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Colonial legacies in Belize continue to marginalize contemporary Maya groups; this is particularly evident in public education practices and national representations of Maya culture and history. A need exists for community-led educational spaces that offer Maya and Maya-Mestizo youth opportunities to explore and practice their cultural heritage outside of the colonial gaze of Western education praxis and nationalism in Belize. Responding to this need, the researcher, in collaboration with local educators and community knowledge-bearers in a Yucatec Maya community in Belize, developed a cultural heritage education program for youth that provided opportunities for youth development and community building focusing on connections to Maya-Mestizo heritage. To explore the possibilities of this project, the researcher employed postcritical ethnographic methods framed by decolonizing methodologies and informed by postmodern and critical postcolonial thought. The blending of these perspectives offers an alternative approach to heritage studies involving Indigenous non-western communities and foreign western researchers. The findings of this postcritical ethnography of this participatory action research project indicate that the experiences offered through this initiative provided youth an opportunity for increased awareness around heritage and agency. Additionally, this work demonstrates how such collaborative, cross-cultural partnerships create the potential for more critical, ethical, and collaborative engagement in the broader field of heritage studies.

TOWARDS COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES TO HERITAGE  
EDUCATION: A POSTCRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF A  
PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH  
PROJECT IN BELIZE

by

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### **Research Context and Problem**

Belize has an extensive and diverse cultural history. The Maya are one of several cultural groups living in the country that have a profound interest in maintaining their cultural heritage. Much of Belize's economy is driven by tourism. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC; WTTC, 2018), tourism and travel contributed to 41.3% of Belize's total GDP in 2017. The impact of COVID 19 on tourism and travel in Belize severely impacted the country's GDP with a decrease to 22.6% in 2020 and 23.4% in 2021 (WTTC, 2022). Inland tourism is linked most notably to ancient Maya culture and history. The Belizean government controls heritage management, and the majority of cultural heritage professionals working in the country, such as archaeologists, anthropologists, and sociologists, are western-trained academics predominantly from the U.S., Canada, and Europe. While contemporary Maya communities in Belize have strong cultural ties to their history and heritage, their involvement in cultural heritage management practices is significantly limited. Tenuous relationships exist between foreign researchers and the contemporary Maya communities whose cultural heritage is the aim of many studies. In part, this may be attributed to limited efforts by researchers to develop partnerships with local communities that could offer multiple alternative perspectives and ways of knowing. However, historical knowledge about the Maya in Belize is disseminated to the local public through outreach and educational initiatives and to the global public predominantly through tourism marketing efforts.

Historical and archaeological research in Belize contributes to the development of social studies and history textbooks that are issued to public schools (see Brown-Lopez, 2009; Leslie, 1983; Shaw, 2017). Little of this research is informed by anti-colonial or decolonizing

discourses. Colonial legacies that maintain dominant Western views in Belize continue to marginalize contemporary Maya groups; this is particularly evident in these textbooks as well as in public education practices. These views portray the Maya as existing in some far-off ancient past or as descendent communities from surrounding countries such as Guatemala and Mexico now living in Belize. Public schools frequently reinforce these narratives in social studies and history curricula. Opportunities for students to critically engage these interpretations is dependent on individual teachers and their specific teaching philosophies and pedagogies.

Montejo (1999) expounds upon this problem:

As Mayas, we find it hard to deal with the academic world, because if we tell the ‘experts’ what is Mayan, they are reluctant to listen. Instead, they tell us what it is to be Maya or how to define Maya culture. We know that there are many perceptions of any situation. We know that we do not possess the sole truth. But it is our culture that is at stake. We regret that our views are not taken seriously, and that we are continually placed in the position of listeners. Our stories and knowledge have been treated as data to be processed into ethnographies by and for the academic interpreters (p. 14).

Montejo suggests the colonial gaze is omnipresent in much of what gets credited as Maya history and identity. Additionally, dominant Western views are deeply embedded in contemporary Belizean education praxis.

Belize, a Caribbean country formerly known as British Honduras, gained independence from Britain in 1981, but still maintains a parliamentary system of government (Shoman, 2011). To the north, Belize is bordered by the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico and by Guatemala to the west and south. Belize recognizes English as its official language, and in schools, children are taught predominantly in English. Home languages vary throughout the country. For example, in

the western part of Belize, Spanish, Kriol, and some dialects of Maya are spoken more frequently. Government schools in Belize are commonly based upon church and state partnerships. Broadly speaking, most of these affiliations are Catholic, Protestant, or Anglican and stem from early Jesuit missionaries and British colonial rule. The Belizean education system is based upon the British model and is broken into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.

The Belize Ministry of Education and the International Bureau of Education offer a detailed overview of the Belizean education system. Primary schools provide eight years of education beginning with Infant 1 and 2 classes followed by Standards 1 through 6. Primary school in Belize is free and compulsory for all children 5 to 14 years of age and follows a national curriculum provided by the Ministry of Education. At the end of Primary school, students must take the Belize National Selection Exam (BNSE), a national comprehensive exam/admissions test that covers content in English, Math, Social Studies and Science (UNESCO, 2010). Access and admission to Secondary schools in Belize is competitive and based upon students' BNSE percentile ranking. Secondary education is tuition-based and is divided into 4 Forms. Upon completion of 4<sup>th</sup> Form, students are required to take and pass the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate Examinations (CSEC) developed by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). Tertiary education often starts with 6<sup>th</sup> Form—two-year post-secondary schooling for vocational and/or professional training. Upon completion, students are required to take and pass additional examinations set forth by the CXC for their Associates degree, as well as the SAT or ACT for admissions to national and/or foreign four-year institutions (Belize Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, and Technology, 2023).

The Belizean primary school social studies curriculum includes units that focus on various aspects of national culture and history. There are “culture” units for each grade level that

concentrate on local and national ethnic groups. Emphasis is placed on the languages, foods, clothing, music, dance, customs, traditions, etc. associated with each group (Belize Ministry of Education, 2021). Teachers make decisions about the specific content, duration, lessons, and activities for these units. Many teachers have multicultural celebrations at the end of these units—in some cases, these celebrations are combined with a school-wide “Culture Day.” These cultural units are often the only space in the primary school curriculum for teachers and students to engage in learning and sharing about culture and heritage. Recently, the Belizean Ministry of Education implemented a standardized national secondary curriculum; however secondary schools continue have more localized autonomy with regard to curriculum decisions. The degree to which courses are offered that provide students the space to negotiate their own cultural and/or heritage identities, in concert with their peers and their communities, varies by school. A need exists for community-led educational spaces that offer Maya and Maya-Mestizo youth opportunities to explore and practice their cultural heritage outside of the colonial gaze of Western education praxis in Belize.

### **Research Rationale and Purpose**

Some Maya communities in Belize are resisting colonized education through community organizing focused on reclaiming and regenerating Maya cultural knowledge. These initiatives often combine formal and informal education practices and work to engage Maya youth, their families, and local communities. The Tumul K’in Center of Learning, located in Toledo—the southernmost district of Belize—is perhaps the most well-established example of such an initiative. Tumul K’in is a Maya education organization that draws on Indigenous perspectives to provide youth in the area access to educational experiences centering on Maya values, knowledge and philosophy. The integrated curriculum provides intercultural education for



students who incorporate both Maya and non-Maya knowledges (Penados, 2018). This school, one of a kind in Belize, grew out of a local Maya grassroots movement in the region focused on Indigenous sovereignty—particularly related to Maya land rights, autonomy, and cultural and environmental sustainability. Tumul K'in offers a specific and unique approach to community-organized Maya heritage education in Belize and has inspired other Maya communities in Belize to create their own versions of community-based heritage education initiatives.

Over the course of three-and-a-half years, a dedicated group of local teachers and community knowledge bearers in a historically Yucatec Maya community in western Belize developed a cultural heritage education program for youth that provided opportunities for youth development and community building focusing on connections to Maya-Mestizo heritage. This program became known as the Motmot Camp. From the beginning, the vision for this project took the form of a community led program for youth that was not affiliated with any particular educational, religious, or political organization. The idea for this project was initially conceived by a small group of local teachers and scholars within the San Jose Succotz community who shared the vision for this program. Throughout this dissertation I will refer to the community using the locally abbreviated name “Succotz.” Two of the project’s leaders had played a pivotal role in the development and enactment of Tumul K'in and offered their knowledge and experiences particularly related to educational philosophy and curriculum to help give shape to this community project. It was around this time, that I was invited to join the initiative as a participant and researcher. The skills I had to offer as researcher and educator contributed to the organization of the project and to the design of its curriculum. Additionally, my positionality as an outsider to the community was leveraged to encourage community involvement and participation. As a non-Indigenous, Euro-American researcher, my participation in this process

has necessitated critical and reflexive negotiations of power and privilege and a reimagining of research that prioritizes the self-determination and well-being of the Succotz community.

The community initiative in Succotz shares many of the elements, motives, and concerns addressed in participatory action research (PAR) (i.e., participation and action by and for the community). While the members of this project did not wish to participate in the research analysis aspect of this PAR project, it was a localized movement aimed at addressing specific community identified needs and desires. My role was seen as both participant and researcher. Stepping back, and taking time to self-reflect on the issues that PAR attempts to problematize, I took seriously the call to be critically reflexive about how my own subjectivities influence or even stifle thoughtful and meaningful engagement. It is through this process that I came to see postcritical ethnography of a participatory action research project as a more applicable methodology for this dissertation.

My role as a researcher and doctoral student working through a critical and decolonial lens creates unavoidable friction between the desire to maintain collaboration throughout all stages of the research process and writing a dissertation, which, in the Western academy, is a solitary act. It is with these issues in mind, that I have considered the possibilities for navigating these contradictory and problematic aspects of the dissertation research process. On one hand, I seek to use my privileged position as a scholar in the Western academy to disrupt and challenge neocolonial research traditions. On the other hand, I want to uphold my commitments to the Succotz community and the Motmot Camp as a participant, researcher, and ally.

With this in mind, this dissertation offers a postcritical ethnography of the process of our PAR project that highlights the local histories, culture, and heritage in Succotz. Through my ethnography of our community initiative, I address the following questions:

1. How do collaborators and youth describe their experiences of engaging in this heritage education initiative?
2. How might the experiences offered through this initiative provide an opportunity for increased awareness around heritage and agency?
3. What are the community, curricular, and pedagogical implications of engaging in a heritage-centered, community-based educational experience?

It is my hope that this work contributes in some small way to the growing field of decolonial research by foregrounding community voices and perspectives and (re)shaping ways of thinking about cultural heritage research. I turn now to a discussion of the overarching theoretical framework that informs this study as well as my role as participant and researcher in this heritage education project.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In conceptualizing a theoretical framework for this study, I first examine postmodern theory as I imagine it to be an overarching web that connects with and supports my approach to this research. I then explore postcolonial theory to better situate this study within the context of colonialism both historically and presently. I offer a critique of postcolonial and critical theories as they have the potential to objectify and essentialize the experiences of Indigenous peoples in the research process. Through this critique I discuss the potential for decolonizing approaches that address the shortcomings of postcolonial and critical theories in Indigenous contexts.

### **Postmodernism and Postcoloniality**

Maya heritage research in Belize has most notably focused on archaeological investigations of the ancient Maya that inhabited the lands prior to European invasion and anthropological studies of contemporary Maya communities. As mentioned previously,

traditionally, the majority of such research has been informed by western positivist thought based on objective reasoning and empiricism. In recent years, collaborative and participatory approaches to research have been influenced by postmodern thought. Postmodernism emphasizes a critical awareness of the subjective nature of knowledge and acknowledges power as a factor in what we know and how we know it (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Kilgore, 2001; Lather, 2006; Lincoln et al., 2011). Postmodernism offers a deconstructive framework from which research works to disrupt socially constructed truths and grand narratives of the past. Emphasis is placed on multivocal narratives and co-constructed knowledge based upon experience and dialogue (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lather, 2006; Lincoln et al., 2011). Within this paradigm, the role of researcher is challenged—that is, reflexivity plays a key role in interrogating the self in relation to the research purpose, process, and engagement with others (Lincoln et al., 2011). Postmodern thought offers a theoretical standpoint that supports participatory methods, practical knowledge, lived experience, and critical subjectivity (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Heron & Reason, 1997; Lincoln et al., 2011). These are essential elements for the collaborative development of the Motmot Camp.

Colonialism pervades Belizean history and modern society. Postmodern theory offers an overarching lens through which to situate this research; however, there is an additional need to situate this work within the context of Colonialism. Postcolonial theory has the potential to provide a framework through which to critically engage with issues of power, positionality, subjectivity, and knowledge production in the larger context of research in colonized spaces. Alexander (2008) discusses postcolonial theory in relation to western thought and notions of otherness and posits that postcolonial studies offers a shift in voice, context, and theory. *A shift in voice* raises larger questions in the research process around “who gets to speak—with and for

whom” (p. 105). Thus, multivocality and reflexivity are essential to critical postcolonial studies. *A shift in context* moves the focus away “from larger social and political systems to the specific contexts of private/ public lives and the ways in which place and space become meaningful terrain of practiced lives” (p. 106). This logic highlights the significance of local knowledge and lived experience and the importance of articulating multiple ways of thinking and knowing in research practice. *A shift in theory*, according to Alexander, takes into consideration the progression of “modernity to postmodernity, to critical postcoloniality” (p. 106). The portrayal of this shift in theory as linear is problematic, as it does not account for the wide-range of ways that theoretical approaches are taken up along this continuum. However, drawing upon Hall (1994) and Parry (1994), Alexander conveys that postcolonial theory moves away “from abstracted generalizations to emergent constructions grounded in the articulation and actualization of experience” (p. 106). These *shifts* help to describe postcoloniality and provide lenses through which to (re)conceptualize research praxis. As Gandhi (1998) expresses, “postcolonialism also holds out the possibility of thinking our way through, and therefore, out of the historical imbalances and cultural inequalities produced by the colonial encounter” (p. 176). That said, postcolonial discourse is not without challenges, particularly within Indigenous research contexts.

### **Critiques of Postcolonialism and Critical Theory**

While postcolonial studies work to resist the consequences of European colonization and foreground subaltern voices and epistemologies (Gandhi, 1998), it is important to consider the potential for such research to reify notions of subjugated positionalities, otherness, and colonizer/colonized dichotomies (Alexander, 2008; Shahjahan, 2005; L. T. Smith, 2012; Spivak, 1999). Some scholars contest the term “postcolonial” as “post” connotes something in the past,

as if colonialism is over and the colonizers have left (Gandhi, 1998; Shohat, 1992; L. T. Smith, 2012); or, that postcolonialism signifies a mark on the linear chronology through history without accounting for the relationship and implications of the past and present on the future (McLeod, 2000; McClintock, 1992; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Shohat, 1992). L. T. Smith (2012) describes this contention more clearly:

The fashion of post-colonialism has become a strategy for reinscribing or reauthorizing the privileges of non-Indigenous academics because the field of ‘postcolonial’ discourse has been defined in ways which can still leave out Indigenous peoples, our ways of knowing and our current concerns. (p. 25)

Postcolonialism as a singular research frame is problematic as it frequently places Indigenous and non-Western forms of knowledge as the object of study, thereby essentializing Indigenous peoples.

As Mutua and Swadener (2004) articulate, “used loosely, postcolonialism collapses identities of individuals who lived in former colonies and whose experience of colonialism was qualitatively different” (p. 255) leading to what Shohat (1992) describes as “suffocating neocolonial hegemony” (p. 105). It is necessary to problematize postcolonial discourse in Indigenous contexts. Mutua and Swadener (2004) suggest that while “postcolonial literature has grown into a reckonable genre of critical theory ... it is nearly impossible, given the contested issues it embodies, to articulate what postcoloniality *is*” (p. 8). According to Goldberg and Quayson (2002) postcolonial studies have “at least three significant clusters of attitudes and ideas ... [that] might be taken as constitutive of generative ambiguities in the field” (p. xi). They suggest:

The first cluster clearly concerns the desire to speak to the Western paradigm of knowledge in the voice of otherness ... In the case of the second, Postcolonial Studies is afflicted by the fact that it has to claim an object for academic study which it is obliged simultaneously to disavow ... The third set of themes in Postcolonial Studies is prompted by the fact that postcolonial theory thus seems to locate itself everywhere and nowhere. (pp. xii, xiii, xvi)

The ambiguous nature of postcoloniality has resulted in a polarization of the field. On one side there is postcolonial politics—studies predicated upon materialist standpoints (i.e., Marxism); on the other side, postcolonial theories—informed by discursive perspectives (i.e., Poststructuralism) (Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Gandhi, 1998). The overarching issue with either strand of postcolonial studies is the tendency for such research to reify neocolonial hegemony. Such ambiguities and binaries have led many scholars toward decolonizing approaches to research. As Mutua & Swadener (2004) work to connect postcoloniality with decolonizing research, they argue, “the materialist and discursive function in decolonization are merely two ends of the same pole. A complete project of decolonization has to chip away at colonization that is discursively located and colonization that serves the materialist function” (p. 10). In so doing exists the possibility for reimagining research and praxis.

Postcolonial and decolonizing approaches to research share some connections with critical theory as emphasis is placed on critical notions of social critique, self-determination and empowerment. However, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) and others (see Battiste, 2000, *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision*) argue that in many ways critical theory perpetuates “neocolonial sentiments while turning the Indigenous person into an essentialized ‘other’ who is spoken for (Bishop, 2005)” (p. 5). L. T. Smith (2000) argues that the emancipatory orientation of critical

theory has a tendency to be prescriptive—that is, the project of emancipation (as defined by the Western academy) is often portrayed as a “universal recipe that has to be followed to the letter if it is to be effective” (p. 229). Additionally, Smith maintains that such an orientation “assumes that oppression has universal characteristics that are independent of history, context, and agency” (p. 229). Therefore, the project of decolonization calls for localized critical theory “grounded in the specific meanings, traditions, customs, and community relations that operate in each Indigenous setting” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 6). The purpose and context of this dissertation work necessitates an overarching theoretical framework informed by decolonizing methodologies. Therefore, it is through a lens of decolonization that I seek to bring together postmodern and critical postcolonial theories as the framework for this qualitative dissertation research. I articulate decolonizing methodologies more thoroughly in the Methodology section, but I now discuss my background and positionality in relation to this research project.

### **Background and Positionality**

Given that colonialism and indigeneity are key issues of this study, it is essential that I attend to the ways in which my own positionality as a privileged Western outsider informs this research. I am a white Anglo-American woman born and raised in the southeastern United States. I grew up in a middle-class family, attended private and public schooling as a child and public U.S. universities as an adult. My position has afforded me access to privilege in almost all aspects of Western society and my personal worldview has undoubtedly been influenced by neocolonial hegemony. While I am unable to remove myself from these colonial influences, I am responsible for examining the ways in which my positionality potentially influences this research. Additionally, I feel it is important to reflect upon my own interests and motivations for engaging in this type of research.



As an undergraduate student studying anthropology and archaeology, I was required to complete field experience as part of research methods coursework. Given my interest in ancient world cultures, I participated in a summer archaeological field school in Belize that focused on Maya archaeology. The program was headed by the director of the Institute of Archaeology in Belize and run by several archaeology professors from the U.S. and Canada. That summer, I spent six weeks with a large group of college students, most of whom were also from the U.S., learning archaeological survey and excavation methods on ancient Maya settlement sites. Two years later, while completing my Master's thesis in Geography, I moved to Belize to continue archaeological and geographical research. Throughout this time, not once was I aware that by participating in this work, I was also complicit in maintaining colonialist legacies.

It was not until I found myself living and working as an outsider in the western part of Belize that my world-view was challenged. I came to realize that the way I had been taught to view and interpret the world was different from the perspectives of my Belizean friends, colleagues, and neighbors. I was suddenly made conscious of the ways in which my racial, socio-economic, and citizenship status afforded me privilege, yet also had the potential to elicit anger and resentment from some folks who perceived me as just another "gringa." During my time teaching at a local university, I became more familiar with the Belizean educational system. Reflecting back, my initial experience felt ordinary and comfortable in large part due to the Westernized structure of the university. There were many similarities to my own university experiences in terms of the types of programs and courses that were offered, and the ways courses were taught—that being mostly lecture, lab, and exams. However, as I engaged in more critical dialogues with my Belizean colleagues and students, I became more aware of my actions and interactions both personally and professionally. It was during this time that I started to

trouble my role as a foreign archaeologist studying, writing, and teaching about the past of a society and culture whose heritage was not my own. Equally concerning was the fact that I had been taught by academic professionals, who, like myself, were foreigners, and whose heritage was predominantly Anglo-European, not Maya or Belizean.

These experiences encouraged me to reconsider the professional path I was taking. I knew that I loved heritage studies and teaching, but I found myself questioning the politics of heritage management and the ways in which heritage studies were being taught in Belize. Of the endless archaeological research projects going on the country, I was not aware of any that were directed by an archaeologist whose cultural heritage was Maya. While a few projects encouraged local community participation in archaeological digs, these interactions frequently privileged the archaeologist as expert. This awareness frustrated me because at the time I felt there was not much I could do to change current practice. Around this time, I moved back to the U.S. and started in a teacher licensure program while simultaneously teaching middle school social studies and science. My newfound passion for teaching youth eventually encouraged me to go back for a Ph.D. in a program that focused on cultural studies in education.

