ABSTRACT

Title of Document: TEACHERS AND TEACHING:
                                      CONCEPTUALIZING QUALITY
                                      EDUCATION IN RURAL NICARAGUA

                                      Anita Sanyal, Doctor of Philosophy, 2009

Directed By: Professor Steven Klees, Education Leadership,
                                      Higher Education & International Education

Policy discourses reflected in the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA)
(Inter-Agency Commission,1990) and the subsequent Dakar Framework for Action
and EFA: The Quality Imperative (UNESCO, 2001, 2004), have called for the
improvement of the quality of basic education. These discourses emphasize student-
centered pedagogical approaches in an effort to improve quality of education at the
classroom level. The Nicaraguan government has sought to improve educational
quality through the promotion of such pedagogies (MECD, 2000, 2001, 2006a).
However, research on teaching in contexts of reform asserts that many factors
influence how teachers understand and implement instructional reform, and highlights
the difficulties in challenging existing teacher-centered practices (Cohen, 1990;
O'Sullivan, 2004; Smylie, 1996).

This dissertation relies on case studies of four primary school teachers to explore
how each teacher conceptualizes and enacts "quality" instruction in the context of

reform in rural schools in Nicaragua. Findings from the case studies illuminate the complexities that teachers face in their daily work. Each of the four teachers, to varying degrees and in somewhat different ways, was committed to adopting or adapting the reform pedagogies. However, for them, what happens in the classroom is largely informed by local contextual factors.

These findings offer insights into how teachers understand and enact "quality" teaching. Such insights can be used in planning and implementing professional development and other initiatives, especially as the Ministry of Education and international donors continue to promote initiatives aimed at improving the quality of education at the classroom level. This study also can inform the process for evaluating policies by providing an in depth description of teaching and the challenges that teachers face in putting into practice ideas being promoted globally as critical for quality instruction. Finally this study contributes to theorizing and research concerned with teachers' ideas and practices, by examining key issues in a context that is less-often in focus in the literature – rural teachers in a developing country context.

TEACHERS AND TEACHING: CONCEPTUALIZING QUALITY EDUCATION
IN RURAL NICARAGUA

By

Anita Sanyal

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2009

Advisory Committee:
Dr. Steven Klees, Chair
Dr. Janet Coffey
Dr. Jing Lin
Dr. Mark Ginsburg
Dr. James Greenberg

Acknowledgements

I am infinitely grateful for the many people that have supported me through the various stages of writing this dissertation.

First, with heartfelt gratitude, I thank the teachers with whom I had the privilege of working in Nicaragua. Their interest and openness about inviting me into their classrooms and sharing with me their opinions, feelings, and stories inspired me and were deeply felt throughout the crafting of this dissertation. I truly hope I have written them well.

I am thankful to the Save the Children staff in Managua, Elena Reilly and Mercedes Gonzales, who facilitated my field experience and offered me insights, access, and friendship during my trips to Nicaragua. I am also eternally grateful for the guidance, kindness, support, and friendship of the RICA field staff in Chinandega, Concepción Martínez, Nelson Campos, Francisco Hernandez, and Marisol Morales Medina.

I am deeply thankful for the guidance and support of my dissertation committee. With most sincere gratitude I thank my advisor, Dr. Steve Klees, whose confident and calming words reassured me that this was the right path, and that I could take it. At many moments throughout this process I have recalled Steve's encouraging words while I was in the field of, *"Hasta la victoria siempre!"* I am also grateful to Dr. Mark Ginsburg whose excellent feedback and counsel early on in the development of this dissertation and throughout has pushed my thinking about how this story should come about. I also thank Dr. Janet Coffey, Dr. Jim Greenberg and

strength and sense of humor has always given me perspective, reminded me of what

is important and to not forget I have been *privileged* to take this journey.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Acronyms

AED- Academy for International Development

ECE- Early Childhood Education

FTI- World Bank Fast Track Initiative

MECD- Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports

MINED- Ministry of Education

NGO- Nongovernmental Organization

RICA- Regional Initiative for Central America

STC- Save the Children

SWAp- Sector-wide Approach

UNESCO- United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

USAID- United States Agency for International Development

ASP- Autonomous Schools Program

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Globally, education policy discourses—reflected in the World Declaration on Education for All (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990), and the subsequent Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000) and EFA: The Quality Imperative (UNESCO, 2004)—have called for achieving universal access to, as well as improving the quality of basic education. Overall these discourses help construct an international climate for education reform. They both reiterate a global consensus on the importance of education as a human right and set the direction for donor-supported programs in developing country contexts.

Since 1990, the Nicaraguan government's educational reform initiatives have focused on improving educational quality through decentralizing education management and changing teachers' classroom practices (MECD, 2002, 2004, 2006a). These initiatives, supported heavily by the international donor community, have promoted active-learning pedagogies based in constructivist notions of teaching and learning (Edgerton, 2005; MECD, 2000, 2006a). Research on teaching, however, highlights the variability in how teachers understand and enact new reform ideas in classrooms (Cohen, 1990; Spillane & Jennings, 1997).

Statement of Purpose & Research Questions

The purpose of this dissertation study is to explore how teachers' conceptualize quality instruction and how they teach in the context of rural primary schools in Nicaragua. This qualitative study draws on interviews and video-taped observations of classroom practices, as well as focus groups, and seeks to illuminate how and why these teachers understand, adopt, adapt or reject/resist the reform pedagogies promoted by the national government and international organizations.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- How do teachers conceptualize quality education?

- What informs teachers' ideas and practices?

- How do teachers' ideas and practices align with national policy?

Overview of the Study

Two main bodies of literature situate this study: global discourses on education quality and studies of teachers' ideas and practices in contexts of reform. These bodies of literature highlight the complex mechanisms and environments within which teachers enact new ideas about teaching and learning.

Despite diverse conceptions of what constitutes educational quality in policy discourses, there seems to be increasing agreement that quality should be defined in terms of students' cognitive and affective outcomes (UNESCO, 2004). This focus demands a transformation of the nature of classroom teaching from emphasizing rote learning, teacher-directed instruction to active, student-centered approaches to learning (Leu & Price-Rom, 2006). Since higher-order thinking skills rather than

lower-level cognition are increasingly valued, attention has been given to *how* and *what* students are learning (Leu & Price-Rom, 2006). Countries are thus increasingly adopting policies that emphasize student-centered and active learning pedagogies. And, since teachers are the most influential school-related factor in students' learning, what they think and do with respect to enacting new approaches is also of increasing interest.

The second body of literature, research on teaching in contexts of reform initiatives, addresses that interest. This literature suggests that traditional teaching practices are difficult to change, even as new elements of student-centered pedagogies are infused into teachers' existing practice (Ball, 1993; Cohen, 1990; Smylie, 1996; Torres, 2000). Studies have further noted that many factors shape how teachers understand and enact new ideas in their classrooms. These include teachers' content knowledge (Cohen, 1990; Spillane & Jennings, 1997); their dispositions to learn (Spillane and Jennings 1997); their prior beliefs, conceptions and practices regarding content and pedagogy (Windschitl, 2002); cultural factors (Ginsburg, 2006; O'Sullivan, 2004); availability of materials and other resources as well as quality of classroom/school facilities (O'Sullivan 2004); teachers' salaries and other incentives (Torres, 2000); and the nature and quality of pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development (Torres, 2000). While this list is not exhaustive, it does underscore an important point: These factors interact and complicate teachers' understanding and implementation of instructional policy in complex ways, and it is therefore necessary to understand the interactions as situated in specific contexts.

3

This dissertation draws on in depth, qualitative case studies of four teachers as "illustrative examples" of the larger case of rural teachers working and living in the context of educational reforms and other dynamics in Nicaragua. In this embedded case study approach (Yin, 1994), I engage in a cross-case analysis to draw out common and divergent themes with respect to how teachers conceptualize "quality education" and seek to enact "quality instruction" in their classrooms. Data for this study were collected in 2006 and 2007 over two 3-month periods in Chinandega, Nicaragua.

Findings from the case studies illuminate the complexities that teachers face in their daily work. Each of the four teachers, to varying degrees and in somewhat different ways, is committed to adopting or adapting the reform pedagogies. However, for them, what happens in the classroom is largely informed by local contextual factors, which includes personal understandings about active-learning pedagogies, the nature of the involvement of parents and community members, the role of the local ministry officials and NGO staff, and the level of support and space they feel they have to collaboratively engage in discussions about their work.

The findings of this study offer insights into how teachers understand and enact "quality" teaching. Such insights can be used in planning and implementing professional development and other initiatives, especially as the Ministry of Education and donors continue to promote initiatives aimed at improving the quality of education at the classroom level. This study also can inform the process for evaluating policies by providing an in depth description of teaching and the challenges that teachers face in putting into practice ideas being promoted globally as

4

critical to quality instruction. Finally this study contributes to theorizing and research

concerned with teachers' ideas and practices, by examining key issues in a context

that is less-often in focus in the literature – rural teachers in a developing country

context.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Issues and Related Research

Introduction

In this chapter, I survey the literature on education reforms aimed at improving education quality, with specific attention to the improvement of teaching and learning. I will draw on two main bodies of literature: global policy discourses on education quality and research on teaching in contexts of education reforms. I will conclude with a brief discussion about implications for policy and professional development.

Global Policy Discourses on Education Quality

The 1990 International Agreement on Education for All (EFA) (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990) underlined a global consensus on education as a fundamental human right and outlined 6 goals in order to ensure all children access to education by 2015. The 6 goals are:

1. Expansion and improvement of early childhood care and education;

2. Ensuring complete, free and compulsory access to primary education of good quality for all children;

3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programs;

4. 50% improvement in adult literacy levels;

5. Elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and gender equality by 2015;

6. Improving all aspects of education quality so that recognized and

    measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy,

    numeracy and essential life skills (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990).

Quality of education is more specifically addressed in Article III (Universalizing

access and promoting equity): "Basic education should be provided to all children,

youth and adults. To this end, basic education services of quality should be expanded

and consistent measures must be taken to reduce disparities". The attention to

education quality in this initial agreement is most directed as a tool to improve equity,

especially for women and girls in education. EFA states improvement of quality as a

"most urgent priority… to remove every obstacle that hampers the active

participation of [women and girls]" (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990, Article III, #3).

While education quality is addressed, the main emphasis of the original EFA

agreement is the expansion of access to education. With this global push toward

universalizing access to education, quality has declined as a result as resources were

not enough to cover education expansion *and* to ensure good quality (Leu, 2005; Leu

& Price-Rom, 2006). Education quality later was reaffirmed as an "imperative" on

the international educational agenda (UNESCO, 2004). The focus of quality shifted

from a focus on equity to a focus on increased achievement scores, inclusion of

vulnerable populations, increased resources (textbooks, etc), stronger links across

government sectors, and the improvement of cognitive and social-emotional

development of children (UNESCO, 2004).

There is debate however about what specifically constitutes "quality"

education and how it might be measured as evident in the broad range of factors listed

previously. UNESCO (2004) concludes that protection of human rights, equity and relevance of education are the broadly shared objectives that underpin the debates about how to define "quality education". These broad ideas are grounded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) (UNESCO, 2004). More specifically, two distinct perspectives on the definitions of quality are identified. From one perspective education quality is defined in terms of students learning outcomes, usually measured by standardized tests. On the other hand, "perceptions, experiences, and needs of those involved in the learning experience" form the basis for determining education quality (UNESCO, 2004) These two perspectives, one that depends on quantitative measures of inputs and outputs and one that argues that what is important for us (education researchers and policy makers) to understand is embedded in the nature of classroom processes, underpin fundamental debates that have unfolded regarding what quality is and how it should be measured.

The input/output model for the improvement of quality constitutes the infusion of education "inputs" or resources (i.e. numbers of classrooms, textbooks, teacher salaries and other material resources) into the education system, which are expected to produce particular outputs (i.e. persistence in school, decreased repetition rates, and increased promotion/graduation rates) (Torres, 2000; UNESCO, 2004). However, no direct links have been established between such educational inputs and student outcomes (Khaniya & Williams, 2004). Furthermore, the input-output model illuminates very little about the actual quality of teaching and learning that is going on in classrooms; rather the degree to which educational inputs improve quality is dependent on the level to which teachers can effectively use them to improve the

processes of teaching and learning (O'Sullivan, 2006). The point even extends to achievement scores, which are used by governments and international organizations as a proxy for measuring learning outcomes and thus as a measure of quality (World Bank, 2005; DiGropello, 2005; Leu, 2005; Torres, 2000). While providing some insight into the learning, these scores do not say much about the quality of teaching and classroom experiences, and in fact might have unfavorable consequences for classrooms:

> In developing countries, a focus on examination results can be detrimental to the quality of teaching and learning, as teachers tend to rely on rote teaching and learning to prepare children for the tests. Children are only developing one skill, that of memorization. The indicators of quality used by donors are also not concerned with processes (O'Sullivan, 2006, p. 251).

Goldstein (2004) discusses the consequences of over-reliance on achievement scores as measures of learning and states, "any rise in test scores should not be confused with a rise in learning achievements, as opposed to test-taking performance" (p. 10). He notes that factors such as teaching to the test, non-universal definitions of literacy and other competencies, and over-reliance on achievement data in terms of donor funding - a factor that links the implementation of certain reforms and the achievement of certain outcomes with gaining external donor funding for education - question the utility of these data in drawing inferences about the quality of teaching and learning. Thus, the input/output model for measuring educational quality can shed light on the economic efficiency of the education system, but cannot provide much insight about the nature and quality of what actually happens in the classroom (O'Sullivan 2006; Khaniya and Williams, 2004).

Despite the issues that surround the practicality of using more qualitative measures of learning[1], there appears to be increasing agreement, however, that education quality should be defined by student cognitive and affective outcomes. UNESCO (2004) notes:

> Two principles characterize most attempts to define quality in education: the first identifies learners' cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all education systems… The second emphasizes education's role in promoting values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development (UNESCO 2004, p. 17).

An input-output approach yields little information about the quality of students' cognitive and emotional development nor the specific challenges and possible solutions to problems regarding development. Thus there is an argument that supports emphasis on more qualitative accounts that illuminate the nature of classroom processes, which can do more to explain quality and the specific challenges to achieving it (O'Sullivan, 2006).

It is essential to note the important role of the international donor community and other international development organizations in the promotion of specific strategies and policies to increase quality. Financial resources and 'best practices' are exported to developing countries and enacted through programs that are that are, in part, carried out by such organizations. Despite the debates, input-output measures and strategies for improving education are widely used by the donor community and by national governments. And, while certainly not the solution to quality problems, monetary investments in educational development has a stronger positive effect in

---

[1] Engaging in defining educational quality by the qualitative aspects of the teaching and learning processes would require more resources, personnel training, and manpower. Issuing tests is much cheaper, easier, and less problematic in terms encountering different interpretations of the data (O'Sullivan, 2006).

poor countries, than it does in rich ones (Schubert & Prouty-Harris, 2003). Still,

Mingat (2003) emphasizes the point that we cannot rely solely such resources to do

all the work in improving quality:

> … One must stay aware of the limitations of a school quality policy that
> consists merely of mobilizing additional resources even if this is done with a
> strategy that is empirically well-justified, more or less following lines that are
> comparable to shore favorable for learning. They are not the learning itself.
> The latter is what matters and policies do not have direct access to this (p. 32).

O'Sullivan (2006) echoes this point, and further argues that too often shortage of

material resources are cited as excuses for poor quality, but she notes the lack of

direct links we can infer from the presence of instructional materials, for example,

and the kind of teaching and learning that is happening in the classroom. It depends

on how the teacher is using the materials.

Coupled with greater attention on the quality of student learning and

underscored by critiques of quantitative measures of learning outcomes is increasing

acknowledgement that the nature of classroom teaching must also be transformed

from emphasizing rote learning, teacher-directed instruction to active, student-

centered approaches to learning (Leu & Price-Rom, 2006; UNESCO, 2004).

Governments favor active learning policies because they are thought to improve

student learning and contributing to national economic development (Ginsburg,

2009). Since higher-order thinking skills rather than lower-level cognition are

increasingly valued as skills and knowledge necessary for the changing world

(Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Spillane, 1999), attention has been given to *how*

and *what* students are learning. Emphasis on classroom practices is noted in the

broader policy discourses and many countries are embracing instructional reforms

that are based in constructivist principles (UNESCO, 2004; MECD, 2000). In this context teachers are noted as having a central role in the promotion of quality (UNESCO, 2004; Leu, 2005; Leu & Price-Rom, 2006).

Theoretical Foundations of Active Learning Policies

The theoretical foundations of active learning policies lie in constructivist theories of learning (UNESCO, 2004, Ginsburg, 2009). Constructivism, while the subject of theoretical debate, is based on the unifying principle that students learn through "construct[ing]" their own understandings, "based upon the interactions of what they already know and believe, and the phenomena or ideas with which they come into contact" (Richardson, 1997, p. 3). The following paragraphs outline the major theoretical principles underlie constructivist learning theories.

John Dewey (1916) argues that education functions to prepare children to actively participate in larger society, highlighting the importance that new knowledge should relate to broader social contexts, and learned in isolation from this context, obscures securing a "general training of mind" (p. 67). Dewey elaborates that meaningful learning results when the student "reconstruct[s] or reorganiz[es] experience…which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (p. 76). He contrasts this outcome for learning with what he observed in schools, where rules and "routine action" increases particular skills, but does not "lead to new perceptions of bearings and connections; it limits rather than widens the meaning-horizon…" (p. 78). He further states that, "an isolated uniform way of acting becomes disastrous at some critical moment" (p. 78). According to Dewey (1916), the primary outcome for learning is for students to engage in social action.

12

From a cognitive perspective, Jean Piaget's (1970) theory of learning expands on how students build understanding. He cites the shortcoming of previous theories of learning as neglecting the process of "invention" or construction that a learner does beyond mere copying. He emphasizes the necessity to "explain how the subject manages to construct and invent, not merely how he repeats and makes copies" (p. 714). Piaget's theory of learning relies on the underlying assumption that intellectual development is the result of both biological development and the internal cognitive process of constructing relationships between pieces of information gained through experience (1970). While recognizing the importance of language and social interaction for learning, his focus is on the individual processes of establishing,

> … cognitive, or more generally epistemological relations, which consist neither of a simple copy of external objects nor of a mere unfolding of structures preformed inside the subject, but rather involve a set of structures progressively constructed by continuous interaction between the subject and the external world (Piaget, 1970, p. 703).

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) social construction theory of learning argues that learning happens *through* social interaction, such that the individual can only build understanding after having gone through a process of interaction first. He emphasizes the central importance of speech in children's intellectual development as well as the interactive relationship of speech and action that enables children to construct new meaning (Vygotsky, 1978). He states:

> From the very first days of the child's development his activities acquire a meaning of their own in a system of social behavior and, being directed towards a definite purpose, are refracted through the prism of the child's environment. The path from object to child and from child to object passes through another person (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 30).

Critical theories of learning, such as those of Paulo Freire (1970/2008), build from this perspective. They emphasize the importance of dialogue for learning, as well as advance the explicit agenda to transform relations of power (Freire, 1970/2008). Students come to new understandings through examining their own experiences critically and this learning leads to action that confronts existing societal structures that maintain the status quo (Freire, 1970/2008).

Constructivists reject the "transmissionist" view of teaching and learning. Characterized as "teacher-centered" (Cuban, 1984) and the "banking" model (Freire, 1970/2008), a transmissionist approach emphasizes factual knowledge, which is transferred from the teacher to the students and results in the development of skills of memorization and repetition of material (Ginsburg, 2009). Constructivism favors developing a practice of teaching that relates new concepts with larger society, accounts for learners' experiences and prior understandings, and which creates new opportunities for learners to construct meaningful understandings through interaction with their social and physical environment. This theory of learning supports teaching practice that holds students, with their prior knowledge and experiences, at the center of the educational process and as active participants in their own education. Cuban (1984), in seeking ways to characterize the nature of teaching uses the dichotomy of student vs. teacher-centered instruction. He states that "student-centered instruction" means that students exercise a substantial degree of direction and responsibility for what is taught, how it is learned, and for any movement within the classroom" (p. 3).

The discussion on global policy discourses at the beginning of this chapter highlighted a disconnect between what global policy discourses say education quality should be and the approaches to quality promoted by donor programs. While global policy discourses have called for education quality to be aimed at improving students' development and learning, donor-supported programs still rely primarily on an input-output model for programs intended to improve quality. However, output measures including achievement scores, tell us little about the nature of teaching and learning that is happening in classrooms. The following section outlined the theoretical ideas about learning that underlie instructional policies and defined, theoretically, what is meant by a "student-centered" approach to teaching and learning. The next section discusses research that aims to explore the nature of teaching and learning in specific contexts where teachers are attempting to honor the tenet that students should construct their own understandings.

Research on Reform Based Teaching

With a particular focus on what happens in the classroom, a body of research "has sought to unpack the 'black box' of education by focusing on learning itself—the creative interaction between pupils and teachers in the classroom" (UNESCO, 2004, p. 20). This body of research is comprised of classroom-based studies from contexts of instructional reforms. This section discusses the conclusions about the nature of teaching and learning that are derived from examples in the US and internationally. The literature from the US draws largely from state reforms enacted in the 1990's that sought to improve the quality of teaching by focusing on student-centered pedagogies. The international literature represented here are from the

perspectives of "poor" or "developing" countries.[2] They are intended to be examples of donor-supported instructional reforms across different political, social, economic and cultural contexts. They are of interest because they help shed light on the context of teaching in this study.

Good teaching, as defined by many student-centered, active learning, and other pedagogies that frame the student at the center of the teaching and learning process, is rooted in constructivist theories about teaching and learning (Windschitl, 2002). In the literature instructional reforms are termed "ambitious pedagogies" (Spillane & Jennings, 1997), "student centered teaching" (Deboer, 2002), or "active learning pedagogies" (Leu, 2005; UNESCO, 2004). These reform ideas challenge traditional notions of teacher-centered, didactic pedagogies that situate learners in passive roles, and are argued to be the most appropriate pedagogies for the new millennium (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Spillane, 1999). They embrace higher order critical thinking and analytical skills (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999). They are reflected in U. S. state and national reforms, as well as in donor funded education development programs. Thus, professional development programs have been implemented to help teachers develop the attitudes, knowledge and skills, and dispositions required to change their practice to be in line with such pedagogies. However, such reform efforts require teachers to essentially "reconstruct" their classroom practice (Spillane, 1999). While such changes involves teacher behaviors,

---

[2] The terminology used here (poor, developing) here is representative of terminology used in global policy and donor discourses. This does not imply subscription on the part of the researcher to a modernization paradigm or intend for any inferences about relative value, quality or deficiency to be made. Identifying countries as such is only important for the reader so as to understand the role of the donor community in promoting education reform, and recognize the inherent political and economic dynamics at play.

or the use of new instructional materials, they also "necessitate changes in other aspects of practice including the way students interact with each other and the teacher, the way teachers treat students' ideas and thinking and what is valued as knowing" (Spillane & Jennings, 1997). In practice, these notions are not easy to envision and even harder to implement. Windschitl (2002) states:

> The most profound challenges for teachers are not associated merely with acquiring new skills but with making personal sense of constructivism as a basis for instruction, reorienting the cultures of classrooms to be consonant with the constructivist philosophy, and dealing with the pervasive educational conservatism that works against efforts to teach for understanding (p. 131).

The central issue that teachers' practice is difficult to change, especially when the changes imply fundamentally restructuring one's thinking about their work, is true for any context. We see this play out in classroom level research on reform-based teaching.

Spillane and Jennings (1997) speak of the challenges and factors that interplay as teachers attempt to change their practice to "ambitious pedagogy" while teaching writing to elementary school students. They found differences in how teachers implement reforms. These differences include varying degrees of change and deepness of change from traditional pedagogies, and suggest teachers' dispositions to learn during professional development activities, interest and experience with writing influenced the way they understand and enact reforms. Teachers who are interested in writing in their own lives, and who approach professional development as useful for their own learning, seem to better reflect 'ambitious pedagogy' through authentic and deep changes in their classroom tasks and discourse (Spillane & Jennings, 1997). The authors label this disposition as teachers' "identity as learners" (Spillane, 2000;

Spillane & Jennings, 1997). Teachers' identity as learners influences what they learn during reform-driven professional development activities. The study finds:

> Although aligning policies so that they support challenging learning goals appears to be effective in encouraging surface-level changes (e.g., materials, grouping arrangements), it appears to be less successful in getting at more difficult-to-reach dimensions of teaching (e.g., classroom discourse patterns)" (Spillane & Jennings, 1997).

Cohen (1990)'s study about one teacher enacting mathematics teaching reform demonstrates similarly how traditional teaching practices combine with new reform ideas. The teacher uses new activities and materials to reflect old mathematical ideas and knowledge. She seeks to reinvent her teaching with her "old professional self, including the ideas and practices comprised therein" (Cohen, 1990).

Finally, Ball (1993) writes about pedagogical complexities that arise in her attempting to teach in ways consistent with policy that promotes more higher cognitive level learning for students in math, focusing on students' mathematical reasoning. For Ball, three dilemmas frame her work teaching elementary math: representing math content in ways that are authentic to the discipline, respecting children as mathematical thinkers, and creating a learning community in her classroom (Ball, 1993). She uses classroom examples to highlight the questions she confronts and difficulties she faces in determining the most valuable and productive instructional response in these instances. She notes the inherent uncertainties in teaching and argues that, "aiming to create a practice that is, at once, honest to mathematics and honoring children …clearly heightens those uncertainties" (Ball, 1993, p. 377). She goes on to note that that the authentic teaching of math content "is more uncertain than a traditional view of math as skills and rules" and "the view of

children as thinkers [is] more unpredictable" than the traditional view of children as receivers of information (Ball, 1993, p. 377).

We can draw on three points from this literature. First, teachers are caught in a central dilemma: they teach using a "mechanical" or traditional conception of reading or writing or math, while they are viewed to be the most important agents of change (Cohen & Ball, 1990). They are the source *and* subject of reform. From this literature we know that making substantive changes beyond the surface to the "core" elements of teaching practice (Spillane, 1999, 2000) is challenging for teachers themselves (Ball, 1993; Cohen, 1990). More specifically the kinds of teaching reforms envision require fundamentally different notions regarding conceptions of the student, the role of the teacher and the nature of disciplinary knowledge and learning (Ball, 1993; Cohen, 1990). As Ball (1993) states, there is greater uncertainty to think of authentic pedagogy than it is to hold onto traditional conceptions. Developing new, student-centered practices involves changes in how teachers' think about knowledge and content and new dynamics of interaction in the classroom that no longer position teachers as authoritative information providers (as in the traditional approaches). Noting the presence of traditional practices despite elements of reform, Smylie (1996) asserts that we, the educational community, have not been attentive enough to the issues that surround why these traditional practices persist. The primary understanding to be drawn from this literature useful in framing the current study is that deep changes that are implied for teacher thinking and practice are difficult, messy and not comfortable for teachers. Second, this and other literature highlight a number of influencing factors on what and how teacher understand and

enact new ideas in classrooms. These include teachers' content knowledge (Cohen, 1990; Spillane and Jennings, 1997; Ball, 1993); their dispositions to learn (Spillane and Jennings, 1997); their prior beliefs, conceptions and practices about content (Cohen, 1990) and pedagogy (Cohen, 1990; Windschitl, 2002), and teachers conception of knowledge (Windschitl, 2002). Finally, this literature cast doubts on the capacity of policy and professional development to result in such deep changes in teachers' practices (Cohen, 1990; Spillane and Jennings, 1997).

What insights are gained from the studies discussed in the last section regard how reform based teaching takes shape in classrooms, teachers' perspectives and practices. They primarily concern individual teachers, and factors that influence their teaching (previous knowledge, content knowledge, etc.). Using very close levels of analysis into teacher thinking and practice, these studies highlight individual teacher understanding and teaching in context. I will now present studies about teaching and learning in reform contexts from international perspectives. It should be noted that in these contexts reforms are derived from ideas about teaching and learning grounded in "Western" or "developed" country literature and imported through donor and NGO supported programs. The point is to highlight the importance of context in the ways that such reforms are carried out and interpreted in light of education quality debates.

While programs funded by donors and governments suggest that the lack of resources (few classrooms, lack of materials or textbooks, etc) or teacher education of are factors producing poor teaching quality, scholars argue that quality should be defined locally, in the real context of teaching and learning (Leu, 2005; O'Sullivan 2004, 2006). We see evidence for this debate in the literature on teaching and reform.

Countries have adopted education quality policies that promote active and student-centered pedagogies that are meant to reform traditional and teacher centered practices that are considered predominant in the international literature cited here (Nakabugo & Siebörger, 2001; Tabulawa, 1997; O'Sullivan, 2004). As was discussed in the previous section, educators face challenges in understanding, internalizing, and operationalizing constructivist pedagogies (Cohen, 1990; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Leu and Price Rom, 2006; Windschitl, 2002). However other factors are cited that complicate the ways that these pedagogies get enacted in classrooms. These include lack of resources, including instructional materials and infrastructure; large class size (Hardman, Abd-Kadir, & Smith, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2004); low teacher salaries; and low levels of teacher education and professional development (DiGropello, 2005; Torres, 2000). These factors lead to generally poor conditions in which teaching and learning occurs and are often cited as a major challenging factors in terms of general education quality (DiGropello, 2005; Gauthier & Dembéle, 2004), *and* to the implementation of active and student-centered pedagogies (DiGropello, 2005; O'Sullivan, 2006). There are still other factors that help make up a context for studying the use of student-centered models from international perspectives. Additional issues that are derived from the use of 'best practice' models include cultural appropriateness of active-learning pedagogies (Ginsburg, 2006) and teacher preparation (Leu and Price-Rom, 2006). The challenge of implementing active-learning pedagogies in many "development" contexts is summarized by Leu and Price-Rom (2006):

> Teachers, often with little preparation themselves… struggle to implement elements of a new paradigm that may be contradictory, and …attempt to

[do] so in classes in which quality would probably drop no matter what the paradigm of teaching and learning in use (p. 12).

In southern Africa, policies that promote instructional reforms toward learner-centered pedagogies offer a good context for studying how teachers adopt these reforms in context. O'Sullivan (2004) describes teachers' difficulty in implementing learner centered approaches in primary classrooms in Namibia. Echoing Cohen (1990), O'Sullivan (2004) reports that teachers believe that they use a learner-centered approach in their classrooms. However, as O'Sullivan emphasizes, teachers are not able to understand learner-centered education, much less describe how to put it into practice consistently with what policy makers intended. The teachers view knowledge as "fixed, objective and detached from the learner", and understand that the teacher's function is "to transmit, usually using rote-learning techniques, this knowledge to children" (O'Sullivan, 2004, p. 595). But, O'Sullivan (2004) also points out that limited space and classroom resources, as well as teachers "unqualified and underqualified status" might have made such deep changes to their thinking a goal "beyond their professional capacity". In addition, she suggests a cultural incongruity in the Namibian context that also might fuel difficulties in adopting a new teaching paradigm. That is, "the interests of the individual tends to be subsumed under the group, and in learner-centered education, the individual is paramount". She further notes that the expectations of how children should behave are a contributing factor (O'Sullivan, 2004). In a study from Nigeria, Hardman et al., 2008 note the prevalent traditional, didactic teacher-led approaches. They code questioning patterns of a wide sample of teachers over 10 states in Nigeria and find a heavy predominance of teachers eliciting cued, very rote based responses from students. They also

highlight the importance of student talk in learners constructing their own

understanding, something that was notably absent from the traditional norms of

classroom discourse in this context:

> … human beings learn by constructing and assimilating knowledge rather than through the addition of discrete facts to an existing store of knowledge, and that the most important ways of working on this understanding is through talk, particularly where pupils are given the opportunity to assume greater control over their own learning by initiating ideas and exploring ideas (Hardman et al., 2008, p. 66).

The above studies from African contexts illustrate some of the same

challenges with implementing active learning pedagogies as is found in the previous

section. Still, in these settings the level of teacher education and opportunities for

professional development are low (O'Sullivan, 2004; Hardman et al., 2008). An

argument exists, however, that teachers are capable of genuinely adopting new

approaches. Ginsburg (2006, p. 1) notes,

> In-service education programs- especially ones which are school- and school cluster-based, extended over a period of time, and actively engage participants in learning and doing- can develop the commitment and knowledge of even less formally educated teachers that is a pre-requisite for implementing active-learning, student-centered pedagogies.

With respect to Latin America, which serves as a more immediate context for

this dissertation research in Nicaragua, Torres (2000) summarizes that governments

have adopted policies that emphasize the development and expansion of primary

education in accordance with EFA goals. In addition, the region has witnessed

quality reforms focusing on efficiency and improved education achievement,

decentralization and school autonomy, greater community and parental involvement

in education (Fuller & Rivarola, 1998), curriculum reform, pedagogical reform

toward using constructivist- based active-learning pedagogies, the provision of

23

textbooks and materials (McEwan, 2008; Torres, 2000), and in-service professional

development and promotion of collaborative opportunities for teachers (Torres, 2000;

McEwan, 2008).

In many Latin American countries these reforms intersect each other in that

teachers' work is extended from purely pedagogical activities in the classroom to

include playing a part in community's mobilization and participation in education

(Edgerton, 2005; Torres, 1992). Ultimately, the vision of a good teacher is one that

can balance both roles; that is, the teacher, "without neglecting [her] teaching role,

[can] convert into a community mobilizer" (Torres, 1992). Edgerton (2005) describes

the nature of changes that teachers must confront:

> Teachers must willingly change their professional self-perception: they must
> come to think of themselves not as traditional lecturers and disciplinarians, but
> as classroom learning managers, and beyond the classroom, as participants
> and local leaders in a democratic, community-based education reform
> movement. (Edgerton; 2005, p. 20)

Reforms promoting active learning pedagogies have been popular and the

region is working to "overcom[e]… deeply rooted teaching practices, which were

introduced under Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule" (Edgerton, 2005, p. 4).

Across Latin America, active and student-centered pedagogies are embedded in larger

reforms. An example is the Escuela Nueva active school rural reform model.

