alert someone if you would not be able to fulfill a commitment. I imagine that there are similar norms of practices in the school and working environments of the youth, though I'm not certain how fluid or fixed these rules are in their lives. I recognize that what we have become accustomed to is a "U.S. style" of participation often comes in conflict with what to expect here. Despite the disappointment, I recognize that the norms are different here and the youth with whom we work lead busy lives. I am grateful when they do make it on time.

The structure of Unlocking Silent Histories (USH) is not particularly reflective of a U.S. education engagement either. When the historical training of what "is" creeps into my psyche, trying to tell me what "should be", I have to stop and remember our ideals. USH is not a required learning experience. It is one that is completely voluntary. Reflecting the practices of what our participants are used to with Maya

Traditions, USH pays for transportation for workshops and meals as well as allows the youth keep the camera we provide if they finish their films. Other than this, the organization offers no particular incentive to participate. These youth openly give their time to learn. Outside of potentially gaining personal growth in the areas of writing, filming, editing, and interviewing, there is no monetary incentive to participate and no government benchmark to meet upon their completed productions. We have nothing to "hold" them to. That they show up is based on their desire to come. That they don't communicate when they can't make it is something else.

Perhaps more importantly, we aim to build its culture of participation with the students. With youth, co-creating such norms is not always easy. They are youth; they find other interests that distract them and other obligations outside of USH to fulfill. To give their time freely is more often than not, a sacrifice for these youth. Here in Chirijox, in the mountains of Guatemala, the youth wake every day at 5 AM. I remember one evening when Carmen, Emilio, Catalina and Fabiola stayed at my home to work on editing, we all woke up at 5 AM the next day. Carmen entered my room and said, "*¿No tienes trabajo en las mañanas?* [You don't have work to do in the mornings]?" "*Si* [yes]," I reply, "*Tengo demasiado trabajo, pero todo mi trabajo es en la computadora.* [I have more than enough work to do, but it is all in the computer.]" In her ever positive and jovial manner, she sprang from the floor, turned, and said, "*En mi casa tenemos que levantarnos, preparar el desayuno, lavarnos la ropa, lavar los platos y de vez en cuando dar ayuda en el campo con las plantas.* [In my house we have to wake up, prepare breakfast, wash our clothes, clean the dishes, and sometimes help in the field with the plants.]"

Carmen had described a typical day for the women in her community. For her brother Emilio, the day will not include "women's" chores such as preparing *masa* [corn dough] and cooking meals. Instead, he will walk into the mountains to gather wood and carry it the house on his back. When he returns, he will lift an ax and cut the wood into pieces, small enough to place in the wood burning stove. He might wash his own clothes from time to time, but apart from this there is definitely a gendered division of labor that still exists in these very close families. Either way, their days begin at 5 AM. These students might have had what we consider a full day by the time Marisol and I arrive in Chirijox at 9 AM.

It is just after 9 when Marisol, Erin, and I arrive to the session this morning. We have visions of getting much accomplished and are happy to see all the kids present. I am, as always, energized when I see them. Today, however, that energy is quickly subdued. This occurred when we were sitting in a circle to check in on our progress for the week. Catalina and Fabiola sit on one of the beds in the room and the others, including us, sit on small, portable plastic stools. The students' faces are somewhat concealed by the dark shadows. Only the tops of Fabiola's and Catalina's heads reflect the soft beams of light that seem to strain themselves to enter the room. I am wrapped in a wool shawl protecting myself from the dampness that coldly covers us. We begin the conversation by directing them to their notebooks. Each week we attempt to set goals for the next. Our check-in is designed to keep the responsibility

in the hands of the youth. For the second week in a row, the youth stare at us blankly. None of them completed any of the shots, nor recorded any of the interviews that they intended to record.

I can feel a sense of frustration rising in my body. This frustration is partially fueled by the various jobs that I am juggling at this juncture of the project. I am still teaching science for a non-profit school in Panajachel, I am teaching an online class, and I am preparing the paperwork to apply for our 501c3 status. The stress that I am carrying does not always allow me to respond with grace and poise. I am sure that my emotions are slowly revealing themselves as if they were being written into my facial and bodily expressions. I begin speaking in English, but Marisol, Erin and I are the only ones who understand the words that I say. It is selfish, but my thoughts turn to my hardships. I think to myself, I woke at 6 AM, have been on a bus for nearly two hours on windy roads, carrying computers and they did not do their part. Again weighed down by the competing responsibilities that I have, I feel that every minute of my day is precious. I turn to Marisol, "I don't understand why they don't have their videos. They seem so excited about doing this project, but every week goes by and we don't have any films." Because I view the learning culture as one that is a collaborative effort, I need them to pull through on their end as well. At the same time, I recognize what has been instilled in me. This northeastern work ethic through which I see colors my ability to objectively see what the real reasons are for what seems particularly foreign to me.

This consciousness of my own ways of viewing the world is now something that I can more quickly recognize. Paying attention to it allowed me to vent my "steam" and refocus. What is really going on here? Their time is as important as mine. More importantly, to assume that my framing, my personal expectations, trump their readings of the space goes against the aim that USH is about hearing them and understanding them and their worlds in order to successfully engage them.

I recalibrate my mind to consider other possibilities. We talk with the youth trying to get a picture of what is going on. The quickest answer is that they didn't have time. On the one hand, perhaps they legitimately did not have time this week to interview people. Another possibility is that they are kids, and my asking them to take ownership of directing their learning is too much too soon. This second possibility is not one that I am too ready to explore as our foundational unwavering principle is just that.

We would soon come to know the real reason behind the lack of progress. This reason never even entered my mind. Not fully understanding the actual issue, Marisol, Erin, and I decided that we needed to take action. We acted in the moment. "*Ok. Vamos! Vamos por las calles. Vamos a encontrar personas en las calles y hacer entrevistas. Lleven sus preguntas, sus cámaras, y el trípode. Si no tienen tiempo entre semana, haremos los videos ahora!* [Let's go! Let's go into the streets. We'll find people in the streets and do some interviews. Bring your questions, your cameras, and the tripod. If you don't have time between our meetings, we will do the videos now!]" I say this with enthusiasm trying to reignite our energies and purposes.

The students' response is guarded, yet with smiles, they grab their cameras and tripods. We start walking out the door in small groups. I am in front with Catalina and Fabiola. Erin is just behind me with Carmen and Marcos. Marisol is a little further behind walking with Emilio. Carmen, Marcos and Erin are falling a bit behind and walking a little more slowly with every step. I faintly hear Carmen's voice softly and meekly sharing a sentient with Marisol. "*Eso no es nuestra comunidad,* [This is not our community.]" she says. Without thinking, I flip around, "*esta bien, si? Es lo mismo que la tuya no?* [That's ok, right? It is part of yours.]" Carmen shakes her head vigorously, "*No, no es,* [No it's not.]" she responds. When I began this project, the then director Marcell introduced this community to me. She never articulated that the group of women weavers, though it is stated that they are from Chirijox, actually are from two to three surrounding towns. Carmen, her brother Emilio, and Marcos (their cousin) are from Chuaxajil, a small village that is at least a 20-minute walk from where we meet in Chirijox. I assumed that their land was part of the same community.

This was the first time that I saw Carmen slightly timid. Usually she is nothing short of a bulldozer taking on any challenge with confidence and determination. Yet today she pulled back. "*No podemos ir.* [We can't go]", she said. She giggled, put her hand over her mouth and stopped in her tracks. Marisol, Erin, and I huddle. They empathize that this in reality is not their community and thus it is understandable that they are nervous. It was in fact fear that kept them from meeting their weekly goals, not irresponsibility, not being a youth, and not being too busy.

We acknowledge their concerns yet continue to encourage them. We finally gain enough momentum to climb the steep hill to the center of Chirijox. "*Vamos a hacer eso para practicar. Esta bien?* [Let's do this as practice then ok?]" I ask. They agree. We quickly recognize that people here are not accustomed to seeing cameras let alone being in front of them. This does not help to subdue their fears. As we persist, we do find that there are some people willing to talk. Before we know it, nearly everyone in the group is in a location filming or interviewing. This was the breakthrough that they needed to confidently move forward, for everyone except Emilio. For Emilio, this interview and filming process continued to be his biggest challenge. Not only because you can see his confidence trying to break through his adorably shy and nervous personality, but more accurately because his theme is perhaps the most difficult of all the topics to approach and investigate.

CHAPTER 6

EMILIO TZOC PORTILLO, 13 CHIRIJOX, NAHUALÁ

"Alcoholismo" [Alcoholism]

YOUTH HAVE THE CAPACITY TO DIRECT THEIR OWN LEARNING AND AUTHOR THEIR OWN STORIES

Antes de este proyecto, tuve miedo por hablar en publico. Tuve miedo hablar en la escuela y en frente de mis amigos. Pero por medio de este proyecto, puedo hablar en publico. [Before this project, I was so afraid to talk to people in public. I was afraid to talk in school or in front of my friends. But through this project, I can now talk in public.]

(Emilio, Exit Interview)

The second tenet of Unlocking Silent Histories is that youth have the capacity to identify and carve out their learning path and to tell their own (hi)stories. This first part of this design principle seeks to assist in countering hegemonic narratives created and perpetuated by traditional schooling. Namely, "early schools redefined the world and where indigenous peoples were positioned within the world" (Smith, 2012; Kindle Locations, 895–896). Indigenous youth were and continue to participate an educational system that presents a particular ideological view and theory of knowledge that has discounted those associated with being indigenous. This education has been in conflict with one's home culture, norms, and practices. Schooling is demonized, and justifiably so, as a major culprit in not only shaping the ways that others see indigenous peoples, but also the ways that indigenous peoples are coerced to see the world.

At Unlocking Silent Histories, we aim to create a learning environment that is constructed with youth, affording them the opportunity to direct their own learning and self-discovery. Opening opportunities for exploring their inner and outer gaze,

they raise consciousness about their identities. Further, crafting the ways that they chose to tell their stories increases the possibilities for them to connect with their cultural histories. In staying close to their inquiry, youth make decisions about what kinds of questions to ask, how to build on their ideas, and cohesively create their own (hi)stories. Finding a path to learning is indeed an opportunity to discover ways to tell stories that come from within. In this process, we recognize some of the messages that the youth receive and the obstacles that afford an ability to more strongly connect with their own cultural lens. In short, giving reigns to the youth like Emilio to direct their learning is not a straightforward and immediately liberating action.

INTRODUCING EMILIO

Emilio, Carmen's (Chapter 5) brother, is 13 years old when I meet him. The first words that came to mind to describe him are adorable, shy, and quiet. His smile, laugh, and voice are captivating and infectious. He is petite and dresses as if he had walked out of a prep school. He wears tan pants and a grey brand-name polo shirt. His hair is short and clean cut. Later in the program, Emilio tests out a new look. He cuts and spikes his hair, and changes his clothing style. He is subsequently found wearing jeans, black shirts, leather jackets, leather bracelets with metal studs, and a large silver guitar pendant around his neck.

The youngest in our Chirijox group and the only boy of this group to finish, Emilio is often silent but connected. With each passing week, he barely speaks and almost literally hides behind his much older cousin Marcos, yet he is always writing and sharing his notes with his sister and his cousin. Emilio rarely makes eye contact with me and when he does it is only for a brief moment. I can get Emilio to talk, but when he does, his nervous habits surface. With a fluctuating yet high-pitched tone, his voice cracks a little every time he utters a word. Immediately his hands start in motion as if to churn out the very words he wanted to express.

Despite this interpretation, there are moments when his shy demeanor temporarily disappears. For example, in one of our first workshops, the youth engage in an activity where they write a skit in order to practice the camera shots that we talk about and introduce (i.e., short, medium, long). The activity is also designed to familiarize the youth with some basics of editing. Emilio immediately takes a central role in this activity. He is actively engaged in creating the scenario that they film. He is also prominently featured in this video, speaking more than the others and his voice echoes with confidence. Emilio is natural in front of the camera. Moreover, his creative abilities are evident in his interactions with his team.

In nearly all of our meetings Emilio appears discreet and distanced. It later becomes apparent that his actions are reflective of his emotions around public speaking. He admits that when he started this project that he was terrified to speak in

public. He explains that in school he doesn't like to speak, even in front of his peers. He is nervous about how his ideas are perceived and thus passively participates in learning experiences, constantly looking for approval along the way. This is of course not uncommon in this age group. Further complicating the dynamics in this setting is the fact that Carmen and Marcos tend to dominate the space as well as the conversations about the learning direction.

Drawing Emilio into a culture of directing his own learning will not be an easy task. As Emilio tries to navigate a way to tell his story, he vacillates between confidently carving out his direction in both learning and storytelling and reticently retreating from it. There is a point at which this tension causes Emilio to leave the program, yet he changes his mind and continues working on his film. Whether it is our encouragement to pull him back, his own decision or a combination of the two is not important, it was his choice to resume. His personal gain from completing the process is a combination of a completed story that moves nearly everyone that watches it and an elevated confidence that he carries away from his experience.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Asking students to direct their own learning starts with them making two basic decisions. The first is how they will work – individually or collectively. The second is identifying their topic. As briefly discussed in Carmen's Chapter 5, we spent time discussing the possible directions that the youth could take in this project. You might recall that this first group originally was going to work as a team under one central project, but changed their minds and chose to work more independently. It is not immediately clear who drove the decision that they made to move to mostly working individually on projects. I cannot clearly claim this either way given that my language skills at the beginning were not sharp enough to follow the conversations that they had with Marisol and with each other. In the early stages, we recommend that the students identify something that is personally meaningful, whether that is done in groups or individually is not important.

Emilio chooses to explore a story that is emotional and individually significant. His story idea focuses on his oldest brother who died of alcoholism at the age of 20. While this may not seem to have an immediate connection with indigenous histories, it is a recurring topic to which many connect with indigenous communities. Namely, the media describes and depicts indigenous groups as having chronic alcohol problems, spinning the stories to reflect that the cause is cultural or hereditary. It is clear that the event of his brother's death has a profound impact on Emilio and the ways in which he views this issue in his community, but it is not immediately clear what sources most influence his perceptions. In more ways than one, the topic of alcoholism proves to be a challenging one for this somewhat timid, and initially unsure young man from Chuaxajuil.

Exploring His Gaze

Once Emilio finalizes his decision to focus on this topic, he begins writing quietly in his journal. He is intensely focused and for the first time working seeking little if any approval from Carmen and Marcos. His first draft is very emotional. It expresses the sadness and confusion that Emilio had around the loss of his brother. The words jump from the page to your heart. You can almost experience the pain that the family endured when this young man, with a wife and child, disappears in what Emilio describes as a senseless moment. This topic will be one that is difficult for a burgeoning teen like Emilio, but in the initial stages it doesn't seem that way.

With the concept emerging from his notebook, Emilio next begins to film scenes that might depict the events. Emilio takes on this initial responsibility with great passion and vigor. This is evident in the images that he records. Specifically, Emilio captures moving videos at the grave of his brother. First, he has an image of the headstone that clearly reveals the name of his brother. Next, he records people kneeling around the grave. One person is holding an incense burner (that many recognize from catholic mass), locals might recognize it from a Maya ceremony. It swings back and forth; smoke emanating from the device and blowing across the frame. These images capture mood and feeling, something that we talk about as an important aspect of transferring emotions to the audience.

Discovering Similar Stories

We compel the youth to interview people within their communities in order to explore their stories not only through their own eyes, but also through the eyes of others. As described in the opening journal entry from this chapter, the youth struggle with this assignment primarily because of their fear of talking with people. At the end of that testimony, I mention that Emilio had the most challenging road ahead of him given his topic. Yet, in the initial stages of interviewing, he is able to capture testimonials in a captivating way.

Emilio shares his first interview with the group. I take a deep breath, trying to conceal the fact that I am somewhat nervous about the quality of the interview. As described in Chapter 5, the youth write their interview questions and then invite community members to be participants of their inquiry. They originally employ this task in a manner that is impersonal and emotionless. Namely, they ask questions, receive an answer and move onto the next question. However, for documentaries, we want to capture emotional sound bites, ones where we can feel what the interviewee is trying to express. In order to do this, the youth need to learn to converse with their interviewees, making them feel comfortable almost like the camera was not there.

I am more than delighted with what I see. Emilio is able to capture the emotions of a woman describing the loss of her brother. Her grief is visible as she emotionally shares her story. She speaks at length and in great detail about the unfolding story and how it affected her and her family. As she tells it, you can see the emotion and pain as she relives losing her brother to alcoholism. It is so well done that we continue to come back to it as an example for the others. When I ask him to explain his process and how he engages the woman in a conversation, he is nervous for a moment and then the pride that he feels shows through as he talks about that moment. He is elated with his opportunity to hear someone else's experience and feel that he can identify with someone else about it.

Given the fact that Emilio is now capturing interesting shots and has completed an interview that will likely elicit emotions from the audience, I am not very worried about him. What is more, in this distributed learning environment, I trust the peer teaching that was taking place within the room among Marcos, Carmen and Emilio. This, I feel, is assisting in Emilio's positive adoption of embracing self-direction of his learning and storytelling. Furthermore, I can sense that he prefers staying in the background rather than being in the spotlight. Yet, these assumptions prove inaccurate. His smiling and active conversations in the shadows are shrouding the reality of what he is experiencing. Not long after I settle into a comfort zone with Emilio's progress, two ensuing incidences reveal the toils and apprehensions that he is silently enduring.

DANGEROUS LINE

Despite the clear progress that Emilio shows in the beginning of our weeks together, he starts to become distant. Emilio stops showing up regularly for our sessions, asking his sister Carmen to convey his apologies, but that he is busy. The excuses vary from house chores, to working with his cousin Marcos, and to doing schoolwork. When he does arrive, he uses the same excuses to explain away the reasons that he had not filmed anything or interviewed anyone new.

I am perplexed by the change I see in Emilio. I initially contribute it to Marcos' departure from the program. Marcos told us that he could no longer continue working with us because of his family's increasing financial demands. His parents requested that he take on more working hours to assist in this manner. This is the account that is conveyed to me, but I am not 100% convinced that this was the entire story. I

sense that there is something more after our experience seeing him in the street. Our group is walking through the community one day and we pass Marcos. We say hello and stop to talk to him. Marcos is very distant and acts as if he barely recognized us. This warm and embracing soul had never revealed such a character. My immediate interpretation is that there was some kind of peer discrimination associated with being in this program. I am concerned that when Emilio witnesses this, he too will retreat. Whatever the reason, I do my best to navigate this roadblock, this apparent negative moment with Emilio.

When Emilio does finally return with Carmen, I quickly express my joy in seeing him. The others are working together, with the help of Marisol, or independently. This meant that I could focus my attention on Emilio. I encourage him to accompany me into the community. "*Vamos Emilio, vamos por la comunidad y hablamos con algunas personas.* [Come on Emilio, let's go ahead into the community and talk to some people.]"

As we walk up the steep hill to Chirijox, he and I engage in a conversation about the accessibility of alcohol in the community. In the town of Chirijox, the *tiendas* [small stores] do not sell beer and liquor. There are no restaurants and there are no bars. Instead there are places to drink called *cantinas* [local bars, selling only alcoholic beverages], which are opened from as early as 9 AM and don't close until undisclosed hours in the night. The establishments are in hidden corners of the village and camouflaged to some degree. They are mixed in among the homes and stores and do not have flashy signs that bring attention to them. Emilio, and others with whom I have spoken, reveal that there is a stigma about drinking in this small town and thus the cantinas, are not very prominent or visible. Emilio has an idea to interview a cantina owner, so we walk toward one that is hidden in a small street off the center of the town. Camera, tripod, and notebook in hand, Emilio looks poised and ready to go. We start to walk down the stairs of the cantina and Emilio stops dead in his tracks. "*Para!* [Stop!]" He yells, stopping me in my tracks. "*No, no, no podemos entrar.* [We can't go in.]" His hands motion me to quickly come back up the stairs. He is vigorously shaking his head no.

It is this moment that I realize that Emilio's absence from our workshops is more complex than I had imagined. His fear is legitimate and justifiable. I ponder this as we retreat from the stairs and return to the main street. I look him directly in the eye and apologize. I told him that I never want him to do something alone, especially something that he is not comfortable with. We walk back down through the middle of town. On the way, we pass a drunken man in the street. He has a bottle in his hands and he stumbles while speaking very loudly. We see him approach a woman, who quickly creates a distance between her and him. We look at each other almost as if we understand each other without speaking. Filming this topic is a brave task, one that comes with great discomfort.

As we walk down the steep hill back to the house, we brainstorm some ideas on how to move forward. Emilio does not want to abandon his topic, but at this point, we need to work more closely to strategize how he can feel safe in continuing. He

expresses a desire to return to the streets to talk with people. He feels strongly that this is important and he wants to try again. Yet he insists that he will never enter the cantina. I agreed with him and we continue to talk.

I think to myself, I am clearly not providing the kinds of support that Emilio needs to complete his film, particularly the interviews. Erin (the director of Maya Traditions) and I talk about the incident. She agrees that some assistance for Emilio is warranted. We discuss that male assistance in particular might be appropriate. Without Marcos, Emilo is the only male in the group. We consider that this might be one of the reasons that Emilio has been distanced lately. Erin suggests asking her very good friend, Iko, from Guatemala City might want to volunteer with us for a week or so. Iko had done some work in photography and film. More importantly he is Guatemalan.

After Iko agrees to help, he travels with us to Fabiola's house for our next weekly meeting. He spends some time talking with Emilio, listening to his ideas and his plans. This time allows them to get to know each other a bit and for Iko to get a sense of Emilio's vision. About an hour later, they leave for the streets expecting to film. The quick bond that he formed with Iko seemed to indicate gratitude for having another male around to go into the streets and to walk with him. That day, Emilio and Iko film interviews with strangers they encounter as well as capture Emilio approaching and interviewing men who are drunk. The shots that Emilio envisions completing are now possible with some greatly appreciated support.

VISUALIZING THE STORY

Once we pass this milestone, I expect that Emilio's path will continue without additional issues. I witness Emilio's reinvigorated appetite for doing the work to complete his film. He is excited to write more, film more, and learn more about recording his voice and editing his film. This is most visible on a day in May, when we meet in the Maya Traditions office.

Identifying a Narration

We gather on this Saturday morning to review and provide feedback on the progress of their stories thus far. Each of them begins to edit and each of them has storyboarded – a concept for their film. The night before the youth arrive, I read through each of their concepts, make comments, and provide individual feedback and associated questions for them to ponder. I translate it into Spanish, to the best of my ability, and am ready to share them with each of them. I transfer the commentaries to individual computers that I would provide for Carmen, Emilio, and our Catalina/Fabiola team. Each of them has their comments and has a chance to think about and respond to them.

My Maya Traditions colleague Erin willingly agreed to be there that day. Marisol usually comes, but has other commitments this day. I feel an immense appreciation to have Erin's help given that my Spanish is still shaky. I am getting a bit better at reading, and becoming somewhat more confident about talking, but I still do not have a good enough command of the language to keep up with the conversations and use the time effectively. We meet with them one by one to discuss their responses to my comments. When we come to Emilio, he is reading my comments and looking at his videos. He was relaxed and content. Erin had just recently assumed the director position at Maya Traditions and she is just getting to know the students' stories. It is on this day that Emilio tells Erin that his brother, who was married and had a child, inspires the story. The death is sad for all of them. We focus on his ideas and his interpretation of the commentary. We ask him what his next steps are. He is proud of his interview and wants to do another one with his sister-in-law. He confesses that he still has not approached her to ask if she is willing to be interviewed about the subject. In the end, she never does appear in the video. Emilio did, however, interview his mother. The interview does not address the real issue; instead the questions are more impersonal and generalized. This is a decision that Emilio makes and one we had to respect.

During our workshop that day, Emilio reviews the material that he has so far and begins to write a script, weaving his story together. As usual, Emilio works independently for the most part, asking for little if any help from Erin, his peers, or me. As with any time that we are with Emilio, we look over his shoulder monitoring his progress and ready to ask clarifying or probing questions. This is an effort to guide him and not to detract from the direction he has in his vision.

In our conversation today, was when we realize the turn that Emilio has taken. Emilio didn't want to tell the same story that he originally wrote about his brother, he now had a new script that expresses what he had been learning about his theme. With the new and decisive direction, Emilio presented the story he had constructed. Emilio decided that he would read this as a voiceover to the images that he filmed. He is ready to record his voice and we find a location with no background noise. Emilio does his first recording in the bathroom, but quickly realizes that the echo was too much and he wants to do it over. He finds a new location and he recorded his

narration again. Something went wrong with the technology and the recording was not playing. He is tired at this point and decides to play with the editing software. He does that for a while and then records his voice several more times. Eventually we collaboratively agreed on one of the recorded versions. Emilio and I sit side-by-side as he, with my guidance, imports the voice file into Adobe Premiere. He begins to piece together the videos, following the script and selecting the most salient images to reflect the text. Again, he did this with little to no help. Emilio eventually finishes this draft of the story on his own.

Over the next few weeks, Emilio works to perfect the draft. This work takes place in Fabiola's home in Chirijox. The final push for their first drafts happens at my home in Panajachel. I organize a sleepover at my home one night so that they had all-day access to the computers. This time and focus affords his peers and him the opportunity to finish their drafts.

Community Show

The day comes that we are ready to present to the community. We meet in the morning at Fabiola's home and walk up the same steep hill where Emilio had retreated from the cantina and later successfully interviewed various members in the community. This presentation of the films in the community is an aspect of the program designed to provide the youth to obtain feedback from their peers and from other people in the village. During the presentation, we invite conversations that help the youth consider what voices and perspectives might be missing from the story or that generate recommendations to improve their work.

The audience is impressed by Emilio's story. Emilio's presentation incites conversations about the problem of alcoholism. The conversation is clearly intense and peppered with genuine concern. I can only recognize this by body language, as the discussion is in K'iche'. After this focus dissipates, audience members provide commentary for Emilio. The majority of the comments for Emilio were that he could condense his story by not repeating the same ideas several times. In this first draft, Emilio does make some of the same statements over and over. Writing in a linear format becomes an apparent challenge for many of these young students, so Emilio is not alone.

After the show, we begin to revise Emilio's film. We work with Emilio to have him highlight and organize the main points of his story. We recommend that he create a concept map and ask him to identify how to group the ideas into main themes. He follows along with us, but I can see at the same time he is getting a bit overwhelmed. He is not able to focus on the production that he previously felt he worked so hard to "complete". Undergoing a revision process is not something that these youth are normally expected to do in school.

Having to rethink and tighten the story is one possibility for Emilio's frustration, but there is another. Indigenous storytelling, experts state, is not linear. In this moment, I reflect on the idea of linearity. In my U.S. experience, storytelling is often

taught in a way that requires stories be told in a linear format. Is there an imposed expectation that stories always have to be linear? What would it look like to have and embrace a non-linear story? These questions give me pause as I consider this tenet of youth directed learning and the agency to author their own stories. When does it become a method of teaching "how film is made" and when does it afford the emergence of what is learned about storytelling within this cultural context? How would this look in the form of film? While there are likely various examples of non-linear and creative expression of ideas and concepts in the greater film world, at this moment, we had not had sufficient opportunities to explore them. I begin to wonder about what a film might look like that more effectively represents Emilio's thought process. What would it take to support his freedom and flexibility to tell his story in a way that is an image of his vision and at the same time compelling to a media-influenced society that expects certain forms of production? These are questions that we plan to explore with the youth in the second level of working on generating a direction of how to engage in documentary film making.

KEEPING EMILIO INSPIRED

Emilio's frustrations, disconnects, or whatever the case may have been, repeat the distance he has from the program. He stops showing up for the revision sessions, again sending excuses related to conflicts with school and home responsibilities. I attempt to call Emilio and talk with him, but I can not reach him. I do not see Emilio for a few more weeks. As this vacillation between engagement and disengagement continues, my colleagues and I contemplate additional important aspects of developing assisting youth in carving out their own learning and engagement.

Social Meetings

The next time we meet is in his home. It is a Sunday and my colleagues Mohit (a teacher and former peace corps volunteer), Rick (a university professor visiting with his students) and I drove to Chirijox to have lunch with the youth. We had been concerned with Emilio's distance and the potential impact it might have on the morale of the rest of the group. The decision to make a special visit is based on the fact that I can sense that it is not only Emilio's enthusiasm that is fading, but also that of his peers. This long process is hard on all of them. With this sentiment, we determine that this day is not going to be a work visit, but rather a social one.

We arrive in our shaky old Toyota 4x4 that we borrowed from Maya Traditions and piled out of the car. We carry the food we prepared and materials that we brought to Carmen and Emilio's house. We meet them and greet them as we enter. We exchange hugs, laughs, and smiles. Emilio does not partake in this welcome. Rather, he sits on his bed with his ear buds on listening to music on the computer. The loud music he is listening to helps him tune us out. I choose not to ignore him and instead take this

opportunity to sit down with him. I walk over to his bed and sit down next to him. I am determined to at least let him know how much we missed him!

Te extrañamos, Emilio! Podemos hablar? [We miss you Emilio! Can we talk?]

Claro. [Sure.]

Solo tienes un poco mas de tiempo para terminar tu video. Veo que tienes que editar un poquito. [You have just a tiny bit of work to do to enhance your film Emilio. I see just a little more editing that you need to do.]

No quiero. No tengo tiempo para hacer nada mas. [I don't want to. I have no time to do this anymore.]

I retreat from the conversation not to push him too much. I change the topic and we talk about other things, such as what is going on in school and what work he is doing. After about ten minutes, I cannot help myself but to turn the conversation back to the program. I comment on just how powerful his story is and how the audience really thought it was important. I tell him that the decision is his and I will respect it either way, if he feels that his story needs to be told.

In the meantime, Carmen, Catalina, Fabiola, Mohit, Rick and his students are setting up the table to eat. I close my conversation with Emilio. I smile at him and told him how much I enjoy and still do enjoy working with him. He looks at me and then looks down at his legs. He shakes his head. He repeats his first sentiment, proceeding to reinforce that he is not going to finish. He thanks me and jumps up from the bed. He grabs his basketball and goes out into the courtyard of his home.

With a bit of a heavy heart, I return to the table to join the others who are now spooning out food to their plates. There is a lot of positive energy as we all engaged in various discussions, joking and sharing stories. To my surprise, Emilio reenters the room. He makes his way toward the table and sat in a chair. It is not directly in our circle around the table, rather it just behind Carmen.

He stares as he intently listened to Mohit and Carmen sharing words in three or four different languages. At this moment, Carmen provides more specifics about different languages in Guatemala, citing Mam as the most difficult to learn. Emilio quietly pulls his chair closer to the table and looks up every once in a while indicating that he was paying attention to the conversation. In an instant, Emilio nods in agreement and without hesitation speaks up offering his opinion. He quickly becomes part of the conversation as if he had been there all the time. None of us brings attention to the fact that he isn't there from the beginning. He slides right in as if he had been.

After lunch we move outside to play some games. Mohit selects certain games that are designed to get the students moving and connecting, and at the same time reflects on the reason why they decide to do this project. Even though Emilio joins us for lunch, he announces he does not want to play the games. Yet when he sees us setting up, he changes his mind and joins us. "*Ya no voy a trabajar mas en mi video.* [I'm still not going to do any more work on my video]*", he proclaimed, "pero jugaré.* [but I will play.]" He does play, he laughs and he enjoys being with the group. After the games we talk a little more. Emilio comes to me, "*Esta bien. Quiero terminar*. [Ok, I want to finish,]" he says. "*Voy a hacer el trabajo y terminar mi video.* [I'll do the work to finish my video.]" I don't know if the visit compels Emilio to rejoin us, or what exactly inspires him to change his mind. I am just glad that he is back.

Our attempt to rekindle the energy around the project that had been there in the early stages and throughout most of our time together worked. I recommend taking more of the kinds of pauses from the rigorous process that we took that day. It is important to pay attention to the community part of our learning community. Not only does it keep things light, it also maintains our realization that learning goes beyond a constant focus on working. And navigating ones path includes navigating the position and relationship to the group.

Reflecting on the Complexity of Engagement

Keeping the youth motivated to not only building and revising their stories, but also to take up a new technology. These movements have their rewards as well as their hardships. We are now more than six months into the project and we have asked a great deal from them. We have requested that they abandon their notion of what it means to be a learner and adopt a prominent role in the process. We have encouraged them to navigate their own paths in learning and in crafting their stories. Further, we have pushed them to adopt new forms of inquiry, analysis, and presentation – conceptually as well as digitally. They have been flexible and patient during our trials of beginning with iMovie only to find that Premiere gave them more creative freedom. As such, they feel like they nearly recreated their stories from scratch to put them into Adobe. Each of these challenges makes for a long and sometimes exhausting experience.

Through Emilio's experience in particular, we can imagine their journeys and their persistence. We can feel the stresses and confusion of going through this novel and uncharted process. It just might be the reason that Emilio struggles to stay connected to USH and at the same time, it reminds us how hard this work of staying true to local voices, knowledge, and emancipatory freedom to negotiate ones own story really is.

YOUTH DIRECTED LEARNING AND AUTHORED STORIES

The decision to afford youth the opportunity to carve their own learning path includes confronting various barriers as well as openings. Youth who are accustomed to scripted learning and having adults define their experiences will encounter moments of faltering and moments of stabilization. When youth work through whatever obstacles might be inhibiting progress, their struggles become moments that cultivate agency and personal advancement. It is exciting to see the ways in which youth connect with an interest and move forward toward identifying what it means to them to tell that story. It inspires them to find their own way through the difficult parts and the challenges. The philosophy of USH is not to leave them completely to their own devices, yet they still are the directors of their journey.

Emilio makes decisions for himself and at the same time counts on the members of his group. His peers are instruments both in terms of support and advice on how and whether he decides to proceed along the way. In the beginning, he reaches out to his cousin Marcos for support, his sister Carmen for editing support, and to the facilitators and volunteers of this project for clarification and the "ok" along the way. Later, he comes to decisions on his own. Our job with Emilio is not to write his story for him, but to listen to him and understand what is important to him, his story and his engaged motivation and vision for his film.

Asking students to direct their own learning and to craft the story as they envision, opens opportunities for them to discover themselves and what they are capable of. Hearing Emilio's words captures the experience as he saw it.

> When we started this project, I wanted to learn and have the experience of using the video camera and making movies. When we came to Pana for the first workshop, I was excited and at the same time anxious about learning to use the cameras and the computers. Then we started to learn a lot of things, how to ask questions, how to use angles, you told us all of these things. And I just wanted to continue to learn more.
>
> I couldn't take good films at first because I really didn't have any experience with the camera or with taking films. My first videos didn't come out well, I moved the camera a lot and I really didn't understand much. But then I went out and practiced with my peers in this project. And together we thought more about how to take better shots. I just loved it.

