

# **Education and Development:**

**The changing perspectives of the role of education in the  
Highland Guatemalan community of San Antonio Palopó**

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## Abstract

When one enters the highland Maya town of San Antonio Palopó, in Sololá, Guatemala one will notice that there is a consistent pattern of adults who weave textiles pulling their children out of school and encouraging them to be domestic and weave from a very young age. As this cycle continues and over 75% of the entire society continues the same handiwork as one another, immense competition brings in very modest earnings for the working individuals, sustaining a low occupational, development, and economic level for the entire community. This ethnographic study began with a curiosity to understand what the community of San Antonio Palopó perceives is the role of education and whether it is thought of as a way to break away from the economic cycle to advance oneself and their community. This study first examines the education system and possibilities for youth, as well as the curriculum and preparation of 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* to understand minimal education expected of young adults that discontinue school early on. Through interviews with over twenty-five youth, educators, non-professional adults, and elder community members, the next part of this study investigates the community perspectives on the objectives of education and literacy and how they have changed. The interviews further investigate whether they believe there is a connection between level of education and level of occupation and what is believed to be the minimum education one needs to be literate and have basic life needs met. Lastly, the study delves into obstacles and support to obtain more education with attention to how perspectives on education are changing and why. I conclude that though outsiders may perceive that there is not much importance given to education, the inclusion and encouragement of women continuing their education speaks to the increased importance for the community.

## Introduction

My research was conducted in the *municipio* of San Antonio Palopó, a highland Maya town in the *departemento* of Sololá off the shores of Lake Atitlan in Guatemala, Central America. Including the surrounding 13 *aldeas* (hamlets), there is a total population of about 12,000 inhabitants, though distributed within 16 *barrios* (neighborhoods) the population of the closed corporate community San Antonio Palopó is a little less than 4,000, where my research was focused. Access was only by boat or footpaths before a road was completed in 1980. Most women and some men still wear the traditional Guatemalan clothing known as *traje* with a blue striped *huipil*, dark navy blue *corte*, and a blue ornamented ribbon in the hair. There are four different churches in the town and most inhabitants connect with either the Catholic or Evangelical Christian religions. Though most of the population can understand and converse in basic Spanish, the majority of the town speaks the indigenous Maya language of Kaqchikel, or a mixture of Kaqchikel with Spanish with one another. The traditional clothing and preservation of language is a strong reflection of San Antonio's geographic and cultural isolation.

More than one hundred men and women participants in the Cooperative Integral de Producción, San Antonio Palopó, which has its own export code and a large inventory of back strap and treadle-loomed textiles for sale, including shawls, napkins, place mats, belts and ceramics which are shipped directly to

Germany, Italy, England, and the United States. Approximately 55% of the town partakes in an overpowering textile industry, whether it is weaving, assembling, or selling textiles. Still, most of the population has never ventured further than Panajachel or Sololá, two large cities about 20 and 45 minute drive away, respectively.

The town has two schools of primaria or elementary education which teach through the United States equivalent of 6<sup>th</sup> grade. There is one *básico*, or junior high school, which teaches the equivalent of the United States 7<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> grades. Although all of this schooling is *oficial*, or free public government school, to continue 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades, venturing outside of San Antonio Palopó is only the beginning of their costs. As of 2008, the government program *Mi Familia Progresá* has been in place throughout Guatemala to encourage families to keep their children, ages 0-15, healthy and in school, though this program has many limitations and is far from accessible to the entire population.

### **Background of investigation questions**

Furst and Reed (1970) mentioned some of the cultural implications and problems of current efforts that aim toward national integration of traditional communities in rural Guatemala. Chapter 7 of their book questions values, customs, and traditions of education and investigates whether age and sex are complicating factors on these perspectives. Although it is apparent that the emphasis on education and basic literacy is increasing throughout the nation through programs such as *Mi Familia Progresá*, whether this is the uniform mentality within rural communities such as San Antonio Palopó was still unknown. The study in *Education Via Radio Among Guatemalan Highland Maya* by JD Early (1973) examines the preliminary results of almost four years with a literacy and mathematics program via radio schools among a community of Maya Indians in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. As almost all the households of the community no longer have sufficient land to be self-sustaining in corn, the Atitecos were forced to leave the isolation of their community and encounter Guatemalan national culture in search of economic survival. This experience has generated a felt need for literacy and I wanted to investigate whether San Antonio has a similar felt need for literacy. Therefore, I wanted to investigate whether the people of San Antonio Palopó give importance to literacy and education. As their culture and economy seem to encourage youth to preserve the weaving and textile industry, I was also curious to see what the people believe is the minimum education necessary to be able to earn a sufficient income and have economic stability, whether they believe in an association between level of education and level of occupation and how are perspectives on education changing.

### **Methodology**

I lived with a family in the neighborhood *Barrio Tzankaley* in the *municipio* of San Antonio Palopó off the shores of Lake Atitlan in Guatemala from February 14 through March 8, 2010. I began my research by formulating fifteen core questions that would help me guide formal and informal interviews with a diverse range of twenty five community members. They differed in age, gender, educational background, and occupation. I spent the first week visiting one of the two public schools, observing classes of 3<sup>rd</sup> and

5<sup>th</sup> primaria as well as three grades in *básico* in an attempt to better understand the school system and curriculum. The second week, I primarily conducted interviews with the principal, faculty of *básico*, and older students and ex-students. The final week, I conducted interviews with community members involved with weavings and textiles with varying education levels as well as visiting organizations that support families with children in school.