My more recent experience as a doctoral student in a cultural foundations of education program has helped me better situate the internal struggles I felt within the larger context of systems of power and oppression in society. Additionally, my doctoral studies have provided me with a vocabulary to better articulate these issues. This experience has helped me to trouble my role as an archaeologist as well as to articulate why I no longer felt a desire to stay in the field. Speaking from my personal experience as a former participant, the majority of archaeological projects tend to reinforce colonialist, hegemonic, Eurocentric, Western ideology. Central to my

concern is the unequal balance of power that privileges Western ways of thinking and knowing and that silences and otherizes alternative knowledges and perspectives.

My intention in describing my background is, in part, to explain my desire to move away from participating in dominant approaches to heritage research in Belize. Additionally, I feel that this personal shift provides context for my motivation to pursue alternative approaches to cultural heritage research. I recognize that I am unable to understand insider Maya-Mestizo realities, as I have never lived them. However, I believe that within the context of decolonizing projects, cross-cultural partnerships create the potential for more critical, ethical, and collaborative engagement. Expounding upon Rogers and Swadener's (1999) work, Mutua and Swadener (2004) argue for a reframing of the field in which "researchers actively decenter the Western academy as the exclusive locus of authorizing power that defines research agenda" (p. 4). This reframing offers alternative foreign researcher identities as the "allied other" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 6; Mutua & Swadener, 2004, p. 4; Rogers & Swadener, 1999). Denzin & Lincoln (2008) describe themselves as allied others—that is, "as fellow travelers of sorts, antipositivists, friendly insiders who wish to deconstruct from within the Western academy and its positivist epistemologies" (p. 6). Through my insider positionality in the Western academy, I position myself as allied other in the context of this research.

Coming into the Motmot Camp initiative, I was very much a foreign outsider. During my first few encounters with folks in the community, I was frequently asked if I was a tourist coming to visit Xunantunich, the Maya temple site across the river from Succotz. When I identified myself as a student and researcher, folks often made the assumption I was doing archaeology. As I began making introductions with local educators, my experience as a teacher helped to establish rapport, as we shared a common vocabulary around curriculum and teaching.

Additionally, having previously lived in the western part Belize, we shared a common knowledge of local schools, stores, events, etc. As the project progressed, my position as an outsider became less static than it felt in the beginning. I was still a foreign researcher, but also known to be a participant in the Motmot Camp project. As I mentioned earlier, while English is the official language in Belize, it is not necessarily the preferred language in western Belize. In Succotz, most folks are multilingual, but prefer to speak Spanish. Reflecting, I feel that had I been able to speak Spanish, perhaps in the beginning, my interactions with community members would have been less formal, and establishing trust and community buy-in may have happened more quickly. I know there have been times where stories or conversations have been lost through translation. Additionally, my position as an outsider likely affected the types of information, experiences, and insight participants were willing to share with me. I am aware that as a foreign, non-Spanish speaking researcher, my position may have limited full authentic engagement with teachers, students, parents, and other community members. I further discuss how my positionality impacted my research approach in the Methodology section.

### **Significance**

This research offers an alternative approach to heritage studies involving Indigenous non-western communities and foreign western researchers in which decolonizing praxis informs the postmodern and critical postcolonial theoretical underpinnings of this work. By placing these perspectives in concert, this research offers a more localized orientation that considers the specific characteristics of the Succotz community. Additionally, the methods of this study, that being postcritical ethnography informed by decolonizing methodologies, work to address the often-contradictory nature of community-engaged collaborative initiatives and individual research interests. In chapter two I explore several studies in Belize and abroad that relate to

heritage education and community-engaged research; however, a review of the literature in the fields of education, archaeology, geography, and the social sciences yield no results that I was able to find which blend these specific theoretical and methodological frameworks specifically in the context of heritage education and community-engaged research between Indigenous non-western communities and foreign researchers. I believe that there is no one-size-fits-all model for this type of research, as each research setting requires a unique approach to meet the needs of the participants involved. That being said, this study offers the field of heritage studies some insight into the process, advantages, challenges and implications of such a project. I use heritage studies broadly here, because coming as I do from a multidisciplinary academic background, I feel that there are advantages to exploring a variety of approaches, frameworks, and techniques that may not traditionally apply to a specific academic field. With this dissertation, I intend to “research back” (L. T. Smith, 2012, p. 8) to the academy—to disrupt, deconstruct, and offer a critical and decolonial approach to heritage research as an “allied other” (Rogers & Swadener, 1999).

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Through this research, I seek to study the process of collaboratively developing the cultural heritage education program for youth in Succotz that emphasizes local histories, culture, and heritage. To provide greater context for this work, I have reviewed several bodies of literature. First, to locate this work historically, I reviewed the literature on the historicity of knowledge production and the ways in which the past may be conceptualized. I then reviewed literature related to the ways in which heritage and heritage studies are conceptualized. This discussion articulates how individual and collective views of the past impact notions of heritage and how heritage is studied. Third, I examined the literature about the pedagogical considerations for teaching various aspects of heritage knowledges. Fourth, I explored literature on collaborative approaches to research and their theoretical underpinnings as way of elucidating the approach that my study takes. Finally, I reviewed four prior studies that have focused on the development of community-based heritage education programs within Belize and abroad. These studies provide insight into approaches to heritage education research that inform the purpose of my study.

### **Conceptualizing the Past**

The past shapes the ways in which we individually and collectively define ourselves in the world. It is central to all aspects of society—cultural, social, political, economic, and ideological—and to the ways in which we construct our personal identities and come to understand others around us. Critical inquiries into history expose and interrogate the development of dominant ideologies related to issues of power, oppression, privilege, equity, access, and the impact of these ideologies on knowledge production. Such inquiries reveal multiple perspectives of history and challenge Western assumptions of grand narratives and

unquestioned objective truths. Additionally, critical understandings of history encourage us to situate ourselves in relation to the past—to examine our own positionality—and to engage in reflexive practices as researchers, educators, and social actors.

Trouillot (1995) explains:

Human beings participate in history both as actors and as narrators. The inherent ambivalence of the word ‘history’ in many modern languages, including English, suggests this dual participation. In vernacular use, history means both the facts of the matter and the narrative of those facts, both ‘what happened’ and ‘that which is said to have happened.’ The first meaning places emphasis on the socio historical process, the second on our knowledge of that process or on a story about that process. (p. 2)

It is important to consider which “facts” are portrayed in history, who the narrators are who interpret these “facts,” and how these historical narratives then become a part of collective knowledge and memory.

As Spring (2011) articulates, “Answers to historical questions have implications for a person’s future choices and actions. The answers shape images and feelings about the past” (p. 3). In the context of Western systems of education and dominant portrayals of history, it is imperative to engage in questions related to power, domination, and marginalization that may reveal counter historical narratives. For example, how and by whom are histories constructed? In what ways do systems of education promote specific historical narratives? By perpetuating particular historic memories and ways of knowing, in what ways does education obscure, make invisible, silence, and/or marginalize alternate connections to the past? How does this impact personal and/or collective memory and identity? Such questions challenge ideologies and assumptions frequently portrayed in dominant Western interpretations of history. Furthermore,

examining the exertion of power and domination of Europeans over Indigenous peoples sheds light on the legacies of colonization that permeate societies today.

Colonial domination in the Americas was structured around the ways in which European colonizers utilized cultural differences as the basis for racializing and otherizing Indigenous peoples. This logic of structural power and hegemony is what Anibal Quijano has termed the coloniality of power (Alcoff, 2007; Baker, 2012; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2000, 2007). The coloniality of power refers to a model of power “framed by world capitalism and a system of domination structured around the idea of race” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 244). Such Eurocentric racial, cultural, and religious superiority—*whiteness*—became the measuring stick upon which everyone was assessed and categorized. Socially constructed notions of race resulted in a privileging and normalizing of *white* and the establishment of its binary counterpart *other*. Rationalizations of racial inferiority, expropriation of lands and human labor, and cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples provided the foundation for colonialism in the Americas.

Maldonado-Torres (2007) describes colonialism as “a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire” (p. 243). Colonialism in the Americas resulted in the imposition of European culture and ideology on colonized peoples. As Quijano (2007) articulates:

The colonizers also imposed a mystified image of their own patterns of producing knowledge and meaning. At first, they placed these patterns far out of reach of the dominated. Later, they taught in a partial and selective way, in order to co-opt some of the dominated into their own power institutions. Then European culture was made seductive: it gave access to power. (p. 169)



As Quijano expresses, not only were dominant, Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies forced upon colonized peoples, it was done in a systematic way as to appear to be a way of participating in dominant culture. Such subliminal indoctrination served as a mechanism for oppressing, silencing, and marginalizing Indigenous peoples.

Schooling became a tool of deculturalization (Spring, 2001) and worked to silence and obscure historical narratives and collective memories of the past that did not support dominant Eurocentric cultural ideology. Additionally, these circumstances provided the foundation of Western imperialism and hegemony that pervades the modern world. L. T. Smith (2012) in her discussion of western imperialism, history and indigeneity, states: “*Coming to know the past* has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. Transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), however, requires us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes” (p. 36). This, Smith contends, “requires a theory or approach which helps us to engage with, understand, and then act upon history” (p. 36). By acting upon history in this way, decolonizing/decolonization works to decenter Western knowledge as the sole measure of what is considered to be valid or truth.

Conceptualizations of the past additionally impact notions of heritage. Heritage connotes connections to past ways of being and doing that have implications for the present and future. Therefore, portrayals of the past influence conceptualizations of heritage. Historic narratives of the past thus have the potential to influence the ways in which any heritage becomes expressed though both collective and personal identities.

### **Conceptualizing Heritage**

As discussed in the introduction, dominant Western, colonialist perceptions of heritage have influenced the research and management of Maya cultural heritage, as well as the ways in

which Maya heritage is defined, understood and taught in public schools in Belize. L. Smith (2006) describes this as the *Authorized Heritage Discourse* (AHD), which “works to naturalize a range of assumptions about the nature and meaning of heritage ... that privileges expert values and knowledge about the past and its material manifestations and dominates and regulates professional heritage practices” (p. 4). This discourse is pervasive in many Maya heritage studies conducted in Belize. In the context of the AHD, Smith is specifically referring to Western, Eurocentric ontologies and epistemologies that are commonly referred to in academic heritage research fields as “expert” knowledge or approaches.

Western literature about Maya heritage and history is extensive, but less frequently do these narratives include Maya voices, Maya interpretations, or Maya knowledge and understanding about their heritage and past. Little effort is made on the part of western-trained researchers to amplify the collective memory and histories of contemporary Maya communities. In these ways, the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) continues to work to erase contemporary Maya communities by perpetuating views of a single Maya heritage and history that stops hundreds of years in the past. Maya heritage in Belize encompasses a continuous history that has direct implications for contemporary Maya communities (Campbell, 1996; Bolland, 1974) and is a multi-dimensional and dynamic process. As L. Smith (2006) expresses, heritage is a “cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present” (L. Smith, 2006, p. 2). In this way, heritage is fluid and changing (Hutson, Herrera, Chi, 2014; Russell, 2010; L. Smith, 2006; Cohen, 1988) as “heritage is about negotiation—about using the past, and collective or individual memories, to negotiate new ways of being and expressing identity” (L. Smith, 2006, p. 4); thus, identity may also be seen as fluid (Hutson, Herrera, Chi, 2014). Conceptualizing heritage in these ways moves away

from the AHD and highlights the importance of approaches to heritage studies that center contemporary Maya consciousness.

Meskell (2009) broadly discusses heritage studies within the context of *cosmopolitanism*, the belief that, as *citizens of the world*, those of us engaged in heritage and cultural research have responsibilities to the living communities with whom we work, regardless of political affiliations; part of this obligation is acknowledging our role as a participant. A cosmopolitan approach to heritage discredits *multiculturalism* as it tends to assume equal status and treatment of various groups without recognizing the limited representation of minorities or Indigenous communities; disregarding difference and treating all groups equally often results in disempowerment of minoritized groups (Meskell, 2009). A multicultural approach to heritage often challenges Indigenous privilege or control to sacred places/ objects in an effort to secure equal access for all; cosmopolitan approaches would go beyond democratic ideals to consider the desire of Indigenous practice to be legitimized within a society for cultural survival, or, alternatively, being aware that in some instances some groups may prefer cultural integration (Meskell, 2009). In these ways cosmopolitanism shares parallels with decolonizing discourse. Additionally, a cosmopolitan approach to heritage studies in a postcolonial country like Belize, in some ways works to disrupt AHD and researcher/researched or colonizer/colonized dichotomies. It is important to realize that heritage research goes beyond the study of the past, and interpretations may directly affect the present—in terms of both people and places.

The struggle for Maya communities in Belize to regenerate their Maya heritage and identity is exacerbated by the lasting impacts of colonialism and the growing influence of globalization—that is, politically, socially, and economically. This is evident in the ways in which education and research practices in Belize reify Western hegemony. There is, however, a

growing body of literature that works to counter neocolonial hegemony in educational praxis. In the following section I explore pedagogies that have the potential to disrupt Western notions of heritage and knowledge production.

### **Pedagogical Considerations**

There is a growing body of literature that explores the importance of cultural knowledge in educational practice. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) coined the concept *culturally relevant pedagogy*—that is, teaching practices that “help students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools and other institutions perpetuate” (p. 469). Building upon Ladson-Billings’ theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, Paris (2012) conceptualized *culturally sustaining pedagogy*—teaching practices that “perpetuate and foster—sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 95). For Indigenous communities, Western schooling and education practices are “interlaced with ongoing legacies of colonization, ethnocide, and linguicide ... impacting Native peoples in ways that have separated their identities from their languages, lands, and worldviews” (McCarty & Lee, 2014, p. 103). Thus, this raises the question, *what are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy?* (Paris & Alim, 2014; McCarty & Lee, 2014). McCarty & Lee (2014) posit that such pedagogical practices should incorporate cultural revitalization particularly with regard to Indigenous education sovereignty. *Culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy* (CSR/P) confronts legacies of colonization in education as “a crucial component of language and culture reclamation” (McCarty & Lee, 2014, p. 101). CSR/P serves as a useful framework for educational initiatives that work to reclaim and revitalize Indigenous culture and heritage, and such pedagogies have the potential to draw upon a multitude of knowledges.

The concept of *Funds of Knowledge*, provides an additional orientation toward heritage education. Funds of knowledge are “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). González et al. (2009) expand upon the concept of Funds of Knowledge as a practice for connecting households, community, and educational spaces. Funds of knowledge goes beyond stereotypical notions of culture to include lived experiences and the relationships between knowledge and power (González, 2009). As González et al. (2009) articulate, “the funds of knowledge of a community are not a laundry list of immutable cultural traits, but rather are historically contingent, emergent with relations of power, and not necessarily equally distributed” (p. 25). Incorporating funds of knowledge into heritage education initiatives encourages participation across and between multiple intersectionalities and acknowledges a multiplicity of worldviews and ways of knowing.

While there is a wide array of literature related to implementing concepts of CSRP or funds of knowledge in education, much of this literature focuses on schooling in the conventional sense and less on alternative educational approaches. While not directly related to CSRP or funds of knowledge, place-based or place-conscious education is an alternative model of education that shares a combination of these values—that is, it emphasizes community, multiple forms of knowledge, knowledge-power relations, lived experiences, and cultural and traditional practices. Gruenewald and Smith (2014) explain place-based or place-conscious education as:

A community-based effort to reconnect the process of education, enculturation, and human development to the well-being of community life ... [it] introduces children and youth to the skills and dispositions they need to regenerate and sustain communities ...

by drawing on local phenomena as the source of at least a share of children's learning experiences, helping them to understand the processes that underlie the health of natural and social systems essential to human welfare. (p. xvi)

Place-based and place-conscious are widely used synonymously in the literature. In the following discussion I refer to this approach as Place-Based Education (PBE) or Place-Based Learning (PBL).

PBE is an offshoot of experiential education and is frequently associated with sustainability, environmental, ecological, and cultural studies. PBE is in many ways a response to the potential detrimental effects of globalization, corporate capitalism, and market economies on local communities (Gruenewald & Smith, 2014). The impact of globalization and neoliberal reforms on schooling and education has resulted in what Freire (1970) identified as the *banking model*, in which children are seen as empty vessels to fill with a prescribed set of knowledge. Such approaches do not position children as co-producers of knowledge nor do they encourage critical thinking or reflection. Additionally, such practices often isolate children from community life (Gruenewald & Smith, 2014). In contrast, educational approaches rooted in experiential learning “immerse students in action and then ask them to reflect on the experience” (O’Connor, 2010, p. 3). Experiential education is most notably associated with John Dewey (1938) and Paulo Freire (1970), although there are sharp contrasts in the theoretical underpinnings of these seminal works. As Stoecker (2003) explains,

Dewey did not see structural barriers to the increasing democratization of society under capitalism. For Freire, capitalism and the unequal structural power it creates builds barriers to democracy. Thus, for Dewey, education itself is not political ... for Freire,

there is no separation between education and politics. ... For Freire, oppressive social structures must be changed by collective social action. (p. 38)

In this way, Freirean approaches to experiential education are predicated upon social action, and are very much a collective endeavor. So too are approaches to PBE, although the extent to which various PBE projects explicitly engage in political action varies.

Gruenewald and Smith (2014) provide an in-depth discussion of the core themes of PBE, which I synthesize here. PBE, as a model, aims to foster an awareness and recognition of the value of local social and natural environments in which we live, and of the interconnectedness of humanity and all living beings. It encourages critical awareness of the multitude of forces that shape our understandings of places, and to forms of education that promote care for places. This approach is grounded spatial and temporal experiences and promotes “consciousness of the historical memory of a place, and the traditions that emerged there, whether these have been disrupted or conserved” (p. xxi). PBE works to “demonstrate to students the challenges and potentialities of collective effort” (p. xx) and orients children and adults toward collaborative and collective action. It fosters the development of a readiness for social action and effective democratic participation for children and youth. Additionally, PBE “challenges conventional notions of diversity in education, of multiculturalism, or culturally responsive teaching which too often take for granted the legitimacy and value of an education that disregards places in all their particularity and uniqueness” (p. xxi) (see Gruenewald & Smith, 2014, pp. xix–xxii for more in depth discussion of themes in PBE).

Johnson (2012) discusses PBL in the context of critical pedagogies and indigeneity and the potential such approaches have on decolonizing western views of knowledge. He builds on Freire’s (1970) articulation of critical consciousness and argues that developing critical

consciousness means “uncovering our place-based knowledge and acknowledging it as a significant part of our ontology ...” (p. 834). Johnson further asserts that for Indigenous communities, narratives of collective identity are inherently linked to place-based struggles. He states “when we are engaged with a place, we are carrying out an act of remembrance, a retelling of the stories written there, while also continually rewriting these stories. Being-in-place is continually an act of engaged/ active learning” (p. 833).

Johnson’s conceptualization of place provides another dimension to the previous discussion of the fluidness of heritage and identity. While collective memory and identity may be seen as continuous negotiations of the past, they are situated by place and the connections that are made via acts of remembrance and the continual “rewriting” of stories of a place. Johnson additionally suggests, “it is the struggle to protect place and all of its wisdom/ learning/ knowing associated with place that leads us not only to place-based struggle for community self-determination but also for the protection and continuation of community knowledge” (p. 833). In this way, place is central to understandings of heritage and identity, and it seems that PBE as a model, offers an orientation toward thoughtful, critical, and experiential approaches to heritage education. To situate this study, I now discuss collaborative research approaches that align with my theoretical framing. I begin by briefly exploring the progression of community-based research approaches and their theoretical underpinnings. I then discuss participatory action research as it is related to community-based research approaches as well as its relationship to this work. Finally, I explore ethnography as a methodological framing for this community-engaged project.



## **Approaches to Community-Engaged Research**

As discussed previously, theoretical approaches to heritage research in the social sciences have been influenced by postmodern thought that has worked to disrupt positivist research practices (Hodder, 1991, 1999; Spiro, 1996). Within the context of heritage studies, this paradigm shift has led to what is broadly articulated as community-based approaches (Atalay, 2012; Leventhal et al., 2014). Broadly speaking, Community-Based Research (CBR) (also identified in the literature as Community Engaged Research) is predicated upon several principals: collaboration between researcher(s) and community members; validation of multiple sources and forms of knowledge; and social action and change for a more socially just world (Stoecker, 2003; Strand et al., 2003). The extent to which community-based research initiatives follow these principles and local communities participate in the research process varies greatly, as does the level to which such projects engage with issues of power and authority of knowledge.