Escuela Nueva, started in rural communities in Colombia, is regarded as one of the

most successful and innovative reforms of its kind (Edgerton, 2005), and has been

adopted by other countries to address similar rural-urban disparities in education

(McEwan, 2008). Escuela Nueva is a multigrade school model[3] that promotes active

---

[3] The multigrade model is used in rural areas and is designed to serve the schooling needs of
communities that lie far from each other and have no school in near proximity (McEwan, 2008).

learning through small group study; self managed study; the use of individual

learning guides; student government; community involvement; and teachers as

facilitators (McEwan, 1998; Schiefelbein, 1992). While acknowledging possible

quality trade-offs in a multigrade strategy, McEwan (2008) and Kline (2002) outline

that under this model the reforms promote peer interactions - collaboration and group

- work in a way that students work productively, even when they are not working

directly with the teacher.

The Escuela Nueva model envisions an active role for the student and the

teacher, as well as community members. It incorporates active learning through the

principles of multigrade class structures, individual instruction respecting the

students' pace, and active-learning materials designed to allow the teacher to manage

various groups simultaneously (Kline, 2002; Torres, 1992). Students are provided

self-instruction materials that outline instruction for students (starting in 2nd grade).

The books set out activities and projects that incorporate exploration, investigation,

and analysis through activities that access prior knowledge and allow students to

construct meaning. Activities require students to engage with and use resources from

their communities (knowledge, artifacts, experts, history). Learning corners are

resource areas in classrooms where students can work independently or in groups

(McEwan, 1998; Schiefelbein, 1992). Teachers are trained through workshops,

demonstration schools where they observe the model being implemented by

experienced teachers, and through ongoing professional development in microcenters

that serve as resource centers, but also as places where teachers can come together to

collaborate and problem solve (McEwan, 1998; Schielfelbein, 1992). The approach

recognizes the need for teacher learning as well as student learning, and through active methods as well (Torres, 1992).

Findings on the success of the Escuela Nueva model are mixed. Some studies suggest that student achievement and permanence in schools is higher for Escuela Nueva schools (McEwan, 2008). However, study of implementation of variants of the Escuela Nueva model in Colombia, Guatemala, and Chile find consistently that participating schools are not fully able to implement all the strategies in the model. In many cases schools do not receive instructional materials and teachers do not get the proper training as the microcenters have not been implemented well, which results in reinforcing teacher directed, traditional teaching (Torres, 1992). Edgerton (2005), reporting on the effect of USAID projects, which involved the adoption of Escuela Nueva in rural Nicaragua[4], suggests that the percentage of student initiated interactions and other indicators of an "active" students (use of use of materials and learning corners) is higher in project schools than in traditional schools. This quantitative account, however, conveys little about the nature of teaching and learning that exists in classrooms. As McEwan (2008) notes, in relation to the effectiveness of multigrade school reforms across Latin America, the reasons for poor adoption of new teaching methods broadly "are complex and little-researched" (p. 479). Still, the Escuela Nueva model is widely recognized as a success in terms of improving education quality, and test scores are higher in Escuela Nueva schools when compared to other traditional rural schools (Edgerton, 2005; McEwan, 2008).

Again, Torres (1992) echoes others' findings in that there can be a presence of new teaching approaches and elements of traditional practice: "Teachers have

---

[4] These will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

internalized (embraced) their new role and stay 'perfectly traditional'…[they demonstrate] the possibility of harmony between an ideal progressive education and a conservative, outdated pedagogy" (p. 9). So, formally, they can accept the principles of Escuela Nueva, and keep untouched the exact practices that are challenged by those principles. And, this is precisely "the explanation of how Escuela Nueva survives, continues and advances", but also is the explanation of "how it can stall…and become bureaucratized, losing the contents and the innovative forces" (Torres, 1992, p. 9).

What we learn from these Escuela Nueva findings reiterate reports of other studies of reform teaching discussed throughout this chapter: that efforts to change the nature of teaching to improve its quality have consistently and persistently resulted in teaching that is similar to what was there before. We can only assume that the complexities that arise for teachers in the Escuela Nueva model are at least as difficult to contend with. However, what is not found in the survey of the literature of Latin America are attempts to qualitatively characterize what happens in classrooms. The necessity remains to explore and better understand what happens in the context of the classroom, at the level of the classroom interactions that provide an account of a teachers, style, approach, philosophy, and rationale for her teaching.

Implications for Professional Development and Policy

As suggested by the literature on professional development for the improvement of teaching and learning, teacher learning processes must be central to reform efforts (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Fishman, Ronald, Best, & Revital, 2003; Leu, 2005). Since, in many contexts, professional development beyond teacher education

has been "frequently scanty or non-existent" (Leu, 2004b). And when available, predominant models of professional development programs, couched under the terms of "teacher capacity building" or "teacher training" programs treat teaching as set of technical skills that equip teachers with a collection of activities and strategies (Leu, 2005). These models rarely function to challenge deep-rooted assumptions about teaching and are thus aimed at "expanding teachers well-defined classroom practices" (Warren Little, 1993, p. 129). A few characteristics seem to underlie what appropriate professional development might look like:

- *Professional development should be ongoing and school-based:* Centralized wide-scale professional development programs are inadequate for promoting the kinds of deep changes that reforms require (Leu, 2004b). Rarely do these types of professional development provide the kind of support necessary for teachers so make substantive changes, as they are formulaic, and passively transmit abstract information to teachers (Leu, 2004b). Professional development programs should therefore base teacher learning in their own practice (Borko, 2004; Fishman et al., 2003; O'Sullivan, 2006), such that reflective and learning-oriented "dispositions" are developed in the contexts of teachers' daily work (Darling Hammond & Sykes 1999).

- *Professional development should cultivate teacher learning:* As reform focuses more on students learning of higher order skills, the teaching skills required are also different (Leu, 2004b) and,

> "If teachers are to become reflective practitioners who use active-learning approaches in their classrooms, where students learn through problem solving, critical dialogue, inquiry and the use of higher-order thinking skills, teachers must learn [by participating] in professional

development programs that not only advocate, but also use and model these methods" (Leu & Price-Rom, 2006, p. 7).

- *Professional development should promote collaboration among teachers:* Teachers' capacity to continuously improve might largely depend on the development of schools as more collaborative institutions or "communities of practice" where teachers can work together and develop "shared membership in a group that accommodates and supports their pursuits of continuous inquiry into practice." (Leu and Price Rom, 2006, p. 12)

- *Continued professional development requires supportive institutional and school cultures and strong leadership focused on instruction:* "Authoritarian" cultures of schools and classrooms must, and are, challenged by more participatory approaches to reform and professional development (Leu, 2004b). Increasingly, decentralization approaches involve more local decision-making, and more opportunities for participation and voice for teachers (Leu, 2004b).

Concluding Thoughts

The discourse on educational policy and what that means in the classroom remains contested. However, it is useful to draw on O'Sullivan (2006)'s proposal to define quality contextually. Research on instructional reform shows that, in practice, reform teaching is often a mix between old and new practices, even in reforms considered highly successful and widely modeled, such as in the Escuela Nueva example. A view of quality that is embedded in specific context of teaching and learning affords the ability to characterize what is happening in the classroom- the

nature of the teaching and learning. Keeping teachers as the focus of interest, we must

acknowledge that schools "will not change unless teachers change them" (Cohen &

Ball, 1990). Their ability to do so is not acted upon by a few, easily understood

discrete factors. Windschitl (2002) notes complexity of the instructional reform

process, addressing this in terms of "dilemmas":

> Conceptual dilemmas are questions or inconsistencies that arise in
> understanding epistemological and philosophical assumptions of
> constructivism. Pedagogical dilemmas occur as teachers try to interpret
> constructivism in the context of their classrooms and practice. Cultural
> dilemmas arise as teachers attempt to engage in the 'radical reorientation' of
> accepted classroom norms and practices. And, political dilemmas play out
> when conflict arises in various stakeholders as institutional norms are
> challenged, and questions of privilege and authority are disturbed (p. 132).

In Nicaragua, as in other Latin American countries, the Ministry of Education

has adopted decentralization and active-learning pedagogies, conceived in the

tradition of Escuela Nueva. I will now turn to the specific case of Nicaragua and

discuss the education policy context of current reforms.

Chapter 3: Nicaragua Education Policy Context

Introduction

In this section I discuss the major goals, shift and trends in education policy during important periods in Nicaragua's recent history. I will begin with a descriptive country profile of Nicaragua before discussing briefly its post-colonial history and the Somoza family dictatorship (1936-1979). I will then discuss education the Sandinista era (1979-1990). I will do a more in depth discussion of education during the Chamorro administration (1990) and more current education policy as these periods form a more immediate policy backdrop for this study. In each section I will discuss education policy as related to educational quality, noting the important political shifts that underlay reforms, the role of the international donor community and the global contexts in which national policies were situated. It is the objective of this chapter to set up an important national education policy context that situates the study in time and place.

Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America covering 59, 998 square miles. It is bordered on the north by Honduras and El Salvador, and on the south by Costa Rica. The total population in Nicaragua is 5,891,200 (U. S. Dept. of State, n. d.). It has a national gross domestic product (GDP) of $6.6 billion and a per capita GDP of $1, 080 in 2008 (World Bank, n.d.). Services make up 55% of the GDP[5];

---

[5] Includes banking, wholesale and retail distribution, telecommunications, and energy.

agriculture makes up 31%[6], and manufacturing, 10% (U. S. Dept. of State, n. d.). The life expectancy is 73 years (World Bank, n. d.). Nicaragua has a large indigenous population that is mostly concentrated in the Atlantic Coast region of the country[7] and is distinct in culture and language from the rest of Nicaragua. On the Atlantic Coast, English is spoken along with Miskito, Sumo, and Rama, the three main indigenous languages (U. S. Dept. of State, n. d.). The official national language is Spanish, and is primarily spoken on the Pacific Coast. Nicaragua is a poor country with 48.3% of the population lives under the poverty line (under $1.25 US per day), with 17% in extreme poverty (UNICEF, n. d.). Access to potable water is 79% and to sewage disposable services is 48% (PAHO, n. d.). Slightly more than half of the population lives in urban areas (56%) than in rural (44%) areas (Govt. of Nicaragua, 2005), however, poverty is concentrated in rural areas where access to potable water and sanitation is below the national average (63% and 34% respectively) (UNICEF, n. d.). Unemployment is 8% of the labor force (PAHO, n. d.).

Regarding education, the net enrollment rate for primary school is 82.6%, and for secondary is 41.9% (MECD, 2006b). Poverty and rural- urban disparities influence the school-going population negatively resulting a reduced rate of enrollment of children from poor families as the education level increases. There is little or no representation of students from poor families at the university level (Porta, Gonzalez, Gutierrez, and Laguna, 2004). Nicaragua has relatively low overall

---

[6] Main products are coffee, bananas, sugarcane, rice, corn, tobacco, sesame, soya, beans, beans, poultry, shrimp, and lobster.
[7] The *Region Autonoma Atlantico del Norte y Sur* (Autonomous Regions of North and South, the RAAN & RAAS respectively) were granted autonomy legally in 1987, but nearly always have functioned as a region with distinct cultures, languages, and political interests than the rest of the country (The Autonomy Commission, 1985).

enrollment in primary and secondary school compared to other Latin American and Central American countries. While similar disparities are noted between urban and rural areas throughout Latin America, Nicaragua also demonstrates a relatively high degree of rural-urban inequity compared to other countries in the region. For example, even through education coverage is less in rural areas, some countries (Chile, Mexico, Peru) have a greater than 90% rural primary school net enrollment rate (Lopez, 2007). Nicaragua's rural net primary enrollment rate is 78.9%, lower than its neighbors El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica (86.3%, 83.6%, and 86.3% respectively) (Lopez, 2007). The secondary rural primary enrollment rate is 22.4% (Lopez, 2007). In urban areas in Nicaragua, the net enrollment for primary and secondary are 86.4% and 57.9% respectively (Lopez, 2007). Not surprisingly, illiteracy is concentrated in poor communities as well where it is as high as 41.3% in zones of extreme poverty, most of which are rural (Porta et al., 2004).

Nicaragua's current society, like much of Latin American can be traced back to Spanish and English colonial roots. While it is not within the scope of this chapter to emphasize colonialism in great detail, these roots should be noted. On a similar note external foreign involvement by England and the United States since independence in 1821 further helped create a political economy that heavily favored a very small minority elite portion of the population to the great marginalization of the majority poor (Walker, 1997). The role of the United States in Nicaragua's post-colonial history is a theme that forms an important piece of the larger political backdrop for national development. There has been a persistent social division

between this elite and the poor and the more recent resistance to U.S. involvement are born from early struggles (Fonseca, 1986; Walker, 1997).

During the early part of the 20th century, Agosto Sandino led the Army to Defend National Sovereignty, in an armed movement against US intervention and marine occupation since 1912, causing a withdrawal of the U.S. military in 1934. The United States, upon leaving, left Anastazio Somoza, as the commander of the US supported National Guard, a military unit that was notorious for its repressive and brutal tactics throughout the regime's tenure and acted under direct control of Somoza and later his two sons (Walker, 1997). Augusto Sandino was assassinated in 1936 by the National Guard after his agreement to disarm. This event, coupled with an alliance formed with President Franklin Roosevelt helped solidify a strong, historic and mutually beneficial alliance with the US maintained by the Somoza 43 year dictatorship. The dictatorship became increasingly oppressive after the 1950's when the student opposition movement gained in strength.

Miller (1985) writes, "The Somoza dynasty ran Nicaragua as a family plantation; disparities were great, and corruption was commonplace" (p. 19). For the majority of the Nicaraguan population, there was no opportunity for political participation; all political decisions were the authority of the dictatorship. The education system was underdeveloped and reinforced gross social inequities. Illiteracy was high and concentrated in rural areas where 75% of the population could not read or write and just more than one half of the primary school age population was enrolled in schools (Arnove, 1986, p. 3). It was "both a condition and a product" of the system (Miller, 1985, p. 20). Teaching and learning standards were minimal

and teachers who challenged the status quo were removed or relocated to remote rural areas (Miller, 1985). As Arnove (1986) writes, during the Somoza era, a public education system that,

> promote[d] the creation of critical, inquiring citizens made little sense in a society characterized by limited opportunity in the modern sector of the economy and limited opportunity for political participation (p. 3).

The education system in general reflected the larger social structure. It served the privileged, in particular the urban and economic elites who were the main benefactors of national development (and the capitalist relationship with the US) (Miller, 1985). Access to schools was concentrated in the colonial capitals of power on the Pacific Coast, to the neglect of the Atlantic Coast and the indigenous populations that live there (Miller, 1985). The education system overtly functioned to maintain the social, political, and economic structures of power.

The FSLN: Revolutionary Struggle & the Role of Education

The *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (The Sandinista National Liberation Front) (FSLN) was a movement that was inspired from the historic struggle of Augusto Sandino's crusade against United States' military presence in the late 1920's and in the student opposition to the Somoza's repressive policies in the 1950's. Founded by Carlos Fonseca, a former student leader, the FSLN was the emergent revolutionary organization that formed after a group fractioned off from the National Communist Party (Vilas, 1986). The movement sought to resist Somoza's repressive regime and fight for popular participation in political processes and national self-determination. In 1979 the Sandinista Revolution overthrew the government. The new revolutionary government had a political, social and economic

35

orientation that directly countered that of the Somoza regime. The primary platforms of the FSLN were based on self determination and sovereignty, democratic participatory governance, explicitly without the involvement of the imperialist influence of the United States, which had supported the Somoza regime (Arnove, 1995; Walker 1997). They envisioned a political system characterized by mass public participation in development and saw local level organizations and collectives as important voices in the system (Arnove, 1994). The FSLN had the priority of empowering the majority of the Nicaraguan population that had been marginalized by the Somoza era, which included all but the small capitalist class that controlled the majority of the country's industry and economic resources. The Sandinistas were not explicitly socialist (Hodges, 1986; Vilas, 1986). They wanted privately owned business, but they resisted the monopolies held by very few private businesses. Rather they believed in community collectives that could exercise ownership over land or business (FSLN, 1986). As they moved into power, the FSLN recognized the challenges they confronted with the goals of the revolution and the lack of expertise, experience, and manpower to do it (Wheelock, 1986). They were not a political party and the only political experience they had was the armed revolution. They had only very few well-trained professionals to take up the task of rebuilding and reforming policies (Carnoy & Torres, 1990).

Drawn from the movement's original roots, the FSLN conceived of education as an important vehicle for their goals of national development, self-determination, and general empowerment of the population. Sandino had strongly believed literacy to be a tool for the empowerment of the peasants during his resistance and had

inspired similar tenets in the student movements that foreground the FSLN (Miller, 1985). The Sandinistas[8] reflected these beliefs, and advanced a philosophy that education served to promote social and political consciousness in order to critically evaluate and participate in the betterment of the collective (Arnove 1986, 1995). Arnove (1995) notes this agenda as reflected in Sandinista education policy:

> Toward that end, the educational system was expected to foster the formation of a 'new person', a more critically conscious and participatory citizen motivated by collective goals, and also to promote the transmission of the skills and knowledge necessary to overcome decades of underdevelopment and set the nation on the path of self-sustaining growth. (p. 28).

The FSLN saw education as a way to promote the active public and popular critique and redefinition of the country's development. Ideologically, education was seen as a tool to promote the ideals of the new Nicaragua, and to skill the population in areas of need according to the development agenda. To enact the belief that education was a human right and to instill a more equitable and egalitarian system, the FSLN aimed to "push a major campaign to immediately wipe out illiteracy" through free and obligatory basic education, and by training more and better teachers "who have the knowledge that the present era requires, to satisfy the needs of [our] entire student population" (FSLN, 1986, p. 16-17). Through mass education, people could learn the fundamental nationalist tenets of the Sandinistas and be inspired to be a part of the new political national project. As the initial reforms, the newly established curriculum and textbook industry reflected the national symbols of leaders Augusto

---

[8] Other influences (i.e. the church), together with the FSLN in the "struggled to depose the Somoza regime. The need for self-help and learning from one another, inventiveness in the use of local materials, the value of mass organization and collective action were all lessons derived from the revolutionary movement. For this reason, it is not uncommon to hear current Nicaraguan political leaders and educators articulating the view that the revolution was the greatest teacher of all, and that the continuing revolutionary struggles constitute an enormous school of experience for all" (Arnove 1986, p. 9).

Sandino and Fonseca, and underscored a new development path that was independent on the United States and any other imperialist influence (Hanemann, 2005). The new education system valued volunteerism and actively recruited the participation and involvement of students and other educated individuals to serve as teachers in the less developed rural areas (Hanemann, 2005). The FSLN sought to produce a new kind of worker, and curriculums in higher education, and even secondary and vocational education became closely aligned and informed by broader national development goals (FSLN, 1986; Arnove, 1986). Industrial, vocational and agricultural colleges were established in order to promote the skills necessary to advance these development goals (Arnove, 1985; Carnoy & Torres, 1990). In the end, through mass education, the FSLN envisioned a complete social transformation starting Nicaragua on a new path of independent development.

The main achievements of the Sandinistas in education came early on in the history of their political power. The Literacy Campaign, popular education, and indigenous language programs were launched at the very outset of the change of government and resulted in a widespread education movement (Arnove, 1995). The Sandinistas enacted the Literacy Campaign specifically to target the populations that had been most underserved by Somoza and most marginalized by a lack of access to education. There was a mass moblization of support from civil society. "Brigadistas", who were mostly comprised of student volunteers, traveled to rural and underdeveloped areas to teach literacy and train literacy teachers, which resulted in increased literacy rates (Arnove, 1986). The brigades were lead and trained by the Nicaraguan Educators' Association (ANDEN), the teachers' union (Miller, 1985).

The mode of pedagogy was envisioned to instill critical discussion and modeled after a Freirian approach, where "conscientazation" was to allow people to understand themselves as part sof larger social and political relations (Hanemann, 2005). Father Fernando Cardenal, the leader of the campaign, reaffirmed the inextricable association of education and political agenda. "The understanding that the crusade was first and foremost a political project had its roots in the premise that… all education is political" (Miller, 1985, p. 26). This mirrored the FSLN perspective of education as a tool for empowerment.

Despite the momentum and achievements early on, the outcomes were not sustained. The Literacy Campaign, which had significantly impacted the literacy rate during the first year of the revolutionary government, quickly dissolved, and the basic literacy that was achieved was not developed (Hanemann, 2005). Very soon after the Sandinistas took power and began sweeping programs in all sectors, they were caught in the midst of another armed conflict. It was the height of the Cold War, and the United States and others in the capitalist international community labeled the revolutionary government as socialist, instated an economic embargo, restricted international aid, and maintained economic and technical military support to the "Somocistas" and the ex-National Guard, many of whom had fled the country after the overthrow. The Contra War, which was fought mainly from bases in Honduras, where the ex-National Guard had outposts, had severely depleted the human and financial resources and by the late 1980's, the government had shifted priorities from education to defense (Arnove, 1986, 1995; Carnoy & Torres, 1990). In addition, steep economic decline that resulted from an already weak economy, inherited from

the Somoza era, only worsened with the war (Arnove, 1995). In 1990 under pressure from the international community and with the Sandinista political base weakened, Violeta Chamorro of the Nation Opposition Union (UNO) party was elected as president.

Internationally, foundations were being set that heightened global attention to the issue of education. The World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand convened the same year, resulting in the World Declaration for Education for All (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990). In signing the agreement, countries committed to the six goals to advance the provision of universal and free education, of good quality for all children by 2015 (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990). Nicaragua took on those goals, which included expanding access to education and focusing on the improvement of education quality. Later in its EFA Plan, the government pledged to "quantitatively and qualitatively advance [toward] universal Basic Education" (MECD, 2000). EFA, which also promoted international cooperation, constituted part of the backdrop that contextualized education reform during the following political administrations in Nicaragua. Finally, Nicaragua's need for resources and development programs in order to stabilize and rebuild the country after the war and economic crisis, contributed to the internationally supportive climate for the renewed involvement of the donor community with the Nicaragua government.

During the 1990's and into the 2000's, the World Bank, IMF, USAID and other bi-and multi-lateral organizations funded projects and programs aimed at improving Nicaragua's development indicators in education and other social sectors. Such international organizations, along with non-governmental development

organizations, have been very influential in the ways that programs have been funded, designed, and implemented in Nicaragua for the last 19 or so years.

Chamorro: Decentralization in Education

Curricular Reform & Autonomous schools

The 1990 election brought in a starkly different political administration that had visions of development that were in direct opposition to the Sandinista tenets (Fuller & Rivarola, 1998). Violeta Chamorro, who had split from the FSLN early on in the revolutionary administration was, by the 1990 election, part of the UNO, a coalition party comprised of diverse factions unified in opposition to the Sandinistas, but with no broad based policy platform (Walker, 1997). Her right-of-center government promised renewed relations with the U.S. and other parts of the international capitalist community, which were viewed by Chamorro as an avenue to reinvigorate the Nicaraguan economy and were major selling points of her presidential campaign (Arnove 1995). Throughout her administration, and those following, the international donor community has been major players in the funding of development projects in all sectors.

With respect to education, the Chamorro era contrasted on ideological grounds about the purposes and utilities of education. The Minister of Education under Chamorro, Humberto Belli, a noted U. S. educated, conservative and religious opponent of the FSLN[9], strongly pushed religious and values education, and to clear the curriculum of remnants of the Sandinista rhetoric and reverence of Sandino and

---

[9] Interestingly, Belli, in the mid-70's was a supporter of the FSLN. He was educated in the U.S. and after fleeing in 1982, taught at the University of Pennsylvania. He returned to Nicaragua in 1990 to become Violeta Chamorro's Minister of Education (citation).

Fonseca; they sought to de-politicize education (Arcia & Belli, 1999). One of the major reforms undertaken with the new administration was the *Transformación Curricular* (the Curricular Transformation), a curriculum reform initiative that sought to rewrite the school curriculum to reflect the new post-Sandinista educational ideologies (MECD, 2000; Arcia & Belli, 1999). Religious and values education was implemented into the curriculum and new materials were published and distributed (MECD, 2000). The other major reform that was undertaken was a radical form of decentralization, known as the *Programa de Autonomía Escolar*, the School Autonomy Program (ASP) (Arcia and Belli, 1999, Fuller & Rivarola, 1998; and others). School autonomy also reflected new and contrasting ideas about local participation in education, the purposes of education, and in general rewrote the educational roles and responsibilities of the central Ministry and local communities. It is important to note the contrasting ideologies about education that were reflected in the Ministry's new ASP model compared with Sandinista education in order to appreciate, not only the direction of education reform, but also the relationship and role that international and donor support played in promoting the reforms.

While the Sandinistas saw education as an avenue for mass participation in a national development goal, the ASP saw local control and an education rich in values as important to develop a moral citizenry (Gershberg and Jacobs, 1998). The Sandinistas envisioned participation through local community collectives that participated, even in national level debates about the direction schools should take (Gershberg & Jacobs, 1998). Belli, on the other hand, saw participation occurring at an individual level. He encouraged parent involvement above all other forms of

participation, even such that parents could (and through a later legal framework did) have a majority voice in the daily workings of the school and classroom (Gershberg, 2002). With the degree of autonomy granted to individual schools Nicaragua's school autonomy reform, it is considered one of the "most radical educational decentralization experiments" to date (Gershberg, 1999).

The main goals of school autonomy were: "increase community participation, obtain financial resources for schools beyond government funding, and increase efficiency in the use of financial and human resource for schools" (Parker, 2005, p. 129). Nicaragua's decentralization model was based on the following assumptions:

- Local level actors would know the most about factors impacting education in their communities and would therefore make more rational decisions regarding spending,

- Parents could directly push for greater accountability from teachers; as they become more involved with the school, they would be more willing to contribute monetarily to the school, and

- Teachers would participate more democratically in school decision making and their morale, motivation and engagement would rise (Fuller & Rivarola, 1998).

While improving education quality was not an explicit goal of the original autonomy reform, it was assumed that schools that were more accountable to local needs and demands when democratically governed, and responsible for generating a portion of their own financial resources. Overall this would lead to improved education quality (Parker, 2005). Furthermore, the participation of parents in education would help

43

stimulate and motivate teachers to provide good classroom instruction (MECD, 2001; Parker, 2005). School based governing councils, the *consejos directivos,* were formed that were comprised of school directors, teachers, and parents and students. All school related decision-making powers were given to the school directive councils (King et al., 1999, and others). The central ministry provided fiscal transfers in an amount per student directly to the school, but the school directive council was also encouraged to generate funding from its own sources, including international organizations (Parker, 2005). Important responsibilities of the directive councils, included management of the funds distributed from the central ministry, hiring and firing of teachers, the ability to set curriculum, and decision-making regarding any other school-based operation (Parker, 2005). For rural schools, autonomy involved changing the school system into a cluster structure. Smaller community "satellite" schools form clusters with one larger, more central "base" school, where the directive council for all the schools was housed (King et al., 1999).

School fees and support form other organizations (including international) were seen as ways that schools could generate money (Parker, 2005; Gershberg, 2002). Ultimately there was an incentive for a school to decentralize because the possibility existed for increased school income. For teachers, this meant potentially higher salaries and additional incentives in the form of bi-annual bonuses for student attendance through a program funded by the World Bank for autonomous schools (Parker, 2005, p. 364).

There were proponents and opponents of the autonomy initiative (Parker, 2005). Proponents believed that autonomy would produce what a centralized

education system could not, particularly in terms of economic efficiency and local

level democratic participation. An emphasis on increased accountability to parents of

the education system sought to revitalize the connection between community and

schools; the "social contract", which had been, eroded during the Sandinista years as

disillusionment about education under the Sandinistas grew toward the end of the

1980's (Arcia & Belli, 1999). The other main argument supporting the autonomy

reform was the increased economic efficiency that would result from local level

decision-making regarding scarce resources (Arcia & Belli, 1999). In all, to renew

the social contract meant to distribute the responsibilities for education across actors

in the system including teachers, parents, communities, and even students themselves.

Opponents feared that this was an attempt by the government to privatize the

education system (Parker, 2005; Torres, 2000). Teachers unions, who traditionally

had been active in education, were strong opponents of school autonomy as there was

no place for union voice on the school councils (Gershberg, 2002). Even in the 2002

Education Participation Law, which provided some legal and regulatory framework

for participation in education, union role was absent (MECD, 2002). There was

therefore potentially less stability for teachers since school councils had the ability to

hire and fire teaching staff (Parker, 2005, p. 364). More broadly there were still

differing public opinions about how the newly elected government should take on the

issues of economic development and political re-stabilization. These included public

resistance to the free market economic principles that were the tenets of the

Autonomy policy.

The substantial international support garnered by the ASP is significant. The ASP reduced the role of the central government in the provision of education by transferring responsibility to local levels and thus echoing the neoliberal policies that were prioritized by donors in order to promote decentralization. The argument in support of decentralization was fundamentally and explicitly linked to accountability structures that sought to improve financial efficiency (Arcia and Belli, 1999; Fuller & Rivarola, 1998; others). The international donor community, most notably including USAID and the World Bank funded numerous education projects in support of school autonomy and wider decentralization. The majority of programs, particularly from the World Bank (and other multilateral lending agencies), were tied to increased inputs into the education system and these were directed toward autonomous schools (Porta & Laguna, 2007). These mostly focused on creation and distribution of instructional materials, infrastructure development, scholarships and grants for poor students and salary incentives for teachers in autonomous schools (MECD, 2001). Considering these factors, it is easy to see the incentive for schools to become autonomous[10].

The World Bank funded a series of studies during the mid and late 1990's that focused on how local school management was being interpreted and exercised by the various actors on school councils (Fuller & Rivarola, 1998; King et al., 1996) and on the effects of autonomy on student achievement (King & Ozler, 1998). The studies on local control of schools found that the degree to which schools could exercise autonomy was variable as feelings were mixed about how the participatory process

---

[10] Schools decided to become autonomous after teachers and the director agreed and sent a letter to the central ministry. It was the choice of the school.

worked. King et al (1996) found that in autonomous schools, school councils exercised increased decision-making regarding school operations when compared to traditional public schools; local control was being exercised more in autonomous schools. However, evaluations of perceptions of the processes by which school councils exercised governance showed mixed results in terms of how the various stakeholders perceived their role on the council (Fuller & Rivarola, 1998; King et al., 1999). When the school councils were perceived to be more democratic, parents and teachers were more receptive of autonomy. However, teachers and parents sometimes felt that directors still exerted more influence over the councils' decision-making (Fuller & Rivarola, 1998). The impact of school autonomy on student achievement was measured as a positive one. King and Ozler (1998) found that achievement scores of students in autonomous schools exceeded those in traditional schools when the processes of school councils operated more democratically. There was only a nominal difference between autonomous schools that operated with less degree of local participation and traditional public schools (King & Ozler, 1998). These studies agree that local control of schools was not uniformly understood or implemented. In fact a legal framework regarding exactly how participation was supposed to happen did not come until much later, in 2002 (Gershberg, 1999; MECD, 2002)[11]. Additionally, how autonomy affected pedagogical practices was not fully investigated (Fuller & Rivarola, 1998). Still, the international donor community was supportive and the degree to which communities participate in decision-making, Nicaragua ranks high among other decentralization contexts (Kraft, 2004c).

---

[11] There exists an argument that the lack of policy framework might have actually helped the ASP. A deeper discussion of this debate can be found in Gershberg (1999).

Despite the freedom for school councils to make decisions regarding curriculum and teaching, neither appears to have been a priority (Fuller & Rivarola, 1998). Professional development programs were not a part of the autonomy reforms, nor was a clear description of exactly what good teaching that was accountable to local communities meant. In this respect, the ASP was more about school management than it was about pedagogy. Kraft (2004c) notes that school autonomy did little to "reculture" schools; the processes of teaching and learning remained the same, despite the decentralization of school management. However, following the implementation of ASP and with support from international agencies, the MECD adopted a reform vision of teaching based on active learning-methodologies (Edgerton, 2005; USAID, 2005). Addressing instructional approaches was a piece of larger reform programs that supported decentralization and that, at the school and community level, sought explicitly to improve the quality of education (Edgerton, 2005).

BASE I & BASE II

After sector-wide USAID assessments of Nicaragua's education, the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and subcontractors Juarez and Associated and Ideas, Ltd. were awarded contracts to implement BASE projects. BASE I ran from 1994, the year after ASP was implemented, until 1998. Later BASE II picked up from where BASE I left off (later in the section). The BASE projects focused explicitly on improving education quality, while supporting the MECD decentralization efforts, and undertook initiatives in multiple sectors of the education system.

BASE I had main activities in three areas. These were: institutional strengthening activities, which were meant to increase the central ministry's capacities in the areas of technology and software for data and financial management; curriculum development, including the creation of a new curriculum framework, production and distribution of materials and teacher training in the use of new materials supported the *Transformación Curricular*; and the implementation of new active learning methodologies (AED, 1998). Within the area of teacher training a "continuous multi-channel system for teacher training and development was established, refined, and implemented" (AED, 1998). The Model Schools programs and teacher "quality circles" were meant to be exemplary sites where new methodologies were being used, and enable teachers to collaborate in the implementation of these new pedagogies (AED, 1998). Additionally BASE I assisted the ministry in elaborating "fundamentally different policies and concepts of the role of the teacher and student in the Nicaraguan context, involving flexible promotion, community involvement in education, student government, [and] orientation toward student learning processes" (AED, 1998). BASE I finished off having accomplished many of the initial aims of the program, but falling short of others. Challenges were experienced in meeting the objectives of the institutional strengthening component due to frequent changes in staffing at the central Ministry and insufficient political and financial support (AED, 1998). The Model Schools program was not functioning as effectively as desired as professional development sites, and it was observed that the child-centered instructional methodologies were not being implemented as well as was envisioned (Kraft, 2004a). While teacher professional development was oriented

49

toward helping teachers use the student learning guides and generating classroom lessons where students could "learn by doing", it did not bring about substantial changes in "deeply entrenched teaching behaviors or significantly improve student learning" (Kraft, 2004a & b). Nonetheless, the extent to which resources were produced and distributed was seen as a major accomplishment (AED, 1998). This resulted as a factor that served to set the stage to enable more substantive, classroom level reforms that were taken up in BASE II (AED, 1998, Kraft 2004c).