Some of the key points of my ethnographic study revolve around chapter seven of the book *Stranger in our Midst* by Peter Furst and Karen Reed (1970) which looks at the schooling process in cultural perspective. This chapter notes the way the population traditionally conceptualizes problems, for example, if they are not accustomed to working in the abstract, it is not as simple for one to transfer principles learned in a classroom into a concrete problem. Therefore, investigating the educational opportunities and key concepts or theories in the curriculum was the launching pad towards understanding what San Antonio Palopó perceives should be part of formal education and what they believe students should know before finishing formal education. To help explain the minimum education expected of a young adult, I delved into curriculum of youth that will or already have stopped going to school at an earlier age. The highest grade level publicly available to San Antonio is 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* and the most drastic dropout rates occur after 6<sup>th</sup> grade, so these were the two curricula that I researched.

One of the main focuses in the article *Education and Acculturation in Highland Guatemala* (1979) by James D. Sexton is evaluating the impact of formal and non-formal education on socioeconomic movement into higher ranks of Latin American society. My first goals in the classroom observation and interviews were to better understand the differences between formal and informal education. Specific classes taught in the school fortify what is commonly perceived as informal education and values that should be learned in the house, giving importance to a very different learning within the formal education system.

My next goal was to understand the importance of basic literacy in this highland Maya town, as well as what is believed to be the minimal education necessary to be literate. The Sexton article (1979) considers the United Nations Economic and Social Council definition of at least four years of education as necessary for functional literacy, but other authors (Rogers and Herzog 1966) have also found that four years of classroom learning did not serve as a modernization take-off point, and instead literacy occurring after these four years is very dependent on the student and the school. This motivated me to investigate the school system further, to see how it is aiding the acquisition of basic literacy as well what do the people of San Antonio believe is the minimum education needed to be literate.

My next step was to question the community on their thoughts on the objective of formal education, whether these objectives have changed, and what one should know before finishing their education. Essentially, I was curious to know why people went to school at all and whether these reasons are different today than they were in the past. Speaking with youth, educators, parents, and elders, made it possible to compare and contrast perceived versus actual goals of the schooling process.

The following questions were whether one believed that there was a connection between level of education and level of occupation, and if yes, what is the minimal education necessary to have basic needs met.

Next were questions about the obstacles to obtain more education, the support for those that want to continue education, estimates of percentages of youth who want to continue education versus how many actually can continue schooling. This was to help understand how economic pressures, outside influences, and development are either hindering or adding to the educational attainment of the students. I also asked questions about the role of non-government and government programs such as *Mi Familia Progresá* within education.

Lastly, I inquired about the effect on gender on obtaining more education as well as whether or not perspectives on the importance of education are changing and different these days than in the past. Though this portion of my interview seemed to show some basic trends between gender, development, and education, it was difficult for interviewees to explain why these changes are occurring.

### **Methodology challenges and successes**

Upon entering one of the two primaria schools, *director*, or Principal Vicente Pérez was very willing to let the anthropology students sit in on classes and observe. Unfortunately, the 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher was highly opposed to college students observing his class, or "taking" from the school, without giving back in some way. Though non-participant observation within the classes did not take resources or time, the idea of giving back was reasonable. Unfortunately, this particular teacher's expectation for "giving back" were along the lines of buying DVD players and painting several walls in the building, neither of which were within the budget of an anthropology student. I offered to help teach some of the *básico* English classes with Panajachel teacher Marco Antonio Oxlej Cumes. Though the teacher for 6<sup>th</sup> grade did not want observers, I spent time in one of two sections of 5<sup>th</sup> grade to understand what is taught to the older children and a bit of time in one of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes in the other school. I also spent a significant amount of time in 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico*, observing 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> *básico* briefly.

Asking for less than half an hour to ask faculty and students a few questions about education and development encouraged them to participate, and as they often became passionate about the questions, it did not matter that most interviews turned into full fledged conversations that took 45 minutes to an hour. All of these interviewees spoke fluent Spanish making it very easy for them to articulate their thoughts and for me to conduct these interviews. Stepping away from the educators and students and speaking with community members was the most difficult portion of my ethnography. It was difficult to find elder men who were not working in plantations or traveling to different cities during the day. Elderly women that either weave textiles or sell to tourists in the market speak primarily Kaqchikel and have very limited Spanish. Interviews conducted in Spanish were difficult for them to respond to as they had difficulty understanding questions and using their limited vocabulary to respond. To overcome this obstacle, I also

conducted several interviews in Kaqchikel with a friend who offered to translate, though from the vague responses, I imagine much of the question and responses were lost in translation.

Investigating government programs and NGOs that support families and students was fairly simple. The office of *Mi Familia Progresá* was very busy with families entering and inquiring about paperwork but they were very willing to explain the program and answer questions during the downtime. The building of *Proyecto Atitlán S.A.P* or Niwas also very busy on their distribution day, which is the only time every few weeks that this building is open with staff, thus I was only able to observe and ask a limited amount of questions.

### **Education system and possibilities for youth**

The two schools in San Antonio Palopó are named E.O.U.M 15 de Septiembre, 1821. The school Jornada Vesputina teaches from pre-primaria (kindergarten) through 6<sup>th</sup> grade from 1 pm to 6 pm and has a total of 504 students. Jornada Matutina has the same grade levels but is taught from 7:30am and 12:30 pm and has a total of 460 students. Before, school used to cost 150Q (quetzal) per month but now, other than a 40Q fee for *computación* and *mecanografía* in *básico*, education is completely free.

Pre-primaria through 5<sup>th</sup> each have about 100 students distributed within 3 sections, the exceptions being 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades which only distribute 70 students within two sections. The class sizes for all of these grades average between 30 and 35. The Jornada Matutina 6<sup>th</sup> grade has only one section with 34 students. However, the only 6<sup>th</sup> grade class has less than half of the amount of students averaging in 5<sup>th</sup> grade this school year. The Jornada Vesputina also has over 70 5<sup>th</sup> graders and only 38 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Perhaps 5<sup>th</sup> grade the year before had less students, but the educators agree that between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade, there is a significant amount of drop outs.