> Then we were asked to make our own films and this I really enjoyed. I was thinking about how many problems there are in the community. And I chose this theme not only because it is a problem in my community, but also this problem affected my family. In my opinion, it is a big problem for us to think about.
>
> You wanted us to film every week. You continue to ask us what we filmed each week, but it was hard. We were studying at the time that we were also doing this project and we didn't have a lot of time. It was also really hard because I know that the people in the cantinas don't like to talk about this problem and maybe they think if we talk about this they will know who buys from them or maybe they think people will no longer buy from them. It was hard too because I wanted to film the people drunk to capture the feeling. But this is a little dangerous. Maybe the contact with them was not safe. I was seriously nervous about interviewing people. Then the weeks would go by and I wouldn't do it. But I found the strength to go out and ask them the questions I was curious about with the help of people in the program.
>
> When I was ready to record my voice, I had a little bit of a hard time. I couldn't find the words and the ways that I wanted to say what I saw. But through the project, I eventually found the words.
>
> My video wasn't really ready to show when I showed it to Chirijox, but I was content to show it. I was content because I was proud of the work that I did. I am proud mostly because I realize that I can talk in front of people. When I started this project, I was so afraid to talk in public. I was even afraid to talk in the school in front of my peers.
>
> In this project, I had many experiences. I learned that I can do things, even if they are difficult. I have been able to discover many things that I haven't been able to discover before. [Translated from Spanish]

Emilio's passage represents the growth that he experiences in just a short time within this project. Emilio has developed a confidence in this navigation and in his voice. This once shy and unsure student who feared talking in front of others soon took on a new perspective. Following this project, Emilio ran for and was elected president of his class. When I asked him how it is, his response was, "*Es muy dificil! Pero puedo hacerlo!* [It's really hard! But I can do it.]"

How Emilio views himself and his abilities has significantly grown. Despite this, there is still work to be done in relation to how he sees the complexity of alcoholism as an issue in his community. Months following the completion of his documentary, Emilio attends a second level USH workshop hosted by Adobe Youth Voices. Javier, the leader of the workshop asks Emilio about his film. Emilio responds describing alcoholism with "bad people" and "bad actions". Javier and our newly hired in country Guatemala Field Director, Jenn try to engage Emilio in considering other

possibilities for these actions and the sources of their problem. Yet Emilio will not release his internalized beliefs about the subject.

Our most ambitious hopes are that this tenet of directing one's own learning and authoring their stories liberates and alters our students' interpretations of dominant narratives previously created and unconsciously adopted. The problem of alcoholism and its impacts on indigenous communities is one of those narratives and the one Emilio chooses. Though we have grand hopes to the youth in USH being able to deconstruct and redefine these narratives, the work to achieve this will be a long a patient process of helping to unlearn normalized and unconsciously accepted chronicles. In his first pass at this, Emilio confronts this very complex and contested topic and negotiates his path to do so. Yet, his read of the issue is interestingly enough deeply reflective of a commonly shared and more normalized narrative. This, we consider is a process that will take time. I address the challenges associate with shifting normative ways of thinking in Chapter 10.

REFERENCE

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London, England: Zed Books.

PERSONAL JOURNAL, FEBRUARY 2013

Drew (my son who is visiting to give a two-day video technique workshop to the youth) and I catch the first *camioneta* [bus] and begin our 1.5-hour journey from the "city" center of Panajachel to rural mountains engulfing Chirijox. The significant distance to this village keeps the Chirijox locals separated from foreigners who are more likely to frequent the lake front towns. The bus drops Drew and me off on a sharp turn where the tree-lined road gives way to a cluster a small stores and a few homes along this Pan-American Highway. We walk to Fabiola's home where we usually meet each week, however, today we retrieve Fabiola and Catalina since we decided to meet at Carmen and Emilio's house today.

We greet these two girls with *un beso* [a kiss] on the cheek followed by *un abrazo* [a hug]. As usual, these quiet teenagers simply giggle in return as if they had never greeted anyone with a hug and a kiss. I ask if they have their cameras, they show them to me and then start to lead the way. Drew with his camera and I with my usual two backpacks filled with computer and video equipment follow Fabiola and Catalina around dangerous and sometimes blind curves for what amounts to approximately a twenty minute walk up this steep and windy Pan-American Highway. As we walk I experience two opposing feelings. The first is calmness as I gaze over the mountainous stretches of this rural community. The other is anxiousness as I hold my breath with each step of the seemingly precarious road. For a fleeting moment I consider returning to my religious upbringing and ask that the power of the church we see over the hills in the distance protect us from what, for my son and myself, is a risky journey.

For Fabiola and Catalina, however, this is a common walk and they feel no fear. In fact on my weekly travels to and from Panajachel, I see many women, men, and children walking along the highways. These travelers often carry wood on their backs, large baskets on their heads, their babies wrapped in textiles strapped around their torsos. What is certain is that as these locals walk along this hazardous highway, they are rarely empty handed.

We pass a few *tiendas* [small stores] along the way and decide to stop at one. A woman in the back is sitting in a chair. In front of her are long sets of yarn extending between her back and the ceiling. This is a traditional practice called backstrap weaving, one of the practices that Maya Traditions works to help preserve as well as assist with bolstering the fair trade sales of their craft. The woman unlatches the strap across her back and comes over to us. She is wearing a traditional *güipi* [embroidered top] with intricate embroidery stitched into it. It is most likely something that she has created herself. She asks, *que le demos* [for what are you looking]? We buy the girls a few snacks (tortrix) and two bananas, one for Drew and one for me. We walk out again to the highway and don't have much further to go.

Our walk on the freeway ends when we meet a dirt path. I am happy to be exiting the freeway, because just ahead is a sharp and steep curve where *camionetas* [buses] and *microbuses* [small vans] grip the corner as they speed toward the bus stop. They come to a halting stop to pick up passengers and then go on their rapid way once again. At the corner there are men and women standing waiting for the bus. The men are dressed in Western clothes. They have either jeans or dress pants on along with either tee shirts or dress shirts and sneakers. Even though I consider this weather warm, these men have on leather coats and heavy jackets. The women are dressed in what they call traditional clothing or *traje tradicional (traje for short)*. The traje includes a *falda* [belt], *corte* [skirt], and a *güipiles* [embroidered tops]. The one here in Chirijox, includes a dark skirt, a white and red top with intricate *bordado* [embroidery]. Although many women, especially the younger generations do not wear the exact local dress, they do wear various versions of the traditional parts of the traditional clothes. As I look down and see my jeans and tee shirt, I can't help but feel underdressed compared to these women. The women here, even when they are young, are dressed well and appear quite feminine as a result of their skirts, blouses, belts, and sandals.

My attention returns to the moment as we enter the dirt path and continue our journey to Carmen's home. The earth-exposed walkway is quickly engulfed by tall cornstalks. We are hidden in this windy path for about five minutes until we reach an open area where we can see a stream in a valley below us. The garbage littered across the terrain masks the beauty of this location. Yet, with a little imagination, the natural elements of tall green trees and glistening water reveal the true magnificence of the natural surroundings of the *aldea* [very small town] of Chirijox.

We continue walking through more cornstalk-lined pathways. Partially obstructed by their leaves we can again see evidence of life. There are small adobe homes, which have gardens. Plant cultivation is one of the main staples of work and I imagine that

these gardens have items such as lettuce, carrots, and tomatoes. The small trees nearby bear fruit of *güisquil* [a squash-like fruit]. Fabiola stops us; she climbs a tree and picks another common fruit here, *cerezas* [cherries]. She gets one for each of us to try. We continue walking as we eat.

The *caserío* [describes the most small of villages in Guatemala] of Chuaxajil is fully revealed when we walk through two tall stalks. The terrain opens up to expose the more populated part of town. The homes are close together and there is a school. We walk from one side of the school to the other, not around it, but rather between two buildings. As we pass the school, students' eyes follow us. One runs to the door and then before we know it, a handful of students are crowding the door to catch a glimpse of us. They laugh, cover their mouths and return to their seats. I hear, "Hello!" in a thick Guatemalan accent followed by a loud laugh. The youthful faces disappear back to their seats, all running away giggling. It must be a funny sight to see not just one, but two gringos walking through this rural and isolated town. I reflect upon the fact that not once in the many times that I have visited this community did I see a foreigner. The teacher continues with her lesson as we exit the patio that leads us to another view of the breathtaking hills surrounding this town.

The adjacent cobblestone street is wide, and there are modest adobe homes to either side. Smoke emerges from the tiny tin chimneys and I assume inside mothers are cooking for the day. I peer around one house and see a dirt path, a small child runs out to the street. She is dressed in *traje* and is somewhat disheveled. The woman, who I assume is her mother, looks out at me. *Buenos dias* [Good day], I say as I am again momentarily captivated by their dress. We all continue walking, and quickly turn left on a small path toward Carmen's home. The trail divides two homes facing each other, each of which has women inside weaving. The dirt path comes to a small creek, we cross a wooden plank and come to Carmen's door. We step up the two stone stairways, knock on the rickety wooden panel, and Carmen greets us.

The door opens to Carmen's courtyard, where her mother is kneeling on the ground. Like the woman in the *tienda* [small store], Carmen's mom is also backstrap weaving. It is the first time that I am seeing up close the intricate process and details. Each town has it's own style of weaving with it's own colors and its own design. The story goes that this ancient process of weaving is a cultural tradition that precedes the Spanish. The Spanish, rumor has it, made one change. In order to identify the different communities and tribes if you will they assigned specific "uniforms".

Catalina and Fabiola selected the topics of sheep and weaving because of its long history in indigenous Guatemalan culture. They recognize it as an important practice in their own community and want to share it with the world. Both of these girls learned to weave from their mothers. At the same time, they are being encouraged to study other crafts that might bring them more sustainable jobs. With Western influences impelling these youth to forego their heritage to find different paths, Catalina and Fabiola feel the impact it has on their traditions. Their concern regarding this rapidly

disappearing cultural practice inspired them to recall memories about the totality of the weaving process – from sheep to shirt – and to learn more about its meaning. As my son and I work with them this day, we only begin to learn about how intricately the weaving culture crosses aspects of the rural life here and uncover the connected personalities of these two young ladies.

CHAPTER 7

CATALINA NACCASIA, 13 AND FABIOLA TAMBRIZ, 14 CHIRIJOX, NAHUALÁ

"Ovejas y Tejidos"
[Sheep and Weaving]

COMMUNITY CONNECTED THEMES ENCOURAGE CRITICAL AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Ellos (USH) nos han enseñado cosas que no sabíamos que debemos aprender. Nos enseñaron cosas que no sabíamos antes. Gracias a ellos para este programa. Podemos comunicarnos con ellos y con nuestra comunidad. [They (USH) have taught us things we didn't know that we should learn. They taught things that we didn't know before. Thanks to them for this program. We can communicate with them and with our community.]

The third tenet of Unlocking Silent Histories is grounded in the belief that connecting student learning to community inquiry ignites the learner's motivation to critically analyze their lives and creatively express their views. Indigenous communities are often described as having a strong bond because of the historical and reverberating value placed on communal tribal living. Communities are important to First Nations and Native peoples and within them there are "protocols of being respectful, of showing or accepting respect and reciprocating respectful behaviours, which

develop membership, credibility and reputation (Tuhiwai, 2012, Kindle Locations, 533–534).

Westernized schooling practices, particularly in the early colonial times, became an instrument by which to attempt to neutralize the embodied and vibrant community culture. Schooling aimed to cultivate and foster disconnectedness and individualism. Instead of enjoying a learning environment that fostered various indigenous connected characteristics of showing, being, or accepting respect that enriches membership, youth have been inculcated to be obedient and submissive. The colonial imposition created a dichotomy between the ideologies of individual and community and with it distances were created between time and space. More specifically, individuals were seen as separate from bodies that govern them, the nature that surrounded them, and the knowledge that encompassed them. The detachment generated aided in created indigenous positionality of inferiority and compliance for dominant structures that control experiences.

At Unlocking Silent Histories, we believe that community and one's connection to it is an essential part of learning and living. We recognize the existence of deep and extensive historical knowledge that provides insight into our identities and acts as a guide to shape the history, present, and future of individual|communal existence. For USH, the reciprocal and dialectical relationship between individual and community is central to learning. Individuals are located within community as well as shaped by the circumstances of it. Everyday activity can be seen through positionality of the individual with others. This frames their deference and entitlement, social affiliation and distance within the social-interactional, social-relational structures of their lived world (Holland et al., 1998, pp. 127–128). Since communities are continually in flux and influenced by intersecting "outside communities", one's position within the community is inevitably variable. By connecting youth with opportunities to explore their communities and reflect upon their positionality, their association, and fluctuating roles, we aim to work from the voices of youth, who become agents of reviving a sense of sense of importance of community in the way it is defined by the learner.

INTRODUCING CATALINA AND FABIOLA

My first introduction to Catalina and Fabiola occurs when we introduce USH to the youth participating the Maya Traditions Youth Education Program. The girls are beautifully dressed in their *traje* and their hands embrace each other. Their chairs are so close together that they could actually be one. Their eyes peer through their long dark hair and appear to sparkle with their bashful smile. At the moment I did not know their names or which community they lived in. It is not until Marcelle and I decide to begin working with the community of Chirijox, that I realize that they will be part of this first iteration of USH.

The journey to Chirijox with Marcelle was the first time that I was introduced to the community. I enter a house, that I come to find out is Fabiola's. There is a reunion

of women and children. The room is densely populated and there are balloons, ribbons, and food. Their community meeting is just wrapping up. Emerging from within the crowd I see the bright faces of Catalina and Fabiola. They still appear as interconnected as they were in that initial moment that I saw them. They continue to be shy, yet emanate a warm radiance. Although they greet me, their heads look down and it is nearly impossible for them to make eye contact with me. They join their peers to sit on a bed in the corner of the room where the rest of the youth are. Their mothers are in a semi circle ready to hear from us.

Marcelle, along with Marisol gather the attention of the group to begin introducing USH. The feeling in the room is warm and welcoming. There are approximately 10 women whose eyes look on waiting for us to begin. As we talk, the youth sit in the background all on one bed listening quietly, while the women listen intently. They appear to be taking in every word and contemplating the concept of USH as we explain the program. After our presentation, the mothers share the joy that they have for this opportunity. At the same time, they ask questions such as what is the purpose of the films, who will see them, and what will their children record. These questions don't unfold in a way that looks toward us for the answer, but instead as a conversation amongst themselves as well as with us. As the philosophy becomes clearer, they realize that the project will grow from their interests and voices of their children. The mothers seem satisfied, more appropriately they are elated. They state that they see this is an opportunity to capture their communities and look back on how their communities changes or stays the same over time.

The closeness of this community is glaringly obvious, giving way to what I see in Catalina and Fabiola's inherent connection. These two, though connected as if to reflect what we see in their mothers, are at the same time similar and different. Over the first several weeks, I come to appreciate the similarities and difference that define these young ladies and how they are positioned in their home and school communities.

Fabiola is the fourth daughter of Isabel, a generous, strong, and positive woman who opens her house to us each week. In the mornings when we arrive, her mother is always hard at work. There is much to do in the home where she lived with three of her six children, three daughters and one son, along with some of her grandchildren and her brother. Fabiola's bed is in the room where we meet each week. Around the room are various weaving tools, yarn, and other materials. Though she weaves with her mother and envisions that she would continue performing this craft, she expressed her aspiration to find ways to succeed in her classes and help her community in the future. She does not share a specific career interest. It is not surprising that a middle school-aged student found it difficult to determine what her future would hold. It is, however, interesting to watch Fabiola's personality emerge over time. Increasingly, we see evidence of her curiosity with modern media culture. Compared to her peers, Fabiola uses the cameras to take a disproportionate amount of photos and videos of herself, her friends, school, and her family. The pictures that she takes illustrate her interest in boys, music videos, dance programs, and trying out

new looks. She is the first of the youth to "friend" me on Facebook. Her posts often evidence her experimental interest with photos and fashion. Over time, it become obvious that technology is something that Fabiola cannot live without. For example, she is constantly on her phone texting, taking photos, or playing games. The natural disposition that she has for learning and fluently adopting technology is visible throughout her participation in Unlocking Silent Histories.

Catalina is the middle daughter of three girls, all of whom still live in a small adobe house just behind and on a slight incline upward behind Fabiola. Their land holds two small structures that are surrounded by a garden. My visits reveal familiar patterns happening on a daily basis. Upon entering their small and confined property, I always see her father and her nephew working and tending to the crops. I then pass her mother, who is outside weaving. I am welcomed into the one room structure, which is a small kitchen. Here I find Catalina's two sisters, their children and one of the husbands. The women are cooking and the husband practices English with me before he leaves for work. Catalina spends her mornings helping around the house and her afternoons in school. She is a *basico* [secondary school until grade 9] student when she begins participating in the project. In her introductions, Catalina shares that her favorite subject was Plastic Arts, a core subject in Guatemala that involves building models and doing art. She plays sports; basketball was her favorite. While in the beginning introductions Catalina confidently communicates her interests on film. These concentrations include being a primary school teacher, this changes several times over the two years that I come to know her. Most recently she chooses to study computers.

The above descriptions bring to light the ways in which Fabiola and Catalina are different yet share similar values and goals. Throughout this chapter, we begin to see the ways in which Fabiola and Catalina draw on these values to work together. Their close collaboration illustrates the importance of connections both in terms of learning with community knowledge and producing their video.

WORKING IN COMMUNITY

Communities are defined as a feeling of fellowship, belonging, and membership. It is a sense of living together with others who have similar characteristics or commonalities, interests and goals. The qualities that define and bind us are not static or confined by borders; they are ever variable and permeable. With porous boundaries we cross in and out of spaces, and are part of an ever-changing notion of the communities in which we work, live and participate.

A Reflection of Their Community

The community of Chirijox is encompassed within the highland region of the department of Sololá. In Chirijox, examples of the constants that define this community are the spoken language of K'che', the arrangements of families, and

the dedication to church. According to the Maya Traditions' Youth Education Program Coordinator Marisol, the K'che' here is the purest form of this language that persists in Guatemala. The families in Chirijox and the strongly connected town of Chuaxajuil live in close proximity to each other. The place however still maintains a rural feel. The perimeters of what they call home usually include several small structures that contain multipurpose spaces (sleeping, working, eating, etc.). Neighbors share roads that lead to diverging paths revealing unique plots that belong to different living quarters. Finally, there are shared trades of farming, weaving, and keeping the lands maintained. The sense of interrelatedness and closeness among members of this place is evident.

The ways in which these elements shape the lives of Fabiola and Catalina are not immediately evident. Yet over time the resonances of values begin to emerge as the young ladies reveal their relationship and personalities. For example these girls have an implicit closeness that is inevitably a reflection of what they have learned from their context. The attachment between these two, I infer, emerges from several possible sources. These two live almost on top of each other. Fabiola can open her window and literally call out to Catalina when she wants her attention. She often did this when we arrived, or Fabiola tells us, when she wants to spend time with Catalina. Shouting for Catalina was a custom that allowed her to continue working at home until we were ready to start. The physical contiguity of their houses resulted in them walking to school together and spending a significant amount of time together.

Aside from nearly sharing a common space, these two girls have similar ideals. They have very close relationships with their mothers, care for their siblings, and relatives spend a great deal of time helping with the upkeep of their homes. What is more, they both are very interested in the art of weaving. They learned this traditional craft from their mothers and view it as an important part of their livelihood. The family as well as its needs and traditions come first, above all other activities such as church, school, and the Unlocking Silent Histories project.

Like their mothers, Catalina and Fabiola are extremely introverted. Their participation in USH echoed the dynamics in the mother's group. Specifically, though all the women talked at some point, there is one woman who rises of as the voice of the group. In our group, Catalina and Fabiola often blended into the background, allowing Carmen to be the prominent voice. They offer ideas and occasionally add their perspectives, but in the end, they are overshadowed by Carmen's more dynamic personality. Fabiola and Catalina are not quite invisible, but neither are they highly interactive. When asked to speak, they offer a word or two mostly without hesitation. There are many times that it was hard to inspire Fabiola to share her thoughts, but Catalina is only slightly more willing to openly talk. What they lacked in vocal presence, they made up for in expressive gestures. Their eyes and actions were more noticeably present. An occasional laugh or a larger than life smile reminds us that they had not disappeared from our conversation; instead they are, as their mothers, physically and mentally present.

"Classroom" Community

Within our "classroom" the Fabiola and Catalina also work as a community. I put "classroom" in quotes because we do not work in a traditional school structure, but instead in the homes and communities of the youth. Similarly to how the mothers interact and built an understanding of USH together, we encourage the youth to consider themselves a community, learning from one another in support of a common end.

While individuality is valued and promoted in normalized schooling, we at USH do not encourage that Fabiola and Catalina or their peers to work separately. This is the case even with then youth choose to make an individual film. Fabiola and Catalina choose to work together and at the same time, they work both separately and together throughout the nearly eight months of the project. When working separately they always attend to a common means toward the same end. Though their peers did in fact choose to create individual films, their participation together is also a significant asset to their learning. In emphasizing community learning and connections, we reinforce that learning is never truly detached from our surroundings. Moreover, we assert that social connections underline learning. Peer check-ins and consultation on writing, editing, or filming progress are practiced during each meeting. These principles assist in building the cultural norm that we learn together, as well as within the communities in which we live. While a dependency on someone other than one's self is more widely seen as a weakness, we view social learning as essential. It supports learners in the materializing struggle that inevitably emerges through peer-to-peer discovery and socially constructed decisions. In both cases the youth are grappling with new forms of knowledge and understanding with others. More often than not, social connections are what sustain us and propel our learning forward.

Peer-to-Peer Discovery

An example of social support in learning is illustrated when Catalina and Fabiola select their theme. During this activity, the girls stare at each other with blank faces. I ask them to begin brainstorming their ideas and they nervously flip through the pages of their notebooks looking to each other at every opportunity. They pretend to scribble down ideas, but in actuality they do not write a word. Their flailing ambiguity is present in their eyes. At this moment, I am out sitting in the grass listening to their peers describe their topic ideas. Out of the corner of my eye, I see Fabiola and Catalina struggling, attempting to work individually despite the fact they were a team. I wave them over to the middle of what feels like a tropical paradise on the Maya Traditions office grounds. It is a perfect time to consult with them as the rest of their peers were scattered around the grounds writing drafts of their initial ideas.

Fabiola and Catalina join me sitting down in the grass on either side of me. I began by trying to draw out the topics in which they were interested. In an effort to help uncover this, I start with open questions. "*En que se quieren enfocar para su*

tema? [What do you want to focus on for your theme?]" Their vacant stares continue to penetrate me echoing that they do not have even a hint of where to start. There seem to be no ideas running around in their minds. Since they had not come up with one suggested theme, I attempt to explore this "assignment" from a different angle, asking them, "*Que quieren decir al mundo sobre su comunidad?* [What would you like to tell the world about your community?]" I often begin with asking the students to consider that many people do no travel to their community or country. I follow with the statement that others who have not visited here do not know the things that they do. I expand on this by reminding them that they take for granted these things as part of their daily lives and might not consider what others would be interested in knowing through their eyes.

Even with this more descriptive explanation, the two of them shake their heads and shrug their shoulders. This is accompanied by a giggle, a roll of their eyes and turning their gazes away from me. "*No tenemos ninguna idea* [We have no idea]". I think about another way to approach this. "*Vamos a pensar, sobre que tienen mucha pasión?* [What your most passionate about?]" The answer to this question is not so easy for these two middle-school aged youth. We sat there as I gave them time to think. Still nothing immediately emerges for them. I consider the fact that these two may not be accustomed to someone telling them that the choice of what to study is open completely to their imaginations. I also resign myself to the fact that my Spanish was still quite limited. I call Carmen over to join us. I always find it interesting that there is someone in the group who can interpret my broken Spanish and translate it into exactly the concept that it is in my mind, and with great detail. Carmen has the ability.

Carmen joins us and the four of us sit in a circle. I reiterate to Carmen the focus on fostering community connections and sharing idea that come from that. I review with Carmen what questions we discussed to this point and share my next suggested approach. This is a delicate balance between drawing out what they want to share and influencing their decisions. Carmen understands this. She has a natural way of doing this herself and she employs that skill as she turns to Catalina and Fabiola to talk to them. Carmen got the two talking almost immediately. She skillfully drew out their hobbies, and their interests. She recommends that they start to list these in their journals and think about which ones stood out the most for them, which ones they thought would be interesting to investigate. This inspires them to generate some ideas. The girls note their satisfaction. We thank Carmen for her help, who goes back to working on her own ideas.

Socially Constructed Decisions

The three of us remain and we begin to talk about the practices in the community that they listed. Again, I recommend that the girls think about these and consider what they were passionate about and what they thought would make a good story for people who were not from their hometown. Since Fabiola is practicing weaving quite consistently and continues to learn this technique from her mother,

she gravitates toward this topic. I give her reinforcement stating this would be a compelling topic because of its history and because it was a practice that acts much like the glue that holds the community of women together. As Catalina talks, she expresses her fondness for animals. I ask her to tell me more about the animals in her community and to think about what she might express about them. In the course of the conversation, the two began to lean toward weaving and animals. This is a start. Though they had identified a theme, they were still held back by their uncertainty about where to go next. The subsequent step I take our conversation is to focus on how these two stories – weaving and animals – connect.

We work together to move forward. We list the big ideas that fall within their broader themes. I guide this by asking what are the major points about their topics that relate to your community and will help the world understand what you are trying to convey about the topic. We engage in the process not only for their clarification, but also for mine. Namely, I am not well versed in the practices of their communities at this moment and I do not see the immediate connection between animals and weaving (not knowing what animal(s) Catalina was thinking about). I ask more questions trying to gain a better sense of what was in their minds about each of these topics. To me, these topics seemed to be separate and disparate. I originally interpret that Fabiola and Catalina are forcing a connection because they are so very adamant about working together. Given this assumption, I offer them the opportunity to work separately or together. Their reaction is not a surprise. They simply lock arms, look at each other and laughed. "*Juntos* [Together]!" They say as they turn to me and look me directly in the eye. This word rings in my ears as they loudly provide this simultaneous response. This answer comes confidently and directly. I never ask again, together it is.

In working through the details of their topics, the connections become apparent. Catalina chooses sheep because they have integral importance to their community and to the historical practice of weaving. I didn't know the Spanish word for sheep at the time, and even if I had, I'm not sure that I would have made the immediate association between the topics. Yet, without a doubt, the two stories relate and it is clear to me that they had realized this all along. In the end, Fabiola and Catalina look at me as if the connection should have been obvious. It is a moment that they teach me about the discernable relationship of the themes. Moreover, this example is a reminder that the deep community knowledge is something that the youth would need to teach me so that I could follow their lead. The process of working in relation with each other and with me is one aspect of community that we are witnessing them embrace.

PLANNING COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIONS

Once Catalina and Fabiola have their focus, they are ready to begin thinking about what this means in terms of capturing their ideas to represent their community. Their unfolding and non-linear process becomes evident in various ways that connect to different activities throughout the USH program. In what follows, I offer a selection of activities and how these unite with their emergent community connected story.

Visual Expression

In an activity designed to inspire the youth's creative expression of their ideas, we watch and examine the opening sequence of *Beasts of the Southern Wild*. I choose this movie for two reasons. The film is beautifully shot and its cinematography style was unique to other films we have seen with the group thus far. Moreover, the first three minutes covered the kinds of shots (long, medium, short, and details) that we had been talking about. The introduction placed attention to framing place and characters in a way that elicited feeling and emotion. Showing a creative foreword such as this, I had hoped to inspire an imagination of filming possibilities.

To scaffold this activity, I create a mock storyboard. This storyboard includes only the first three minutes. It is intended to serve as an example to reinforce how a filmmaker might use a storyboard. I emphasize that this storyboard was my interpretation and not that of the author. We talk about the fact the there could the director use several interpretations of the meaning of the scene through the artistic elements. I invite the group to make their own interpretations. Pointing out the elements of the storyboard, I ask them to pay attention to the type of shot, the angle, the setting, the lighting, and the sound. I ask them to think about why these elements are chosen, how they made them feel, and what the elements told us about the place and the people.

We watch the first three minutes in its entirety. Then we return to the beginning stopping each frame just at the point when it would transition to a new scene. As the beginning of the movie plays, the youth are sitting closely watching. They lean in and I stop it around one minute in. We continue in this manner until the end of the introduction. We stop frame-by-frame to unpack their interpretation of the meaning of the scene and the purpose behind why the shot is framed as it is. After each pause, the youth have an opportunity to write down what they see and how they feel about what it says about the community being introduced. I offer guiding questions that might help them to reflect and focus their ideas: *What do you know about the setting*

and the main character from this introduction? How is the director bringing you into the story? What do you see? What do you know?

Scene by scene, we deconstruct the introduction. I begin by modeling the first scene. As we go on, I talk less, and they interpret more. Their interpretations are important to me, in order to allow them to listen to each other's ideas about how this storytelling example might have been constructed and might be done from the perspective of their own community. Right now, each of their introductions follows a pattern of *"Hi, my name is... we are going to learn about*... While this is perfectly acceptable, if this is what they truly chose to do, I also hope to expose them to the fact that there are multiple ways to tell a story. Further, we want the youth to reflect upon how stories are told from within their culture, encouraging them to draw on the storytelling practices of Chirijox. We share that this is an artistic process and that they are limited only to their imaginations.

Catalina and Fabiola come together to think about the opening of their documentary short. Not too long after, I am presented with Catalina and Fabiola's first visions of their opening scenes. The following are excerpts from their notes that day.

Catalina Notebook:

Empezar tranquilo de mostrando lugares donde se investiga las histories de las personas y…
Después empezar con todas las histories describir los personas.
Primero hay que aparecer el nombre de las ovejas como titulo después imagina de las ovejas cuando se están pastoreando. También cuando se corta su pelaje.

[Start with a calm demonstration of the place.
Next, start with a history that describes the people.
First there will appear a name – "The Sheep" – in the form of a title and later an image of the sheep that are in the pasture. Also an image of when they are cutting the wool off the sheep.]

Fabiola's notebook.

Empezar mostrando lugares describir el tema de lugar
Despues expresar con tranquilidad, demostrar que el tema es importante
Poner ejemplos sobre a tema para que la audiencia entienda mejor

[Begin with showing the place and describe the theme of the place.
Later, express the tranquility; demonstrate what the theme is important
Put examples about the theme so that the audience understands it better.]

Empezar los tejidos y bordados
Presentarme yo misma
Poner unas personas tejiendo
Poner una persona con el güipil puesto
Poner como hacer güipil
Describir el proceso de elaboración de güipiles y bordados.
color fondo como redactaron del video

[Begin with weavings and stitching
I will present the same
Put a shot of a person weaving
Put how to do güipils
Describe the complete process of weaving and stitching
Have colors in the background…]

The activity is meant to inspire creativity help the youth to begin brainstorming a vision of representing their locations and their themes. It succeeds for Catalina and Fabiola. The list that these two create illustrates their connection between the activity and how they imagine introducing the audience not only to help to visually capture both sheep and weaving a topic, but also introduce their community.

Storytelling

Another activity that we facilitate is a discussion led by inspirational storyteller Julio Cochoy. Julio is a famous Guatemalan author who volunteered to join us that day. His book entitled *Voces Rompiendo El Silencio de Utatlan* [Voices Breaking the Silence of Utitlán], is a collection of women's stories that document their unspeakable experiences in their community of Santa Lucia Utitlán during the internal conflict. The purpose of this activity is to spark the youths' imaginations on how to visually represent their communities.

Julio begins his conversation with his personal experience and why the work was so important to him. He explains to the youth that the topic of his film was to begin his healing process. As a child, Julio witnessed intense violence and the death of nearly every male adult figure in his life. It was his intention to, as accurately as possible, represent his community through the voices of those affected by the war.

He shares that in order to express their voice, would require interviewing people in a way that makes them feel comfortable enough to reveal their deepest and most trying experiences. Though his creative medium is a book, he talks with the youth about the importance of contextualizing the story by adding details to bring to life the community wherein the story is told.

Julio talks for approximately a half an hour as he describes how he weaves together 35 survivors testimonies to paint a picture of the events and their affects on his community. Catalina and Fabiola listen without speaking. They write in their notebooks what appear to be ideas about interviewing in connection to their topics. Their peers express a familiarity of storytelling style. Specifically, Chirijox and other surrounding indigenous communities the history of oral storytelling is deep and extensive. Adding the visual component to the art of oral stories is somewhat different and new to the youth. Thus following Julio's conversation we transition to talking about the difference between expressing details in text and video.

Catalina and Fabiola's video shows evidence of attending to something both personally meaningful and representative of local voice. Their interviews of people in the field include those who can share a deeper understanding of their topic. These include an interview in the field with a sheepherder, women who weave, and a man who has knowledge of the extensive history of the origin of weaving in Guatemala. This reveals that the jottings that Catalina and Fabiola take are an internalization of the recommendations of Julio's presentations and their interpretation of how they envision expressing the voices and knowledge of their community.

CAPTURING THE COMMUNITY SURROUNDINGS

Media Relationships

The youth in Chirijox are incredibly busy. They have various responsibilities that begin quiet early and take them well into the night. Their consumption of media is

limited then by their free time. In addition, media representations are limited by the powers that control them.

Media, movies, TV, and other forms of visual media don't find their way into significant chunks of their busy days. When free time allows, the youth of Chirijox access media in an assortment of ways. Nearly all homes have televisions. What typically plays on these TVs is either sports or *tele novelas* [soap operas]. News also plays in the background when families are eating or sitting together. Aside from sports, the representations are not necessarily depictions of realities. This is particularly true of news. In a post-conflict settings news is presented from on perspective. Trust in the media has been systematically eroded among indigenous communities due to government control and restriction of media sources, further problematized by the suppression of indigenous voices and lack of available alternative sources in the Guatemalan landscape.

Like us, many of these youth unconsciously consume the media around them. Seldom is the image dissected to ascertain the possible meaning and message the author is attempting to convey. Nor are the power dynamics questioned and challenged. Realizing that media creates messages about reality is particularly important in this project given that they would be authoring stories to show their realities and those of their communities. At USH, we aim to encourage the presentation of a reality that the students see and have developed through their investigations and conversations with others in their communities. This is a difficult and arduous task for a first time filmmaker.