BASE II, which started in 1999, essentially picked up where BASE I left off in terms of overall aims, but with a more consolidated focus on community, school and classroom level processes, with emphases on rural and Atlantic Coast areas (USAID, 2005). The goals of BASE II were increased emphasis on: classroom methodologies, community participation, rural and multi-grade education, bilingual education, and continued support of decentralization (Edgerton 2005; Kraft, 2004; USAID, 2005). Early on in the BASE II project, the *Escuela Nueva* (EN) model was adopted. A new teaching model meant that the roles of teachers were reconceived to be "learning managers" (Edgerton, 2005). Professional development was oriented toward helping teachers use individualized learning guides, making classrooms more stimulating and friendly for students, and implementing active pedagogies (Edgerton, 2005). By the end of BASE II in 2003, significant progress had been made on the more qualitative goals of the BASE projects (Edgerton, 2005). In the classroom teachers had been trained in the use of the new multigrade teaching guide; teacher-training resources had been distributed; local level ministry officials had learned how to use them for teacher training; and there was more widespread use of active learning

methodologies (USAID, 2005; Kraft 2004b). More specifically, despite the earlier

finding that deeply entrenched practices had not substantively changed, traditions of

teacher-talk, copying, and regurgitation were found much less in model schools than

in other schools toward the end of the BASE II project (Kraft, 2004b). Additionally,

the community participation component had worked with communities and school

councils to develop democratic norms of participation and decision-making, around

school-based issues, incorporated local level ministry offices into community level

processes, and helped develop student government organizations at each school

(Edgerton, 2005; Kraft 2004b).

Overall, Kraft (2004c) notes that the materials development and resource

distribution that resulted from BASE I played an important role in facilitating the

deeper, more classroom and community based reforms that were the achievement of

BASE II. The reforms undertaken in BASE I and II are currently continued through

the USAID *Exeléncia* Program (ongoing) that focuses on similar classroom

pedagogies with the emphasis on rural preschools and primary schools, up to 3rd grade

(STC, 2006). Still, the sustainability of the Model Schools and ongoing professional

development for teachers remains in question due to the lack of priority it has been

given in the Ministry (USAID, 2005).

Recent Major Policies, SWAp & Local Programs

In 2002,the *Ley de Participación Educativa* (Education Participation Law)

was passed. This became the legal framework from which the school directive

councils operated. It reinforced the roles and responsibilities of the councils, set up

guidelines for how participation of the various stakeholders (parents, teachers,

students, local ministry officials, other members of civil society) should take place, and laid out the function of the central Ministry in regulating the processes (MECD, 2002). Other major policies outline the Ministry's major goals, objectives, and priorities for education and take more explicit aim at improving education quality. These policies form the framework that outlines the Ministry's orientations and visions: *The Plan Nacional de Educación 2000-2015* (the National Education Plan) (MECD, 2001) and the *Ley General de Educación* (the General Education Law) (MECD, 2006a) form the basis of ministry policy on education during the last decade, along with the *Ley de Participación*.

The *Plan Nacional* (MECD, 2001) was laid out in 2001 and is rooted in Nicaragua's *Plan de Desarollo Nacional* (National Development Plan), a broader development program. It is grounded in the commitment to meeting EFA goals, with a focus on improving education quality and access, and lays out the objectives and strategies of the education system until 2015. Education quality is addressed explicitly as,

> The formation of a person *of quality* in personal, social and economic terms. Education quality aims at the construction and development of relevant learning, that enables learners to successfully confront life challenges and so that each can be a positive subject and actor in the community and the country MECD, 2001, p. 27).

The principle strategies that are laid out include decentralization of education management and an emphasis on parents and community participation and an acknowledgement of the role of the international donor community as major players in education in Nicaragua (MECD, 2001). The emphasis on quality is important for this context and outlines a new vision for teaching and learning. The *Plan Nacional*

52

reconceptualizes students' role in education toward a more active participant in the learning process. This attempt follows up on the ministry's EFA Plan (MECD, 2000) in directly addressing quality of education and extending coverage and access to education to the most marginalized populations (MECD, 2001).

The *Ley General de Educación* (MECD, 2006a) articulates a mission and vision for the education system, which include the various modalities outlined in the Law (primary/secondary/ECE, adult education, teacher education, higher education, etc.) and the qualities education seeks to develop in individuals. The *Ley General* reaffirms the ministry's earlier commitment to good teaching and envisions a process by which learning should happen[12] (MECD, 2006a). The goals for reform in teaching and learning are conceptualized to challenge very traditional teaching approaches in favor of more constructivist-based, active learning pedagogical approaches. The *Ley* additionally, more strongly emphasizes the role of ECE and the special attention required by children of preschool age. It also affirms the responsibilities of the wider society for meeting those needs (MECD, 2006a). The outcomes of ECE are also made concrete in the Law. The objective of early childhood education is:

> To develop in children, the skills and psychological preparation for success in basic education, to guide their first education experiences, and to stimulate the development of their personalities, and facilitate their integration into [the broader] education services (MECD, 2006a, p. 18).

The ideas highlighted are part of a larger set of policy goals articulated between 2002 and 2006 that are targeted to improve quality of education as one among three main agendas: 1) to improve relevance and quality of education with

---

[12] A more in depth analysis of these policy documents and the ideas specific to quality of teaching and learning and parent participation appears in Chapter 5, the "Introduction to the Cases".

respect to appropriateness of material and teaching, 2) to improve the coverage, stimulate demand, access and equity in education, and 3) to improve governance, participation and financial efficiency (MECD, 2004).

In 2003, after a sector assessment, Nicaragua created roundtable discussions and formed committees to progress toward taking a "sector-wide" approach (SWAp)- a coordinated approach among international donors, the ministry, and civil society organizations in order to reform all parts of the education sector. The three aforementioned policies formed the basis of Nicaragua's SWAp. In 2003 Nicaragua was accepted into the World Bank Fast Track Initiative (FTI), a program that funded projects in specific aim to meet EFA by 2015. Overall, the efforts of the SWAp, which included cooperation from the EU, World Food Program, World Bank, IDB, USAID, Governments of Japan, Spain, and a host of local, national and international non-governmental organizations, were coordinated by the MECD and the committees with representatives from organizations and governments (MECD, 2004).

A more specific context of community level education work further helps to narrow the context for this study. In an example of an NGO with the target of improved quality of schooling, Save the Children in 2002, launched a program that focuses on improving the quality of teaching and classrooms that specifically targets the very high drop out rates in the early grades (preschool through third grade) in rural areas in Chinandega, Nicaragua. The Regional Initiative for Central America (RICA)[13] program has a two-pronged approach: capacity building with local level Ministry of Education officials and professional development for preschool and

---

[13] RICA is a regional program that targets rural areas throughout Central America.

primary school teachers. The main goal of the program is "to improve their [Ministry officials' and teachers'] work so that students are motivated to stay in school and successfully progress through third grade" (Gonzalez, 2006, p. 1). The main activities are professional development workshops for teachers, direct technical support in classrooms, and workshops for ministry officials. In terms of professional development for teachers, Save the Children guides teachers in constructing classroom materials (they also provide the materials), presents theoretical information regarding constructivist teaching and active-learning pedagogies, and provides teachers with a bank of strategies and classroom activities that they can use in their daily practice (Gonzalez, 2006). Additionally, Save the Children field staff members individually visit teachers in their classrooms to observe and provide feedback and support in their daily practice (Gonzalez, 2006). The impact of professional development on teachers' practice varies in terms of the use of materials and strategies, however participant teachers were found more likely to independently construct classroom materials from locally available materials and more likely to elicit community help in doing so compared to non-participant teachers (STC, 2007). Other findings include participant teachers having higher self-efficacy than non-participating teachers (STC, 2007).

Bringing It All Together: The Current Situation Its Challenges

The political administrations that followed the Sandinistas - Chamorro, Aleman, and Bolaños - reflected similar political ideologies. All supported free market principles, and had favorable relations with the United States, an obvious player in the region, but specifically in the case of Nicaragua. In education

decentralization has remained a central tenet in the policy arena, and the school councils and parents play large parts in the daily operations in schools. Nicaragua, since the Autonomous Schools Program in 1993, has consistently reinforced the same trend toward community participation. International focus has also, more recently been called to education quality (UNESCO, 2004) and increasingly the central Ministry has made a more concentrated effort on classroom practices and methodologies.

Much progress has been made in education. The education budget for primary and secondary was increased by 42% between 2000 and 2006 (with 20% coming from external grants or loans) (MECD, 2004). The primary school net enrollment rate was 84% in 2005, up from previous years (Porta & Laguna, 2007). However, despite progress in many respects with reference to access to education and percent of budget apportioned to education, there are still some striking education indicators that point to persistent inefficiencies in the system and in general poor quality. The completion rate in primary school was only 66% in 2005 (Porta & Laguna, 2007). And only 47% of students (of their cohort) reach 5th grade in 2006 (World Bank, n. d.). What is even more striking is the degree of inequity in the system. Poverty is concentrated in rural areas where the disparity in education indicators is revealing. The percent of 6-year olds enrolled in schools in rural areas is 28%, compared to urban areas where it is 53%. The number drops to 9% for rural areas for ages 9 and up (Porta & Laguna, 2007). And the dropout rate in primary school is 12% in rural areas (Porta & Laguna, 2007), with close to a 50% dropout in

first grade (STC, 2006)[14]. The repetition rate is also disproportionately higher in first grade than in all other primary grades at 17.8% (Porta and Laguna 2007). The dropout and repetition rates in early primary school are attributed to the necessity for children to work (Porta et al., 2004).

One main reason for such a disparity in education in rural versus urban areas is resource distribution problem that the Sandinistas inherited 30 years ago in 1979. Unemployment affects rural communities disproportionately where many families have members that must migrate to Costa Rica, Honduras, or the United States for work. There is a general need for income generation that directly impacts the school-going population. Economic reasons were cited as the main reason students miss school on a 2001 nationwide household survey (MECD, 2004). In rural communities early primary school students miss school in order to engage in income generation themselves, or to support parents by fulfilling other home-based responsibilities.

With respect to teaching, as we can see from the mixed results from evaluations of the reform programs, the use of active learning pedagogies remains a challenge (Kraft, 2004c). System-wide professional development seems lacking. As Porta and Laguna (2007) note, surprisingly, the number of unlicensed teachers was 33% in 2004, almost double what it was in 1997 despite extensive efforts and resources being placed in teacher training over the past decade. While it is not clear what the direct cause of this trend is (possible causes include a high turnover among teachers or no difference in pay for certified versus uncertified), it does speak to the

---

[14] In comparison to the relatively high Net Enrollment Rate cited earlier in this discussion of 84%, the very low figures for subpopulations of children in rural areas highlight the particular challenges for rural primary education.

persistent need and challenge for addressing classrooms, teacher education, and professional development.

In 2007 Daniel Ortega, an FSLN leader during the revolution and former president in 1984, was re-elected to office. This represents a change from the trend of right of center political administrations and cooperative relationships with the U. S. and other donors. The newly elected Ministry has stated that it will do away with school autonomy and engage in re-centralizing the education system (Porta and Laguna 2007). The way this takes shape remains to be seen. It is unclear how this new political situation, with such strong implications for donor relationships, will influence what happens in education.

Chapter 4: Research Methods

In this chapter I discuss the research methods employed to conduct the study. I include a description of the specific qualitative research tradition that grounds the methods, the setting and participants, the techniques for data collection and analysis, my role as the researcher, the limitations, and issues of bias, quality, and ethical considerations.

Multiple Case Design

The case of teaching and reform in Nicaragua is represented by portrayals of individual teachers using a "multiple case design" (Yin, 1994). I will present a holistic, descriptive portrait of each teacher in relation to the research questions (Merriam, 1998). Individual cases of teachers serve as "illustrative examples" of a larger case of teaching and reform in rural Nicaraguan contexts (Yin, 1994). I use "thick description" to portray the cases and their complexities (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000).

This case study is both "intrinsic" and "instrumental" (Stake, 2000, p. 437). It is "intrinsic" (Stake, 2000, p. 437) in the sense that it is of intrinsic interest to me and naturally fits with my experience as a teacher and teacher educator. However, it is also "instrumental" in that it "facilitates the understanding of something else" (Stake, 2000, p. 437), namely how teachers understand and enact reform ideas. My intent is to provide insights into the complex, and context-dependent processes of teaching and

reform because I want to know more about it *and* because I believe that such insights can inform policy and practice. Further, my study is "particularistic" in that it explores individual teachers and teaching in Nicaragua (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000). Teacher case studies will shed light on the issues highlighted in the literature review: that teachers understand policy ideas in different ways, and their practice reflects policy ideas in very different ways. Thus, these case studies will examine a "particular instance", but "illuminate" a general issue (Merriam, 1998, p. 30).

Stake (2000) writes, "a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry" (p. 436). My thinking described here is part of the inquiry process about the case. The case study boundaries are determined by the interview questions and responses, contextual factors, and individual teachers' philosophical and epistemological assumptions. Merriam (1998) notes that, "case study is a design particularly suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context" (p. 29). In conducting this study, it is assumed that context plays an important role in shaping the ways reform happens, a factor that is particularly informing in the context of international development.

Origin of the Study

During the months of June through August of 2006, I was an intern in teacher professional development program of the Regional Initiative for Central American (RICA), a Save the Children project, which is focused, in part on improving teachers' classroom practice. The RICA program in Nicaragua is housed in the Save the Children field office in Chinandega. This work consisted of involvement in the program's teacher professional development activities and assisting in drafting a

framework for their professional development work with teachers. During this time, I was able to get a sense of the rural Nicaraguan context through accompanying field staff on trips to communities, participating in staff meetings and having informal conversations with staff and teachers. Through being a participant observer in the professional development workshops, I was also able to meet the teachers that later would become participants in my study.

The following year, 2007, I traveled again to Nicaragua for 3 months with the same program in order to conduct a study evaluating the impact of their professional development work with teachers. During this time, I had the opportunity to more closely engage with teachers about their thinking and practice. Again, I participated in professional development activities, as well as traveled to communities to interview teachers and observe classrooms. The data for this dissertation was collected during this period.

Data Collection

Case studies use multiple sources of data and data collection methods (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The multiple sources of data for this study are interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, policy documents, and supplemental data.

Two one-hour long semi-structured interviews and two days of classroom observations were conducted with 3 primary school teachers and 1 preschool teacher. I videotaped the observations as well as took field notes during each observation. The interviews were conducted after class observations at the school. Interviews focused on teachers' conceptions of instructional quality and how they think about

their own practice. Classroom observations and videotapes provide evidence of teachers' practice and their thinking about practice. These are my primary sources of data for the teacher case studies.

In addition, I conducted 2 focus groups: one group of 6 primary school teachers and one group of 7 preschool teachers. The case study teachers participated in the focus groups. The focus groups were conducted at the Save the Children office. They groups provide evidence of collective understandings of teaching and reform ideas, and norms of practice.

I also reviewed policy documents from the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education and from international organizations. These documents serve as evidence of government policies regarding educational quality. Teachers' conceptions of quality instruction, and their thoughts and actions in constructing their instructional practice will be compared with the ideas reflected in these documents.

Finally, supplemental data illuminate the context in which my four case study teachers live and work. I conducted interviews with four other teachers in the process of my work with Save the Children. I also participated in the planning and implementation of professional development activities, where I took participant observations. I took field notes for all staff meetings, planning sessions, and professional development workshops. I also kept notes of my general observations and reflections throughout my stay.

All interactions (interviews, focus groups, professional development workshops, meetings) were conducted in Spanish. Interviews and focus groups were first transcribed in Spanish and then translated into English. Only pertinent excerpts

from policy documents were translated into English for inclusion in the text of this dissertation.

Setting & Participants

__Rural Context__

The setting for this study is Chinandega, a mainly rural state in the northwest region of Nicaragua. Chinandega, which is also the name for the state capital, borders Honduras and shares a border over water with El Salvador. Chinandega is the agricultural center of Nicaragua; sesame, peanuts, cashews, bananas, soybeans, and sugar cane are the main industries. Urban/semi-urban areas are located at the centers of commerce: the state capital, the main border town of Somotillo along the Honduran border, and the port of Corinto. Rural communities that make up much of the rest of the state include coastal communities, which benefit from the fish and shrimp industries as their economic base, and agricultural communities, where the main employment is in the fields. The weather is hot year round with a rainy and dry season.

Individual rural communities are relatively isolated due to geographic distance from more urban centers and/or due to difficult topography. In the smaller communities (3 out of the 4 case study communities), the infrastructure is not well developed. Infrastructure refers to, among other factors, electrification, road conditions, and general services accessible from within the community. Rainy season makes reaching some communities particularly challenging. In general people who

live in the smaller communities make their living in agriculture and, in the more urban areas, in the informal business sector[15].

Chinandega has a population of 378, 970. It makes up 7.4% of the population of Nicaragua (Govt. of Nicaragua, 2005). The net enrollment rates for preschool and primary school are 33.7% and 82.2% respectively (MECD, 2006b). The primary school repetition rate in the state is between 8% and 15%[16] (Porta, Gutierrez, & Laguna, 2005). The total literacy rate in Chinandega is 80%, with 86% in urban/semi-urban areas and 71% literacy in rural areas (Govt. of Nicaragua, 2005).

The structure of rural education accounts for the great distances and relative isolation of some of the smaller communities by relying on a cluster "structure". In Nicaragua, education in the communities that make up the context for the cases operates under the rural system that was developed to accompany school autonomy. A cluster organization incorporates larger schools housing first through 6th grades as "base schools", central ministry locations for the cluster, surrounded by a network of smaller "satellite schools" that are made up of community multigrade schools. The "*director de nucleo*"- the ministry official responsible for monitoring and overseeing technical support for teachers, and administrating professional development workshops- is housed at the base school. All together the cluster forms a "*Nucleo Educativo Rural*", a Rural Education Nucleus. The director has a small staff of nucleo-level ministry "*tecnicos*" (field staff) that are responsible for conducting classroom visits and providing technical support to teachers in the satellite schools, and who carry out professional development workshops. Cluster level workshops

---

[15] Includes selling items on buses or the street, driving a tricycle rickshaw, or other services.
[16] Only municipal level data was found for repetition rates. The range represents the municipalities in Chinandega that have the lowest and highest rates of repetition in primary school.

occur at the base schools. The levels of the cluster and school are where the majority of the support for teachers occurs.

The Ministry of Education acknowledges the challenge of education in rural zones because of the lack of access to education and lack of relevancy of material in many rural communities (MECD, 2001). They identify those communities as main targets for the improvement of educational access and quality (Gonzalez, 2006; MECD, 2001). Save the Children (2006) notes that in Chinandega low teacher salaries, low levels of teacher education, and lack of professional development on the part of the Ministry help contribute to a high teacher turnover rate in rural communities, especially in first and second grades. Vulnerability of teachers on that account is acknowledged, and the importance of reaching these teachers is emphasized as they often teach in zones of extreme poverty (Gonzalez, 2006; MECD, 2001).

Selection of Participants

In the selection of participants for the study, I employed "purposeful sampling", which is the selection of relevant cases that show a variety of perspectives on the process being studied (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 2005). Since I was working with STC's teacher professional development program, I elicited the help of the field team in selecting teachers to participate in individual interviews and focus groups. I asked for recommendations of individual teachers who were participating in the Save the Children professional development program and who represent the range of "quality teaching". This recommendation is meaningful because members of the field

65

team are all experienced teachers, have an intimate sense of the context, and have personal knowledge of the individual teachers and their practice.

Participants

The teachers who participated in my study are all participants in the Save the Children project activities. Their experience with STC ranges from 1 year to 5 years. All are women and range from 20 years to mid-40 years old. All the teachers live in rural areas and one teacher lives in the community in which she teaches. In the other three cases, teachers commute to their schools. All teachers were certified (or in the process of being certified) at *La Normal* (Normal School), the teacher education institution in Nicaragua. There are 8 locations for the institution's teacher education program, which is a two-year, post secondary school program.

Positionality

In this section, I describe my personal history and the experiences that necessarily inform the ways I have gone about conceptualizing this study, carrying out the data collection and analysis, and composing the narrative. These factors bias the ways this research has come about and is communicated, and it is my intent to acknowledge these mediating factors as transparently as possible.

My interest in teaching and learning is derived from my experiences as a high school teacher in Prince George's County, Maryland and later as a graduate assistant on a research project studying science teaching. My experience as a teacher affords me the ability to identify with the work of teachers and with the classroom based challenges of teaching students that come from diverse backgrounds and levels of

understanding. It was after this early experience that I began to question the role of education in the lives of students, especially when those students came from diverse backgrounds and contexts, and the responsibilities shouldered by teachers in providing that education. As a research assistant on a project studying science teaching, I began to understand the complexities and challenges facing teachers as they try to be more authentic to students, more student-centered in science. This project relied on close analysis of classroom interactions accessed in videotapes, notes from classroom observations, and videotaped meetings with groups of teachers; it was the inspiration for the research methods used in this study. My interest in international perspectives has been the constant thread throughout; it is rooted in the life experiences of my immigrant parents, my teaching experience in a predominantly immigrant neighborhood, and in my doctoral coursework in the International Education Policy program at the University of Maryland.

These experiences color my interpretations of teaching and learning in the context of the study, and create the lens through which I engage with the research.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this dissertation includes a cross-case analysis and an analysis of policy documents (Merriam, 1998). As Merriam (1998) writes, the "most basic" presentation of the case is a descriptive account (p. 178). I first present descriptive accounts of each teacher in the teacher case studies in Chapters 6 through 9 of this dissertation. I make liberal use of quotations from interviews and focus groups, and thick descriptions of instances of classroom practices to allow, as much as possible, for the cases to "tell [their] own stories" in relation to themes that

emerged during the study and the research questions (Stake, 2000). These accounts serve as portrayals of teacher thinking and teachers' practice (Merriam, 1998). While acknowledging that the ways I represent policy and the selection of quotes and examples of classroom practices I present in the case studies (including the way these examples are written) is inherently interpretive, I attempt to withhold my explicit analysis until the Cross Case Analysis in Chapter 10.

Policy documents were analyzed by coding specific pieces of policies that pertain to the quality of education. The codes that emerged are: the role of the student in education (SR), the role of the teacher (TR), and the role of the parents (PR). As a reference for comparison of each teacher's ideas and practices, I draw on those key ideas pulled from those policy documents as discussed in the policy analysis in Chapter 5.

The cross case analysis, Chapter 10, discusses the similarities and distinctions in teachers' ideas and practices according to the research questions. From the case studies emerged initial codes that related to teaching/teachers, students, parents, student levels (of understanding/maturity/grade), Save the Children, and local level Ministry of Education officials. As I was doing the initial coding, I made note of nuances and variations that arose within each code as I was attempting to get at the essence of each case in relation to the other cases. These were solidified during the second round of coding and help thicken the descriptiveness of the codes. The final emergent codes used for the cross case analysis can be found in Appendix D.

Many quotes/instances of classroom practice fell into more than one code. This was left as such so as to note which particular codes might have been referred to

together, and whether this differed from teacher to teacher. Additionally pieces of data for which there was debate regarding how to code were assigned all possible codes. The cross case analysis was written as an iterative process including analysis of primary data and policy documents, reference to the literature, and composition of the narrative text, each informing the others.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are listed as follows:

- Technology presented some limitations with regard to sound. The sound quality in some of the videos is poor due to the open classrooms and ambient noise.
- The data is limited by the specific interview and focus group questions, and reflects only what the teachers were thinking and doing over the three month period of data collection.
- All interactions in this study were carried out in Spanish. I translated all interviews and snippets from classrooms from Spanish to English. Since there is not always a direct, word-for-word translation possible between languages, there could be meanings that were lost in the process of translation.

Study Bias

Bias may play a role this study in that while collecting data for this dissertation, I was consulting with Save the Children. Teachers knew me through my affiliation with Save the Children and had worked with me during professional development workshops where I had a part in organizing and delivering. This factor

could have influenced teachers' responses to the interview prompts, especially since some questions posed regarded how teachers understood Save the Children's strategies and their opinions regarding the technical support they received from Save the Children field staff. I have tried to make transparent the personal experiences and history that inform my understanding of the context and phenomena being studied in the section entitled "Positionality" earlier in this chapter. I address below how I account for this potential bias.

Assumptions

A number of assumptions underlie my thinking about this research. These are:

- Individual teachers may construct their practice in different ways. The ways that they make sense of policy ideas may also be different.
- Context matters. That is, the specific elements that make up the national, local and individual contexts are unique and influence teacher thinking and practice in distinct ways. And these are situated in broader social, political, economic and historical realities.
- I was able to gain access, and elicit the trust and confidence of participant teachers during the interviews, focus groups, and classrooms observations.

Validity and Quality

Maxwell (2005) defines validity as "the credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, or interpretation" (p. 106). I seek to enhance the validity of my findings in a few ways. These validity checks are drawn from suggestions from Maxwell (2005), Creswell (1998) and Merriam (1998):

- Establishing rapport with participant teachers: The initial opportunity that I had to go and work with Save the Children in 2006 was critical in providing me access to the community of teachers whom I would likely not have been able to contact otherwise. During professional development workshops, I was able to informally chat with teachers and developed a rapport. When I returned the following year, the teachers remembered me and noted positively, in contrast to other consultants whom they had met in the past, that I had returned to Nicaragua and to their communities. My relationship with the teachers was cultivated throughout my work in 2007. I continued to have informal conversations with teachers during breaks at workshops or during recess during classroom observations.

- Triangulation: I triangulated data from various sources to corroborate or refine claims. I used interviews, focus groups, observations, informal conversations, policy documents, organizational reports, field notes of staff meetings, professional development workshops, and community visits for triangulation.

- Checking for discrepant evidence: During the data analysis, I looked for discrepant evidence and counter cases for claims that I made about teachers' thinking or teachers' practice.

- Including Spanish words when no direct translation exists: In the narrative, I include the Spanish words and literal translation (in footnotes and in text) when direct translation into English was not possible, or when I rephrased the expression to make meaning clear.

- Addressing bias: I address researcher bias by explicitly describing my experiences, values, and assumptions that might influence how I draw conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

__Informed Consent__

Before conducting any focus group, interview, or observation, I explained to the teacher[s] what my research was and asked for their permission to interview them on tape and to videotape their classes. Teachers were also given student assent and parental consent forms to share with parents at the next parent association meeting. All teachers complied willingly to handle getting signatures from the parents, giving me permission to videotape class sessions in which their children were present.

__Confidentiality__

All measures possible were taken to protect confidentiality of the participants. No identifiable information regarding communities, schools or individuals was used in the reporting of this study. Pseudonyms have been used in the writing to protect participants' anonymity. All hard data (on videotapes or compact discs) have and will continue to be kept in a locked office. No one but myself has access to any of the data including video and sound files of classes or interviews/focus groups, transcripts, and field notes. The state name, Chinandega, will however, be used because of its importance for communicating the context and because it does not identify any particular community, school or teacher.

In the following chapter, the Introduction to the Cases, I present the policy analysis highlighting the ministry's ideas and values regarding education quality and I discuss Save the Children's work in rural communities in Chinandega in order to present a more immediate context for the study.

Chapter 5: Introduction to the Case Studies

This "Introduction to the Cases" is organized into two parts. Broadly it is meant to anticipate the teacher case studies by orienting the reader to the salient aspects that create a common reference point and context for the four cases. In Part I, I present a policy analysis of the specific ministry policies that espouse ideas regarding good quality education, which include reform ideas regarding parents' role and responsibilities in education and ideas about good teaching and learning. I refer back to these ideas in each case in the Cross Case Analysis (Chapter 10) as I discuss how each teacher's ideas and practices align with reform ideas. I follow, in Part II, by presenting a more detailed local context for the study including common aspects of schools and classrooms that situate each of the 4 cases. I will conclude by discussing Save the Children's work in promoting ministry policies, specifically of its RICA program in Chinandega. Part II serves to illustrate the more immediate context for the cases.

Part I

Policy Analysis: Policy Ideas on Education Quality

There are four main policy documents that embed ideas about education quality, and to which teachers' ideas and practices can be aligned (or not). These, the EFA Plan (MECD, 2000), the *Ley de Participacion Educativa* (the Education Participation Law)(MECD, 2002) the *Plan Nacional de Educación* (the National

Education Plan 2000-2015) (MECD, 2001), and the *Ley General de Educación* (the

General Education Law) (MECD, 2006a), were discussed more broadly in Chapter 3,

Nicaragua Education Policy Context.   Here they provide insights as sources of

Ministry official policy regarding education and instructional quality, the ideas of

which will be discussed here in more detail.   In this section I address the specific

policies and policy ideas that regard quality teaching and learning in the first section

and policies and policy ideas regarding the role of parents in education in the

following section.

Quality Teaching & Learning

The overall objective, including the qualities education seeks to develop in

individuals is stated as:

> To promote the total and integral formation of all Nicaraguans; equip them
> with a critical scientific and humanist conscience; the development of their
> personalities and sense of dignity; enable them to assume tasks of common
> interest that are the demands of national progress (MECD, 2006a, p. 7).

The issue of education quality, as related to classroom-based processes, focuses on a

renewed idea about what good teaching and learning entails and attention to the

"improvement of all qualitative aspects of education" (MECD, 2001, p. 30).   The

Ministry of Education's idea of education quality aims at "the construction and

development of relevant learning, that enables learners to successfully confront life

challenges and so that each can be a positive subject and actor in the community and

the country" (MECD, 2006a, p. 12).   More specifically, the kinds of endeavors that

constitutes that relevant learning are described in Objective 2 of the National Plan:

> To redefine[s] the role of the student, from a passive subject of education, to a
> learner that participates, observes, investigates, constructs and reconstructs, on
> the basis of his/her previous experiences, and significantly learns, creating

and/or strengthening his/her capacities, abilities and skills that allows her/him to participate in social, economic, cultural, and political development of the country (MECD, 2001, p. 30).

This description envisions an active student role by promoting learning experiences that involve the particular tasks of participating, observing, investigating, and constructing/reconstructing knowledge. The student is considered to be the "architect of his/her own learning, in permanent interaction with [his/her] teachers and fellow students, and [his/her] environment" (MECD, 2001, p. 4). Further, the *Plan Nacional* secures learner as the "spotlight (center) and builder of [his/her] own learning" (MECD, 2001, p. 4). Redefining the role of the student as an actively involved "builder" of knowledge, as opposed to "a passive subject of education", indicates the intent to challenge teaching practices that hold the teacher as the center of the teaching-learning process and move toward a more student-centered focus.

Teaching in order to promote this new student role is thus reconceived to nurture learning rooted social and creative *processes*. An explicit focus on active learning pedagogies and constructivism describes the kind of teaching that promotes the shift in the role of the student from passive subject to active participant. The EFA Plan 2000 (MECD, 2000) envisions this teaching approach as:

Constructivist- humanist approaches through which active, participatory learning methodologies are applied, where the students construct their own learning (MECD, 2000).

The General Education Law (MECD, 2006a) reiterates a similar notion defining the teaching- learning process as:

[a] creative process, where the students are the creators of their own knowledge, in which the teacher provides the means and resources necessary for [children] to progressively achieve educational objectives, and such that

76

they can incorporate [new knowledge] into their existing cognitive structures (p. 11).

The role and responsibility of the teacher in creating an active student role is as "a facilitator of the holistic development of … learning" (MECD, 2000). The *Plan Nacional* also implies acknowledgement of the complexity of shifting the orientation of teachers from education deliverers to facilitators of learning. The policy suggests that improvement in the quality of teaching and learning depends on professional development programs that attend to deep aspects of teachers' thinking about their work:

> With respect to quality of the process of teaching and learning, there is an imperative to develop programs that influences not only the knowledge and abilities, but also the pedagogical processes and attitudes such that the learner is the center of attention and the constructor of his/her own learning (MECD, 2001, p. 24).

> The *Plan Nacional* furthermore extends the agenda regarding improvement of the quality of teaching and learning by acknowledging the importance of the inclusion of teachers of early childhood education (ECE) into these overall goals (MECD, 2001). The ministry articulates a strategy to:

> Update the pedagogy and increase the permanency of teachers, administrative staff, and *educadoras*[17] in the formal and non-formal systems… providing incentives for community and retired *educadoras* especially in rural areas, and above all for those that work in zones of extreme poverty (MECD, 2001, p. 34).

The *Ley General* additionally, more strongly emphasizes the role of ECE and the special needs of children of preschool age. It also affirms the responsibilities of the wider society for meeting these needs. The Law states, children:

---

[17] "Educadoras" are preschool teachers. They are not called "teachers" (maestra/profesora), a title that refers to primary and secondary school teachers.

> Whose characteristics demand the articulation of efforts from different sectors of the state and civil society, with a focus on the whole child… to promote community environments that ensure the compliance with children's rights (MECD, 2006a, p. 17).

The outcomes of ECE are also made concrete in the Law. The objective of early childhood education promotes children's development in order to prepare them for success within the education system:

> To develop in children, the skills and psychological preparation for success in basic education, to guide their first education experiences, and to stimulate the development of their personalities, and facilitate their integration into [the broader] education services (MECD, 2006a, p.18).

While policies aimed at improving quality have a focus on processes of teaching and learning, attention to concrete student outcomes are also reflected in the National Plan as: "to secure measurable results of learning, especially in reading, writing, arithmetic, and basic and essential practical competencies" (MECD, 2001, p. 30).

Finally, the *Plan Nacional* identifies a "major concern of the education system" as "the formation of values. Values include democracy, human rights, culture of peace, environment, interculturalism, and civic responsibilities, among others, at the level of the classroom…" (MECD, 2001, p. 11). Such values are instituted as topics into curriculum (Arcia & Belli, 1999), but are not described in more detail in policy documents.

These ideas are part of a series of policies targeted to improve quality of education as one of three main agendas for the ministry[18] and were conceptualized to challenge very traditional teaching approaches that predominate (MECD, 2001). A

---

[18] The other two main policy goals are to improve equity and efficiency; they are not of interest in this section.

new definition of learning as a process relies on notions that knowledge is built and integrated into prior understandings. As stated in the policies such learning requires the specific conceptions of students' role as active constructors of knowledge and teachers' role as facilitators of learning.

Parents' Role

Broadly, the Ministry envisions a large role for civil society and local communities in the management of education. The specific argument for parent involvement for better quality is rooted in the assumptions of decentralization of school management and accountability, which envision the role of parents as primary actors on the school councils (see Chapter 3, Nicaragua Education Policy Context).