Furthermore, a drastic decline in number of students attending school can be seen between primaria and *básico* and throughout the years of *básico*. The only *básico* in San Antonio is held in the afternoon from 1-6pm in the same school as the Jornada Matutina. Vicente Perez is the Principal and science teacher who rotates amongst the classes with 6 other teachers. 1<sup>st</sup> *básico* (7<sup>th</sup> grade), 2<sup>nd</sup> *básico* (8<sup>th</sup> grade), and 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* (9<sup>th</sup> grade) can be compared to the United States junior high school in both age levels and curriculum content, though many of the students are closer to high school aged.

The principal of Jornada Vesputina believes that only about half of the 38 students in 6<sup>th</sup> grade will continue onto *básico*. The previous year had about 60 6<sup>th</sup> graders at the Jornada Vesputina and 30 6<sup>th</sup> graders at the Jornada Matutina, but of a possible 90 students that could have continued to 1<sup>st</sup> *básico*, there are only 55 students distributed amongst two sections of 1<sup>st</sup> *básico*. This means that a little less than half of the students from 6<sup>th</sup> grade did not continue to 1<sup>st</sup> *básico*. There are only 40 students in one section of 2<sup>nd</sup> *básico*, and 32 students in one section of 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico*, a total of 127 total students in all of *básico*.

Though every year between pre-primaria and 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* sees drop outs, the most common years to pull children out of school are after 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* and all schooling up through 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* is nationally run and free to attend. However, one does need to buy a uniform and pay a 40Q fee for

*computación* and *mecanografía* for *básico*. After 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico*, one can continue to high school, referred to as *carrera*, *diversificación*, or *colegio*. This schooling can either be a daily commute to towns such as Panajachel or Sololá or can be boarding high school in Xela, Chimaltenango, Antigua, or elsewhere in Guatemala. Most of these schools have a monthly fee, although boarding costs much more. These three years are known as 4<sup>th</sup> *diversificado*, 5<sup>th</sup> *diversificado* and 6<sup>th</sup> *diversificado* (equivalent of grades 10, 11, and 12 in the United States). The *carreras*, or specialty one can choose between, are *majisterio* (to become a teacher), *perito contador* (accountant/working with money), and *Secretariado Bilingüe* (secretarial position). One can also choose to study *bachillerato* which is only two years, but most only choose this if they are sure they can continue to university, as it is very difficult to find jobs with only a *bachillerato título*, or degree. Of 32 students that are in 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico*, their social studies teacher Maria Pérez believes that similar to this year, only 25 will continue with one of these schooling options the following year.

After *colegio* is *Universidad*, or university. Main universities are in Guatemala City though there are branches of universities in nearby cities such as Sololá. Outside of *Universidad*, there are institutions such as INTECAP or *El Instituto Técnico de Capacitación y Productividad* in Sololá, a 45-minute voyage away from San Antonio. It provides a way for Guatemalans to receive a bit of experience and degrees in varying specialties, such as cooking or computer proficiency.

### **Curriculum and preparation of 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico***

As these trends of students discontinuing school after 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* emerged, I focused on the curriculum of these grade levels, their literacy levels, and essentially what these students know before ending formal schooling and starting work. Though Kaqchikel is taught in the first few years of *primaria* or elementary school, by 6<sup>th</sup> grade, all of the classes are taught in Spanish and the students are encouraged not to speak Kaqchikel with one another. Their curriculum book divides all the main subjects into four parts: Knowing our diversity, consolidating our relations, valuing our connivance, and enforcing our future.

There is a class called communication and language taught daily. The first section of the curriculum book is about communication and language of the first, second and third language. Though Kaqchikel is technically the first language, the school teaches Spanish as the first language. The curriculum states that by the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade, the students should be fluent and fully functional in the Spanish language. For example, should be able to argue orally, use language as an interlocutor through content and context, interpret systems of verbal and non verbal communication, understand persuasions of mass media, read critical texts, identify important ideas and dates as well as produce literary texts as a way of expression (Sexto Grado Curriculo, 2006). The portion on enforcing our future emphasizes utilizing normative elements of written language and applying larger vocabulary in different situations with individuals and in groups. The book also discusses the 2<sup>nd</sup> languages, but as Kaqchikel is not a formal class, it is hard to measure whether the proficiency of understanding the structure and significance of words and vocabulary

are met. A little English is taught in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, enough to establish relations between important pronunciations, being able to read and comprehend short or oral works, produce understandable written texts about known themes and follow language rules and understand the nature of those using the native language (Sexto Grado Curriculo, 2006).

With three more years in *básico*, the emphasis on Spanish language class transforms from learning the proper rules to book reading and interpretation of complex poetry. The students continue to increase their vocabulary through reading and writing as well as conversation. The students learn to better manage the Spanish language not only in Spanish class that meets for half an hour first thing every day, but in other classes such as social studies which meets the period afterwards. They also have English classes several times a week, though as their teacher Marco Antonio is still learning, they only have very basic conversation skills in English by the end of their third year in *básico*. The teacher emphasizes pronunciation and grammar to the best of his ability, but there are a lot of gaps and not much practice outside of class for the students to better their English.

The 6<sup>th</sup> grade math curriculum emphasizes using logical, reflective, critical and creative thoughts into the solution of problems. To further extrapolate mathematic ideas outside of the classroom, the curriculum book emphasizes using math to better transform the natural, social and cultural world. The curriculum also helps students learn to apply strategies of math to the solution of daily life problems to better the quality of life, as well as use the information that one obtains of different elements that occur in social cultural and natural context. In short, the goals of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade math curriculum focus on personal, community, and familial development through the knowledge of basic geometry, graphs, symbols, and basic arithmetic.