Despite the fact that Catalina and Fabiola have rarely if ever engaged in media analysis, their film represents their ability to stay true to uncovering local voice and expressing their personal views of how they see their community. As illustrated in the previous section, Catalina and Fabiola create questions that afford us to connect with how people in their community talk about this topic. In terms of representing their realities, these girls utilize their unencumbered access to the community to film scenes nature scenes. In the scene where they introduce the sheep first, audience members feel as if they are viewing the beauty of the rural setting through the eyes of the youth. In this moment, Catalina and Fabiola capture the feeling of being on the farm and corralling the sheep in the pasture. These two young women's film continues to provide realistic scenes of women weaving in their homes and textile venders in the streets. None of the scenes are staged; rather they record their surroundings as they see them.

Filming Strategies

In the visual expression activity, we focus primarily on theoretical and foundational visioning of representations. This discussion-based activity is coupled with a practical application of learning to take and pull together compelling shots.

My son Drew was present to lead an activity aimed at inspiring creative filming that incorporates the long, medium, close, and detailed shots that we have reviewed

before. Drew set up a context in Catalina's home where the youth play a video game. He arranges the youth in groups and creates a goal of making a one-minute video. The aim is for the youth to incorporate various angles to make the scene as interesting and fun as they can. Each team created a video that can be seen here: https://vimeo.com/61094859, https://vimeo.com/61093757, and https://vimeo.com/61093044.

Following this activity, Drew invites the youth to create a shot list for their movies. He reviews them with each of the youth – as a team with Catalina and Fabiola – and then we head into the field. Drew accompanies Carmen to the mountains where she films the forest fires and other aspects of the trees. I follow Catalina and Fabiola to a pasture where sheep are nestled in the sides of the mountains. The two young ladies lead me off to the fields. We walk through the corn stalks and past the garbage filled ravine. They take me past this harrowing sight to a more pristine and untouched location. In this remote pasture, sheep roam the fields. The winds whipped our hair in front of our faces as we settle into a spot. We find ourselves hugging the mountainside.

Catalina and Fabiola assess the location and pull out their cameras. They get down on their hands and knees for one shot and then on their stomachs to grab different angles. This gave them a unique view of the subject, a perspective that provided more detail than if they had continued to stand over the sheep. They stay in the setting for some time and then adjust their stance and perspective to ensure that they captured long, medium and short shots as well as the details they got from the ground. This day is a great start to what Catalina and Fabiola would take very seriously in order to record a multitude of shots representing their community.

My son departs Guatemala and he leaves the youth with some new video strategies to capture their stories. With confidence they begin capturing footage that represents their community's ideas, perspectives and feel. Catalina and Fabiola, in particular, begin filming not only with us, but also significantly on their own. In the following weeks, Catalina and Fabiola put into practice the concepts that Drew had taught them. Evidence of Catalina and Fabiola's work with Drew is visible in various parts of their video. For example, when the girls discuss weaving, there are transitions between different detailed angles that illustrate the complex and intricate process of this cultural practice.

FINDING THEIR STORY

Over time, Catalina and Fabiola accumulate an enormous amount of films. They had taken so much footage that they became overwhelmed with creating a storyline. They find themselves daunted by how to take everything that they have and create a sequence that represents their community in a creative way. Through a process of working with the editing software and with adjusting their storyboard, they eventually come to an agreement on an order. However, this sequence will adjust and modify as they work toward creating a cohesive and fluid story.

Story Writing

Catalina and Fabiola readily admit that writing their sequenced storyboard was the hardest part. This is evident as they two engage in multiple conversations attempting to pull the pieces of their films together in a way that unfolds, in their vision, logically. They create several drafts of this storyboard yet each of them falls slightly short of connecting the dots between their ideas. They have excerpts that illustrate the sheep culture, which include extensive shots of sheep and one interview with a farmer. They also have several disconnected pieces of weavers practicing their trades and interviews with them. Yet they have not quite realized the story that will capture an audience enough to stay engaged and draw together the story that is their film.

In an attempt to scaffold this process for them, Marisol, the newly appointed director Erin, and I work together. We take the girl's storyboard and transfer it to a word document. I create a table approximately three pages of cells. There are two columns. One is the current script that Catalina and Fabiola have and the other are the video clips that they select to give visual background to what they say. I add a row in the table between any two rows that seem to abruptly jump from one idea to the next. We leave gaps where they are and wait for them to fill them. Marisol, Erin, and I review this document several times offering our input and readying it to take to the girls.

In Erin's early stages of her new position, she is traveling with us to the community each week. Her connection to the program helps her to better understand it and how these young people in the Maya Traditions Youth Education Program also participate in USH. Erin dedicates her time to working on helping Catalina and Fabiola structure their story. Catalina and Erin work closely on the story sequence, while Fabiola begins to edit. Erin introduces this graphic organizer of sorts that we created, but it is Catalina who takes the reigns on making the decisions. In fact Catalina adjusts our sequence, reorders what she initially had, and skillfully creates connections between the leaps from one idea to the next. This work however is not immediate; it takes several weeks to complete. Erin expresses her perplexity as she participates and observes the work we are doing. She shares her feelings about working, particularly with Catalina and Fabiola to help them overcome their struggle of grappling with the various films that they had and how to weave them into a cohesive story. Erin reflects on her work of taking the graphic organizer to Catalina and attempting to work through it with her.

> By the third week of working with our youth and Unlocking Silent Histories, I realized there was no concrete process for these students. I found myself frustrated, just as they were. "But how should I put the story together? Why can't you just tell me what to do?" In Guatemala, creativity is not taught in the educational system. Students sit facing the teacher, and rapidly take notes as their teachers talk to them. There is no time for discussions nor critical thinking. I realized that this was the first time these students had the opportunity to

> explore what interested them, what topic they wanted to investigate, what they were curious about. Donna explained to me that this is the basis of the project. There was no 'right way' or 'wrong way.' Students were to develop their own process, to discover what interested them, and to take the lead in their own development and education.
>
> I found myself traveling to the communities, one day a week with my co-workers, chicken bus after chicken bus, with 'up days' and 'down days,' days where the I felt the students did not understand the process at all, and days where I knew the students were on the verge of unlocking all of their potential. My breakthrough was working with the wide-eyed Catalina one chilly, cloudy morning. We were sitting outside, on two brown plastic stools, when I asked her what she wanted her video to convey. "No sé," she replied. At this point Catalina and her partner Fabiola, who conveniently did not show up today, had a lot of videos of weaving, sheep, and traje—or the typical dress. Yet, as I looked over the current video that she had on Adobe Premiere, there was no story line, no central theme tying everything together. I took a deep breath, and tried to remember the last time I worked with youth in the United States. Were there similarities? Differences? How could I provide direction without directing? I took another deep breath and tried thinking of the best way to support Catalina while still letting her take the lead. "Why is weaving important to you?" I asked, refusing to let her answer with a "*no sé* [I don't know]." She looked at me for a bit, flashed a timid smile and let her head fall into her open palms on her lap. I asked her again. "Why is weaving important to you?" From there a dialogue was born. She answered me with words including '*cultura* [culture]*,' 'tradición* [tradition]*,' 'vida* [life]*,' and familia* [family]. And from there, we connected it with sheep and wool. "Why is it important? How is it connected?" We began to draft a narrative, Catalina busy writing it down in her notebook. At the end of the day, Catalina had a good solid 5 pages of direction of where to take her video. Her smile had grown less timid and I knew she had found her direction. She gave me a warm hug before leaving, "*nos vemos la otra semana* [see you next week]" she said, and I told her I expect her to continue the work by herself, that she did not need me to do it. She shook her head saying "*yo sé* [I know]," ten times better than "*no sé* [I don't know]."

The next few weeks are enormously productive for Catalina and Erin in particular. Catalina used our organizer to catapult the creation of her own insights and sequence.

After organizing their thoughts and direction, Catalina and Fabiola delve into the community knowledge they capture and intend to capture around this topic. They are curious about the details of weaving that before had not entered their mind. Some of their questions included, *What was the history of this custom and for how long did it exist? What were the significance of the colors and the stitching? Were people*

still passing on the traditions of weaving and what were the thoughts about why it was disappearing? With these baseline questions that they want to ask, they go off into the markets to talk to women and men about weaving and the fading cultural practice of both herding sheep and using traditional dress. They spend time capturing and questioning anyone that they can, including a sheep farmer and weavers. The inspiration to find out what their community knows and believes about weaving and its associated meanings, practices, and histories propelled the two to develop a lengthy film.

Dialoguing with the Edits

Erin's one-on-one work with Catalina helped launch Catalina's interest in connecting her story to her passion for the activities she positions as important to her community: culture, dress, life, and family. This team's advancement did not happen only through the interactions, but also through building the story in Adobe Premiere.

Fabiola held most of the responsibility for pulling the story together in the editing software. Emilio and Carmen were farther along with the editing process. With them we decided to use iMovie. Yet when it came time for Fabiola to begin creating her video, it quickly became obvious that the more simplistic program would not suffice for the vision that these two girls are imagining for their film. Fabiola struggles as she attempts to add subtitles and image overlays. We decide to transition her to Adobe Premiere. This program is more versatile; it turns out, not only for their film but also for the films to come.

Though the video program is significantly more complex, I don't worry so much about introducing it. In my experience, when you invite students to meet a challenge they do meet it. This was no different. Fabiola, in particular, quickly adopts this tool. With little training, she embraces and manipulates the program with ease. She virtually becomes our editing expert. She handles the program as if she has been using it for years.

The software's design gives Fabiola more flexibility to construct the story that she and Catalina conceptualize. However, their conceptualization is not a direct copy from the paper to the computer. In the process of adding subtitles and images, Fabiola begins to see the story emerging and where the additional gaps are. The dialogue between building the sequence, considering the films, and returning to the community to obtain more films results in their ever-changing and developing realization of how the story comes together in a way that represents the connection among sheep, weaving, cultures, life, family, as well as history.

In no time, Catalina and Fabiola construct their story in Premiere and are able to view if it was unfolding in their conceptualized vision. It is a tool for us as facilitators as well. Together we could review what they are thinking and what is visible in front of us. The editing process becomes the central point of discussion to assist in

developing a flow for the story. Each of us can visibly see the missing links and the themes emerging from the interviews that the girls had recorded. With persistence and enthusiasm, the two continue to work until they are satisfied with a sequence ready to share with the community of Chirijox. In their film, is a message – a plea if you will – to embrace the customary practice, to teach your children, and continue a legacy that has bonded their community.

COMMUNITY CONNECTED THEMES FOR CRITICAL AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION

The focus on community centered learning reflects the idea that learning exists within those around us. Historically, indigenous peoples have been forced to separate learning from community living and its associated importance and knowledge. The intentional design practice of connecting the youths' documentary themes with their communities refocuses learning on the importance of community and belonging. Drawing on Freire, we extend this attention to community by including his pedagogical philosophy that education embraces social transformation. Freire asserts that connecting youth with their community affords oppressed peoples to be more attentive to representations of the aspects of their cultures that make their communities unique. At the same time, the pedagogy's aim is to reinvigorate and validate the voices of those they interview, by emphasizing the practices and cultures from which their audiences can learn.

How youth connect with their communities is open to them and their own design. At USH, we invite students to search for questions that they desire to answer. We ask them what more they need and want to learn. We facilitate our work with them to cultivate the emergence of their own opinions of what they hear, see, and interpret. A final and more long-term goal is to encourage the youth to imagine solutions and recommendations related problems or concerns that they have about their communities or about preserving the cultures they find most valuable. In their film, Fabiola and Catalina take a first step in doing this when they invite their neighbors to consider the implications for abandoning this life long tradition.

The community connections are one of the most valuable learning outcomes that Fabiola shares with us when she talks about her involvement in USH.

> They (USH) have taught us things we didn't know that we should learn. They taught things that we didn't know before. Thanks to them for this program. We can communicate with them and with our community.

While Fabiola attributes the learning to us, she also expresses that the process has brought her closer to her community. Building directly from Fabiola's statement, Catalina confers with her partner. Catalina express an example of the knowledge she gained during her many interviews with the men and women in her village.

> The *traje* [traditional dress] didn't start within just the past 3, 4, 5 hundred years ago like the man said, it was around for a thousand years and we didn't know this. And also we learned the meaning of the colors.

These statements from the Fabiola and Catalina illuminate the rationale for the purposeful intent to engage the youth with their communities. That is, we hope to inspire our youth participants to learn, by connecting with community knowledge and re-connected with their history. In doing so, they develop an authority to represent their customs and traditions and define what is important to explore.

In the process of making their documentary short, Catalina and Fabiola capture cultural practices and histories that are interesting to them. They choose to investigate an aspect of their culture that they had a desire to understand more about and to advocate for its preservation. At USH, we believe that by connecting youth with a theme that is personally meaningful, youth are more likely to identify and maintain a desire to critically inquire and creatively express themselves.

While Catalina and Fabiola initially had a difficult time arriving at a theme, their major struggle ended there. Their commitment to a personally meaningful topic assisted in sustaining their desire and momentum to see their project to completion. Their film is a testimony to community, both in the sense of learning and representation. The film is the result of their socially constructed, peer-supported learning and of their negotiated vision for their documentary. Further, "Sheep and Weaving", their final production, is a representation of this historically and traditional practice told through their own as well as through local voices.

REFERENCES

Holland, D., Lachicotte, W., Skinner, D., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London, England: Zed Books.

PERSONAL JOURNAL, JUNE 2014

"*Mi mama ya te está esperando frente al mercado*. [My mother is waiting in front of the market]" Chema sent this message to me just minutes after I left my house to meet Chema's mother, Vicenta, at the market. It was exactly at 9 AM. Vincenta and I planned to meet at that time, but when I glance at the time and it reads 8:59 it occurs to me that I'm more than on time. It takes me exactly three minutes to walk to the market from my house in San Juan. I actually assume that I will be waiting for her since Guatemala time translates to never on time. More often than not, anyone on time in reality waits for 20 or 30 minutes. Vincenta, however, was punctual.

I worry that she might be upset that she has to wait for me. I know that she has been up since 5 AM, making breakfast for her family, washing clothes, and preparing the *masa* [corn dough] for the batch of tortillas that she will make at least two times today. I also know that there will be so much more for her to do. When I see her, she is not upset. Rather, she jogs toward me with positive energy and a big smile. It is as if nothing but happiness can emanate from her in this moment. We hug and exchange "*buenos días* [good morning]" and *besos* [kisses]. We prepare to go into the market to buy what we need for Pepián, a traditional Guatemalan dish that is just to die for!

The smile remains on her face as we go down the hill into this bi-level market. The bottom level looks like an underground garage. In this large, yet sparsely occupied

space there are just a few tables and a handful of women in colorful *traje tradicional* [traditional dress] and just a few men in more modern clothes. The only light coming into this space is the natural light through the open entrance. It feels dark and lonely, yet warm welcomes emerge from all the venders.

As we enter, we see one woman sitting on the floor with three cartons of tomatoes. Past her, farther into this underground space, are three other tables of vegetables. There are no customers except for Vicenta and me. As we buy our tomatoes from the woman on the floor, she and Vicenta speak in front of me in Tz'utujil. They giggle and look up at me. This funny petite woman might have nearly the same skin color as them, yet it is clear *no soy Chapin* [I am not Guatemalan]. *Extranjeros* [foreigners] are certainly not a common sight in San Juan's food market so when I enter, I always hear either a comment or receive a second look.

Further into the space the women are selling the vegetables that we need. Vicenta carefully examines and then selects the carrots, güisquil, red pepper, and potatoes that she likes. I offer her the money to buy them. As we walk away, the vender tries to sell us more items. I experience this often in the markets here. There is the economic gain of selling everything of course, but it is also possible that these vendors, who often travel great distances with heavy merchandise, prefer not to carry anything back. We put our things in a straw basket that all women carry to the market, we move on.

We scale the stairs to the second level. Although there is enough room for about 50 venders, only six spaces are open. On this level mostly the meats are sold. Two stands sell whole chickens. Unlike in the U.S., the chicken is on the counter in the open air. The woman standing behind the counter swats away the flies. As with the vegetables, Vicenta carefully assesses the chicken. She is not happy with the first stock and moves to the second vendor. She selects the one that she wants. The vendor takes her cleaver and chops the chicken in pieces. She places the pieces on a hanging scale and then announces the price. We exchange the money for the chicken. Our final stop is a *tienda* [small store] on the corner, still inside the market. Here,

Vicenta purchases pumpkin and sesame seeds as well as a dried chili pepper. We buy these and add them to the basket.

It is time to head home. We begin our journey back to her house. As we walk up the hill of this indigenous pueblo, I ask her, "*Cuanto tiempo necesitamos para cocinar el Pepián* [How long do we need to cook the Pepian]?" She answers, "*tres o cuatro horas* [three or four hours]." I half expected this answer as I have vague memories of when my Italian grandmother cooked sauce, which took nearly the entire day. All our comforts and technological advances can't compare to a slow cooked meal, and Vicenta prepares one of this magnitude every day for lunch. I reflect on the fact that in my experience women always worked hard and long hours to care for their families. Yet, women in this town are held in the highest esteem. According to Chema, his mom is a model example of the significant presence and importance that women have in this community.

We enter her home. She and her husband moved the family here about a month ago. It is a temporary location that is attached to the home of Vicenta's brother. In the meantime, her husband is constructing a new house on this same property. The house is much further away from where they previously lived. This one is closer to the mountains and the town *fútbol* [soccer] stadium. It is quiet and the air is clean. Where they lived before was in the center of town. Their door opened to a busy street, where there was much noise, traffic, and pollution.

The provisional accommodations are not much better than their previous dark and cramped home. This will change when the new house is built. We walk into a room that serves as the kitchen. Below us is a dirt floor. There is one wall of cinderblocks that act as one of the walls. The other walls are made of lamina as is the roof and the door. There is a traditional Guatemalan wood stove in the corner. Unlike many kitchens here however, there is a chimney that funnels the smoke up and out of the space. I recall being in my "family's" house in Comalapa (a town in the mountains near Antigua). The kitchen was constantly filled with smoke because it did not have proper ventilation.

The rest of the kitchen is equally simple. To the left of the stove is the "storage". There are low rising shelves with silverware, plastic basins, and unused herbs and seeds. Pots and pans hang from a wood post. In the center of this room is a table. Much of the meal preparations take place here and later it is converted to a space where the family eats. The only electricity is a poorly wired light above our heads. There are no windows and no refrigerator. The *pila* [sink] is outside, which we walk to often to get water for cooking.

We continue to talk as she lights the fire under her modest *plancha* [traditional stovetop]. She then turns to cover every piece of kitchenware and exposed food to save them from the swarm of flies. Flies are always present in the homes of locals. It seems that they are here because there is never time to sufficiently clean the surfaces to keep the flies away. Once one meal is finished, it is time to start the next. To an outsider this space where the cooking takes place would likely be graded as completely unsanitary. For families here, it is normal.

I don't think twice about it anymore. I have cooked several times with Vicenta. Although I never get used to the flies, I learn that they are a part of being here. She places the tomatoes, red peppers and onions on the *plancha*. They char on the edges and we put them aside. Meanwhile, the chicken is boiling and after I have cut the potatoes, carrots and güisquil, we add them to the boiling water. We had set aside one carrot and one red pepper and chopped them into small pieces. These were prepared as such for the rice. All the pieces are in place and we liquefy the charred vegetables in a blender for the sauce. Once this is finished it is time for tortillas! This is perhaps the fourth or fifth time that I have tried to make tortilla. What is so natural for these women and girls just doesn't work for me. They are clapping the dough together and turning it in their hands. I try my hand at this again as I have done several times before, yet the dough sticks to my hands and holes make themselves visible immediately. I succeed at making perhaps one full tortilla to their ten. They laugh at my attempts and all I can do is smile. Not fair! I utter in Spanish. You have been doing this since you were 6 years old!

Cooking alongside Vicenta we talk about many things. Mostly, the conversations come back to the many jobs that she juggles. In additions to those I already mentioned she makes a daily trip to the market for food that she will cook that day. She prepares three healthy meals for her five children, her husband, and her father. Breakfast is always cafe and bread. Lunch is the biggest meal. Today it is Pepián, tomorrow perhaps *caldo* [chicken broth] or *pollo a la plancha* [chicken cooked on the stovetop]. Other traditional meals include vegetable soups, fried chicken. For dinner it is usually eggs and beans. Freshly clapped and fired tortillas are a staple for every lunch and dinner. Vicenta also ensures that her young girls are bathed, clothed, and organized for school.

Outside her daily housework, she finds employment outside the home to support the family financially. For example, she cooks for a local restaurant, but only when tourists request traditional meals. She is commissioned to weave fabrics, yet this work also comes in ebbs and flows. Aside from this, she belongs to a weaving cooperative supported by Maya Traditions and for them she will weave every evening for up to four hours a night.

Lunch is ready and as with everyday, every family member is present. My meal comes as if it were being served to a tourist. The food is artistically arranged and I am given a fork, knife, spoon, and napkin. For the family, all the ingredients are present, but not necessarily as neatly. Rather than a fork, the family uses tortillas and their fingers to eat. I feel the tension between comfort and discomfort eating my meal with utensils. When in Rome!

A meal that took four hours is gone in about 20 minutes. As in every setting I am the slowest eater, taking 40 minutes or more to finish. Vicenta, her husband (the two young girls on their laps) and Chema politely sit with me at the table and talk with me until I am finished. The family unit is very strong here. The sense of their dedication and support of one another is continuously evident. I notice in this

family as well as in my other students' homes that the mothers are the ones that hold everyone together.

After our lunch, we say "gracias" and "buen provecho". By now it is 2 PM. I enjoy my time with the family, but need to get back to my house to write. I give Vicenta an extra hug and a thank you. She is off to a cooperative meeting and I am reminded that she still has a full day's work ahead of her.

The San Juan women are the pillars of this community. They have a strong presence and hold many responsibilities. While Chema did not immediately choose this as a topic for his documentary, it will become clear by following his process that he holds the women of San Juan in high authority and realizes their significance.

CHAPTER 8

JOSE MARIA PEREZ VASQUEZ (CHEMA, CHINO), 17 SAN JUAN LA LAGUNA

"Mujeres Luchadoras"
[Fighting Women]

THE AGENCY OF YOUTH TO SHAPE THEIR OWN SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Cambié mi tema muchas veces. Pero lo que me encanta sobre mi decisión de seleccionar este tema es que mostré que las mujeres pueden hacer muchas cosas que los hombres no pueden. [I changed my theme several times. But what I love about doing this theme is that I showed that women can do many things that men can't do.]

(Chema, 06/15/14)

The following three chapters highlight the methodological underpinnings of the Unlocking Silent Histories philosophy. The first, addressed in this chapter, is how video captures and catalyzes the agency of youth as they shape their own environment. This focus is an effort to appreciate the ways in which indigenous youth not only create video productions, but also come to create a space for their own learning and position in the community during the filmmaking process.

This tenet directly speaks to the critique that institutionalized organization of research has created the marginalization of indigenous knowledge. Moreover, the dehumanizing effect left indigenous expertise, experiences, and practices unvalued

and ignored. A consequence of this colonizing action resulted in indigenous peoples forced adoption of not only Western ways of knowing, but also their values associated with "acceptable" roles within society. Whereas many indigenous communities embrace distributed and communal arranging of their communities, Westerners believe in hierarchies and individual ownership. Within such hierarchies indigenous peoples were forced to adopt particular "ideas about gender difference and what that means for a society" (Smith, 2012, p. 47).

The creation of polarizing roles does not divide solely between men and women. Within genders, if a man does not fall squarely into the expected position, it can cause him to lack confidence in his own voice, ideas, and opinions. Indigenous peoples often find themselves in a third space, resulting from the mixed messages of past and present expectations. Living under oppressive rule leaves little freedom to exercise ones agency to shape one's social future in one's own views. Equally, the struggle to find voice in the wake of both external and internal oppression is a result of colonizing methodologies. The methodologies that drive ongoing work and research must then bring attention to the ways in which colonization imposes research on communities rather than engages in research with them.

Our methodology necessitates openness to equalizing position, power, and knowledge. Uncovering – along with the youth – the role of video in this process makes these shifts visible and brings awareness to how youth envision igniting the agency in themselves and in their communities. Further, Unlocking Silent Histories' first methodological tenet draws from Smith's (2012) challenge to envision a world where indigenous people actively determine their participation in learning and in the world. We assert that in implementing critical pedagogy with students, they come to articulate and act in ways that help awaken their agency to identify the barriers around them and navigate them to shape their own futures.

This chapter traces Chema's experience in an effort to illuminate the aspects of our first methodological foundation. I share how Chema's interactions with and around the use of video are a resource that carries him into both his learning and his participation.

INTRODUCING CHEMA

Chema is a 17-year-old San Juan resident whose first language is Tz'utujil. He is the oldest son and one of five children. He has one older sister, a younger brother and two younger sisters. I have become quite close to this family cooking with his mother and spending time in their home. In doing so, I came to learn that Chema's father is Carlos' (Chapter 9) older brother. This makes Chema Carlos' nephew, though they share nearly the same age.

Chema has a kind, intelligent, and gentle spirit. Aside from his participation in USH, he involves himself in assisting his family, participating in community activities, and in completing his degree in elementary education. He is acutely aware of what he has defined as important and gravitates toward working toward that. In

our sessions, he is quiet, yet observant. He is unique to the others around him in that peer recognition and acceptance does not take priority in his life. This is apparent to me in our USH sessions as Chema arrives to our workshops alone, keeps to himself, and seems pensively reflective, yet not outwardly vocal.

He appears to be aware that his peers do not make an effort to fully draw him in when we meet each week at Carlos' home. For example, two of the other youth in our program, Pedro and Carlos explained the reason that they do this. One day as we were having pizza, they tell me that Chema is "different". Pedro took the ketchup, mayo, and *picante verde* [green hot sauce] – all typical Guatemalan pizza condiments – and separated the three bottles. Using this as a metaphor, Pedro presented the three bottles and told me how they are different, making a comparison with their interpretation of Chema. I reply that these three sauces go well together, noting that they use all of them to top their pizza. I try to emphasize that it makes a good combination that they like. Both Pedro and Carlos reply no, vigorously shaking their heads. In chorus they said "*El es diferente* [He is different]". However, they never provide specifics to help me understand what they mean by this. Though it was never completely obvious or articulated why Chema was considered different, I knew that Chema could sense that the others ostracized him.

The immediately visible affect of this marginalization is that Chema is hesitant to speak in front of his peers. Each time we meet as a group, Chema nervously laughs when asked to speak. One illustrative moment stands out the most for me. After we watch *When the Mountains Tremble*, I ask each of the youth to share their thoughts. I loosely frame questions to facilitate their critical interpretation of this movie. We are sitting in a circle and Chema is next to me. Since his eye catches mine, I ask for his thoughts first. His response, as in many occasions, is to let someone else go first and insist that he speak last. The way that he smiles, looks quickly at me and quickly looks away exposes his nervousness. Rocking his body back and forth, turning inward, and apprehensively laughing again often follows these mannerisms. He carefully listens to the other's answers as they offer their thoughts one by one. When it comes to Chema, he is more comfortable to respond. Yet this comfort is masked by the fact that his response is a synthesis of what had already been shared.

His shyness in the larger group does not carry into every aspect of his life. For one, it does not dissuade him from participating in this project, copiously and with determination. In fact, his continued presence each week and the amount of films that he recorded translated into his being the most dedicated student in the San Juan group. While Chema stays on the margins of the others, he finds a space in filmmaking where his confidence is revealed. Moreover, in a personal context, Chema talks openly with me and is not afraid to try out different ideas and think through concepts little by little. He is positive, creative, and persistent. He has a desire to learn and be heard. He illustrates a sense of inquiry about what it means to shape learning within the group and eventually among his own students. When

Chema's self-assurance reveals itself, he becomes a strong voice in the contributions of the program both during his time as a student and beyond.

Chema's time as a USH participant illustrates the reality that he, like each of us, has a personal connection with the surrounding world. We each have an interpretation of and interaction with the spaces we traverse and our interpretation of our context is colored by the activities in which we participate and the people with whom we socialize. In Chema's case, his reading of the world is astutely uncovered in and around the use of video in the learning process. As Chema embraces the camera, he assists us in better understanding his positionality in his world, and in realizing the role of this technological device as a methodological tool for driving learning and defining his own social space. Throughout, we see how Chema asserts his agency to shape his participation.

IN THE CENTER AND CO-CONSTRUCTION OF LEARNING

Chema's enthusiasm for recording films exemplifies how video becomes a powerful tool for putting him in the center of learning, including co-constructing its direction. The highlighted aspects of this learning include selecting on a topic, securing a direction, and constructing a cohesive story.

Selecting a Topic

In the early stages of identifying topics, Chema announces that his movie will be: "*What is San Juan.*" He continues to tell us he desires to more narrowly focus on the artisan community. Chema's first videos reflect this topic. For example, they capture the dying and weaving processes. Chema shares these videos in a spirit that exhibits his excitement about showing the abundance of San Juan's resources and how they are used to make natural dyes for the brilliant fabrics that are so famous in this town. Weavers use plants, herbs, vegetables, and other locally available natural materials to create the plethora of colors used to stitch garments sold in the ample San Juan weaving cooperatives. Capturing the weaving culture in San Juan was not difficult for him. For one, his mother works in one of the cooperatives. In addition, with just a short stroll down the street, he will always catch a glimpse of women weaving through nearly every door or window. Equally present in a community walk is the humble exquisiteness of the colors that come to life in their textiles.

In the coming weeks Chema's cinematic gaze shifts. His videos have multiplied and expanded beyond his topic. There are masses of videos on his camera such as religious processions, town celebrations, and everyday happenings at home and with his friends. It is possible that in thinking about "*What is San Juan*", Chema wants to capture everything. I am not particularly surprised by Chema's broad scope. In this culturally rich and beautiful town, I could imagine how difficult it would be for someone to choose what represents San Juan. This is especially challenging for a first time camera user who is given complete and open reign to make the decision.

It occurs to me as well, however, that filming everything was a result of more than simply selecting a topic. Chema was exploring his town for the first time through a new medium and a new lens, literally and figuratively. Everything seems more visible to Chema and he appears to have the desire to capture it all. Moreover, when youth take cameras in their hands for the first time, it is common for them to film all that is around them. This is a revealing way of seeing what youth identify with, what they gravitate toward, and what interests them in learning more.

Chema's films demonstrate more than a desire to capture his surroundings. He is experimenting with techniques. It is evident that he had a very good sense of composition. The shots are beautiful and he is getting more and more comfortable with filmography. While I am impressed with the amount of filming that Chema does and its continually improving quality, I view these videos with confusion. It is increasingly clear by the numerous and diverse set of shots that he captures, that Chema is struggling to settle a topic. I think to myself, Chema is definitely taking this commitment very seriously. At the same time, what he is capturing goes beyond his initial theme of artisans. We have somewhat of a time constraint for this project and I want to work with Chema to talk through what ideas he has and if his interests are shifting.

In a fleeting moment, I have an opportunity to have a conversation with Chema about this portfolio he is constructing. This is my attempt to listen to where he is going. As we are walking away from Carlos' home, we discuss his growing number of films. He says that he wants to show what San Juan is, create almost a commercial for it. He expresses this idea with animated passion "*Puedo ver el principio: empezaré con un poema que leeré y una imagen de un amanecer aparecerá.* [I can see opening with a poem that I read while there is an image of the rising sun]." His hands motion toward the sky, as he explains this, and he points to the water and then to the mountains as if to insinuate that these would be part of the opening scene. He continues, "*Después, me gustaría contar una historia de las montanas y poco a poco mostrar algunas partes de la cultura que ilustran quienes somos."* [Then I would like to tell a story of the mountains and little by little show the different parts of the culture that illustrates who we are]." Chema explains this to Erin and me and we listen intently as we walk her to the dock to catch her boat back to Pana. Chema confidently tells us his plans of what exactly to film and when. I almost feel, pleasantly, as if Chema is exploring himself to some degree.

Erin and I are not disappointed the next time we meet him. He follows his promise to film what he said and so much more. As his diversity of films continues to grow, it is not my intention to discourage him. Chema is increasingly confident about his work and using the camera. What was more, what he is capturing is illustrating a budding talent for composition technique. For example, he is diligent about the tripod, he considers the lighting, and he is using the different angles as we had explored talking about "film theory". Just because I am unsure of his direction doesn't mean that he doesn't have one. I am careful not to convey a message that he is "lost" or step in and decide what his path is. Rather it is important for him to articulate the path his is navigating.

Another week passes. At our next Saturday meeting, Chema and I have a moment to revisit our previous discussion about his focus. At this point in the process the youth are all in different stages. This affords me to spend more time with Chema. I ask him what he sees as emerging as most interesting to him and what he feels is significant for the world to know about what San Juan is in his eyes. His blank face stares back at me. Yet his eyes were bright and sparkled with his innocent smile. "*Todas las cosas, todo es importante"* [Everything, all of it, is important]," he says. I can see in his gaze that everything is important to him and he genuinely is having a hard time eliminating or deciding on any one idea in particular. The camera is bringing Chema's world more vividly alive. Moreover, his films provide us with a view of his community and his enthusiasm in capturing it. In this eclectic portfolio, we were beginning to see his world through his eyes.

Securing a Direction

During the upcoming week, I happen to have some time to visit with Chema. I walk to his house hoping to review his films with him and talk about narrowing his focus. Unfortunately, he doesn't have the time that day. He is in a hurry to get to a Maya ceremony that is taking place in the neighboring town of San Pedro. I say goodbye to him. He walks out of his house where I stay to copy his films. While the files copy, I talk to his younger sisters. We have a notebook and are practicing writing words in Spanish, English and Tz'utujil. Their older sister helps with the Tz'utujil words, since the younger girls are only learning Spanish. The girls also love to borrow the camera and the iPod that I have with me. They take turns running around recording films in their house and playing games on the iPod. It is always a joy to have these moments that don't count as work.

When the films finish copying, I pack up my things and take them across the lake. I arrive in Pana for an appointment with Erin and Marisol. I meet them in the

Maya Traditions office to review Chema's videos. Still learning to speak Spanish well enough to talk with the youth, I often consult with Erin and Marisol. I talk with Erin first about my thoughts and questions related to Chema's work. We regularly talk about the progress of the students, given our close collaboration. "I'm not really clear where he is going," I tell Erin. Aware of his participation over the weeks, she says, "I am not sure either". My choice to seek out Erin's opinion isn't motivated by concern. I am not worried, not yet. One thing that I have learned in my work with emergent learning environments is to trust the process. In my experience, everything is connected; it is just a matter of how to articulate the connections. I am certain that Chema is in a process of discovery. I am also sure that he has a vision – however clear or unclear that is for him now, I cannot tell. Neither can I decide it for him. Only he can elucidate his thoughts about what really is developing in his mind. Chema must have a reason for what we interpret as a seemingly chaotic accumulation of films. We just haven't yet discovered it.