The historical influences and relationships between theory and practice of CBR are central to understanding the multiple uses and interpretations of this type of research. Generally speaking, current CBR practices stem from three broad models that have developed over the past century. Strand et al. (2003) articulate these models as:

A popular education model that emphasized the involvement of people in education themselves for social change; an action research model used by academics in conjunction with major social institutions; a participatory research model that emphasized the involvement of people doing their own research for social change. (p. 4)

Two different types of research practice—participatory research and action research, broadly inform these models of CBR. Participatory research practices originate from the “third-world development movement of the 1960s. Academics, activists, and Indigenous community members

collaborated to conduct research, develop education programs, and create plans to counter global corporations' efforts to take over world agriculture" (Stoecker, 2003, p. 36). Paulo Freire is most frequently associated with participatory research as his "theories of empowerment and creating knowledge for change laid the groundwork for participatory research's theory and practice" (Flicker et al., 2007, p. 239).

Action research is based on the work of Kurt Lewin in the late 1940s which "focused on race relations, attempting to resolve interracial conflicts, along with conducting applied research to increase worker productivity and satisfaction" (Stoecker, 2003, p. 37). More recent action research practices focus on a more emancipatory perspective that extend "beyond Lewin's work, which did not include a critique of the wider society or consider 'power bases that define social roles and strongly influence the process of any change' (Adelman, 1993, p. 10)" (Lykes & Coquillon, 2007, p. 297). While more recent trends in action research explore power bases, the most notable distinction between these two community-based practices relates to issues of power and knowledge production. As Stoecker (2003) notes, "Action research does not challenge the existing power relationships in either knowledge production or material production" (p. 37). Drawing upon Gaventa (1993), he explains participatory research "is about people producing knowledge to develop their own consciousness and further their social change struggles" (Stoecker, 2003, p. 37). At the heart of these two approaches lie distinct differences in the theoretical frameworks that guide these practices.

Stoecker (2003) explores the sociological theories that elucidate differences in varied interpretations and practices of CBR. Participatory research is frequently categorized as a radical approach grounded in conflict theory while action research is characterized by conservative orientations undergirded in functionalist theory (Stoecker, 2003). Functionalist theory argues that

“Society tends toward natural equilibrium and its division of labor develops through an almost natural matching of individual talents and societal needs ... because the model does not recognize structural barriers to equality, it can only provide opportunities determined by existing power holders” (Stoecker, 2003, p. 40). In contrast, conflict theory argues that the natural tendency of society is toward conflict over resources. “In this model society develops through struggle between groups. Stability in society is only fleeting ... not because society finds equilibrium but because one group dominates other groups” (Stoecker, 2003, p. 40). While I find it helpful to contrast CBR approaches through this binary theoretical distinction, CBR in practice exists on a continuum between radical and conservative and participatory and action, and may be influenced by a wide array of alternative theoretical approaches. Additionally, more recent CBR approaches blend aspects of participatory and action research, further blurring the lines.

### **Participatory Action Research**

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a community-based approach to research that works to combine aspects of participation and action research. PAR approaches define the relationship between researcher(s) and community members as a collaborative partnership. In other words, research is not conducted *on* but *with* community members (L. Smith et al., 2010). PAR prioritizes local concerns and knowledge and positions the community as change agent—in other words, power is located in the community. As Shore (2007) articulates, “*community as agent of change* assumes empowerment of the community as a change agent and an egalitarian relationship between the community representatives and the researchers” (p. 32). Additionally, one of the primary goals of PAR is research resulting in action. PAR works to “implement the results in a way that will raise critical consciousness and promote change in the lives of those

involved—changes that are in the direction and control of the participating group or community” (Kidd & Kral, 2005, p. 187).

Of particular importance in PAR is accountability of the researcher(s) to the community, which necessitates reflexive research practices. Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2007) articulate reflexivity in the context of research as both a self-critical action and a communal process. Reflexivity as a self-critical action requires attentiveness to the ways in which our identities, positionalities, and subjectivities impact research and productions of knowledge (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007; Datta et al., 2015, Wilson, 2007). As a communal process, reflexivity in research “fosters sharing, engaged relationships, and participatory knowledge building practices ... [that] can bring alternative forms of knowledge into the public discourse” (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007, p. 496). These combined approaches to PAR address the critiques of positivist thought by questioning the authority of knowledge, by emphasizing a comprehensive and multivocal narrative (Hesse-Biber, 2007), and by acknowledging and challenging hierarchies of power inherent in the research process (Potts & Brown, 2015). Nakamura (2015) critically examines PAR in Indigenous communities and works to address the question: what is a community’s desire? He cautions that PAR is not always the best approach as there is the potential to overlook local power relations and inequities. Additionally, the expectation in PAR that participants engage appropriately “might be considered another form of domination by authority” (Nakamura, 2015, p. 169).

Exploring PAR methods are useful in the context of this study as they share many of the key themes: collaboration, locating power in the community, action, accountability of the researcher to the community, and reflexivity. However, I take Nakamura’s critique seriously as this project differs with regard to the role of research. Community participants were not

interested in research analysis as the process through which action was realized. While participants recognized the benefit of various aspects of qualitative research in propelling the program forward, they were not interested in collaboratively collecting and synthesizing data. This was viewed as a role that I was able to fill as a contribution to the overall development of the program. It was this methodological shift that encouraged me to explore ethnography as an alternative approach for writing my dissertation.

### **Ethnography Instead of PAR?**

On the outside looking in, it may seem counter intuitive to consider ethnography a viable research approach to a project that centers around Maya cultural heritage and that is framed by decolonial thought. For me, the term “ethnography” dredges up images of early European anthropologists inviting themselves into communities they deem “exotic” and attempting to objectively study said community’s culture and behavior. That image is perhaps the antithesis of how I just described participatory action research. However, like PAR and the social sciences in general, ethnography has undergone significant paradigmatic shifts. I articulate these shifts more fully in the Methodology section where I discuss in detail postcritical ethnography as part of the framework for this research study. However, I wish to clarify here my decision to employ ethnography as an approach to research in a community-based project setting.

The development of the Motmot Camp has very much been a PAR initiative and my role throughout this process has been that of participant-observer. As I have worked to find a balance between this collaborative project and my dissertation research, I saw the possibility of writing this dissertation as an ethnography of the PAR project. Atkinson et al. (2001) contend that ethnography is “grounded in a commitment to the first-hand experience and exploration of a particular social or cultural setting on the basis of (though not exclusively by) participant

observation” (p. 4). My role throughout the development of the Motmot Camp project has afforded me first-hand experience as participant-observer. Additionally, while reflexivity, participant checks, and sharing research findings back with the community are essential pieces of collaborative work, my analysis and synthesis of data still remains my own interpretation of the process. Therefore, it was not a stretch to employ ethnographic methods to the construction of this dissertation project. In the next section, I examine heritage education more broadly and explore several examples of research studies that have focused on the development and progress of heritage education programs within Belize and abroad.

### **Heritage Education Studies**

There is an immense body of literature that situates and explores the multitude of ways in which heritage is taken up in education. As this dissertation focuses on a community-based program, I reviewed literature pertinent to heritage education initiatives in community contexts. More specifically, I was interested in literature related to Indigenous and descendent communities within settler colonial countries. Much of the relevant literature emanates from the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand and most frequently relates to cultural resource management and archaeological studies, anthropological studies, language/culture revitalization, and specific aspects of cultural heritage artways such dance or music. Within these broad categories, there is a wide array of approaches to theoretical framing, research design and methodology. Additionally, the specific focus also varies, but most frequently topics include curriculum design, pedagogy, program evaluation, efficacy, and identity. There are important and relevant contributions in the available literature that help to better situate this research. First, I explore two studies located in Belize that focus on heritage education. These studies provide a snapshot of recent research that focuses on community-based heritage education initiatives in the

country. Then I examine two studies conducted outside of Belize that provide insight into methodological approaches to heritage education that are more in line with my study.

### **Studies In Belize and Central America**

Studies conducted by Rebecca Zarger and Kristina Baines in southern Belize, Alicia McGill in northern Belize, and Patricia McAnany and Shoshaunna Parks in southern Belize and other countries in Central America focus on improving the incorporation of cultural, archaeological and environmental heritage material into the classroom. McGill's (2012) ethnographic research conducted in schools in a Kriol community in northern Belize, apply collaborative approaches to heritage and education. She examines the impact of state ideologies in the cultural production of citizens. She addresses issues with current heritage management practices that do not engage local communities, and that often prioritize certain cultural groups over others. McGill (2011) identified several issues faced by teachers when integrating culture, heritage, and archaeology into social studies units. While some current archaeological materials are available to teachers, they are often difficult to obtain and pedagogically inadequate largely because archaeologists are not trained in or familiar with education practice and theory or education systems and curricula in Belize (McGill, 2011). McGill's research highlights the difficulties experienced by many communities in Belize regarding heritage management and heritage in education. McGill's work offers much to understanding connections between heritage and nationalism in Belize and was heavily influenced by community archaeology initiatives by Chau Hiix Archaeological Project (CHAP).

Baines and Zarger's (2012) community-based research is situated in two different Maya communities in Southern Belize and addresses these communities' feelings of loss of cultural and environmental knowledge and aspects of heritage due to formal westernized forms of

education. Baines and Zarger differentiate between *formal* knowledge, or knowledge learned in a westernized school setting, and *informal* knowledge or “traditional” knowledge primarily learned outside of formal settings. Baines & Zarger worked collaboratively within these communities to integrate local Maya environmental knowledge into the formal school curricula and developed a program to provide support to local educators and community members in this process. This research project encouraged local community participation and resulted in the development of curriculum materials that are still being used in schools within these communities. This work might broadly be defined as an ethnographic study that applies a phenomenological approach, grounded in the lived experiences of folks in these communities (Baines, 2012).

McAnany and Parks’s long-term heritage education project, the Maya Area Heritage Education Initiative (MACHI), was as an educational outreach and Maya grassroots movement founded in 2006 aimed at conserving Maya archaeological sites and promoting contemporary Maya heritage in multiple Central American countries including Belize (Parks et al., 2006). MACHI developed collaborations with local Indigenous communities and worked to create informal and formal education opportunities to increase access to archeological and Indigenous knowledge. The ways in which this research was pursued in these countries varied based on local contexts (McAnany & Parks, 2012). The program in Honduras among the Ch’orti’ Maya, began as workshops held in elementary schools and were led by local instructors who identify as Ch’orti’ or, in one case, Mestiza. One of the project’s primary concerns was addressing what the authors term, *heritage distancing* which they define as “the alienation of contemporary inhabitants of a landscape from the tangible remains or intangible practices of the past” (McAnany & Parks, 2012, p. 80). This program curriculum integrated information about ancient and modern Maya identities and the conservation of cultural heritage through nine themes: Maya



of Copán, plants and animals, maize, religion, rulers of Copán, Maya science, writing, archaeology, and Maya peoples of today (McAnany & Parks, 2012).

In Belize, MACHI partnered with the Julian Cho Society, a non-governmental organization (NGO) in southern Belize devoted to Maya land rights. The Belize program followed a similar model to the Honduran project and worked to implement workshops in Maya communities throughout the region; however, the content was not the same. In the Belize project, workshop lectures began with a discussion of who the Maya ancestors were, the connection between Maya ancestors and the heritage sites in the area, the archeological process with emphasis on the roles archaeologists play (what they do with artifacts, and where artifacts are stored, i.e., kept in the country not removed), and why archaeological sites should be preserved (Ishihara et al., 2008). Ishihara et al. (2008) note that the project initially met with several challenges; these being (a) project collaborators met with resistance from village and community leaders when trying to organize with them, and (b) there was little interest from residents—there was little to no turnout during workshops. The authors reassessed their approach, materials, and audience and decided to focus on children in primary schools; however, this iteration was not particularly successful either. Ishihara et al. state, “The presentation of the material, despite completely reworking the information, remains static and common. Children’s participation has somehow become secondary to the obligation of presenting the information” (Ishihara et al., 2008). On their website, the Julian Cho Society in Belize with whom MACHI partnered states: “The Tumul K’in Center for Learning has also been a recipient of the program’s efforts through rigorous Maya history course instruction, cooperative work in a radio broadcasting initiative, and through support of Maya Days, an annual celebration hosted by the school” (Julian Cho Society, 2008). Through a review of the literature, I was unable to find any other publications related to

MACHI in Belize, so I am unable to discuss any long-term effects of the program. While MACHI involves collaboration with Maya communities in Central America and these publications cited participatory methodologies, the theoretical underpinnings of this research stem from processual archeological theory and positivist epistemologies.

These three research projects demonstrate research between foreign, Western-trained researchers and minoritized communities in Belize and Central America. These studies take place in public school contexts and focus on cultural heritage knowledge. While McGill's study takes a more traditional ethnographic approach, she exposes the politics of heritage management practices in the country and elucidates how these issues permeate schooling and curriculum. This is particularly important in conceptualizing the more systemic problem of neocolonial hegemony. Baines and Zarger offer a more action-oriented approach centered on a collaborative model of research. Their study works to address the systemic issues that McGill addresses as well as those raised by culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Their work highlights the significance of traditional Maya environmental knowledge through an integrated curriculum. While not explicitly aligned with place-based learning or funds of knowledge, their study connects with these pedagogical approaches as they center around the community and multiple forms of cultural knowledge. McAnany, Parks, and Ishihara's project provide insight into collaborative archeological practices in the region. While these studies come out of the field of archaeology and not education, they do employ heritage education programs for youth. While participatory, this approach is not in line with my methodological or theoretical positions. I examine this particular study to provide context for the various types of heritage education work being done in Belize.

Broadly speaking, these studies represent three important elements related to my research. First, McGill's work addresses the larger social and political issues surrounding heritage management and heritage research practices in Belize. As I mentioned previously, part of my desire in carrying out this project is to use my position of power in the Western academy to disrupt and challenge neocolonial research traditions. Second, Baines and Zarger's study speaks to my desire to engage in a collaborative approach to research that has the potential to incite change from within the community. To my knowledge, and based on my review of the current literature, there are no research projects in Belize that work to intersect decolonizing research methodologies with heritage education in community settings. Third, McAnany, Parks, and Ishihara's work offers insight into the efforts made by very few archaeological projects in Belize to encourage and facilitate more collaborative approaches to heritage studies. While I do not seek to emulate their approach, I feel that it is important to examine their collaborative initiative because it involves Maya communities in Belize as well as Maya heritage sites. I turn now to a discussion of research projects situated outside of Belize that share connections to the methodological approaches that are more in line with my study.

### **Studies Abroad**

The two studies explored in this section focus specifically on collaborative heritage education projects within Indigenous contexts with non-Indigenous researchers. As with the studies in Belize, these projects take place in school settings. The first study draws upon PAR and ethnographic methods, while the second study utilizes a critical ethnographic approach. The methodologies of these studies align with my research and provide insight into the often-tricky balance between research in community settings and writing a dissertation.

Henry-Stone (2010) explores participatory action research (PAR) approaches to a collaborative curriculum design project in an Indigenous-serving charter school in Alaska. The school “teaches with an Alaska Native approach, emphasizing place-based, experiential, and holistic education by utilizing students’ natural and human communities to facilitate learning” (p. 1). Through a lens of sustainability pedagogy and PAR, her study facilitated the development of a collaboratively designed gardening curriculum that complimented the school curriculum. As a PAR project, Henry-Stone’s study adhered to a collaborative research process that positioned the community members and educators as co-researchers. PAR supports sustainability research approaches oriented toward action, experience, and locally-relevant knowledge and additionally offers a cyclical and reflexive approach to research (Henry-Stone, 2010). She states: “While guided by PAR, my fieldwork was grounded in the qualitative approaches typically associated with ethnography; in a sense, my study was an ‘actionography’” (p. 8). Of import, is the blending of methodologies that Henry-Stone highlights in her research journey as she worked to balance participant-observer aspects of observation and interview with participatory action methods of collaborative curriculum design.

Anthony-Stevens (2013) examines the ways in which an Indigenous-serving charter school in Arizona created a space for culturally responsive schooling practices that engaged the Indigenous cultural heritage of students. Through this critical ethnography, Anthony-Stevens explores the ways in which teachers, parents, and youth co-constructed a “school community of practice around connections to mainstream standardized knowledge and local Indigenous knowledges ... [and thus] offered students access to strength-based both/and identities” (p. 12). State pressure from high-stakes testing and accountability measurements led to the premature closure of this school (Anthony-Stevens, 2013). Anthony-Stevens’s research additionally details

participants' educational negotiations within the limited school options available following the charter school closure. This study offers both insight into the possibilities of transformative educational praxis that supports culturally relevant ways of thinking and knowing such as culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogies (McCarty & Lee, 2014), as well as a critique of the unjust educational practices upheld by accountability policy in education.

There are important parallels between Henry-Stone's (2010) and Anthony-Stevens's (2013) framings and approaches to their research. Both studies contribute to critical and anti-colonial discourse as they foreground community voices, Indigenous knowledges, and values. In each study, the fluidity of heritage is highlighted particularly with regard to the ongoing process of negotiation of the past on the present. This is evident in the ways in which curricula were designed and implemented. These projects align with critical approaches to ethnographies and explore experiences negotiating and interrupting unequal power relationships between non-Indigenous researchers and Indigenous communities.

The studies discussed above shed light on the possibilities that exist for collaborative practices and approaches to heritage education with/in Indigenous and minoritized communities and with/between foreign/non-Indigenous researchers. Of import is noting the fluid and dynamic ways in which research was taken up in localized and specific contexts. While not all of these studies were framed by decolonizing orientations, they share common characteristics that center around non-Western/ Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies and push against neocolonial discourse in research praxis. Each of the studies focused on performative community and culturally-based education initiatives aimed at centering community voices, knowledge, values, customs, and language. While the particular research methods and methodologies varied, they shared an orientation toward critical and reflexive practices that challenged power differences in

the research process. What I glean from these projects is that there is value in the possibility for reciprocal relationships and friendships between foreign/non-Indigenous researchers and Indigenous communities. It seems from within these relationships, possibilities also exist for finding ways out of the imbalances and inequities produced by the colonial encounter (Gandhi, 1998) as well as those (re)produced by neocolonial hegemony (Shohat, 1992).

### **Summary**

A review of relevant literature revealed a gap in studies that explore the intersections of indigeneity, cultural regeneration, community organizing, and heritage education. That is not to say there are not projects out there engaging with these concepts and approaches. Rather, there are simply limited resources and publications that explore these processes simultaneously. Through a lens of decolonization, I seek to contribute to this body of literature and address this gap through my postcritical ethnography of the PAR heritage education project in Succotz.

Having participated in a variety of heritage studies in Belize for over a decade, I want to find space in the field where more authentic collaboration with and between local communities and foreign researchers may exist. So often these relationships are tenuous and nuanced and continue to reinscribe colonizer/colonized, researcher/researched, western/other dichotomies. I feel that collaborative, community-engaged approaches that embrace decolonizing methodologies and attend to critical reflexivity, positionality, and representation in the research process have the potential to disrupt and challenge the status quo of western hegemony in heritage studies. I hope that my study contributes to the larger conversations of decolonial praxis in research.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I first reiterate the purpose of my research study as well as my research questions. I then discuss decolonizing methodologies and epistemologies as they inform my methodological approach and overarching theoretical framing of this dissertation. Third, I examine postcritical ethnography as my research approach for this study and articulate how this aligns with both my theoretical framework and methodology. Next, I delve into my research methods for this study. Within this subsection I address the methods I utilized for participant and site selection, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, I attend to my efforts to maintain trustworthiness and rigor.

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

Having spent the first half of my career so far participating in heritage studies that centered positivist and Eurocentric ontologies and epistemologies, I wanted to understand better how a collaborative partnership between researcher and community might challenge the dominant paradigm. This project attempts to “research back” (L. T. Smith, 2012, p. 8) to the academy. The focus of this project is on the perceptions, beliefs, and stories of teachers, children, parents, volunteers, and community knowledge bearers around the intersections of community organizing and heritage education. I acknowledge my subjectivity as a foreign outsider participant and active observer. I realize that this may limit full authentic engagement, and I work to address this through my own reflexive accounts. With these assumptions in mind, I have chosen to write about this project and experience as a postcritical ethnography of the process of our PAR project that highlights the local histories, culture, and heritage in Succotz. Through my ethnography I address the following questions:

1. How do collaborators and youth describe their experiences of engaging in this heritage education initiative?
2. How might the experiences offered through this initiative provide an opportunity for increased awareness around heritage and agency?
3. What are the community, curricular, and pedagogical implications of engaging in a heritage-centered, community-based educational experience?