In 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico*, the math class takes a form of basic to complex algebra, preparing one for the calculus to come. The young teacher of 28, Dalila, had given the students the students problems such as  $5X+4\{6x-3[7X+4-4(3X+59-2(X+9)-7X+4)]6X-2\}$ , however, as the student worked the problem out on the board, the teacher claimed that as the last step, the  $5X+4$  turns into  $9X$ , which every student knew and fought for as incorrect, and her only explanation was that since none of the students never listen to her or their peers, no one knows how to properly solve this problem. Though this dialogue was a bit disturbing, when some students walked out of the classroom out of sheer frustration, it was evident that the students themselves had a good grasp of the math. 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* also has a unique class taught by Sayra Vitalina Vasquez Torar of Godinez called *contabilidad*, or accounting. This class has homework assignments such as finding out spending and earning costs in the household and seeing whether or not spending is less than earning. They learn that spending is not only on food and clothing but on house rent, trash disposal, cable, potable water, electricity. In an interview with Sayra, she claims that this class teaches how to manage our economy so students know how to live. If we save  $1Q$  of  $5Q$  every day, at the end of week, one will have  $5Q$ , but the youth do not even know how to save some for different things. People never learn because they

get used to money coming as gifts such as from *Mi Familia Progresá* (Sayra, Interview February 20<sup>th</sup> 2010).

6<sup>th</sup> grade receives a class for about half an hour, three times a week called *formación ciudadana*. This class essentially strengthens values that might be thought of as informal education and basic values. The goals are to help students participate in social relations of quality with rights and responsibilities necessary for a culture of peace in the natural and international worlds. They do projects and actions oriented towards exercising rights of the citizen and democracy in the family and community. They also promote actions to strengthen the attitudes and existence of cultural peace in different spaces and situations, as well as planning a personal and community future through a critical analysis of the past and present (Sexto Grado Curriculo, 2006).

When the industrial class for 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* boys meets, the girls go to *hogares*, a home and family class. This class teaches women about female reproduction and childcare such as how to hold a baby and importance of breast milk. Although *formación ciudadana* is a class taught through many years for students in primaria, *básico* continues with the values of this class by teaching youth who may soon be married with children how to take care of the household.

Along these lines of education with out of classroom applicability, 6<sup>th</sup> grade receives the class productivity and development in which the students learn about nature conservation, technology use specific to Guatemala, innovative processes and productive services in the community. 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* has a bit of *computación* and *mecanografía* to compliment these ideas of technology and innovation, which are classes geared towards preparing one to use computers and machines after they have finished their schooling.

### **Perspectives of youth on the objectives of education and basic literacy**

I interviewed both students and youth that are not in school to understand the perspectives of youth on education. I categorized youth as men and women between the ages of 14 and 24 that are unmarried and without children, though it is important to note that San Antonio does have a high number of people that marry and have children within this age range. I later categorized a few younger women as adults, as they have the responsibilities as mothers and all tell me that they can not further their education with their children and household obligations. When I asked what they think is informal education and whether it is important, they believed that since it teaches one to talk to people, have respect, and have morals (even if they are sometimes not practiced) it is equally important as school and the two go hand in hand. If one does not learn these values in the house, it will show in school and they will have a hard time (Diego Armando 22, Interview February 15<sup>th</sup> 2010). When I asked what they believe is the objective of education, the responses of those in school or with education varied from those who stopped attending school at a younger age. Jonathon age 20, the only young person in San Antonio currently enrolled in the university in Guatemala City, believes the objective of education is to change the way people think (Interview February 27<sup>th</sup> 2010). Edwin Armando, a 20 year old *ex-colegio* student believes that objective of education is to

learn about our world and leave ignorance behind (Interview March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010). Some youth also believe that it to learn a little of everything and better oneself to get a job. They put emphasis on knowing Spanish so that one can meet new people and travel around Guatemala. On the other hand, Maria Cumez Sicay, age 18 with only education up through 6<sup>th</sup> grade gives education a sense of everyday practically "For example, school is important to learn Spanish and ask for things and take care of health" (Interview February 24<sup>th</sup> 2010). Though Jonathon did not believe the objectives have changed, most youth were in agreement that the objectives of education have changed. Telma 15 in 1st *básico* believes that now the students learn much more about Guatemala and government than before (Interview February 26<sup>th</sup> 2010). Before we didn't learn English or Kaqchikel, now we learn these and *mecanografía* and *contabilidad* [in 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico*] (Jennifer 14, Interview February 19<sup>th</sup> 2010). Erick claims that before, one could get a job after 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade but now, one needs more experience and there is a lack of respect for the teachers who do not have much more education than the students (Interview February 20<sup>th</sup> 2010). Edwin believes education has changed as families are now giving women the chance to go to school and continue their education. It was unanimously thought that basic literacy is important, with males giving common examples such as signing at the bank, not getting lost, interacting with outsiders and traveling. Girls thought that being literate would help their children (Jennifer, Interview February 19<sup>th</sup> 2010) and to be able to read and write can help one buy medicine and food. When asked what they think is the minimum education needed to be literate, most youth agreed that at least 6<sup>th</sup> grade is necessary and without basic literacy, one can not earn money. However, when asked what they believe is the minimum education needed to have a life with basic needs met, the answer of the youth seemed to depend greatly on their personal education level and aspirations. For example, Jennifer Yamilet thinks that to have a university level degree [and job] is the minimum education necessary to have basic needs met. She herself wants to be a teacher and continue teaching school, then become a doctor at the university (Jennifer, Interview February 19<sup>th</sup> 2010). On the other hand, Maria Cumez Sicay who speaks minimal Spanish and only attended up through 6<sup>th</sup> grade thinks that if one has 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico*, their life comfortable, and if they have 6<sup>th</sup> grade, it is more or less okay though some don't pay attention and don't learn (Interview February 24<sup>th</sup> 2010). Though 19 year old student Rosa Isabel also agrees in 6<sup>th</sup> grade as the minimum for basic literacy, her 15 year old sister Telma Roxana believes 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* is the minimum for literacy and they both agree that to have a good life, one needs to finish high school (Interview February 26<sup>th</sup> 2010). Edwin and Erick also believe that high school is the minimum education necessary to lead a comfortable life, and with a university degree, it is even better (Interview March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010). In short, most of the youth believed there is not only a connection between level of education and occupation but that it is very strong. They believe that education is extremely important and at the very least, one needs to have 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* to have basic needs met.