Marisol and I meet after I speak with Erin. She and I review the films and interviews that Chema recorded. Marisol and I talk through the films identifying themes, patterns, and concepts that were emerging for her. I do this with Marisol as more or less a practice of how I engage in a conversation with the youth. This time, I prepare to frame a conversation with Chema, predicting how it might unfold through a collaborative analysis of his films. In addition and to reiterate, with limited Spanish, this is a step that helps me gain confidence to guide him and not direct or influence him. After this exercise, I learn some new words to use in my upcoming conversation with Chema. I am now more aware of the films and what themes Marisol and I respectively see. This exercise, particularly practicing the Spanish language, helps to ready my exploration with Chema.

Chema and I meet within the next week to have our conversation. I take the constructivist approach that I practiced with Marisol. Chema and I begin by viewing the videos. I ask him to look at his films and consider the current organization of them. He goes through different folders that he had created and I sit back and watch him. He follows them intently and with deep concentration. From time to time, I offer a question, but I limit my comments, curious to see what direction he takes. With so many films, Chema at times becomes overwhelmed. Occasionally, he quietly smiles, shakes his head and laughs. He now realizes how much he had filmed and how finding a way to pull from so many films to create a short documentary is not going to be easy. Though the task is enormously difficult, he is clearly ready for this challenge.

I offer Chema another strategy. I ask him to write down what he is seeing. I ask, *"Para ti, puedes pensar en las palabras que entran en tu mente cuando estas mirando los videos? Hay ideas o temas grandes suscitando?* [For you, can you think of words that enter your mind when you are looking at the videos? Are there ideas or larger themes that are emerging?]" This seems to stir up Chema's creative energies. He begins to write ideas, such as jobs in the community. The jobs included cooking, weaving, dying and preparing threads, and taking care of the community. Looking more closely at these jobs and who does them, Chema comes to the conclusion that his videos are

predominantly about women. We talk through this a little more and then together we agree that focusing on the women in this community was the emerging theme.

This discussion and discovery process is somewhat delicate. This is Chema's documentation of his observations, the insights and understandings of his interpretation of the social and cultural context. He is the local actor in the role of observing and capturing events that positions him as the expert to identify the emerging patterns. Through viewing and analyzing video footage, Chema engages as reflective practitioner. He was offered a way to document his world and now he begins to participate in uncovering, seeing, and negotiating what it says about his reality. Since this is a role that Chema needs to author, I, the facilitator, need to tread lightly on any commentary that might influence his decisions.

The videos offer Chema a chance to reflect and they make visible his thinking, his ideas, and his interests. Sifting through them requires that he organize his thoughts in a way that represented these. I pay careful attention to how we work through this and how to support the encouragement of his inner voice. Chema takes this opportunity to rely on himself. Unlike the early stages of watching *When the Mountains Tremble*, when he seemed to wait to find comfort to speak, Chema is focused on his own approval. He confidently moves through the process of discovering his story. Chema illustrates his ability to identify a main theme essentially on his own. For the rest of the morning he works on organizing his films according to the women's jobs he identifies. With a focus on women in the community, Chema discovers his focus.

Constructing a Cohesive Story

Through this activity Chema seems to find his voice and heighten his confidence. Chema moves through the remainder of the project with a steady vision. This focus on women as the theme creates a series of new thoughts and directions for him. While this is exciting progress, I still want to be sure he has the support he needs to continue his momentum. What is evident with Chema is that although he retreats from the larger group, he benefits from aspects of social learning, particularly talking

through ideas with someone. This is immensely evident as he works through and around his video clips.

It so happened that the next week, Carmen (Chapter 5) started to apprentice as a Program Leader. On the way over to San Juan, my very insightful volunteer, friend, and colleague Mohit – volunteering with us that day – brought up the concern of whether or not Carmen would want to work with the girls or the boys in the group. Mohit mentions this since the gender roles are quite defined in Guatemala, which more often than not shapes the interactions between genders. Broaching this topic seems ironic to me, given that Chema had now decided it was important to focus on the women in his community for his film.

Carmen, however, is quite unique. I am reasonably certain that working with males or females would not make a different to her. Yet, I feel that the decision ultimately had to come from her. In keeping with the youth having a say in their learning, I want to put the decision in her hands. I turn to her and told her what we said. I proceed to ask her, "*Con quien quieres trabajar, chicos o chicas?* [Who do you want to work with Carmen, girls or guys]?" "*No importa, es lo mismo*. [It doesn't matter it is the same.]," she replies. If she has any reservations about working with boys, it would never show.

When we arrive, we assess who is in attendance and who needs to work on what. Chema shares that he plans to film today. It seems appropriate to have Carmen go and act as his assistant. I am confident that this combination would be a good one. Carmen is detail oriented whereas Chema sees a bigger picture. The working chemistry between Carmen and Chema is shaky at first. Chema looks a little bit as if he did not want to work with her, but this does not rock Carmen's confidence. She starts to talk to him about basic social things in his life. After not too long they are both laughing and smiling. Within a matter of minutes, Carmen skillfully moves the conversation toward Chema's work and begins to draw out a plan with him. What materializes is the intention to head out to the streets to conduct interviews. Carmen and Chema create a set of baseline interview questions and the two of them take to the streets. Tripod, camera and microphone in hand, they go together. Mohit follows them. They find Gloria, a woman artist and restaurant owner in the community. They interview her about what it is like for her to be a widowed mother juggling two jobs.

Carmen and Chema return with several full interviews and a handful of very good films. Chema is inspired by these interviews, so he immediately begins writing his introduction. He composes a draft of this, one that illustrates the power of women and their importance to this community. The passion that connects him to his work permeates the space in which we work.

Now with his interviews completed and a significant amount of exciting footage, Chema begins to storyboard and edit his film. At USH, we introduce the youth to storyboards in the beginning of the program, along with numerous other tools. In many educational video projects, storyboarding comes first. We steer away from using them before the youth film for two reasons. Storyboards set up a linear model. In using them, the youth organize their predetermined films, expected answers, and story. In such a model, the youth have an "answer" to what they want to go out and prove about their theme, rather than inquire and uncover what emerges from their discovery in the field and with their interviewees.

In creating documentaries, the author is not always aware of what the interviewees will say, what they will learn during the process, and essentially what story will surface. Moreover, in an effort to highlight local knowledge and voices through ethnographic means stories are not planned, they emerge. As a result, our use of the storyboard later in the process might seem a bit backwards, but this is intentional. The storyboard is something that later helps our participants pull the emerging themes into a cohesive narrative. It is a tool to structure their sequences after they have identified the big ideas in the films they have captured. These ideas evolve as the youth obtain and analyze mounding information, as Chema had done early in is review of his films. Thus the storyboard becomes a tool available to them when they decide it is appropriate and it supports our effort to cultivate community-based documentary creations that are grounded in video ethnography techniques.

Chema's process to define his story was just that, emergent. He works diligently to organize his footage into themes. He arranges his interviews into themes as well. Chema listens closely to what he heard and began to organize subtitles for his film. This leads to a creative sequence for how Chema wants to thread the ideas to

develop his story. Throughout, Chema engages in a process of moving in and out of reviewing films, appraising interviews, perfecting his introduction, capturing more footage, and editing. The fluid "conversation" between these practices is in actuality the process the youth undergo to establish their final documentary versions.

It is inspiring to watch Chema flourish as a filmmaker. His process of creating never seems to end. Each time we discuss a creative idea to include in the film, a light bulb would go on in Chema's mind. Chema would say, "ohhhhh" and then run out the door and record another video. In fact, up until the last minutes before his first showing of his film, he works on various finishing touches. Chema arrives to his final product through video and the conversations with his peers, members of his community, and with all of us connected to USH. Throughout the process Chema navigated the positive supports around him that assisted him in coming into his own.

TOWARD DEVELOPING HIS FUTURE

Chema's final video is impressive for a first documentary. The process he undertakes to create his film reflects many of the core principles that we aim to cultivate in our work with the youth. For one, the video shows that Chema not only asserts his perspectives, but also shares the perspectives of others in his community. The film is a final culmination of the themes that Chema found within his interviews. Chema's documentary is a creative organization of the questions and answers of the interviewees combined with images that brought their words to life.

What is missing from Chema's movie is the historical connection that we invite students to explore. Why are woman held with such significance in the family and the community in San Juan? What in the history has caused women to struggle in the way that they do? These are profound questions that in a second level to this project, Chema might explore. Yet to ask this of their first films is to ask a great deal.

The ability to move in toward a more critical analysis of one's community and history takes time. To meet Chema where he entered the learning environment was the first priority. The vacillation between his timid tendencies and his emerging confidence was a struggle that Chema had to first confront. Over the year, he grew a great deal through his participation in this project. This young man, perceived as quiet and reserved in the beginning of our USH program had started to transform into a confident and openly vocal presence in the group. Chema found self-assurance in his words, talents, and visions. There were fewer and fewer times that Chema was waiting for others to speak before him. He began to believe in his own ideas, perhaps leveraged by finding a theme that was personally meaningful.

> *Pues, cambié mi tema muchas veces. Pero lo que me encanta sobre mi decisión de seleccionar este tema es que mostré que las mujeres pueden hacer muchas cosas que los hombres no pueden. Por discriminacion, muchas personas dicen que las mujeres no pueden.* [Well, I changed my theme several times. But what I love about doing this theme is to show that women can do many things that

men can't do. Because of discrimination, many people say that women's can't do things.]

This statement might be interpreted in two ways. First, this statement reflects that Chema believes in individual power to achieve what they envision, regardless of their gender. Second, Chema is also outwardly speaking about discrimination, a topic that he rarely would breach with me in the early stages of our time together. By focusing on women and asserting their power, Chema is identifying his developing progressive ideals and his willingness to challenge dominant expectations created as a result of discrimination. In his community where there are very clear distinctions between men's work and women's work that position women as subservient, Chema takes a bold step to assert an opinion opposing normative thought. It occurs to me that there is perhaps a connection between Chema coming into his own and this newly articulated stance. He may be paralleling his experience of shaping his own path, with the ability of women to shape theirs.

The topic of women, mainly his mother, was very near and dear to his heart. He emphasized this position by attributing his work to his mother. He shared what completing this video, this particular theme, meant for him.

Ahora, me doy cuenta que lo hice para mi mamá. Aprecio que tan duro ella trabaja para nuestra familia y que tanto hace. [Now I realize that I did it for my mom. I appreciate how hard she works for our family and how much she does.]

His closeness to his mother is evident in his writing about her.

Y en ese año me inscribieron en la escuela, me puse muy contento pero cuando me fueron a dejar, mi mama empecé a llorar mucho porque yo quería mucho a mi mama, no quería separarme de ella pero al transcurso del tiempo me fui acoplando en la escuela y al final del año ya no quería dejar la escuela. [And this year they registered me in school, I was very happy, but when my parents dropped me off, my mother began to cry a lot because I loved my mom very much and I did not want to leave her, but over time I went to school without sadness and at year end did not want to leave school.]

This says a great deal about the role that Chema sees that his mother plays and that women play in his community. Though his video he does not explore the nature of who created these roles and why, through making it Chema does illustrate the adoption of such roles in his mind and the realization that keeping them immensely rigid is something that should be brought into the forefront of community dialogue.

ASSERTING AGENCY TO CREATE ONE'S SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS

To say that Chema came to see different roles for himself and for women uniquely through our methodological approach outlined in this chapter would be a reductionist

statement. However, USH purposefully adheres to the methodological tenet of using video assist youth in asserting their agency to shape their environments. We believe that this supports our youth's shifting identity and perspective that is internally motivated. In dialoguing around the videos that they record, spaces open up for our participants to assert their agency within the environment in order to create their path not only for learning but also to envision their own futures. This is a concept that we embrace to counter previously oppressive educational principles that impose a way of learning, being, and knowing.

As mentioned in the opening chapter, educational practices have historically denied indigenous knowledge and ways of being as valid ways of participating in the world. In the process of imposing a one size fits all ideological conception of not only knowing but also being, members of society have unconsciously adopted particular roles within communities. When one does not "fit" then he/she becomes marginalized. This can lead to self-deprecation and fear to embrace ones own emerging identity. There is little room for youth to explore their uniqueness and their creative navigation to find their "place" in the world.

Chema shares how having the opportunity to find moments of agency to question and explore himself and his topic expanded his once simplistic interpretation of himself and others.

> *Sobre mi mismo, aprendí mas. Uno es grabar mas. Pero, primero sobre las personas. Nunca había escuchado a sus propias historias de sus vidas por que nunca preguntamos. Entonces, cuando hice este video para conocer mas a la gente, quienes son, que es importante para ellos, y como estan luchando para sus hijos. Es muy importante saber también conocer el lugar un poco. Y sobre mi mismo, aprendí mas. Hacer un mas creativo, explorar mas como hacer eso, buscar otros planos generales de nosotros mismos para crear un video mejor. Al final, tuve una bonita experiencia.* [About myself, I learned more. One is to film more… But first about the people… I never listened to the stories of their lives because we never asked. So when I did this video to know the people more, who they are, what is important to them, and how they are fighting for their children. It is also important to know to place a bit. And for myself, I learned more…, be more creative, explore more how to do that, look for other general shots of ourselves to create a better video. Finally, I had a nice experience.]

The growth that I saw in Chema was enormous. This once tentative talker is currently one of the most forthright voices carving out the direction and sustained success of USH. He is also forging opportunities to expand the work of USH. Specifically, he has connected with an elders group and has organized a schedule of capturing the stories that they are eager to tell.

Watching Chema develop over time has been a fascinating and rewarding experience. Working with him reminds me that students like Chema don't always get the opportunity to assert their opinions and draw on their own resources to

create their own possibilities. Initially quiet youth like Chema might be dismissed as hopeless at Chema's age, now 18. His social introversion with some of his peers and his perceived tendency to rely on others to provide his views might label him as hopeless. Many times, the inert voices and abilities don't find their way to the surface, because the design of experiences close the possibility. In fostering flexible design and conversation around video, Unlocking Silent Histories aims to support youth like Chema to find the opening to discover how they can make their way. Chema is a perfect example of the potentials and possibilities that emerge through a flexible learning design that invites learners to find the moments to assert confidently their voices and securely amplify their identities.

In relation to our described methodology, Chema's story shows us how video becomes a major catalyst in his development. Video has been used in various research projects with an intention to promote literacy, invite participatory learning, and support youth-led ethnographic studies. At USH, we build upon these aims and amplify them by using methodological approaches that involve youth.

What this chapter has attempted to model through Chema's experience is that video becomes a powerful tool for putting youth in the center of directing their own learning and in enlightening culture. These methods position youth as researchers of their own communities. This research affords us insight into their worlds in a way that helps us co-construct curriculum with them. Explicitly, using video makes visible the learning process, the co-construction of curriculum, reflection on practices in the community, record aspects of their lives, capturing cultural practices and community interests. In other words, it places the youth in the center of directing USH.

REFERENCE

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London, England: Zed Books.

PERSONAL JOURNAL, MAY 2014

I wake up in San Juan to the honking of the very first bus that leaves from San Pedro to the city at 3:30 AM. It is not until the 5 AM bus honks that I roll out of bed. When I do, I look out the window of the "eco house" I rented in order to spend more time in San Juan. I am greeted with the morning colors that paint the sky, mountains and the water. Everything else is silent as the sun begins to rise. The land that makes up my yard generates a sense of calm, positive and a peaceful energy. The water and the various items that reflect a Maya cultural past create this feeling.

I walk downstairs and begin my day. Throughout the hours I rotate to different parts of this property. Each spot has a unique view of the lake and in each corner I am surrounded with symbols of a Maya world. Centering the land is an altar that is used for Maya ceremonies. Ceremonies are personal and held for various reasons. To my left is a temascal, which in English is loosely translated as a Maya sauna or bath. These saunas hold much more significance than just a bath. To the right is a palapa (covered eating area) with black corn tied in strategically placed locations on the posts that support this space.

Aside from the obvious features, the greenery and vegetation are important to this culture. These include native chaya, ruda, and apozote. Chaya is a plant very high in iron. It was a common staple in the diet of Maya families, as it is known to be more nutritious than spinach. Chaya must be cooked for ten minutes before it is eaten or it can kill you. Ruda (rue in English) is a plant that the Maya people believe can be used to ward off evil spirits. Citizens of San Juan might be found carrying it in a pocket. Locals speak credibly about bad spirits that present themselves in the streets

after midnight in this town. Thus, carrying this plant helps to protect those who have it with them. Apozote comes from a sparse tall shrub-like plant with pointing leaves. It is commonly used to combat parasites.

Maria, the woman who owns my house is a Maya shaman. These shamans are sometimes called spiritual guides or healers. I imagine that she constructed this space with Maya representations for two reasons. For one, Maria tells me that this house is built on Maya sacred ground. The symbols and structures here represent some of the most well-known core practices of her early ancestors. Maria uses this space to perform ceremonies and utilize the temascal. She brings locals and tourists alike.

I chose to rent this house for its serenity while I write. However, it has been anything but that. The non-typical experience is perhaps also a reflection of the culture here in San Juan and for Maria's family. Although Maria does not live here, many people come to the door asking if she is home. Others knock looking for the *guardian* [groundskeeper], Rafael. Maria, her guardian, and her family spend quite a bit of time here. The guardian works on the garden and cares for the medicinal plants. He is present in the early mornings and returns in the afternoon. At times he can be found sleeping in a space next to the temascal. He also has a shower in that area. Thus on occasion, the clothes he has washed after working hang on the line.

Maria schedules ceremonies based on her schedule and often occupies the space for several hours at a time. When I enter the property thinking that her ceremonies are finished, I often find her sitting with her clients. They perch themselves on the hammock that was gifted to me by a good friend. When they are here, I feel like an intruder or an unwelcomed guest. More accurately, I feel that I am interrupting her very important work with people who come to her to find peace.

When her family experiences water problems in the upper part of the pueblo, they come here to wash their clothes. I never am certain when they will come. At first

visitors came unannounced. They all have keys and can enter at will. In actuality, it is a rare day that there are not interruptions and a rare day that I will have completely to myself.

As a person who grew up in a culture where privacy is taken for granted, this was strange to me. At first, sharing this space with all the players was stressful. Maria and I spoke and we came to an agreement that she would call first to let me know when visitors are scheduled. We learned to respect each other's cultural differences and live harmoniously in this space. Yet still, it continues to feel a little strange.

I focused on letting go of my views on privacy to better understand the cultural practices here. I interpret that in her eyes this is Maria's land and her space and I am simply a visitor. Yet perhaps it is more than that. Families live together, support each other, and do not think twice about entering a space unexpected. I have observed this as a common practice in town. There are always many people in the homes of my students and not all of them live there. Privacy is not something that is expected, these families are very close and quite interdependent. As a visitor here, I am compelled to respect that I should be flexible and sensitive to the rhythms of Maria's world.

I have come to accept this because I feel very fortunate to be in this home and welcomed into this community. Being here affords me the opportunity to write in a beautiful location and be closer to my students and families. Moreover, it allows me to explore the rituals and practices as I see them take place before my eyes. This despite the very limited view that I had through the eyes and explanations of gringos while living in Panajachel.

When I lived in Panajachel, I did not fully understand the meaning of all the Maya symbols around me. The least of which was the temascal. In Pana, the term temascal was used quite often amongst the gringos who had lived here for many years. "Temacals are amazing! There is a temascal in Santa Catarina," they would say. I can make an appointment for you! When they spoke of them they were referred to as Maya saunas. In my mind a sauna is a place where people go to relax themselves and their sore muscles. Thus, I had an image of a sauna that was not unlike what we would experience in the U.S. No one refuted this interpretation. In fact this image was only reinforced through the continued discussions about how gringos use them. The practice of foreigners here not surprisingly is that they go to the sauna to heat us for a while and relax. What the locals don't understand is the next step. Once they are over heated they run to jump in the cold lake. The use is quite the opposite of how the Maya use them, which I would eventually come to understand.

It was not until Norma decided to do her story on the temascal that I realized that there was much more behind the temascal. It was after her story too, that I could more greatly appreciate the importance of the herbs and plants in my yard and how they were historically used by the Maya population and currently used by only a few. Norma's rendition of what this means to the communities in this location helps us see

what the significance of these baths are to the Maya. The temascal on this property is one of four that exist in San Juan. In San Juan, their use requires permission. Unlike the other three in town, the one on this property is a new construction, created to represent and rekindle an ancient and traditional practice of this community.

CHAPTER 9

NORMA MENDOZA, 18 SAN JUAN LA LAGUNA "TEMASCALES"

[Maya Saunas]

USING VIDEO TO CAPTURE THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE OF INDIGENOUS YOUTH

En el pasado, las mujeres se bañaban en un temazcal para obtener poder. Ellas se bañaban también para prevenir enfermedades. Eso fue la verdad especialmente en el caso de las mujeres embarazadas. [In the past, the women would go into the Maya Sauna to get power. They would also bathe in them to prevent sickness. This was especially true of the pregnant women.]

Language, though often taken for granted, has powerful significance. Over the years, the language of those continuing to assert a position of power has created a particular vision of society and of what others should aspire to be. According to scholars, Western terms used to describe indigenous peoples and their histories draw out particular emotions associated with the continuing implications of this time. To be sure, Smith (2012) highlights four words that have been particularly devastating to indigenous peoples: imperialism, history, writing and theory. It is argued that "language carries culture and the language of the colonizer became the means by which the 'mental universe of the colonized' was dominated (Smith, Kindle Location, 974). Consequently, indigenous peoples were forced to abandon and be embarrassed of their own tongues. The persistent transmitted meanings of these words continue to impact the education of indigenous youth. Countering this pattern is important

in facilitating an education that honors language and opens up opportunity to use language to share custom and traditions.

We at Unlocking Silent Histories aspire to encourage indigenous youth to use their language and to analyze semantic connotation of it. We inspire the use of our participants' native languages by emboldening opportunities to speak, reflect, upon and share their ideas in these languages. We do not make or force this selection. To raise conscious about "choice" we do, however, ask critical questions regarding why youth and their interviewees choose one over the other. More often than not, the reason that our youth cite for using Spanish relates to the implicit messages conveyed in school. Students are forced to learn in Spanish and they are told that the use of this language will benefit their integration into a "better world". Increasingly throughout this project, youth gravitate toward making their films in their mother tongue. Norma, a student from San Juan La Laguna spearheaded this trend. She felt compelled to document and share the temacal traditions *temascales* [Maya saunas] in her language Tz'utujil.

INTRODUCING NORMA

Norma is an 18-year-old young woman, who is confident, busy, and guarded. She carries these characteristics in a sophisticated manner. Though she always gracefully and politely communicates with me, it is difficult to break through what seems to be a means by which to protect herself and her time. She and her sisters Juana and Lucila are the only three girls participating in this initial San Juan group. While Norma and Lucila complete their projects, Juana does not finish, as her love for sports quickly overtake any interest in making documentaries.

When I encounter Norma in various spaces, it is evident that she elects to speak Tz'utujil. This language is a derivation of K'iche' and is one of 22 Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala. Tz'utujil is the second most endangered languages in Guatemala. Norma's community of San Juan la Laguna is one of six around the Lake Atitlan region where the language continues to be spoken.

My first encounter with Norma exemplifies her preference to speak Tz'utujil. We are in Chema's house the first day that the program is introduced. After we familiarize the youth with the concept I hear Norma turn to talk with her two sisters. It is immediately clear that their communications are not in Spanish. The sharp sounds and occasional clicks release a harmonic rhythm heard when the language is spoken. There is an evident hesitation among the three of them. Juana and Lucila on either side of Norma appear as if they are wrapped around Norma waiting for her lead. Whispers permeate the room, until Chema's mother steps us and addresses the group. She says in Tz'utujil, "This is a good opportunity and you children should take advantage of it" [Translated by Marisol]. It is an early indicator of the strength, respect and power women in San Juan have and another example that the language is very much alive.

I continue to realize the strong presence of Tz'utujil as I enter Norma's home. As the oldest girl in the family, she assumes much of the same responsibilities as her mother

and directing her sisters' chores and caring for them as well. All communications in the home, except when foreigners like me enter, are in Tz'utujil. In this tight family one would never recognize that Norma and her two younger sisters are half sisters. Though I cannot speak the language, the gestural interactions between Norma and her two younger sisters mask the fact that these two are the daughters of her mother's second marriage. Norma also interacts with their biological father as if he is hers. She and her older brother lost contact with her natural father when Norma was very young. After many months of coming to know, she tells me, "*Mi padre no me conoce y no conozco a el. No tomé su apellido tampoco. Nunca tuve la oportunidad de tener mi padre a lado de mi. Pero con la ayuda de mi madre y de lo que ella me ensenó, he aprendido como luchar para las cosas que tengo en mi vida.* [My father doesn't know me and I don't know my father. I didn't take his last name either. Never have I had the opportunity to have my father by my side. But with the help of my mother and what she has taught me, I have learned to fight for the things that I have in my life.]"

In our beginning workshops, Norma communicates with Marisol and me in Spanish, but always evokes her Tz'utujil with her peers. What I find interesting is that during these meetings the other youth ask if they can speak in Tz'utujil when they review what they learn or discuss films they watch. Norma, however, never asks permission to speak her language within the group meetings. She always feels the authority to make that choice.

My impression of Norma during these initial sessions is that she was going to be the superstar in this group. In our first workshop, we introduce basic camera skills and editing. Norma takes interest immediately. She seizes the camera and goes straight to the *concha* [the local gym] to film. She applies her ideas of videoing different shots: short, long and various angles. We return to Carlos' house and I open the computer and give Norma a brief introduction to the editing software. It does not take long for her to take control of the computer. In no time, she creates a sample video complete with titles, edits, and music. It is a two-minute video that is

impressive for a first time user. During the time that she works on her film, she also guides her sister; again, she does so in Tz'utujil.

Although the language is a favored means of communication for Norma, her family, and many of her peers, it is evident that the use of Tz'utujil is rapidly shifting. The government recently set a mandate that Mayan languages be taught in schools. However, not much time is dedicated to learning Mayan languages. In Maya villages, our youth report that they have language classes several times a week. In San Juan Tz'utujil is taught three times per week, for twenty minutes each. In Guatemala City teachers spend no more than 40 minutes a week on the language. School's emphasis is on Spanish and increasingly on English. To be sure, Norma learned Spanish at a very young age, beginning as soon as she entered Kindergarten. It is interesting to note that this is drastically different than what our youth from Chirijox tell us. Those within the same age range as Norma, tell us that their first introduction to Spanish was their fifth year in school. Norma, who is studying to be a primary school teacher, is also learning English and will be expected to teach basic words to her students. She and her peers spend significantly more time studying to read and write English than reading and writing Tz'utujil.

On the other hand, many of the families with whom we work illustrate the language's swift decline. In one family, for example, the grandparents speak only Tz'utujil. The parents speak a basic level Spanish and are completely fluent in Tz'utujil. The older children are fully fluent in both languages. Where as the youngest children only learn to speak Spanish. The families cite that the reason for this decision is based on their vision that it will more likely bring economic security. In just two generations, I observe the endangered Tz'utujil disappearing within a single family.

The recognition of both the importance and the fragility of the Tz'utujil language are visible as I work with Norma, visit her home, and visit her extended family's homes. As I come to know Norma through her work, I also acknowledge the challenges of simultaneously holding on to her language and culture while simultaneously living in the modern world that assumes this language is impractical. The complex role of language and its inherent value for expression emerges not only in my work with Norma, but also with her peers in San Juan and in Chirijox. Thus this chapter touches both on how Norma's experience illustrates the significance of language, and the ways in which our other youth encounter language within their own process and participation in USH.

"CHOOSING" A LANGUAGE

While I mention that Norma chooses to use her language, such a choice is not afforded to the youth as they cross various contexts. Instead, the youth have adopted the expectation that Spanish is obligatory and expected. This creates an inability for the youth to truly exercise their right to make a personal decision to use their language. In the course of the time with Unlocking Silent Histories, language has been a combination of a requirement, an unconscious choice, and a conscious choice.

Requirement

When we began working with the youth in Chirijox, it was necessary that students use their Mayan language. The majority of the older generations speak only K'iche'. This becomes evident when the youth set out to the streets to interview their grandparents and parents when they converse with they youth in the only language that they know. While we hear an occasional Spanish word, these are rare substitutions when describing something for which no K'iche' word exists, or which has simply become customary.

I am personally elated by this "accidental" opportunity to document language and I begin sharing my excitement with the students. During such communications, the youth seem appreciative and surprised. The glimmer in their eyes is unmistakable. Such an expression is one of disbelief as well as delight. It is one that you might expect when you receive a pleasant surprise or are rewarded positively for something. I cannot be sure, but I imagine that this reaction is a result of the youth not often being rewarded for the use of their language in anything academic. This is later confirmed by an experience discussed in the next section.

The required use of the K'iche' in the interviews brings about benefits and challenges. One of the most advantageous gains is that the youth are capturing language on film. The youth are documenting the words and expressions used to describe memories and opinions of their elders. Another reward of taking in these stories through K'iche', and later in San Juan's Tz'utujil, is that the interviewees feel comfortable speaking and freely voicing their thoughts. This is especially important given the fact that there is an apprehension about being on film.

The most difficult challenge is that the interviews eventually need to be translated into Spanish and then to English. In this process, we are uncertain how much meaning we lose between translations. This is evident when, for example, Norma and Chema sit in front of a computer together to begin Norma's translations. In the conversation, they speak Tz'utujil and Spanish. It is apparent while listening to them that they are struggling to agree on the interpretation of the dialogue. In fact this is a regular occurrence across all the students. When translating their interviews, the youth spend a significant amount of time debating and "arguing" about both how to find the words to express what their elders are saying and how best to capture the essence of the dialogue. In the process the youth do their best to decode the meaning in a way that holds on to the particular sentiment.

This continues throughout the project and we realize that we run the risk of providing one of several interpreted meanings or expressions. Yet there is a benefit to this process of engagement and decrypting meaning as well. The majority of the time, the youth discover that there are no exact Spanish translations. In coming to this realization, the youth see the direct interrelationship between language and culture, seeing language as carrying culture. In this process, the youth are reconnecting with the significance of language to express their stories and cultures more authentically.

Unconscious "Choice"

The premise of unconsciously choosing the language is one that takes on two forms. Specifically, the choice includes slipping habitually into their Mayan language or into the presumed election to use Spanish. In both cases we aim to make the unconscious conscious in order for the youth to distinguish the difference and assist them in more consciously choosing when, where, and why they decide. In the end, we want the choice to truly be theirs.

Norma and her San Juan peers participate in our workshops in Spanish, but quickly turn to using Tz'utujil to more deeply explain how to think about the concepts we share or technical skills that we teach. This transition is often automatic and instinctive. There is a visible comfort that falls across the space while speaking in their Mayan languages. We bring this unconscious transition to the attention of the youth in times when they ask permission to speak in Tz'utujil. I ask them to consider why when they often feel most comfortable speaking their Tz'utujil, do they feel compelled to ask for permission from me. I can imagine that there are two immediate reasons for this action. One is that my Spanish is limited, but I can still understand enough to facilitate their conversations. The second thought is that asking permission has become a habit given the expectation that Spanish is the dominant means of communication in their schools and beyond their community.

An example of unconsciously using Spanish is present in the events surrounding one of Norma's peer's who participated in the second year of USH. This student, Evelia, asks her mother to record the narrative for her film about traditional food. In it the mother records the step-by-step process of making *caldo* [broth]. The recording is in Spanish. We listen to the recording and agree that it seems quiet and timid, and carries little emotion.

We work through the benefits of re-recording the voice only this time in Tz'utujil. Evelia agrees that it might be a stronger narration if done in Tz'utujil. I offer to help with this and walk with Evelia to her home. We enter the house, the mother is cooking and the father is sitting at the table. Evelia approaches her mother and speaks to her in Tz'utujil. Her mother looks somewhat puzzled but is willing. Her father listens on, emitting a look of concern. He turns to me and says, "*No salió bién?* [It did not come out well]?" I respond, [*Si, por supuesto. Fue maravilloso*. [Yes, of course, it was wonderful]. I continue to describe that we like the recording very much yet at the same time we are thinking that Evelia's mother's voice will sound much more authoritative and emotional if she speaks in her own language. I tell him that we recognize this fact in other interviews we conduct in the surrounding villages. The husband looks at me and says, "*Estamos acostumbrados a estar obligado a hablar en español*. [We are accustomed to Spanish being obligatory.]" He proceeds to tell me that it is compulsory in the schools. I reassure him that in our project this is not the case. Though I might sound like a broken record, I reiterate that this is their community and their films; thus the youth are free to decide to use their language and use it proudly, without consequences. There are smiles and "thank

you's" exchanged throughout the room. Evelia and her mom find a quiet space and record the narration in Tz'utujil.

While the students and sometimes the adults habitually and naturally communicate in Tz'utujil, their unconscious decision to use it is open to them only within their homes and community activities. Their unaware "choice" to use Spanish arises in contexts that are more reflective of dominating and colonizing activities. These include school or many of the non-profit or volunteer activities organized by foreigners. This may explain why the majority of the first year students narrate their videos in Spanish. To be sure, on various occasions of the students cite that they choose to use Spanish because it will be easier for us and for a broader audience to understand them. The citizens with whom we work, have unconsciously accepted what it "easier" and for whom, denying their own right to assert their cultures and stories through their own voices.

In my interactions with Norma specifically, I have surmised that she outwardly chooses the language she uses and in what situation. However, as I observe the various students and their parents during our program, it is gradually obvious that choice is not one that is overtly made. The context influences the language decision and that decision vacillates from one location to the next without any visible internal conflict. What is more, upon further inquiry, it becomes increasingly apparent that this "choice", especially to use Spanish is an internalized, unspoken, and unexamined expectation relating to the fact that indigenous youth have learned to forego their language and instead use Spanish in a "progressive" world.

Conscious Choice

In our USH program, the youth are becoming more conscious about choosing to use their Mayan languages to both interview their subjects and narrate their documentaries. A great deal of the credit is attributed to Norma for this emerging

trend. In what feels like a reactive determination. Norma makes this conscious choice and carves the path for others to make it as well.

Norma unconsciously and consciously choose to use Tz'utujil in many spaces within which she participates. The consciousness of this decision emerges after she specifically asks me "the rules". *Debemos hablar en español o en Tz'utujil*? [Should we talk in Spanish or in Tz'utujil?]", she says. I take a deep breath when I hear this question. I feel as if time freezes for a moment and various thoughts rapidly race through my mind. While I am aware of the history, the fear, the oppression, the mere subject of choosing what language is disturbing to me. For myself, choosing a language is not ever a decision with which I am confronted. I was raised in the States with an explicit and implicit message that English is, and always will be, the dominant language. This message that I once conceived to be neutral and harmless, I recognize as laden with power. In this moment, the detection of such power that is reflected on Norma's face, has shown itself in the other students as well when they are confronted with this choice. Norma is not the first of our students to ask this question. Although I can hope that no other students will feel the need to ask this question, I am quite certain that she will not be the last.