### **Decolonizing Methodologies and Epistemologies**

As I have discussed in other sections, this study is centered on collaborative, participatory, and decolonial approaches to research. While I briefly discussed decolonizing methodologies in the theoretical framing of this dissertation, I expound upon this approach as it specifically relates to carrying out this research. As Swadener and Mutua (2008) articulate, “Decolonizing research goes beyond postcolonial analysis to a more socially engaged, collaborative alliance model that reconstructs the very purposes of research and epistemologies that inform it” (p. 41). Given its fluid nature, it is important to articulate that the project of decolonization is not singularly defined, nor is there a set of methodologies or methods that are considered constitutive. That being said, Swadener and Mutua (2008) draw upon their own experiences and the works of Bhabha (1994), Hamza (2004), Jankie (2004), Kaomea (2004), McCarthy (2014), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (2011), G. H. Smith (2005), L. T. Smith (1999), Spivak (1999), and others, to provide a synthesis of what they consider “defining features of decolonizing performances” (p. 32). Swadener and Mutua (2008) state,

We see the distinctive hallmarks of decolonizing research lying in the motives, concerns, and knowledge brought to the research process. We contend that decolonizing research is defined by certain themes and defining elements and concepts that arise when researchers



engage in what they describe as decolonizing research versus research that studies coloniality or postcoloniality (p. 33).

To articulate better the project of decolonization, I paraphrase Swadener and Mutua's (2008) synthesis. Decolonizing research

- is performative—it is enmeshed in activism. (p. 33)
- is constantly mindful of the ways in which the process or outcomes ... might reify hegemonic power structures, thereby creating marginality. (p. 33)
- works within the belief that non-Western knowledge forms are excluded or marginalized in normative research paradigms; therefore, non-Western/Indigenous voices and epistemologies are silenced and subjects lack agency within such representations. (p. 33)
- recognizes the role of colonization in the scripting and encrypting of a silent, inarticulate, and inconsequential Indigenous subject and how such encryptions legitimize oppression. (pp. 33–34)
- functions to highlight and to advocate the ending of both discursive and material oppression that is produced at the site of the encryption of the non-Western subject as a 'governable body' (Foucault, 1977). (p. 34)

These “defining features” provide insight into the goals, orientations, and aspirations of decolonizing endeavors at the intersections of theory, reflection, and practice—*praxis* (Freire, 1986; L. T. Smith, 2012).

L. T. Smith (2012) articulates this in terms of methodology *as* theory where concern lies “with the context in which research problems are conceptualized and designed, and with the implications of research for its participants and their communities ... [also] with the institution of

research, its claims, its values, and practices, and its relationship to power” (p. ix). Decolonizing methodologies as a research framework push us to move beyond deconstruction to action. L. T. Smith (2012) states:

The methodologies and methods of research, the theories that inform them, the questions which they generate and the writing styles they employ, all become significant acts which need to be considered carefully and critically before being applied. In other words, they need to be ‘decolonized.’ Decolonization, however, does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. (p. 41)

As mentioned previously, one of the main critiques of postcolonialism is the tendency for postcolonial research to reinscribe Western ontologies and epistemologies, particularly in Indigenous research contexts, thus, reifying hegemony and perpetuating oppression and marginalization. However, there are aspects of postcolonial theory that when placed in concert with certain approaches to qualitative research create the potential for decolonizing performances. Speed (2008) proposes questions to consider when working toward research that is performative, participatory, and decolonizing: “Do they address neocolonial power dynamics in our research processes? Do they seek to engage rather than to analyze our research subjects?” (p. 230). Such concerns help to situate research within a decolonizing framework. This argument is supported and taken up by Mutua and Swadener (2004) and Swadener and Mutua (2008) in their examinations of the intersections between qualitative research and postcolonial theory and the possibilities that may be produced in such spaces for decolonizing projects.

The blending of theoretical and methodological framing in decolonizing research centers non-Western and Indigenous epistemologies and knowledge forms while simultaneously reclaiming and affirming Indigenous languages and customs in the research process and in the

Western academy (L. T. Smith, 2012; Swadener & Mutua, 2008). The emphasis on performativity in decolonizing research supports creating projects that work toward cultural reclamation and regeneration in Indigenous contexts. Additionally, advocates of this reframing assert that “researchers actively decenter the Western academy as the exclusive locus of authorizing power that defines research agenda” (Swadener & Mutua, 2008, p. 38). This reimagining of who and what is centered in research creates new possibilities for “researcher identities for both the Indigenous and foreign researcher as ‘allied other’ (Rogers & Swadener, 1999) ... framed broadly, none of us carries only ‘one’ colonizer/colonized subjectivity/identity” (Swadener & Mutua, 2008, p. 38). Redefining research and praxis in these ways has important implications for this dissertation work and my positionality as a foreign researcher working with/in a Maya-Mestizo community in Belize. In the next section I discuss my decision to write about this project as a postcritical ethnography and examine what this approach offers to this study.

### **Research Approach**

In Chapters I and II, I briefly touched on the methodological shift that occurred during the course of my research and data collection—that being a shift from Participatory Action Research (PAR) to Postcritical Ethnography of PAR. When I started to design my initial study between 2014 and 2015, I was drawn to the literature around Participatory Action Research (PAR) because of the emphasis this methodology places on collaborative partnerships, researching with community, and action. Following my initial pilot study, I felt that PAR was still a good fit for this research because folks seemed genuinely interested in a collaborative community-based project. In my second field season in 2016, my discussions with participants revealed a distinct lack of community desire to approach this endeavor as a collaborative

research project. Rather, participants felt that the primary focus should be on the action of doing something to promote youth development in Succotz and to leverage community knowledge and resources, not on collecting and synthesizing data. Participants felt that my skills and knowledge as a researcher and educator would contribute in a meaningful way to the development of the project and would provide space for other participants to contribute their specific skillsets, knowledge, and abilities. In this way, responsibilities were shared in more authentic ways. In chapter four I provide a more elaborate discussion about my decision to make this methodological shift, but in this section, I describe my purpose and rationale for situating this dissertation as a postcritical ethnography of a PAR project.

My decision to situate this dissertation research as “ethnography” at first, incited feelings of angst. Coming from a background in anthropology and archaeology, I feared taking up a methodology with deep-seated connections to colonialism. As L.T. Smith (2012) articulates: “The ethnographic ‘gaze’ of anthropology has collected, classified, and represented other cultures to the extent that anthropologists are often the academics popularly perceived by the Indigenous world as the epitome of all that is bad with academics” (p. 70). As I have continued to trouble this approach as well as my hesitations, I am left with the notion of flipping the ‘gaze’ around. As Denzin & Lincoln (2008) remind us, “the project of decolonization reverses this equation, by making Western systems of knowledge the object of critique and inquiry” (p. 6). So then, it seems fitting, given my background and insider knowledge, that I use this dissertation as an opportunity to decolonize and deconstruct the ‘ethnographic gaze’ and the structures within the academy that privilege Western ontologies and epistemologies. These structures continue to marginalize and exclude non-Western and Indigenous voices, identities, knowledge, and epistemologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999).

## **Postcritical Ethnography**

Postcritical ethnography signifies a more recent shift in the way critical approaches to ethnography have been challenged, in particular by postmodern and poststructural thought (Noblit et al., 2004). Critical ethnography emerged as a response to traditional ethnography that was constructed in the context of colonialism and positivism. Critical ethnography sought to blend critical theory (said to lack method) with interpretive anthropology (said to lack theory) to address larger social issues and systems of power (Noblit et al., 2004). Drawing upon the work of Bennett and LeCompte (1990), Noblit et al. (2004) contend that “critical ethnography has had a history of controversy about exclusiveness, patriarchy, Eurocentrality, and its over simplified view of asymmetric power relations, that seemingly expects consensus to result from transformative efforts” (p. 19). A postcritical critique suggests that “critical ethnographers have not and are not taking into account changing social conditions and the unique forms of power that are employed to control different oppressed people” (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 19). This has very real implications for research in postcolonial and Indigenous contexts, as experiences of colonialism are not universal.

Critical ethnography has been further challenged by postmodernism and its rejection of objective knowledge. One of the most significant critiques of critical ethnography is the lack of reflexivity regarding researcher subjectivities, relationships between researchers and participants, as well as the research process, product, and results (Hyttén, 2004; Noblit et al., 2004). While critical ethnographic approaches “illuminate how theory informs lived experience as well as how larger social structures can inhibit the development of transformative social practice” (Hyttén, 2004, pp. 95–96), it is important to consider how this is represented in specific research contexts. Postcritical ethnography attends to these critiques by challenging the epistemology of critical

ethnography and by interrogating the “power and politics of the critic himself/herself as well as the social scene studied” (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 19).

There is no singular definition of postcritical ethnography as the focus is more on difference and critique. However, Noblit et al. (2004) suggest that postcritical ethnography specifically addresses issues that “include but are not limited to: positionality, reflexivity, objectivity, and representation” (p. 21). Each of these issues is reflected in my overall theoretical and methodological framework and additionally informs the methods of my study. Perhaps most central to postcritical ethnographic studies is reflexivity, which Noblit et al. (2004) describe as a redesigning of both the observed and observer. With regard to the observed, the researcher must accept that identity is fluid and changing in different contexts and that “time and history are lived and constituted rather than exist as a context to identity” (pp. 21–22). For the observer, this involves “working toward dialogic and bifocal (emic/etic) exegesis that elaborates the alternative possibilities, identities, juxtapositions, and outcomes in any scene studied ethnographically” (p. 22). In other words, practicing reflexivity as a postcritical ethnographer requires that we ask questions throughout the research process such as: “How might I interpret this experience differently? What role do I play in the telling of it and what responsibility do I have to the production of it?” (Anders, 2012, p. 104). As well as “How might I interpret differently what I have come to understand? How might I construct representations that reflect multiple realities?” (Lester & Anders, 2018, p. 7). Reflexivity in this way becomes part of the entire research process.

Hyttén (2004) describes postcritical ethnography as a collaborative, dialogic, accessible, pedagogical and transformative process. Participants should play a role throughout the research process and research findings should be shared, negotiated, and made accessible. Accessibility

requires sharing research findings with participants in meaningful ways not just within academia. Regarding the pedagogical and transformative elements of postcritical ethnography, Bocci (2016) articulates:

By attending to consciousness-raising (for the researcher and the researched) throughout the project and by presenting the work in ways that bring the findings to the community, the transformative impact of the research can extend beyond the theoretical and into the material. In other words, rather than situating “transformation” in the hope that readers of the findings be inspired to make social changes (Hyttén, 2004), postcritical ethnographers (and those they research) take concrete actions as a result of and possibly through the presentation of their findings (Gerstl-Pepin, 2004). (p. 63)

In this way, postcritical ethnography shares commonality with the performative goal of decolonizing methodologies. Postcritical ethnography alone does not constitute a project of decolonization. However, as a research method framed by decolonizing praxis, postcritical ethnography offers a unique perspective from which to base this study. I cannot claim this dissertation to be a fully authentic postcritical ethnography given the fact that collaboration with community participants was not possible throughout the entire research process. However, I draw from postcritical ethnography and decolonizing methodologies as I design my methods of this study.

## **Methods**

In this section I describe the background context for my research study as well as how I gained access to Succotz. I then provide an outline of our PAR project. I identify and describe the two phases this project took: Program Design and the Motmot Camp. Following this discussion, I offer an outline of my ethnography of our PAR project. In this section I discuss my

selection of participants, my data collection procedures, my methods for data analysis, as well as my trustworthiness and rigor.

## **Background Context**

In Chapter I, I discussed my background and positionality as it relates to this study. I now expound upon the background context of this initiative to situate better the specifics of my study methods. This study utilizes a layered research approach in which I both participate in the collaborative development of the Motmot Camp and conduct my own ethnography of our experiences through the process. For the most part these layers overlap; however, I want to clarify that my involvement in the heritage program started before I realized that I would end up writing this dissertation as an ethnography. Through my participation in this project, this study shifted from what I thought initially might be a participatory action research project to a postcritical ethnography of a PAR project. As I have discussed previously, this distinction was based on community participants' vision and desires for the overall project and for their own participation in the initiative. While community members were not interested in collaboratively conducting this project as research, participants saw my skillset as an educator and researcher as an important contribution to the project. Consequently, I was invited to contribute my thoughts and ideas to the development of the heritage education camp for youth. I additionally collected, documented, synthesized, and shared-back information and ideas from project participants related to the development and progress of the Motmot Camp.

The methodological shift that happened during this process undoubtedly affected my initial study methods. This is perhaps most evident in my decision to focus on interviews and community voices first, rather than the thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) that often come from initial participant observations. This is not to say that participant observations do not play a vital



role in my research methods, because they certainly do, but much of my initial insight into the context of Succotz, the community members, and the heritage initiative emerged from informal conversations and formal interviews with many folks in Succotz and the surrounding area during my first field season. It was through these personal interactions that I provide context for this study. It was later in this process, once the project had taken on its own rhythm and momentum, that my field observations began to explore and capture the project as a collective whole.

My initial connection to the project in Succotz began prior to my acceptance in Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations (ELC) program at UNCG. As I discussed in my positionality statement, I lived in Belize and worked there as a researcher and an instructor beginning in 2010. I first met my mentor, Dr. Filiberto Penados, in 2012 when I began teaching at a local university where he also taught. Dr. Penados is a Maya activist-scholar; his work focuses on Indigenous future-making and education. During a national heritage studies conference in the summer of 2014, I asked Dr. Penados if he would be willing to meet with me to discuss my interest in collaborative heritage education studies. I knew I would be starting in the ELC program that fall and was exploring ideas for my dissertation topic. At that time, he and a few teachers in the nearby village of Succotz had just started considering ways to engage youth in the community. He encouraged me to speak with teachers and community members within Succotz as a way of potentially initiating a larger community-based project for heritage and education in the village. I was not able to proceed with an exploratory study until the summer of 2015, once I fulfilled the requirements for conducting qualitative research. In the spring of 2015, Dr. Penados and a few teachers and community knowledge bearers held a small day-and-a-half long camp for youth that centered Maya heritage and community building. Following the camp, the children who participated requested that there be another camp or other activities in which

they could participate. Given the positive feedback received, Dr. Penados encouraged me to plan a trip to Belize over the summer of 2015 to explore potential options for expanding this community-based heritage initiative. It very quickly became clear to me that I wanted this project to be a part of my doctoral research project. Given the complex nature of community-engaged projects and the longevity of this particular project, I began collecting data in my first year of this doctoral program. I believe that this alternative approach played a significant role in my overall experience both as a participant and researcher. In the following section I discuss Succotz and how I gained access to the site.

### **Entering the Site**

Succotz is located in the western part Belize, near the Guatemalan border and is situated on a hill overlooking a beautiful river. The ancient Maya site of Xunantunich, the second largest site in Belize, is located directly across the river from Succotz, and is a popular tourist destination. The majority of folks who live in Succotz predominantly speak both Spanish and English, with Spanish most often being the home language. Belizean Kriol, as well as some dialects of Maya, are also spoken, but less frequently. The population of Succotz is approximately 3000, and the majority of community members identify as Mestizo—that is, a blend of Maya and Spanish culture and heritage. Succotz was historically a Yucatec Maya village, though nowadays, it is often referred to as a Mestizo community. Succotz has both Roman Catholic primary and secondary schools and Nazarene primary and secondary schools.

As a foreigner, qualitative researcher, and graduate student wishing to conduct research in Belize, I was required to obtain a research permit from the Institute of Social and Cultural Research (ISCR) in Belize as well as approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UNCG prior to conducting research. Following protocols for conducting research outlined by

both institutions, I was able to begin my preliminary study. As this research continued, I was required to renew my research permit and seek IRB approval each year for the duration of the study. This annual renewal process allowed me to update and make necessary changes along the way with regard to my research goals and methods.

While I was familiar with western Belize from having lived there, I was less familiar with the village of Succotz. I had learned how to navigate my insider/ outsider positionality as a foreigner living in the nearby town of San Ignacio. While not from Belize, I had gained insider knowledge into the daily social and cultural norms and routines. I was familiar with local stores, schools, transportation, holidays, etc. I had a network of friends and colleagues. I had visited many parts of the country and had a basic understanding of the different regions and communities. However, in the context of Succotz, I was very much an outsider in the community. At the time, the only people I knew from Succotz were Dr. Penados and his immediate family. Dr. Penados's wife, Beatriz [pseudonym], a teacher in the next town over, knows many of the folks living in Succotz. She had also been part of the small group of teachers wanting to do more with heritage education for youth, so she volunteered to play the role of liaison. In this role, she supported me in gaining access while also protecting the community. In the following two sections, I provide outlines and timelines for the community-engaged heritage education project and my ethnography of the project.

### **Outline of the PAR Heritage Education Project**

As I mentioned in the background context, this is a layered research project in which I both participated in the collaborative development of the heritage education program and conducted an ethnography of the collaborative process. In this section, I discuss the project timeline and provide an outline of project phases. For each phase, I outline the phase goals,

participants, and events. In this section, I note overall participants in events as well as those who participated in my study; however, I go into further details about study participants in the outline of my ethnography section. This project took place over a three-and-a-half-year period between 2015 and 2018. The majority of collaborative work happened during my yearly summer field seasons in Belize or via video/phone calls and email when I was not in Belize. There were times that I was unable to participate in program events that occurred while I was not in Belize. I have chosen to divide the project into two chronological phases: Program Design and The Motmot Camp.

### ***Phase 1: Program Design***

The first phase of the PAR project took place between June 2015 and May 2016. This phase directly corresponds with my first two field seasons in Belize which took place between June 22 and July 20, 2015 and between April 27 and May 7, 2016. The goal of Phase 1 was to collaboratively design a heritage education youth program in Succotz. This phase began with my first field season during which I gained access to the site, met with teachers and community members, and invited folks to participate in a preliminary exploratory study (pilot study) to identify and document interest in cultural heritage education and ideas for developing a community-based initiative. I started with a list of 16 names of teachers and community knowledge bearers that Dr. Penados helped put together, and over the course of the first week, Beatriz walked me around the village and introduced me to folks. These were informal visits, mostly calling on folks at their homes. Beatriz made the initial introduction, and then I would share about myself and my research interests. At the conclusion of our introduction, I provided each person with a letter further detailing my research interests, my hopes for conducting exploratory interviews with them, and my contact information, as well as two copies of the IRB/

ISCR approved consent forms. Of the initial 16 people we met with, four wished to contribute their thoughts and ideas about heritage and a potential program for youth in Succotz but did not wish to participate in my study. The remaining 12 folks agreed to participate in my study and showed an interest in facilitating a community-led program. Over the following weeks of my first field season, Beatriz and I met with participants to conduct my preliminary interviews. I expound upon my interview protocols in a later section.

Between August 2015 and April 2016, I worked to synthesize the information that emerged from the initial interviews and compile a document that could then be shared back with teachers and knowledge bearers. We arranged for two focus group meetings during my second field season between April 27 and May 7, 2016. The goal of the first meeting was to share the compellation of information and ideas that emerged from exploratory interviews and initial conversations and collaboratively decide how to proceed. This meeting included eight of the original 12 participants. During this meeting, the group decided to move forward with a community-led program for youth which centered Maya heritage. The group established a program purpose and developed goals.

The objective of the second focus group meeting was to establish the form the program would take and to begin developing a program curriculum that supported the heritage program purpose and goals. Four of the eight participants from the first focus group were able to attend this meeting. It was agreed that the program would take the form of a three-to-four-day summer camp and would not be affiliated with any educational, religious, or political organizations. It was important to the project facilitators that all potential program participants felt welcome. Additionally, project facilitators decided the camp would serve eight to eleven-year-old children in the village because youth of this age were most likely to be available during the summer and

old enough to participate in a full day camp. The idea of after school clubs was also discussed as a way of continuing youth involvement throughout the year.

A master list of themes was compiled outlining all potential heritage-based topics and corresponding activities that emerged from interviews and the first and second focus groups. Topics/activities were then prioritized based on the availability of one or more community knowledge bearers who would lead the activity, access to and availability of materials needed for the activity, and the time an activity would take from start to finish. Program facilitators wanted to ensure that the themes and corresponding curriculum highlighted the interests of the children who would potentially be participating in the heritage camp. We developed a survey of interest based on 25 potential themes for the camp, and asked children to rank their top three choices. Facilitators felt that it would be easiest to share information and gain insight from children while school was still in session. In June, after my second field season was over and I had returned to the US, teachers participating in the development of the camp spoke with school principals and received permission to distribute the camp surveys to primary classes. Based on completed surveys received from over 60 children, seven themes were selected for the first camp. Between June and July, 2016, I participated in a series of meetings with camp facilitators via skype to further develop the camp curriculum. Camp facilitators and I designed objectives and activities and facilitators collected materials for each camp theme with the help of community knowledge bearers. We established dates for the first camp and selected a camp location. Teachers participating in camp development distributed camp information and participation permission slips to children prior to school letting out for the summer.

## *Phase 2: The Motmot Camp*

The second phase of this project was marked by three consecutive iterations of the Motmot Camp and the continued program planning and development that took place in between these summer camps. The goal of this phase was to establish and maintain a recurring heritage education camp and to find ways to continue youth involvement during the school year. The first Motmot Camp took place between August 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016. The third day of the camp was postponed until August 20<sup>th</sup> 2016 due to severe weather caused by hurricane Earl. Twenty children participated in the first camp. Dr. Penados, five teachers, and nine community knowledge bearers facilitated the camp. Six of these facilitators were participants in my study. The camp focused on the seven Maya heritage themes developed in Phase 1 as well as on community-building activities.