### **Perspectives of educators on the objectives of education and basic literacy**

Educators tended to have very similar perspectives as one another, and although some of their ideas overlap with the students, other ideas are in stark contrast. The educators all believe that informal

education is just as important as formal education, though informal can not help one get technical work and a job the same way formal education can (Maria Pérez, Interview February 21<sup>st</sup> 2010). The principle believes that informal education and formal education help one develop into a good citizen (Vicente, Interview February 20<sup>th</sup> 2010) while the English teacher believes it teaches one to be a human being (Marco Antonio, Interview February 19<sup>th</sup> 2010). Sayra believes that informal education teaches things in the house such as being obedient, not to lie, to be responsible, and that formal and informal education enforce each other. In contrast with the youth perspective of bringing learning from informal education into the school, Sayra believes that without informal education, the life outside of the house will be very difficult (Interview February 20<sup>th</sup> 2010). Maria Pérez, teacher of social studies for *básico* and one of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade sections, believes that the objective of school is to have greater knowledge to work, achieve personal goals, and work in whichever place with their title or diploma. She also mentioned that through earnings, one can better their personal social condition and help the level of their village, a concept that no other interviewee had brought up. Each of the educators believed that the objectives of education had changed in very different ways. The principal spoke to the theme of basic literacy and furthering education, as “before they [students] would only go to read and write and now people think about their future and go to school to become professionals” (Vicente, Interview February 20<sup>th</sup> 2010). The teachers Marco Antonio and Sayra both noted teacher student interactions, and though Marco Antonio believes that students interact with teachers much more and form their own decisions, Sayra believes that the school is less formal, the students are less obedient and don’t maintain discipline (Sayra, Interview February 20<sup>th</sup> 2010), and she believes that these are to be learned in the home. Maria Pérez believes that every year, there are more students attending school who want to learn, so education and objectives for students to attend are changing for the better. She also believes that basic literacy is important to distinguish between good and bad and her husband Vicente believes that knowing math and language helps one be rational. The two women, Sayra and Maria believe that 6<sup>th</sup> *básico* is the minimum to be literate, while Vicente believes that 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* is the minimum to understand how to take care of ones health such as washing hands (Interview February 20<sup>th</sup> 2010). Marco Antonio believes that university education is the minimum to be literate, though absolute minimum is high school graduate. They all believe that before finishing their education, students should be thinking about their future, know what *carrera* they want and which windows are open to them. Maria Pérez also mentioned that to weave and sell textiles is a skill but not a career. It seemed plainly obvious to the educators such as Sayra that there is a connection between level of job and education and high education can get one a dignified job. For example if someone is a teacher, they can teach others and work in the government says Maria Perez. She also believe that professionals in San Antonio Palopó believe in this connection, but those that are illiterate do not see this (Interview February 21<sup>st</sup> 2010). Vicente mentions that people in San Antonio see that some teachers do not have money so why would they want to [further their education] (Interview February 20<sup>th</sup> 2010). Within the educators, who are seen as professionals with higher education than majority of the *municipio* of San Antonio, there is unanimity

towards the importance of education and its capability to help one continue further in their life. I do realize that these perspectives differ greatly from the majority of the population and are the exceptions in San Antonio Palopó.

### **Perspectives of adults on the objectives of education and basic literacy**

The non-educator adults that I interviewed ranged from ages 23 to 49 with a range of education levels, although most had less than 6 years of education and were non-professionals. I chose to interview men and women with children who were currently or would soon be attending school. Most of the women I interviewed were domestic and stayed in the house, taking care of the children, household tasks, and weaving. While interviewing adults, there seemed to be stark differences in opinion based on gender. There were also prominent differences within educational attainment between women and men which probably affected these opinions. When I asked about the differences between formal and informal education, both men and women stressed the potential of a job or career. In an interview with a mother of 5 who primarily stays at home and helps with the family *tienda*, or small store next door, Christina Pérez says that formal education can help one gain more earnings while informal allows one to only sell things (Interview February 18<sup>th</sup> 2010). Isabel, the sister in law of my host mother stressed that as her husband drinks a lot and does not provide much for her or their children, more informal education would have helped him [not drink as much and give more to their children]. She also notes that we are all different people but with education, there is a more level playing field. Her personal wish was to get ahead with her education but now, as she married fairly young and has two kids, she repents that she can not go to school anymore (Interview February 19<sup>th</sup> 2010). The perspective of *tienda* worker Gabriel who only has two years of education is that he hopes his two children can get much further he could with their education (Interview February 25<sup>th</sup> 2010). Regarding informal education, Juan Carlos (pseudo name) has a very differing perspective from the other interviewees in almost all regards. Unlike Sayra's belief that informal education in the home teaches obedience and respect, Juan Carlos believes that it is the school's responsibility to teach respect and obedience, though it is not (Interview March 1<sup>st</sup> 2010). When asking about the objective of education, most adults believe that it pertains to a good future, ensuring jobs, and giving the opportunity to become professionals. Felipa who sells textiles by the Catholic church in the center of town and only attended school for two years explains that she once read a book which talked about the importance of education, and this is why she believes education is important and wants her children to continue as far as they can (Interview February 26<sup>th</sup> 2010). Pablo, the office worker at *Mi Familia Progresá* mentions that his family did not give much importance to education of any sort when he was younger, but he used his own money to go back to school as an adult and is currently receiving a university education in Sololá to become a manager or administrator. Regarding changes in the objectives of education, most adults do believe that education has changed. Myra, a young adult textile weaver believes that unlike before, teachers are now from different places to teach in San Antonio Palopó (Interview March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010). Luciano speaks about how at one point, education was only to teach people to read and write while now, it