Pulling myself back to the here and now, I answered with brevity. "*Es tu decisión, Norma*. [This is your decision Norma.]" I am quite certain that my body language expresses that I am startled by the query. As the broken record yet one more time, I continue to remind her that these are her films and that I want them to do what is most comfortable and what makes the most sense with what you are trying to convey. I have patience in saying this as I know that I am up against a long history of asserting a power of using language to shape indigenous experience and thought. Within our sessions we build the understanding that the youth will decide with whom, how, and why the films are distributed. Within that discussion we emphasize that their languages are important in capturing their stories. Nevertheless, to develop trust that this is actually the case takes some time. With time we hope to develop that this question is unnecessary and in fact, we hope that they consciously choose to use, document, value, and conserve their language.

Norma does not tell me her decision. Instead, she sets up the camera, frames her aunt in the viewfinder, and begins to speak. Without hesitation, Norma begins the interview with a question that she asks in Tz'utujil. Opening the spaces for the youth to explore their culture through their language is our effort to help them unlearn that they do not have a choice. Moreover, as we increasingly uncover that language carries culture, then the conscious use of the language to explain histories and traditions is one that they should be able to make without self-reproach.

KNOWLEDGE-LANGUAGE ATTACHMENT

We see subtle evidence of the fact that language carries culture is visible when Norma elects two locations to conduct her inquires about the cultural practices of the *temascal*. These locations include her hometown of San Juan and the nearby

Santa Clara. Norma makes this decision for logistical reasons. Her family lives in San Juan, and her aunt and her grandparents have significant knowledge about the subject. However, in San Juan, the *temacsales* are few. This practice is slowly disappearing. In Santa Clara, however, most of the homes still have functioning *temascales* on their properties. Norma seeks out her family in San Juan and a friend in Santa Clara to help her investigate and express the purpose of and cultural attachment to this practice. Accessing both communities provides an example of how language, location, and explanation are intertwined in expressing this tradition.

A Perspective from San Juan

The same day that Norma and I had our short interaction about what language to use in her film, is the same day that she has interviews scheduled in San Juan. After electing to use Tz'utujil with her aunt, she continues in this manner when she interviews her grandparents. After the aunt's interview is finished, we review it on Norma's camera. As we do her grandparents enter the courtyard from the street. They walk into the home slowly, but with stature. I feel a pause of sorts and I observe a moment of respect that comes first from Norma. She bows her head as she greets them with a kiss on their hand. The others in the room follow her lead. It is as if the red carpet were rolled out in order to announce the presence of the incoming cherished elders. These two indigenous *abuelos* [grandparents] enter with stature and subtly command the respect of those in the room.

The distinct greeting resonates with the lyrical sounds captured in the Tz'utujil language. Norma asks their permission to interview them about the *temascales*. Although I know that she previously arranged this, it seems that asking for permission to film them is customary and courteous. They agree to be interviewed.

Her *Abuelo* [grandfather] takes a seat and waits to be interviewed first. I have heard Norma explain *temascales* in Spanish, but there was something different

about his explanation. Without question, the interview is conducted in Tz'utujil. Norma's grandfather expression while he talks is emotionally captivating and awe-inspiring. I cannot understand a word he is saying, but I can feel the sense of pride and authority in the way that he talks about this tradition. I later come to understand that he describes how the *temascal* functions including how to heat it up and how to enter it. He discusses the associated cleansing of the hot water and why it is important for pregnant women. He identifies the *temascal* as one of the most important medicinal practices passed down by his ancestors. The passion with which he talks about this historical practice fills the space with warmth.

Norma's *Abuela* [grandmother] is next. She speaks softly and more quietly than her husband. Yet certain accentuations of her ever so softly spoken words make it obvious that she is describing this disappearance in the local language. I hold the microphone more closely in hopes to capture her words. Her grandmother speaks mostly about the disappearance of this tradition. She reiterates its importance, but stresses that not only are the *temascales* scarce in San Juan, but the majority of the people today do not know how to use them. As the interview continues, I cannot help but wonder if my sentiments are shared. Does Norma feel the same way that I do watching this unfold before my eyes? I feel as if I am watching history being captured as the daughters and granddaughters attentively take it all in. The respect given to these two elders in my eyes is unmistakable.

The words of her grandparents, and later her Aunt, describe the interpretation of the temascal in San Juan. This custom was very important part of their culture to maintain health and to protect pregnant women's bodies and unborn children. Both the ceremonial process of heating up the temacsal and bathing in hot water and vaporous surroundings, helped to ward of illness and keep the body of a pregnant woman warm.

A Perspective from Santa Clara

Norma continues her quest to explore the historical practice of the *temascal*. While in San Juan, Norma could capture the words of this tradition, she was set on also recording the temascal in practice. She sets out to find experts who have direct experience with its significance and identifies a woman in nearby Santa Clara la Laguna. Norma and I schedule a time to visit the woman's home, interview her, and film the lighting of this Maya bath.

Norma schedules the meeting for our trip to Santa Clara and informs me when to meet her in San Juan. Our plan is to travel on a Sunday morning, leaving at 8:30 AM. The expected travel time of this journey was 40 minutes from Norma's house. Our trip to Santa Clara is longer than we anticipated. We have a number of connections to make. First, we jump in a tuk-tuk to San Pablo, which is approximately 15 minutes away. Next, we wait for a pickup to Santa Clara. This takes us another 15 minutes. We do not go to the center of the town, instead we veer off a side road and catch two different mini buses before we finally reach the pathway to the house, another 30 minutes.

Once we arrive in the town, we walk another 10 minutes before we reach her contact that has a *temascal.* The path is worn, as it is a commonly used corridor to get to the main road. It is a dirt path that is littered with some garbage. On our path, there are many tress and livestock. We then pass a few young boys who giggle at us as we go by. I chuckle a bit, when they laugh at me. It occurs to me that their laughter is because I am strange to them since gringos don't pass here often, if ever. I have experienced a similar reaction in many of the rural towns that we visit. The youth say something. I don't recognize the words because they are speaking K'iche', the language spoken in Santa Clara.

When we enter the property two woman and two children greet us. There is a barn, a house, and behind it a *temascal*. A man appears, greeting us as well. He and the boy watch as Norma and I set up the video equipment. I imagine that this isn't a common sight here in the rural community. Unable to talk with them, I wonder what they think about our work and if they question why we record them. I assume that Norma has explained this, yet I still ponder their opinions.

Our timing, though longer than expected, is perfect. Norma is able to record the woman light the *temascal*. The woman leans over to light the *temascal* as Norma begins to film. It will take about an hour to heat up. In the meantime, Norma interviews the woman who discusses the medicinal benefits of the practice. On another previous visit Norma was able to record locals residents using the *temascal* to bathe. There is no discussion about language this time, these two naturally begins conversing in K'iche'. During the interview Norma captures the woman talking more about the medicinal importance of the *temascal*. I stand back and take video with my camera, occasionally checking in on Norma and both the video and audio recorders. The interview lasts for about 20 minutes.

As Norma and I break down the tripod and put the cameras away we contemplate B-roll that she might need. I ask her to think about what the woman said in the

interview and consider if there are other videos that will help bring her words to life. She shares that the women gives greater detains about the herbs and medicinal plants that are used in the rituals and why they are important to the process. She tells me that plants are seen as providing cures of many illnesses that a person might want to address in the *temascal*. There is a younger woman present now, the daughter of the woman Norma interviewed. She chimes in, adding to Norma's explanation. She motions us to follow her to the medicinal plant garden on the other side of the *temascal*. During our walk, she and Norma occasionally speak to each other, slipping back and forth between K'iche' (between them) and Spanish (for me). This young woman proudly contributes to my understanding of the surrounding objects and their associated purposes for the *temascal* ritual. Unlike in San Juan, the discussion around the temascal here in Santa Clara centers on healing of an ailment. This healing is possible through the various medicinal plants, each of which are selected according to one's sickness.

On our way home, Norma and I discuss the interview today and the one with her grandfather. She explains the two, noting that there are subtle differences between the knowledge, beliefs, and practices in this small rural part of Santa Clara and in San Juan. Norma does not consider them to not be stark differences, rather interpretations that are attached to semantics of the unique languages. This assertion reinforces the particular importance of language to describe and interpret cultural practices and traditions. It is also an opportunity to critically examine the unique ways in which each community practices and celebrates culture.

Norma and I later discuss that we are grateful for this opportunity to both capture a historical tradition that is quickly fading. Norma's hope is that her film will perhaps inspire its revival through appreciating its significance to the Maya culture. We converse about the fact that documenting this cultural practice in Tz'utujil and K'iche' provides explanations that extend beyond what can be expressed accurately in Spanish.

Norma shows her film during various presentations as well as to upcoming students. Norma's experience about the language-culture connection incites more dialogue with her audiences and especially with our students. Not all of our forthcoming students make the decision to create their film completely in their Mayan language. While we hope to encourage a settled comfort in choosing their indigenous languages, we are content that the interchanges around language use heighten debates about whether they have a choice, what choice they make and the implications of both.

EMBRACING THE TENENT OF CAPTURING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Through my work in Guatemala, I come to experience the consequences of pressuring indigenous peoples to forego and question the validity of their language. The costs are felt in relation to choice and expression. The experiences that I encounter with Norma and her peers bring each of these to light.

The very practice of asserting that language is a choice "others" indigenous peoples and their learning. Whether obligatory, unconscious, or conscious youth begin to see their indigenous languages as inferior, isolated, and often essentially extinct. Assuming Spanish over Tz'utujil or K'iche' violates the ability to articulate oneself through their own cultural lens. As we have seen, language is connected to culture, and culture is connected to learning. Asking youth to shelf their first language constrains the ability to fully and eloquently express their ideas and thoughts equally and seamlessly. To assert that Spanish levels their abilities to equitably participate and assimilate to society is unjust. Simply discarding one language and adopting another does not equally allow one to represent thoughts, ideas, and significance. This is evidenced in the various examples of how students struggle to translate from one language to the next.

I can personally relate to this now after feeling like the outsider and having felt the pressure of using Spanish to express myself. Words carry meaning and meaning is conflated with the very choice of words that one uses. For example, with my new friends in Guatemala, we converse a great deal about words and their significance. We discuss the differences between words (e.g., conocer and saber – to know and to know) that embody different connotations. We also realize that a direct translation of a word is not equally transferrable. I am new to this process, yet the youth, who have been speaking both a Mayan language and Spanish, illustrate the difficulties of the transitions between languages. They, and I along with them, realize that language is not just about communication. It is directly attached to the cultures expressed within them.

Norma's experience allows us to see the complexities of languages as well as the fragility of them. While Norma makes her decision to use her language, she in a way asks for the freedom to do so. Yet, the "decision" of these youth to use their indigenous languages in their films is not always one that is negotiable. The youth, however, continue to use Spanish to speak in school and across indigenous communities. In many homes, indigenous languages continue to be strong and valued, yet increasingly parents refuse to teach their language to the youngest children in the family. In this way, more and more youth are adopting the message that their language is not important and it will soon disappear. Norma, and many of our participants are beginning to see the connection between language and culture. With this, they are gaining a deeper appreciation of language's role in their developing identity. Perhaps affording and encouraging the use of video to capture and preserve the community's language and associated cultural knowledges through their eyes and their authentic voices, rekindles the awareness that culture, knowledge and traditions are intricately intertwined with meaning and identity.

For Norma, she has successfully captured and narrated the *temascal* tradition in Tz'utiujil. There are continued debates as to whether the translation and the meanings of the original words are fully expressed in the film. However, Norma's production is now an historical artifact available for to discuss, analyze, debate, and learn more about the significance of the beliefs and practices of their ancestors.

PERSONAL JOURNAL, JUNE 2014

The days in San Juan begin as early as 4 AM. Smoke rises from the chimneys, indicating that people are starting their day. Inside, women prepare food for the family or to sell in the streets or the markets. Men prepare to journey around town for their work in the fields or in the neighborhood.

By 5 AM, the first fleet of workers head for the mountains, the backyard of this community. Carrying their machetes, men, young and old, hike up clearly marked manicured trails. The paths are lined with stones and it is evident that these trails have been carved out and well traveled for many years. On their journey, these men pass banana, avocado, and coffee trees. A bit off the path, they will spot a tree, climb it, and begin chopping. By 6 or 6:30 AM, the chunks of wood are cut into logs (leña) and carefully stacked and tied. The nature of how the wood is tied depends upon if the load will sit on the back of the men or on a horse. Wood is a necessary resource in town; its primary function is to fuel the wood burning stoves.

Around the same time that the men go into the trees, the bus routes begin. The early *camionetas* [buses] make themselves known with loud honking noises. The few early risers jump on board to reach their destinations, which could potentially be Santa Clara, the City, or Xela. The other option is to ride in the back of a pickup, though these do not arrive as consistently as the buses. They are a nice alternative to the bus because one can have fresh air and an amazing view of the lake as these trucks carry their passengers to the mountains away from San Juan.

Not much later, the cobble streets slowly come to life. At first there are only one or two locals exiting their homes. Stray dogs accompany them, as they are just beginning to rise as well. By 6 or 6:30 venders have prepared various foods to sell in the streets. Tables appear in the streets on top of them are baskets and metal cylinders. The contents include local common breakfasts such as *atoll*, [hot cereal/a warm corn drink], tamales, bread with chicken salad, or just bread. Other stands sell orange juice, *líquidos* [smoothies], and small bags of fruit. There is one woman who receives the most clients. She arrives each day looking beautiful. She secures the same corner each day by placing her two large baskets next to her. Colorful patterned cloths encompass the contents. Inside are *chuchitos* [corn dough, tomato-based sauce and meat inside, wrapped in dried maize husks] and tamales. Hurry, though, because these are all gone by 8 AM.

Lancha [boat] drivers are in full force as well. Boats start carrying San Juan inhabitants on their journeys to work or school. They set off for other towns including San Pedro, San Marcos, and Panajachel. Some who dock in Panajachel will have another leg on a pickup or a *camioneta* [bus] en route to Sololá. The water is also occupied by handmade canoes. Each morning men launch them from the shores, paddle out about 100 meters and sit with their fishing poles waiting for something to bite.

By 7 AM, other noises fill the streets. For example machines that grind the corn for the *masa* [dough] are running full steam. Beautifully dressed women carry basins filled with kernels of corn on their heads. When they are finished, the basins, now full of dough, return to their heads and these women either return to their homes or to local tortillerías. Either way, the very nostalgic sounds of clapping together the masa for tortillas reverberate in the streets.

Increasingly the streets are more occupied. Many people are buzzing around to work, school, the market, and to cooperatives filled with travelers on foot, moto, or tuk tuk.

Other life emerges inside the homes. Weavers begin to prepare, dye, or organize thread. This is a preparation process that takes place each day so that men and women can create their textiles. I pass on the street to peer into one home. A man, his two sons, and his son-in-law all sit in their own spaces working on their jaspe. Arts and artisans are ever-present here. San Juan is known for its textiles but also for its paintings and other crafts. Those artists who do not weave, pick up a brush and paint throughout the day. Men and women are in their homes paining.

Tiendas [stores] and pharmacy doors begin to open. Owners do not travel for this work, as most stores here are an extension of their homes. The items do not very from tienda to tienda. Each seems to have the staple items: eggs, beans, snacks, drinks, and minutes for your phone. The few restaurants in town open next. Most of them are empty, with the exception of one. All the locals seem to find their way to "Elenitas" for lunch. It is perhaps the busiest business in town.

Most however, youth and parents, aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers, return to home where families come together to have lunch. After lunch a second round of work begins and the second shift of school. Work includes women cleaning houses or selling more food either in the streets or from home to home. Men can be found again in the mountains, gathering small stones and sand that they will use for local construction work.

People head back to their homes again for dinner around 7 PM. Often work continues after dinner. Women weave into the night or clean up after dinner. Men chop wood and stack it, readying it for the morning meal. Girls and boys do homework or help with other household chores.

There seems to be no shortage of necessary work that needs to happen for the families to function. Yet not all jobs are paid well if they are paid at all. Thus, the economic crisis perpetuates in this proud indigenous community. Tourism is the biggest moneymaker here in San Juan. Yet tourists come in ebbs and flows so the weavers and painters do not sell enough to justify their working hours. Other income comes from corn and coffee. Coffee is perhaps the most profitable, but not too long ago, the coffee bushes were infected with a disease. The coffee plants were all cut to the stem and are just ready to bud beans again. Income is at an all time low.

Reaching "success" is a constant battle for the residents here. For Carlos, a teenager with big dreams, life is a constant and daily struggle. His family fights

each day to keep the money flow consistent enough to support his large family. The daily practices within San Juan do not do much more than maintain their existence. Visions of a better more economically stable life seem impossible to achive.

The fact that Carlos chose to create a video about success was not surprising. It is a topic that Carlos contemplates with every passing day. His struggles include wrestling with the different messages that he receives about what constitutes success for himself and his community.

CHAPTER 10

CARLOS AGUSTIN VASQUEZ MENDOZA (TÍN), 18 SAN JUAN LA LAGUNA "EXITO"

The Use of Analytical Tools to Assist in Dissecting Social, Cultural, and Political Realities

Yo? Tengo muchos sueños. Me encantaria ir a la universidad, especialmente en los estados unidos. Quiero obtener mucho conocimeinto y regresar acá. Quiero crear un mejor vida para mi familia y mi comunidad. [Me? I have many dreams. I dream of going to college, especially in the U.S. I want to learn as much as I can and return here. I want to create a better life for my family and my community.]

(Carlos)

The previous chapter opened with the words that Smith (2012) identifies as most detrimental and imposing aspects of colonizing language used to oppress indigenous communities: imperialism, history, writing and theory. Smith argues that these terms are "words of emotion which draw attention to the thousands of ways in which indigenous languages, knowledges and cultures have been silenced or misrepresented, ridiculed or condemned in academic and popular discourses" (Kindle Locations, 606–607). In concurrence with this trend, research more often than not occurs without indigenous peoples input. Which in turn not only denies participation in the dissection of their own circumstances but also suppresses the ability to have an equal voice in expressing the implications for their own communities.

At Unlocking Silent Histories, we employ the tenet of critical pedagogy that Freire (1973) calls critical consciousness. Critical pedagogues define this as providing opportunities for youth to question taken for granted norms. This tenet of critical pedagogy asserts that learning engagements should provide opportunities for youth to become aware of the social, political, and economic situations that influence the conditions of their situations, historically and presently. Learners apply a variety of lenses to become more familiar with normative, as well as alternative, ways of looking at social life while developing critical learning skills. These perspectives come through dialogue, which is one of the most important aspects of fostering critical consciousness (Freire, 1973). Further these tools orient social action to change the circumstances when and if they are deemed necessary to change.

This methodological aim is perhaps the most difficult to practice with our participants. For centuries indigenous people have, as have we all, been indoctrinated to absorb the implicit and explicit messages of social structures, positions, and the definition of social life and achieving success within it. In sharing the story of our work with Carlos, the chapter illustrates the associated challenges to engage in critically analytics when deep rooted dominant Western influence consumes us.

INTRODUCING CARLOS

It is a sunny morning in April 2013. Marisol and I have an appointment with a youth group in San Juan. It is the first time that we introduce Unlocking Silent Histories to our second community. We enter to see approximately 20 youth sitting waiting to speak with us. I am hidden slightly behind Marisol, smiling and trying to appear relaxed. As the foreigner, I am more comfortable sitting slightly in the background. I peer over Marisol's shoulder as she describes the Unlocking Silent History program. Carlos's stature and stare catches my attention. The presence of this 18-year-old overshadows every other person in the room. Something about him radiates the unmistakable characteristics of and strength.

The youngest of 11 children, Carlos father died of illness several years ago. Carlos is admirably dedicated to helping his family fill the gap of this loss. This was the third death in his immediate family. Carlos has also lost two sisters, one when she was 27 and the other was age 6. His mother illustrates in no way that she is defeated by these events. She is strong, warm, and works tirelessly to care for her family. Each time I enter Carlos' home she is warm and welcoming. Despite never having attended school, she has a good command of Spanish. However, she prefers to and always does speak in Tz'utujil. Whether necessary or not, Carlos translates our exchanges back and forth between Tz'utujil and Spanish. I look into her eyes with admiration not being able to imagine having endured such losses, let alone raise 11 children in San Juan, given its economy. In the midst of it all she is always smiling and always looking forward.

Carlos seems to have adopted his mother's strength, and at the same time the heaviness of what she carries. His self-imposed feeling of responsibility for his

mother fuels Carlos' strong work ethic. He consistently talks about finding a job in order to help her. The best way to do this, he believes, is to obtain an education. Moreover, he asserts that leaving San Juan to learn as much as he can will best position him to help his mother and also his community. Carlos' mother supports this quest. In fact, she sent Carlos to Guatemala City to attend school. Although it is rare for children to leave theirs homes, Carlos' mother did this – as many families do – with the aspiration to provide Carlos with a better education. Carlos tells me that he returned because his mother was no longer able to afford to send him. However, in coming to know Carlos and with his participation in my analysis, I am compelled to conjecture that there is more behind that story. This story underlies his suspicion of outsiders and his cultivated resilient identity.

Erudite Suspicions of Outsiders

Carlos' eyes fixate on me as Marisol continues to talk. His stare makes me somewhat uneasy. A feeling of nervousness washes over me. I temporarily unlock my gaze from Carlos attempting to put us both at ease. I look around the room meeting eyes with the other faces that seem more focused on Marisol. I return my attention to Carlos and his look intensifies. I feel as if the thoughts behind his stare carry words. It is as if they are saying, "*Who are you and what do you want? What is your angle here and what do you get out of this? Who is Donna and what is this Unlocking Silent Histories project*?" In this moment, I can only infer that this it what he is thinking. Later in one of his a journal entries, Carlos' journal reveals that he was initially skeptical of the project and of me.

> It was a Tuesday morning; we were called together by the Maya Traditions Foundation, to talk about a project that neither our mothers nor we had any idea what it was. I went to that meeting without energy or a bit doubtful, but I listened. I did not trust this project. We began to raise questions about the project and in my opinion I was not convinced by it. We were told that we were free to participate and to continue or leave at any point. I was undecided because I was not convinced and wondered about the consequences of participating. My question for the coordinator was what do we gain from this project, a project that gave her documentaries. I decided to join though, because I did see a personal opportunity. [Translated from Spanish]

Carlos' life unfolds with many experiences and uncertainties that inform his suspicion of projects that enter his community. I am not the first outsider to bring ideas and ventures his way. Others come and go, leaving Carlos feeling as if the benefit of their efforts is not for San Juan. Carlos has both a strong affinity for his community and while he is open to foreigners, he cautiously questions their motives. In his experience these outside entities inhibit the ability for his indigenous community to move beyond its current conditions. Instead, he asserts, they are only advancing their own lives.

Resilient Sense of Identity

Carlos first and foremost identifies as a Maya indigenous young man. What this means to him is not always easily expressed. In this passage shares his feelings about this:

> In my community they call me Tín. I am trying to find the way to communicate and express how we feel about being indigenous and being from a pueblo. I feel rejected because of the way I talk. Sometimes when I am wearing the typical dress, other people, they look at me with a certain face. Sometimes the same thing happens with my language. [Translated from Spanish]

Carlos connects with the dress and language of his indigenous heritage. Carlos' attachment to this history is also evidenced by the activities that occupy his time. For example, he plays Pelota Maya (a traditional ball game) and participates in cultural events such as dances, performances, and ceremonies. He can be found wearing traditional masks and traditional clothes when participating in Maya celebrations. Carrying on these traditions is important to Carlos and, he believes, for the future of his community. At the same time he recognizes that not everyone outside him embraces the value of securing this identity.

> As I was trying to say, we feel comfortable and amongst family here in the community of San Juan la Laguna. It is a pretty place and very touristic, but at the same time, we feel very rejected by other places such as the capitalists and the tourists that look the other way. We have the same right, but I think they do it just to do it (look down on us). The truth is, we are always rejected, by those who are not of our communities. This makes you get up and say that we are different and we fight for our lives, we keep on going. I feel good when they reject me because I realize that I am different, and I like that. At least, I am trying to be different than others. [Translated from Spanish]

In this excerpt, Carlos conveys his experiences that shape how he interprets others see him. When I hear him speak, I can feel the pride and at the same time the sadness in his words. I stare at this confident and strong young man, who stands before me in his baseball hat, Bob Marley bracelet, jeans, and t-shirt. These Westernized icons do not define him, I think to myself. Carlos is proud of and feels a deep connection to his indigenous heritage. As Carlos refers to "being rejected" he creates a separation between himself and an outside world. For Carlos a secure future means appreciating his traditional ways and at the same time living in a contemporary world.

This handsome, strong, and confident young man does not participate in his world passively. Carlos is constantly critically questioning his surroundings, both locally and globally influenced. He is already chipping away at the social, political and historical structures that create his world. Our conversations most often focus on these topics as they apply to government, history, economics, politics, and Western

ideals. In these discussions, Carlos continually returns to the theme of wanting to be educated in order to help his family and community. In talking about this profound dream, he constantly struggles to make sense of the overarching and entrenched structures that inhibit his ability to achieve his dreams. His decision to focus on success as a topic is not surprising. Carlos's approach, however, has various unexpected turns. While Carlos is unequivocally critical in his own right, he struggles to fully create an image of his topic that encompasses both tradition and modernity.

SETTING THE FOUNDATION FOR PROFOUND EXPLORATION

After meeting Carlos for the first time, I think to myself, if I can gain his trust the others will follow. This trust will require treading lightly, listening and waiting. Without this bond, approaching difficult topics that foster critical analysis and critical consciousness are virtually impossible. Rather than diving into the heavier side of the work, I take the time to come to know Carlos. Both my one-on-one times with Carlos and my participant-observations of his interactions with his peers, afford me to work and learn with and from Carlos and eventually earn his confience.

Our One-on-One Time

My original time alone with Carlos was serendipitously crafted. This began shortly after our meeting and upon my first return to San Juan to work with the youth here. I walk toward Chema's home feeling a bit relieved that we are meeting there in this comfortable space. When I arrive this comfort dissipates as I quickly am guided out the door. As we exit, Chema says "*Vamos a cambiar de casa. Vamos por la casa de Carlos*. [We are changing houses. We are going to Carlos' home.] I feel a quick tensing sensation come over me as Chema speaks. The striking eyes that Carlos focused on me still were a little haunting. I take a breath and gather my composure. I smile and talk with Chema as we walk through the center of town and then along to Carlos's home. About five minutes later, Chema stops and turns. We are standing in front of an iron gate with a sold door behind it. Chema reaches over the top to release the lock to open the door. This is, after all, Chema's grandmother's house. Otherwise it would feel as if he were breaking in.

We take a step over a small concrete curb that is designed to keep the water out during the rainy season currently in our midst. I walk one pace behind Chema as we continue through a short passageway that reveals the open space. My unease about confronting Carlos subsides in his surroundings. The first thing that I notice is his mother as her weaving process retains a steady beat uninterrupted by our entry. The sound of the wood tightening the threads is couched within a few chirps of chickens that walk around the yard. Her presence is dwarfed by the large space that engulfs her. Similar to what I witnessed in Carmen's home, Carlos' house is a combination of inside and outside spaces. To the right is a cinderblock structure that has four rooms.

Three are small bedrooms occupied by different family members. In front of these is a traditional wood burning stove under a covered outside area that serves as their main kitchen.

To the left, there is another structure that also has three small square spaces. Three of these are bedrooms and the fourth is a second kitchen. Inside the family stores the plates, pots, and pans. Aside from this there is another wood burning stove. On this side there is also a *pila* [traditional outdoor sink] and the bathroom is a little set back and separate from the house. Both sides are in one long line, each side separated by the short walkway that I just entered. Outside each space is a concrete floor with a roof above, which is supported by pillars. It is here that we set up each Saturday morning to meet. Those pillars open to the outdoor space behind us. It is slightly crowded and inclines upward. There is a corn plant, a few coffee plants and the ground has little grass.

I finish taking all this into my memory when Carlos suddenly appears. He emerges from his bedroom and salutes Chema and me. He greets me with a smile and a handshake. The handshake is firm. His expression, I interpret, still emits a hint of caution.

It is possible that I imagine this caution, Carlos does not reveal hesitation toward me. He is hospitable and courteously offering to help me set up the three computers

that I carried across the lake, up the steep hill to Chema's home and then across town to his home. He disappears into his room for a moment and reemerges. When he returns he is carrying an electrical cord that he stretches over a doorway and out into the open space where the table is. I smile and gesture a thank you. At the same time I hesitate, thinking about the safety of the equipment. This of course is not the first time that questionable electrical work would touch these computers. It was a similar site, I recalled, in the Dominica Republic. There we worked with a string of cords connecting one to the other to eventually provide us with the power necessary to start our machines. That experience doesn't stop me from holding my breath and saying a little request to who ever is watching us to protect my computers as I plug them in. This may seem like a strange attainment of my precious equipment, but without these slightly well traveled, overused machines, the youth will have no computers and the program will simply cease to exist. The plug from my computer connects with what appears to be an outlet converted from a to a three-prong opening. As we set up the computers Carlos is quiet. Attempting to break the ice, I talk to him with my now more "fluent" yet very broken Spanish. We make small talk waiting for the other students participating in USH to arrive.

This time together on Saturday mornings become our personal time. Each week our time alone seems to get longer as the youth adhere to Guatemala time. We never start exactly at the dedicated 9 AM time. This leaves a stretch of quietness, a space where Carlos and I get to know each other over the passing weeks. Each meeting, we repeat our ritual. I enter, he and his mother greet me, he helps to set up the computers and we wait for the other students. We talk about our lives, our histories, our ideas, and Carlos' dreams. Carlos shares his many dreams. Little by little, I feel Carlos'

protective shield weaken ever so slightly. As time goes on, Carlos talks more and I listen more. I tell myself, perhaps he is frustrated with my Spanish, but the reality is that I feel his increased sense of comfort with me.

With His Peers

I also come to know Carlos a little better as he works with his peers during the activities we engage in as a group. He and his peers participate in similar activities that we did with the Chirijox team. The youth here also experiment with cameras, watch *When the Mountains Tremble*, practice interviewing, and contribute their perspectives. The nature of and sequence of the activities alters a bit both by what we learned from the process in Chirijox and how the San Juan group directs our progression. Carlos leads much of this. For example, after we watch *When the Mountains Tremble*, Carlos takes it upon himself to create his own questions about the film, relating these questions to how it impacts his community. The questions are thoughtful and profound.

Our activities, designed around discovery, provide the youth with a space to play with the technology and be both in front of and behind the camera. With each passing day, the youth fell increasingly confident about directing the ways in which the conversations help to create our unfolding activity. Their actions and dialogues around the cameras also provide them the space to develop a sense of the project as their own. Carlos often takes the lead on steering the emerging direction. This usually is a result of his inspiring thoughts and questions. Carlos' contributions more often than not turn political. In these moments, I do not interject, I simply listen.

Although the youth provide a sense that they own the project, there are times when they still request permission for how they work. For example, one of the students asks me, "*Podemos hablar en Tz'utujil* [can we speak in Tz'utujil]? "*Por supuesto* [Absolutely]!" I tell them. However, Carlos never asks. He speaks Tz'utujil most of the time with his peers. It seems not to occur to him that he "needs" to ask permission. Each week, like in Chirijox, Carlos slips in and out of conversation in Tz'utujil. The majority of the time when he is speaking to his peers, he speaks in his first language. Tz'utujil is most prevalent among all the students with the group is trying to deconstruct complex ideas and conversation, or when they are learning new concepts and technologies. I sit on the sidelines as Carlos and his peers speak. I do not understand a word, yet I enjoy watching a transformation occur when they do. Their voices strengthen and their articulation echoes with conviction when they speak to each other in Tz'utujil. The language seems to amplify the visibility of emotions around whatever the topic is. The melodic and harmonious pace with which they speak reveals, not surprisingly, how much more comfortable they are using their own language.

In both our personal and group interactions Carlos slowly begins to open up to me. His sense of humor emerges along with his quickly growing his leadership. We begin to form a bond through inside jokes that we create together. One of these

involves gender roles. When I need help with something, he says, men are superior. And then when he requires assistance, I say, women are superior. This back and for jesting lessens Carlos' impulse to question my motives. Simultaneously, Carlos asserts more and more of his perspective. He does not hesitate to interject and modify any ideas that I have for our meetings. For example, when we split into groups to have discussions, I always prepare them guiding questions. Carlos, similarly to what Carmen did in Chirijox, takes these questions reads them, and quickly makes them more profoundly and personally connected to the community needs and perspectives.

These interactions, along with my one-on-one meetings contribute to dissolving the wall Carlos originally erected as he analyzed me. We continued finding things to connect on and little by little he lets down his guard and lightens his suspicious gaze. We begin to talk more freely and directly covering just about any topic, personal and project related. Over time, we developed a trust, not necessarily with language, but with sentiment. Now, there is an unmistakable openness and comfort that matches his vibrant smile.

DEVELOPING CRITICAL INQUIRY

In the weeks leading up to Carlos' selection of a topic, I witness his inquisitive mind in action. I see a young man who does not readily accept ideas bestowed upon him. The questions that he asks illustrate that his beliefs are not simply informed by ideas that enter his world; they are also defined by his connection to his indigenous identity. Carlos presents as a critical constructor of information who does not merely consume ideas. Yet this seemingly unwavering core of his being all but disappears during his learning trajectory and video production. Carlos struggles to release his firm grip on the overwhelmingly globally accepted definition of what success is and how to achieve it. This struggle begins after he selects his topic and during my interrogation aimed at challenging his steadfast hold on projecting only his espoused view of his theme.