At the August 20 gathering, the concept of after school clubs was shared with camp participants. Six different after-school clubs were offered based on the heritage themes from the camp. Children were invited to choose their favorite club to join. The clubs began in the fall and were facilitated by six teacher participants; however, the clubs were not sustainable into the spring of 2017 mostly due to teachers' time limitations. I was not in Belize during this time but did attend follow-up meetings with participants via Skype. These meetings held in the fall of 2016 explored aspects of the 2016 camp that went well and those needing improvement. These meetings attended to issues related to curriculum, logistics, funding, and parent and community involvement.

In February 2017, planning began for the second Motmot Camp. One of the biggest issues noted from the first camp was a need for volunteers to help facilitate camp logistics and activities. The local Rotaract Club was invited to meet with the Motmot Camp facilitators to

explore the possibility of partnering for the second camp. The Rotaract Club is a group of young adults in Benque dedicated to community service and leadership. They agreed to participate in the planning and carrying out of the second Motmot Camp. The Rotaract members played a co-facilitator role in this process and served as camp counselors during the camp. Planning took place during various meetings throughout the spring and early summer of 2017. I participated in the majority of these via Skype.

The second Motmot Camp was held between July 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>, 2017. My third field season was between July 1<sup>st</sup>-July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017. I intentionally planned my third field season around participating in the second Motmot Camp—before, during, and after. Thirty-five children participated in the second camp. Three teachers, eight community knowledge bearers, seven Rotaract members, two parents, Dr. Penados, and I facilitated the camp. The three teacher facilitators continued to participate in my study in addition to four of the Rotaract members. Additionally, six children and four parents consented to participate in my study. The second Motmot Camp focused on six of the original Maya heritage themes, one different additional Maya theme, as well as community building activities. A debriefing meeting was held following the conclusion of the camp and the majority of camp facilitators were able to attend this meeting. The Rotaract club members agreed to continue the partnership with the Motmot Camp project as co-facilitators and camp counselors. Between the second and third Motmot Camp, several planning meetings took place. The majority of these meetings were held when I was in the US, thus, I joined these meetings via Skype when possible. The focus of these meetings was similar to those following the first camp— curriculum, logistics, funding, parent/ community participation, and additionally, program leadership and sustainability.



The third Motmot Camp took place between July 19 and July 21, 2018. My fourth field season was between July 17 and July 24, 2018. Again, I intentionally scheduled this field season around the camp dates so that I could participate in the camp and events happening before, during, and after the camp. Fifty-two children participated in the camp. Three teachers, two community knowledge bearers, eight camp counselors, two parents, Dr. Penados, and I facilitated the camp. The same seven facilitators from 2017 continued to participate in my study. Additionally, six parents and nine children consented to participate in my study. Three of the children and two of the parents had also participated in 2017. The third Motmot Camp focused on four of the original Maya themes, two different additional Maya themes, and community building activities. Camp participants also attended a heritage event hosted by an archaeological outreach program that took place in the village during the camp. At the end of the last day of the camp, I held a focus group with participants. A camp debriefing meeting with camp co-facilitators also occurred the following day. A couple of follow-up meetings took place after I had returned to the U.S. These meetings addressed program leadership and future program sustainability. In the next section, I outline my ethnography of this heritage project.

### **Outline of the Ethnography**

I have discussed previously that I made the decision to write this dissertation as an ethnography after I had started my dissertation research and participated in the Succotz heritage project. As such, I had a wide array of data spanning three and a half years that I obtained using multiple qualitative data collection methods. Given the depth and breadth of the project and my data, this ethnography encompasses before, during, and after the Succotz heritage project. Through this ethnography I examine how participants experienced engaging in the Succotz heritage education initiative as well as how the experiences offered through this initiative may

have provided opportunities for increased awareness around heritage and agency. I then explore the pedagogical, curricular, and community implications of engaging in this project. In the following sections I provide an overview and description of participants. I also discuss my data collection methods, analysis, trustworthiness, and presentation of findings.

### ***Participants***

Given the rather lengthy timeline of my research and the fluidity of community-engaged projects in general, this project grew, shifted, and changed over time. Participants and participant roles also changed and shifted over the course of the initiative. A core group of 5 members saw this project through from its inception and several have contributed to various phases of the project. With each iteration of the summer camp, new folks joined the effort while others were not as active as they were in previous years. Children, parents, teachers, community knowledge bearers, and members of the local Rotaract club (henceforth referred to as camp counselors) participated in the project. The roles that folks played were not singular or static. While this speaks to the nature of community organizing and engagement, it helped me in selecting participants for this study.

**Selection of Participants.** As my ethnography explores the collaborative process of developing this heritage program, I felt that it was important to offer a multitude of stories and experiences that emerged from the many steps along the way. This includes insight from parents, teachers, children, community knowledge bearers, camp counselors, as well as Dr. Penados and me. Throughout my research process, I invited anyone who was actively participating or connected to the project in some way to share their experiences and stories with me. Certainly not all these folks had a desire to participate in my study, but many did. In total, I obtained informed consent from 37 participants over the course my study. This includes parental informed

consent as well as assent for minors who participated in my study. I mentioned in my positionality statement that I am an English-only speaker. As such, all data was collected in English. All participants in my study were fluent in English, though most participants indicated that Spanish was their home/preferred language. To reiterate, the official language of Belize is English. School is conducted in English, although Spanish is also used. In Succotz and many other parts of Belize, Spanish is often the preferred/home language. I worked to include multiple participants across project roles, understanding that there would be several community knowledge bearers and parents who did not wish to formally participate in my research study. While their thoughts and ideas contributed to the overall development of the heritage program, I did not collect data on their experiences, nor did I include them in my ethnography. Some participants played more active roles than others, but I felt that all contributions provided valuable insight into the overall project. Below are two tables detailing participant information. Table 1 provides an outline of participants, their roles, and the project phases (by year) in which they participated. Table 2 provides some general information about each participant that was shared with me via survey questionnaires. I provide more detailed descriptions of participants later in chapters that discuss my findings.

**Table 1. Participants' Roles and Timeline of Involvement**

Name (Pseudonym)	Role	Phase 1: 2015	Phase 1: 2016	Phase 2: 2016	Phase 2: 2017	Phase 2: 2018
Dr. Penados	Scholar, Co-facilitator	X	X	X	X	X
Maribelle	Teacher, Co-facilitator	X	X	X	X	X
Rodrigo	Teacher, Co-facilitator	X	X	X	X	X
Beatriz	Teacher, Co-facilitator	X	X	X	X	X
Itzel	Teacher	X	X	X		
Valentino	Teacher	X		X		
Sofia	Teacher	X	X			
Malia	Teacher	X	X			
Ava	Teacher	X				
Veronica	Teacher	X	X			
Marisol	Teacher, Retired	X				
Isabel	Cultural Heritage Specialist	X				
Diego	Community Knowledge Bearer	X	X	X		
Delores	Rotaract co-facilitator, camp counselor				X	X
Yasmine	Rotaract co-facilitator, camp counselor				X	X
Megan	Rotaract co-facilitator, camp counselor				X	X
Arturo	Rotaract co-facilitator, camp counselor				X	X
Elsa	Parent				X	X
Adriana	Parent				X	X
Jeraldo	Parent				X	
Emilia	Parent				X	
Kailan	Parent					X
Juanita	Parent					X
Kamela	Parent					X
Lidia	Parent					X
Nadir	Child				X	X
Josue	Child				X	X
Martin	Child				X	X
Jaime	Child				X	
Alonzo	Child				X	
Hector	Child				X	
Alberto	Child					X
Arabella	Child					X
Angelina	Child					X
Mia	Child					X
Ernesto	Child					X
Tobias	Child					X

**Table 2. Participants' Demographic Information**

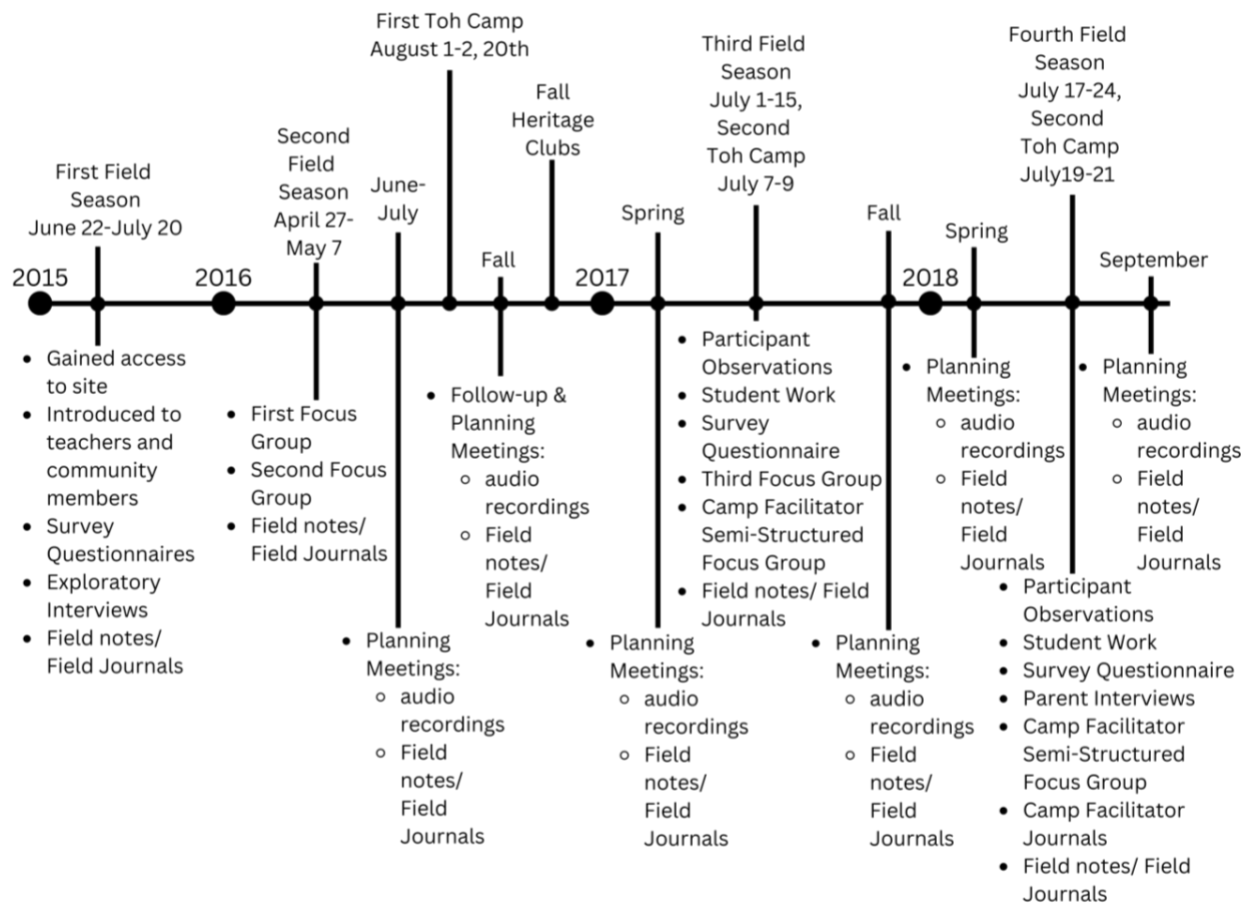
Name (Pseudonym)	Occupation	Age	Ethnicity	Cultural Identity	Native/ Preferred Language
Maribelle	Assistant Teacher, Primary	44	Maya-Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Rodrigo	Teacher, Junior College	49	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Beatriz	Teacher, High School	N/P	Maya-Mestizo	Maya-Mestizo	Spanish
Itzel	Teacher, Primary	29	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Valentino	Teacher, Primary	30	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Sofia	Principal, Primary	30	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Malia	Teacher, Primary	30	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Ava	Teacher & Counselor, High School	34	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Veronica	Teacher	31	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Marisol	Teacher, Retired	67	Maya-Mestizo	Maya-Mestizo	Spanish
Isabel	Arts Coordinator, Government Agency	38	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Diego	Community Knowledge Bearer	N/P	Maya-Mestizo	Maya-Mestizo	Spanish
Delores	Project officer at trade and investment firm	29	Maya-Mestizo	Maya-Mestizo	Spanish
Yasmine	Student	23	Mestizo	Mestizo, Belizean	Spanish
Megan	Student, Teacher	30	Caucasian	American	English
Arturo	Student	27	Mestizo	Mestizo, Belizean	Spanish
Elsa	Housewife*	46	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish/ English
Adriana	Housewife*	31	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Kailan	Housewife*	36	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Juanita	Teacher, Primary	29	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Jeraldo	Teacher, Primary	29	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Emilia	Housewife*	35	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Kamela	Housewife*	29	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish/ English
Lidia	Housewife*	46	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Nadir	Student	9/10	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Josue	Student	10/11	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Martin	Student	10/11	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Jaime	Student	9	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Alonzo	Student	10	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Hector	Student	9	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish/ English
Alberto	Student	8	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish/ English
Arabella	Student	8	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Angelina	Student	6	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish/ English
Mia	Student	8	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Ernesto	Student	11	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Tobias	Student	8	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish/ English
*Participant self-identified in written survey-questionnaire					

**Data Collection Procedures**

Throughout the various phases of this collaborative project, I have had opportunities for collecting data in a variety of ways. While the majority of my data collection has taken place in

Belize, I also participated in community meetings via Skype when I returned home. My data collection encompasses the span of three and a half years and four specific summer field seasons. I briefly noted dates of my data collection in an above section where I outlined the timeline of the PAR heritage education project. However, Figure 1 provides a more concise timeline of my data collection and may be used as a reference as I discuss the types of data I have collected throughout this process as well as my rationale for each method. I briefly detail the contexts, timeframes, locations, and methods of recording that I used. Following my data collection procedures, I provide a table detailing data types and quantities by year to more clearly delineate when and what particular data were collected.

**Figure 1. Dissertation Research Data Timeline**



**Participant Observations/Field Notes/Field Journals.** I spent a significant portion of my field seasons engaging in participant observations. This was most extensive in 2017 and 2018 when the Motmot Camp was in session. The camp was held in the same location each year—outdoors in a large field. Facilitators and camp counsellors set up tents, tables and chairs. Children participated in small and large group activities guided by camp facilitators (teachers and camp counselors) and community knowledge bearers. The camps were facilitated in English, though Spanish was also used. The schedules for the 2017 and 2018 camps were very similar. The camps were held over a three-day period. The first day started after lunch and ended at 5pm. The second day, children arrived by 8:30am, went home for lunch between 12pm-1pm, and came back and participated in camp activities until 5pm. The third day, children arrived at 8:30am; parents and community members were invited to join us for lunch, followed by a closing ceremony in the afternoon. The camps were the longest periods of time during which I was both participating and observing. While much of my time during camp days was spent as participant-observer, I facilitated the Motmot Camp t-shirt tie-dyeing activity on the first day of both the 2017 and 2018 camps. This provided a space for me to get to know each child a little better, and for them to get to know me.

For each of my four field seasons (2015-2018), I maintained separate field journals. During the camp observations in 2017 and 2018, I used my field journals to keep track of my field notes and observations. One of the biggest goals of the Motmot Camp was to encourage and support community building in the village around the concept of Maya-Mestizo heritage. During camp observations, I paid attention to camp dynamics; specifically, how participants interacted with one another, the relationships that evolved or did not evolve between camp participants, participants' level of engagement in activities, and those participants who took on leadership

roles—both children and adults. I also observed the camp environment and the ways in which rules and guidelines were established. Additionally, I looked for participants' statements indicating the extent to which, if any, the space of the camp impacted perceptions of place. Another project goal was developing a camp curriculum that highlighted the cultural heritage of the people living in Succotz. I observed how curriculum was enacted by teachers, camp counselors, and community knowledge bearers. I also paid attention to participants' thoughts and feelings during the camp, and looked for statements made by participants indicating their feelings of agency, as well as statements indicating perceptions and awareness of heritage.

I had many opportunities to photograph and video-record during the summer camps in 2017 and 2018. As part of the camp registration, parents were asked to fill out photo and video release forms, allowing or not allowing camp facilitators to photograph or video their children while participating in camp events. The majority of parents encouraged camp facilitators to photograph and video their children and to share them back with parents. A few parents each year asked that photographs or videos not show their child's/ children's face(s), and a few were not comfortable with any photography or videography of their child/ children. As all camp participants wore name tags, I created a list of the children for whom the camp did not have permission to photograph or video. As I took videos or pictures, I was careful to ensure that I only captured on camera children for whom we had parental permission to photograph or video. These photos and videos helped me gain a broader insight into the camp. The photos and video recordings were particularly useful as a way of looking at activities, events, and interactions after the fact as I journaled the day's activities and performed data analysis. I used these photos and videos as a way of exploring the larger camp dynamics, as well to document experiences of study participants for whom I had informed consent, informed parental consent and child assent.



I do not include the experiences of camp participants for whom I did not obtain consent in my data chapters. My participant observations during the camps were a vital part of my ethnography because they highlighted the collaborative efforts that went into the planning and facilitation of the program. These observations provided insight into the experiences of camp participants of the Succotz heritage program. From the 2017 and 2018 camps combined, I obtained 34 hours' worth of participant observations/ field notes.

I also conducted participant observations during collaborative meetings when we discussed and planned the heritage education program and camps (2015-2018). Several of these meetings were actual focus groups, but several times throughout each year of this project, I participated in group planning meetings via Skype. Throughout these experiences, I positioned myself as participant-observer. I actively contributed to conversations and activities during these planning meetings. I kept field notes during planning meetings, and wrote personal reflections after each session. The majority of these meetings included folks who had consented to participate in my study; however, on occasion there were folks who joined meetings who had not formally consented to participate in my study. I asked at the beginning of meetings for verbal consent to record meeting proceedings as a way of being able to be more fully present and to provide me a way of listening back to thoughts and ideas that emerged during meetings at a later time. I was able to audio record many of the group meetings which allowed me to more fully participate in conversations without the distraction of constantly taking notes. Additionally, these recordings enabled me to critique more thoughtfully my participation during meetings. I did not collect data on anyone who had not formally consented to participate in my study. I collected 10 hours of audio transcripts from these planning meetings and closer to 16 hours of planning meeting field notes.

I additionally used my field journal each year to document and explore thoughts, questions, and concerns that arose during data collection and analysis. I have used these journals as a space to reflect on my research process as well as issues related to my subjectivity and positionality in relation to various stages of my research experience.

**Survey Questionnaire.** As an initial way of learning more about participants' experiences, I invited folks to complete a paper copy of a survey questionnaire at home a day or so prior to interviews. These survey questionnaires provided insight into participants' experiences, personal background, as well as their conceptions of cultural heritage and identity. This information was important in situating participants' stories within the contexts of their personal and social lives. During my first field season, I invited teachers and community members to complete these prior to my initial exploratory interviews. During my third and fourth field seasons, prior to the camp, I invited the camp counselors to complete this survey. I additionally asked parent participants in 2017 and 2018 to complete one as well. See Appendix A the various renditions of these survey questionnaires.

**Interviews.** I conducted interviews with teachers, community knowledge bearers, camp counselors, and parents to gain deeper insight into individual experiences through this process. I conducted the first set of interviews during my first field season (2015) with teachers and knowledge bearers who had previously indicated that they were interested in collaborating around a project for cultural heritage in the village. Through these interviews I wanted to learn more about how community members identify, express, celebrate, and explore their cultural heritage with family, friends, and the community as well as how this information might be integrated into an educational curriculum. Beatriz attended several of these initial interviews with me. While she did not participate in the interview process, her introductions, presence, and

familiarity with many of the teachers provided reassurance to participants that my intentions were trustworthy. Her willingness to help me and her generosity of offering her time was a tremendous gift. Without her contributions, I feel that I would not have been able to establish such a strong initial rapport with participants. The majority of these interviews took place in participants' homes; a few were conducted in participants' work settings. I was given permission by participants to audio record these interviews. Interview times ranged between 45 minutes to one hour, giving me nine and a half hours of recorded time total for this first set of interviews. Additionally, I took notes during each interview. These notes enabled me to keep track of my thoughts, perceptions, opinions and questions that arose during interviews and have provided opportunities for me to attend to reflexivity.

In my fourth field season (2018), I invited teachers and camp counselors who helped orchestrate the summer camp to participate in individual interviews. The goal of these interviews was to provide space for participants' articulation of their heritage and identity as well as to explore their desires and intentions in participating in the heritage education program. Additionally, these interviews offered space for participants to share their thoughts related to the process of organizing and preparing for the camp as well as facilitating the camp. Initially, it was my hope to conduct these interviews in person; however, given the amount of collaborative planning time needed to prepare for the camp, and the collaborative debriefing following the camp, participants wrote their responses to the interview questions and shared them with me. While this limited my ability to ask follow-up questions in the moment, participants had more time to think about and articulate their responses. Two camp co-facilitators (2 camp counselors) participated in these interviews. While I followed up with co-facilitators several times in the weeks following the camp, I only received interview responses from two participants.