teaches students how to do things and think about their future in a similar manner to principal Vicente. Juan Carlos thinks that “before, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders learned a lot in school. Now when I ask my 5<sup>th</sup> grade son [a question such as], what is family, he does not even know”, further enforcing his personal belief that family values should be learned in school. In the questions pertaining to literacy, there was a distinct pattern of adult women using their personal experiences to describe its importance. Francisca claimed that with literacy, she can buy medicine for her baby who was just recovering from an ear infection (Interview February 17<sup>th</sup> 2010). Christina Perez says “Those that are literate take advantage of illiterate. I’ve seen cases here of women who don’t know how to read, then bad people make them sign something that they didn’t know, which later results in them losing their land and house” (Interview February 18<sup>th</sup> 2010). The adults also emphasized literacy enabling one to communicate with visitors from outside that come into San Antonio, uniquely different than the youth who mentioned communication with outsiders when traveling to other parts of Guatemala. Francisca and Felipa, both with less than four years of education believe that 6<sup>th</sup> grade is the minimum education necessary to be literate. Myra, Christina, and Isabel think 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* is the minimum to be literate. However, Isabel thinks a lot depends on the desire to *salir adelante*, or go ahead in life, a frequently mentioned phrase in interviews with both educators and community adults. Juan Carlos also believes that 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* is the minimum education to not be completely illiterate, though he stresses the importance of the individual and how it may not be enough for those who do not pay attention in school. When asked what one should know before finishing their education, the adults of both genders mention their future, potential jobs and careers, and what they desire out of family life. They also believe that these levels of basic literacy are minimal to having basic needs met, though Isabel notes that without 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* literacy, one’s life is difficult as they can not explain to a doctor how their child is sick. Francisca also believes that one can further themselves with more education. Although Luciano, father of nine children, does believe in the connection between education level and occupation level, he notes that the entire pueblo of San Antonio Palopó does not think the same. Luciano gives the example of a man who lives down by the water who owns a *molina*, land, and is very wealthy in many ways, but can barely sign his name. He contrasts him with Santos Perez, a professor who has not much at all. Juan Carlos states “There used to be a connection between educational level and job attainment. Before, if one had 6<sup>th</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> *básico*, they could get good work such as in the *municipio* or government and earn a lot. Now, those with less than university level do not have value. People who finish *colegio* also don’t have much work, so [with] less than [a degree from] university it is hard to say [whether one will get a job]. People here have too much trust in education and don’t think in the future about what they will do. They just do their studies and don’t realize if it’s good or bad or important.” (Interview March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010).

### **Perspectives of community elders on education and literacy**

Conducting interviews with this population was the biggest challenge. Much of their responses did not relate to the question, though were unique were personal stories. Maria Sicay Perez has never attended school and runs a *tienda* and weaves during the day, while her husband works in the onion fields. Her

youngest daughter is in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and has very limited Spanish, and will not be continuing to *básico*. She has to ask others to buy things for her and she claims her life is tough without being able to read or write, though she does not think people take advantage of her. My brother was able to go for three years and my son for six years. It is important to be literate to be able to put a signature. I want to learn more but I have to work in the house, offer my weavings to people in Panajachel, and mostly housework stops one from continuing (Interview February 27<sup>th</sup> 2010). Paula, a mother of three with no education who stays in the house weaving and cooking, also perceives that education is different now than before because students can become teachers. She believes literacy is important but women who stay in the house do not have this opportunity. She also believes that if one finishes school, they can find a specialty job through which they can buy food, clothes and more, but if they do not do school, they do have the option to do weaving and textiles. As with all the elders, Paula brings the questions of education directly back to her personal experience. She explained that before, planting and cultivating would only help sustain. But now weavings are actually an economic gain and they can make money. Women who used to stay in the camp can now stay with kids and work, and men who used to travel far to work for very little can now do weavings and stay at home with the kids and families as well (Interview March 1<sup>st</sup> 2010). Paula's husband don Francisco also retells a unique story that when his parents were younger, educated youth would leave San Antonio with professions and never come back to help the community, thus there was a taboo on furthering education for a long time, though this is not the case any longer.

### **Obstacles to continuing education**

When I asked the question, what are the obstacles to obtain more education within San Antonio Palopó, the universal response from youth, educators, non-professional adults and community elders was "lack of money". Everyone continued to mention economy as the major obstacle and this seemed peculiar because through talking to the principal and teachers, it was evident that primaria education in San Antonio Palopó was completely free, and other than a uniform and a 40Q fee for *computación* and *mecanografía*, *básico* was free as well. However, with further questioning, it became evident that there is a combination of two economic factors. First, there are little costs for things such as school supplies and daily *refacciones* or snacks that can add up on a daily basis for the family. Juan Carlos believes that before, a student could go to school with just a bag and pencil but now, the school demands backpacks, calculators, and supplies that us poor people can not afford (Interview March 1<sup>st</sup> 2010). Secondly, when the children go off to school, they lose half a day of work and the extra set of hands, especially of the older children. Often the children do not want to work and help the parents and they only want study so the parents stop them from continuing school (Edwin, Interview March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010).