The following is a principle of the education system outlined in the *Ley General* and relates to the specific responsibilities of civil society in the management of education (MECD, 2006a):

> It is the right and the responsibility of fathers and mothers, communities, institutions, organizations and the rest of who comprise civil society, to actively participate in the planning, management and evaluation of the educational processes… (p. 5).

The *Ley de Participación* (the Education Participation Law) (MECD, 2002) outlines the notion of local participation in education through school directive councils, which include parents and community members (as well as school directors, teachers, and students). The law states that participation in education:

> Consists of the shared community exercise in education is decision making capacities of parents, teachers and students in the elaboration, management, and evaluation of education and the functioning of the centro educativo [school] in conformation with regulations of the MECD (p. 1).

The fundamental objective of the directive councils places parents as primarily

responsible for children's education:

> To ensure the participation of the community, especially of the parents, who
> are firstly, the ones responsible for their children's education, in the areas of
> making decisions regarding academic activities, and administration and
> management of the school (MECD 2002, p. 2).

The ideas about community participation underline the important role the Ministry

would like to see parents play in education. Parents' role is delineated, but most

strongly in terms of the school councils and relating to education *management*. The

roles that parents should take on to promote quality education through supporting

learning are not emphasized in policy.

In the Cross Case Analysis (Chapter 10), I refer back to the previous analysis

as teachers' ideas' and practices are discussed along the lines of their conceptions

about quality education and how those get translated into classroom practice.

Part II

Primary and ECE Classrooms: An Immediate Context for Teaching and Learning

There are common elements that characterize the schools and classrooms that

were observed and are reminiscent of most classrooms in rural areas. In the satellite

schools, where three out of the four teachers work, schools are one-room buildings

that house one classroom for primary (in a mutligrade model) and one classroom for

ECE. Base schools comprise all the primary grades (see Figure 1). At the satellite

schools, there is a playground and latrine outside the school building. In base

schools, classrooms are arranged around a central courtyard where students have

recess.

Figure 1. Rural Satellite School

In all the observed classrooms, the *aula letrada* (welcoming classroom

environment) was present in posters and visuals hung on walls, displays of student

work, and learning corners. Learning corners are spaces where materials and

resources are kept. They serve as work/play stations for students. Typically, learning

corners are themed by discipline (i.e. Spanish corner, math corner, reading/writing

corner). The presence of learning corners was universal, but as is described in the

case studies, the set-up and use of the corners was variable.

Save the Children's Work in Communities in Chinandega

Save the Children's[19] work in Nicaragua involves work with all levels of the

education system. Through various projects, Save the Children works at the central

ministry level primarily in a research capacity. It also works at state, municipal,

cluster and individual community levels doing capacity building workshops focused

---

[19] In this dissertation, I use the organization name "Save the Children" until the case studies where I refer to the same as "Save" to be consistent with teachers' language. Even though teachers speak specifically about the RICA program, the "RICA" acronym is not used by teachers, and therefore is only used in the narrative when the distinction is necessary.

on various aspects in the promotion of good teaching. These may include theoretical knowledge on good teaching and learning, providing constructive and useful technical support in workshops, and conducting useful and constructive "pie a aula" (visits to classrooms) technical support.

At the community level, Save the Children's Regional Initiative for Central America (RICA) program began work in Chinandega began in 2002 in two communities with a focus on capacity building with teachers and ministry officials toward new active learning classroom methodologies, and on working with communities and parents to mobilize toward education. From the beginning Save the Children was involved in promoting community ECE centers and capacity building teachers in those centers. The community preschool centers are often located in someone's house, and are not "formalized" with the ministry. That is, the teacher is a community member that has not received any teacher education of any sort and often has not more than an elementary level education. These *educadoras* (preschool teachers) work voluntarily to provide early childhood education to community families. Save the Children also worked with parents' committees and community members to promote parental/ community support for ECE centers and to communicate the importance of early education for children's individual and community development. They expanded to work in formal preschools[20] and in 2005, began with primary school teachers, with a focus on equipping teachers with skills and knowledge to be more effective teachers, for the main purpose of improving the enrollment, retention, and success of students in schools. Save the Children's work

---

[20] Teachers are licensed through La Normal as a primary school teacher, with a concentration on ECE.

operates under the main premise that students' attending preschool programs is essential to prepare them for successful school experiences in first grade and throughout primary school (Gonzalez, 2006). Along those lines, Save the Children also focuses on the transition from preschool to first grade, which is seen as similarly important to promote success in education (STC, 2006).

Toward those ends Save the Children's professional development focuses on approaches that promote active methodologies that incorporate a variety of activities, songs and games into classroom practices in order to make classes more appropriate and engaging, to motivate students, and to improve student learning (Gonzalez, 2006). There is an additional focus on theoretical knowledge about learning and child development that, along with concrete classroom strategies, is incorporated into professional development workshops that teachers attend at Save the Children's field office. Additional technical support is provided by periodic visits to classrooms to provide individual support in dealing with issues and challenges particular to the community and teacher. For a more detailed illustration of Save the Children's work throughout the education system in Nicaragua see Appendix E.

In the following chapters I present cases of 4 individual teachers in Chinandega. In each case study I address the research questions by presenting the main themes that emerged during the course of the study. As much as possible, I aim to authentically represent each teacher's voice through liberal use of quotations from interviews and focus groups. In addition, I use thick descriptions of instances of classroom practice to highlight elements of their teaching and to note how teachers' ideas relate with their practice.

Chapter 6: Case Study-"Ines"

Personal and Teaching Background

Ines teaches primary school in a community near the state capital of Chinandega. Like many teachers in rural schools, she is not from the community in which she teaches. She lives in a nearby semi-urban center and commutes by bus to the community weekly. She stays with a family during the week and commutes back to her home on weekends. The community in which Ines works is a coastal community, where most families make a living by fishing and is located about 5 km off the main road.

Ines was 22 years old at the time of data collection in 2007. She is married, with no children. Ines received her teacher training at the Normal School,[21] the national professional teacher training institution in Nicaragua. This was her third year of teaching and her first year teaching in the community; she started 5 months before the observations and interviews. During her first year teaching, she taught in a rural town about 200 km to the south, near the Costa Rican border where she taught 5th grade. The year before data collection Ines was teaching in a neighboring community in Chinandega, where she taught a multigrade combination of first and fifth grades.

At the time of data collection Ines was teaching a group of 55 primary school children in a multigrade combination of first, second, and third grades. She had 33 students in first grade, 12 in second grade, and 10 in third grade.

---

[21] The normal school is the two-year, post high school teacher education program in Nicaragua.

Ines's Conception of Quality

Ideas & Classroom Practices

In response to the direct question of "what is quality instruction?" Ines

expresses a dichotomy between traditional teaching and good teaching:

> The children are not receptors that only write, that have pages full, columns full of work. Rather, the kids are participants in the activity. If we are going to give a new topic or new activity, the kids are not only going to read and read. Rather also they have to be creative …the kids support the activity. Not that kind of education where the teacher knows everything, rather how, the student is the one that says…there is interaction between the student and the teacher. They are activities where the student participates, plays, sings… its not an activity that one would do everyday either… that they do the same game every day, but to changing and progressing.

She suggests students' participation as an integral part of quality teaching. Ines also

paints a picture of traditional teaching that helps her identify what good teaching is

not. In describing more about students' roles, she states they should "participate in

their own learning *and* the teaching"[22], "[they] have to know how to discuss and ask

questions. Otherwise how are they going to learn?" The idea about student

participation seems to involve students interacting with their peers and teacher.

Regarding student engagement, Ines states:

> They have to be involved. If they are not involved and interested, the information doesn't' [sink in] and they will become disinterested…of course, they are little. And its more interesting for me, the teacher too, to have students participating in class".

She continues to describe the role of the student and the learning process, introducing

important implications for the role of the teacher in promoting such involvement:

---

[22] She is referring to a strategy that she reportedly uses that involves pairing older students with younger ones.

> We explore the knowledge that they have and they tell us, so we can have an idea of their work, so that they, with the information from the book, can think, analyze, reflect about the work, then after they, themselves can let us know they understand.

Ines reiterates, "Students themselves can let us know they understand… there is interaction between the student and the teacher". The idea is revisited in one of my individual interviews with her. She states that she considers an important part of her teaching as "tak[ing] out ideas from what students say [to her and each other] and guid[ing] them in answering", and that "this is different from just giving them the answer". She further notes that teachers "have to ask and listen to students because [they] might not understand them right away".

A few noteworthy insights can be derived from the way Ines talks about quality teaching. First, it seems clear (and not surprising) that student participation in a more sophisticated way than sitting and copying is ideal. For her learning requires engagement in higher and sophisticated thought processes (like analyzing, reflecting and being creative) than are involved in copying or rote learning. Additionally, Ines' ideas about student interaction suggest she thinks it is an important part of students' role in education because it contributes to the learning process, and provides valuable evidence for teachers' to make judgments regarding student understanding. She identifies the need for teachers to guide students' forming of new knowledge based on what they know and say. Ines further notes the importance of teachers needing to pay close attention to what students say because of the potential for misunderstanding them. In all, these ideas imply necessary attention on the part of the teacher in creating opportunities in class for students to express themselves and using that as a basis for informing evaluations of student understanding.

I turn now to giving a physical description of the classroom and my immediate observations upon arriving at Ines's class. I follow by discussing the norms of Ines's teaching practices, including her day-to-day routine, the way she plans lessons and assesses students, the resources she uses in her daily practice, and her broad goals. These descriptions will help illuminate how Ines's ideas about quality instruction translate into her classroom practice.

I arrived at Ines's school for my first observation at around 8:00 am, class having started at 7:30. There were a total of 6 third graders, 10 second graders, and 25 first graders in class that day. Fourteen students were absent out of a total of 55. Ines had just broken students into their groups. The classroom was decorated with posters and other visuals that were made by Ines as well as student work. Along one of the walls were the learning corners, which students use to work independently. There are two blackboards on opposite sides of the classroom; first grade faces one black board and second/third grades face the other. In general Ines arranges students in groups according to their grades. And within the grade-level groupings, in second and third grades, she often has students arranged in smaller groups, either pairs or groups of 3-4 students. For first grade desks are arranged in one group (33 desks). As observed, while a large part of Ines's work with first graders is in a whole group, she pairs or groups them in smaller groups for specific activities, particularly while she is attending to second or third grades. At the time of my arrival, three pairs of third graders were sitting outside in chairs working on desks that were brought from inside. They were working on workbook questions on a poem that each group of third graders had read just prior. Sharing books, one per pair of third graders, they

were answering the book questions inside their notebooks. Inside the classroom, Ines was working with the group of first grade students and 2 groups of second graders were working independently in two groups of five students on copying a story out of the workbook for which they were then going to draw pictures describing the story. Ines was introducing a new letter, the letter L to first grade students, and was having them discuss a poster on the board with pictures of objects that start with L.

The specific goal for the activity was to introduce the letter "L" and was followed by a review of syllables and forming words from the letter. Ines introduces the topic by presenting a poster with pictures of objects that start with "L". These include a lamp (lampara), a moon (luna), lemons (limones), and a book (libro). She proceeds by asking students what they see on the poster and what letters those objects all start with. Students respond as a group identifying each picture and yelling "L" in response to the starting letter. She then turns to talking about the poster and the following conversation occurs:

Teacher: (pointing to the lamp), Do you all have a lamp in your houses?
A few students: "Yes".
Teacher: What color is your lamp?
Student: Red.
Student: Yellow.
Teacher: For what reason do we have a lamp?
Student: To light up…
-- Students all calling out at the same time--
Teacher: And the lamp...we only use it to light things?
Student: No, my mom uses it when she walks[23].

_____
[23] Student is referring to a flashlight.

Teacher: [We] walk with it... there are people that take them (lamps)...when they go to work...

Student: When the lights go out

Teacher: Right, when the light goes out, good. We use it to light up things that when we cant see…

Student: We could bump into something (chocar)

Teacher: Uh huh… He (referring to previous student) says that we could bump into something. Imagine if we didn't have a lamp and went into the street at night.

Student: We could fall.

Teacher: We could fall.

Student: We could bump into someone

Teacher: We could fall or bump into someone…

Student: Someone could scare us.

Teacher: We could get scared.

After this exchange, she asks students, as a group to make the sound of the "L" and to trace the letter in the air with different parts of their body, an activity used by many of the teachers. She has similar conversations about the moon and lemons.

This transcript from the videotape gives an image of how Ines elicits student participation in the context of whole-class teaching with first graders, and one way she attempts to draw on their real lives in order for them to make connections between what they know and what they are learning.

Another example is illustrative of how Ines uses objects in math to engage students. She has second grade students roll dice to choose what numbers to multiply. Then students complete a multiplication problem in their notebooks and each student is responsible for completing one problem on the chalkboard. Students

engage in this activity on their own while Ines is working with first grade. For math

in particular, Ines says,

> It's hard only to put problems on the board; kids get bored with so many
> problems so one has to find another way for them to be engaged. Most of
> them don't really like math so we have to do other things to create interest.
> That is why I use things like the dice. It's practical, you [the teacher] don't
> have to write a lot, and the kids don't copy much. And they like it. They are
> interested because they like throwing the dice. You know, sometimes we
> have that same problem for the multiplication tables. We think they aren't
> learning them...but with dice, they can learn multiplication.

In order to get a sense of how Ines conducts her classes on a day-to-day basis,

I inquired about her daily routine. Ines starts of the day with a clean-up of the

classroom and announcements. She then orients her groups around what they will be

learning on that day:

> Then after the students write the date in their notebooks because they can do
> that. For first, I make sure it is on the board so they can copy. Then I write
> the letter from the previous day so they can start with thinking about words
> that start with that letter. Then I get to second grade and I explain to them the
> topics for today, and then to third.

Ines's second and third grade students focus on Spanish and math on Mondays,

Wednesdays and Fridays, and on "Thursdays, we review what [was done] for the

entire week. Wednesdays, classes vary with Spanish, Science, Math and moral

education. Tuesdays, we [have] physical education."

> She closes out the day with an evaluation of how the class went:

> Then at the end of the day, we come together, the three groups [first, second,
> and third graders], and we evaluate how class went. Then I give them their
> homework. I leave first for last [in terms of giving homework], then I go back
> and review what we did in class that day with first, because then I have more
> time and in the end again with first, we evaluate class.

For planning her lessons, Ines mainly uses the "Practical Guide for Multigrade Learning" (GPAM) as her main guide for learning objectives for all grades, which comes from the ministry and goes from first to third grades and includes curriculum for all subjects. The GPAM is the curriculum guide for all specifically for multigrade classrooms and outlines the learning standards. Ines uses the GPAM in lesson planning, but it does not suggest activities or teaching strategies that she believes scaffold enough for first grade in particular.

> And for first grade I only use it for preparation (planning) because there it is what students should know...all the things that are conceptual. But, for example, it doesn't have the consonants. It only says that they should know the alphabet and lower and upper case letter, cursive, all that. But, it does not specifically say that students should learn a letter, then syllables, then words...

Ines is not required to use particular resources as guides for planning. She is, however, required to write daily and monthly plans that constitute what specific content she will cover and the classroom activities that she will use to do that.

> [We] have to put how many letters we will get thought per month and what is what we are going to accomplish per month...and if students have learned it or not… It is not that restricted, its pretty flexible. And it is a way for us to organize, right? If the GPAM isn't going to tell us how to do it, then we need to have our own idea about how to do it. And that is a monthly plan, and in there is only the letters that I am going to get through each month, but we also plan daily. We note all the activities that we are going to do because we have to document it. If they come and visit the class and we don't have anything, well, then we look like we are not doing our job, or it looks like we are conducting class just to get through class. So, the lesson has to be noted, the activities we are going to use and the time each is going to take, the time that we are directly with students- because this is multigrade, some activities we are doing directly with group and in other indirectly- so we have to note all that.

She shows her plan books to the local level ministry official that comes to observe her classroom.

Ines alluded above to one method of assessment she uses, which is what students say. She also uses a few other techniques to assess her students' learning. Tests she develops to assess mastery of a skill or pieces of content such as syllables with the letter L. She looks at students' notebooks as they complete specific classroom assignments; and she keeps individual files on each student that houses their work for the semester. She further describes how she uses individual student files:

> The evidence [of what students are learning] is from the classroom and the work students do. In the notebooks they write down what they are learning, but only the things that the teacher directs them to write. I look at the notebooks during class, but also we do a file with the activities that students do...with everything they do from the beginning of the year. At mid semester it is given to parents so they can see all the work their children did during the semester.

She gives the individual student files to parents at the end of the semester. This is meant to let parents know how their children are doing. The Ministry of Education does not mandate that teachers keep files for each student, but Ines describes why she chooses to do so:

> [I]t's the idea of the teacher. They [the MINED] haven't told us to do anything like that. Not all teachers have one. Only teachers that want to do that... With that one also has an idea of students' learning... each individual. So, the students that are having more difficulties or problems with their learning, so we then can know that we are going to have to give more attention, with which students are we going to have to work with more to bring them to the same level. Yea, but that is the idea of the teacher.

Factors that Inform Ines's Practice

Multigrade Classroom Setting

For Ines learning how to and managing multigrade classes has been an

important part of the way that she constructs her practice, especially because she had

to learn on her own when she assumed responsibilities for this class. Planning for and

handling the learning in a multigrade setting seems to constrain how she teaches, but

she also uses elements of the multigrade setting to help her overcome other

challenges.

Teaching multigrade classes was noted in the focus group to be challenging

for teachers, most generally because there was limited attention to multigrade

teaching in their teacher education programs. In other ways, Ines expresses the

reasons that teaching multigrade is challenging. One has to do with managing the

learning of students at different grade levels and stages of development

simultaneously. Multigrade classroom teachers manage learning of different groups

through "direct" and "indirect" instruction. These refer to the teacher working

directly with a group versus groups of students working independently, without the

direct presence of the teacher. Within direct and indirect instruction, students can be

working in groups or individually. First graders and the combination of first, second

and third graders, all young ages, presents a specific challenge for Ines:

> First grade tires one out…and more when it is combined with other grades. In
> my case, first, second, and third- its hard. I try to work with second and first
> can't [work independently]. So, there with first and second…its hard. It's
> really hard and complicated. [And]…second grade[ers are] is still dependent
> on the teacher. They are always [saying] 'teacher help me, teacher look here,
> look at this', so to be with first and second is difficult. If they do well, they
> can complete [the activity] correctly, and I know I have a good result, but still
> its 'teacher this' and 'teacher that'.

Despite these challenges, Ines seems to use the multigrade setting to help her cope with the lack of classroom instructional materials. As a part of Ines's reported weekly classroom routine, she builds time in for third graders (and sometimes second graders) to develop materials for the classroom. This includes making posters, collecting objects such as pebbles, seashells for use in math, and constructing any other materials for lessons or activities.

With third grade, some time on Fridays is usually spent creating classroom materials for the following week, for all the classes "… because the lack of books and materials for each student- that is what makes us [teachers] have to find other materials or make our own materials." Despite helping to meet her need for resources, she also notes that, importantly, this enables students to have an active role: "They participate in their own education. It makes them responsible because they sometimes say 'its hard' and they know because they sometimes have to make materials for everyone. So they definitely help me."

The Role of Parents

During the focus group sessions, the teachers highlighted the important role of parents in providing an education of good quality. Ines notes that "sometimes parents don't take the time to [even] come to the school and ask 'how is it going for my child in class'…the parents take little interest and don't go to the schools." Furthermore, she adds:

> Parents should stay in contact with teachers, just as teachers should with parents. But if someone does not show up, the teacher has to go and find him. But, where the parents' interest that the child learns? So the entire role is played by the teacher. And sometimes, to give a good quality education, the teacher will play the whole part. So parents want that the teacher help him, that they teach his/her child, but their part they just don't play. I think that

everyone would want to give a good quality education, but if we don't get help from the parents, what are we going to do?

Ines believes the role that parents take or don't take as impacting her practice most directly with first graders, particularly in the cases where these students fall behind or miss class:

> [T]he difference is more noticeable in first grade. Why? For my kids, a lot of times they [parents] don't have notebooks or supplies for the younger ones, [if that is the case,] they don't send them… That complicates things for me. I was telling Carlos[24] that [last year] I stayed three days this week giving lessons after school at five in the evening. This year is going to be no different. Despite the fact that I don't live in the community, I'll stay. I stayed yesterday. I stayed Monday… I'll do what I can to have all the kids passing. …parents take their students out because they are too little, but the third grade, for example are most always present, but even they sometimes have to go out for fishing so even then, it's a problem.

The impact to Ines's classroom practice seems to be focused on keeping students from falling behind when they miss school. During the course of class, she must attend to individual students that cannot complete the task because they have fallen behind or do not have the appropriate materials. This takes up time and attention during the course of the class, and from her planning time after class. Limited resources for parents and the need for the children to work, weather, and illness contribute to children's absenteeism. Despite her frustrations about attendance, Ines notes positive things that parents do to support her teaching practice:

> I have two or three parents that show up sometimes (to class). Sometimes they don't come because they have other obligations, but yes, I do get some parents in here to help. They say 'teacher, look I can be with this grade and watch them'. …she [referring to a mother that was in class the day of the observation] has two kids in first grade and she always comes to help me.

---

[24] Save the Children field staff member.

This particular conversation was regarding a mother that was there the day of my observation. She monitored first graders when Ines was working with second or third graders. This aid in classroom management, allowing Ines to focus more attention on and engage in more sustained interaction with students, speaks to some challenges she had expressed earlier about first grade students and having a difficult time when having to leave them for other groups.

Parents also contribute to the upkeep and construction of the school and surrounding areas.

> "They made the fencing. We are in the process of decorating. They have been planting some things outside, like coconut. They keep the school clean and tidy. And, we did a few activities, like a festival and there were some parents that came to help."

Local Level Ministry of Education

Local level officials from the MINED visit teachers for observations of their classrooms about twice a semester (sometimes less). In general, the teachers participating in the focus groups believe the MINED is purely evaluative when they come and observe and do not offer much constructive feedback or support. Ines notes that "they come to see and evaluate what we do, but they don't value our work". She further notes that the MINED officials "come only to evaluate us and our work and that doesn't allow the teacher or the students to feel comfortable."

Additionally, she explains:

> I think they should respect the right of the teacher; in class, he/she is the one responsible. It is him/her that is always with students. The MINED should come to see how much the teacher has done and what ways to best support him/her, not to count up the number of things the teacher did wrong. But they are the first to say 'this activity is good, but change it'. So maybe they don't know a better way to talk to us. But they don't have the [appropriate] attitude.

Ines sees Ministry officials as having singular vision about what good classroom

practice is and seek to impose this vision on teachers: "The same MINED says there

is one way to do things, and when they come to class, they say 'you should have done

it this way'. In the MINED there is one solution for everything."

I asked Ines what kind of additional support might be useful for her, to which

she replied:

> I would like to have some help with more activities. I get support from Save
> and some from the ministry in different ways, but I would like to have support
> where I learn other activities and strategies to help students overcome their
> difficulties. Because when, for example, first grade students that didn't go to
> the preschool-it's really hard. And sometimes I notice that I am not sure what
> to do and I feel stuck. So, in these particular circumstances I would really like
> to find some way of supporting these students. Time is short and that is why I
> have to stay after school. But those children, that are having problems, its
> hard also because also the parents don't read and can't teach them at home.

Save the Children

Ines has been a participant in the Save project for 2 years. Part of the support

that Ines receives has to do particularly with teaching multigrade classes. She credits

Save the Children with her learning how to manage multigrade classes.

> I told Jose[25] that I had only worked with higher grades. Being with first had
> to be different. The patience you have to have, they way that you talk to
> them… Because some will be very shy, they might not like to talk… So how
> do you do it such that they participate? Because, for me I was going to
> approach first grade in the same way as I did fifth (laughs). And they [Save]
> are always flexible and in the moment.When they come to visit, they are
> always respectful of the students and the teacher.

Evidence from Ines's classroom also denote influence from Save the Children.

The learning corner for instance, is a Ministry-supported strategy, although according

---

[25] Save the Children field staff member.

to focus group participants, teachers were not taught how to construct the learning corners or how to use them. Save the Children helped teachers elaborate the learning corners and in most classrooms there is at least one, if not a few subject-specific learning corners. In Ines's classroom there is a math corner, that houses a few math books and some manipulatives (shells, stones, flashcards, dice); and a reading and writing corner that houses story books and posters with alphabets and syllables. On both my visits to Ines's class, I observed students working in, or using materials from, a learning corner. On one occasion two first grade students were looking through a storybook in the reading/writing corner during recess, and on another occasion a group of second grade students were reading a story similarly after they had finished an assignment.

Ines also uses activities and strategies that she has learned from Save. On one occasion, I observed Ines putting into practice an activity she had learned at one of the Save the Children workshops on developing students' questioning skills, in which I also was involved. The goal of the activity was to have students ask each other questions about a story that was read out loud. A student came to the board and read a story from the board out loud a short story (4 sentences) from a poster. After the student read the story Ines instructed students to come up with questions to ask the reader about the story. As it turned out, students had difficulty responding and ultimately Ines took a more central role in the lesson. She read the story again aloud and facilitated a discussion that asked students to speculate about details not written in the text and predict different possible outcomes for the story. While the intent was to have students ask questions and engage in conversation about parts that were not

"out of the drawer" kinds of topics, such as character names, setting, and plot, the

activity was not successful. When asked in the interview, Ines notes:

> Students had not done that before… just come up with questions. It is going
> to take them time to learn and perhaps they will need help at the beginning. It
> is not that they cannot do it, but it will take time. They are not accustomed".

Another activity from Save the Children is first grade students gluing seeds in the

shape of letters, and then hanging their work up in the classroom.

Aside from activities, the majority of what decorates Ines's classroom was

constructed during Save the Children workshops or inspired by suggestions from

technical support provided by Save.

Chapter 7: Case Study: "Pia"

Personal and Teaching Background

Pia is a first grade teacher in a community that lies within a few kilometers of the state capital of Chinandega. It is a slightly larger community than where Ines teaches and is considered semi-urban, in part because of its size and because of its proximity to Chinandega. Some families have members that work as field workers in sugar cane fields in the surrounding areas, and many families have members who migrate to Honduras and Costa Rica to work as migrant labor. Many parents also have jobs in the small businesses sector and service sector.

Pia is 44 years old and has been teaching for 22 years. All 22 years of her teaching have been in the same school where she currently teaches. Pia lives in the community and her house is a block and half away from the school. She considers herself "fortunate because many of [her] colleagues have to travel a great distance to get to their schools; some even stay the week in the community." Pia is one of few primary school teachers who work with Save the Children who live in the community in which she teaches[26]. She has three adult sons. The youngest is 16.

In the early-1980's Pia was a *brigadista* for the Literacy Campaign organized by the Sandinista government in 1980, soon after the revolution (see details in Chapter 3). She volunteered to go into rural and mountainous areas as a literacy teacher when she was 17 years old. This experience had a positive impact on her. Indeed, she indicated that most of her *compañeras* went into nursing, and she also

---

[26] This is an observation that I made during the work with Save the Children.

wanted to become a nurse. However, because of her fear of the sight of blood and her experience as a literacy teacher in her youth, she decided to stay in teaching and, like other primary school teachers, received her teacher education in *La Normal*. At the time of the interview, Pia had participated in Save the Children's teacher training program for 3 years.

The school in which Pia was teaching is the *escuela base,* the base school, for the surrounding school cluster. The satellite schools in the surrounding communities are much smaller and do not house the upper grades in primary school, 4th through 6th.[27] According to Pia this base school used to be "much more rustic," before it was rebuilt in 2004. Now it is comprised of classrooms for grades preschool through 6th grade surrounding a courtyard where students spend their recess time. The base school is made up only of *grados puros*, or single grade classes. Pia has taught preschool, second, and third grades; however, the majority of her teaching experience is in first grade. Initially, she was apprehensive because "it is difficult to teach first grade students; they are young and just learning. They don't have the basics yet, and require a lot of attention." However, she came to appreciate being able to teach first grade and was confident and pleased that she would be assigned first again the following year. She was even the teacher of many of her students' parents.

---

[27] There are more details about the structure of the school system in rural areas in the Nicaragua in Chapter 4, Research Methods.

Pia's Conceptualization of Quality

Ideas & Classroom Practices

As Pia talks about what constitutes a good quality education, she identifies

student learning and the need for students to use their prior knowledge to form new

understandings:

> The student should assimilate all the contents [contenidos] that are taught by
> the teachers. That child learns how to read, how to write … He [or she]
> dominates all that is [incomprehensible]. It's like the student appropriates his
> previous knowledge that he/she already brings and with the course and the
> help that the teacher provides, he [or she] can be successful. Because students
> do bring previous knowledge and, so, we have to use different ideas and
> strategies to develop that knowledge.

She agrees with other teachers (other case study teaches and focus group teachers)

that students should be "actively involved in their education" and that they "learn by

doing", a phrase commonly used by the teachers and a central tenet of Save the

Children's methodology. For Pia, there should be a departure from "traditional"

teaching approaches that have been used in the past, in favor of more varied and

dynamic classroom practices:

> Because we used to use traditional methodology where the initiative all stays
> with the teacher, where the students are sitting there, they are only going to
> feel bored. We have to use different strategies and methodologies every day
> so that the children can participate. For the kids, it will serve as motivation to
> come to school every day.

Pia sees the distinction between traditional methodologies and more active

learning methodologies as reflecting different roles in the students as passive or active

in their own education. With respect to her own practice, Pia describes her move

away from a traditional approach to teaching:

> I've thought about it and come to the conclusion that my teaching was boring.
> And the way I planned – I made a plan and did specifically only things that

were on the plan; I wouldn't deviate in anything from the lesson. And despite going in a particular direction, I felt that the students, at the same time, would just be tired of what we were doing. But, I feel like I have improved greatly because I have changed the way I do things. I use a different way of planning class and working with the students, always singing and playing with them. I have felt a complete change."

When she talks about the impact of the new teaching approaches rooted in active-learning principles, she states:

> I noticed a change in my students. … They [students] want to work with the materials in [the classroom]. They ask, 'how can we help you, *profe* (teacher)?' They themselves become integrated in what is going on. They say, 'we like it when you get on the ground with us, or run around and play with us.' We [other teachers and I] have learned that when [students] are playing, they are learning. And if I keep them sitting the whole time, saying 'do this, do that.' Well, [when I ask them] 'how would you feel? … they'll say, 'we're bored *profe.*' So, its like they see the difference and I can see that they are more involved, and helping out in the class.

Pia believes that active learning approaches work because students are more motivated to come to school. That is, students' persistence in school is influenced by how engaged and interested they are when they are in class. She acknowledges student learning as an outcome of good quality education, though the specifics regarding what students learn do not seem to be her main consideration. Rather, engaging students such that they appear motivated to be at school seems to carry more weight.

To address how her ideas about quality education are translated in her teaching, I will start with a description of Pia's classroom, followed by examples of typical activities and practices to demonstrate her style and to illustrate what and how the ideas discussed above might manifest into practices. This provides an opportunity to examine in what ways her ideas about quality education are consistent or inconsistent with they way she teaches.

Pia's classroom has two chalkboards that face each other, in the front and back of the room. However, there is a clear orientation toward the front. There was not much on the back-board except for a few posters. There are posters and student work hung on all four walls. There were charts on the board showing the alphabet, syllables, and the numbers from 1 to 100. There was a math learning corner and a Spanish learning corner along opposite walls; they also did not occupy much space or prominence in the classroom. Each had materials including books, manipulative objects, drawing materials and other educational resources.

On the day I arrived at Pia's classroom at the beginning of class at 7 am and found students seated at desks arranged in two U-shaped rows and facing each other and the front board. There were 27 out of a total of 32 students present. As I came into the classroom, the class was reviewing previously learned syllables. There was a tree cutout on the board and students were given cards in the shapes of fruits and vegetables that they had to identify. Pia was calling students up to the board, framing the activity as students contributing to a soup, to identify their fruit and break it up into the syllables, which were pointed out on a syllable chart. The goal here was "for students to be oriented to the words and sounds of the syllables." Students seemed attentive. They were quiet and waiting their turn to get called to the board. This quickly (after 15 minutes) transitioned to Pia using call and response with the whole class while using a pointer to point to the syllable on the chart, each time asking the class as a whole to repeat the individual syllable and then whole words using the syllables. This activity moved quickly and the students were quiet and attentive as Pia asked the day and date, and introduced the theme for the lesson, the "the letter c,

as in *casa* (house)." After this came a physical activity to "wake up [their] bodies." This activity was not integrated with any content; it was essentially a break in the lesson for students to stretch their legs, and a transition into the next part of the class.

Pia reports her goal for this review portion of the lesson was to go over the syllables that had been taught in previous classes:

> This, the students already know. It was to review and get them to remember where we are. Only then can we move on to the next topic. I want to make sure they have it and they are ready to go on.

While she implies that she checks for understanding before she introduces something new, there was little that would have been evident if students did *not* understand; the first activity involved only 6 students and individual voices (or lack of) would not have been detectible in a whole class call and response.

Typically, like the other teachers who were observed, Pia starts the day with Spanish, which seemed to take up most of the day (with Pia and others), and ends the day with mathematics. She explained that she designates a weekday for, each science, *educación moral* (values education), and *educación civica* (civic education). These follow the Spanish lesson, which is everyday. Regarding how Pia plans her lessons, she explained:

> At the moment that I think students are not understanding, I think I have to do something different … That is why I don't make weekly plan; I plan daily. The problem with planning for the week is that they are going to have trouble with some parts of the content. If they don't assimilate what they are doing, I have to do other activities with the same content. That is why I am always looking for more strategies and new techniques, so that they can easier learn the content, and I can do a different thing from day to day.