Also, in my fourth field season (2018), I asked parents of children participating in the camp to participate in individual interviews with me at the conclusion of the camp. The purpose of these interviews was to learn about parents' desires, intentions, and hopes for allowing/encouraging their children to participate in the heritage education camp. Additionally, these interviews provided parents the space to share their children's experiences during the camp and to contribute their ideas of how to improve/change the camp. I conducted the majority of these interviews face-to-face at participants' homes. Most parents had not actively participated in the development or implementation of the camp and were not familiar with me. Maribelle [pseudonym], a friend and colleague who has been a part of this initiative from the very beginning, attended these interviews with me. She is a teacher in Succotz and knows many of the parents. Her presence, much like Beatriz's during my preliminary interviews, helped me to establish trust with parents. This was a true gift to me because her presence at these interviews encouraged a more relaxed atmosphere and the interviews were more conversational and less formal. Six parents participated in these interviews. Participants gave me permission to audio record interviews. The time per interview was between 30 and 50 minutes, with a total of three and half hours of recorded interview time. I took detailed notes of our conversations as well as of my observations, perceptions, opinions, and questions. See Appendix B for the protocols for each set of interviews.

**Focus Groups.** Throughout this project, I asked participants to participate in focus groups as a way of sharing and hearing multiple perspectives around the same questions. This also provided space for dialogue within and between participants. Focus groups were a vital part of this community-engaged project. The first focus group I conducted in my second field season (2016) was with the teachers and community members whom I had interviewed the previous

summer. This was an opportunity to share back what I had heard and learned during preliminary interviews. I provided an overview of my findings to participants prior to our meeting along with a short list of questions. The purpose of this focus group was to invite discussion and collaboration around ways of moving forward with the development of a cultural heritage program. This focus group was held in a classroom at a primary school in Succotz. We arranged desks in a large circle so that everyone could see one another. Participants gave me permission to audio record this session. Seven participants attended this first focus group in addition to Dr. Penados and myself. The focus group lasted an hour and 45 minutes. I took detailed notes that I could refer back to for future planning as well as for clarification and reflexivity.

The second focus group (2016) was a follow-up to the first focus group meeting. Again, I invited all 12 of the original participants to join our meeting; though not all participants were able to attend. The purpose of this meeting was planning for the heritage program. This meeting built on the ideas that developed in previous meetings and focused on the development of the camp and curriculum design. This focus group took place outside in the commons of a primary school in Succotz where we all sat around a large picnic table. Participants gave me permission to audio record this session. Four teacher participants attended this meeting (all four had also attended the first focus group) as well as Dr. Penados and myself. This meeting lasted an hour and 35 minutes. I took detailed notes which I then typed up and shared back with the group. It was from this focus group session that we collaboratively developed a survey of heritage-based activities to share with children in the community.

The third focus group took place during my third field season (2017) with parents of children who participated in the camp. This focus group took place following children's presentations to their parents at the end of the camp. All interested parents were invited to join

our discussion. We arranged a big circle of chairs outside in the field so everyone could see and hear one another. The goal of this focus group was to encourage dialogue with and between parents around their perceptions of the camp as well as their children's experiences of participating in the camp. Maribelle, Rodrigo, and Beatriz (three camp co-facilitators) also participated in this focus group as a way of establishing trust with parents as well as providing Spanish translation, as a few of the parents who attended the meeting only spoke Spanish. Twelve parents joined the meeting and I was given permission to audio and video record this session by all participants. Four parents consented to participate in my study. Input from all the parents who participated in the meeting was a contribution to the Motmot Camp program. However, for my study, I only collected data on the experiences of parents who provided informed consent. This focus group lasted one hour. During this meeting I took detailed notes on what parents shared as well as on my own observations, opinions, and questions.

During my third and fourth field seasons (2017-2018), we held a camp debriefing meeting with camp facilitators following the conclusion of the camps. These were semi-structured focus groups aimed at examining camp logistics and curriculum, student and camp facilitator experiences, funding, parent/ community participation, and program leadership and sustainability. Participants gave me permission to audio record these meetings. In 2017, this meeting was held in the evening on the day after the camp at the home of a few of the camp counselors. Four counselors participating in my study were present as well as Dr. Penados, and I. We sat in a big circle in the living room. This focus group was an hour long. In 2018, this meeting was held directly following the last day of camp outside sitting in chairs under a tent. Four of the camp counselors, Maribelle, Dr. Penados, and I attended this debriefing. This focus group was 45 minutes long. While these meetings included all camp facilitators, I only collected

data on the experiences of the participants who consented to be in my study. These meetings played a vital role in the ongoing development of the Motmot Camp.

During a planning meeting in 2017, camp facilitators felt it was important to hear from the children themselves. Initially, we thought that we might ask each child to individually respond to a set of questions; however, after working with the group of 8–11-year-olds for three days (as well as their younger siblings who joined them), we quickly revamped this plan. On the last day of the camp in 2017 we took 6 pieces of large butcher paper and wrote a question at the top. We then asked students to get into groups and sit at tables with one of these papers. Counselors were with each group and asked the children to record their personal responses to the question on the paper and then talk about their responses with their peers. Students and counselors rotated through the stations until all groups had an opportunity to respond to each of the questions. While this was not a focus group in the traditional sense, it was guided by the idea of creating an opportunity for children to talk about their experiences of the camp with each other and with adults. We did not receive parental consent or assent to audio or video-record this process. During this time, I interacted with the children and counselors and took as many notes as I could during the process. I was able to use the written responses as research artifacts of the six children from whom I obtained parent consent and child assent. See Appendix C for the protocols of these focus groups.

**Camp Facilitator Journals.** In my fourth field season, I invited camp facilitators to keep a reflective journal of their experiences before the camp, during the 3 days of camp, and after the camp. The purpose of these journals was to provide a space for group members who were working directly with the children to reflect on their daily experiences. Participants were given the option of keeping the journal digitally or in hard copy. Only two camp counselors maintained

these journals. They shared their journals with me in a word document. See Appendix D for the journal protocol.

**Children’s Work Examples.** I invited children to share samples of their work/ projects to document students’ interpretations of camp activities. I obtained parental informed consent and child assent from six children in 2017, and nine children in 2018. The work samples were crafts, drawings, paintings, poetry, skits, and stories. I photographed all samples and the children kept their original work. I elaborate on these activities in my findings chapters. Table 3 breaks down data types collected by year. In the following section, I discuss my methods of data analysis.

**Table 3. Dissertation Data Breakdown by Year and Type**

<b>2015</b>		
<b>Data Type</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
Survey Questionnaire	11 teachers, 1 community knowledge bearer	12
Interview	11 teachers, 1 community knowledge bearer	12
<b>2016</b>		
<b>Data Type</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
Focus Group 1	8 teachers, 1 community knowledge bearer	9
Focus Group 2	4 teachers	4
<b>2017</b>		
<b>Data Type</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
Survey Questionnaire	4 parents	4
Focus Group 3	4 parents, 3 teachers	7
Children’s Work	6 children	6
Children’s interactive focus group	6 children	6
Participant Observation	6 children, 3 teachers, 4 camp counselors	13
Focus Group 4	4 camp counselors	4
<b>2018</b>		
<b>Data Type</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>
Survey Questionnaire	6 parents	6
Interview	6 parents, 2 camp counselors	8
Children’s Work	9 children	9
Participant Observation	9 children, 4 camp counselors, 3 teachers	16
Focus Group 5	1 teacher, 4 camp counselors	5
Co-facilitator Journals	2 camp counselors	2



## *Data Analysis*

**Organization and Transcription.** Given the depth and breadth of this study, I have collected a large amount of data in both digital and hard copy format. I digitized hard copy data, specifically, survey questionnaires, consent/assent forms, children's work, and any hand written documents that were given to me by participants. I categorized all data by year and then by type. I stored these data—observation notes and videos, field journals, survey questionnaires, interview recordings, focus group session recordings, transcriptions, camp counselor journals, children's work as well as consent and assent forms—digitally with password protection on my personal computer as well as on my password protected university cloud backup and/or in a locked filing cabinet in my office. I personally transcribed all interview and focus group recordings. After I completed each transcription, I conducted low-level coding and analysis to explore emerging themes. I also made notes about my initial thoughts and reactions which I referred back to in my later analysis. I used MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software to organize and code my data. From this preliminary analysis, I then created a table to identify which data potentially corresponded with each of my research questions. This process also served as a way to reduce my data by keeping track of what pieces did not specifically address my research questions. In the following subsections, I discuss my analysis strategies for interpreting my data.

**Thematic and Polyvocal Analysis.** I grappled with data analysis strategies for this study because on the one hand this project was a collaboration between many people, while this dissertation is my own telling of the project. Additionally, by the end of my research project I had collected an enormous amount of data. As Glesne (2016) states:

The open nature of qualitative inquiry means that you acquire even more data than you originally envisioned. You are left with the task of selecting and sorting—a partly mechanical but mostly interpretive undertaking, because every time you decide to omit a data bit as irrelevant to your study or to place it somewhere, you are making a judgment. (p. 194)

In the end, I found that two analysis techniques were necessary. As I mentioned previously, I conducted low-level coding of data following the transcription process. This was useful because I had immersed myself in the recordings as I transcribed and then I re-read the transcription and conducted a first round of coding. For this, I used thematic coding analysis. Glesne (2016) articulates that thematic analysis is a way of looking for themes and patterns in your data (p. 184). She contends, that looking for patterns often focuses on unifying aspects in the data “it is not about stipulating the norm. A strength of thematic analysis is its ability to help reveal underlying complexities as you seek to identify tensions and distinctions, and to explain where and why people differ from a general pattern” (Glesne, 2016, p. 184). Thematic analysis offers a way of bringing stories together by developing codes that are derived directly from the experiences participants share (Glesne, 2016; Saldaña, 2009). Saldaña (2009) identifies this type of coding as “In Vivo Coding” (p. 6). While I did use the In Vivo method frequently, I also developed a set of “Descriptive Codes” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 7) that helped me to categorize ideas across my data. By examining categories that emerged from this analysis, it is possible to reduce data by using those categories that are most salient to the study.

Using my preliminary analysis, I conducted a second and third round of coding as I considered my data from different angles. I created my own reflexivity memos for each transcription. I used these memos to aid my interpretations of the data. Thematic analysis was

particularly useful in exploring the possible ways in which the Motmot Camp provided opportunities for increased awareness around heritage and agency as well as the pedagogical, curricular, and community implications of the project. While thematic analysis helped me to form connections across my data, I simultaneously wanted to find a way to highlight the individual experiences of participants.

As my theoretical and methodological framework for this study is grounded in postmodern and decolonizing thought, polyvocal analysis fits within the assumptions of these frameworks “especially the notion that multiple truths exist and these are always partial, local, and historical” (Hatch, 2002, p. 202). Additionally, Hatch (2002) argues that “polyvocal texts speak with multiple voices, telling multiple stories ... Constructing such texts means finding ways to listen to many voices in our data and exploring ways to tell many stories in our findings” (p. 202). This research encompasses the experiences of many voices. As such, a polyvocal analysis provided a unique pathway for capturing the multiplicity of stories shared through this process and offered space for reflexivity in the analysis process. Hatch (2002) cautions that there is not a prescribed set of steps to follow for such analysis; however, he suggests the following as a starting point:

1. Read the data for a sense of the whole
2. Identify all of the voices within the data, including your own
3. Re-read the data and mark where each voice is heard
4. Study the data related to each voice, decide which voices to include, and write a narrative for each voice
5. Re-read the data and refine or alter the narratives

6. Participants check the narratives and work with participants to clarify, refine, or change the narratives

7. Write a revised narrative for each voice (Hatch, 2002, p. 202)

This research has taken place over a long period of time and data has been collected in numerous ways. There have been participants who have been a part of this project from the beginning and those who have joined during various phases along the way. Polyvocal analysis provided a way to construct stories from the voices of participants over the entire course of the research process. Such analysis is congruent with decolonizing methodologies and postcritical ethnography as it works to engage the voices of research participants (Speed, 2008) and provides space for researcher reflexivity and deconstructing the ethnographic gaze.

Because I had previously organized my data by field season, I began polyvocal analysis by creating digital folders for each participant, myself, and each group (student, teacher, counselor, knowledge bearer). I then placed all data that I had for each participant or group in a separate folder. I also included my field notes and memos, student work, as well as images or artifacts produced during the camps. From these composites of raw data, I then wrote narratives for each voice. I used these narratives as a way to highlight the individual and collective ways in which participants described their experiences of engaging in the heritage education initiative.

By developing a larger narrative of individual stories, this research may offer a more complete interpretation of the process of this community engaged initiative and the nuances found within. In other words, such analysis isn't seeking consensus in the performative process of this heritage project; rather, it offers the possibility for both commonalities and differences to be revealed. By analyzing this research in these ways, I may be better able to share back my findings with community participants in more meaningful ways. Additionally, this process

provides an opportunity for “researching back” (L. T. Smith, 2012) to the academy in ways that challenge dominant approaches to heritage research.

### **Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness**

As a foreign researcher working within a Maya-Mestizo community, there was a myriad of ethical considerations. As a graduate student researcher, I complied with my University’s IRB approval process prior to undertaking any research. This process works to protect participants and takes into consideration participants’ privacy, anonymity, vulnerability, welfare, etc. Beyond this, however, I felt there were other considerations that were important. I worked to establish a sense of trust between myself and the folks with whom I was working. I have discussed how I gained access to the community and how initial trust was developed, but beyond that, over the course of my research in Succotz, friendships were established. By establishing relationships and friendships with participants, I also had a profound sense of responsibility to those with whom I was working to share and give back in meaningful and important ways. This reciprocity materialized in different ways with different people and the relationships that were established. As I have discussed in preceding sections, the research aspect of this project was important to me, but was not the driving force for the community engaged project. As such, I worked to include member checks throughout my data collection process; however, there were times that participants did not wish to review my notes or analysis. Representation of my findings additionally warranted attention to ethics. As I have discussed in previous sections, ethnography has morphed and evolved over the past several decades, though I still have occasional moments of unease when I think about writing about this project as an ethnography as L. T. Smith’s (2012) notion of the *ethnographic gaze* is constantly at the forefront of my thoughts. As I take time to think through these feelings, I am left with the realization that while positivist notions of

objective truths may still linger in my original comprehension of ethnography, I have come to see ethnography as inherently interpretive. My role in this research project has always been participant and observer. The way I view and process what I see, how I interact, what I say, what I do, is all influenced by my own positionality and lived experiences. Therefore, this work is neither objective nor neutral. It is my interpretation and understanding of the collaborative experience of creating a heritage education program. That being said, I also take seriously the need to be aware of the potential for self-other dichotomies to emerge. In the context of qualitative research, Michelle Fine (1994) termed this *working the hyphen*. The hyphen being the place “at which Self-Other join in the politics of everyday life, that is, the hyphen that both separates and merges personal identities with our inventions of Others” (p. 70). This concept takes on an additional level of significance in the context of this work as it is situated within a decolonizing framework. In their work and research together as White and Indigenous scholars, Jones and Jenkins (2008) build on Fine’s (1994) concept and articulate that in the context of indigene- colonizer relationships working the hyphen in collaborative work can be difficult. With regard to cross-cultural collaborative initiatives, Jones and Jenkins (2008) state, “‘learning *about* the Other’ is not the aim—or even possible. ... Learning *from* the Other, that is, *from* difference, *from* the hyphen, becomes the possibility we seek” (p. 476). I believe that this emphasis on learning *from* versus *about* directly relates to trustworthiness in my ethnography of our collaborative heritage initiative.

As I have previously discussed, cultural heritage studies in Belize are prolific and varied. A tremendous number of these studies focus on the ancient Maya while fewer have concentrated on contemporary Maya or Mestizo communities. These studies typically involve foreign researchers working in Belize. While some projects work to engage local communities, others do

not. Of the cultural heritage studies taking place in Belize, very few are grassroots movements. I have spent a large portion of my career as a foreign researcher participating in archaeological studies of the ancient Maya in Belize. However, once I was aware of the possibility of doing cultural heritage research differently, I felt at once compelled and obligated to work toward something that interrupted the status quo way of thinking about cultural heritage studies. The notion of community-engagement in cultural heritage is not a new concept. There are numerous studies in Belize that work to include aspects of community-engagement in the research process, though critical reflexivity on the part of researchers is often lacking. I made a conscious effort throughout my research process to examine the ways in which my own subjectivities influenced my understandings and assumptions. I do not claim objectivity in my research process. I am aware that my political aims impacted my research design and approach. Through this process, the questions that kept coming back to me were: Who is this research for? Who benefits? Who does this research essentialize or marginalize or ignore? Whose voices are amplified and whose voices are silenced? Whose agenda is being pushed or aided and whose isn't? For me, and for this project, the community-engagement was the center of this cultural heritage project. My decision to write this dissertation as an ethnography of this PAR project is my attempt at highlighting the ways in which a cultural heritage study might leverage cross-cultural collaborative initiatives that push against the Authorized Heritage Discourse (Smith, 2006).

Given the longevity of this study, I have been able to develop relationships with members of this project as well as more broadly within the Succotz community. I have had many opportunities for research in terms of interviews, observations, focus groups, etc. and I have also had time for social engagement. I have worked to reflexively position myself in relation to this work by reflecting on my subjectivities. The multiple theoretical perspectives and data-collection

methods I have used, the number of participants, and the collaborative process of this project, provide opportunities for triangulation during data during analysis (Glesne, 2016). Through my field notes and journal entries I have additionally worked to maintain rigor and reflexivity throughout the research process.

### **Summary**

I designed this postcritical ethnography to study participants' experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and stories around the intersections of community organizing and heritage education. I chose postcritical ethnography informed by decolonizing methodologies for examining our PAR heritage education initiative because I felt that its focus on performativity and collaboration as well as its attention to issues related to reflexivity and representation aligned with my theoretical framework. It allowed me to navigate better my positionality throughout all steps of my research process as well as to uphold my commitments to my fellow collaborators and to my dissertation work. Using a postcritical ethnography approach supported my efforts to maintain multivocality through my presentation of polyvocal narratives and additionally encouraged me to continue challenging observer/observed, researcher/researched, self/other, colonizer/colonized dynamics that exist at the crossroads of this type of community-engaged research.



## CHAPTER IV: DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY ENGAGED HERITAGE EDUCATION PROGRAM

In this chapter, I explore the collective experience of developing the heritage education initiative in Succotz. I utilize the data that I collected during my first two field seasons to describe and analyze our process of developing a community-based heritage education program for youth in Succotz. As I discussed in my methods section, this ethnography may be broadly broken into two phases. The first phase was our process of developing a heritage program. The second phase focused on the implementation of the program—the Motmot Camp. This chapter explores the first phase—the development phase—to provide context for our initial collaborative efforts as well as to examine further the methodological shift that took place following my first two field seasons. Given the longevity of this project and the flow of participant involvement during different times of the project, I have provided participant information in the beginning of each subsection to organize and clarify my findings.

I have given an overview of the first phase of our project in my methods section, but I briefly recap the main events of this phase to situate the following discussion. Our program design phase took place between summer 2015 to summer 2016. This phase encompasses my first two field seasons in Succotz during which time I conducted a preliminary pilot study followed by two focus group meetings that contributed to the development of the Motmot Camp Project. As I have mentioned, planning continued to take place when I was not in Belize, but I was present for the majority of meetings via Skype. In the following subsections I first explore my findings that emerged during my preliminary pilot study. Second, I examine the program design that emerged during two community meetings and the events that followed these meetings. These events led to the implementation of the Motmot Camp. Third, I discuss the

methodological shift that took place following my first two field seasons, altering the course of my research. My analysis in these sections include interview and focus group data as well as data from my observations, fieldnotes and journals.

### **The Pilot Study**

During the spring semester of 2015, after having discussed ideas for cultural heritage education initiatives with Dr. Penados, I began planning an exploratory study to identify and document interest within the Succotz community regarding cultural heritage education and ideas for developing a community-based initiative. I conducted this preliminary study during my first summer field season in 2015. I was introduced to many folks in the village and in Benque Viejo Del Carmen (Benque) an adjacent town, and I met with 16 people—teachers and community knowledge bearers—about the heritage of Succotz. Twelve folks consented to participate in my study, and I conducted face-to-face exploratory interviews with folks over the following weeks. The majority of folks with whom I spoke live in Succotz. Two participants live in the Benque but had strong community ties to cultural heritage work taking place in the surrounding area. Therefore, I included these participants in my pilot study, as my initial goal was to make connections with folks who had an interest in heritage and education. Table 4 gives an overview of the participants in my preliminary pilot study including demographic information that each participant shared with me via survey-questionnaire.

Three major themes emerged from my data analysis process; these include: 1. Culture, heritage, and language influence individual and community identity in Succotz; 2. There is a concern for cultural loss in Succotz; 3. There is a need for community-based opportunities for youth development in Succotz. 4. A cultural heritage community-based program may be one way

to address the need for youth development in Succotz. I explore each of these themes individually and discuss the significance of my overall findings.