Another large obstacle for continuing education stems from the lack of support from parents. 19 year old Erick noted emotional support from family as the most prominent obstacle (Interview February 20<sup>th</sup> 2010). Christina Perez claims that some people like her father in law, do not believe in education and do not want to change their mentality about the importance of education because they think money and

working are the most important things and school *sirve para nada*, or serves for nothing (Interview February 18<sup>th</sup> 2010). Interviewees such as Juan Carlos believes that many students turn to drugs and alcohol and many students can not continue to the next year because they fail their exams (Interview March 1<sup>st</sup> 2010).

Although 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* show the most drastic decline of students' continuing education, through interviews with the principal and other teachers, it seems that between every school year, there is a 5% to 20% drop out rate. Vicente is proud that this current school year, 70% of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade continued to 1<sup>st</sup> *básico* while in past years, only 30% have continued to *básico*. Maria Perez claims that of the current 72 students in 6<sup>th</sup> grade between the two schools, she thinks that 100% want to continue to 1<sup>st</sup> *básico*, but only about 50 will be able to continue and 20 will stay behind. Telma believes that about 80% will continue from 2<sup>nd</sup> *básico* to 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico*. For example, Jennifer Yamilet had 41 students in her class of 1<sup>st</sup> *básico*, 40 in her class of 2<sup>nd</sup> *básico*, and 32 are currently in her 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* class.

To continue to high school is a very different story, as the commute to Panajachel is 5Q each way, and that is only the start of the costs for families that could barely send their children through 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico*. By informally asking students in 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* if they want to continue education, I had no doubt that all the students in the class want to continue. Teacher of *contabilidad*, Sayra would like to see all of the 32 students continue to high school but believes only 28 or less will have the economic means and familial support to further their education.

### **Support from NGOs and government program *Mi Familia Progres*a**

When I asked what sort of support existed for students, the organizations *Niños de Oro*, *Proyecto Atilán SAP*, *Padres de la Familia/Junta Escolar* and *Mi Familia Progres*a were often mentioned, as well as scholarships and financial aid from wealthier family, such as godparents.

*Proyecto Atilán SAP* is an NGO run by volunteers from North America. Though it was difficult to get much information from them, the *Niños de Oro* is part of the Proyecto and helps provide school supplies for all students, payment for *computación* and *mecanografía* for *básico* students, as well as providing nutrition for kids through *incaparina* (rice nutrition) or *mosh* (oatmeal). *Padres de la Familia* and *Junta Escolar* are organizations of parents that allocate government funds to buy supplies and *atol* (corn drink) for the students' daily snack. They also filled out paperwork and sent it to the government in order to receive supplies and payment for *mecanografía* and *computación*, boxes that are sitting in the principles office will be distributed to families depending on family size and number of kids in school.

*Mi Familia Progres*a is a government program that started in December 2008 and aimed to give support to the poorer populations throughout Guatemala. It supports 477,746 families within 177 *municipios*, and 1,500 families are supported in the *municipio* of San Antonio, of 16 barrios and 14 surrounding *aldeas*. There were census takers affiliated with the INE or *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* who went around to all the villages to see how much property each family has and how much money each family earned. This data went to the capital and then resources a monthly stipend of 325Q or about 40

USD for each child is given to families of lower income. This support that the families receive is highly conditional. Parents need to send all their children to school, take their children to the doctor regularly, and have proof that their children are well fed. These can all be proven by documents provided by the school and doctors that need to be submitted to the *Mi Familia Progres*a office before the first Thursday of every month when *Mi Familia Progres*a gives money to the chosen families. There was repeated mention of this program as a form of support, as well as major criticisms to its system. Several of my interviewees mentioned that they were either out of the house on the day the census people came around or that census came and asked questions but they did not fall in the low income category to receive support. *Tienda* worker Gabriel says that there is a lot of paperwork for not that much money, it does not even support 100% and so it is a loss of time for parents to apply to the program. He also believes that parents often do not use the money well, and Luciano claims that many women don't like to be talked to by census because they don't get anything anyways. When I asked the *Mi Familia Progres*a office about these situations, they said that not being in the house is something that just happens and those that did not receive support may think they are more impoverished than they are. Teacher Maria Pérez told me that more than half of the Jornada Matituna is part of this program, but it doesn't seem to have a good selection process because some kids have money and are in the program, and vice versa. Though many of the interviewees realize that *Mi Familia Progres*a is obligating parents who would normally pull their children out of school to keep them in school, the support is only given to kids aged 0-15, eliminating their option to continue to high school with this support.

### **Changing perspectives of education**

One of my main questions to the interviewees was whether or not it was easier for one gender to continue their education than the other. Although it is not as common to marry and domesticate at young ages these days, there is still a large population that do not believe in their children remaining in school beyond 6<sup>th</sup> grade, so several youth (especially females) are potentially prepared for marriage and domestic life by age 14. Women tended to believe that now, they have just as much opportunity as men to pursue an education and career, though select men such as Jonathon Perez thinks that it is still more difficult for women to pursue their education as people have the mentality that they should stay in the house. Pablo Diaz believes this mentality needs to change. Community elders believe this has already changed and is still changing. Margarita Perez notes that education used to cost a lot and her parents did not want her to attend school because she was not a boy, though her daughter has been able to attend 6 years of school. Pablo also believes that *Mi Familia Progres*a is putting more importance on education, which is greatly affecting the mentality of Guatemalans towards education. As the whole world is changing and believes that education is important, San Antonio must change their mentality and change as well.

### **Conclusions**

In regards to formal versus informal education, the class *formación ciudadana* essentially strengthens in the classroom what might be thought of as informal education and basic values. Though this

brings forth the debate of whether values should be learned out of school and transferred in, or learned in the school and transferred outside of the classroom, it is agreed that there is importance of both educations and that they enforce each other. There is an agreement between the youth, educators and adults that there is lack of respect for teachers which did not exist before, though this may be due to increased interaction between the two or because some teachers not have much more education than the children themselves, as seen in the 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* math class.