A Theme Primed for Critical Inquiry

Finding a theme for his film project was not straightforward. Originally, Carlos sets his sights on a topic that reflects his pride in both San Juan and in his indigenous heritage. He, like many of his San Juan peers, wants to share the rich customs and traditions of this town. His interests include the natural resources, *Pelota Maya* [Maya Ballgame], and traditional celebrations. For the first several weeks, Carlos vacillates back and forth among these topics deciding which one speaks to him the most. At the same time that Carlos is trying to decide, we invite the youth to keep an open mind, reinforcing that they should select something that ignites their passion and commitment to seeing the project through. We advocate that they walk the streets with curiosity, asking themselves what captures their attention and what they want to understand more deeply. Carlos takes this recommendation

seriously and what seems to come out of nowhere, Carlos announces that he changed his focus. He describes that his enticement to engage in the activity of walking the streets with an open mind is what inspired his change of heart. Carlos writes:

> One day I went out on the street for a walk and I realized I had many people wasting their life on other things. And there were many unsuccessful people. So then I asked myself, how could I help these people? I decided I was going to do my project on this idea of success. [Translated from Spanish]

This statement is not far removed from Carlos' desire to help his family and community. The fact that his attention gravitates to the practices in his community that are a "waste" of time, illustrate his interpretation of what work and habits are inhibiting their success. Carlos now names *Éxito* [Success] as the topic to which he commits to exploring.

Though Carlos never states this implicitly, it is plausible that in his desire to help his family and community influences his decision to select "Success" as his topic. Exploring this theme might assist him in gaining insight into how his community defines what they need to rise above their current conditions and use that to inform how he might assist in bettering the local conditions. Thus, the topic has purpose for Carlos, a purpose that aligns with his personal dreams. What is more, the theme is in and of itself at the center of what Carlos enjoys persistent inquiry. Focusing on success, Carlos can further deconstruct the larger structural forces that come into play in his local situation. Exploring success as a theme has the potential to inspire critical inquiry and consciousness not only of the political framing of success, but also the cultural, economic, and social lenses that help assess the impacts on the community. I am initially very excited for Carlos because I see this as a tremendous opportunity for him to explore more deeply his own questions about his local situation.

Resisting Critical Inquiry

To date, the majority of my conversations with Carlos have centered on challenging political ideals, deconstructing the status quo, and revealing "my intentions". I have seen him interrogate what is around him and ask profound questions that deepen his knowledge and curiosity. There was something, however, about this topic of "Success" that made Carlos forego this seemingly naturally critical aspect of his character and hold steadfastly to his initial belief of about the nature and attainment of success.

This begins with Carlos adamantly and rigidly defining success. Namely, Carlos expresses a sentiment of success that reflected a Western mantra – work hard and you will succeed. Carlos, as inquisitive and guarded as he had been in coming to accept me, assumes this imported definition of success. This uttered meaning materializes throughout his work on the project. He cites examples of working hard and fighting for what you want. He persistently claims that this in turn will yield achievement, a state defined by monetary and material advancement. His images included workers walking through the cornfields, men chopping and carrying wood, and venders in the streets. Through the lens of the camera, Carlos captures his own crafted significance of hard work happening within San Juan.

As I watch his videos, a faint voice echoes in my mind. This voice says, "pull up your bootstraps and you will achieve!" This is of course one of the very phrases that inspired me to question my own belief systems and which eventually materialized into my dedication to developing socially just learning designs. With flashbacks of my own initial biases and internal struggles with this topic, I feel an urge to steer Carlos toward my own thinking and experiences. I hold back my words. I instead pause and contemplate the irony. All around Carlos people are working hard. If anyone is literally pulling up their bootstraps, it is the citizens of San Juan working in the fields, in the mountains, and in their homes. What is more, is that indigenous communities – in Carlos' words – fight for their lives. Yet their hard work leaves them in an endless cycle of poverty and oppression. The harder they work and fight, the more difficult it seems from them to reap the promised benefits of their labor. This western interpretation denies the long history of resistance and indigenous agency.

Rather than directly point out to him the possibility of looking at this through a lens of and resilience. Rather than achievement, I find avenues to explore other possible interpretations of success with Carlos. I do this by gently pushing back on his thoughts. I ask him where he heard this definition and if he could recall who influenced his definition and what it means to him. Carlos cites his mother and his teachers – people who make it difficult to counter. I wonder out loud in order to engage him, if everyone in your community shares this definition of success. I try to guide him to take this opportunity to speculate what people in San Juan define as success. Finally, I ask him, *Whose definition is this and is it representative of the definition within his community? Are there possibly different definitions of success?* Perhaps, the message of the community is to work hard, but it is possible that it holds

different cultural meaning. I reflect at this moment on Smith's caution that colonizing words embody colonizing culture silencing indigenous knowledges and practices. It is my intention to support Carlos in investigating local meaning of success.

I try to remind him, and myself, that the work with USH is not to define and prove their ideas, but rather to explore the possibilities and perspectives of them across the community. Our conversations are not easy because this topic is perhaps the most politically charged of any in the group. I know from my previous talks with Carlos that he appreciates being challenged, and often incorporates what others say into his decisions on how he views things. Yet this time, he doesn't seem to enjoy the challenge.

Carlos does listen intently, but I am not convinced that I have enticed him to unpack the roots of his beliefs about success. It is clear that Carlos likes to ask deep questions and that he wants so much to talk about ideas, politics, social justice, and anything that comes to mind. Nevertheless, I'm not certain that he was ready to be pushed to start to critically dissect the highly westernized and loaded term. He is a confident person, and this confidence appears to fuel his reluctance to be open to other possible ways of seeing "success".

I imagine why it might be difficult to release this definition. At 18, Carlos has made it his life goal to find a way to be successful in order to help his family rise above poverty and lessen their struggle. This message of success is associated with money and material goods, that he envisions will change his family's circumstance. It is a message that is carried by many sources including his teachers and other adult role models in his life as well as the media. I am quite certain that this steadfast adoption of what success is, is not about just consuming the message. It is about having hope, seeing possibilities, and creating a goal for which to strive. At the same time, this word and its potential definition bring with it a culture that does not immediately coexist with his indigenous identity. In the end, our discussions to this point lead us to unpacking this definition to some degree. However, our sometimes heated, yet enjoyable and interesting conversations left us both with more questions than answers.

The only words I can find right now are ones that reflect the USH mission. We have to be careful, I remind him and myself. Our purpose is to learn together. We do not want to enforce our ideas on people; we want to create spaces where youth can discover, and connect with their own stories and ideas. Our dialogue begins to exercise a critical analysis of the his theme, an opportunity to begin loosening the grip in order for Carlos to find his own answers, to whatever degree that might be. We close the conversation and are left reflecting on our discussion that we agree to reconvene another time.

TEASING OUT CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

About a month into our work, I had to leave Guatemala. Foreigners need to leave every 90 days to renew their visas. I never wanted to leave the youth, the project

or Guatemala, but at the same time, I had to remember that having space without me was an opportunity for self-direction and self-struggle. My time away affords Carlos the chance to mull over and contemplate his ideas on his own. In reviewing his interviews, I am again reminded that both of us calling into question our unconsciously adopted norms that relate to success will continue to be a challenge in teasing out critical consciousness.

The Message of Language

Carlos and I communicate through Facebook from time to time while I am away. He tells me that he is doing interviews around the community to see what people were thinking about his topic. His limited access to stable and fast internet restricts our communications. He is not able to upload or send his recorded interviews to me, leaving me with almost no connection to him while I am gone. I do know however, how much work he is doing to quick connections and low bandwidth. I am excited to hear about his progress and patiently wait to see what his work.

Carlos is the first person that I see upon my return to Guatemala. We are happy to see each other and exchange our usual greetings. Carlos does not waste time, he retrieves the computer and he brings up the interviews that he has been recording. In reviewing his films, I quickly realize that none of his interviews are recorded in Tz'utujil.

I ask him why his interviews are in Spanish and his response is short. It is for you, because I want you to understand me. While I appreciate his sentiment, I cannot help but think that there were other reasons. Historically, colonizers, politicians and teachers have required the use of Spanish. Are these influences what causes Carlos to use Spanish instead of his preferred Tz'utujil? This, I consider, goes beyond Carlos' expectation that gringos, that I, require him to use Spanish. It is an implication of years of being conditioned by outside forces that impose restrictions on our ability to be conscious of the decisions that we make and why they are made for us. The only words that I can find are: "Carlos, these movies aren't for me they are for you. They are for your personal inquiry, for you to share with your community and to share with students in other communities. Your language is an important part of your story" [Translated from Spanish].

This should be an opportunity for Carlos to use analytical tools "to assist in dissecting social, cultural, and political realities phenomenon". I try to engage him by wondering out loud, if the obligatory expectation of using Spanish might factor into his assessment of success. Carlos firmly states that he is using Spanish because there is a wider audience that will understand it. I understand this and to some degree is correct. After all, I struggle to learn Spanish quickly and well enough to communicate with him, and Carlos desperately wants to intellectually engage and be challenged. At the same time, I rebut this, by asking him why this is has become an accepted norm. Carlos goes into a quick monologue, speaking too fast for me to get his every word. However, I infer that he makes his case that Spanish

is more accessible, and this is just the way that it is. These questions are nothing more than teasers at this time. I realize that shaking centuries of deeply rooted fears and coercion to detach indigenous youth from openly questioning the adoption of imposed norms will not be rapid. This is not something that happens over night, not even in six months. In these first months with Carlos, I worked hard to gain his trust. I realize that pushing too hard too fast could isolate him. Carlos is not alone in this decision. The majority of his peers in this first iteration of USH use choose to use Spanish in their narrations even if most of their interviews are in their local language. With Carlos, I leave this battle for another time, analyzing the topic of success is enough for us to tackle at the moment.

Although this is a battle that I do not take up with Carlos in this moment, the message relating language use, cultural practice, and social norms will continue to be a focus of inquiry with our students as we continue our work.

The Message of Success

We change the topic of conversation to look more closely at the kinds of interviews that he has captured. We view the list of questions that Carlos uses to talk with his subjects about this concept. The way that Carlos organizes his questions helps to reinforce his own definition of success.

Carlos' interviews are structured methodically. That is, he asks each of his subjects the same questions. These include asking them to define success and given an example of a time that you have failed in trying to achieve success. Carlos has selected family and friends as his interviewees. It is not surprising then that their answers mirror, and thus reinforce, Carlos' own definition of working hard to achieve. The majority of his interviews are of people ranging from age 11 to 20. Limiting his subjects to the younger generation narrows the possibility for expanding his definition.

We discuss that obtaining one perspective is a great start, yet to fully understand the vision of success within his community, Carlos might consider reaching out to his mother, his grandparents, and the elders in his community. Carlos recognizes the value of this and at the same time reveals its challenge. "It's hard", he says. "Going out to interview on your own is really hard" [Translated from Spanish]. He tells me how he tries to interview one man who he described as rude to him. "*Me gustaba más cuando practicabamos entrevistas en la calle y estabamos con un equipo* [I liked it better when we practiced interviews in the street and we were with a team.]" I empathize with him and agree. It is much easier to film in teams for various reasons. In this incident it descreases the unease of talking to people who are not accustomed to or uncomfortable with being filmed. I reassure him that there is no rule that says that he can't team up with others in the group. They are there to support each other. I also reinforce how to approach people for the project. Not everyone will be happy about being on film. And some, like you did with me, I remind him, might question your motive. We smile and laugh, remembering how Carlos was incredibly suspicious of me in the beginning. This seems to put him at ease and he

CARLOS AGUSTIN VASQUEZ MENDOZA (TÍN), 18 SAN JUAN LA LAGUNA "EXITO"

takes this advice as he continues on with his project. He seems determined to find people willing to talk about their idea of success and perhaps broaden this definition. Despite this, there is little content that ultimately pushes the boundaries of and disrupts the notion of the term success to which Carlos is wedded.

In order for our youth to question and determine their own belief systems, they need experiences that challenge their normalized and unconscious ones. Evidence implies that we adhere to our internalized ways of being until "unsettled times" disrupt our unrealized schema (Swidler, 1986). This consciousness arises only when our ways of being in the world suddenly do not function as "normal" and expected. The disruption allows us to raise our awareness, questions our beliefs, and potentially alter our world views. By asking the same questions to his interviewees, and by finding people with his same perspective, Carlos never experiences these "unsettled" moments. It is not that Carlos was not interested in other perspectives. On the contrary, he normally questioned everything. Carlos was too close to this subject in that it is the core of his dream. Perhaps if this dream was shattered, his hopes of attaining his goal would be as well. Developing critical consciousness is a process of learning to unlearn and becoming aware. It is also associated with one's readiness to accept what might be earth shattering alterations of what has become safe. Moving toward critical consciousness and critical inquiry is a delicate endeavor. One that requires care, support, and patience.

VISIBLE MEANING AND MASKED GROWTH

Engaging youth as researches is a way in which to slowly and supportively make visible the realities surrounding them. Ideally, when employing video ethnography in particular we aim to create spaces for youth to contest notions of commonly constructed realities, which have become familiar. The practice widens a vision of reality beyond what meets the eye, extends critical perspective of the future, and offers the opportunity to imagine new possibilities. While Carlos' account of his experience

initially demonstrates that he is unwavering in his viewpoints, a closer look at his engagement in making his film reveals that he is processing his imagined reality and that he is beginning to tinker with possible alternative truths.

Unwavering Definiton of Success

The editing process is a chance for youth to engage in an dialogue that connects the ideas in their minds with the visual representation of those ideas. This process brings visibility to their thoughts, which can reveal numerous internal dialogues throughout the process.

Carlos' reflection on his first pass through creating his video demonstrates his struggle to develop his story as well as his dedication to stay true to his internalized message of success.

> I had problems with the structuring of video. I kept thinking: What will my introduction be? What will be the main context? How can I capture why people say they are failing? [Translated from Spanish]

His journal represents the kinds of questions he asks himself in order to organize and sequence the pieces that he finds important. What is interesting is that the word success is not mentioned, instead Carlos highlights failing. This indicates that in his investigation, he is trying to better come to terms with a pattern of "failure". His fascination with failure tells us that this provides a clue to the "secret to success".

While this is clearly something of interest to Carlos, he does not explore the connection between success and failure. Instead, he feels a pressure to meet our deadline to complete the films.

> I was thinking about all of this for about a month. What were my scenes and how do I want to put them in line? I could not decide in the end and I was running out of time. So I stuck with my introduction and I decided that I would do a narrative about people struggling and working really hard. Then I would follow with my interviews in order of the questions that I asked. The final part was going to be something to sensitize the audience, something that impacts people to make them question themselves. [Translated from Spanish]

His journal entry indicates that time was an imposing factor on his hurried production process. Whether this time constraint keeps Carlos on track to represent his definition of success as it stands is unclear. It does not, however, stop him from thinking about his vision of creating a unique and interesting documentary short all the time focused on, rather than critically analyzing, his definition of success. The fact that he is focused on making the audience question themselves, is an indication that Carlos is engaging in that process himself.

This solidified idea of success and its manifestations continue to reveal themselves up until the moment we prepare to show Carlos' film. On the Saturday afternoon that

my colleagues and I are busy preparing last minute subtitles and exports for this evening's screening, Carlos shows up at the door. He presents us with a new version of his film. This one has a beginning that I had not seen before. The members the Maya Traditions staff and a few volunteers view the film with me. We panic for a moment about Carlos' last minute change. There is a skit that follows his introduction and precedes the video we had come to know. Not accustomed to this change, we initially feel that the skit changes the entire feel and flow of the movie. *What do you think Donna*, someone asks me. *I think we should call Carlos and talk to him. This is his movie and it is his final decision. If he wants it, we keep it.* We reach Carlos on the phone and gently interrogate him about the skit he added. He proceeds to articulate the rational for this introductory addition. He confidently asserts that the skit provides a context for what is to come. We keep the skit and prepare to export his film. In actuality, it is the most powerful representation of Carlos' mental image of the potential reason for failure in his community.

Carol's adjusted film opens with his narrative introduction. He has chosen a photo of himself, head in hand, representing the significant emotional and mental energy he exhausted while engaging in this program. Carlos then reveals the focus of the film, in the backgrounds a series of images flash by as he speaks. Immediately following this, we view his new editions, a dramatization introducing his film on "Success":

> Why are you coming dressed like that? You look like street children. (A woman addresses to two youth man)
> Why do you care? (One of the responds)
> I always work and you do nothing.
> I don't give a shit if any of my sisters work or not.
> Shut up! Help! Help! (the woman calls to a nearby man)
> Get out! Get out! (The man yells running toward the woman)
> Get out! (He continues running after the young men), Go smoke your damn weed and get out.
> The man runs back to the woman.
> Are you ok? (He asks)
> Yes, Thank you for helping me. It was bad, They always act that way.
> I'm tired of those good for nothings. (The man says as he exits the room.)
> [Translated from Spanish]

The scene fades intense, almost ominous, and music plays in the background transitioning to an image of a many carrying a wooden plank walks across the screen cut and the beginning of Carlos' message.

Both sequences are riddled with messages related to Carlos' definition of success. In the skit, we "read" that youth who don't care to work hard, who dress poorly, and who disrespect their families will end up on drugs, leading to a path a failure. The proceeding sequences shows Carlos' image of a community where both men and women work hard to make a better world for their families, particularly their children.

After these sequences, we encounter a number of interviews, reminding us to work hard, overcome our obstacles, and achieve our success. Carlos closes the film with a message to his community: take the opportunity that our parents give us, he says, to walk the right path to success. With each word and associated image, we are repeatedly reminded that our journey to success is one of struggling, overcoming, and arriving.

The entire sequence of his final film reverberates Carlos' continued attachment to the pervasively communicated Western definition of success. What Carlos defined as "working hard" in the beginning of this process, remains highly consistent with the original definition. Despite our many critical conversations and our various arguments about the authority that imparts this message of success onto Carlos, the message persists. Carlos' final film does not readily reveal that he has grappled deeply with our aim of using tools to socially, culturally, and politically analyze his conditions that create barriers to achieving success. The movement and internal shifts that Carlos does internally confront may not be visible in his film, yet evidence of this growth emerges in later in my conversations with him.

Possible Alternative Truth

While one can argue that Carlos' movie perpetuates and retains the Western notion of success, my conversations with Carlos indicate otherwise. It becomes obvious during our later conversations that Carlos does not stop engaging with this topic, and in fact alters his own sentiments regarding it. Even after Carlos completed the final version of his film, he began to consider other perspectives that were informed by additional sources in his community.

Carlos begins to reveal this during our interviews after the project. At the time of this interview, Carlos is on school break. He has taken on a job as a tuk tuk driver in San Juan. He begins his day at 6 AM and ends at approximately 11 PM. He makes 35 Quetzales (approximately $4.75) a day, plus tips if passengers choose to give them. I meet him at his home and we hop in the tuk tuk and drive down to the park. We sit in a small gazebo, in a park at the foot of the Indian Nose trail in San Juan. We set up the camera and then begin to talk about how and if he feels about his topic now. He tells me:

> I don't think that I think differently. I think that I think the same. But what I did learn is what other people think about my theme. I see that people have different definitions of success and different goals and dreams toward success. Our grandparents know a lot about what the difference is between the past and now. They can tell us how they lived before. Because today we live in peace and maybe, I didn't know what that means for us until now.

In this reflection, Carlos contradicts himself. Though he tells me that his thinking hasn't changed, in his next breath he provides an account that his elders inform his new insights into his theme. Carlos is someone who is profoundly connected to his

community, yet mostly at the level of his peers. Though he respects his mother and those older than he, it was clear from his movie that he focused primarily on what the youth in his village think about success. This is evidenced by the fact that youth are prominently featured in interviews and in the skits that are part of his story. Today Carlos begins to talk about the value of the voices of those that come before him.

In articulating his process in developing his film, Carlos also exposes his view of attaining success, which in reality is more aligned with the long and impressive history of his ancestor's resilience. He describes his process in the following way:

> The whole process if difficult. The investigations, the interviews, the editing. But we don't use the word difficult… I don't know… All that we do, we don't believe that we can do. But if one has the force and one fights for what you want then you do it. Then things come out well. For me difficult is something that, I don't know… It doesn't exist. Things that are difficult? There are none. We struggle. We force ourselves. We insist. If things aren't coming out well, we find a way. We often do things that cost us a lot. Maybe when we do things for the first time, they come out bad, but we force ourselves again, we try again. So for me, the word difficult does not exist. We fight and we persist and then eventually the things come out well.

I asked him where he got this fight and he told me it's his form of thinking. He has a hard time explaining why he has this vision, only citing that he listens and reads stories and he is constantly learning to see things differently. What is striking however, is that in articulating success here, he continuously evokes the word we. He is unconsciously attaching the communal aspects that function to support a continued vision toward the future. His film transmits the message of individualism, where as his words convey communalism. This comment makes visible the realities of traversing the tensions between an externally defined notion of achieving success and an internalized way of embracing resilence.

Transitioning back to understanding how Carlos now defines success, I ask him to tell me his thoughts on the subject now. He explains:

> Success is defined by us together and is something that is individually interpreted. Youth need to have more contact with the elders to realize what this means to them.
>
> It is the older people in the community that have the most information about our culture and histories that still exists. We have our elders now through which the youth can learn more about their cultures and themselves. For me, I'm not saying that everyone that works hard will have money. But in working together, you find happiness. Happiness is the most important thing in the world. If you don't have happiness, you don't have anything. [Translated from Spanish]

Carlos says that if he were to make his movie today, he would make it differently. His definition of success, he says, is not about arriving at a certain place or attaining a particular status. He says that is more about achieving happiness. He asserts that there are different definitions of success in his community and that he is learning more about the ones that come from the wisdom of those that came before him.

The questions that he asked himself during his own discovery, such as what makes people succeed, what makes them fail, what makes them fall into problems that become obstacles in their lives, was a start to asking what social, political, and economic forces influence this as well. His engagement in and of itself is a testament to Carlos' willingness to critically inquire and openly examine his world, finding his voice to tell his interpretation in his own time. Today Carlos has a vision of creating a community center in San Juan. He and his nephew Chema (Chapter 8) have been working through ideas of how to establish such a center, that would become a resource to revive stories of their past and afford youth to learn not only the technologies associated with filmmaking, but also about the stories that are hidden from them.

ONGOING FOSTERING CRITICAL INQUIRY

At USH, we strive to create a learning environment that is co-constructed with our youth. We aim to learn as much about our unconscious beliefs and ourselves as we hope our youth learn about themselves during this process. With each of the youth presented in these chapters, I have and continue to learn a great deal about the strong hold the Western ideology has on all of us, even when we enter and leave our PhD programs that aim to awaken our unconscious attachment to them. Each of these students are not only learners, they are also teachers. In particular, they teach me to question and release my intense Northeastern work ethic and self-inflicted pressure that from time to time caused tensions within our learning together.

Though each of the youth with whom I work teaches me something about the residual connections that affect my own interpretations of the world, I perhaps have learned the most from Carlos. Many times Carlos would remind me that there is more to life than the stress I impose on myself, the stress that I have adopted as part of my culture. When I worry about "things not getting done" in the manner to which I am accustomed, he would continue to calm me. *Tranquila* Donna, *tranquila*. When he said this he reached his hand out to touch my arm and consoled me. "We can do this." He reassured me as we rapidly approach our prostration deadline. Have confidence in us.

His brief moment of comfort quickly turned to terror. He said, "*Tal vez nos odias. O mas como te caemos mal.* [Maybe you hate us. Or maybe you think badly of us.]" I stopped breathing for a minute as the words stabbed me like a knife. He continued to talk and I continued to listen. He explained that he and his friends did a movie for school in a short time. "We had a week." he told me. "We filmed in two days and

then we edited in three. We did it and it was great. We used Camtasia, which was easier he said than Premiere, so we can do this."

Immediately I felt the possible truth that my work here was more the cause of the problem than it was an opportunity to open a space for youth to critically and creatively express themselves. No education is neutral, I thought. None. I could feel myself holding back the tears. How could I tell him what was really in my heart? Part of me was not thinking straight because of the stress that I had created for myself and the other part of me, I knew… I wanted great things for them. I wanted success. I wanted *amazing*.

But isn't it my role and the role of USH to have them define success and amazing? Isn't it for them to decide how they see this project, interpret and create their films, and decide how they use these tools and do what they want with them? And then I realized, my *lucha* will constantly be one that includes organizing not only new educational forms, but also challenging my own historically informed notions of these forms.

I felt compelled to try to explain myself. Without Internet in Carlos' house, I waited until I returned to my home. I wrote to him and was able to take the time to translate it into Spanish. It began with: I don't hate you Carlos, I don't hate any of you. I don't even think badly of you. I simply want amazing things for each and every one of you. I continued writing a short version of the history that I present in my first chapter of this book. I tried to explain why I came here and what history influences my personal drive and self-imposed pressure. Both of which I know I must release, especially if I am to afford the space for a different kind of education. I enjoy what I do and I enjoy watching the youth with whom I work create and shine in their own visions. What they create, is exactly what it is supposed to be in this moment.

This conversation with Carlos, perhaps above any other amazing conversations that I have had in this first year with each of these students reminded me of what this

work really is. The work is about learning with and from youth. It is about listening to them, learning who they are, what they see, how they think, and how they live. It is about how they guide us through their inquiry and learning.

This moment with Carlos resurfaces my own struggles that brought me here. With the conversation also reminds us of the challenges that he and I have endured to build our relationship.

Carlos recognizes that our many profound and difficult conversations deeply affect me. I cannot count the number of times he reaches over and places his hand on my arm. He looks at me with his empathetic eyes and his captivating smile, *tranquila* Donna*, disfrute la vida, tranquila* [Take in easy Donna, enjoy the life, take it easy]. We are fighters he says, and continues:

> What we look for is the happiness. He continues – if I have a lot of money, great, but if I don't have love, if I don't have happiness, I would live a sad life. What I care about in this life is to live *tranquilo*. [Translated from Spanish]

His words became sentiments that embody why I took my leap from the academy to the field, why I fight, and why I do this work. This work, our work together, is a *lucha*, a constant becoming. Realize your passions; strive to put your ideas into reality, no matter the impediments. Navigate the powers that inhibit your dreams and the powers that oppress you. In the end, the most important goal is to have a happy, calm life. This is the peace you find, when you know you have critically become aware that you have done everything you can to liberate yourself and create your own path. This is what Carlos teaches me and to this day continues to remind me.

USH aims to assist in cultivating an ability to use analytical tools to identify, direct, and take action toward a self|collectively-defined future. Carlos has identified what success is for him and is beginning work toward a definition that reflects his and his community's definition. What I take away from our experience is a reminder of the fight that I have undergone, and the larger one that is ahead of these youth. Finally, I am reacquainted with not only the theoretical assessment of the structures that these communities must navigate to become simultaneously aware of themselves, their surroundings, and how they can be liberate themselves from passively buying into cultural and social norms (Freire, 1970). At the same time, they cannot escape their current realities. It is the combination of working side-by-side with Carlos and his peers and confronting my own history that we learn together what it means for these youth, and for us, to traverse the structures and obstacles they face everyday. It is this work together that we *poco a poco* (little by little) realize a vision of education that is liberating and that stems from local voice.

REFERENCES

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: The Seabury Press.
Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York, NY: The Seabury Press.

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London, England: Zed Books.

Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in actions: Symbols and strategies. *American Sociological Review*, *51*(2), 273–286. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2095521

PERSONAL JOURNAL, AUGUST 2014

It is a Sunday morning at 8 AM in August of 2014. Three leaders from the first generation of Unlocking Silent Histories and one from the second year meet in the gazebo on the grounds of where I currently live in Panajachel. We begin to envision the next stages and steps of our work together. It is only August, and we are starting to think about my return for the December/January break. I know that the next day I will be on a plane back to the States. Against all that is within me, I am returning to face the politics of the university and apply for tenure. Staying focused on the youth, their project, and building their skills to now run what we have built together, we discuss a second level workshop that will take place when I return. The idea is to probe further into the "Unlocking" part of Unlocking Silent Histories.

The first set of videos was getting great reviews and commentaries. Yet the way that I envision these videos and their final forms are two different things. Because I am greatly influenced by my academic analytical views, I was hoping for more social, political, and cultural analyses of the topics that they chose. However, if I were to push that before they decide that they are ready to or want to go in this direction I would be repeating a history of dominations, in this case – telling them what we want to see and hear from them. Now, after having been introduced to various concepts of filming, interviewing, finding themes, and visually expressing their stories, they were confident that they were equipped to decide their own next steps.

This became evident in an unexpected conversation that emerged. The camera was off when this happened and I couldn't help but wonder; perhaps that the camera is not there is not an accident. I find myself thinking about questions that are somewhat obvious, yet pertinent. Does the camera change what people say and do? Even after having it present for almost two years now in our meetings, both in the student meetings and the leader meetings, its absence seems to make a difference in the depth and freedom of expression. Does this mean the work that I am doing is not authentic? Does this mean that this form of expression does not lead to freely expressing ones' true inner thoughts and ideas?

Is the camera a symbol that inadvertently creates distrust? Is there a hazy residual effect, a presence of the implications of historical events that hangs in the space as a silent ghost, or perhaps a silent judgmental observer? When the camera is not present, it seems to me that the most amazing conversations happen. There was Carmen's moment of declaring that religion separates her community from their historical Maya traditional practices. These times that these conversations happen are usually when Carmen is present. This girl never seems to stop amazing me.

Today, the conversation was an accident and at the same time, I wonder how much I provoke and invite these accidents. My new colleague Jenn, who is helping to establish the structures in Guatemala, responds when I tell her this. *"You shouldn't call it that. You should take credit for it."*

I know that it is part of my pedagogical frame to be peripheral, but at the same time I know that this is just not completely possible. I know that because I think deeply about the themes of hegemony, dominant culture, and the implications of political, social, and cultural forces that influence thought and action, I can't help myself. I can't help but be overly passionate about these ideas and I likely, unconsciously, provoke conversations.

We were moving on with the topic of the upcoming second level workshops that we would begin in December or January. We started to conceptualize that in the second level, the youth would work together to create their ideas of what this would look like and what content it would entail. They took the computer and started on the outline. Ingrid (a volunteer and native Guatemala, who has returned here to work with Cultural Survival and to reconnect with family) and I were there. Lacey, a volunteer from the States went upstairs to read the "Facing Histories, Facing Ourselves" documents that our leaders were to have read before out meeting. The leaders gave excuses why they didn't read them, which included not enough time, didn't have the computer, and forgot with all the other responsibilities that they have. I understand this fully and think of my own graduate students who sometimes don't do the readings. I give them a bit of a hard time and remind them of their responsibilities as leaders. Carmen tells me, with a cheeky smile, that it's not on the paper that they signed[1] We laugh and move on.

The exact manner in which the conversation turned, I do not fully remember, but yet, it was my fault, or to my credit. I simply recall the youth talking about the Dispensa (Wal-Mart) and without thinking I said, "I don't shop at Wal-Mart and I'm not a fan of McDonalds for that matter". (A perfect example of not being able to help myself from provoking conversations!) The conversation unfolded like this:

Carlos:	Wal-Mart is inexpensive.
Me:	But it changes the landscape of local venders and actually your open markets are less expensive.
Carmen (re: McD):	Why? I just want to understand why.
Me:	We shouldn't get started on this… We have work to do.

[Translated from Spanish]

They all look at me with a questioning eye. *I know,* I say, *I started it!!*

Carlos, with his way of capturing everyone's attention, starts by saying that he admires people who think big.

> "I think that they know how to decide how to make money," he continues. This statement of course makes me shiver a bit, but I hold my tongue, for the moment. "Like Gallo," Carlos resumes, "they are a big company and now they are doing things for this town on the lake (referring to Tzununá). [Translated from Spanish]

Carlos always says that he wants to leave and be something such as a lawyer, a doctor, or a math teacher. There are many dreams that Carlos has all which return to

the same goal, coming back to help his community and family. But I never imagined that I would hear what I heard next.

Carlos: They are smart, because they know how to take advantage and make money.
Me: Is that a good thing?
Carlos: Well, they are smart and look what they have?
Me: So you are not smart?
Carlos: It's not that we aren't intelligent, we are. It's just that we don't have the opportunities.
[Translated from Spanish]

At this point, I want to interject. But before I do, Carmen jumps in. "Let me talk now," she says. "I want to talk." As Carmen had now gained an increased interest in her history, she was reading an historical book about Guatemala. In her conversations she draws on this to take us back to colonialism, the Spanish, and the Ladinos. She recaps the history to remind us that this is a long history that informs where we are today.

> Indigenous people are intelligent. They don't have the opportunity to amplify their voices or express themselves. But perhaps given the opportunity we can see our abilities, our creativity, and our intelligence.

Carlos nods in agreement as Carmen continues.

> We live in a country with much racism. The people in Guatemala with power look down on the indigenous Maya people. Because of this racism, they discriminate against us. The government doesn't share its resources with us and thus doesn't give us the opportunity that other people in our country have. [Translated from Spanish]

Carlos returns to the conversation. It's true and it's true of foreigners as well. "People come and do the work with us, they bring their resources and their projects, we work with them because we have many dreams to move forward, but they benefit more from these experiences than we do." With this statement, Chema chimes in.

> "I can give an example," he says. "My mom is a grand chef, people come and they learn from her. We do a lot of work, we share it with others, but then we are in the same place as we always are and they go on with their successes."

Rather than "fix" this for them, I recommend that we reorient our ideas for the second level workshop. Let's consider how that next workshop could have an impact aspect associated with your next films. Let's think about how we can use the films or take an action that tackles some of the issues that you are raising.

We now have that work ahead of us, and I have every confidence that these youth will continue to strive not only for doing better films, but to take advantage of the process of engaging in deeper video ethnographies to continue questioning and later offering ideas that will positively impact their futures.

The topic today concentrates on the power of position and economics as well on the barriers of indigenous communities advancing in this world. All the education in the world cannot undo nor can it change history. However, listening to the voices that can authentically speak of their continued fight and struggle, perhaps we can learn the real issue that lies in front of these youth. Perhaps we can learn that building their future with them instead of for them allows us to truly hear how together we can build pathways for a better future.

NOTE

[1] Carmen is referring to the document that the youth leaders and I created, which lists the roles and expectations for the USH Youth Leaders position.

CHAPTER 11

OWNING UNLOCKING SILENT HISTORIES BECOMING TEACHER|LEADER

The Development of Internal Expertise (Co-written with Jenn Miller Scarnato)

> *There are always lessons to be learned in the process of decolonizing: it is not enough to hope or desire change. Systemic change requires capability, leadership, support, time, courage, reflexivity, determination and compassion. It is hard work and the outcome often seems a distant vision. Paulo Freire referred to this as praxis; theory, action and reflection; Graham Smith has called it indigenous transforming praxis.*
>
> (Smith, 2012, Kindle Locations, pp. 192–195)

The preceding chapters have brought to light the underlying tenets of Unlocking Silent Histories and the methodological practices of our work. Namely, I have shared that USH engages in exploring the intersection of critical pedagogy, cultural sociology, and media studies and how their collective implementation emerges and evolves in the hands of the youth who participate in USH. Yet our philosophy of engagement is not solely one of educational organization, arrangement or practice. We at USH believe that these tenets are directly connected to and in reciprocal development with local leadership.