Pia continually assesses her students on whether they understand the material through whole class call and response, individual interaction (including checking

notebooks and working one-on-one with students who are having trouble), and tests she develops and administers after a lesson [or series of lessons] on a given topic. The majority of what was observed was whole class call and response of the syllables or of words. On a few occasions she had individual students come to the board to read a word or identify syllables. In these instances (one is described above with the soup activity) Pia was mostly attentive to the five or six students that actually got to go to the board. During math, she had students take turns solving sets of problems on the board. This activity involved all students since more than a few could complete problems simultaneously on the board. One way she makes certain that students are ready to move on is by checking how sure they are of their responses:

> With the words, it's almost like I try to get them to make a mistake, so I can see if they are sure about what they have done. … And, I try to make sure. I know some of them didn't quite 'get it', but I really love it that one student, who I have been very worried about, told me 'that's the way it is *profe*; its 2 and 3 (referring to numbers in a math problem that should be added) …

Student engagement in the activity of the lesson is one major aspect of Pia's idea of quality instruction. Her energy and dynamism in general in the classroom seem themselves engaging for students. She can easily call students' attention because she talks loud, she makes jokes, and plays games with students. But, taking another example from the classroom, we can also see how she engages students in the midst of teaching content and what "active" learning for Pia might look like.

In one lesson Pia gave each student a card that has a word on it. They sounded out their individual words – to themselves (not quietly) – and then switched cards with their neighbor and sounded out that word. Pia next, dictated a sentence, "*Ana es mi mama*" (Ana is my mother), and students had to recognize if they have

one of the words in the dictation on their card, and come to the front. Students

seemed attentive and eager to go up to the front. Pia then asked students to arrange

themselves in order of the dictated sentence. She then wrote the phrase on the board

and repeated this with 6 other sentences. Each time, Pia asked the rest of the class if

students had arranged themselves to reflect the phrase, and if not, for them to point

out the mistake. Students seemed engaged in the activity. They were attentive to

what was going on at the front and seemed interested in seeing what words their

neighbors had. Students also were calling out mistakes in the sentence

enthusiastically. There were a few students that occasionally caused a disruption as

the activity proceeded. An example includes one student who was up out of his chair

and engaging other students in off-topic conversation as students were forming the

sentence at the front. Pia dealt with this situation by calling the student by name,

urging him to take his seat, and reminding him that he "ha[d] to learn the syllables,

otherwise how are [was he] going to go to second grade?" As the activity proceeded,

the students who did not get to go up to the front after the sentence was dictated

seemed to start to be less attentive. In the beginning the activity seemed to keep most

students' attention, however, this seemed to wane after a few rounds. After doing this

with 6 sentences, to "reorient", Pia lead students in a song, which while not content-

related, transitioned the class from Spanish to math.

Factors Informing Pia's Teaching Practice

<u>Students' Differing Levels of Understanding</u>

Teachers in the focus group expressed one of their major challenges to be

addressing the needs of students who have fallen behind. Most often, they either have

poor or intermittent attendance and/or they did not attend preschool, viewed by STC and the other teachers in the focus group, and evidenced in national policy as an important factor for success in first grade and beyond.

Pia's community was in the middle of a 4-month long water crisis. The well had broken and people had to travel up to 2 km to bring water back to their houses from a different well. The water situation was affecting children's health, and a many of students had missed days of school due to illness. While the well breaking is not a regular occurrence, illness is one factor that keeps children out of school, and if it is contagious, affects many students at a time. As Pia commented to me in conversation (not during the interview), "They just pass it around."

Having not attended preschool is also a reason that students do not keep up with their peers in terms of learning curricular content. In effect, these students are behind their peers from the beginning and Pia said that she is constantly searching for ways to "catch them up." She notes the difficulty for students that did not attend preschool by describing the important basic school skills and behaviors children learn that prepare them for primary school:

> [If they go to preschool] they can adapt to being in school. That is when they develop and learn the importance of coming to class, and they'll know, from having done it before, how to draw a line. They know what is addition, what is subtraction, what is a curve, and what is a square and what is round. That alone is an improvement from when they entered [preschool].

Her attention to students who are behind is evident in her classroom where, on some days, her class appears more like a multigrade than a single-grade classroom. That is, she sometimes separates the group of students that are behind in the material and effectively treats each group individually, with separate assignments and separate

attention. For instance, Pia sometimes groups together students who did not attend preschool with students who are repeating first grade or are behind because of attendance or other problems. This grouping speaks to differing levels and pace at which students are working. She does this in order to facilitate her coverage of specific material for specific levels of students.

In one lesson Pia had a group of 7 students seated apart from the other 20 students, while doing math. All students were learning topics related to addition and subtraction. However, while Pia was explaining the associative property[28] with the group of 20 students, modeling for them how to work through problems, the other seven were completing a set of basic addition problems. She took turns attending to each group while the other group was working in their notebooks. With each group, she called up individual students to complete problems on the board. During this lesson, students were much more off-task than the previously observed lesson in which Pia interacted with the whole class. For example, a few students were up and out of their chairs; they were not working or talking about math, rather they were playing with other students' pencils or with materials from the learning corner. These students posed a very evident distraction for what was going on in class due to the noise and movement. Working with each group, Pia spent a substantial amount of time working with individual students. This factor might have left time and space for students not immediately engaged in individual work with Pia, or by themselves, to get distracted as much of the time students were supposed to be working independently on solving math problems.

---

[28] The "associative property" refers to order of operations in basic arithmetic: complete the operation within the parenthesis first, and then add the outside number.

Pia expressed frustration during the focus group discussion, precisely because she considers it a challenge when students fall behind: "How else are they going to catch up? … What can we do when they miss school? It's a constant fight for those students." In the individual interview I conducted with Pia, she discusses her challenges with particular students:

> I have 3 [who were among the group of 7] students who came [to school for the first time] two or three weeks into the first semester. And they didn't come again until now. What am I supposed to do with those three? I have to try to have them learn. But, in the end, I want them to be confident in what they are learning. However, I know from walking around and seeing what they are doing, that even simple addition is difficult for them.

With regard to the other students that were learning the associative property in the lesson described above, Pia comments:

> Ah, yes, I liked how it went because I wanted to be sure that they were sure with what they were doing. I feel satisfied. They progressed today. The associative property is difficult for them. I think it is for second grade, but I think we did a very good job today with it. They did well.

The Role of Parents

The circumstances described in the previous section underscore the important role parents have in facilitating what happens in the classroom by ensuring students' consistent attendance.

As noted earlier, since she has taught in the community for many years, Pia had taught many of the parents of her current students. In general she reports a very positive and personal relationships with many of her students' parents. Pia asserts that she has the support of most of the parents and often one of the mothers is present in her room to provide support in terms of classroom management and/or to help monitor when Pia splits up the class into groups. She believes that the ways that she

has improved as a teacher, in terms of focusing on engaging her students actively in their learning, has positively affected the support that she gets from parents. She commented: "Sometimes parents have the habit of thinking sometimes that 'if teachers can't make my child understand, then I am not going to send him [to school].'" But, she notices that when students are more interested in coming to school, parents are more involved and supportive. Referring to one mother that was there on one of the days I observed her class:

> She comes everyday to clean up the classroom for me. Everyday that woman comes and she says '*Profe* this would be a waste of your time to do. You should just worry about teaching them because my daughter tells me what she does in class, and sometimes she sings the songs she learns … And that is why I keep sending her. I won't take her out [of school].' She tells me that.

> Pia recognizes the important responsibility that parents' have for their

children's education, a responsibility that is complicated by various factors in the community. Take preschool attendance, for instance:

> Parents have the big responsibility to bring their children to preschool… Sometimes parents take the attitude that students learn something in preschool, but others, irresponsibly, don't send their children to preschool, because they say, 'Oh, they just go to play, so why am I going to send them? Better that they stay and help out around here.' So, they think that children are going to play and nothing else happens. But, that is completely wrong. The fundamental base for first grade is preschool.

Pia points to other reasons, common in rural communities, for students not attending preschool, such as the need for children to support parents' working or other home-based responsibilities: "Sometimes children have to stay at home to help out. That is how it is sometimes in the *campo* (rural areas). There is the custom that some parents prefer for their children to stay to watch the house, or working, and not send them to school". Pia also sees the importance of parents' education. She notes that many

111

parents lack reading and writing skills, and calls attention to the fact that some

parents work such long hours that they don't have much time to spend with their

children:

> Another big problem that we have in the *campo* is that the parents sometimes cannot help their children at home because they just don't know, or they get home too late from working. That impedes the development of students. Despite that we do everything we can, at home there is no one to reinforce the material. It is only what we give them here.

It is clear that Pia recognizes parents' important role and can envision how they can

positively influence what she does in the classroom, but at the same time, she has

deep understanding of the factors that complicate their involvement.

Local Level Ministry of Education

Local level Ministry of Education officials are in direct contact with schools

and teachers. These officials are responsible for observing and evaluating the

teachers within their school cluster. Pia indicates that the local level ministry officials

influence how she teaches, but she does not seem to view them and their ideas as

having much legitimacy. While it is not clear how much she tailors her lessons when

ministry officials arrive for observations, she has a different philosophy about what

makes good teaching than she understands they do. She notes that the officials from

the MINED "are very traditional. They have not changed, at least [not] yet." Pia

explains that when these officials come to evaluate her teaching:

> "[t]hey only look for students to be doing what they are supposed to be doing. But, they want them to be quiet and to sit and have neat notebooks. But, we [other teachers and I] don't think like that. We have learned that children learn by playing. So, of course, it is going to be noisy and messy."

Similar to other teachers in the focus group, Pia sees the MINED officials in a

critical light. She says, "They are completely demoralizing. In front of the students,

they say 'look this doesn't work, this doesn't work, it doesn't work … They never come to see the positive things that one does, only to say what *doesn't* work."

Save the Children

In contrast, Pia, like other teachers, sees Save the Children staff and programs as a very positive influencing factor in her teaching. Her community and school have received assistance (mostly instructional materials) from other organizations, including Peace Corps and Plan Internacional. Peace Corps volunteers held one workshop on using games and other dynamic strategies in classrooms, but aside from that there have been no other organizations involved in providing capacity building, guidance, and support related to pedagogy, except Save the Children. Pia is very thankful for the support offered by Save the Children, and credits the field staff with transforming her teaching:

> As a teacher I feel actualized. I feel satisfied. I know that it was the effort that they [the Save field team] have put forward so we can change the way we think about our teaching, and to get away from the routine. It has really, really served me well, as well as most of my colleagues who have [participated in] Save workshops. I know that my colleagues also are putting [new strategies] into practice, and when we get together, even sometimes at recess, we talk about [our efforts]. We all feel like we are doing much better.

Pia told me during an interview that she credits Save for helping her change her teaching enough to provoke better attendance and interest in school:

> I needed a new orientation to change what I normally did in the classroom, because for a long time, I never used anything different, like dynamic activities or the materials. I didn't know the songs or stories. But Save has changed the way I think about teaching. They have made me change my attitude because the students all used to drop out, but that was because my class was completely monotonous ("*directamente monotona*"). It was always me, me, me, and they just were sitting there and they would, of course, get bored. It was boring. The drop-out was enormous.

In practice, Pia uses the strategies that she has learned from Save the Children workshops. She reports that her students use learning corners 2 or 3 times a week, and are free to use them during recess, as some do, though I did not observe students in Pia's class using the learning corners in either classroom observation. Pia says that she was exposed to the activities mentioned above – which involved students learning through the use of games and other active-learning approaches – during Save workshops and through the technical assistance she has received from Save staff. She says her biggest challenge in implementing some of the activities from Save is that "conditions don't permit us sometimes. ... But sometimes the conditions don't allow us to put into practice everything. Like for example, sometimes there isn't enough space for me to do an activity. So, I try to modify and make it work." Even with these challenges, Pia "feel[s] like [students] come more to school; attendance is better, they are more attentive and waiting for the next activity, and there is more participation. There is interest to learn."

Chapter 8: Case Study: "Carolina"

Personal and Teaching Background

Carolina is a multigrade teacher of first, second and third grade students. The community in which she teaches lies in between fields of sugarcane belonging to a Guatemalan sugar company. It lies about 6 kilometers from the highway on a dirt path, and at the bottom of the foothills of Nicaragua's central mountainous region. The sugar company is the main employer for families in the community, and there are similar small communities scattered in between the fields. Carolina does not live in the community in which she teaches; rather she commutes on a bicycle from her house to the highway, and then travels by bus or "*a dedo*" (hitchhiking) for about 12 km along the highway to "*la entrada*", where the path that leads to the community and school meets the highway. There she is picked up, usually by one of the parents in the community in a pick-up truck or on a horse, to take her to the school. Her commute is long; it can take her 1.5 hours every morning to arrive at her school, and treacherous in rainy season, when the paths regularly flood. On one occasion, I arrived after a night of heavy rain to find the paths impassable and school closed for the day. This occurs frequently during rainy season, in part due to the topography of this particular community and the surrounding areas. The school where Carolina teaches is a small satellite school, and houses a multigrade primary school comprised of one first, second and third grade class and a preschool classroom.

Carolina is 35 years old and is in her 7th year of teaching. Her first four years were teaching preschool in her own community in an *escula comunitaria*.[29] After she became "*titulada*" (licensed) she began teaching in this community with her current combination of grades. That was 2004, 3 years prior to my interviewing and observing her. Carolina has adolescent-age children who attend school in her home community, which is larger which houses the base school for a different cluster. In her current classroom, she has 19 first grade students, 6 second graders, and 15 third graders for a total of 40 students, increased from a total of 28 last year. Her explanation for the dramatic rise in students is:

> because families also come from other communities, and some of these students are repeating because they had to leave school the year before. My third grade students, I have had since first grade. I have one who didn't start first grade until he was 12. He has kept coming, and now he is 14.

Carolina is an Evangelical Christian and deeply religious. The role of God and spirituality are important factors in her life and her work. And, as I will address later in this case study, Carolina attributes much of her successes and capacities in teaching to her spirituality and faith.

Carolina's Conception of Quality

<u>Ideas & Classroom Practices</u>

Carolina characterizes quality instruction as being dependent on the active role of the student. Carolina defines quality instruction in terms of what students should be doing:

---

[29] A community preschool is a non-formal school organization that is taught by a non-licensed volunteer teacher; after a teacher gets licensed, the preschool school gets formalized and under the Ministry of Education.

> Students should be active and motivated. They should be actively participating in what they are learning. There should not be dead time[30] and they should also be doing something, which is hard to do in a multigrade class. But, the teacher should have control at all times.

She adds, "students should learn by doing, not only in theory". When asked how she in particular provides quality instruction in her classroom, she identifies the important elements as "the strategies [she] use[s], the elaboration of materials; it is most important that [she] elaborate[s] the materials, [paying] attention to the classroom atmosphere, and keep[ing] it interesting to motivate the students. That is most important for quality teaching." Her overall goal for her students "is that that all students pass their grade, and continue onto the next grade. They should assimilate what they are being taught. And they should learn the material with love and enthusiasm."

Carolina sees her religion as equipping her with a moral foundation to be able to deal with the situations she encounters with students and parents, and as a tool that serves the purpose of motivating students:

> I motivate [students], principally with my character. I don't bring in a bad attitude.[31] Because one has one's own problems at home, but you leave your problems at home. Your attitude has to change at the school. My attitude has always been the same, thank God, because also I am Evangelical Christian and I understand many situations, sometimes relating to parents as well as the students. My character helps me in my vocation. So I motivate them that way, and I give little gifts, I care for them a lot, and that motivates them. They feel cared for and loved with me, and I feel that way from them.

While Carolina emphasizes her moral and affective qualities as a main factor, she does not directly relate those to students' active role or, more generally what is

---

[30] "Dead time" refers to non-instructional time. This might be the time after students have finished a task or activity and are awaiting further instruction or attention from the teacher.

[31] This is translated from "mal-carácter", for which the literal translation would be "bad character".

going on in the classroom. Her mention of students' motivation does not make clear what they are being motivated to do. Further she adds, "I am always prepared and I always come to school. I never miss even though sometimes it is difficult to get here. And, the students know I care for them and they care about me." Carolina's attention to moral and values development is also evident as she presents a civic education lesson focused on showing respect for the country:

> Ok as I was saying, our country (*patria*) is where we were born. The place that has seen us grow. That is our country. But, we have to demonstrate respect and caring for our country; the place where we live. It is just like when our mothers embrace us. Our country embraces us and we have to show respect and caring in return. So how can we demonstrate that respect?

Students' responses to Carolina's question include "we can be good students", "show love", "behave well", "to try to be happy", "show caring", and "we should take care of our country". Carolina then comments: "Very good, all of those are very important. We always have in our hearts the place where we live. All of these (referring to students' ideas) is how we show that we care, love and respect our country." This lesson finishes with students undertaking the task of listing five ways they can show respect and caring toward the country, a task that can be done by making a list of the ideas students had previously presented (and that are cited above), since there is no other direction to the assignment. This example illustrates how Carolina involves values in her lesson, but also how the notion of caring takes shape in her practice.

During the focus group, the topic of relevance of the curriculum was brought up, and I revisited this topic during an individual interview with Carolina. Her thoughts regarding curriculum relevance were in agreement with what teachers in the

focus group thought: that the curriculum materials were not written for rural areas. Some of the examples are "inappropriate" and "out of context". Carolina does not modify examples to make them more relevant, rather she believes that all the information given in curriculum is necessary for students to know in the event that they leave the community:

> No it's not relevant for students because they don't see traffic lights or crosswalks in their community (two examples that were given in the focus groups). But I don't completely think it is not relevant either. If one day their parents take them to the city, they will recognize it because their teacher taught it in class.

More precisely she notes that teachers "have to be creative. They have to teach it *because ...* [e]ven though our community is rural, they still need to know it."

Before exploring how some of these ideas get translated into classroom practice, I will give a brief physical description of Carolina's classroom and daily routine. This is followed by typical classroom examples that illustrate her teaching style.

As in other classrooms, Carolina has two blackboards on opposite ends of the classroom; she has the group of first grade students facing one of the boards and second and third graders facing the other. Her classroom is small and crowded, although she and the students are very lively. Her classroom is actually a part of one room that was divided into two to accommodate a preschool and primary school class. The walls are covered with posters that she has made herself, featuring letters of the alphabet, syllables, the numbers, multiplication tables, charts and student work. There are learning corners for math and Spanish, although they are not clearly discernable because there was so little space. On one of the days I observed, there

were only 24 out of 40 students (only 10 out of 19 first graders showed up that day),

and on the other, 33 out of 40 were present.

Carolina recounts her typical daily routine:

I come in the morning, and the first thing we do is clean up. Everyone is responsible for helping the clean up. We sweep the classroom daily. Then we come in and sit. On Mondays and Fridays we sing the National Anthem. We also say a prayer every day, where we thank God for the day, and how he helps us in learning new things. Then we start class by singing the *bienvenida* (a welcome song) in order to wake ourselves up, and then we start class doing oral questions of review from the previous day. Then we start the new material. I usually start with a short lecture and then start with the different activities.

Carolina evaluates students "in written and oral forms. [She] know[s] they are

understanding if they can answer [her] questions correctly, or read correctly. But

[she] also use[s] tests that [she] write[s], and look[s] at students' notebooks when they

complete an activity in class or at home."

A closer look at classroom examples will help paint a picture of Carolina's

practice. In one example, Carolina is teaching second grade students the concepts of

singular and plural nouns. This lesson is illustrative of the kinds of activities that

were most often observed with second grade, where basic grammar concepts were the

main skills being taught. This review lesson reinforced the knowledge of singular

and plural forms through matching/identifying exercises. She introduces the lesson as

follows:

Carolina: Lets see, so what do I have here? (referring to some cards she is holding).
Students: many!
Carolina: many… Many what?
Students: (in unison) things

Carolina: things. So, this is an … (unusually long pause). Is it plural or singular?

Student: Plural

Carolina: It's plural. But, if I only have in this hand, only this card (referring to only one card that she is has in her hand), what is it? Is it plural or singular?

Students: It's singular.

Carolina: It is singular. Good. Have you all understood? (moving closer to one particular student). Do you understand?

[That student nods his head.]

Carolina: Ok, just so we are all even clearer, we are going to do another exercise.

Carolina then transitions to the next activity, which involves students identifying from a list of nouns and categorizing them as plural or singular. All the while she reinforces the definitions of singular, "*una cosa*" (one thing) and plural, "*varias cosas*" (many things). After setting up the activity, she leaves the second graders to attend to a different group. During the course of this activity, there were instances of classroom management issues with the other two groups. For example, she had to interrupt the lesson with second grade to attend to individual students from first who were off task, moving around the classroom and distracting other students. These interruptions however only occurred on two occasions during this part of the class. Later she comes back and reviews the activities by asking students as a group, word-by-word, to label the word as singular or plural. There is evidence that students are still having trouble identifying the words correctly, which is addressed by continual reinforcing of the "one thing", "many things" definition.

Another classroom example illustrates how she works with first graders on introducing letters of the alphabet and their sounds. In the following example, Carolina is teaching the letter "b". The lesson is introduced by a poster with a picture of a *burro* (donkey) and the following rhyme:

Mira ese burro (Look at that donkey)
se sabe la b, (he knows the letter "b")
su rabo barre (his tail sweeps)
la bola de (the ball that belongs to)
su bebe. (his baby)

She then asks for student participation in calling out answers and engaging in a conversation about the rhyme.

> Carolina: (reading the poster) Look at the donkey. He knows the "b". What does he know?
> Students: The B!
> Carolina: And what do we ourselves also know?
> Students: The B!
> Carolina: The donkey knows the "b", and we also know the "b". But what else; what does he do?
> Student: He hits the ball!
> Carolina: Very good. He hits the ball, with what?
> Students: (incomprehensible – many students talking at the same time, but not the same words in unison)
> Carolina: Ok, good. Do you all see? Very good, Carlos. Carlos just told us that he hits the ball with his tail. What do you all think? Is Carlos correct?
> Students: Yes!
> Carolina: Ok, very good.

Next, upon Carolina's directions, students start coloring in a picture of the donkey while Carolina turns her attention to the second graders. After a few minutes, she returns to first grade and launches a new activity that involves choosing a person to

122

go to the board to read the same short rhyme by identifying the syllables and sounding out words.

This is typical for first grade and Carolina uses a similar approach in teaching other letters and sounds. She notes:

> When I teach the letters I always try to do something that is engaging for them. This way, like with the rhyme and pictures, they can see what we are talking about. I try to use similar activities, but not completely the same (for teaching other letters). I do change [the activities] so the students don't get bored.

Carolina sees the biggest challenges in her teaching relates to the number of students and general conditions in which she teaches. Carolina notes, "most schools have way too many students. The numbers of students we have to teach really poses a challenge for quality teaching, especially because of the minimal conditions we have in the community."

Factors Informing Carolina's Practice

<u>Multigrade Setting</u>

One factor that informs her practice has to do with teaching in a multigrade setting. Carolina identifies the multigrade setting as a challenge and worries, in part, because "to have one grade, I think it is easier to facilitate better direct attention for the students. When there are three grades that attention is much less." Carolina mentions that teaching multigrade classes was not a substantive part of her teacher education; her exposure to multigrade teaching and methods during her teacher education was "mostly observing, but only in a few classes. They didn't worry about teaching specifically for multigrade classes." Many of the methods for multigrade

123

she has learned from some of the workshops organized by Save the Children

(discussed later in this section). Nevertheless, she expresses the constant struggle to

keep all children occupied and motivated while working with three different groups

of students.

> Teaching multigrade is difficult. My *compañeras* were saying this before [in the focus group discussion]. I know this because I teach three grades now, but [previously] I only taught preschool, and that is different because you can play with students. Here, you have to constantly try to keep students occupied, and it's difficult because they finish the activities quickly and then they want you to be with them. But, my students know that I care about them and mostly do not misbehave. But still, it is great effort and I am constantly checking on all the groups at the same time.

During classroom observations, I at times noted that Carolina was attending to

more than one group at a time. For example, on one occasion, she was with first

grade students, who were taking turns individually solving arithmetic problems on the

board. As they were working, she was dictating to students in third grade the

vocabulary for their civic education lesson. This constant back and forth attention to

multiple groups, is typical for Carolina. As noted above, she worries when students

finish assigned work and have nothing to do; that is, *tiempo muerto* (dead time) is one

big concern for her teaching multigrade. She says, "It's a constant fight. You have to

do dynamic activities and make sure they are engaged all the time. I am constantly

worrying about students having dead time. It is not good for them, and they will lose

interest."

During the lessons I observed, the students in Carolina's class were engaged

in tasks most of the time. The activities most often involved individual students

engaged in completing tasks written on the board or from a guidebook in their

notebooks (e.g., sets of arithmetic problems, fill-in answers, using new vocabulary, dictations).

Save the Children

Another factor that informs Carolina's teaching is Save the Children. Carolina started the RICA[32] program only one year after she started teaching multigrade classes, and she credits the program as being where she "learned most of the activities and games for active methodologies that [she] use[s] for the three groups." She adds that she has gained a "better understanding of how to use the learning corners and how to use illustration activities, for example to help first grade especially in learning the letters and sounds." In thinking about how her teaching changed since working with Save, Carolina expresses the insight she has gained from them. In the following, also note her attention to affective qualities:

> They have enriched my understanding, my knowledge and abilities. The activities and methodologies have become easier for me and they have been really important. All the things that I learn with RICA I have put into practice, I always do, and, I have had very good results, and I always, first and foremost as a teacher, love my students.

She expands:

> My teaching was boring. I was never worried about [students'] motivation, and I didn't have the motivation [myself]. But with Save the Children, they have been like a light for me ... And my *compañeras de trabajo* [teacher colleagues]. I tell them that 'thanks to [Save the Children]', I feel like I can control[33] my group, and I don't worry that I am continuing with the same group.[34]

---

[32] The RICA program is discussed in more detail in the Nicaragua Policy Context and in the Introduction to the Case Studies (Chapters 3 & 5).

[33] "Control" is translated from "*dominar*", for which the literal translation is "to dominate".

[34] She is referring to having a combination that includes first grade, a grade that as expressed in the focus group, is notoriously difficult for teachers because of the young age of the students.

To get to a more specific level, I encouraged Carolina to discuss how she knew her teaching was boring. I asked her what kinds of things she saw in her students told her she was being boring. Carolina was struggling with students' attendance, a factor that she perceived to be caused in part by a low quality experience in the classroom and likened it to other reasons that contribute to low attendance: "Students are bored, they don't come to school. It's the same when there is illness or if the weather is bad. They stop coming to school, and then I've lost them."

She elaborates on the challenge of students' attendance, and how Save has influenced the way she addresses this challenge:

> They give constructive criticism, and my teaching has changed a lot in terms of the methodologies that I use with students … the way that I facilitate their [students'] learning. They have also helped me in the way that I communicate with students in more effective ways, giving [them] more individual attention, mostly when students are having problems learning the material. So, how do I help those students to catch up (*adelantar*)? What materials should I use? At what pace and rhythm should I go so that they understand? Over the 3 years with Save, I now know how to deal with all that.

She adds, noting the importance of knowing how to develop materials to help engage students:

> I have learned many strategies and methodologies and I always think it is most important to use materials to facilitate students in practical learning (*en la practica*). [Save has] enriched my understanding on how to develop materials to help make the class more practical. Students will remember better the next day. They will come with more enthusiasm if they see that they are learning; it motivates them a lot.

It is this aspect of her teaching, motivating and engaging students, so that they are interested in being at school, is where she sees Save the Children's influence has been the strongest:

126

> Using the dynamic activities,[35] my teaching has improved. We use more active activities and the students are more active. I can have them more motivated and they participate actively. Also, I don't have as much dead time. It is difficult to always be with them you know, with the combination of grades, which is three. It's pretty difficult, but I always- the first thing that I do is try to control what is going on. The activities that I use are always the ones that I have planned to use, in my [lesson] plan. And I implement those activities and students get motivated. I also always try to have them working throughout the day.

A good example of an activity adopted from Save is the "Magic Tree". As a reinforcement of the letter "b", Carolina introduces this activity to her first grade students. She refers to a tree poster with fruit cut-outs with words written on the back, which are taped to the tree:

> This is what we find in the trees. But this is a magic tree, and here we are going to find something on the back of each fruit. So, this is what we are going to do. We're going to practice the sounds of the syllables. When each person comes up, to be able to 'eat' a fruit, they are going to see that, on the other side, they will find a surprise. They should then move to the *fichero*.[36]

The "surprises" are words that include a "b" in various parts – *cubo* (bucket), *beso* (kiss), and *buque* (ship) – which students sound out to read, and then identify the individual syllables that make up the word and spell it using syllable cards. In this activity, reading and writing skills are addressed through an activity that is fun and engaging (the magic tree).

While, as noted above, Carolina described the challenges she faces in teaching a multigrade class, she also indicated how the Save program has helped her in trying to affect change in her classroom:

---

[35] The "*dinamicas*" are part of the active learning strategies on which Save the Children works with teachers. They are activities that couple physical movement with learning curricular content.

[36] A hanging poster with pockets where a collection of laminated cards that have all the syllables of the letters they have learned (ba, be, bu, bi, bo, etc.). Students use these cards to spell words by identifying and combining syllables.

I think that it has not been difficult for me because RICA has been working with me since the beginning, and everything that they have given me I put into practice. From what I see that the students deserve it; they need it. But I don't think it has been very difficult for me. I first present it, and students do it.

In reference to a follow-up question, in which I inquired about how the process of implementing a new strategy goes, she elaborates that she:

give[s] students everything that [she] ha[s] learned, the new methodologies, strategies. I implement them in all of my grades – even third [grade], if it is useful for them. It doesn't depend only on the teacher; the students also have opinions. In RICA, they told us that it is should not be that the teacher only says, 'ok, do this and the other thing,' and students do it. They (students) themselves can pose their own questions and they themselves can answer them. And [the students] are clear about what I am trying to do.

Another look at a classroom activity illustrates the implementation of a new questioning strategy that Carolina had just learned about in a Save workshop.[37] I observed Carolina implementing an activity involving the following short story (4 sentences) with third grade students:

One black night, passing through a silent forest, a terrible noise was heard, similar to a lion's roar. My pounding heart accelerated its beats; in my throat welled up bitter bile of fear, and my hot blood went cold as ice. A violent earthquake shook my body.[38]

She started with having student come to the board and to read the verse, which was followed by a brief conversation that involved students identifying the main message of the paragraph. Then, she set up the activity as follows:

Carolina: Let's see, Jose, did you like the reading?

---

[37] In this workshop Save the Children staff provided examples of how to foster student questions about things appearing in the text. This was framed as teaching higher-level thinking and analysis skills rather than rote-learning strategies that ask students to regurgitate information from the text (title, names of characters, the setting).

[38] Translated from: *Una negra noche paseaba por un silencioso bosque, Cuando de pronto se escuchó un ruido espantoso, parecido al rugido de un león. Mi palpitante corazón acelero sus latidos a mi garganta subio como amarga hiel el miedo y mi caliente sangre un frío hielo fue. Un violento terremoto estremecio mi cuerpo.*

Students (in unison): Yes.

Carolina: Ok, so what is the reading talk about? Lets see, … Carlos?

Carlos: [does not respond right away.]

Carolina: Roberto?

Roberto: an earthquake?

Carolina: Roberto says an earthquake. Very good. Lets see, … Jorge, what else is the reading talking about?

Jorge: Is it about our bodies?

Carolina: Our bodies? Ok, good. So we are going to work with this paragraph. We're going to read the verse again and try to think about the message that it is telling us. What does this paragraph tells us? What is it talking about? But, before we do that, we are going to formulate a series of questions using what, how, when and why. What we want are questions to interrogate the story. So, I'll give you an example: what passed through the silent forest?

Student: a violent earthquake?

Carolina: Very good. 'A violent earthquake,' he said. So, how do we know that? From the paragraph. Where should the answers to the questions come from then?

Student: The paragraph.

Carolina: Very good, the paragraph. Are you all understanding what we are going to do? We, ourselves, are going to pose the questions, and we, ourselves, have to give the answers. So, lets make some what, how, when and why questions from the paragraph.

She leaves third grade students working, moving to another grade, and then 15-20 minutes later she returns to the third graders and asks them to share their questions. One student comes up to read his questions:

Student: A violent earthquake, how did my beating heart beat faster? How bitter? When was the sound similar to a lion's roar heard? Why was there a violent earthquake that shook my body? Why did my blood freeze like ice?

The answers, while not discussed specifically as a part of the activity, were addressed in the following way:

Carolina: Ok, good. And where can we find the answers?
Students: The paragraph.
Carolina: Very good, the paragraph.

Carolina then turns to dictate definition of a paragraph as "a piece of written narrative that we use often, and is written in prose. Paragraphs begin with a capital letter and end with a period. Also, it is indented and has a margin."

In reality, to answer the questions would have involved students drawing on other sources of information or extrapolating from the story, for example to imagine ways to describe similar feelings as a bitter, beating heart. Doing this would have fulfilled the intent of the questioning and answering strategy, as represented in the Save workshop, which emphasized students learning more sophisticated and higher-order thinking skills. In the interview, conducted following the class, Carolina discusses the activity in the following way:

And I was fine with the third grade students. We learned the paragraph today and they did the questions well, the form of the questions and answers they gave. A few had problems, but for the most part I am satisfied with the way it went.

When asked about the timing of her transition (away from answering the students' questions to dictating the definition of a paragraph), she noted the other things that were competing for her attention: "I have other students that needed my attention.

The first grade group requires more direct teaching and I have to make sure that I

don't leave them for too long without the teacher." While this example is of an

activity adopted from a Save the Children workshop, it also emphasizes the

challenges of managing teaching and learning in a multigrade classroom.

Parents

Carolina discusses the role of parents and the effect of parents' role on student

outcomes in much the same ways as other teachers. However, she does not mention

much direct influence on her classroom instruction, a point made by the other

teachers. As discussed earlier, Carolina sees students' attendance as the central

challenge for their success:

> Students might have to work, but also there are some that come from other
> schools, and students that I had the year before that didn't pass. Health
> problems and changing houses/moving… that is why some students have so
> much lost time (*tiempo perdido*).

Carolina further explains:

> I think that when there are such low performance and bad attendance, it is
> because the parents themselves are absent. Maybe they do not attend the
> technical meetings that we do sometimes with parents (where specifics that
> parents can do for students are laid out). Many parents, because they lack the
> economic resources, mothers that have to migrate or even just work all day …
> It's like they can't call kids' attention (to school matters) or attend parents'
> meetings to hear how their children are doing.