Previous studies have shown that the increase of western influence affects feelings of rural highland communities towards education and its importance. An increase of interaction and trade with outside communities as well as a desire to not be cheated were what I expected would be the main motivations for gaining basic literacy in Spanish. Though these were mentioned by some interviewees, educated youth tended to have more profound ideas of why people attend school. Women with less education or Spanish speaking level showed a pattern of turning inwards and towards personal experience to explain that education and literacy helps buy medicine and food. It seemed that the level of education of the interviewees effected what level is thought to be the minimum needed to be literate. Most believe that minimum education for literacy is 6<sup>th</sup> grade or 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico*, potentially influencing the drastic drop out rates after these years. Those that believe that much more education is needed to have basic needs met are either higher educated, or plan on sending their children to as much schooling as possible. As for preparedness before ending education, the home and family class in 3<sup>rd</sup> *básico* teaches women how to take care of the household in the chance that they will not continue education, while *computación* and *mecanografía* seem to prepare for further education or specialization. *Contabilidad* also plays a strong role in preparing students who will not continue their education on how to manage their economy, though may serve well for those continuing with *perito contador*. However, it does not seem like 6<sup>th</sup> grade teaches nearly enough about life skills to prepare one who ends school after *primaria*.

As written in literature of past studies, many families are not able to help their children continue school due lack of economic surplus, though the need for children to work in the house as an economic gain and a lack of parental support to further education, came as a surprise. Though the encouragement to get married at an early age has subsided a bit, it still exists to some degrees. The traditional views from men such as Juan Carlos who do not believe in education were a continuous reminder of overwhelming preservation of tradition that exists throughout the culture and mentality of this community.

While interviewing adults, there seemed to be stark differences in opinion based on gender. There were also prominent differences within educational attainment between women and men which probably affected these opinions. Youth and educators believed strongly in education, while male adults seem to be the most doubtful of education and understand why not everyone believes in a connection between education level and occupation level. *Mi Familia Progresá* keeping children in school is further enforcing the importance of education though there is still a lack of complete confidence in the power and possibilities of education.

Though some educators say that textile weaving is a skill but not a career while adult males see it a sure way of gaining income while education has no guarantees, community elders shed a different light on the occupation. They claim that textile weaving and staying with the family is an improvement to going out to the *campos* or farm plantations far away and earning hardly anything. Youth, adults and educators both agreed that education is changing as people are not just learning to read and write but thinking of the future as well. A woman being able to attend school and further their education is one of the most astonishing recent developments in both education and society, especially from the point of view of the elders. Therefore, as we as outsiders see slow progress and lack of faith in education, community members in San Antonio see that education is progressing and integrating into their lives quite rapidly, giving both men and women opportunities to become professionals that a few decades back, they couldn't have dreamt of by working on plantations or with absolutely minimal education. Educators and the principal have dreams to progress the school system and have a *colegio* soon, but as traditional is the preservation of the *traje* and indigenous Kaqchikel language, so are the traditional mentalities of select community members who have yet to warm up to the ideas of education helping with economic development. With the budding aspirations of the youth to travel, have professions, and attain university degrees, within a decade, there is no doubt that the ideas of education in San Antonio Palopó will have completely transformed.

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- Cumez Sicay, Francisca, age 30 mother of an autistic 10 yr old, a 6 and 1 yr old (February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010)
- Diaz Diaz, Pablo, age 35, father of 2, *Mi Familia Progresa* office worker (March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010)
- Martin Sicay, Juan Carlos [pseudo name], age 32 father of three (March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010)
- Oxlaj Cumes, Marco Antonio, age 30 teacher of English at *básico* (February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010)
- Pérez Calaby, Margarita, age 52 grandmother of 7 school aged children (February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010)
- Pérez Calaby, Santa Isabel, age 25 mother of one 8 yr and one 2 yr old children (February 19<sup>th</sup> 2010)
- Pérez Diaz, Luciano, age 40, father of 9, jack of all trades worker (March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010)
- Pérez Diaz, Rosa Isabel, age 19 student of 4<sup>th</sup> *diversificado* in Panajachel (February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010)
- Pérez Diaz, Telma Roxana, age 15 student of 1<sup>st</sup> *básico* (February 26<sup>th</sup> 2010)
- Pérez Pérez, Gabriel, age 30 *tienda* worker with 2 school aged children (February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010)
- Pérez Pérez, Jonathon, age 20 university student in Guatemala City (February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010)
- Pérez Pérez, Vicente, principal of Jornada Matutina and *básico* (February 20<sup>th</sup> 2010)
- Pérez Sicajan, Christina, mother of four school aged and one 2 yr old child (February 18<sup>th</sup> 2010)
- Pérez Sicaján, Felipa, age 24 mother of 5 yr old and 2yr old (February 26<sup>th</sup> 2010)
- Pérez Sicaján, Maria, teacher of 5th grade and social sciences in *básico* (February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010)
- Sicaján Cumez, Francisco, age 51 father of 3 children and cooperative weaver (March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010)
- Sicaján Pérez, Myra, age 23 mother of one 2 yr old baby (March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010)
- Sicaján Pérez, Edwin Armando, age 20 *básico* graduate and cooperative weaver (March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010)
- Sicaján Pérez, Paula, age 48 mother of 3 children and one grandchild (March 1<sup>st</sup> 2010)
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- Sicay Martin, Erick Eschurado, age 19 graduate of *básico* and weaver (February 20<sup>th</sup> 2010)
- Vasquez Torar, Sayra Vitalina, teacher of Contabilidad at *básico* (February 20<sup>th</sup> 2010)