**Table 4. Pilot Study Participants**

Name (Pseudonym)	Occupation	Education	Age	Home Address	Work Address	Ethnicity	Cultural Identity	Native/ Preferred Language
Maribelle	Assistant Teacher, Primary	Jr. College associates degree	44	Succotz	Benque	Maya-Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Rodrigo	Teacher, Junior College	4-year university degree	49	Succotz	San Ignacio	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Beatriz	Teacher, High School	4-year university degree	N/P	Succotz	Benque	Maya-Mestizo	Maya-Mestizo	Spanish
Itzel	Teacher, Primary	Jr. College associates degree	29	Succotz	Succotz	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Valentino	Teacher, Primary	Jr. College associates degree	30	Succotz	Succotz	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Sofia	Vice-Principal, Primary	4-year university degree	30	Succotz	Succotz	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Malia	Teacher, Primary	Jr. College associates degree	30	Succotz	Succotz	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Ava	Teacher & Counselor, High School	4-year university degree	34	Benque	Benque	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Veronica	Teacher	4-year university degree	31	Succotz	Succotz	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Marisol	Teacher, Retired	not provided	67	Succotz	Succotz	Maya-Mestizo	Maya-Mestizo	Spanish
Isabel	Arts Coordinator, Government Agency	4-year university degree	38	Benque	Benque	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Diego	Community Knowledge Bearer	not provided	N/P	Succotz	Succotz	Maya-Mestizo	Maya-Mestizo	Spanish

## **Culture, Heritage, and Language Influence Individual and Community Identity in Succotz**

I would like to begin this discussion with a few quotes from participants that capture what many folks in the community expressed when asked to share what culture and/ or heritage means to them.

Itzel: culture to me means your roots. Where you come from, who you are, your background. Your culture is what is exposed to you every day.

Valentino: for me, culture or heritage is going back to my roots and practicing and conserving the customs of my ancestors. It is being proud of one's self, from where I come from, my past, the teaching of my parents and the community as a whole.

Rodrigo: Culture is what makes you as who you are—that is your identity. It has to do it the way you think, you dress, you eat, you act. What you believe.

Participants described culture and heritage as related to both the present and the past simultaneously, and connected to individual and community identity. In other words, culture and heritage are seen as interwoven, blended concepts that are part of identity. This became even more evident when I asked participants to talk about who they are. Itzel shared:

My heritage, it comes from the first people that inhabited our area—the Maya. My family, we are a mix. We are from—well, my great grandfather from the Yucatan and then my great grandmother from the Guatemalan side. So, it's about both mixture of Mayas. So, that's what basically my heritage is about.

Itzel attributes her blended heritage to cultural practices that stem from two different regions. Marisol, a village elder and retired teacher, explained: “Here, we are made up of mixtures of cultures. If I say ‘Maya’ my grandparents were Maya, but my father was not a Maya,

he was from Guatemala, we say ‘Mestizo.’” Ava, a teacher and counselor at a high school in Benque stated:

I’m a mixture of different races. From my father’s side I come from Mestizo culture. My grandparents came from Guatemala. From my mother’s side and from my father’s side. But my grandmother on my mother’s side spoke Maya ... I would say I’m Latina or Mestizo.

As Itzel, Marisol, Ava and other participants describe, cultural identity for many folks in the community is a blend of cultures and heritages. Each participant I spoke with identified themselves as Mestizo—a blend of Spanish and Maya traditions. Itzel culturally identifies as *Maya* in her interview—a blend of two different groups of Maya—and *Mestizo* in the cultural identity portion of her questionnaire. Ava identifies as “Latina or Mestizo.” Additionally, three participants described themselves first as *Maya* and second as *Mestizo*.

There was one exception to the ways in which identity was discussed. Isabel, who lives in the Benque and also works there as an arts coordinator at a government operated cultural heritage museum, conceptualized identity in a slightly different way. She states:

Whenever we are asked for our identity, we must answer, I am a Belizean. That’s the first thing that we should answer. I am a Belizean. Descendants of the Mayas and the Spaniards and I am Mestizo, that should be our correct answer. And that is what we are trying to promote in our community— before being a Mestizo we are a Belizean.

For Isabel, national identity comes before ethnic or cultural identity. Of all participants, Isabel was the only person to discuss a Belizean identity as taking precedence over Mestizo identity. This emphasis on national identity may in part be attributed to the ways in which government institutions in Belize often promote unity and equality over cultural diversity and

equity (Shoman, 2011). While Isabel does identify as Mestizo, she does not consider herself a part of the Succotz community. I draw attention to Isabel's comments as this speaks to the impact of nationalism on individual and community identity in Belize.

Isabel also articulated her relationship to Succotz. She states:

But you see [Succotz] and [Benque] we're—[Succotz] it's a village near to us and I am not so much related to the Succotz people. I studied abroad, I came here [Benque], I started to work. We do work with some of the groups, with the artisans over that side [Succotz] from time to time.

While Isabel's work at the museum may facilitate relationships with some folks in the Succotz community, she does not feel that she is part of that community. For Isabel, and for many of the folks I spoke with, Succotz is seen as separate and apart from Benque. While extremely close in geographic proximity, a socially constructed barrier exists. In part, this is likely because Succotz historically was a Yucatec Maya Village that maintained a level of independence from other nearby towns. As Maribelle states:

My Tio, he's like 80. He was the interpreter for his grandfather. That's how he learned Maya. Tio was in the Alcalde system. He was in charge of the village—how do you call them?—chairman of the village. This was the Alcalde before. They were the authority.

They really had the authority. Not like today.

Maribelle discusses how her uncle was a part of the Alcalde system many years ago. The Alcalde system is the Indigenous governance system of the Maya, predating colonial contact, and is used to maintain their own authority within their communities separate from larger governing bodies (Gahman et al., 2020). Nowadays, in Succotz, the Alcalde is significantly influenced by mainstream government and politics in Belize. I return to the impact of politics in Succotz as

they relate to culture and loss in the following section; however, I seek here to highlight the impact of the past on Succotz today. Succotz's unique history as a Yucatec Maya village still influences the cultural identity of the village today.

The ways in which participants describe their identity is central to understanding how heritage is defined by individuals, by the greater Succotz community, and by those outside the community. For all participants, cultural identity and ethnicity is seen as a mixture of heritages and backgrounds. While several participants make distinctions, all participants do consider Succotz to be a blend of Maya and Spanish tradition, or as Malia says “we are a Mestizo community” [referring to Succotz].

This blended cultural identity is perhaps more clearly depicted in the cultural traditions that participants maintain and celebrate with their families and within the community. Each participant identified a variety of cultural practices and traditions, each stemming from a particular aspect of heritage—Maya or Spanish—but for the most part, there was not a distinction between the two; it was described as a blend. Annual community celebrations and events in Succotz such as Fiesta Cultural, Los Finados (or day of the dead/All Saints Day/All Souls Day), Novenas (9 days of prayer), and other spiritual practices, such as the veneration of Catholic saints and ancestors, reflect these blended cultural traditions. Rodrigo describes some of the practices for Los Finados as this blend of cultures:

For Finados ... we can do like the bollos and an alter, but we are using the calabash for xpasha—a porridge made with corn. And then you set it there. Okay, still it's religion, but still you have a connection with the Mayas.

Los Finados in Succotz is celebrated along with the Catholic holiday of All Saints/ All Souls Day in November. In his description of his family's practices on this day, Rodrigo describes the altar

in his home that holds statues of the Catholic saints, and the food offerings that are made to saints and ancestors during this celebration. The food offerings he describes—Bolloos, a version of tamales made with palm frond wrapping, and xpasha, a sweet corn porridge—are traditional Maya foods. Additionally, the calabash is a gourd-like fruit that grows on trees in the region and traditionally was used for food storage. Beatriz pointed this tree out to me one afternoon on one of our walks around the village. Ancestor veneration is also a common Maya spiritual tradition. These aspects of Maya heritage are blended with the influence from Spanish Catholic tradition; this is a common community practice as a large percentage of community members in Succotz are devout Catholics.

Language plays a role in participants' articulation of the impact of blended culture and heritage on identity. Beatriz articulates: "There are a few words that we use along with Spanish, that when I was a kid, I thought it was Spanish, but that's not Spanish. So, there's still a few words that we use that are Maya words." In Succotz, most people speak Spanish as a first language and English as a second language; however, as Beatriz describes, there are Maya words that are still used in the colloquial dialect of Succotz and surrounding towns. Beatriz and many other participants described feelings of loss regarding language, cultural heritage, knowledge, and practices. In the following section, I discuss this concern for cultural and language loss in Succotz.

### **Concern for Cultural Loss in Succotz**

While participants discussed the pride they felt for their cultural heritage, as Valentino articulated in the previous discussion, many participants additionally described a lack of pride in cultural heritage identity and the impact this has on youth. Maribelle shared: "If I tell the children in school: "We are Mestizo. We are Mayas!" they say 'No! Miss, we are not Indios!'"



She goes on to say: “Because people are ignorant of the past—we don’t know our history and that is keeping us back from accepting who we are.” Maribelle articulates what many participants discussed with regard to a lack of acknowledgment or even embarrassment within the community regarding cultural pride.

Participants identified multiple aspects of cultural loss that they attributed to this lack of cultural heritage pride in the community. Aspects include: loss of language—specifically dialects of Maya; loss of cultural expressions such as dance, music (particularly the marimba), and art; loss of local history; loss of traditional food-ways and environmental sustainability. As I continued to analyze these data, I identified five categories that participants expressed as contributing factors to an overall sense of cultural loss: loss of language; public schooling; Maya archaeological research in the community and nationally; impact of “modernity”; and lack of collective agency within the Succotz community. I discuss each of these categories in greater detail.

### ***Contributing Factor 1: Loss of Language***

Loss of the Maya language in Succotz has contributed greatly to the overall sense of cultural loss within the community. In Belize, three Mayan dialects are still spoken: Q’eqchi’, Mopán, and Yucatec. Q’eqchi’ is more commonly spoken in Maya communities in Toledo, the southernmost district of Belize, as well as in parts of Guatemala and Mexico. Mopán, more frequently spoken in the Petén region of Guatemala, is also spoken in some communities in southern Belize. Yucatec is spoken in the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico and therefore is more commonly spoken in areas that are now northern and western regions of Belize. Succotz was settled predominantly by Yucatec Maya fleeing the Caste War in the Yucatán of Mexico. The Caste War also known as *Guerra de Castas* or the *Maya War*, began in 1847 and continued well

into the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Shoman, 2011). The Maya in the Yucatán began the Caste War against colonizers who were in control of their territory and as Shoman (2011) states:

as a reaction against the caste system that had developed in the Yucatán under the Spanish and their successors in power, in which the ‘pure’ Maya were at the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder. But it may more accurately be viewed as a class war and as a Maya war of liberation for their homeland ... it was an anticolonial war against two powers, and fought on territory which included the old providence of the Yucatán as well as the settlement of Belize. (pp. 60–61)

During this time, the British settlement, now Belize, saw an influx of Maya, Mestizo (mixed Maya and Spanish ancestry), and Yucateco (direct descendants of Spaniards) immigrants and refugees (Shoman, 2011).

Beatriz recalls her grandmother telling her stories of her family’s journey from Mexico to Succotz. She recollects:

We had many of our ancestors running away from the war—the Caste War—and coming to this area [Succotz]. Interestingly, for some reason I would sometimes ask my grandfather grandmother about their ancestors ... My grandmother told me a story about they came from Champotón, which is next to Campeche [in the Yucatán of Mexico]. And she said her great-grandmother would tell her the story of how they came through the forest and they ended up in this area ... And she spoke about the Caste Wars, that they were running away from the Caste Wars. Our people settled here ... So, they used to speak that language [Yucatec] too, but not anymore ... My grandfather used to speak Maya as well but he never taught us. It was Yucatec. And my uncles—I remember when I was a kid, I used to hear a lot of Maya, but I didn’t know what they were saying. And I

used to ask my uncle, and I would get my notebook, and I would say uncle “tell me how you say this ...” and I would write it how I think it was spelled. But then I would lose my notebook. Like when I was a kid, I would learn a little and then I would just leave it.

In Beatriz’s discussion, her elders would speak Maya to one another, but they did not make the choice to speak it to the younger generations; hence, she asked her grandparents and uncles to teach her, but being a child and busy, she never really learned. Beatriz wasn’t sure why the language was not purposefully taught at home, but it was likely because Spanish was becoming the more dominant language in the community at that point. In Beatriz’s example, the adults did not prioritize teaching the younger generation the language and as a result the language was lost. Maribelle and Rodrigo also recall their elders speaking Maya when they were young. Maribelle recalls:

One of my aunts would speak Maya with her kids, with my other aunt ... they would just speak Maya. We would ask her, “What are you saying Tia, what are you saying? Tell us!” And she would tell us, “repeat it!” But we would take it as a joke.

Rodrigo also remembers his family speaking Maya. He shared:

They would communicate in Maya when we were there. ‘Give water to your cousin’ they told them in Maya and they would learn what they were saying. Like they would take out the cup. But now the language has been lost.

Beatriz, Maribelle, and Rodrigo emphasize the fact that even one generation ago, Maya was spoken more frequently in the village, but over the past two generations or so, Maya became less common and Spanish dominated as the prevalent home language. These narratives reveal that a couple different dynamics are taking place. In Maribelle’s and Rodrigo’s experiences, they remember having family members who chose to speak Maya at home and their children were

encouraged to learn the language; however, when the adults would urge the children to repeat the language, and really learn it, as Maribelle said, “we would take it as joke.” In this situation, the children did not recognize speaking Maya as a serious or necessary endeavor. It was easier to speak in Spanish. These examples offer insight into the intergenerational experiences with language and culture in Succotz and also show how over time, Yucatec has become an obscure language in Succotz. Nowadays, as many participants pointed out, only a handful of folks in the village still speak Yucatec; many of these folks are elderly and are no longer able to teach the younger generations. Both Beatriz and Maribelle identified Don Pedro [pseudonym], an elder in the community who speaks Yucatec, as someone who in the past had offered to teach Yucatec to youth; however, at the time of our planning and organizing, Don Pedro was not well.

Beatriz mentioned that not long ago, Don Pedro had met with a principal and another community knowledge bearer about teaching Yucatec to youth in school. Beatriz articulates:

They had already organized ... and so he said he was happy that he was going to go and speak and teach Yucatec. And he said they took him to school, to Standard 6, and he asked them, “who wants to learn Maya language, the Yucatec Maya language?” And he says “you should stand up if you want to learn!” And he says Nobody was sitting down. Everybody was standing up. They wanted to learn the Maya language. Well, afterward the principal retired and the project died there. And he didn’t go.

While I address public schooling as a contributing factor to language and cultural loss in the next section, I draw attention to schools here to highlight the ways in which the politics of public education limit community or intergenerational involvement, thus further contributing to the loss of language in Succotz. A simple change in school administration derailed a project that could have been incredibly beneficial to youth in the community.

There are Maya communities in southern Belize in which Mayan dialects are still frequently spoken as the dominant language, though this is not the case in Succotz. Geographic location may play a role, as the Maya communities of southern Belize are situated in more remote areas of the country. Succotz is situated in a more heavily populated area of Belize and is impacted by daily tourism to the site of Xunantunich, as well as constant traffic at the Belize-Guatemala border. The reality is that Maya language loss in Succotz has happened gradually, but at this point there are so few community members who still speak Yucatec, that it makes it a tremendous challenge to reclaim the language. Beatriz articulates, “there are things ... in the Maya language that cannot be expressed in other languages.” She goes on to say that “language is where the meanings of things are expressed—for us, losing the Maya language then I think it’s a great loss.” Language loss contributes greatly to the overall sense of cultural loss that participants expressed. Additionally, public schooling has also contributed to language and cultural loss in Succotz. In the following section, I explore the impact that public schooling has had on participants’ feelings of cultural loss.

### ***Contributing Factor 2: Public Schooling***

I briefly discussed public schooling in Belize in the chapter one. I will reiterate here that public education in Belize follows the British model and is most frequently a partnership between church and state. Instruction in public schools is conducted in English, as English is the official language of Belize. While teachers and students may choose to communicate in Spanish or other languages that might be more indicative of home languages, texts and materials are in English. The majority of participants that I spoke with are teachers in Succotz or a nearby town, and described the impact of schooling and education on cultural heritage practices.

All of the educators that I interviewed expressed frustration and concern with national education standards and curriculum regarding history, heritage, and culture and the lack of space in the curriculum and in schools for youth to explore individual and community cultural heritages and histories. The Core Curriculum Guide established by the Ministry of Education includes a single unit called “Ethnic Groups” in the social studies curriculum for each grade at the primary level and one course at the secondary level, titled “Celebrations and Cultures.” Schools additionally host a “Cultural Day” each year during which time students share their class projects from these units with their families and the community.

As Valentino, articulates, “cultural day is for all cultures of Belize but there is no time for students to focus on their own heritage.” Beatriz, expressed her frustration with the repetitiveness of the activities each year, and the focus on generalities rather than an in-depth exploration of heritage and culture. She states:

In the primary school—it’s part of the curriculum ... the groups. There is a unit on ethnic groups they ask our kids to like dress-up and display foods of the different ethnic groups. That’s about it. Every year they do the same thing over and over. I think they should explore other things than just superficially the food, clothing.

Additionally, participants voiced several challenges related to teaching heritage material in their classes. Malia articulates: “it [Core Curriculum Guide] only provides you with the topics that you’re teaching; you have to find information on your own—do research, read a lot ...” While the Core Curriculum Guide identifies the unit and broad topics to be covered, teachers are not provided any resources to help plan their units. Itzel articulates this problem further. She states:

What we have in our curriculum is, we just have the main topic and the sub topic that you need to cover for that, for that specific area. It's up to the teacher to expand it. Because we just don't want to—our idea was not only to teach them about the ethnic group. “This is the Maya and they dress like this ...” and so on ... no. We just wanted to expand it. And it's up to the teacher. It's up to the teacher as well how they want to teach it and what they want to do with their classroom to enhance their learning about those topics.

Itzel and other teachers with whom she collaborates, make a great effort to develop units that go beyond the superficial aspects of culture and heritage and offer deeper exploration to students. However, she goes on to say:

In the upper grades, it's really difficult to find information. It's really difficult. But we found one book, it's “Maya Civilization,” because in our other book, “The History of Belize” it's a little bit outdated so the “Maya Civilization,” that's what we use because they haven't upgraded anything else. And we need to do a lot of research as well, because even myself, I need to give the right information for those children to have the idea.

Itzel articulates the difficulty that many teachers described with regard to access to pertinent resources. As I have discussed previously, the texts that Itzel refers to are books that focus on the Ancient Maya and on what the archaeology of the Ancient Maya tells about Maya culture. It is up to the teacher to make (or not make) connections to contemporary Maya Mestizo culture and heritage.

Other teachers discussed the challenge of not having enough room or time in the curriculum for cultural heritage exploration. In her discussion of the weekly class schedule Maribelle states: “We would have like social studies two days of the week; 25 minutes per day. So little.” Malia expounds upon Maribelle's articulation: “It's not a lot of time because we have

to cover a lot of things. I cannot spend my whole year teaching about culture or ethnic groups. The time is not enough.” While many participants felt that limited time was a challenge, other participants described the school system culture as the primary challenge. Beatriz states:

we’re are challenged at our school— it’s that they’re [administration/ System] trying to focus so much on more academic things and whenever they see you do something a bit more—that’s more community-based or having to do kind of with culture, they kind of believe that it’s a waste of time.

Valentino articulates: “the system is so focused on covering curriculum, covering material that culture is not part of our curriculum.” Beatriz and Valentino describe a common feeling among participants that the school system is hyper-focused on core subject material and deems cultural studies a “waste of time.”

This push for teaching to the curriculum as well as administrative decisions also limits any community or intergenerational involvement in school. There was a time not too long ago where community volunteers were welcomed in schools to facilitate classes such as Maya language. Many of the primary school teachers I spoke with include fieldtrips to nearby heritage sites, such as Xunantunich, as part of a social studies unit on “Archaeology and Tourism in Belize;” however, several teachers expressed frustration with the ways in which the standard curriculum, textbooks, and tours at these sites distance and mystify the ancient Maya rather than encourage connections with the past. Beatriz expresses her frustration:

When it [culture/heritage] is taught school, especially in the primary school, it is talked about the Mayas of long ago and somehow, they don’t relate it to the people now, which there is still a connection, so then you feel disconnected from that ... they [youth] are



taught in schools—Mestizo children, mixed—from mixed origins, of Spanish and Maya, so then you kind of see the Maya long ago as some other group.

This feeling of disconnect that Beatriz describes between past and present gets at the core of what many participants felt was a driving factor in cultural loss. This highlights the negative impact of the public-school curriculum choices that are made by people in power—i.e., the Ministry of Education. These decisions of what to include and what to exclude contribute to the lack of resources about contemporary Maya people and additionally provide a lack of support in finding such resources. In the following section, I further explore the ways in which archaeological studies perpetuate this disconnect.