She adds:

> In my case, the major challenge is in first grade, where there is very low
> performance and attendance. So, what we did was implement a parents'
> committee – separate from the school parents' organization – with only
> parents of first grade students, so they can be of more support and maintain
> the interest in sending their children daily to school. They are responsible
> principally for reinforcing the vowels at home, and ensuring that students
> attend school daily. And when students don't come, the committee will
> mobilize and conduct house visits to those homes. They will talk to the other

parents, and if something happens that a parent does not want to comply (with the commitment to make sure their kid comes to school), there is a procedure by which we will talk with the school director, and/or RICA who sometimes helps us in that way with parents … Sometimes parents don't even know that their children are not coming to school. Ultimately parents have a big role, and they have to be attentive (*cuidar*) to [their children's attendance].

While Carolina is very attentive to students who are behind, she does not seem to tailor her daily classroom activities much to account for this gap. Rather, she stays after school to work with individual students who are struggling. However, she expresses frustration about parents' not taking up their responsibility:

> A deal that I made with the parents is that I would stay twice a week after school. I want to get everyone at one level. Last year I made that promise to parents and I stayed twice a week for the whole year to help students. That strategy actually made the students upset because they thought it was a punishment. I spoke again to parents and asked them to speak to their children [to explain] that it was not punishment, but rather to help them. ... In the future I want them to know it is not a punishment, but support and help so that they can be at the same level as their peers. So then we came to an agreement. But, it turns out that more than a few [students] are missing a lot of class. So, this coming meeting, I am going to have to repeat the message to parents so they understand how they can help me.

While Carolina notes some challenges with parents assuring students' consistent attendance, she is proactive about bringing parents into the school processes and helping them carry out their responsibilities. She also elicits their help in communicating to students the beneficial role of after school tutoring (as opposed to a punishment). She, herself, has additionally taken on the responsibility for mobilizing parents in her community and, on her own initiative, launched the formation of a first grade parents' group. Acknowledging the special role of first grade achievement for success in the remainder of children's school lives, she called the parents to action in order to support the consistent attendance of these young students. She has given

132

parents' committee responsibility for following up with students whose attendance is dwindling. Still she assumes her role:

> Sometimes the teacher alone has to be the one to visit homes; sometimes the road is long. But for now parents are fulfilling that role of visiting parents that are not complying with their responsibility. And, about illiteracy in parents; there is a lot in my community. They used to tell me that they could not help, they didn't know how to help when the children come home with homework. So, at the meeting I told them 'we are going to do the most important, key thing.' And, as a part of that, I check students' work daily, and I make sure that the work done at home is done well. And we all decided that since they do not read well, that they will take care of enforcing student attendance. And that is how we are doing it now-a-days (*y asi estamos marchando*).

Local Level Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education (MINED) seems to play a less significant role in Carolina's thinking and teaching than is the case for the other teachers in this study. She acknowledges having had a few workshops from the Ministry "on methodology, strategies to improve learning. They are few and not really practical; not as concrete as we get in [Save]. It's different. For example, the MINED tells us we have to use active-learning methodologies, or the learning corners. But, they do not tell us how to do it."

Moreover, regarding classroom visits, Carolina did not seem bothered or influenced either way. She notes that the local MINED "talks different and looks for different things (than Save the Children), like whether the students are behaving correctly." However, she does not seem expect much or take much from ministry official visits.

Chapter 9: Case Study: "Carmen"

Personal and Teaching Background

Carmen is a preschool teacher in a town near the border with Honduras. Her town is considered semi-urban because it is the main border town along the Central American Highway 1 (CA-1).[39] The town is large enough to house a number of smaller communities, and there is constant movement of people and goods into and out of Honduras. There is a center of town that runs along the CA-1. The border is 6 km from Carmen's community. There is a business sector in town comprised of mostly small independent businesses, accompanied by a large informal sector of people working on buses, on streets, and offering various services. Carmen's community is off the highway and on the periphery of town. There is a base school within a few kilometers from the community, but Carmen's preschool is a new addition that replaced the community preschool that was previously in operation, and where Carmen began her teaching career.

Carmen is 24 years old, is married, and has a 9-year-old daughter that attends the base school. Carmen began teaching in the community preschool that her mother started while her daughter was at preschool age, and she began working with Save the Children 6 years ago when they first began with in this community and while she was still a community preschool teacher. Upon the encouragement of the RICA director, Carmen began participating in Save's professional development; at that time, she only

---

[39] The Central American Highway 1 is part of a larger network of highways and smaller roads, the Pan-American Highway, which runs from Alaska to Argentina; it connects the countries in Central America.

had a 6th grade education. The Ministry of Education recognized this effort and began paying Carmen the salary of a fully licensed preschool teacher, considering the training she had received from Save as enough to qualify her, and upon condition that she continue her education in *La Normal*. With this, her school became formalized and the ministry built a formal preschool in the community. Carmen continued toward her licensure as one of the 3 preschool teachers chosen by the municipality, out of 100, that filled the vacancies at *La Normal*. Currently she is in her fourth year of secondary, and about to complete her licensure in primary school with a concentration in early childhood education. Carmen relies on her husband who supports her, even as far as helping her make materials for her lessons, and acting as a substitute teacher if she cannot show up to class. He is also supportive when she has to study for her own classes or if she needs to help her daughter with homework.

The school where Carmen teaches is in a one-classroom satellite school school. The preschool uses the classroom and first and second grades have class outside under a tarp, while the second classroom in under construction. There is a base school located nearby and most of the students that live in the surrounding communities attend that school; it houses up to sixth grade.

Carmen's Conception of Quality

Ideas & Classroom Practices

Carmen conceptualizes quality instruction in a few important ways. First as defined by student learning, as "teaching so that the student learns, and that what he/she learns stays with him/her, but not in an obligatory way, rather in a positive

135

way, with their involvement, and that it is important for their (students') lives." She

goes on to discuss the role of student learning in preschool and its impact for students

in first grade. She adds that students should recall their experiences positively:

> We want that what the students' learn to impact that student, so that they
> remember with fondness, and not with dislike. At least I have mostly good
> memories from my teachers. And they remember me too. So, I want that
> my students, when they remember me, that they loved me, and not like 'oh,
> that teacher, I hated her' (sarcastic laughter).

She also notes the important developmental stage that preschool children are at, and

points out the importance of how children are treated and taught:

> I have learned that children are like sponges. They absorb everything. If
> somebody does something, like if they teach them (students) something bad,
> that is what they are going to learn. If you teach them good and useful
> things, those are what they are going to learn. It is most important because
> whatever they learn at this age will stay with them for the rest of their lives.
> If they learn that they can be egotistical (egoista), they will be for the rest of
> their lives. If they learn how to behave well, and be good and respectful,
> like they are treated, they'll always be like that.

Carmen states her personal goals and objectives for her teaching as:

> One objective for me is principally for students that come and seem sad or
> quiet, that they can be here and not feel badly or sad. Because the truth is
> that many times we say- many times… when I didn't know better, [I would
> think] 'oh, that student is just isolated', 'he is not getting it'. But, now I
> don't think like that because, maybe the student seems isolated because
> maybe there is some problem. Maybe it is not so easy at home. The thing is
> that sometimes we think that because we see him and it doesn't look like he
> is happy, that he just hasn't developed language. Or you can tell that
> student something that he just doesn't understand. But that is not true. I
> used to think that way, when I didn't know about children. … but, I want to
> have students that are active. I want that all that sadness to go away once
> they are with me, in our class. I see that sometimes they come like that, all
> sad and quiet. Or sometimes the mother comes to me and says 'I wasn't
> able to bathe my child, I am not going to send him to class'. And, the
> students, sometimes they even cry because they want to be here. And I
> actually feel good when a child cries because they want to come here, and I
> know I am doing something right. So, that is my goal.

This goal is anchored in the interest of student's social and emotional development. Carmen is, at the heart, concerned about her students' overall well-being, and she sees social and emotional factors as indicators of potential problems elsewhere in their lives. She also notes the importance of students having basic early school experiences and technical skills for success in first grade and beyond, though her focus still seems to be on students' social and emotional well being:

> The goal is principally for the child to arrive at first grade prepared. It is not the same when the student did not go to preschool, because when they get to first grade, that student… its like its harder for them. The child that went to preschool has an easier time with what they are learning in first grade, because he already has an idea. It is like that child arrives more prepared."

She refers to this preparation in relation to the broader purposes of early childhood education:

> Because the ministry demands that we do a lot with the letters and phrases, they want that students read a few- two or three- phrases, that they can form the syllables. And, my idea is for third level (of preschool) is really to send them prepared. It is going to matter, because the truth is that first grade is not like preschool, it is not the same. Sometimes older students will stand at the door and watch me playing with the children. It's the truth that over there (referring to the first and second grade class) they have to learn to read. Here I can be more relaxed and can teach them the letters. But, over there no (referring to the primary class). They have to know to read and write. The first grade students have to do tests and those kinds of things and here I can play with them and it pains me to see a student that has not passed through preschool in first grade. If students are not prepared for first grade, they will feel badly. If a student were to go prepared, they won't feel it as much. That is how I feel.

Carmen's attention is clearly preparing students with both the technical and social-emotional skills to enter first grade, and to continue through primary school. In terms of quality teaching, she highlights the need for teachers to listen more closely to what students say in order to better understand their needs:

It doesn't seem true, but… sometimes we don't let the children talk, [but actually] it is important to let them. Before I start a theme, I ask them about the theme, 'what do you know about this?' So, then they start. And sometimes, and there is usually one, that starts to talk, and usually they make sense. And sometimes, they know concepts. Nothing less. They have some practical things in their minds. Imagine? Sometimes one actually learns from them.

In talking about characteristics of quality teaching, Carmen notes that students' being active in the classroom is the best way to promote cognitive development and learning. She is also talking specifically about the role that play has in helping children of this age:

For example sometimes students play in the learning corner, and they try to read, and they look at the pictures, and that way they develop their imagination. They can construct things out of materials and they use their imagination, which is good for their development.

One main challenge to instructional quality, that Carmen identifies, that was also the topic of a lengthy discussion during the focus group, and an issue as well for the primary school teachers was the relevance of parts of the curriculum. Carmen argues that the curriculum is "practically written for students in the city. Some of us, well … [are] close to the town, but others are not".   She further notes the lack of access to resources, including parents' previous educational experience and attainment, in rural areas compared urban areas and how that access influences to what students are exposed:

There are other communities that are even farther and are completely that… all the parents don't read or write. I think it must be difficult for that person; it is like it is hard for them to understand. And the kids are more humble. And children from the city are… its like they are more… I don't know, more active; they know about more things. They have access to things like television and other things, so they see more (more exposed). So I think maybe because the guide is based on their lives, or their realities. … For example, the police, or the health center or other community services, in

138

some communities those don't even exist. And for example, for us (referring to her community), the police and health center exists, but it is really far; how am I going to show the kids? They never see it. [I have to teach it] only through pictures. It's like the streetlights. We don't have streetlights. I think only here (Chinandega) there are streetlights. (laughter).

When asked how she deals with such disparities between what her students see on a daily basis and what the curriculum guide is asking her to teach, she comments, "Its that they have to have that knowledge, right? Because one day they are going to go to the city, they have to know, but it is difficult to teach when there are no examples that we can refer to in the students' daily lives. It is inconsistent with their reality." Carmen explains that she:

Seek[s] solutions with other teachers in the communities, but the truth is that the guide is not appropriate. [She doesn't] think there is an easy solution. They are never going to put a health center in the middle of the community! (laughter). We have to find solutions ourselves.

Carmen thus seeks ways to contextualize topics for her students, so that they can connect what they are learning with their realities:

It depends on the circumstances, when we get to the theme, for example, the modes of transportation, that you saw… [They] have to know what we are talking about, so we have to go to what really exists in the community where we live. That is why I mentioned to you about the helicopters… At the least in my community, there are no helicopters[40]. But we try to tell them what are the modes of transportation. Then we go to reality, so they can see what is really there (laughing).

Carmen's classroom can be described in a similar way to the teachers in the preceding case studies in terms of the stimulating environment of the classroom. There were students' drawings and other work displayed on the walls, as well as

---

[40] This was a topic of conversation between Carmen and I during the walk through the community with students. Helicopters are one of the modes of transportation that the guide suggests teachers present.

posters with the alphabet, numbers, etc. There were four learning corners (math, science/nature, civic education, reading and writing, and el *rincon de mis trabajos* (corner where student work is displayed). There were some distinguishing characteristics that made this unmistakably an early childhood education classroom; these included small plastic chairs and tables and posters that were all hung very low on the wall so as to be at student's eye level. There was at times more open space because as activities changed, the students seating arrangement changed and the chairs/tables were moved often.

As I arrived Carmen was reading a story to students who were gathered in a cluster very close to the center of the room. As she read "*El Perro Policía*" (The Police Dog), she showed students the illustrations, asked them to make observations and predictions about the story based on the pictures. The students seemed very engaged in the story. The following is a short snippet during this introductory activity to give a sense of how Carmen was questioning students. The storyline involved a group of 6 baby dogs that were stolen and were trying to escape:

> Carmen: Whom were they going to rescue? They are going to rescue whom?
> Students: The dogs!
> Carmen: What were to happen if they were to be seen?
> Student A: They would be seen.
> Student B: They would get caught.
> Student C: That would be bad.
> Carmen: So what did they do? They went silently, in silence. Then they were able to get the keys from the bad guy. So what happened (pointing to the illustrations)?
> A few students: They escaped (referring to the picture)
> Student C: They got away. They got away from the bad guy.

Using this similar of questioning, Carmen continued with the story and transitioned to the theme for the day: modes of transportation. It is this activity to which Carmen refers in the above section. The modes of transportation were first presented on a poster to the whole group of students, whose seating arrangement had changed to a large U- shaped row of chairs. She first presented the modes of transportation on a poster titled "On Land" (*terrestre*), that had pictures of a taxi, a bus, a horse drawn cart, a motorcycle and a bicycle. As she presented the poster she asked students (for each mode of transportation) to identify the pictures. She asked students if they have used each mode of transportation. Students then took turns sharing experiences of having ridden a taxi or a bus; a few expressed their parents owning a motorcycle, and most seemed to say that they (parents) had a bicycle. The next two posters, "Aquatic" and "In the Air" modes of transportation were presented slightly differently. Carmen walked slowly around the U of students and presented the posters, one showing a boat and a ship and the other showing a helicopter and a plane, and asked students individually to identify the pictures. Throughout this exercise, students seemed engaged and were talking about their experiences or about what they knew about the modes of transport. She concluded this activity by going through each mode of transportation again and asking students to identify it. Next she gathers students and tells them they will do a "*caminata por la comunidad*" (a walk through the community). I accompanied Carmen and her students on the walk through their community. During the walk Carmen asked students to identify different modes of transportation that they encountered. She kept referring back to the theme of the modes of transportation and encouraged them to be observant to

what they were seeing. During the walk, students individually called out the modes

of transportation (bicycle, cart and horse, our own feet). After coming back

approximately a half an hour later, students spent some time drawing various modes

of transportation they encountered on their walk. As they were drawing, Carmen

walked around and attended to students' individual needs and questions. As students

finished, they taped their pictures on the wall in the *rincón de mi trabajo* (student

work corner). The students who finished first, went to work independently in the

"*rincón de lectoescritura*" (learning corner for reading and writing), where they

looked through books or continued to color and draw.

This example is meant to highlight what I observed in Carmen's class, but is

also an example of how she puts into context elements of curriculum that are not

written with rural communities in mind. During the interview, I asked Carmen in

what other ways she tried to put new topics in context. She uses community walks to

teach other topics as well:

> When we teach the colors, or shapes. I take them out and ask them "what
> color is Fulanito's house? What shape is it? What size? Which one is taller?
> These [walks] are also important for the theme of the community and the
> community services. This is all in the *guía multinivel* (the preschool
> curriculum guide for the three levels of preschool). This is why I am so
> certain that they do not have in mind our communities.

She adds:

> But when I do geometric shapes, I do that in class. I use concrete materials
> and the learning corners. They can tell me the shapes that are in the letters, or
> for example, the door of the classroom. I don't take them out for that. But at
> the same time, the guide does not say 'go take them on a walk'. We decide
> and we do it so that what they learn is more real to them. When we teach the
> numbers we use examples like bring me two rocks or flowers. We are
> outside, but we are not necessarily walking through the community. And we
> use the learning corners.

She reiterates the results for learning that she wants to see in students and emphasizes relevance of material to students' lives: "it is more to facilitate their learning. Like that it is easier to learn because they are moving, observing… its just more real." She further notes that the learning corners offer students a space to manipulate materials and concrete objects:

> [The students] sometimes use the learning corners during recess. It is really up to them during that time. Sometimes they get enticed and sometimes during teaching activities I have them use the learning corner. Also for math, there are concrete objects that are in the learning corner and those always call students attention.

She elaborates on how concrete objects "actually helps [students] learn because they can manipulate the [them]. It is a great way for them to learn in math. It reinforces what they are learning. … They are entertained, and they are learning". I observed the students working in the learning corner. Individuals went on their own interest. They seemed well aware of how to use materials and how to respectfully play. I observed students trying to read, playing with dolls, and drawing and coloring using the materials from the reading and writing learning corner.

In general, Carmen seems to be satisfied with her work. While other teachers note the difficulties about working with such young children, she feels at home and most comfortable with her preschool class. Carmen states:

> The primary teacher (in the same school) told me that she knows she doesn't have that kind of patience, like me with the younger ones. [She says] 'I just couldn't do preschool. I can do the other grades, but not preschool, not with those little ones. You have to have so much patience.' But I think that, if they told me that I would have to do second grade for example, I think that it would be more difficult. It is that we get accustomed, you see? And [the students] are used to each other and me also. I have students that are now in third and fourth grade, and they come and see me and are always happy to see me.

Factors Informing Carmen's Practice

<u>Save the Children</u>

Carmen was asked to join the Save program while she was still teaching in her mother's community preschool. Her daughter was of preschool age. Her teacher education began with learning from her mother and on-the-job, as well as from Save. Save has provided support for her continued teacher education in the Normal, as advocates for her admission: "I was selected to attend the Normal, with [Save's] help. [Carlos[41]] helped me a lot; he went and spoke to the person from the MINED so they would select me for entrance [into la Normal]". She notes other personal benefits that she has experienced from having worked with Save for so long:

> I was a volunteer teacher at the beginning, but I wasn't receiving any help or support. I didn't even ask for it, but they (Save) have helped me a lot in my personal life, [especially] to elaborate my understanding on the purpose that preschool serves. I now feel like I am doing something good for the students. [Regarding my personal life], my economic situation has improved, and so I am able to offer my daughter much more than I ever had.

The work with Save has also formed the foundation on which she builds as she attends the Normal School: "I know that now that I am attending the Normal School, I feel that it helps me. I think that if I had entered before receiving all these workshops, it would have been much more difficult to understand the things that I am learning there. I have learned much of it here."

Carmen also sees that her students have benefited from the influence of Save as she has changed her practice to be more attentive to them:

---

[41] Save the Children field staff.

I have received many workshops here with Save, and I have acquired a lot of knowledge about how to manage the children. At the beginning I really didn't know much. Now the students really enjoy being in class. It is because I have learned games, songs, dynamic activities and the children love it… I feel like I have also understood better how they can learn best.

She adds, "Most of all really, they have given us more activities. Most of the activities that I knew to use were poor… very dry for young children."

Carmen also notes that what she has learned about the learning corners, she has learned from Save. This echoes the primary school teachers in the notion that the curriculum guides refer to learning corners, but do not describe how to use them:

The learning corners are in the guide. We have to have certain learning corners. But it does not tell us how to use them. They never say '*this* is a learning corner' or 'this is how it can be used', and 'it can be used to teach this [particular topic]…' What is so important about having a learning corner if you don't know how to use it with students? Just to have one? No.

She also credits Save with teaching her how to manage the students; she "couldn't manage what was going on before [she] started working with Save".

I asked teachers during the focus group what they thought was the most important insight they learned from Save. Carmen focuses on the basic technical strategies for teaching preschool students, and a foundational knowledge about how students at this developmental level learn:

Before I used to read books to them standing up, for example, instead of sitting down… with all the posters at my eye-level, rather than the students' (everyone in the focus group laughs). But it is really important, so that they can see the pictures. It draws their attention. And before also I used to say 'we are going to read *La Caperusita Roja* (Little Red Riding Hood).' I didn't wait for students to be involved. I didn't ask them anything. I didn't used to focus on asking them questions and letting them develop their imagination. I didn't take into account their opinions. Now I ask them for example 'what do you think the title of the story is?' And they start to imagine what it might be called. They might probably say 'its called 'the Little Girl', because they see a little girl in the picture. Or maybe the might say the 'Bad Wolf', but it doesn't matter, because they are using their

> imagination. Then I read the story so that they can find out really what it is
> about.

She adds in terms of content "reading and writing basics and math basics are the most

important. They will need those for first grade."

Carmen further describes the kind of support that she receives from Save in

her classroom:

> Well, in my case… I feel more secure when they come. At the beginning I
> was very nervous, and I was just starting, but now no. I only feel supported
> when they come to my class because when the representative from the
> ministry comes, sometimes it is like they are very critical, not like they like
> what [Save] are doing. It is like its (her teaching) never good. But now, they
> have changed *técnicos* (field staff), but before there was a woman… I always
> thought that at least one time, [she would evaluate] me as good, but it never
> happened. She even corrected me on my handwriting! (laughs) Can you
> believe it? So, I used to feel pretty bad. I used to never like it when the she
> came. When I knew that she was coming, I always knew it would be negative
> feedback. And, the support that I get from Save… it is like they help you. It
> is constructive. And, if I am having difficulty with something, they help.
> They orient you; they explain how to implement things in your classroom.
> And, they never talk badly. At least I've never heard them talk badly. Never
> have I ever heard someone from RICA say something bad, or heard 'Carmen,
> this is not right', 'this doesn't work'. No.

In the focus group Carmen elaborates on the kinds of interactions she experiences

while working with the Save field staff.

> It is a dialogue. What happens is that they give one confidence, at least most
> times. I have never dared to tell a *técnica* (MINED field staff), 'look this is
> something that I don't understand'. But with [Francisco] I tell him right
> away. But, I can do that because he gives me confidence, and she sees me
> like a fly (whole group laughter).

She goes on to highlight the traditional teaching practices to which Save promotes an

alternative:

> I see them (Save) like a light. I sometimes think that classrooms before
> (thinking years back), there wasn't any *ambientación de aula* (welcoming and
> stimulating classroom environment), not one poster. It was monotonous.

146

> There they would give the word during class. It was like isolated, with nothing. And the teacher, there alone with a ruler, and the students are all sitting there straight and intimidated. They didn't learn with love. They learned by force. That was the way to learn then.

I will refer to this notion (of how education used to be) later in this section when the discussion turns to parents and their personal education histories and opinions.

Parents

As has been illustrated in the previous case studies, teachers see parents' primary role as ensuring students' attendance in school. This is a challenge for primary school teachers because attending school competes with families' need for students to work. In preschool, the concerns are slightly different. Teachers worry about little support at home, and as one teacher in the focus group noted: "sometimes [the students] need individual help. Like sometimes, you know in the home they don't get the attention. They only get what they are learning in the preschool, but the parents sometimes don't follow up". However, they also note important emotional and social consequences as well. Earlier Carmen referred to students arriving at school and being sad and isolated. She states that when students do not regularly come to school, they "don't show much interest in things". She continues that for students that do attend regularly, "its like it takes away some of the fear and shyness of relating to other children. They can make more friends, and participate more." The impact that Carmen feels preschool has on students is also evident in her sentiments regarding preparation for first grade that was discussed in the earlier section. Carmen thus notes how important it is for parents to understand what is happening in the preschool:

Also, sometimes in the communities, there are many people that don't know how to read or write. They think… the first thing they say is "I don't read or write, and I am surviving. So, why do they have to read and write?" It is not important. Or, rather, they don't make it important. They say sometimes, that the child is only going to play in the preschool, and they don't understand through playing, children learn.

This issue was unpacked further in the focus group, where teachers cited a difference in philosophies about how children learn best between what teachers are trying to do and what parents think they should do. Teachers brought up how education used to be "before" and described an education based on behavior management and "learning by force" or "*a golpe*". They reminisced about their schooling experiences and shared stories about their teachers using wooden sticks to beat their hands, or being punished by having to stand on one foot for a long periods of time. Carmen recounts one instance where a parent encouraged her to "hit the kid, hit him, [and that she didn't] need to ask his permission to hit the kid." Other teachers affirmed having been told the same by parents of their students. Another teacher adds that it is due to "the problem with the parents. That is how things were taught before. Now they don't do the same kind of thing, but parents think education was better before. Carmen continues to highlight the problem of parents' differing philosophies:

> He is the father, and one can't really take away that right of the father to talk. But, the father can say what he wants, but I know that I am not going to hit a kid. Because the truth is he doesn't know how to control the child in this own house. That is the way it is. And one does feel bad anyway if the parent is going to tell that to the teacher.

Carmen further explains the consequential effects of poor treatment of children:

> So, at the least, when I started, I wasn't sure… It is not that I ever hit the children, but I know I didn't pay enough attention [to them]. It was like amidst all the knowledge, like… here, when they give the workshops about

how to read the children, how to treat them, I have realized that when the children are badly treated, like maybe [parents] yell at him/her, then it is more difficult to control him/her. And, if they are treated well, he/she is respected, its like the child has more respect for the teacher than the parent! That parent, when they hit him or yell at him, then they (the child) will also be like that. If in school, we don't yell at him/her, or hit him/her, maybe they won't end up like that. … And maybe it is because the parents themselves were treated like that. But I think that maybe if there was something that made them (parents) more conscious, like to equip them, to tell them that there is another way to raise their children, then I think it would be different. But, it is almost like they don't have the know-how, and so don't know another way.

Addressing this kind of challenge underlines the importance the teacher being in communication with parents. Carmen, like other teachers takes this on as part of her work:

> I feel like at times, some people do it (have parent meetings/be in touch with parents) because the MECD suggests we do that. However, I think… at least if a student does not arrive, it is in my mind that I have to go a talk to the mother, on my own initiative (mi propia voluntad), because I feel like I want that child to come. I know how important it is, and I know exactly which parents know how important preschool is, because, really everyone knows… the truth is that some, don't take that reality as important. But everyone knows because everyone (all the teachers) has given parent meetings. The meetings parents can attend to are led by the MINED, or at least they give us the themes and then RICA teaches us how to work with those themes (with parents). But, I think that even if they didn't do that, we (teachers) should still do it (still have parent meetings to tell them what the importance of preschool is), even if it is voluntarily.

When asked particularly about her relationship with parents and if she believes that things improve when she communicates with them and how, Carmen responds:

> Relating to the relationship between *educadora* (preschool teacher) and the parent… it is like there is better attendance from that child, more participation and also it is like you (herself) feel more support because when the parent doesn't send the child, it is like I don't have that support. And for the child, there are some children, who themselves say [why their parents did not send them], when I ask them, for example, 'why didn't you come yesterday?' So, one knows. You can tell sometimes because of [what children say] also because through just [asking the student] you can reach the parent, because you know which parent is not conscious of their child's education.

149

Local Level Ministry of Education

The conversation that surrounded the Ministry of Education was not surprising given what the primary school teachers felt regarding classroom visits from MINED officials. Carmen describes a general sentiment regarding the MINED's classroom visits:

> It is like they (MINED) see one in a bad way. It is like since I am an *educadora* (preschool teacher), I am less. Because the truth is that happens a lot (others in the focus group agree/conquer), from the part of the ministry of education, but not from RICA. We are less than the *maestros* (primary school teachers).

The preschool teachers in the focus group discussed the MINED only in terms of feeling marginalized and in comparison to the type of support they feel from Save the Children. While the group seemed to be in consensus, Carmen articulates their collective perspective:

> In the MINED sometimes that (responding to a comment about teachers feeling left out) happens. They don't invite *educadoras* (preschool teachers) to celebrate Teacher Appreciation Day. I only got invited after they formalized my preschool, and other *educadoras* do not get invited. The ministry thinks that the early childhood education is not that important; it is just not that important for them.

Other teachers in the focus group agree with the sentiment and the experience. Carmen continues:

> I have noticed that the *educadoras comunitarios* (teachers of community preschools) work a lot with the students. They work hard. And there is a difference when a preschool is not formalized. At the beginning when I was *comunitaria*, they didn't even take me into account. I didn't even get invited to the meetings. Now they do invite me and I have a colleague; she is at La Normal with me, but they have not formalized her preschool yet, and she doesn't get invited to anything going on at the ministry. For Teacher

Appreciation Day, I got invited (to the celebration) and she did not. Actually most of the other preschool teachers were not invited either. I try to tell them not to feel badly. I felt bad at the beginning and still sometimes, because sometimes they (other *educadoras*) ask me 'is there a meeting', or 'are we going to celebrate Teacher Day?' It is like they feel outside. I know they are not getting invited to these sorts of things, *I* also feel bad.

Chapter 10: Cross-Case Analysis

In this chapter, I discuss each of the research questions in light of data presented in each teacher case. I will identify the similarities in the ideas and practices of teachers and the individual nuances embedded in those ideas and practices. Special attention is paid to the broad themes that were pulled out during data analysis. For Research Questions 1 and 2, I refer to pieces of data that were presented in each case in order to highlight differences and similarities across teachers.

Research Question 3 is addressed at the end of this chapter. In order to discuss how teachers' ideas and practices align with national policy, I draw on the major themes represented in policy (students' & teachers' roles and the role of parents) as they were highlighted in the Policy Analysis in Chapter 5, as a comparison point for the conceptions and practices discussed in the previous sections.

Ultimately I will argue that while at a rhetorical level, there is agreement on what good teaching is and is not, underlying ideas regarding how and what students learn vary. Instructional policy is therefore reflected in diverse ways. Lastly, the role of parents and local ministry officials, while influential to what goes on in classrooms, illustrate inconsistencies between what policy has sought to do and what seems to happen in practice.

Research Question 1: How do teachers conceptualize quality education?

Evidence for teachers' conceptions of quality are grouped into two themes: the role of students and the role of the teacher in an education of good quality. There are embedded ideas about how students learn and implications for teachers and teaching, which will be discussed within the sections.

Students' Role in Education

There was universal agreement from all the teachers, affirmed in the focus group, that an education of good quality first and foremost denotes an "active role" for the student in their own education. The case study teachers used similar language as the larger group of teachers and Save the Children field staff and all four teachers agreed that students should be "actively involved", and "participate" or "learn by doing" in their own education. This is not surprising, especially since much of Save the Children's work reinforces "active learning" methodologies and uses similar terminology, and it is not likely that any teachers would believe students should be *other* than active in their education. It was also universally accepted, though more strongly for some than others, that students being "active" was, to use Pia's words, a way to promote students' "motivation to come to school everyday". This basic idea of the role students should have in education cuts across all four cases.

More specifically, and to unpack exactly what an "active student role" means and its function in promoting student learning and other outcomes, I turn to each teacher's conceptualization of that role. Among the case study teachers, there were

nuanced variations in how they thought about the meanings and purposes of an "active" student role. Consider each teacher in turn. In Ines' case, students talking, interacting and manipulating concrete objects are elements of that active role. She articulates students knowing how to discuss and question are important parts of student learning, where she seems to focus heavily. The rhetorical question, in reference to students discussing and questioning, of "otherwise how are they going to learn?" suggests the obvious utility of discussing and questioning skills for student learning. Her focus on student learning in terms of higher order cognitive skills is evident as she notes the importance of tasks of students "think[ing], analyz[ing], and reflect[ing] about their work". Additionally Ines refers, on a few occasions, to the important "interaction between the student and the teacher". Together, a focus on higher order cognitive exercises and a focus on student interactions imply a more constructivist-oriented sense of how learning should happen. The active student in this respect is "active" in the sense that he/she is actively constructing understanding. Ines seems to try to enact these conceptions of "active" in her practice. Students in her classroom were observed using the learning corners in their own time. Her questioning and involvement of student ideas and opinions during the "L" lesson is one example of how she promotes an active student role. In particular, this example demonstrates how Ines privileges students' ideas, and how she attempts to enable students to make connections between what is being learned and their everyday lives, as well as an example of the teacher-student interactions that occur in her classroom. In addition, the questioning activity, where she engaged students in asking their own questions and thinking about elements of the story not written in the text is an

example of an attempt to promote the kind of higher order cognitive skills she mentioned in the interview. Together the classroom examples help communicate the active role that students have in Ines' classroom.

Pia, in contrast, emphasizes motivation and recognizes student motivation as the important purpose of an active student role. Pia emphasizes students' outcomes of learning the curriculum and basic literacy skills. Her main emphasis is on students "assimilating the contents" that are taught by the teacher. She highlights the need to do "other activities with the same content" if they don't learn it the first time. Evidence from Pia's classroom, for instance the way she brings individual students to the board to read or solve a math problem, underlines the notion of students' mastering the syllable, or arithmetic operation being taught. Pia's notion of an "active" student seems to be about student behavior and motivation, rather than related to a learning process. As Pia discusses students' active role, she articulates what students *should* do in an idealized conception of quality teaching and learning. She cites students' interest in being involved as evidence that she has transformed her teaching (from her previous "boring" practice). In Pia's classroom an active student role seems to the shape of transition activities and in other ways that are not about teaching content, or in students being attentively engaged in the activity. The substance of the activity- the specific *what* that students are learning - does not appear to be an issue for Pia. She uses a game or song (with physical movement) when she realizes she does not have the attention of the class, to regain attention and to motivate students before moving on. That is, for classroom management purposes and to regain students' attention. Even as Pia describes students' active role, it is not

155

clear that she associates that role with enhancing learning, and similarly that students'
motivation to come to school is not derived out of their interest to engage in learning
processes, rather a separate interest in coming to school.

Carolina, in a similar way to Pia, seems to envision an "active" role for
students as ultimately resulting in their motivation to continue coming to school. For
Carolina, it also signifies their engagement with the activity throughout the period of
the class, so as to not have "dead time"- their active involvement in the assigned
activity. Carolina adds that she wants students to "learn with love and enthusiasm"
the curriculum, with the purpose of passing to the next grade. In her classroom,
students' "active role" is most evident with first grade, where an activity, "The Magic
Tree", involves students coming to the board and identifying syllables from the word
on the back of a card. However, in another activity, Carolina engages second grade
students in answering questions about a passage she presented in a lesson on the
concept of a paragraph. It seems like there might have been an attempt to make
students' draw on higher order skills like predicting or questioning, but the kinds of
questions she posed had clear and correct answers that could be drawn directly from
the text, not emphasizing the skills that might have been necessary to pose questions
for which answers were not directly stated in the text. For second and third grade,
this may mean students are involved in completing the assignment. Interestingly, she
has an orientation around teaching students values, which was evidenced in her civic
education.