We conceptualize leadership through the lenses of critical theory that draws upon as well as expands upon Paulo Freire's theory of leadership. In his signature book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire unequivocally connects teaching to leadership in that he asserts that to be a leader one must teach and to be a teacher one must lead. Freire suggests that the process of teaching must begin by entering the communities where one will teach. He continues that in entering the community, we as teachers can ascertain the language and practices of youth and the context in which they live. However, we alone cannot interpret language, practices, and the context without the contributions of youth voice. Otherwise, we run the risk of reading the context only through our own lenses and experiences, potentially recreating a "power over" students' participation.

In our role as Teacher|Leader, we define our work as a mutual learning engagement where all involved in USH are simultaneously teaching, leading, and learning. Part of our leadership role is to help our participants "unlearn" the normative definition of teacher that asserts a delivery model and foster a culture of co-construction and co-direction. We redefine education as a "transformative vehicle for individual and

collective social change" (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010, p. 5), which is constantly in development. Thus our participants quickly become leaders in their own right, defining the pathways for learning and co-interpreting how we as outsiders come to know the community's language, practices, and context. Subsequently, the youth are part of the educational and filmmaking process in a way that helps ensure that I – as well as my foreign colleagues – do not unconsciously craft the "curriculum" according to our own agenda. Freire (1970) reminds us that curriculum cannot be created in a way that imposes it's own agenda; it must be in collaboration with those traditionally oppressed.

For Freire, leadership happens in action and reflection in order to develop new knowledge. Through the concept of praxis, new dialogues foster new knowledge in collaboration and in connection with the world. Smith (2012) reminds us that undermining indigenous leadership and enforcing individual leadership was part of the greater colonizing strategy. Reviving the vision that indigenous are and act as valued and legitimized leaders through praxis is part of our philosophy. We do not advocate for individual leaders but rather encourage development of community norms, practices, and decision-making. In this sense, the rehumanization of indigenous youth voice in our view goes beyond revolutionizing the dialogue with "others" (Freire, 2000). It privileges their dialogue as having impact for future directions of the work in their vision and experience. In this sense, our participants are in the constant practice of developing characteristics of leadership.

While in the beginning of the pilot I could not envision the exact shape in which the Teacher|Leader practice would materialize, I was unwavering in my vision to have local leadership be an explicit part of our program. This resolute vision existed due to my observations of other programs in underrepresented communities. Many of the models created a practice of foreigners entering the community, benefiting from the experience in some way, and leaving without fostering internal skills and agency to continue the work without them. Thus, it was important to me that this pilot not be a "hit and run" program and more importantly, it take roots quickly by fostering local ownership. With the support of Maya Traditions, who shared this vision, our leadership model quickly and collaboratively emerged along with, and highly influenced by, our indigenous youth participants.

To reiterate, it is one of the underlying goals of USH that all the youth gain leadership qualities, and practice our Teacher|Leader philosophy. At the same time, we recognize that not all of our students will have the passion to continue to be a central part of our organizational growth. In this way, we immediately began to incorporate those who expressed an interest in taking on program leader roles into the structure of our organization. Within our first year three inspirational and highly motivated youth, Carmen, Chema, and Carlos expressed interest in having a more prominent role as leaders for sustaining the program within and beyond their communities. These trailblazers are now establishing new student groups and spearheading new projects in their own communities. In this chapter my colleague Jenn and I introduce how the youth are co-creating our conception of youth leaders.

Next, we provide descriptions of each of our three leaders. Finally, we discuss how they are shaping the future of USH.

CO-CONSTRUCTING OUR CONCEPTION OF YOUTH LEADERS

Jenn Miller Scarnato, was hired as our Guatemala Field Director in March of 2015. She began working with us part-time in the fall of 2014 after I decided to return to the university of the 2014–2015 academic year. While away, Jenn began meeting with the youth leaders on a regular basis. I had left after just hiring the youth as program leaders and only having a brief opportunity to work with them on their leadership development. Jenn and I held symbiotic visions for the unfolding and the development of USH. From the beginning, she led our development of an assessment tool that would begin our conversations of leadership, one that would come from the youth in dialogue with both of us.

> On a Friday morning in Panajachel, I pass out a self-evaluation form to my three team members – Carmen, Carlos, and Chema – assessing their leadership and teaching abilities. The three "leaders," as we refer to them, are asked to rank a variety of teacher/leader skills that our founder Donna and I have meticulously come up with in our best attempt to capture the abilities, leadership styles, and teaching methodologies most important to our unique program philosophy.
>
> Amongst these skills are Active Listening, Maintaining Group Unity, Making Participants Feel Valued, Working in Collaboration with Participants, and Allowing Students to Experiment and Understand Subject Matter in an Independent Manner – perhaps not the sorts of skills one might expect to see on a conventional leading/teaching evaluation form, but abilities that we deem absolutely crucial to the successful implementation of our program. In addition to these numerical ranking questions, the leaders are asked to respond to a few open-ended questions, articulating their leadership style, teaching style, and identifying their strengths and areas for improvement in each.
>
> After a few initial complaints about the length of the form and the necessity of doing it right at that moment, the three of them each begin to approach this assessment tool in their own way. As I observe my three teammates, I find that their manner of engaging the task effortlessly illustrates the teacher/leader styles each of them has developed in their work with USH.
>
> Carmen sets right to work, prepared with pen in hand, directing all of her attention to the evaluation and moving through the items rapidly. She does not ask questions, but reads thoroughly, comprehends, and marks each answer with confidence. When she arrives at the open-ended questions at the end, she takes a bit more time, reflecting carefully on how she chooses to describe herself. Having studied to be a teacher at the high school level and now majoring in Social Work at the university level, Carmen has a firm grasp on

the terminology she needs to express her responses. Ever efficient and down-to-business, she writes her responses in an organized bullet-point, rather than narrative, form, then turns her finished evaluation into me and begins studying for an upcoming exam as she waits for the others to finish. Carmen knows how to follow instructions, maintain focus, complete a task, and manage time wisely. Her thoughts are organized and concise. And she is at the ready to assist the others by imparting her experience, which becomes necessary as Chema works through his evaluation.

Next to Carmen, Chema struggles quite a bit with getting started initially. He first asks about the instructions, checking to see if he has understood the ranking system correctly. Then as he begins moving through the form, he asks many questions about the wording of items listed, ensuring that he has the correct understanding of each one. He is very concerned about a particular classification – not applicable, or a ranking indicating that one hasn't yet had the opportunity to employ a certain skill. He wants to verify that responding this way doesn't mean he's indicating that he doesn't have the skill, just that he hasn't had the opportunity to practice it. Instead of using the number indicated on the ranking scale, he chooses just to write "NO," across all of the boxes to make this clear. When he arrives at the open-ended questions, he wavers and doesn't know what to write. He turns to me for help, and the process of writing his responses become an open conversation that Carmen joins in as well. Chema tells me he doesn't know how to describe a leadership style and he's not sure he considers himself a leader. I tell him that this is really a self-evaluation, it's about what he thinks about himself, but if he'd like, I can tell him what I've observed of his leadership qualities. We begin to talk it out and identify that he has a very non-hierarchical leadership style, one in which he joins with his students rather than being an authority figure; this caused Chema some hesitancy, because prior to this conversation, he didn't conceive of that as leading, thinking of only traditional/authoritative leadership styles as legitimate. But after discussing it with Carmen and I, he feels confident in describing his leadership style in such a way. He reviews what Carmen has written on her form (with her permission) to get an idea of the types of strengths and areas for improvement he might list and the sort of terminology he should use. He reflects on his own training as a teacher, and then is able to articulate himself quite well with short responses. After our conversation, he seems full of ideas and is able to write out his responses rather quickly, completing his form with renewed self-assurance.

Carlos, meanwhile, has been in his own world, focused intently on his form. He is moving through it slower than the other two, but with great reflection and in silence. He reads each item and really considers his own level of skill, often making a mark in one box, considering it further, and changing his mark to

another box. He is brutally honest and self-critical, giving himself much lower ranks in many areas than I would have expected, given what I've seen of him. But Carlos holds himself to extremely high standards. Carmen and Chema are completely finished with their forms already by the time Carlos reaches the open-ended questions at the end, but this gives me the opportunity to focus on him as he responds. Arriving at this section, he looks up at me for the first time, questions in his eyes, the first of which he articulates as, "I don't know what to say." Together we talk this through into a more specific question: "What defines a leadership style?" and enter into a more philosophical discussion, identifying a variety of leadership qualities that, when combined, form various styles of leading. Carlos begins writing out his responses, talking them through with me as he does so. His responses are almost all focused on his "followers" – the people he is trying to lead, very indicative of Carlos' leadership style characterized by selflessness. His focus is on how he can serve others. His responses are the most thorough and reflective, especially in the areas for improvement, where his self-critical nature and true desire to improve shine through. He reads over everything before turning in his form to me, satisfied.

In my work with these three inspiring young people, one of my charges is to assist them in developing their leadership abilities and professional selves. It is a responsibility that I find hugely rewarding as I watch their skills in building unity, in motivating others, in sharing power, deepen and grow. But measuring and articulating that growth is always a challenge, and this self-evaluation is our first attempt at quantitative measurement, and is therefore, problematic.

But as is true with all of our work, this self-evaluation was more about the process than the outcome. Regardless of how the leaders ranked themselves, regardless of what growth we may or may not see in those rankings over the course of the next few months, all four of us learned a great deal through the process of completing the evaluation forms. The leaders were asked to designate this time in their days to reflect on their own skills, to think critically about their strengths and needs, to focus on their self-perception and self-actualization. And while I'm sure their self-rankings will be useful, I believe I learned more about the leadership style of each of them in observing them engage with this task than any combination of numbers on a completed form can tell me.

As was so clearly illustrated to me through this process, Carmen, Chema, and Carlos each have very different approaches to their work in USH. While they share a common vision for their work with program participants, and often articulate our program methodology and practices in similar ways, their application of these sophisticated concepts varies greatly depending on who is doing the leading/teaching. And that too, is a part of the enactment of our philosophy – that each leader adopts her/his own style, rather than mimicking a rigid example or adhering to a strict guide. (Jenn Miller Scarnato)

As a non-profit, this self-assessment records and assists us in following the leadership trajectory and development of our team. Moreover, it provides a tool around which we can hold deep conversations about the assumptions, definitions, and styles of leadership. The tool brings to light that Carmen, Chema, and Carlos have very diverse styles and conceptions of leadership. This diversity of leadership styles brings a richness to our program that would otherwise not exist; when these three team members come together in meetings and presentations, we benefit from the coalition of their individual and unique viewpoints, self-concepts, forms of expression, and interactional approaches. Jenn, shares, "I don't know if it is my team member's innate natures, the balancing tendency of natural group dynamics, the years they've spent working together, or all of the above, but our teacher|leaders and their individual teaching|leading styles could not be more complementary." She and I often reflect on their traits in interrelationships. Where one team member excels, another needs improvement, and a skill that comes very naturally to one team member must be taught to another. We have come to recognize that we are not a perfect team, but a complementary one, and in that way, we embody one of our organization's key principles: we are constantly learning from one another and with one another, teaching and leading each other toward the inspirational change agents we want to be.

OUR THREE YOUTH LEADERS

One day while we were in Carmen's home, I talked with Carmen and told her that I would be thrilled to have her work more closely with us. She gasped while looking at me with elated surprise and fell immediately onto her bed. Carmen pulled her hands over her mouth, kicked her legs and squealed with joy. She did not contain one ounce of her excitement.

Carmen (Chapter 5)

Within a month of this conversation, I explored and secured resources to begin providing Carmen with a stipend to work with me. When I secured them, Carmen became our first officially stipended program leader. Carmen's work began in a mentor role in San Juan La Laguna, working closely with me as we expanded our

work to this community. Since that time, Carmen and I have co-taught in Chuacruz, she next mentored our leader Chema in Santa Clara la Laguna, and now teaches her own groups Chuaxajil, and Queijel.

Since the beginning of Unlocking Silent Histories, Carmen illustrated qualities and aspects of "traditional" leadership. For example, Carmen is always punctual, prepared, and professional. She assesses situations, analyzes their details, and problem solves solutions. It is due to these strengths that Carmen was offered and accepted the role of Team Administrator at the beginning of 2015, now assisting in coordinating reporting, scheduling, and documentation with other team members. These were skills that Carmen clearly possessed from the beginning of my work with her. When we began the pilot in Chirijox, Carmen took charge of the group coordinating the organization of our meetings in the community and in the Maya Traditions offices. Familiar with Maya Traditions' method of documenting and reimbursing youth travel, Carmen also took charge of that. While she was impressive when I first met her, as time passes, I am even more captivated by the spirit and the determination of this young woman.

Associated with carrying her traditional leadership qualities, it is apparent that Carmen has adopted normalized conceptualizations of leadership. She sees leaders as commanding authority and taking charge of spaces. To be sure, in the initial days of her role as co-teacher, Carmen stood in front of our students in Chuacruz and spent a considerable amount of time talking. When I recommended an alternative to this, she shut me down. "No," she tells me, "It makes more sense to do it this way." I remember being both initially concerned and positively struck by this assertion. On the one hand, the model of engaging Carmen in a collaborative construction of learning did not immediately transfer to her practices as a youth educator. On the other, I was pleased that Carmen saw me as her peer and felt comfortable in that moment to assert her view on what and how to position herself. In taking this center role, Carmen initially structured her conversations with her students in a traditional way, while at the same time clearly articulating the collaborative, co-constructed, and emergent tenets of the program.

While we value the traditional leadership traits that Carmen brings to the team, to fully enact our Teacher|Leader philosophy we also want to develop leaders that "walk the talk". Developing leadership qualities to enact what we have asked the youth to unlearn is a process. Thus, we at USH are not expecting immediate employment of the collaborative philosophy, but instead are interested in our leaders' potential to move toward it. As a result, we look for leaders who have a potential for embracing a more distributed and collaborative leadership style.

Carmen demonstrates this quality in various aspects of how she teaches and how she traverses life. While Carmen might initially exude authority in her teaching style, she also balances this by working with students to allow their ideas to emerge. As she works side-by-side with her students, Carmen has a natural way of talking with them and encouraging them to identify and communicate their thoughts. From time to time, she may have the urge to tell students how she thinks or what she would do. Yet Carmen continues to work towards a model of collectively constructing stories

with her students. She readily demonstrates, sometimes with self-talk, the ability to reflect in action on her methods of teaching|leading. Watching Carmen, one can almost see the sparking of an inert knowledge, information that she has the ability to express but not yet fully enact, ready to ignite.

What also impresses me about Carmen is her flexible and adaptable character in moments of uncertainty. Perhaps this aspect of her persona is related to the uncertainty of various aspects of life in Guatemala. It is difficult to count on job consistency, reliable forms of transportation, or governmental stability. Carmen navigates obstacles, challenges, and ambiguity with grace, never appearing fazed by anything. She is open to new opportunities for learning and for adventure.

Carmen will tell you that she is most grateful for this experience. She views this as an opportunity to gain experience for her future work and to assist her family with sending her brother to school. For Carmen, the stipend is of course helpful to provide her family with more security, however, she explains that it is much more than the financial support. When I talk to her about the minimal stipend that USH can initially afford she says:

> *Eso no es importante, lo importante, es que tengo la oportunidad de tener la experiencia para hacer este trabajo.* [That is not important, what is important, is that I have the opportunity to have the experience to do this work.]

With Carmen's sights set on a career in social work and community development, she appreciates the time and experience as a USH program leader as invaluable. This mode of employment gives her first hand insights into the work involved in helping people see the power of their knowledge and their voice to create community change.

To watch Carmen work and grow is nothing short of inspirational. This exceptional young woman seems unbreakable and unfazed by nearly anything. This personal confidence that exudes from her transmits strength, evidenced by her voice and ideas and visible in her work with her students and the USH Leadership Team. Carmen's powerful words to groups within and outside our program exemplify Carmen's sentiments about the importance of leading in USH. Carmen shares:

> *Se nos ha enseñado a ser silencioso que debemos cerrar nuestras bocas y no compartir nuestras opiniones y no podemos seguir creyendo eso.* [We have been taught to be silent that we should close our mouths and not share our opinions and we can't continue to believe that.]

She embraces USH and her role in it as central to empowering herself, her peers, and her local and national community. Carmen has demonstrated a mature self-awareness, identifying herself that she would like to work on improving her patience with her students and her ability to learn from them, both skills that will allow her to continue on her path of unlearning the authoritative leadership approach that was her default in the beginning. Listening to Carmen and watching her blossom is evidence that she values and will continue to cultivate a pedagogical philosophy that incorporates the importance of local voice and knowledge.

Chema (Chapter 8)

Chema's dedication to moving as an agent through his learning process secured him a position as an USH program leader. Unlike Carmen, Chema's reaction to receiving the news inviting him to participate was not externally visible. Chema received this news from me on the telephone, so it was difficult to ascertain his enthusiasm. He gave a short and low laugh and proceeded to provide a quiet and composed thank you. It was not until later, when Chema shared a school project with me, that I realized what this meant to him. He wrote:

> *En el mes de febrero me llamaron en la escuela donde estudie las clases de videos. Me dieron una gran sorpresa de que yo tenía que impartir clases para otros nuevos estudiantes. Hoy en día estoy impartiendo las clases en santa clara la laguna gracias a mi video que me dieron esta gran oportunidad.* [In February, they called me at the school where I am studying videos. They gave me a big surprise, that I would have the opportunity to give classes to new students. Today I am providing classes for students in Santa Clara la Laguna. Thank you to my video, they have given me this grand opportunity.]

Today Chema confidently leads his own groups in San Juan la Laguna and Patanatic, an aldea of Panajachel. However, in the beginning of his time as a program leader, Chema's tendency to question his abilities led to my initially assigning him to a co-teaching role. I originally paired Chema with Carlos to co-teach a youth group in Santa Clara la Laguna, a community just above Chema's hometown. However I quickly realized that this pair would not be beneficial for Chema's quest to find the skills within him to lead due to personality differences and existing relationship dynamics. Chema needed the opportunity to work with someone outside of his community, a professional relationship that would not be blurred by family and community ties.

Thus, I reorganized the groups and paired Chema with Carmen. Together these two began co-teaching our third group of student from the community of Santa Clara la Laguna. I observed Carmen and Chema as they introduced USH to the group. Carmen stood assuredly with the students while Chema faded slightly into the background. Every now and again, Chema would assert his voice finishing a sentence for Carmen or quickly repeating the same set of words reflecting the USH

philosophy and practice that Carmen had just shared with the group. The habit of doing this seemed to be Chema's effort to find his way into comfortably accepting this role. Chema had grown a great deal and was still in the process of overcoming his nervousness to speak confidently in front of others. The hesitation was very clear, but not unusual for someone new to a job.

In a short time, Carmen's modeling of how to engage the students and draw out their own ideas was enough of a safety net to allow Chema to develop into a confident leader. Chema was more than ready to take on the leadership role in no time. In fact he excelled beyond what I had imagined. Pairing Chema and Carmen allowed Chema the time and space to slide into this role, to foster confidence and provide moral support in this sometimes-challenging work of unlearning norms, adopting self-determination, and inspiring self-directed creativity.

As one of the program leaders, Chema would now be charged with taking on the significant responsibility of becoming Teacher|Leader and fostering this identity within students in their own filmmaking and learning processes. Though the hesitation was visible in the beginning, I knew that Chema understood the philosophy as well as how to enact it. Here is how he described our program after his first year of participating in it and right before he began his leadership role:

> USH is project based and that is my best, my favorite way to learn. When I do projects, it impacts me the most. It is how we realize things. When I propose a project, I do it. I focus more. [Translated from Spanish]

Chema described projects in a way that reflected our community- and learner-centered approach. He continued describing to me his philosophy for teaching and learning. This become clear after I asked Chema to describe how he would improve our work at USH and what his vision is for working better:

> I would have a teacher for each student. Well, maybe one teacher for every two students. This would give the opportunity for students to listen more and for students and teachers to have a unique and leveled relationship. It is harder when you have a lot of students. The teacher can't create a confidence between himself and the student. There is no way to explore what the student wants and thinks. You need to do that as a teacher, explore more with the youth as well. The most important thing is to have a good relationship with the students.
>
> There are new schools and there are traditional schools, he continues. In the traditional schools all the teachers just talk and talk and talk. And they don't explore more about their unfortunate students. But in the new schools, the students have ideas, they have knowledge and they ask a lot of questions. The teacher listens and responds to the students.
>
> I'm very excited to be a teacher of the next group. It is because I want more experience. Having more experience is the most important thing. [Translated from Spanish]

Chema, perhaps more than the others fully experienced and embraced what it was like to live the emergent pedagogical model we had imagined. Achieving fluidity in the process seemed, at times, to be a struggle for Chema and, at others, to be effortless. In the above excerpt, Chema reflects on various experiences to organize his description of teaching, learning, and leading. He draws on his formal educational experience, what he learned in his teacher preparation classes, and what he had first hand experienced in USH. He discards parts that do not resonate with his vision and embraces others that do to articulate the role of a facilitator for USH and to foster community connected learning. The only absent variable of Chema's actualization of this vision was the experience and occasion to enact a Teacher|Leader role and how to implement and navigate this vision in practice.

Chema embraced his role of program leader fully and meticulously. In the beginning, he stood slightly in the shadows of Carmen until he found a successful integration of his personality, philosophy, and style. He consciously drew upon the tools he gained from USH as well as what he learned in school, at home, in work and with Carmen to develop his own method of leading and building relationships with his students. In the end, Chema's work as a leader exceeded all levels of my hopeful expectations for his success in this role. Chema became the most reliable and conscientious leader of the group. He organized the leader meetings, travel, and the presentation of their work.

During that time and presently, Chema acquires trust with his students and is keenly responsive to their individual needs and story development. One of his greatest strengths as Teacher|Leader is ability to develop rapport with program participants, which quickly turns into true trust and friendship, seeing and treating students as peers. His model and method of working with students is one where he ensures that the students create videos in their vision and in their own time. He impressively takes great care with the details of ensuring the success of his students.

Chema also took initiative to learn to administer the technology, skills often new to him. One example of this is when he came across technical problems with one of our hard drives. Chema and our brief creative consultant Franklin, were working with student video when the computer crashed. When they restarted the machine and reconnected the hard drive, the entire folder holding the student files disappeared. Chema had not yet backed up the latest version of the films and reached out to me immediately for help. We worked together and along with our local film volunteer. The three of us connected through Skype for several hours troubleshooting until we reached a solution. Chema viewed his learning new technical and communications skills as a critical part of leading and teaching for USH.

Today Chema has occasional moments when he hesitates, questions himself, or takes the time to reflect upon who he is and how he fits into this role. We welcome this type of reflection as in the end it makes him a better Teacher|Leader. In addition to growing as a peer educator, Chema has recently accepted the role as public relations and finance administrator, a position that draws upon his detail-oriented nature and passion for sharing our work, while allowing him to gain new skills he

identified as desirable. His resilience in continuing to shape his participation with his students and the USH leadership team supersedes any infringing doubt that Chema is right where he belongs in his position with us.

Carlos (Chapter 10)

Carlos, our current Peer Educator and Technical Administrator, formerly taught a group of youth in is hometown San Juan and now teaches two groups of students from Santiago Atitlán, associated with our ADECCAP partner. The fact that Carlos would eventually take on a leadership role in USH was something that I believe I assumed from the first time that I met him.

At that first meeting, when we introduced USH to the students of San Juan, Carlos exhibited his ability to take on this role through his natural leadership abilities. Carlos had participated in many cultural groups and activities, and always seemed to emerge as the organizer, president, or captain. Carlos was different than Carmen, who liked to take on an authority role. Carlos just seemed to silently command on-lookers and listeners. Yet Carlos never imposed his authority over others, rather he caused us all to pause to reflect and think about things deeply and from multiple angles. Carlos exuded confidence, and he had leadership experience, and it was clear that this was a role in which he was comfortable and excelled. It was also quickly clear that Carlos would make an important contribution to USH and its development.

Week by week, Carlos seemed to take on a leadership role, or perhaps I bequeathed it to him. Each week, his questioning of his work, the process, or us seemed to become increasingly profound and reflective. In addition, he took on the responsibility of helping his peers with filming, downloading, editing or whatever they needed, all without ever being formally asked to do so. This was not just a function of the workshops taking place at his house, Carlos was and is naturally inquisitive, analytical, and skeptical and at the same time unconcerned, practical, and optimistic. My admiration of his strength and unwavering ability to see the world in a positive way perhaps created a path for Carlos to effortlessly slide into

the position of program leader. Yet his entrance into being, or invitation to become, a program leader is murky and the details of it somehow undocumented. Neither Carlos nor I officially recall the details of its progression and his eventual acceptance of this role. When asked about it, Carlos simply states that he felt he was always treated like a program leader.

Accordingly, Carlos essentially took on the role without being asked and without "preparation". Unlike Carmen and Chema, Carlos did not study to be a teacher, he studied first physical education and then computer science. Carlos' academic interests have fluctuated greatly as he has thought about his career trajectory in the last year: he has considered the possibility of becoming a lawyer, a mathematician, a doctor, or an agricultural engineer, finally landing back at lawyer, with the intention of advocating for the vulnerable in his community and perhaps going into politics. It is possible that these experiences and interests influence the way in which he interacts with his students' learning processes. His fields of interest promote struggling with problems and solutions, inquiry and discovery. Similarly, Carlos' Teacher|Leader style is one that promotes self-direction, inquiry, and exploration. Carlos employs this aptitude and expectation almost unconsciously and almost to an extreme.

Carlos and I agree that his acceptance of this role actually began when he was a participant in the program. Our discussions around his role have always centered more on the direction of USH and its longevity than the implementation of philosophical foundations. His biggest preoccupation with the program is that it will, like others he has seen, disappear from the community, making his work seem meaningless. As a result, I find myself openly discussing the aims and goals of USH and the future of it with Carlos frequently.

While Carlos's voice was always recognized as part of building the direction of USH when he was a participant, as a leader he now has an increased and conscious responsibility to contribute his vision. This leads us to more delicate conversations that relate to the power dynamics of the organization, as well as Guatemala's political climate, education system, government, and their impacts on language and culture. We both share the same sentiment that he and his students should feel compelled to freely use their primary language and need to be encouraged to begin critically analyzing their surroundings and the forces that shape their reality. Thus our conversations focus on the foundational principles and profoundness that we envision that our students will come to, that this idea of Teacher|Leader is more than facilitating a freedom for our learners to connect with culture, language, and community, but more deeply question the normative forces that deny the advancement of indigenous peoples.

This is to say that Carlos' identity as a leader is deeply philosophically rooted, yet he excels in the practical application of his ideals. Carlos' natural charisma, confidence, and ease in public-speaking make it seem natural for him to take an authoritative and dominant role in his work with USH, and at times when that leadership role is needed, Carlos can fulfill it. Yet in his everyday interactions with

students, Carlos exemplifies the "step up, step back" adage – taking himself out of the equation, to some regard, in order to allow the voices of others to come through. When asked about the qualities of a good leader, Carlos mentions, first and foremost, listening to the people one seeks to lead, learning from them, and serving them – not an easy feat for a bright and articulate young man who could easily dominate conversations and take control of a crowd. Yet Carlos doesn't strive to be the center of attention or the implementer of law and order, he aims to serve.

This year, Carlos began leading two groups of students composed of young people older, and in some cases, more technologically experienced, than himself. This would have been a challenge for any of our program leaders to take on, but Carlos volunteered to do it. While it caused some initial self-doubt and discomfort, the experience has allowed Carlos to further develop his supportive leadership style. He describes himself to these students as a resource, humbly stating that he is happy to share with them "the little that he knows," and very excited at the prospect of learning from them. With this leadership stance, Carlos has cultivated a strong mutual respect with these new students, and created an environment of equals where each individual is empowered to share and to learn. Age and experience level don't matter in this environment, but an openness to others and a willingness to listen and learn are key.

In meetings and every day conversations, Carlos will often go for long stretches of time without saying anything other than the occasional positive affirmation to keep the speaker going. While some may read this as daydreaming, not paying attention, or checking out, Carlos is actually absorbing – taking in vast amounts of information and analyzing, reflecting, processing. This is Carlos' learning process – he listens intently, thinks things through thoroughly, and then articulates his opinion or perspective. After one of these silent periods, if somehow prompted, Carlos will often speak for 20 minutes or more without pause. When Carlos decides he has something to say, it is with a purpose. And when he chooses to verbalize his thoughts, they are articulate, well organized, and original – always adding something new to an idea, an unconsidered element, a slightly different angle. And because Carlos is constantly listening to others and learning from them, when he expresses an opinion, it represents a multitude of voices. In this way, Carlos is able to give voice to others, just as he does in his work with USH.

Carlos often talks about his dreams of making change in his community, and he realizes that he needs strong leadership skills to create the positive impact he hopes to achieve. He sees his work with USH as a crucial step in the right direction, recognizing the opportunity to build relationships across cultures and work to unite and mobilize young people as necessary skills that will assist him on his personal quest for community improvement.

Carlos, Carmen, and Chema bring unique and complementary leadership qualities to each other. Together these three initial local leaders of USH could not have been designed as perfectly as they are.

HOW THE LEADERS ARE DEFINING THE FUTURE OF USH

An important part of developing leadership is continuing to ensure that the leaders feel part of the process and that their voice matters. The Teachers|Leaders is a part of our educational process, one that is a transformative vehicle for individual and collective social change. In the following excerpt we share an example of processing collectively visioning USH and working through the historically influenced expectation that programs like this are masked hierarchies with their own agendas. Jenn shares her experience of this account:

> Just a few months into my work with Unlocking Silent Histories, a time when I was still transitioning into my role, focused, above all, on building trust with my team members, I left a meeting almost in tears. The young staff members I was responsible for coordinating, motivating, and developing professionally were all present (albeit not punctually), and we had been in deep discussion for about three hours. I was leaving that very day for my first visit home since I moved to Guatemala, and almost couldn't bear to close the meeting and board my flight because I was so overwhelmed with emotion. The team members hadn't been mean to me, no angry disagreements had arisen, no one had quit or walked out or lashed out at anyone. The meeting had been productive and I felt I had definitely gained my team members' trust and confidence. The tears that I fought to hold back as I hugged each of them goodbye weren't tears of sadness, frustration, or anger, they were tears of empathy.
>
> I had gone into the meeting, as always, with an agenda that Donna and I created in advance – topics for conversation that needed to be covered during the course of the meeting, leaving a lot of flexibility for other items that the team wanted to discuss on focus on. In fitting with our program philosophy, my leadership style is non-hierarchical, so while I am usually the one to keep track of time and move us through agenda items, the meeting belongs to all of us. Everyone is free to express themselves, bring up ideas or concerns, share their opinions and observations. In fact, this is something I had been trying to encourage more of – more of the leaders talking and me listening, more invested participation on their part, more taking advantage of the time we had together to meet their needs. In the three to four team meetings we had together so far, the leaders responded to what questions I asked of them, engaged in conversation when prompted, and listened attentively to updates and announcements, but hadn't really taken the wheel in driving a meeting yet. Until then.
>
> We were talking through the agenda items, as usual – planning out timelines for their projects, discussing upcoming group and individual meetings. Then we got to a more open-ended agenda item: responsibilities for the year. And things immediately took a different turn.

I don't recall exactly how it came up, or what exactly we had been discussing beforehand that might have led into this new conversation. But somehow, this conversation turned into a very intense grievance process in which my team members, all of whom had been working with the organization much longer than I, expressed to me some very serious concerns, questions, and doubts they had about the organization, their roles, and the future.

I remember, just before this, a silence coming over the group, an anxious fidgeting, a heady expectancy. I looked around the table, slightly bewildered at what was going on, and searching for answers in their faces. Their eyes darted across the table and eventually rested on Carlos, who was sitting to my left. In his laid-back, steady, and confident way, Carlos opened with, "Well…we have some concerns."

As it turned out, three of the four team members had met the day before to prepare for this meeting – they had made the conscious decision to use this time with our team together to air their concerns and had listed them out beforehand, and designated Carlos as the principal speaker. Their main, and legitimate, issues were: lacking a clear plan for moving forward, feeling uninformed about administrative decisions and processes, not seeing the direct benefits in their communities that they would like, being uncertain of the project's main goals and intentions, and feeling their work was unappreciated. The conversation that gave rise to these grievances was long and weighty. It was a lot for me to process and take in, but I listened intently and felt their pain deeply as they each spoke out in agreement and stressed the urgency of these issues.

As I later wrote in my documentation of this meeting, I think that the team was feeling some general frustration, but that they did a great job of examining and articulating that frustration in specific terms. From my point of view, they were expressing to me that they felt motivated and capable, but not empowered to do what they truly wanted, that our organization hadn't given them the opportunities they were seeking. They were feeling disconnected from the organization, rather than involved and invested in it.

The leaders wanted change, and they were coming to me for help. They asked me to be their ally, their advocate. On the one hand, I was overjoyed, because this was a sign that I had earned their trust and respect; but on the other, I was uncertain of my own ability to help them. I was new in my role, still getting to know my boss (who lived out of the country and I had only met in person once), and not as well-versed in organizational history and operations as I would have liked to have been.

But I thanked the leaders for taking me into their confidence, applauded their bravery in bringing these concerns to light, promised them I would do what I

could to make sure they were addressed, and impressed upon them, more than anything, that I was with them. That their concerns were my concerns. That we were one – a team. Hence, the empathy tears.

I think I started writing the email to my boss explaining all of this while on my plane to the U.S. I felt so burdened by the task that I couldn't put it off. And again, given my newness to the role and my only just-developing relationship with Donna, I was rather afraid, or at least, very uncertain of how she would react.

This experience revealed to me a lot about Donna, and I believe solidified my decision to dedicate myself full-time to USH. I wrote to Donna in the most honest, yet professional and respectful way that I could, and awaited her response. And Donna – who I now know is very open to criticism and constantly questioning herself, who has a keen ability to see things from a different perspective and find the positive aspects of almost any situation, and who has a deep passion that drives her in this work – took me by surprise with her response. She was actually happy. And she allowed me, too, to see this as a step in the right direction.

As Donna saw it, the leaders were coming into their own, expressing their desire to take ownership of Unlocking Silent Histories, to enact it with their own vision and direction – one of Donna's goals for the program from the start. As Donna wrote:

The idea that these youth were finding confidence in weight of their voice was exciting.

I saw this assertive movement as an opportunity; one that I had been hoping would come to pass; yet I wasn't certain when that might be. This 'stand' that they made, and their meeting to present a united front, is in fact a reflection of the individual and collective growth. It illustrates the strides that they have made from the beginning of the program. Specifically, they have moved from resisting taking ownership to now insisting on it.