Lastly Carmen, who teaches preschool, sees students' active role as playing,
using their imagination and connecting what they are learning to their lives. She

emphasizes that children learn playing, and using the learning corners. She also reiterates student interactions and the importance of students being given opportunities to talk. She recognizes that expectation to be a reasonable one since students "make sense… sometimes know concepts, …and have practical things in their minds". She also notes that when students are entertained with activities or objects that capture their attention, they will be learning. Carmen reiterates that it is "easier to learn because they are moving, observing... its just more real". She is very attentive to students' developmental stage and the specific needs of that particular age. The outcomes she is concerned with are equally on developing the skills necessary for first grade, as they are on students' socio-emotional development. This is evident when she talks about situations when students come in and seem sad or isolated. It is her intention to engage those students such that they want to come to school and that they enter first grade cognitively and emotionally prepared. Her ideas about students' active role are brought to life through the story she read "The Police Dog", where she asks students to share their opinions and observations of the pictures and predictions for the outcomes.

In both Pia and Carolina's cases, there was little evidence that students' active role, was reflective of a *process* of learning. Rather learning is evidenced in students' abilities to read or solve problems correctly, and students' active involvement seems to be evidenced by students seeming interested, happy or engaged in the activity. By contrast Ines and Carmen seemed to embed agendas regarding student learning in the purpose for students' active role. Both seemed to see the active role for students as evidenced in their participation in activities requiring engagement in complex

cognitive tasks and involving social interactions (usually with the teacher).
Interestingly, both saw the importance of students' opportunities for articulating their
thinking and both seemed to believe that students could be reasonably expected to
engage in more demanding intellectual endeavors in the classroom.

Teachers' Role

Within the discussion on how teachers conceptualize quality, an active role for
students is coupled with the important role that teachers have in creating and
supporting that student role. For the case study teachers, it was evident that they
thought about "traditional" teaching as inconsistent with good quality instruction.
Rather, it was a comparison point; an idea of what teachers should *not* do or what
used to be done in the past. With the exception of Carolina, the other three case study
teachers articulated this explicitly. While Pia asserts that what was commonly used
was traditional teaching, where "all the initiative stays with the teacher", Ines paints a
more vivid picture of the same idea: "children are not receptors, that only write, that
have pages full, columns full of work… and the teacher knows everything". Again, it
is not surprising for the same reason previously stated, that STC explicitly tries to
challenge traditional teaching approaches. And again, there are nuances regarding
what this meant for particular teachers.

For Ines, teachers should "explore knowledge that children bring". She
explains that it is her job to take "ideas from what students say, and guide them in
answering". She is clear to explain that this is different than giving students the
answer. She conveys the sense that students should construct answers on their own
with guidance from the teacher. This invokes the notion of teacher as facilitator of

learning, and learning as a process, an idea that is reiterated as she reflects on the questioning activity as taking time for students to learn how to think and interact in ways they have not been asked to in the past.

Pia seems to have an orientation around students' learning skills for reading and writing. She sees the teachers' role as to ensure mastery of these skills, and notes that she knows she must do something different if students do not understand. This is emphasized in her classroom practice, where repetition and correct answers (to for example arithmetic problems or recognizing syllables) seem to be favored over discussion and other types of activities. While she talks a lot about student motivation, she does not discuss motivation in terms of what students do in classrooms, rather, that motivation serves primarily as a reason for students to keep coming to school. It is her focus to teach curriculum such that students are confident in what they know and she is "always look[ing] for more strategies so they can easier learn the content".

Carolina's notion of the teachers' role has a strong emphasis on love and caring for students. She points to her character and level of caring for her students as being essential to her practice and credits her religious beliefs as giving her a moral foundation to be able to do her job. She stresses that she "motivates [students] principally with [her] character". She is careful to not bring in a bad attitude into the classroom and sees her character as her main attribute for equipping her to give a quality education. She also suggests that the teacher needs to maintain "control" of the classroom at all times. She frames this in opposition to students participating: there should not be "dead time… *but* the teacher should have control at all times".

159

She refers to the notion of control later in her interview as well when talking about how she learned how to "dominate" her multigrade class. This is however not to say that her classroom appeared particularly strict or regimented, though there were very few classroom management issues in her class; in general class appeared to run smoothly. She is similar to Pia in the sense that she sees her main responsibility to teach curriculum and to impart values to her students. As noted in her civic education lesson, values including respect and caring for the country are addressed.

Carmen's idea about the role of the teacher is more as a facilitator, even in her preschool class. She also sees her role as a teacher as ensuring that students have positive experiences in education. She asserts that students should remember their experiences with preschool "fond[ly] … and with good memories". In her classroom, she often takes her students into the community so that they can practice a theme that they are learning. She emphasizes that this kind of activity "makes it real" for students. In her classroom, students can be observed engaged in activities as a whole group, but individuals are given opportunities - and indeed use them - to play or work independently in the learning corner. It is evident that this is a regular part of their school experiences since they knew well how to use and take care of the materials and resources in the learning corner.

Discussion

One thing that seems to emerge here are distinct ideas about students, their attributes, how they learn, and the nature of knowledge. Ines and Carmen seem to rely on notions that students are reasonable, reasoning, knowledgeable beings. Indeed both emphasized the need for teachers to listen carefully to students because of the possibility of misreading, misinterpreting, or misunderstanding how and what

students are thinking, feeling or learning. It is revealing that these two teachers do not assume to understand students, and surprising in Carmen's case, since her students are only at preschool age. It should be noted that Carmen even stated that we (teachers) "actually learn from [students]". There also seems to be a sense on the part of these two teachers that students need to learn in social settings. The importance of allowing students to talk and promoting questioning (in Ines's case), and thinking predicting skills (in Carmen's case) suggest a sense that students verbalizing their thoughts and ideas is an important part of the learning process. This is evidenced in their interviews, but also in their classroom practices. Their classrooms, in general, were louder, and more *inter*active in comparison with Pia and Carolina. Pia and Carolina does not emphasize talking or interacting as an important part, even in terms of student engagement. Noise in their classrooms was due to student off-task behavior rather than expected as a part of students being on task, as in both Ines's and Carmen's classrooms. They both place heavy emphasis on the curriculum, and in Carolina's case in particular, do not make modifications in the ways that Ines does. For example, Ines reports that she modifies curriculum to make concepts more relevant for rural learners. Their attention is on students learning the basics of reading and writing, and they seem to treat material as fixed, to be mastered by students.

It is also interesting to note that in interviews and in responding to questions of "what is an education of good quality to you?" Ines and Carmen often spoke in terms of an *ideal* during their interviews, "teachers should …". Pia and Carolina, on the other hand, most frequently referenced what they personally do in their

classrooms. This distinction might suggest that in Ines and Carmen's cases, they envision an ideal classroom with particular characteristics of teacher and students, to which they strive. In contrast, Pia and Carolina seem to draw on their own teaching as they describe how they think about quality education. The elements that they personally put into practice *are* quality education. I do not, however, suggest that any teacher thinks she is *not* providing a quality education, and in fact all four case study teachers were judged as good and effective teachers by Save the Children field staff. This is important in the sense that while Ines and Carmen may strive toward this ideal, they do not seem to assume their teaching to be unproblematic or lacking space for improvement. Ines's reflection on the challenges of promoting questioning is an example.

Research Question 2: What informs teachers' ideas and practices?

Factors that inform teachers' ideas and practices are grouped here into two broad categories: the classroom based factor of teaching students at very different levels and external factors that exert influence on how teachers think and enact their teaching (parents, the ministry, and Save the Children). It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list of factors that inform teachers' practice; rather these are the main themes that emerged from the interviews and focus groups.

Differing Levels of Students in the Same Class

A challenge for teachers that influences what and how they do what they do in classrooms regards having to teach a group of students with varying levels- ages,

grades, or levels of understanding. This happens via two ways: as a characteristic of a multigrade teaching setting and as a result of high absenteeism[42]. I will start with the challenge of multigrade teaching, which arose with both Ines and Carolina, who teach combinations of first, second and third grades.

One big and understandable challenge for Ines and Carolina is the issue of not being able to directly attend to each group at all times. They note the particular difficulty for the younger grades since, to use Ines's words, first and second "are still dependent on the teacher… it is 'teacher help me, teacher look at this, look here'". Carolina adds that they finish activities quickly and there is always the threat of "tiempo muerto" (dead time). For this reason, one thing she strives for is to keep students occupied at all times. This is why she is "constantly checking on all the groups at the same time". Ines and Carolina have different ways of coping with this situation during their class. Ines elicits the help of her third grade students in making materials and helping her manage what is going on with younger students. She notes, "Fridays usually, they spend some time creating classroom materials for the following week, for all the classes" and that doing this actually makes students feel "more responsible". She also reports using paired arrangements with older and younger students. In doing this, she is able to engage them in the "teaching *and* learning". Using this premise, she rationalizes using third grade students in helping her with teaching responsibilities. Carolina actually attends to multiple groups at the same time. During a classroom visit, for example, I observed her working with first grade

---

[42] Teachers cited absenteeism as the primary cause of students being at different levels of understanding. They did not include the effects of individual styles of learning or problems with learning. These factors, while potentially contributing to students' differing levels of understanding, where absent in the discussion.

(correcting their math problems) as they were taking turns working through arithmetic problems on the board, while dictating vocabulary to students in third grade on their civic education lesson. This allows Carolina to divide her attention between both groups.

Carolina and Ines both stay after school two or three times a week to give extra attention to students that have fallen behind because of poor attendance in school. This segues into the other reason that contributes to teachers having to contend with students at differing levels, high rates of student absenteeism. In Carolina and Ines's case, they must attend to this issue in addition to the challenges of multigrade teaching. Absenteeism is also a problem for Pia, who teaches first grade. She describes the "constant fight" for students who have or consistently miss class. During a class that I observed, the class was split into two groups: the on-level students, and the 7 who were on a completely different topic because they had been absent. She recounts that "3 who [came to school for the first time] two or three weeks into the semester, and didn't come again until the observation day", a total length of time of about 2 months. Her coping mechanism of conducting class in two groups resembles more a multigrade than pure grade class. One other mechanism that I observe Pia using is to try to catch students up is staying in and working with individual students during recess.

One other factor that Pia brings up is the issue of whether her first graders had attended preschool. She agrees with Carmen's ideas about the importance of preschool and notices a big difference between the students that attended preschool, and those that did not. She notes, "[students] can adapt to being in school. That is

164

when they learn the importance of coming to class and they'll know, from having done it before how to draw a line. They will know what is addition, subtraction, what is a curve and what is a square and what is round." The importance of this foundational knowledge echoes Carmen's ideas about the importance for students to attend preschool- for learning the cognitive and social skills necessary for success in primary school. Carmen does not bring up any issue of varying student levels as a challenge. Her ideas about students attending preschool are illuminated as she discusses parents' role, an influencing factor that will be addressed next.

Parents' Key Role

Among the factors that inform the ways that teachers think and teach is the crucial role that parents play in supporting what goes on in the school. Regarding parents, there is consensus about the role that parents should play in providing support for learning and in general, school success. Generally, teachers seem to agree that parents and teachers play dual roles in the endeavor of ensuring an education of good quality, each party having an important responsibility. As Ines notes, "parents should stay in contact with teachers, just as teachers should with parents". She explains that if parents do not take on the role they need to, "the entire role is played by the teacher".

One way that the teachers perceive parents demonstrating support for education is to physically contribute either directly in the classroom or through providing other support in the way of construction or other maintenance of the classroom or school. In Pia's case, a mother of one of her students cleans up the classroom daily, and in other cases parents have contributed to the maintenance of the

school premises and the construction of playgrounds, latrines, etc. More specifically regarding instruction, Ines noted she has "two or three parents that show up sometimes (in class)… they say 'teacher look, I can be with this grade and watch them'." As observed in one of Ines' lessons, a mother of one of the students was monitoring first grade students as they worked on an assignment independently. She did not do any teaching, only attended to questions, quelled classroom management issues, and made sure that students were on task. The presence of this mother enabled Ines to more comfortably leave first grade students in order to attend to the other groups.

The most important way that parents can support what teachers do in the classroom is to ensure the regular attendance of his/her child, a fact that is reiterated in all the cases and with all the focus group participants. There is no discrepancy on this point. However, when parents face difficulties in taking on that responsibility, the burden falls on teachers who feel that they do not have a choice but to continually engage in the constant fight[43] to make sure students are learning what they are supposed to be learning. Two main factors seem to contribute to parents' capacities for sending students to school, parents' economic resources and parents' education levels.

All the case study teachers noted parents' economic resources as fundamental to their decisions about whether to send students or not. Ines pointed out that parents sometimes cannot buy school supplies, and therefore do not send their students to school. Ines would rather those students attend school anyway, because their absence

---

[43] Both Pia and Carolina referred to the "constant fight" to attend to students that have fallen behind due to poor attendance.

166

"complicates things for [her]". Carolina brings up the need for some parents to emigrate to find work and even points to the general long hours that some parents need to work, a point that is affirmed by Carmen. Pia highlights another factor that challenges families in the *campo*[44]: "there is the custom that some parents prefer for their children to stay to watch the house, or working, and not send them to school."

Still another factor that influences the kind of support that parents can provide is their education levels. The level of parents' education is influential in two ways according to the case study teachers. First, parents sometimes cannot help their children with homework because "they just don't know". They are not able to "follow up", and as Carmen notes, children "don't get the attention." Pia offers additional insight by pointing to the differences in philosophies that parents have regarding why students should (or should not) attend preschool. She notes, parents sometimes "don't send their children to preschool, because they say 'oh, they just go to play, so why am I going to send them'"? Better that they stay and help around [the house]." Carmen further explains that since parents sometimes do not read and write, they think "I am surviving, so why do they have to read and write?" However she also adds how parents even sometimes disagree with teachers in the way that education should look like, some even advocating for hitting the children in order to discipline them. She posits that "maybe it is because they themselves were treated like that". She suggests more knowledge might help make parents "more conscious" about alternative ways to raise their children; "it is like they don't have the know-how and so don't know another way."

---

[44] Rural areas

Both Ines and Carolina note that support for children's education is more important and will have a stronger impact for younger- first grade- students. Pia and Carmen echo the notion with regard to preschool, which is seen as the "fundamental base for first grade." And, in Carolina's case in particular, she was active in mobilizing parents of first grade, recognizing the importance of students' success in first grade for later successes throughout primary school. She, on her own initiative, decided to start a parents organization for first grade parents and explicitly elicit their help in ensuring children attend school.

Save the Children

Save the Children is another factor that the teachers report as influential to the ways they think and practice. There was clear and universal consensus about Save the Children's work and the effectiveness of their methods. All the teachers, including agreement in the focus groups, concur that Save the Children has provided them with valuable new knowledge regarding methodologies and strategies on how students learn, and regarding students' needs at particular developmental stages. In addition, teachers noted the confidence that results from their work with individual teachers during visits to classrooms

Ines describes how she only has experienced teaching 5th grades and has had to learn how to approach first grade students. The case study teachers described Save the Children as "like a light", as having "enriched [their] knowledge and abilities". Pia stated that she, after working with Save the Children felt "actualized as a teacher". In particular, they provide teachers with understandings of how to develop new materials using locally available resources and provide a bank of strategies and

168

activities (use of songs, stories, games and other dynamic activities) to help teachers implement active learning methodologies. Additionally, Save the Children has taught teachers exactly how to put the learning corners to use. All the case study teachers reported all or some of the aforementioned as effects Save the Children has had on their teaching. All the classrooms observed have materials that had been constructed at workshops, though the use of the learning corners was only observed in two out of the four teachers. Nearly all of them also expressed that their teaching prior to working with Save as "boring." Pia notes that Save the Children helped her come away from a very traditional approach to teaching; away from "the routine" and "[has] change[d] the way [she] think[s] about her teaching." Further, teachers note that the ways that Save conducts classroom visits and technical support is "constructive" and through a "dialogue" works with teachers to figure out what works and what doesn't work. This, they articulated, has helped them build confidence and a sense of self-efficacy about their teaching. As Carmen puts it, Save makes her feel "secure." Ines further notes that when a field staff member comes to visit, that they are "flexible" and "respectful of the students and the teacher". Lastly, Save has helped teachers' personal development. Carmen recounts how Save has helped her get into *La Normal*, and further notes that "it would have been much more difficult to understand the things [she] is learning there." She credits Save the Children with helping her become formalized subsequently influencing even her economic situation.

In practice, all teachers were observed using a Save activity or strategy. These include the classroom activities mentioned earlier in the previous chapters (Ines's questioning activity and the "Magic Tree"). More generally the songs and

games used in the classrooms (used both instructionally and non-instructionally in order to grab students' attention), and the stories were all ideas of Save. It is safe to say that there are elements of Save the Children (including the use of materials and the *aula letrada*) that are parts of teachers' daily and routine classroom practices.

Local Level Minstry of Education

The local level ministry representatives that supervise and evaluate teaching in the communities are seen as having ideas about teaching that differ with what teachers believe to be good teaching or as having approaches that undermine the role of the teacher. There was consensus on this note as well, and in most cases, teachers compared what the ministry does (technical support and professional development) to what Save the Children does. Carolina was the least vocal in expressing opinions regarding the Ministry's influence on her thinking and practices, though the other teachers had very strong opinions about the local ministry officials. Pia notes that the officials for the MINED are still traditional, that they have "not changed yet". She further describes this orientation as, "they only look for the students to be doing what they are supposed to be doing… they want them to be quiet and sit and have neat notebooks…." Ines adds to the sentiment that they come to see only what the teacher has done poorly and that the ministry only sees "one solution for everything." I interpret her to signify what Pia refers to as a very traditional orientation: a problem-solution, simplistic approach to teaching, with which she and other teachers disagree. However, additional to the ministry's orientation, what seems to be the biggest challenge with working with the ministry is their attitude and approach to giving technical classroom support. Ines notes that the ministry comes to "evaluate what

[teachers] do, but they don't value [their] work." Pia adds that they are "demoralizing." Carmen sheds light on a similar sentiment, however her experiences are dependent on her job as a preschool *educadora*. She and her colleagues express feeling marginalized completely by the ministry, especially if they are not "formalized." She confides that before she was licensed, she did not benefit from any ministry attention. Her colleagues at *La Normal* (who are not formalized yet) experience the same: they do not get notified about professional development workshops or invited for special celebrations like Teacher Appreciation Day. Carmen further comments that she would never tell the ministry official who comes to see her if she did not understand something; she wouldn't "dare." Her words, "she (the ministry official) sees me like a fly" and "since I am an *educadora*, I am less" are very telling.

Discussion

These factors: having to contend with students at varying levels of understanding and the roles of parents, Save the Children, and local level MINED, emerged from the data as the main influences on teachers' practice. They interact to produce local dynamics that frame teaching in each teachers' context. These local dynamics are relevant in that they represent factors that teachers believe constrain or enable, in various ways, how they provide good quality instruction.

The ways these local contextual factors play out, along with findings for Research Question 1 (at the beginning of this chapter) also point to various discrepancies and points of alignment between policy and practice. They also underlie a disconnect between the specific policy ideas the central MINED wants to promote and what is understood to be good teaching by local officials. These and

other main points are discussed in more depth in the following findings from Research Question 3.

Research Question 3: How are teachers' ideas and practices aligned with national policy?

In this section I discuss how the four case study teachers' ideas and practices presented here align with national Ministry of Education policy as reflected in the main policy documents presented in the Policy Analysis section of the Introduction to the Case Studies (Chapter 5). This is considered a different level of policy than the local level MINED that was discussed in the above sections. Local level ministry officials oversee very local processes that occur at the level of the classroom and school. In contrast, the ideas used here as comparison for teachers' ideas and practices are represented in national policy documents. They articulate instructional and other policy that communicate are the ideals of the national ministry.

Quality Teaching and Learning: the Roles of Student & Teacher

There is general agreement among teachers about the basics of what constitutes quality education. All 4 case study teachers, in consensus with other teachers in the focus groups, clearly envisioned quality education as involving an active student. This idea is also promoted by Save through ideas embedded in the teaching of active learning pedagogies. A few teachers, notably Pia and Ines, contrast quality education with traditional, teacher-centered teaching practices that require students' main activities to be sitting quietly and copying: an approach that emphasizes rote skills, consistent with the National Plan's call to "redefine the role of

the student" from passive to more active, participatory roles in learning" (MECD, 2001, p. 30). There are different emphases in teachers' notions of the purpose for an active student role and varying ways that this gets translated into practice. As evidenced in the case studies, different teachers' ideas and practices appeal to different aspects of policy. While all the case study teachers implement some elements of students' active role, these vary and reinforce different kinds of learning.

Ines and Carmen seemed to appeal more strongly to constructivist notions of how students should learn and participate in education conveyed in the Ministry's EFA plan (MECD, 2000). Their ideas and classroom practices reveal attention to students' individual voices and ideas. They both encourage students to make connections between what they are learning and their real lives, and what they already know. This is very evident in Ines's "L" lesson and in the way Carmen presents "The Police Dog". Both of these activities demonstrate students responding to questions that privilege their ideas and opinions over a predetermined answer or outcome, and reflect the General Law's identification of learning as a "creative process" (MECD, 2006a, p. 11) and of the "construction of relevant learning", (MECD, 2006a, p. 12). Similarly for both teachers, attention to students' engaging in complex tasks is evident in their ideas and classroom practices, which includes Ines' attempt at promoting questioning and Carmen's asking students to predict what was going on in the story. In both cases, elements of their teaching resemble the more process-oriented elements of learning reflected in policy. As specifically stated in the *Plan Nacional*, students in these classes are engaged in the kinds of endeavors policy implies as "participat[ing], observ[ing], investigat[ing], construct[ing] and

reconstruct[ing], on the basis of his/her previous experiences" (MECD, 2001, p. 30). Both teachers also seem attentive to the notion that students' enter the classroom with previous knowledge on which they attempt to build on, or at least appeal to.

Pia and Carolina have different orientations that are reflected in what they say and do in classrooms. In both cases, "active involvement" of students seems to be more about students being physically active and behaviorally engaged. Both also seem to reflect a commitment to teaching the curriculum and ensuring students' learning of its material and mastering skills. The focus on this outcome (over process), appeals more strongly to elements of policy that stress students' attainment of applicable skills and measurable outcomes, especially in reading, writing and arithmetic (MECD, 2001).

Carolina specifically and uniquely identifies values as part of the necessary knowledge children must have and is evidenced in the civic education activity cited earlier. The values of caring, love and respect for the country align with the specific values cited in the National Plan of "democracy… and civic responsibilities" (MECD, 2001, p. 11).

Carmen, the only preschool teacher among the case study teachers, is understandably particularly attentive to students' socio-emotional development, an aspect that is reinforced in the *Ley General* for preschool specifically. The law states the role of preschool education is to "align with [students'] physical, affective, and cognitive development…" (MECD, 2006a, p. 17). She seems to have the "*enfoque integral*" (focus on the whole child) articulated by the ministry, which is evident in

her attention to the skills and knowledge as well as the social-emotional preparation students must have to enter into first grade (MECD, 2006a, 2000).

<u>Parents' Key Role</u>

The four case study teachers agree that parents have an important role to play in education. While policy does not explicitly state that student attendance is mandatory, the teachers all agree that parents' primary responsibility must be to ensure students' regular attendance in school. The effect of students' absenteeism impacts the ways teachers run their classrooms. This is most evident in Pia's case, where at times, her class resembles more a multigrade than a single grade class in order to deal with issues of differing levels of skill abilities. This is particularly interesting in terms of the policies that the ministry and donor agencies have sought to promote, which rely on more parent participation in education, a focus signified by adoption of decentralization policies (MECD, 2001, 2002, 2006a). These ideas however are specific to parents' roles on school governing councils, and thus in the management of education. They do not speak to other responsibilities parents' should carry out and make no mention of how parents can best support the learning that is going on in classrooms. Similarly as noted Edgerton (2005), teachers must fulfill roles that extend beyond the classroom and into mobilizing roles in the community. Carolina in particular appeals to this idea. However, the teachers all hold and/or participated in parent meetings, encouraged and supported by Save the Children; and in general agree that parents' role includes reinforcing when possible the learning that is going on in schools in the home. Similarly the teachers agree that the effects and consequences for students' not attending school regularly are more important for first

grade than other grades. In fact, this reason is fundamental to the conception of the importance of preschool for children's success in primary school.

Discussion

We can see from a comparative analysis of the four case study teachers that while there is consensus at a superficial level regarding good teaching and learning and the factors that inform that teaching and learning, there are varied ways each teacher enacts those ideas in practice. Fundamental notions regarding what and how students can and should learn underlie these conceptions and the practices that embed them. Teachers that have notions of students' active role as being interactive and engaged in challenging intellectual activity, more seem to reflect elements of policy that refer to learning as a process, and involving such thinking. Similarly, teachers' whose notions of an active student role is more behavioral and about engagement seem to reflect elements of policy focused on particular curricular outcomes, such as mastery of basic literacy and numeracy skills. While teachers are all committed to fundamental rhetoric about "active" student roles that is consistent with policy, the ways those roles play out in practice illuminate very different underlying notions about what constitutes an "active" role in practice.

Notions regarding parents' and their role consistently underscored the major challenge of ensuring student attendance. National policy long has sought to make schools more accountable to parents (Arcia & Belli, 1999), a policy idea that seems to be linked to Pia's observation that parents ensure attendance more when students are motivated (the more the teacher motivates, the more accountable the school is being to parents' expectations and the more likely they are to send students regularly to

school). However, the challenge of student attendance despite teachers' attempts to promote motivation persists.

Finally, there seems to be a disconnect between national level ministry policy rhetoric and local level ministry officials' understandings of what constitutes good quality teaching. While the teachers each arguably represented some part of ministry policy in their teaching practice, the local representatives universally were interpreted as in general critical of aspects of teachers' practices without acknowledging positive aspects, and seem to base evaluations on observations that contradict notions of good teaching that teachers themselves believe.

In the following conclusions chapter, I will summarize these findings and discuss why an understanding of teachers' conceptions and local contextual factors that influence practice are important in light of previous research. A discussion of implications that can be drawn for policy, professional development follows, and I end with a presentation of avenues for future research.

Chapter 11: Conclusion, Implications & Future Research

Summary

This study has sought to explore teachers' conceptions and enactments of quality education in the rural Nicaraguan context as guided by the research questions:

1. How do teachers conceptualize quality education?

2. What informs teachers' ideas and practices?

3. How do teachers' ideas and practices align with national policy?

These questions have been addressed using qualitative case study methodology including interviews, videotaped classroom observations, focus groups, and participant observations of professional development and NGO meetings. Drawing on data presented in the case studies, the cross case analysis examined similarities and differences in these four teachers' ideas regarding education quality, their practices and how those align with policy ideas espoused by the Ministry (and promoted by Save the Children).

Findings

Conceptions of Quality

Teachers agree on the principle that students should have an active role in their education. They cite motivation, engagement, and learning as outcomes of students being actively involved. However, compared to the other two teachers, Ines and Carmen seem more attentive to the social and cognitive importance of students' interaction with each other and with the teacher. That they both suggest students be given opportunities to talk and to express themselves as parts of activities, reflecting a

belief that even very young children are capable of understanding material and expressing their own ideas. Pia and Carolina, in contrast, agree with the general notion that students should be "active" in their classrooms, however they differ from the other case-study teachers in the sense that they viewed student motivation as the goal. Their orientation around learning is not associated with students' engaging in different kinds of intellectual tasks, but rather as reflected in students "learning" the curriculum and necessary skills and competencies.

Their conceptions of the teacher's role also vary. Listening to students seems to be fundamental element of the teacher's role for Ines and Carmen, a point not mentioned by either Pia or Carolina. Also, Carolina referenced primarily her religious faith and values as influencing her capacity to provide an education of good quality, whereas Pia stressed experience and strategies learned from Save the Children. It is indeed consistent for Pia, for example, for her to teach for a rote skill versus deeper thinking processes if she thinks the end goal for student learning is being able to read a word or solve a problem. Likewise, Ines is consistent in believing that students should be able to think, analyze and express themselves; it is consistent that she tries to engage students in posing their own questions in class.

Factors Informing Teachers' Ideas and Practice

While the factors that inform teaches' ideas and practices are not an exhaustive list, the common factors include the classroom-based element of students' differing levels of understanding and the external factors of the roles of parents, Save the Children and the local level ministry officials. Regarding these, there is consensus

to a large degree. The teachers feel that teaching students at differing levels of understanding, whether this is due to a multigrade classroom setting or differences in students' learning levels from not attending preschool or being absent often during primary school, is a challenge for the primary teachers. It is not reported as an issue for Carmen, the only preschool teacher.

Teachers think that the role of parents primarily is to ensure students come to school. This fundamental role is significant because they attribute the cause of students' intermittent attendance to parents' not fulfilling their responsibilities either because of a lack of value parents in rural areas place on schooling—sometimes seen as a function of their own educational level—or a simple lack of attention to the issue, perhaps because of the parents' overwhelming work and other family responsibilities.

Save the Children is universally acknowledged as a supportive and enabling factor. All four case-study teachers – as well as their colleagues who participated in the focus groups – feel they learned new theoretical knowledge about student development and learning as well as practical classroom strategies they can use to improve their teaching. Moreover, Carmen credits Save the Children with helping her get her teaching license and therefore directly contributing to her personal, as well as her professional development. All the teachers acknowledged that Save the Children's impact on their confidence.

All teachers reported that professional development activities (e.g., workshops) offered by the Ministry are far less frequent and adequate than what they receive from Save the Children, they further note that visits of ministry *tecnicos* to classrooms is "demoralizing" and purely evaluative, and thus undermines the teacher

and students. Carmen further notes feeling very marginalized as a result of her being a preschool teacher.

Alignment of Teachers' Ideas and Practices with National Policy

Save the Children works to promote the policy goals of the Ministry of Education that are reflected in the national policies discussed earlier in this dissertation. The professional development and support they provide is to help teachers enact elements of policy that relate to the improvement of teaching (i.e. active learning approaches; helping teachers redefine the role of students in day to day class activities). Teachers recognize that the ideas that Save the Children promote originate at the central Ministry, while they acknowledge the valuable role the organization plays in helping them understand *how* to enact different approaches and strategies in classrooms. Teachers described not knowing how to put into practice many things they are asked to do from the Ministry. They refer to this point when discussing their experiences with the local Ministry and the NGO[45], strongly attributing their success with enacting new ideas in their classrooms to Save the Children.

In terms of the alignment of teachers' ideas and practices with national policy, the variation in teachers' conceptions of the roles of the teacher and student underlie how policy ideas are represented in teachers' ideas and practices. These conceptions, however, reflect different aspects of quality education espoused in Ministry documents. The policies convey notions of teaching and learning characterized as involving students as active agents in their learning, in constant interaction, and

---

[45] A discussion of the possible reasons for this inconsistency and the need to more fully understand it will be discussed in greater depth in the following section on "Future Research".

having previous knowledge on which teachers should build. It is evident that teachers have differing ideas of students' role and the ways that "active" role plays out in practice similarly differ. These align differently from teacher to teacher with the policy ideas.

All teachers reflect some elements of the national policies, though different elements are emphasized in the four teachers' ideas and practices. Ines and Carmen focus more on learning processes and the outcomes of cognitive and affective development, while Pia and Carolina appeal more to the development of skills and values. Only Ines and Carmen seem to approximate in their practice what might be intended to be "interactive" learning processes articulated by the *Ley General* (MECD, 2006a).

Teachers' ideas regarding the role of parents are particularly interesting in light of the *Ley de Participación Educativa* (MECD, 2002) and the decentralization reforms (discussed in Chapter 3), which solidified the most important role on school councils to be fulfilled by parents, and envisioned making the teacher and school accountable to parents. All four teachers' beliefs and actions were in line with parents participating in school governance. All had conducted meetings with parents to mobilize support for education and to form parent organizations. However, they also noted a challenge for some parents to send their children to school, causing students to fall behind, which is a factor that impacts their teaching.

Significance

The findings from this research affirm other studies that find teachers'
interpretations of reform ideas vary and the degrees to which they are able to enact
those ideas into classroom practices also varies (Spillane & Jennings, 1997). My
research focused on rural teachers in Nicaragua, and confirms the claim made by
Cohen (1990), Torres (2000), O'Sullivan (2004), Spillane and Jennings (1997), and
Smylie (1996) that in reform contexts teachers' practices can be a mixture of more
traditional and new reform-based practices, and can play out in classrooms in non-
uniform ways. All the case study teachers think that students should play an active
role in their own learning and that this is a fundamental aspect of quality education.
However, the nuanced understandings about what that active role constitutes, and the
more overt classroom practices differed, sometimes between how teachers
conceptualize and enact quality, and from teacher to teacher.

In accordance with O'Sullivan's (2006) analysis, my study also indicates that
education quality is not merely a function of the availability of financial and material
resources. Rather, teachers' understandings reflect differing ideas regarding the roles
of teachers and students, even demonstrating in two cases sophisticated progressive
understandings and elements of practice that reflect such. This idea echoes
O'Sullivan (2006) in directly challenging notions of many donor supported programs
that rely solely on increasing educational inputs to increase quality. The diverse ideas
and practices illuminated in this study point to the necessity to understand and
address the qualitative mechanisms that influence reform in teaching and learning.

O'Sullivan (2006) and Leu (2005) promote the idea that education quality should be defined in local contexts. The context in this study is made up by the local factors that influence teaching and learning. Despite these findings being consistent with other studies from the U.S. and other countries about how traditional practice gets transformed through instructional reforms, the dynamics that influence teachers' decision-making and thinking (including how new reform ideas are understood and enacted) are unique to the particular local, rural contexts in which these teachers work. For example, the role that the NGO occupies makes up part of the context in this case. Thus the mechanisms and particular understandings that teachers encounter while learning new ideas about teaching and learning are dependent on this element of context. This issue is an important one in international development as policies intended to change teaching practices are adopted from larger discourses espoused globally as important to improving the quality of education.

Teachers' opinions regarding the role of Save the Children is reflective of the potential of NGO work. While the understandings teachers come away with vary, it is significant that they feel so strongly regarding the kinds of interactions they have with members of Save the Children field staff about their work. While these teachers may have hesitated to share negative comments about Save the Children programs, given my association with the organization, they certainly identified specific things (activities, strategies, support) that they gained from their interactions with Save the Children staff. Moreover, I observed several instances of teachers implementing specific strategies or activities to which they had been exposed during a Save the Children workshop.

Finally, my research illuminated that teachers do not value the professional development activities and school visits undertaken by local Ministry staff. This is partly a function of their being infrequent, but appears to have more to do with the nature of the relationship (evaluative versus offering guidance and support) and the fact that the conceptions of instructional quality that were promoted differed from those that the teachers (and Save the Children staff) held. What is interesting – and concerning – is that, according to the teachers, some of the ideas and practices that local ministry staff were promoting were not aligned with national educational policy as presented in the documents reviewed.

Implications

Implications from the findings of this study can be drawn along two lines: implications for Ministry policy and for professional development. Regarding instructional policy, these findings offer insight into how programs can better equip and support teachers in engaging in reflective practice. One implication regards the role and work of local level Ministry officials. Since teachers' ideas and practices vary, some more closely approximating constructivist notions of teaching and learning and others less, continued work with teachers (at both ends of the spectrum) is necessary. Their ideas can form the foundation for further development of ideas and practices as well as contribute to the discussion regarding what is important for children to learn. Furthermore, what teachers can offer in terms of insights into how active learning gets enacted in their classrooms can help contribute to defining what it means to provide quality education in this context and the challenges. Much can be learned about how to deal with particular constraints in response to what is articulated

in national policy. The Ministry can address this issue in part by being more attentive to how teachers understand what good teaching is, and by continuing to work with them in promoting such change in their classrooms. This, however, illuminates the need for the Ministry to reconcile a gap that teachers perceived to between what national policy (as promoted by Save the Children) promotes as good teaching and what local officials support.

This study also has implications is for the practice of professional development. Teachers expressed interest in cooperating with their colleagues, and in the cases of teachers that worked in larger base schools (a few of whom participated in the focus group along with Pia, work in base schools), described the interest of other teachers in their schools in learning some of the approaches and classroom strategies learned from Save the Children. In one case a teacher took some of the lessons she had learned in a Save the Children workshop and organized a workshop for other teachers in her school in order to share the insights. Teachers' ideas and opinions regarding what they have gained from working with Save the Children highlight their need for support and their interest in getting professional development (activities and materials as well as technical support at their schools). This is consistent with Borko (2004) and Fishman et al. (2003) who note that ongoing and school-based professional development is more likely to promote reflective teaching and respect teacher learning. However, professional development programs run by NGO's – whether funded by international organizations or self-funded – are not likely to be generalized beyond the pilot contexts in which they are implemented or sustainable in the long term. As I was leaving Nicaragua in 2007, there was talk of

transferring the RICA program[46] from the communities in Chinandega to communities in the mountainous central coffee-growing region of Matagalpa. A direct implication is for the Ministry to structure spaces such that teachers can continue to engage in sharing ideas about their work. This is especially important for the satellite schools where teachers work in conditions of relative isolation. Since local Ministry visits to classrooms are evidently few and far between (and not very helpful), structured opportunities for teachers to collaborate would increase autonomy and level of support for those teachers, and allow for ongoing professional development.

Future Research

Several avenues for future inquiry can be derived from this study. An avenue for future research lies in an exploration of the various dynamics that take shape within the Ministry of Education. One area for further research regards gaining a better understanding of the political relations between teachers and the Ministry. Inquiry into the political dynamics, especially in light of Nicaragua's history of social/political struggle and the important role education has played can provide a deeper understanding into the relationships between teachers and the Ministry, especially at the local level, and what might be recommended to solidify a productive relationship. In addition, greater understanding can be gained into how policy ideas regarding good teaching get passed to local levels. The question of how local level Ministry officials encounter and understand the ideas espoused at a central Ministry

---

[46] RICA is the Regional Initiative for Central America. It is the specific Save the Children program in which the teachers are involved.

187

level is salient to understanding their potential to provide support for teachers. Also, the ways in which local officials may be held accountable for ensuring teachers do certain things, even if these are not emphasized in policy, can provide further insight into the dynamics within the system and the potential for change.

Similarly an exploration of how policy ideas are integrated from broader international discourses to national policy and subsequently to local level implementation may afford more insight into the inconsistencies in the system. Broader policy discourses, discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, promote student-centered and active learning pedagogies as important to improve the quality of education and the quality of student learning. The ideas expressed by the national Ministry of Education mirror these. The Ministry explicitly states that teachers should adopt a constructivist orientation in their practice in order to promote students' active role (MECD, 2000). However, since the language in policy documents does not deal with issues of implementing such practices, how the Ministry understands the ideas being promoted internationally and how they envision them to get enacted in Nicaraguan classrooms is important.

Exploration into the role of NGOs' promoting ministry policy constitutes another potential line of inquiry. The role of NGOs in education is recognized in the international policy discourses and has played a significant role in educational development in Nicaragua especially after 1990. Since teachers identified Save the Children as such an influential actor in helping them improve their teaching, the important role they fulfill in promoting Ministry reforms is highlighted. More insights on the dynamics through which this work takes shape, the interests that are

protected, and the services provided are little researched dynamics as related specifically to teaching and learning. Furthermore, in light of the sustainability of NGO programs, insights can be gained into how the foundation enabled by Save the Children regarding implementing active learning in classrooms, can be sustained in the longer term by teachers and the Ministry.

Likewise, inquiry into the role of communities and parents in education, specifically regarding what goes on in classrooms, can add to the findings of previous studies done following the autonomy reforms (Fuller & Rivarola, 1998; King et al., 1996; King, et al., 1999, Gershberg, 1999). The role of parents, particularly as influential factors to the teaching and learning processes in classrooms can be more fully investigated. For example, within different communities, the dynamics of how parents support or challenge the work of teachers can be understood more fully. The particular decisions they make regarding whether to send, and continue to encourage, students to attend school are important to understanding how schools and teachers can be more accountable. Similarly, since schools and teachers are supposed to be accountable to parents primarily, parents' ideas of good quality education can also be also more deeply understood.

Finally, as outlined by Foreman-Peck and Murray (2008), studies on teacher action research, have affirmed the potential of action research for professional learning and to serve the implementation of policy. Teacher action research can contribute claims about teaching in context and highlight important local knowledge that can be shared as a resource for other teachers in order to advance instructional

189

policy (Foreman-Peck & Murray, 2008)[47].   Involving the teachers in the inquiry

process about their own teaching can build from the implications for policy and

professional development articulated in this study.

---

[47] The authors also describe the debates that surround generalizability of claims made from action research as well as the potential for it to be co-opted as a policy implementation "tools" versus a vehicle for social change (Foreman-Peck & Murray, 2008).

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Day 1: The points and questions below represent the topics of interest for this study and will guide the semi-structured interviews. Any of these may be discussed in more detail during the course of the interview and some may not be discussed at all depending on the relevance during the interview.

1. What is your background (family situation/age)?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. For what reason did you decide to become a teacher?
4. What grade level(s) do you teach?
5. In what school and community do you teach?
6. What are your overall goals for your students?
7. In what ways do you have complete autonomy in the classroom?
8. In what ways do you not have complete autonomy in the classroom?
9. Describe your daily classroom routine?
10. Describe what you use as criteria to evaluate your students?
11. Describe any assessments or tests that students have to pass in order to matriculate?
12. Lets talk a bit about curriculum:
    a. Could you describe the curriculum, curriculum materials, etc. that you use?
    b. Were you trained to use the curriculum? If so, how?
    c. What are you thoughts in general about the curriculum that you use?
    d. What are the negatives/positives you experience with the curriculum?
    e. In what ways do you feel that the curriculum should change?
13. Where have you heard about "active learning"?
    a. What does active learning mean to you?
    b. What changes to classroom practice does implementing active learning imply for you?
    c. Are there any material resources (i.e. curriculum) that support active learning in your classrooms?
    d. What about implementing active learning is most difficult for you?
    e. What about implementing active learning works best for you?
14. Are there any things/strategies/lessons/activities that you would like to enact in your classroom, but have not been able to?
15. Why (have you not been able to enact those)?
16. Is there any type of professional support that you do not feel like you are receiving? Could you describe that?

Day 2: If there is a classroom tape available from this teacher, then teaching practice as shown on the tape will be discussed.

17. Briefly talk about your goals for this class?
18. What were you expecting your students to come away with after class?
19. What material had been taught immediately prior and after this class?
20. Is what you do in class a part of curriculum? If some part are, then which ones?
21. Could you point out what elements of this class are active learning pedagogies?
22. If something did not go as expected during this class, please describe what that was?
23. Were there any difficulties you experienced in this class?
24. Were your goals for your students during this class met?
25. How do you know? What is your evidence?
26. Are there any things about this class that you would like to have done differently or might do differently in the future? If so, could you talk about that?
27. How does this class speak to your general goals for your students that spoke about earlier (#6)?
28. Are you pleased or not with the way that the class went? Why or why not?

Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

The points below are discussion points that will be addressed during focus groups. Any of these may be discussed in more detail during the course of the focus groups and some may not be discussed at all depending on the relevance during the focus group. Additionally, emergent themes that arise from the teachers' ideas or from the videotaped classes during the focus groups will be discussed.

Main discussion points include:
1. The meaning of quality education and quality instruction
2. Challenges to quality instruction in teachers' contexts
3. The most important aspects of professional development
4. The most useful aspects of professional development
5. Challenges to enacting lessons, strategies, etc. from professional development in classrooms
6. The meaning of active learning
7. Challenges to enacting active learning in classrooms

Appendix C: Classroom Observation Protocol

Teacher _____ Date/Time _____

Community_____

Total # students _____ Girls _____ Boys _____

Grade Level_____ # in 1st Grade _____ 2nd Grade _____ 3rd Grade _____

Other important information about students:
      Number of students repeating grades
      Number of students that are new to the school
      Number of students that went to pre-school
      Number of students the community who do not attend school & why
      The predominant challenges for students in that particular community

Sketch of classroom noting:
      Front and back of classroom
      Teachers' desk/corner
      Grouping and relative positioning of students & desks
      Learning corners

Descriptors for activities:
      Whole-class question vs. individual question & answer
      Group activity or assignment (nature & size of groups)
      Group discussion (probing student thinking)
      Direct vs. indirect instruction
      Worksheet/ work from workbook
      Review/ introduction of new concept
      Use of games, stories or songs (purpose)
      Work in learning corners
      Formative or summative types of assessment

Format for noting observations:

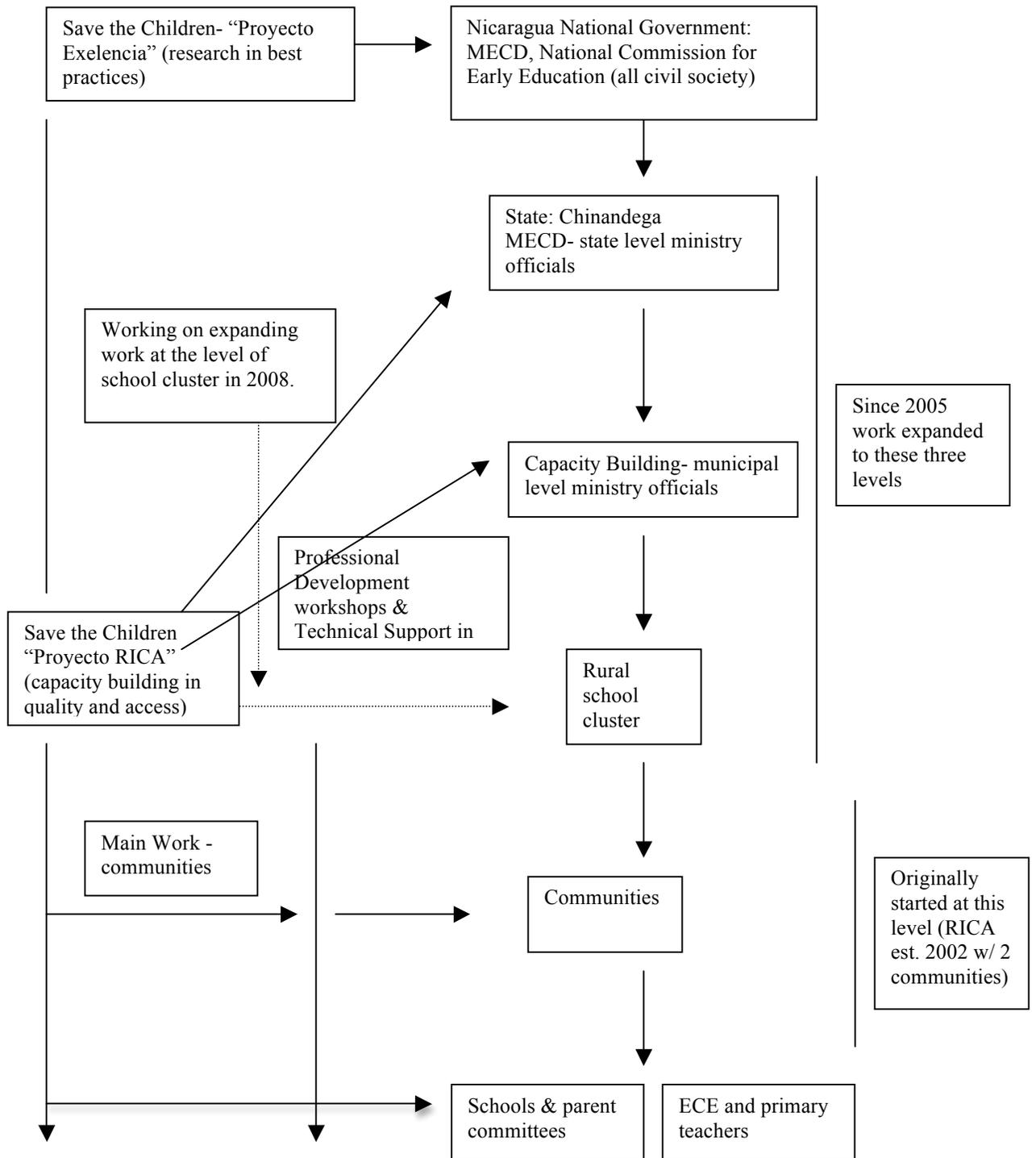| First Grade	Second Grade	Third
Grade		

In each column, the following information is noted:
- The activity (nature, description, length of time, and as many details about what the teacher and students are doing as is possible). As activities occur in the different grades at the same time, they are noted on the same line (horizontally).
- Teacher's transition (time and nature of transition) to and away from individual groups/grades of students.
- What is written on the chalkboard or on handouts (or any other scaffolding/materials) that support the activity is noted.
- Interesting comments by students or teachers are noted. Interesting comments might include a student comment that seemed unexpected, an interesting student or teacher question, a teacher comment, question or activity that I cannot understand, or anything else that stands out while class was happening.
- Any immediate thoughts, questions or comments that I have are noted in brackets under the activity descriptions.
- As often as possible note times. This is particularly important if a video is also being made of the class.
- As often as possible note speculations or thoughts about what kinds of things teachers are noticing, attending to, or prioritizing in class (for example, completion of activity or curriculum vs. mastery of a concept, a correct answer vs. student explanation or reasoning, student behaviors vs. student ideas, etc.).
- When possible, draw connection between activities or methods observed and content of teacher capacity building workshops or policy language.

Appendix D: Coding Scheme

Teachers' role- how should teachers behave, teach TR
      Teacher as facilitator of learning/giver of knowledge TR_{fac}
      Teacher as caregiver, imparter of values TR_{cg}
      Personal teaching, style, classroom practice TR_{pers}

Students- role, outcomes, realities, attribute ST
      Students' role in education (active/traditional) ST_r
      Student outcomes- skills/cognitive ST_{oc}
      Student outcomes- social/emotional/affective ST_{oa}
      Student interest/motivation/[engagement?] ST_m
      Student attributes- developmental stage, behaviors/capacities ST_{at}

Parent role in education PR
      Parents' philosophies, experiences, capacities in education PR_{ph}
      Parents' support for education (other ways) PR_s

Save the Children- role in personal and professional growth & dvpmt STC
      Personal growth (confidence, success broadly) STC_{pers}
      Professional growth (materials, classroom strategies, theoretical knowledge
about learning STC_{prof}

MINED- roles, realities and support
      Support role for teachers (including evaluative) $MINED_s$
      Representing different ideas than teachers $MINED_{TR}$

Differing student levels (grades, learning, etc) SL
      Multigrade setting SL_{mg}
      Attendance related issues SL_{att}

Curriculum- guides, content, context CURR
      Context $CURR_{ctxt}$

Traditional teaching- as a comparison point to what teachers do & think TRT
      As reflection of parents' philosophies, TRT_{pr}
      How education "used to be", personal experiences TRT_{exp}
      What we should not be doing TRT_{not}

Conditions- resources, space, materials, conditions of communities COND

Appendix E: Save the Children & Education in Nicaragua

Save the Children- "Proyecto Exelencia" (research in best practices)

Nicaragua National Government: MECD, National Commission for Early Education (all civil society)

State: Chinandega MECD- state level ministry officials

Working on expanding work at the level of school cluster in 2008.

Since 2005 work expanded to these three levels

Capacity Building- municipal level ministry officials

Professional Development workshops & Technical Support in

Save the Children "Proyecto RICA" (capacity building in quality and access)

Rural school cluster

Main Work - communities

Communities

Originally started at this level (RICA est. 2002 w/ 2 communities)

Schools & parent committees

ECE and primary teachers

Bibliography

AED. (1998). *Final Report: Nicaragua Basic Education Project (BASE) 1994-1998*: Academy for Educational Development.

Arcia, G., & Belli, H. (1999). *Rebuilding the Social Contract: School Autonomy in Nicaragua*: World Bank.

Arnove, R. F. (1986). *Education and Revolution in Nicaragua*. New York, NY: Praeger Publishers.

Arnove, R. F. (1994). *Education as Contested Terrain: Nicaragua, 1979-1993*. San Francisco, CA: Westview Press, Inc.

Arnove, R. F. (1995). Education as Contested Terrain in Nicaragua. *Comparative Education Review, 39*(1), Special Issue on Education in Latin America), 25-53.

Autonomy Commission. (1985). *Principles and Policies for the Exercise of the Right to Autonomy by the Indigenous Peoples and Communities of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua*: Dirección de Informacion y Prensa de la Presidencia de la Republica de Nicaragua.

Ball, D. L. (1993). With an Eye on the Mathematical Horizon: Dilemmas of Teaching Elementary School Mathematics. *The Elementary School Journal, 93*(4), 373-397.

Borko, H. (2004). Professional Development and Teacher Learning: Mapping the Terrain. *Educational Researcher, 33*(8), 3-15.

Carnoy, M., & Torres, C. A. (1990). Education and Social Transformation in Nicaragua. In M. Carnoy & J. Samoff (Eds.), *Education and Social Transition in the Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cohen, D. (1990). A Revolution in One Classroom: The Case of Mrs. Oblier. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 12*(3), 311-329.

Cohen, D., & Ball, D. L. (1990). Policy and Practice: An Overview. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 12*(3), 233-239.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Cuban, L. (1984). *How Teachers Taught*. New York, NY: Longman Inc.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Sykes, G. (1999). *Teaching as the Learning Profession: Handbook of Policy and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Deboer, G. E. (2002). Student-Centered Teaching in a Standards-Based World: Finding a Sensible Balance. *Science & Education, 11*, 405-417.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. Norwood, MA: The Macmillan Company.

DiGropello, E. (2005). *Barriers to Better Quality Education in Central America*. Washington DC: World Bank.

Edgerton, D. C. (2005). *Schools, Communities, and Democracy: The Nicaragua BASE Project*. Washington DC: Academy of Educational Development Global Education Center.

Fishman, B. J., Ronald, W. M., Best, S., & Revital, T. T. (2003). Linking Teacher and Student Learning to Improve Professional Development in Systemic Reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 19*, 643-658.

Fonseca Amador, C. (1986). Nicaragua: Zero Hour. In B. Marcus (Ed.), *Sandinistas Speak: Speeches, Writings, and Interviews with Leaders of Nicaragua's Revolution*. New York, NY: Pathfinder Press.

Foreman-Peck, L., & Murray, J. (2008). Action Research and Policy. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 42*(S1), 145-163.

Freire, P. (2008). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (30th Anniversary Edition.). New York, NY: Continuum. (Original work published 1970)

FSLN. (1986). The Historic Program of the FSLN. In B. Marcus (Ed.), *Sandinistas Speak: Speeches, Writings, and Interviews with Leaders of Nicaragua's Revolution*. New York, NY: Pathfinder Press.

Fuller, B., & Rivarola, M. (1998). *Nicaragua's Experiment to Decentralize Schools: Views of Parents, Teachers, and Directors*. Washington DC: World Bank.

Gauthier, C., & Dembele, M. (2004). *Quality of Teaching and Quality of Education: A Review of the Research Findings*: UNESCO.

Gershberg, A. I. (1999). Decentralization, Citizen Participation, and the Role of the State: The Autonomous Schools Program in Nicaragua. *Latin American Perspectives, 26*(4), 8-38.

Gershberg, A. I. (1999). Education decentralization processes in Mexico and Nicaragua: Legislative versus ministry-led reform strategies. *Comparative Education, 35*(1), 63-80.

Gershberg, A. I. (2002). *Empowering Parents While Making Them Pay: Autonomus Schools and Education Reform Processes in Nicaragua*. Paper presented at the Woodrow Wilson Center Workshops on the Politics of Education and Health Sector Reforms.

Gershberg, A. I., & Jacobs, M. (1998). *Decentralizaton and Recentralization: Lessons from the Social Sectors in Mexico and Nicaragua*. Washington DC: Inter-American Development Bank.

Ginsburg, M. (2006). *Issue Paper: Challenges to Promoting Active-Learning, Student-Centered Pedagogies*: US Agency for International Development.

Ginsburg, M. (2009). *Active-Learning Pedagogies as a Reform Initiative: Synthesis of Case Studies*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

Gobierno de Nicaragua. (2005). *VIII Censo de Poblacion y IV de Vivienda*. Retrieved November 3, 2009. from http://www.inide.gob.ni.

Goldstein, H. (2004). Education for All: The Globalization of Learning Targets. *Comparative Education, 40*(1), 7-14.

Gonzalez, M. (2006). *Programa de Apoyo a La Capacitacion, Seguimiento y Acompanamiento de Docentes en Servicio en Chinandega: La Asesoria Pedagogica*. Chinandega, Nicaragua: Save the Children.

Hanemann, U. (2005). *Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign*. Hamburg, Germany: UNESCO Institute for Education.

Hardman, F., Abd-Kadir, J., & Smith, F. (2008). Pedagogical Renewal: Improving the Quality of Classroom Interaction in Nigerian Primary Schools. *International Journal of Educational Devleopment, 28*, 55-69.

Hodges, D. (1986). *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Inter-Agency Commission. (1990). *World Declaration on Education for All*. Jomtien, Thailand: Inter-Agency Commission.

Khaniya, T., & Williams, J. H. (2004). Necessary But Not Sufficient: Challenges to (Implicit) Theories of Educational Change: Reform in Nepal's Primary Education System. *International Journal of Educational Devleopment, 24*, 315-328.

King, E. M., & Ozler, B. (1998). *What's Decentralization Got to do With Learning? The Case of Nicaragua's School Autonomy Reform*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association.

King, E. M., Ozler, B., & Rawlings, L. B. (1999). *Nicaragua's School Autonomy Reform: Fact or Fiction?* Washington, DC: World Bank.

King, E. M., Rawlings, L. B., & Ozler, B. (1996). *Nicaragua's School Autonomy Reform: A First Look*. Washington DC: World Bank.

Kline, R. (2002). A Model for Improving Rural Schools: Escuela Nueva in Colombia and Guatemala. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*.

Kraft, R. J. (2004a). *Volume III: Reculturing the Schools: Going to Scale*.

Kraft, R. J. (2004b). *Volume II: BASE II (1998-2004): "Remodeling" Schools Through Best Practice in the Nicaraguan Model Schools*.

Kraft, R. J. (2004c). *Volume I: BASE I (1994-1998): "Restructuring" Schools: A Retrospective on Educational Change and Reform*.

Leu, E. (2004a). *Developing A Positive Environment for Teacher Quality*: Academy for Educational Development.

Leu, E. (2004b). *The Patterns and Purposes of School-based and Cluster-based Teacher Professional Development Programs*. Washington, DC: USAID.

Leu, E. (2005). *The Role of Teachers, Schools, and Communities in Quality of Education: A Review of the Literature*: Academy for Educational Development Global Education Center.

Leu, E., & Price-Rom, A. (2006). *Quality of Education and Teacher Learning: A Review of the Literature*. Washington, DC: USAID Educational Quality Improvement Project 1.

Lopez, N. (2007). *Urban and Rural Disparities in Latin America: Their Implications for Educational Access*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: UNESCO.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1999). *Designing Qualitative Research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (2nd ed. Vol. 41). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

McEwan, P. J. (1998). The Effectiveness of Multigrade Schools in Colombia. *International Jounral of Educational Development, 18*(6), 435-452.

McEwan, P. J. (2008). Evaluating Multigrade School Reform in Latin America. *Comparative Education, 44*(4), 465-483.

MECD. (2000). *EFA 2000*. Retrieved April 9, 2008. from www.mined.gob.ni.

MECD. (2001). *Plan Nacional de Educacion*. Retrieved April 10, 2008. from http://www.ilo.org/public/spanish/employment/skills/hrdr/init/nic_2.htm.

MECD. (2002). *Ley de Participacion Educativa*. Retrieved November 20, 2007. from www.mined.gob.ni.

MECD. (2004). *Plan Común de Trabajo del MECD: Prioridades Estrategicas para el Periodo 2005-2008*. Retrieved February 10, 2009. from www.mined.gob.ni.

MECD. (2006a). *Ley 582, Ley General de Educacion con Reformas*. Retrieved April 10, 2008. From www.mined.ni.gob.

MECD. (2006b). *Estado de la Educacion Basica y Media 2005*. Retrieved January 20, 2008. from www.mined.gob.ni.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, V. (1985). *Between Struggle and Hope: The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Mingat, A. (2003). *Analytical and Factual Elements for a Quality Policy for Primary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa in the Context of Education for All* (ADEA Biennial Meeting 2003, Grand Baie, Mauritious, December 3-6, 2003). Grand Baie, Mauritious: Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA).

Nakabugo, M. G., & Sieborger, R. (2001). Curriculum Reform and Teaching in South Africa: Making a 'Paradigm Shift'? *International Jounral of Educational Development, 21*, 53-60.

O'Sullivan, M. (2004). The Reconceptualisation of Learner-centered Approaches: a Namibian Case Study. *International Journal of Educational Devleopment, 24*, 585-602.

O'Sullivan, M. (2006). Lesson Observation and Quality in Primary Education as Contextual Teaching and Learning Processes. *International Journal of Educational Devleopment, 26*, 246-260.

Pan American Health Organization. Health Indicator Database.   Retrieved December 1, 2009, from http://www.paho.org/English/DD/AIS/cp_558.htm

Parker, C. E. (2005). Teacher Incentives and Student Achievement in Nicaraguan Autonomous Schools. In E. Vegas (Ed.), *Incentives to Improve Teaching: Lessons from Latin America*. Washington DC: The World Bank.

Piaget, J. (1970). Piaget's Theory. In P. H. Mussen (Ed.), *Carmichael's Manual of Child Psychology* (pp. 703-732). New York, NY: Wiley.

Porta, E., & Laguna, J. R. (2007). *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2008 Nicaragua Country Case Study*: UNESCO.

Porta, E., Gonzalez, P., Gutierrez, R., & Laguna, J. R. (2004). *Estado del Sistema de Educación Basica y Media*. Retrieved November 30, 2007. from www.http://www.mined.gob.ni/.

Porta, E., Gutierrez, R., & Laguna, J. R. (2005). *Estado del Sistema Educativo Nicaraguense: Una Perspectiva Municipal*. Retrieved January 20, 2008. from www.mined.gob.ni.

Richardson, V. (1997). *Constructivist Teacher Education: Building New Understandings*. Philadelpia, PA: Falmer Press.

Schiefelbein, E. (1992). *Redefiniting Basic Education for Latin America: Lessons to be Learned from the Colombian Escuela Nueva*. Paris: UNESCO.

Schubert, J. G., & Prouty-Harris, D. (2003). Accelerating Paths to Quality: A Multi-Faceted Reality: American Institutes for Reserach in collaboration with Academy for Educational Development; Education Development Center, Inc; Juarez & Associates, Inc.' The University of Pittsburgh.

Smylie, M. A. (1996). From Bureaucratic Control to Building Human Capital: The Importance of Teacher Learning in Education Reform. *Educational Researcher, 25*(9), 9-11.

Spillane, J. P. (1999). External Reform Initiatives and Teachers' Efforts to Reconstruct Their Practice: the Mediating Role of Teachers' Zones of Enactment. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 31*(2), 143-175.

Spillane, J. P. (2000). A Fifth-Grade Teacher's Reconstruction of Mathematics and Literacy Teaching: Exploring Interactions among Identity, Learning, and Subject Matter. *The

Elementary School Journal, 100(4), 301-330.

Spillane, J. P., & Jennings, N. E. (1997). Aligned Instructional Policy and Ambitious Pedagogy: Exploring Instructional Reform From the Classroom Perspective. *Teachers College Record, 98*(3), 449-481.

Stake, R. E. (2000). Case Studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research, 2nd Edition*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

STC. (2006). *Project Excellence: Facilitating Children's Transition to the First Grade in Nicaragua*. Managua, Nicaragua: Save the Children.

STC. (2007). *Teacher Training: Nicaragua*. Washington DC: Save the Children.

Tabulawa, R. (1997). Pedagogical Classroom Practice and the Social Context: The Case of Botswana. *International Journal of Educational Devleopment, 17*(2), 189-204.

Torres, R. M. (1992). *Alternativas Dentro de La Educacion Formal: El Programa Escuela Nueva de Colombia*. Paris: UNESCO.

Torres, R. M. (2000). From Agents of Reform to Subjects of Change: The Teaching Crossroads in Latin America. *Prospects, 30*(2).

UNESCO. (2000). *Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All: Meeting Out Collective Commitments*. Dakar, Senegal.

UNESCO. (2004). *EFA Global Monitoring Report: The Quality Imperative*. Paris, France: UNESCO.

UNICEF. (n.d.). *At a glance: Nicaragua* (Database. Retrieved December 1, 2009, from UNICEF: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/nicaragua_statistics.html

USAID. (2005). *BASE II Final Report*. Managua: MECD, USAID, AED, Juarez & Associates.

U. S. Department of State. (n.d.). *Background Notes: Nicaragua.* Retrieved December 1, 2009, from http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1850.htm

Vilas, C. (1986). *The Sandinista Revolution: National Liberation and Social Transformation in Central America*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Walker, T. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Nicaragua Without Illusions: Regime Transition and Structural Adjustment in the 1990's*. Wilmington, DE.

Warren Little, J. (1993). Teachers' Professional Development in a Climate of Educational Reform. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 15*(2), 129-151.

Wheelock, J. (1986). Nicaragua's Economy and the Fight Against Imperialism. In B. Marcus (Ed.), *Sandinistas Speak: Speeches, Writings, and Interviews with Leaders of Nicaragua's Revolution*. New York, NY: Pathfinder Press.

Wilson, S. M., & Berne, J. (1999). Teacher Learning and the Acquisition of Professional Knowledge: An Examination of Research on Contemporary Professional Developmen. *Review of Research in Education, 24*, 173-209.

Windschitl, M. (2002). Framing Constructivism in Practice as the Negotiation of Dilemmas: An Analysis of the Conceptual, Pedagogical, Cultural, and Political Challenges Facing Teachers. *American Journal of Education, 72*(2), 131-175.

World Bank. (2005). *Central American Education Strategy Paper* (No. 29946). Washington DC: World Bank.

World Bank. (n.d.). EdStats Database. Retrieved June 1, 2009, from World Bank: http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTEDUCATION/EXTD

ATASTATISTICS/EXTEDSTATS/0,,menuPK:3232818~pagePK:64168427~piPK:64168435~theSitePK:3232764,00.html

World Bank. (n.d.). Millennium Development Goals Nicaragua Data (Database. Retrieved December 1, 2009, from The World Bank: http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/NICARAGUAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20212601~menuPK:287226~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854~theSitePK:258689,00.html.

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Works Consulted

Arcia, G., & Belli, H. (2001). La Autonomia Escloar en Nicaragua: Restableciendo el Contrato Social. *PREAL*(21), 22.

Arnove, R. F., & Dewees, A. (1991). Education and Revolutionary Transformation in Nicaragua, 1979-1990. *Comparative Education Review, 35*(1), 92-109.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1990). Instructional Policy into Practice: "The Power of the Bottom over the Top". *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 12*(3), 339-347.

MINED. (2007). *Politicas Para La Educacion Basica y Media Del Gobierno de Reconciliacion y Unidad Nacional, Para el Periodo 2007-2012*. Retrieved March 1, 2007. from www.mined.gob.ni.

Porta, E., Arcia, G., & Horn, R. (2002). *Nicaragua Education for All- Fast Track Initiative Country Proposal*. Retrieved June 2007. from www.mined.gob.ni.

Ragin, C. C., & Becker, H. S. (1992). *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Spillane, J. P., Reiser, B. J., & Reimer, T. (2002). Policy Implementation and Cognition: Reframing and Refocusing Implementation Research. *Review of Educational Research, 72*(3), 381-431.

Sykes, G. (1996). Reform OF and AS Professional Development. *Phi Delta Kappan, 77*(7).

Weiss, I. R., & Pasley, J. D. (2006). Scaling Up Instructional Improvement through Teacher Professional Development: Insights from the Local Systemic Change Initiative. CPRE Policy Briefs. RB-44. 16.