In the early stages of the program, the students would often insist on my direction. What should they do when, why, and how? While the opposition to assert their own path waned while designing their own films, this need to follow a "how to" continued in the initial stages of taking on their roles as leaders. In what emulated an apprenticeship model, each of them presented the concept of USH and interacted with their new student groups in a way that mirrored my own work with them. As the months went by they gained confidence in their own personal teaching identities and moved away from imitating me. In this space, the leaders discovered and tried out new strategies.

This freedom afforded them the opportunity to begin seeing USH as theirs and not solely a concept that I developed. What they are expressing now is a

> connection with the organization (though they say that they don't feel one at the moment) as well as an assertion of their own ideals and visions."
>
> From that point on, things were different – we became the very unified and indigenous-youth-driven organization that we are today. Donna and I learn from these leaders every day, and often marvel together, in awe of their brilliance and potential. I think I can speak for both of us when I say we are honored to work alongside them, to witness and support their tremendous growth, to join with them in making the changes they want to see in their lives, their communities, their futures. (Jenn, Journal Entry)

There will be many more challenges, like this one, on the journey ahead, but we will navigate them together, and continue to encourage the type of questioning, critical analysis, and reflection that our leaders exhibited on that day in January and on many occasions since. We will continue to encourage and support one another on our individual, organizational, and community paths to change. We will express ourselves freely. We will challenge norms. We will break boundaries. We will teach and we will lead and we will *luchar*.

Reflecting on our emerging vision of leadership, we recognize that we are in fact creating a distribution leadership model within each phase of the program. We see this as a way to increase our sustainability and developing local ownership. First, youth activate leadership skills and strengthen the confidence in their voices as they identify what stories in their local context are important to tell. As the youth continue through the next level of our program they will youth have the opportunity to practice and develop leadership styles through working together, emphasizing shared leadership, non-hierarchical relationship, and horizontal approaches. Teammates also practice applied social change skills in the development of cultural revival initiatives for their films: preparing questions to incite dialogue after film screenings, developing a marketing plan or campaign to disseminate the film, raising awareness about language and cultural loss, and planning a community-wide event that seeks to mobilize the community around cultural revival and preservation. Through community involvement in the creation and implementation of their cultural revival initiatives, youth truly become agents of change, leading their communities toward a collectively envisioned future.

REFERENCES

Dale, J., & Hyslop-Margison, E. (2010). *Paulo Freire: Teaching for freedom and transformation*. New York, NY: Springer.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: The Seabury Press.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London, England: Zed Books.

CHAPTER 12

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

> Hope is essential to any political struggle for radical change when the overall social climate promotes disillusionment and despair.
>
> (hooks, SECP)

REFLECTING ON MY LEAVE

At the close of my two-year leave of absence I reflect on my journey that resulted in building Unlocking Silent Histories with Maya indigenous youth of Guatemala. This expedition began with my escape, so to speak, from the tensions and my disheartenment with the confining political system that largely shapes academia and education. The "time off" from the bricks and mortar institution was intended to be an opportunity for me to focus without distractions on what I had been learning with youth about youth-driven, technology supported, emergent learning environments. It was also a time for me to survey whether or not to return to academia.

The decision was not an easy one, very much colored by my previous experiences within the institution. An idealist of sorts, I moved through various stages of my

career in search of a collegial home. I was employed by organizations both inside and outside of the academy that espoused to believe that the role of education is to foster social justice and equitable education; one that invites the voices, knowledge, and ideas of "othered" communities. However inside the walls of each of these places, the gravity of hegemony somehow pulled professional conversations and practices toward an entrenched ideology to assimilate "others" into "our" world and toward a functional and mechanistic maintenance of the status quo. While I know that I was not alone, it felt as if I were the only one trying to resist and defy gravity. I felt isolated, out in the ether, levitating on an empty plane imagining, actualizing, and realizing other forms of education that were in fact socially just and liberating. In the midst of colleagues either blinded by the political structures that bind them or too afraid to challenge norms, my struggle to resolve and live within a seemingly unwavering system became overwhelmingly oppressive. As I had written in the opening chapter of this book, I had a choice – conform or "rebel":

> The safe thing to do would be to conform. The fear of losing my job, my career, all that I had worked for should have compelled me to do so. After all, "dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity" (hooks, 2003, p. 197). But instead, I felt the urge to break free. I took a deep breath and I jumped.

I contemplate this statement now after being contextually situated in a country where for nearly half a millennium the political climate has employed fear as a means of attempting to force the Maya to choose safety and sameness over risk and diversity. Yet the resistance to and resilience of the Maya to maintain aspects of their identities is evident and inspiring. The historically framed and solidified institutional, social, and cultural forces that reproduce a hierarchy over "others" such as the Maya indigenous communities have permeated into our academic institutions.

Imposing fear that structures the normative educational vision works to replicate the privileging of particular educational practices, types of knowledge, and forms of organization of learning. It also works to conform educators to be part of maintaining this system (Durkheim, 1995). These constraints that reproduce education, which become masked as progress, assist in perpetuating our well-oiled machine that continues to attempt to assimilate "others" (Spring, 2012) into a power-driven ideology that structures our world. What becomes seemingly overwhelming can materialize into an unwavering perception that these deeply rooted routines and practices are impossible to overcome and change.

I feel that as educators, it is our responsibility to learn from and enact resistance and resilience in order to create learning designs that are truly reflective of what we espouse to achieve. Working with the youth at Unlocking Silent Histories is one example that makes visible the ways in which we can. The work of Unlocking Silent Histories illustrates that we can take risks and successfully challenge societal and academic structures and create new forms of educational practices and participation. This work is a foundation of social justice and equitable education that invites

currently marginalized voices, ideas, and methods to the conversation and creates a critical pedagogy that is built from the local context.

In my personal and professional quest to explore the potential for a marriage between theory and practice, tradition and innovation, the academy and the field, I have learned a great deal through my work with youth. Together we have begun to demonstrate how to move away from the dichotomous "either|or" and toward the implementation of "both|and". In layman's terms, this means that we are not bound to choose one pole or the other, but rather we can take elements of both to employ new visions and possibilities. My decision is not to choose *either* my career *or* my work at Unlocking Silent Histories, but rather both. I returned to the academy in the fall of 2014 and at the same time, I live outside of it. Unlocking Silent Histories keeps me in the both|and reality of existing simultaneously in the theoretical and the practical. Beyond this, USH transcends the dichotomy of structure|fluid, in that its foundations cultivate an ongoing emergent organization that allows learning to be built by the visions and voices of indigenous youth in a way that is a constant dialogue between theory and practice. In my journey that has taken me to live both inside and outside the academic world, I can now adequately articulate my experience in 1) Achieving new learning models, 2) Employing critical pedagogy with and through the voices of youth, and 3) Recognizing that this is a process of a responsible and continual becoming.

ACHIEVING NEW LEARNING MODELS

Revisiting Educational Initiatives

In my various roles as an educational technology professional, a former K-12 teacher, an educational consultant, perpetual learner, and practicing academic, I have been introduced and asked to implement various pedagogical waves asserting to be the "best" structure for learners. I have witnessed that the "powers that be" who send these educational philosophies and structures down the pipe are essentially the same, only packaged differently. Specifically, these decision makers, more often than not, enforce a mechanistic and hierarchical structure that places teachers in a power position to have control over learning and students. What materializes is a "banking model" where teachers "deposit" information into the brains of their students. For the indigenous populations of Guatemala, such an education distances students from their histories, cultures, and languages, decreasing the success and graduate rates of indigenous children.

Expecting students' minds to be "empty vessels" assumes that all students connect with learning in the same way and that their rich cultural histories have no place in the learning process. The banking model presumes that local knowledge as well as culture and customs are inconsequential to and have no place in engaging learners. This model has materialized into U.S. federal initiatives such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top. It is no surprise that many of the leading pedagogical

models of certain time periods in the U.S. are "exported" to peripheral countries with little development in educational research and without deeply knowing the local context. While there are new initiatives that appear to move in a direction that more aptly engages student-centered learning (e.g., Core Curriculum, Project Based Learning, etc.), the unconscious adherence to fixed sets of knowledge that educators deem necessary for students to learn remains present in the design. These educational initiatives aim to "level the playing field", but still fail to make strides in creating socially just learning opportunities, or often even engaging learners from non-mainstream backgrounds.

This is problematic for several reasons. First, it creates a supposition that certain populations need to be "caught up" or "assimilated" into the greater educational narrative dominated by western influence. Second, dominant knowledge and norms are enforced as "the knowledge" and "the way", continuing to undermine the rich histories of other peoples. Third, such delivery models grounded in western thought distance culturally diverse populations from tying personally connected meaning to learning. Lastly, it inhibits the confidence for these marginalized learners to assertively express their learning as informed by their own positionalities in society at large, and their unique identities within marginalized communities. Eliminated also are the possibilities for flexibility and adaptability that come through evoking critical inquiry and creative expression for all learners.

Overcoming Hegemonic Structures

Many outsiders and some of my academic colleagues have considered culturally responsive learning designs like Unlocking Silent Histories to be ambiguous. Further they view taking "uncharted, unwritten" curriculum into underrepresented communities as irresponsible. These naysayers have argued that this is particularly reckless in these communities that supposedly require structure, conforming, and direction. However, the evidence emerging from my ten years of work with youth has revealed a different story: provide these deficit-defined youth with tools and your trust and amazing things materialize.

It is imperative that I stress that many of my academic colleagues see my work in a very different light. They may not agree with everything that I do, but when they don't, they push me to think more deeply about my role, the role of the youth, and about maintaining a foundation of valuing local knowledge, voice, and culture. They ask me difficult questions, yet in their studies of critical theory, hegemony and oppression, they support the efforts of Unlocking Silent Histories, its mission and its pedagogy. Nevertheless those of us who do this work are defined as a group of "rebels". We belong to a set of marginalized voices in our profession fighting to be seen and heard and have our evidenced ideas legitimized.

The patterns associated with these actions cause me to draw parallels between this academic situation and the historical accounts of oppression in underrepresented contexts. We "rebels" who attempt to design learning that connects with culture,

language, and communities are often suppressed and politically "othered" within our institutions.

Those of us who advocate for new educational models for underrepresented communities, who think outside the box, and who push the boundaries that yield positive results are ostracized. We are explicitly and inexplicitly warned that if we do not conform to the likes of those in power, we lose our jobs, our positions, and at times, our careers. Our voices, our achievements, our efforts are quickly deemed insignificant and unworthy. We must be civilized into the greater structure of "how the world is" and accept it as is or we will not survive. Our indoctrination of the political majority is part of our expected path. In various messages we are told how to act, how to think, and to conform or perish.

If this sounds radical, perhaps it is time. There is integrity in challenging practices that show residuals of reproducing colonial practices in education. These barriers that make doing work like Unlocking Silent Histories difficult, don't simply attempt to conform us and rally us behind the larger dominant beliefs about standardizing education locally and globally. They mirror a lineage of an oppressive, colonizing history. The consequences for university professors are somewhat minimal. Already being the "colonizer', we can retreat, survive and successfully take on our Westernized personas.

The greater consequences come for youth from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Education is one institution that has historically been a means by which to assimilate indigenous and other marginalized youth. It has been a method by which to strip them of their languages, their identities and their homes. With various espoused good intentions educators today want to "catch them up". This "catching up" is often at the expense of situated and meaningful learning. It is at the expense of affording indigenous and other marginalized youth the opportunity to leverage their powerful voices, ideas, and knowledge to shape their own social futures.

The current Western influenced instruction in Guatemala focuses on rigid, rote, and disconnected subjects that will allegedly ensure students' survival and their ability to traverse economic boundaries. Yet with the long and dismal promises provided before, it is not surprising that while they see the value in education, they do not trust its promises. Reforms and Western style education has not functioned as its promised pathway to a better life. Guatemalan Maya literacy, achievement, graduation rates, and university attendance continue to be dismally low.

Moving toward Culturally Responsive Teaching

More culturally responsive arrangements for learning are important in affording opportunities for marginalized youth and communities to employ agency toward actively participating in the process of deciding what to adopt, what to appropriate, and what to create for their own purposes and in their own communities. Each of the preceding chapters highlighting the experiences of participating youth makes visible

their ability to navigate their lives and utilize technological tools to create a story that is produced from their viewpoint.

The philosophy at Unlocking Silent Histories begins with creating a learning environment that considers the contexts as part of the learning design. Specifically, we honor local languages, knowledge, and skills. We believe that education helps to inspire youth to question norms that are often unspoken, contemplate how they shape their lives, but then begin to create solutions for their own futures. We believe that learning together, across peers, and across the community empower them to gain confidence in their voices and in their dreams. Empowering youth to be responsible for living and learning in emergent learning environments in turn develops youth leadership.

The pedagogical model at Unlocking Silent Histories is one that moves from using education to "facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity" and instead toward an education that inspires the "practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire, 1970).

At Unlocking Silent Histories, we aim to support a structure that allows youth, perhaps for the first time in their lives, to enjoy an education that is based on the foundational principles that value and honor their knowledge, culture, and language. We create spaces that provoke questioning history, and at the same time allow the flexibility for youth to create a learning direction individually or alongside their peers. It is a concept that requires, with guidance and a form of Socratic questioning, youth to come to make decisions for themselves and for their own futures. In each of the earlier chapters, I have framed the underlying principles, which are grounded in the tenets of critical pedagogy, situated the context, and connected the student's story and experience to both these principles and the context. To recap, our principles include:

- Local knowledge and voice are the foundations of authentic learning.
- Youth have the capacity to direct their own learning and author their own stories.
- Community connected themes encourage critical and creative expression.
- The agency of youth as they shape their own social environment.
- The language and cultural knowledge of indigenous youth.
- The use of analytical tools to assist in dissecting social, cultural, and political realities.

These tenets are not scripts, nor do they require a planned set of instructions to guide youth through their experiences. As Erin Kökdil, the director of Maya Traditions wrote in Chapter 7, this method could be frustrating for outsiders and for the youth. But later, through her direct participation in the program working side-by-side with participants, Erin came to recognize that there is a power in having an open process. She wrote, "I understood the impact in giving these students full power in developing their documentaries, in investigating, and creating their own process." We are celebrating the profound impact that we are seeing on both academic

(i.e., critical inquiry and technology fluency) and personal (i.e., confidence and identity development) levels, even in this early stage.

EMPLOYING CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: FROM THE VOICES OF YOUTH

Unlocking Silent Histories and its pedagogical and methodological philosophy is built from the integrated theoretical underpinnings of critical pedagogy, cultural sociology, and media studies. Its foundations are derived from the critical underpinnings connected to each of these theories. Critical theory invites us to question the underlying historical, political, cultural, and social dynamics that inform the nature of our world. It assumes that we are subjects, but not objects of our histories in that they do not bind us nor determine our futures. Critical theory requires that we engage ourselves with the world – not allow it to dominate us or to be dominated by it. In relationship to learning and the education of marginalized youth, how is it then that we can expect learning to occur outside community and outside a connection to history?

Our work at Unlocking Silent Histories then becomes a product not packaged and employed, but rather a process facilitated and designed with our participants. Thus the voices of the youth involved in Unlocking Silent Histories is what drives us forward and what ensures that we are in fact holding true to the vision of this implementation. While my voice and the voices of our facilitators, partners, and directors are often valued more in a hierarchically organized educational model, the impact of USH is most profoundly evidenced by the voices of the youth. Their own words powerfully explain why the educational model of USH is different and important to them. The youth at various times discuss why Unlocking Silent Histories has been a unique and appreciated experience for gaining closer connections to their communities and developing confidence in their voice.

Local Connections

Our three pedagogical underpinnings is our emergent philosophy include connecting with local knowledge and voice, opening spaces for youth to direct their own learning and stories, and involving community-connected learning. In our exit interviews, many of our first year students shed light on how Unlocking Silent Histories' model provides a distinctive learning opportunity that impacts them on each of these levels. For example in a conversation with one of our program leaders, Carlos and I explore the nature of USH and the processes involved in our investigations. He shares:

> Here with USH it's different [than school] because it's more of a focus on history and cultures – we do edit videos in our school, but this is different. It's [USH] about our village. It's an opportunity to put light on what we have forgotten or what (look at the video excerpts that you took from this interview). [Translated from Spanish]
>
> (Carlos, 6/20/14)

This sentiment of community connected learning is one that resonates throughout. Our program participants describe a difference between their perceived purpose of school as a place for "preparation" and USH's intentional focus on learning.

> This is different than projects that we do in school. They don't teach us how to handle the cameras. In the school, they teach us about our profession. Yet, I think it is important to learn about our community the way that we do [in USH] and even more important to learn about our culture and our traditions. In this project, I learned things that I haven't learned before. [Translated from Spanish]
>
> (Chema, 6/10/14)

As Chema and I continue on with this conversation, we explore the differences that he cites. What comes to fruition is that he recognizes that a preparation for a career is a valid and at the same time is limiting. He shares that it provides him the expected skills to perform a trade and yet at the same time, an experience such as in USH causes him to explore his own ideas and problem solve creative solutions to achieve his goals – in this case, the creation of a short documentary.

In our vision, we embrace that community-connected learning encourages critical and creative expression. The ways in which the youth in this first year continued to challenge themselves to ask deeper questions about their histories in relation to their present is one example of this. Catalina express this when she tells me:

> The traje (traditional clothes) didn't start within just the past 3, 4, 5 years like the man said, it was around for a thousand years and we didn't know this. And also we learned the meaning of the colors. [Translated from Spanish]
>
> (Catalina, 6/30/14)

Many times, our youth express that before this project, they had little dialogue or connection with their communities and thus had little knowledge about it. Their more deeply profound questions in their individual investigations brought them closer to their communities and raised awareness of the value of their historical cultures and local knowledge. Fabiola builds upon Catalina's statement by stating:

> Like she said [referring to Catalina], we learned many things that we didn't know. Thanks to them for this program. We can communicate with them and with our community. [Translated from Spanish]
>
> (Fabiola, 6/30/14)

Our program leader Carmen asserts that community connections and uncovering history that occurs through the video ethnography methodology is important for her community and her peers. This, she tells me, is not just a learning opportunity, it is a platform through which youth gain confidence to become agents of their own futures, reviving and recovering what is theirs. She expresses that USH has both personal meaning and collective importance.

> This project has been very special for me. And it is a good opportunity for our young people to fight for what we are losing and continue to maintain our beautiful places. [Translated from Spanish]
>
> (Carmen, 6/03/14)

In this structured yet fluid model, youth have an identified goal of creating their documentary and at the same time define the path to take to their productions. In this design, youth have the space to discover their histories as well as their interpretations and expressions of it. In the process of building USH with youth, lies the chance to step back and reflect upon various aspects of not only what it means to learn in a culturally connected way, but also to recognize the significances role that culture and tradition play in the ongoing relationship among history, present, and future.

Developing a Sense of Voice

The local connections to community are instrumental in cultivating a space where youth feel empowered to draw upon and utilize their voices. The evidence of how USH's design affords opportunities to amplify the voices of youth comes in various forms. For many of our students, having the opportunity to know that their voices are valued and heard translates to them becoming more confident in creatively expressing their ideas. Carlos expresses this overtly:

> This [USH] is a better process because you get to select what you are interested in. You put your part it. It is voluntary, if you don't want to do this you don't have to. It is something to do if you want to give something not because you want to get something from it. [Translated from Spanish]
>
> (Carlos, 6/20/14)

Here, Carlos articulates the importance of knowing that it is his decision to elect what to learn, investigate, and share. Setting this tone from the beginning is important to creating a learning culture that youth voice is first and foremost in our process. Our interpretation of drawing upon their voices incorporates their determining the subject, the questions, the direction, and whether or not they complete the project.

Another conversation associated with voice is the determination of language. As discussed, particularly in Chapter 9, the use of language is a "choice" for the youth. This "choice" however, has been historically influenced by an obligatory use of Spanish in school. Over time, our youth have amplified their appreciation for and understanding that their language is inherently connected to authentically expressing their cultures and ideas. As Chema reminds us, voice includes a decision not only to choose what they say, but also to preserve the language that they choose to use to say it:

> It is our language and we can't leave it behind. We have to continue to fight because many people discriminate against us only because of our language.

> But today we need to raise our voices so that we use to them be something in this life [Translated from Spanish].
>
> (Chema, 10/25/13)

Increasingly, our youths' films incorporate their indigenous languages. The youth previously recorded the majority of only their interviews in their languages – particularly with their ancestors who are often not fully fluent in Spanish. Currently, the youth are making more conscious decisions to use their native language to narrate and to participate with their peers as well. This concept of drawing on and amplifying the voices of indigenous youth within and outside their education might seem foreign to many of us who have not had to think about the silencing of voices. However, the fear of using their voices in indigenous communities has been limited to few who find the avenues, locations, and security to speak more openly and freely. As our youth continue to explain USH to other communities, we are reminded of the fears associated with open and free expression within indigenous communities. An example of this comes when Carmen speaks to a potential new USH partner about her process in the program. In Nebaj, Guatemala, Carmen put the audience at ease after they expressed their fear of using cameras to document their histories and the violence within it.

> Unlike the Ladinos in our country, indigenous people are taught to close our mouths (she moves her hands to motion the zipping of her mouth). Like you, those of us who participate in this project were originally afraid to speak and even to interview people in the streets. But we have gained confidence in our own voices through this process. We know that we have the right to be heard as well [Translated from Spanish].
>
> (Carmen, 7/10/14)

These examples highlight the ways in which we at Unlocking Silent Histories aim to amplify youth voices and identities and the youths' experiences associated with this goal. Through our pedagogical and methodological approaches, youth come to guide us in how voice is utilized and positioned as a critical aspect of our work. Through affording them the opportunity to lead us and through exploring phenomena and themes that they choose to explore, our youth gain confidence in their words and the manner in which to interpret and express their worlds.

ON CONTINUALLY BECOMING

In order to do this work successfully and fully and to identify as a critical educator, one must commit to continual engagement in the inquiry process and the growth toward critical consciousness. This includes considering oneself in not only one's own contextual history, but also in relation to others. A colleague of mine writes, "becoming critical is always an act of becoming" (Steinberg, 2010, p. ix). That is, one has never truly reached criticality because our histories and unconscious habits

will persistently surface and find their way into dialogue with our attempts to see the world in new ways. Critical consciousness then, is not an end; it is a constant development of our character. I identify my "act of becoming" as beginning in the early stages of my career and continuing in my ongoing work as an academic and director of USH.

Early Career

I have shared in Chapter 1 the ways in which my upbringing influenced my initial beliefs and the resistance to embrace new ways of seeing the world. It was not until I began knowing myself as a learner and then experiencing unsettled times (Swidler, 1986) that I came to question my embedded and unconscious belief systems. My early career was void of a language to express critical theory, or the employment of agency rather than an acceptance of determinism. This language was unnecessary given that I was unconsciously content walking through life blinded by the ways in which I silently adopted the norms that assisted in reproducing the hierarchical machine. A reoriented worldview emerged during my PhD experience and led me to ten years of working side-by-side with youth and learning from them. The inspiration I gained from them gave me the strength to jump; a leap that resulted in the founding of Unlocking Silent Histories.

The awareness of the roles of the systems and structures in reproducing the tiers of social and economic classes – as well as my role in it – became life altering. Following this realization, I made several futile attempts to initiate change, which I initially thought possible if I "pulled up my bootstraps and worked hard". After several failed efforts to find a place where new visions of the world and inspirations to foster change would be valued, I was confronted with the reality that this mantra was one to be challenged.

I felt compelled to take a risk and deviate from the "normal" path of graduating and maintaining a university job - teaching, publishing, doing service only to attain tenure. I elected to take the opportunity to focus on the growing integration between my research, teaching, and service and do something with it. I recognize that I left this normal path because I have the ability to do so, an opportunity not always open to everyone particularly those with whom I work. I am conscious of this in my every day practice in the context of Guatemala and in working with the youth to build Unlocking Silent Histories.

Ongoing Career

In leaving my initial worldview and opening myself to other ways of seeing, I find myself vacillating in what is often termed "border worlds". This concept asserts that one no longer exists "here" or "there"; but instead lives in both and neither place simultaneously. My newly formed identity is one that carries over into the ways in which my work emerges from the contexts and voices of youth. In each passing

moment, this "fine-tuning of myself" causes me to reflect on my positionality, my nationality, and the consequences of my work.

The following excerpt from a journal entry begins to paint a picture of my inner dialogue that is part of my ongoing development of critical consciousness.

> This adjustment between "home" and "abroad" feels more sharp than usual. I think to myself, why do I feel this? Shouldn't I adapt more easily after traveling more often? At the exact same moment this enters my mind I question myself. I'm not certain that I fully believe what I am thinking.
>
> The culture shock from simple Guatemala back to the abundant U.S. started with the plane. There was a screen on every seat, people holding cell phones, objects, lights, loudspeakers… The entire stimulus was quite overwhelming. Upon landing and making my way to my lodging in the U.S., everything seems bigger. Immediately and continuously, I find myself missing the minimalism of life in Guatemala. I miss walking, the market, and the lack of choices, options, and the significantly diminished emphasis on material things.
>
> Guatemala is third world… so it is a fact that people struggle with many things including water, malnutrition, education, and work to name a few. At the same time, there is a heart, a familiar openness and happiness in the people that I recall in the Dominican Republic. That somehow gets lost in the progressive country we call the United States of America. Excessiveness is abundant. The tough transitions back makes me realize that something is still not right inside me.
>
> After my week in the U.S., I return to Guatemala, I consider the location around me and try to decide why I feel more comfortable here when I had only lived in this country for two years. I live on Lake Atitlán where 75% of the Guatemalan population is indigenous. Yet, it feels as though the majority of people I see are foreigners. The abundance that exists in the U.S. and in other first world countries permeates the boundaries of a simpler Guatemala. I think we call this "progress" but I'm not really sure about that. While many people cite that they want to escape a material life, the patterns of holding onto many of the "luxuries" of life remain – this includes cars, houses, and the like. There are clear attachments to political, social, and cultural norms that are unconsciously embedded in their (and my) daily first world practices. And they are ever present around the lake.
>
> Clarity begins to surface. My education has taught me to question power and influences of outsiders. It has also taught me to listen to locals and involve them in the deconstruction and agency of their own lives. What is the impact of the infiltration of foreigners on this already marginalized Maya world? What chance is there for local control over one's future? The concern about these kinds of questions coupled with the fact that the connection I rekindled with

my son, my family, and my friends reinforced a sense of contentment – both at "home" and "abroad". I put these in quotes, because as I cross boundaries, home takes on a new definition for me. It is something sentimental rather than a fixed location. Without hard and fast boundaries, I consider I inhabit "border worlds". I "live" in multiple locations and my crossing of worlds – for me – requires that I be conscious of my participation in each of them.

"Inhabiting border worlds" is a concept that I recently read, but it also reflects other ideas that I have come across. Each relates to living simultaneously in the past and the present. One definition of this concept suggests that "we come to see our space shaped irrevocably by the colonial presence that created" (Haig-Brown, 2008) new nations. I didn't quite internalize how I applied this concept to my own experience, but at this moment, its reality is quite visible. The colonial world in which I have lived has infiltrated the new nation where I currently reside. "Border worlds" captures the synchronicity of my unrecognizable hesitation to return and my elation to be back. This disequilibrium for me is the constant reminder of how we all unconsciously illustrate our co-existence in yesterday and today. And without recognizing ones role in the "progress" of new nations, I wonder: Is my life and work here helpful or is it part of the "problem"? Are the forces around me too great to overcome? Having such questions might be one of the reasons that I didn't feel 100% fervent about being back.

Then, a day after returning, I step off the lancha in San Juan la Laguna and immediately, I feel settled again, yet I know that the question of my work and the nature of its impact will never cease. Greeted by welcoming faces of the youth with whom I work continuously centers me for the moment. They are enthusiastic and ready to learn and eager to question. I am always excited about this and at the same time, I will keep in the forefront of my consciousness, that we are mutually learning and leading each other through this delicate intersection of cultures. We all inhabit these "border worlds" and are in one way or another influenced by them. It is how we see them, understand them, and enact them in our daily lives that can make all the difference. I'm glad to be "home".

Now living back in the U.S., having been denied tenure, the consequences of my risk are salient. With my latest university connection, I enter with new hope while at the same time I do not feel at "home". I often long to return to the field and to sit with our participating youth questioning and problem-solving, listening to and learning from them. Yet I know when I return that I will not fully feel at "home" there either. "Border worlds" captures the synchronicity of my unrecognizable identity and hesitation to feel grounded in any location. The instability I immensely feel is the constant reminder that in committing to openness, committing to seeing the world through multiple lenses, and committing to fighting the relentless habits

of colonization means facing our histories and constantly creating and recreating ourselves and our locations. It means belonging everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

My work at Unlocking Silent Histories is to provide a space for youth to explore, examine, question and challenge themselves and me. Our hope in this space is that the youth have the freedom and confidence to investigate the relationship between their history and past in order to raise consciousness and to make informed decisions, their decisions, about their futures. In essence it is to unpack the history of colonialism and be an agent of constructing a vision of a constructive future.

The questions that I ask myself are the same ones that I invite the students to ask. These include: *Who am I to do this work? What is my privilege and what role does it take in this work? What are the larger structures shaping the idea of normal, knowledge, and progress? How do I play a role in perpetuating or challenging this? Who do these definitions benefit? Who do they leave out? At what cost and to what end? What do the power structures afford and constrain and again at what cost and to whom?* In this work, these questions become an internalized part of our everyday practices. These are important to continue both outer and inner dialogue so as not to unintentionally create a system that perpetuates and reinitiates the hierarchies that we try to overcome. As Freire warns, in our work with liberation and social justice, we run the risk of those in the "oppressed" role identifying with the oppressor. Freire continues, that in their quest to become liberated, members of the oppressed class who do not become conscious of the system that has bound them, can themselves become oppressors, again perpetuating the cycle.

IN CLOSING

Settled Times

After a long journey of attempting to feel settled as an educator and as a researcher, I have finally experienced a rhythm and a sense of peace within this profession. While I appreciate my struggle to get here and the accord I feel, I realize that my journey is not over. On this excursion, I have come to accept that sustaining a harmonious rhythm and peace between research and practice is a delicate balance and one that requires continued reflection, learning, and strength.

With this epiphany, I look back on this decision to take a hiatus from the academy as more than simply resolving the tensions between theory and practice, traditional and innovative schooling, and the academy and the field. A large part of this journey was about coming to terms with the idea that diverging from the norm is an acceptable path. Despite cautious words from my esteemed and more senior colleague to take the safe path, I chose and continue to choose to take the more risky road. Accompanying this gamble is openly expressing my changed worldview as well as being outwardly vocal about my trepidations with my particular academic contexts' attempts to narrow my vision of education. These unsafe steps, particularly

my disappearance from academia, however, resulted in the actualization of a vision that was simply a seed when attending Penn and was cultivated peripherally while within the confines of my particular systems in which I worked.

In my departure from the "normal" academic trajectory, I came to appreciate that creating Unlocking Silent Histories in the particular context of Guatemala, was an invaluable learning opportunity. I was living in the midst of a 500-year history that attempted to instill fear in the Maya, to try to extinguish indigenous peoples or at best convince them to relinquish their beliefs, their accomplishments, and their histories. Not one of the youth with whom I worked, not one of the families that I have come to know gave an indication that the oppressive practices applied during colonization, during the 36-year war, and even today stop them from persevering. Though I realize that there are many similar societies who transcend an analogous past, at this moment I can only speak to the communities I have come to know in Guatemala. Those that I have met are some of the most resilient and persistent people that I have ever known.

If ever existed an experience that validated my inspiration for me to continue my *lucha*, it was my time in Guatemala. The time with the youth here and within their communities rekindled my passion for my work and reminded me of the very reasons that I chose to jump instead of conform. I listened to my internal yearning to create a space where academics and application live in harmony between and simultaneously in a both|and existence.

Appreciation and Growth

Three years have passed since I took the jump that led to the founding of Unlocking Silent Histories, and we have grown significantly in that time. What started as a pilot project with The Maya Traditions Foundation in 2012 has now become a thriving and expanding non-profit organization. In these three years, and with the continued support of Maya Traditions Foundation and our new partner organization, ADECCAP, USH has expanded from one pilot to seven communities. What is more, we have held true to our vision of ensuring that USH is grassroots, growing from local knowledge, ideas, and skills. The three leaders described in Chapter 11 now contribute their voices and time to teaching as well as developing our organization. By 2014 our collection of films included 20 documentary shorts written, filmed, edited, and produced either individually or collaboratively by our 18 participating youth. This year, 2015, has been a particularly busy one. Our three leaders are teaching six groups and a total of 32 participants. I am thoroughly excited about the continued growth of USH and where the indigenous youth of Guatemala and eventually other countries take us on this journey.

While many efforts in these conflict areas focus on the war and its implications of it, I have tried to illustrate the vibrant and lively communities that exist here. With this spirit, Unlocking Silent Histories does not center its efforts solely on conflict nor does it ask its students to do so. Through the use of movies and media to help students

analyze the social, political, and economic factors that shape their current lives, we strive to make visible that history informs their present but does not determine their future. In short, we focus on positive visions for their future while connecting them to their pasts. We do this by encouraging them to investigate the things that they are most passionate about. Through this focus, the vibrant and rich communities of which I speak come alive.

During this time, I gained a deeper appreciation for creating consciousness around producing new models of learning with underrepresented youth, a greater understanding of the value of employing critical pedagogy, delicately cultivating the analysis of history, and a reflection on the process of continually becoming. This jump has enabled me to open dialogues that explore and create new learning terrains for our local and global work in education of diverse and underrepresented populations.

Through the process of engaging in the use of documentary shorts, our youth are able to show us their world through their eyes and learn more about themselves in relation to their history and their present. We are working to support them in defining their futures, but with youth rather than for them. In approaching the work in this manner, our youth teach us a little more about ourselves along the way.

REFERENCES

Durkheim, E. (1995). *The elementary forms of the religious life*. London, England: Allen and Unwin.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: The Seabury Press.

Haig-Brown, C. (2008). Taking indigenous thought seriously: A rant on globalization with some cautionary notes. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, *6*(2), 8–24.

hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Spring, J. (2012). *Deculturalization and the struggle for equality: A brief history of the education of dominated cultures in the United States*. Colombus, OH: McGraw Hill.

Steinberg, S. R. (2010). Foreword. In J. Dale & E. Hyslop-Margison (Eds.), *Paulo Freire: Teaching for freedom and transformation* (pp. vii–ix). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in actions: Symbols and strategies. *American Sociological Review*, *51*(2), 273–286. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2095521