### ***Contributing Factor 3: Maya Archaeological Research in the Community and Nationally***

As I mentioned in the introduction, the ancient Maya heritage site of Xunantunich is located in the town of Succotz—it is across the river from the village proper—and the National Institute of Culture and Heritage (NICH), a government organization, manages this site and others throughout the country; additionally, NICH issues research and excavation permits to archaeologists to work on these sites—the vast majority of these researchers are foreign (mainly American, Canadian, British, or from other European countries). Having previously worked on archaeological projects in Belize, I am familiar with the common practices of these research groups, and familiar with many of the particular groups conducting research at the site of Xunantunich. While these projects are required by Belizean law to hire “local workers” from nearby communities for the duration of their research, typically, little is done by way of the archaeologists to encourage collaboration in the research process with local communities.

Prior to conducting this study, I was aware of a couple of archaeological projects in the surrounding areas near Succotz that have made efforts to engage with the Succotz community.

When these projects are in session, the researchers live in the village and work to support local businesses as well as hire folks directly from within the Succotz community to participate in the archaeological projects. In particular, one has worked at Xunantunich for many years. They are well known and liked by many in the Succotz community. They have invited students from Succotz to participate in archaeological investigations and have hired local archaeologists from Succotz to participate in excavations. For the past several years, as part of their yearly field season, they have put on a Maya archaeology fair in Succotz. They invite the community to participate in a variety of activities and shows centered on the ancient Maya and local archaeology. Many of the participants I spoke with were familiar with this group; three participants had worked with or had family members who had worked with these projects.

In discussions with participants about the archaeology taking place near Succotz and the relationships between archaeologists and the community, several folks mentioned the two projects that I refer to above. Veronica articulates: “The only one that I’m familiar with is the one with [his & her name removed]. When they come around and then you see the villagers getting involved in like working with the archaeologists.” While Veronica has not participated in any archaeological work with this project, she is aware of their efforts to encourage some community involvement in the archaeology. Itzel shares:

The group that I am telling you about just now, the leader, I’m not sure if you know him, it’s [name removed]. So, he lives here in our village for a couple of months until he goes back [to the U.S.]. And now, he’s very well acquainted with the people here in our village. He even speaks Spanish very well, and writes Spanish very well. So, he’s very literate in Spanish. So, the connection with him and these people that he hires for these months is, I think it’s a good connection because it’s not only bringing in income for

them, but it also connects to other people here ... My dad was an archaeologist. And he was a tour guide for his last days, and he knew my dad. And we didn't even know that they knew each other. [Laughter] So it really, I don't know, it lifted our spirit that someone knew my dad and they knew each other and he talked well about my dad and many people here in our village know him. And knows his family. So, probably he's the only one that is really connected to our village.

Itzel discusses how this project has made an effort to connect with folks in Succotz and also draws attention to the ways in which this project is a source of work and income for some community members in the village. She also expresses pride in her father who worked as both an archaeologist and tour guide before his passing.

Sofia shared her experience working on a different local archaeological project when she was younger. She says:

when I worked with [her name removed], I was 13 years, I just started high school, and because my aunt, she was the one taking me there and helping. Then, I worked with her I guess until I was 15 or so. I used to wash the stones they would get and draw. They were here in the village a lot ... it was a good experience working with them.”

Sofia additionally shared that her brother worked with this particular group for over 2 years working on excavation and her aunt has worked in the ceramics lab with them for many years.

For Itzel and Sofia, connections between some archeological projects in and around Succotz offer positive experiences as well as sources of income for some Succotz families. This may be in part because they have developed personal relationships with these archaeologists; however, the decision on the part of foreign archaeologists to hire young children is concerning. Other participants with whom I spoke feel like there is less of a connection or the connections

that do exist have room for growth and improvement. As Beatriz puts it, the only connection is “with the people who have been working there. Like, assisting the archaeologists. There’s a little relationship but the rest of the community? No.” As I mentioned above, NICH does require archaeological projects to hire a certain number of Belizeans per project. Community engagement, while encouraged is not a requirement set by NICH. So, in the above descriptions, there are projects that do more community outreach than others; however, these connections often center around working relationships in which the archaeologists hire folks in the community to work for them. Additionally, community outreach projects that center Maya cultural heritage, such as archaeology fairs, The Toledo Cacao Festival, and other Maya-centered events in the country are most often developed and financed by NICH and foreign heritage research groups. These events tend to emphasize Maya folklore and target tourism and are used as opportunities to “celebrate” diversity within the country, which brings in money. On the other hand, The Belizean government rejects the efforts of Indigenous peoples to be respected and autonomous as seen by their refusal to sign the Maya Land Rights agreement in Toledo, the southern-most district of Belize (Penados, 2018; Penados et al., 2022; Shoman, 2011). For some participants this creates a tension between some community members in Succotz and the archaeologists that position themselves as experts. In speaking with participants in this study, it became clear that many felt a lack of connection between archaeologists and the Succotz community, and that this disconnect contributed to cultural loss expressed by participants. When asked to share how they saw connections between archaeologists and/or the archaeological projects at Xunantunich and the Succotz community, half of the participants said that there was no connection. Perhaps Rodrigo most poignantly articulates this point:

I don't see no connection. It's something different; like, we don't even know what's going on there. We are not being part of what's happening. So, two different things. It's our past—it's about our past our ancestors, but what are they doing there? Not even communicating with the community.

Rodrigo expresses feelings of appropriation with regard to the ways in which archaeologists carry out their research projects at Xunantunich. He also articulates a frustration voiced by several other participants with regard to the lack of communication and community involvement between researchers and the Succotz community.

In her response, Maribelle addresses the role that the government plays in this disconnect; she states:

I think that the government has fault in that, because I think that this should be like one-to-one basis—okay, you give me I give you. Okay. I understand people need to come down and get educated; we exchange that education, but like, people would come and they would do their own thing ... So how, how would we be able to know about what's happening in that community?

Maribelle describes the way in which the Belizean government supports foreign archaeological projects in the country but makes no real effort to use these experiences to include local communities. Maribelle and others express a desire for a connection—as she says, “one-to-one” relationship—that is, for every foreign archaeologist or student working in these heritage sites, there should be one community member so that an exchange of knowledge may occur between both groups.

This distinction between collaborator and “worker” is made clear in the ways in which Valentino and Rodrigo express having no voice. Valentino states: “We know that Xunantunich is

there, but we don't have any voice or vote, or nothing.” Rodrigo reiterates what Valentino shares and describes the feeling with an example. He says:

But sometimes, if you go to see a talk with an archaeologist—let's say that it's a talk taking place at San Benito Hotel, or somewhere, and then you go, and then, when you listen to what they explain, sometimes you feel like, I am, or I know better than what you are saying here. But there is where the connection comes, but it's—you have no voice. Nothing. But sometimes you feel like, okay, you're in a better position to explain or to give information or to help them in their developments, so you can see ... you are a part—we are a part—we should be a part, but it's not there.

Rodrigo clearly states that he feels he, and his community, have no voice when it comes to the research and work that archaeologists do in his community (or more broadly in the country at large). There is no effort made on the part of archaeologists to collaboratively analyze and ascribe meaning to what is being found in excavation. The talks that are put on (here he is referencing a conference that takes place yearly) talk at the community rather than encourage dialogue.

In this same conversation Maribelle contributed her thoughts:

And like Rodrigo says, sometimes you would hear people saying—they would get just part of the truth, and then they would ... ‘okay this is how it looked and this artifact—this Mayan king used to use it as a ring’ and then the others: ‘No, Man! That's not a ring, that was his earring!’ Let them come! Come to the village; visit people! See how they live. Find out information from older people from young people what's their perspective. How can we improve? What do you think we're doing wrong? How can you be included? And

I guess, that if there would be more inclusion of the villagers, then they would be more aware of what's going on and then they would try to build up on our heritage.

Much like Rodrigo's comment, Maribelle describes not only a disconnect in communication between archaeologists and local communities, but also discrepancies in the meaning-making process which have direct effects on the ways in which ancient Maya identity is portrayed in history. Maribelle highlights the ways in which interpretation may be different depending on the cultural knowledge one has. She articulates her desire to see archaeologists take the initiative to start a dialogue in the community and encourage local involvement in the research process so as to minimize discrepancies in interpretation. She additionally calls attention to the impact that such collaboration might have on regaining cultural knowledge that has been lost in the community.

Like Maribelle, many participants expressed a desire for collaboration between archaeologists and community members in Succotz. Participants feel that because they are essentially denied access as co-creators of knowledge in this meaning-making process of their heritage, that foreign researchers, particularly at Xunantunich, are contributing to experiences of cultural loss in the community. Additionally, participants did not articulate archaeology as a goal for a community program. While several participants felt Xunantunich was important to Succotz's history, there was not a desire to push for involvement in archeological investigations because of the way the systems were set up.

#### ***Contributing Factor 4: Impact of "Modernity"***

Each participant shared some variation of the ways in which modern life-style choices, influences from Western culture, technology, globalism, etc. have contributed to cultural loss within the community. As Valentino describes, "We are losing our culture ... we are

modernizing ourselves. The children as well.” Itzel shared a particularly vivid description of the ways in which western culture has influenced youth in Succotz during the celebration of Los Finados; she says:

Children are trying to be more modern. Because whenever they would used to go out trick-or-treating for that special day, they would go out chanting ‘xpasha’ ‘xpasha’ which is a porridge we do with the corn. And now I’m telling them that they are trying to come in to the modern things. We’re trying to imitate the ones in the United States. That’s what I tell them because right now, these past years they are chanting “trick-or-treat.” Now it’s not ‘xpasha’ no more, it’s more ‘Trick-or-treat.’

As Itzel describes, during Los Finados (All Saints/Souls Day) youth have also started imitating western Halloween traditions and putting aside the more traditional ways of celebrating Los Finados. This in part may be attributed to greater access to technology, thus fueling globalism through social media and other online platforms from around the world. U.S. television channels are also part of most cable television packages in Belize. Additionally, the influx of U.S and European expats moving to the country over the past few decades, as well as western tourism, has contributed to what local stores choose to buy and sell.

Rodrigo and Maribelle shared a similar story; Rodrigo explains: “Like that calabash [referring to a stack of several bowls on the kitchen shelf], you would have a hard time finding those things sometimes. Like people throw it away—not give it value.” Maribelle clarifies: “They don’t want a calabash, they want a tupperware; crystal.” These anecdotes that Itzel, Rodrigo and Maribelle shared describe the ways in which subtle influences lead to widespread change, and a lack of interest or appreciation for various aspects of tradition. Perhaps most frequent were participant’s discussions of the ways in which technology has contributed to



cultural loss. Television and the internet were cited as having the most significant influence, particularly on youth. Because global media, particularly U.S. media, is streamed on television in Belize and most families have television and often internet in their homes, Western culture has played a huge role in youth's desire to, as Itzel said, "imitate the ones in the United States." Belize does have its own television and radio broadcasting with multiple news channels and other programming; however, these options do not necessarily counter access to global media. Valentino attributes various aspects of technology to cultural loss much as Itzel does, but additionally he links it to a lack of cultural pride. He says, "The pride is not there. It's not there. And we are influenced—television, things like that. Internet. And there's nothing there that promotes our culture." Valentino expresses the ways in which media depict particular cultures over others; thus, privileging certain ways of being and knowing. He expresses his frustration that there are no spaces in which his culture and the culture of his community are promoted.

Maribelle also highlighted this frustration she states:

The Garifunas. They have their day. How about the Mayas? When are we going to have their day? And right now, the tourists—most tourists come to visit the pyramids—the Maya sites. And then we were saying, why don't we have a day for Mayas, and set it aside and make people aware.

Maribelle speaks to the ways in which the country and government have appropriated ancient Maya heritage for profit through tourism, yet continue to ignore, marginalize, and deny the desire of contemporary Maya communities to have a national day devoted to the celebration of their heritage and identity as Mayas. The Garifuna are descendants of the Afro-Indigenous population of St. Vincent in the Caribbean and were deported from the island to Honduras by the British in 1797; by the beginning of the 1800s Garifuna communities had immigrated into what

is now Belize (Shoman, 2011). According to Belize's 2010 Census report, the Maya represent 11.3 percent of the total population of Belize while the Garifuna make up 6.1 percent of the total population (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2023). The 2020 census was postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions and will not be published until the latter part of 2023 (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2023); however, for the purposes of this research study, the 2010 census is likely more relevant as I collected this particular data in 2015. To Maribelle's point, it is concerning that there is a nationally recognized holiday in Belize representing the Garifuna but not the Maya.

The history and politics of Belize help to situate this discrepancy. Belize was first a British settlement, then a British colony, and did not gain independence from Britain until 1981. While it is an independent country, it remains a commonwealth of Britain and therefore current politics in Belize are deeply rooted in the British system of government. The populace of Belize is incredibly culturally and ethnically diverse. While this may be the case in many countries, perhaps it is more noticeable in Belize as the total population is 325,528, and the country itself is quite small (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2023). Nationalism and the notion of "one people one nation" has been ingrained in Belizean society and is part of political consensus in the country (Shoman, 2011). As such, Indigenous movements, particularly those regarding Maya land rights in the country have met with extreme hostility from the government and other groups within society. Belize society is having difficulty coming to terms with, as Shoman (2011) states:

the demand by the Toledo Maya for land rights and autonomy. Many Belizeans still cling to what they have been taught involves being a nation, where what is emphasized is individual rather than communal rights, and where no distinction should be made as between ethnic groups: all are equal, all have equal rights. (p. 364)

This mentality certainly impacts the ways in which the Belizean government and other groups in the country perceive, react, and respond to Maya claims for autonomy and sovereignty. The impact of modernity on cultural loss in Succotz manifests in both subtle and pronounced ways. Technology and globalization spur cultural changes and adaptations that shift and change over time. Additionally, the political push for a singular national identity that ignores the cultural diversity and unique needs of specific cultural groups further fuels divisiveness between and cultural loss within these groups. While external influences have contributed to feelings of cultural loss within the community, participants also described internal contributing factors that I discuss in the next section.

***Contributing Factor 5: Lack of Collective Agency Within the Succotz Community***

Many participants described a lack of sustaining community projects. A number of community projects in Succotz have focused on various aspects of culture (particularly dance and music), but as Itzel articulates, in reference to a cultural dance group, “I don’t know what happened. It all suddenly died.” Itzel and other participants discussed various projects starting and then dying and not gaining momentum to start again. Interestingly, in my conversations with village elders, Diego attributed this lack collective agency to divisions within the community along religious, political, and socio-economic lines. Diego expressed:

One problem in the community is that many [community members] are skeptical of the idea that someone would start something that would benefit the community without expecting something in return because there have been issues in the past with groups of people affiliated with opposite political parties that do not see eye to eye.

Diego is articulating the ways in which divisions along political party lines have negatively impacted intra-community relations. Differing political affiliations have at times

created tensions between people and groups within Succotz. Diego felt that this is also true of religious affiliation. Because so much emphasis has been placed on difference within the community, it makes it difficult to create a truly neutral space where commonality may be supported regardless of differing political, religious, or socio-economic lines. This loss of collective agency as a community in conjunction with the factors discussed above have greatly contributed an overall sense of cultural loss, which has impacted cultural heritage identity and feelings of cultural pride for community members. In the following discussion I explore community member's desire for cultural revitalization as a way of resisting and taking action against factors contributing to cultural loss and loss of cultural pride.

### **Need for Community-Based Opportunities for Youth Development in Succotz**

While each participant expressed frustration with the current issues at play in the community that have contributed to a general feeling of loss of cultural heritage, there was unanimous agreement among participants that collaborative efforts should focus on youth in Succotz. Many participants mentioned a lack of opportunities outside of school for youth to engage with their peers and elders. Rodrigo states, "We see this is our responsibility to get the kids involved and teach them to get involved also, because often the children see it's only Me! Me! Me! There is no community between the generations." In our discussion, Rodrigo drew attention to the ways in which he sees his responsibility to his students and his own children to promote a sense of community that fosters a sense of responsibility to one's self and to others. Several participants mentioned this disconnect between the generations as well as a lack of community mindset with youth. Marisol also voiced a concern shared by other participants. She articulates, "We need a place where children are involved in something that would benefit them in a positive way. In the community I don't hear anything going on in the summer for children.

Nothing. Children they just stay at home with TV, electronics.” For Marisol, Rodrigo and others, the lack of community-led spaces for youth was a frustration. While there could be innumerable options for addressing this need for youth development in Succotz, participants felt that a heritage-based program might be a way of addressing two concerns at the same time.

While heritage is viewed by participants as important, it was not necessarily a driving force that everyone stopped to think of all the time. On the one hand, participants acknowledge a strong concern for cultural loss in the community, but participants did not speak of wanting to return to a more traditional lifestyle. Rather, they spoke of wanting to keep the memories and the cultural traditions of the community alive so that the younger generations do not lose that cultural knowledge altogether. In this way, retaining culture does not necessitate going back to traditional lifeways; it simply means finding ways to preserve and pass on cultural knowledge in ways that are meaningful for youth and the for the community.

### **A Cultural Heritage Community-Based Program May Be One Way to Address the Need for Youth Development in Succotz**

Participants shared a hope of passing on cultural traditions to their children and other youth in the community. Sofia shared:

There are many things that are—fading away here in our village and I want to bring it up as an educator. I feel that dealing with the children is a good place start. Instilling in them who they are and knowing more about it.

For Sofia, heritage is important and it is worth making space for children to explore their heritage and the traditions of their community. Maribelle also articulated this sense of responsibility. She says:

We need to be more aware and more conscious of who we are then that would help us to identify ourselves: “Oh! I am a Maya!” So, I should try to do something to revive it again. Because of our kids. If we don’t accept it then how can we teach our kids—our own kids—our family—to be proud of their heritage?

For participants, the idea for a heritage-based program was viewed as something that needed to be taken up for and by the community. As Rodrigo puts it:

The village in itself is a cultural house. Because we still have people around, they have the features of Mayas. We don’t have the language now but it’s just a matter of working on it. A lot of people are aware of who we are. We still identify ourselves like that. But as the years go, we are losing it. So, if we don’t do something now then it will get lost completely. I believe it should be part of the community. Something small that you can work with.

When I asked participants to share ideas about how this might happen, folks agreed that there must be a collective facilitation among a group of community members who were willing to be proactive, and, like Valentino says, “do something because you feel it’s important ... If you don’t do anything, it’s like any other thing, nothing happens.” Conversations with participants revealed an idea for a community-based cultural heritage youth program that highlights the blended cultural heritage practices and traditions in Succotz, although emphasis was placed on Maya aspects of heritage. Participants articulated the importance of involving community elders and community knowledge bearers willing to share their skills, and expertise.

Participants felt strongly that any efforts should take place outside the confines of school and should have no affiliation with religious or political groups. Each of the participants that I spoke with was eager to form and be a part of a group of interested and vested organizers who

would be willing to work together to create a community-based heritage summer program for youth in Succotz. All of the educators I spoke with felt that a summer program would be ideal, because teachers do not teach during the summer, and a program for youth would benefit families in the community. Each educator voiced a willingness to collaboratively develop a curriculum for such a program. Conversations with participants regarding program content yielded a wide range of topics including Indigenous Maya languages; traditional art forms such as pottery and carvings; jewelry making and other crafts; dance; music (almost every participant brought up the importance of the marimba in the community); traditional dress; traditional foodways and cooking; sustainable agriculture—there was great interest in the possibility of creating a community milpa or garden; and documenting the local history of Succotz through conversations with village elders. With each idea that participants brought up, they also identified other community members who possessed that particular cultural knowledge. Participants felt strongly that by encouraging these individuals to participate in a community-based program such as this, and additionally encouraging family and parent involvement, a greater sense of community in Succotz would develop. As participants and I discussed the next steps for facilitating these ideas, it was frequently suggested that a collaborative meeting with participants and any other interested community members should be held. In the next section, I examine the community meetings that followed my pilot study and how we collaboratively designed the Motmot Camp.

### **Community Planning Meetings**

Following my pilot study, I analyzed and synthesized my findings. In the late spring of 2016, I went to Belize for my second field season. Prior to my trip, I contacted participants and asked folks to help organize a community meeting. We had two community planning meetings

during my second field season and other meetings that I participated in via Skype after my second field season. The first two meetings were structured as focus groups while subsequent meetings were less structured and followed our goals outlined in previous meetings. While scheduling did not allow every participant to attend each meeting, there was a core group of nine collaborators who contributed to the overall program planning. All collaborators lived in Succotz. Eight of the collaborators were teachers. Diego was the only community elder and knowledge bearer who assisted in the initial planning of this program. Table 5 provides an overview of collaborators in the program planning phase.

**Table 5. Participants in Program Design Phase**

Name (Pseudonym)	Occupation	Education	Age	Home Address	Work Address	Ethnicity	Cultural Identity	Native/ Preferred Language
Maribelle	Assistant Teacher, Primary	Jr. college associates degree	44	Succotz	Benque	Maya-Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Rodrigo	Teacher, Junior College	4-year university degree	49	Succotz	San Ignacio	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Beatriz	Teacher, High School	4-year university degree	N/P	Succotz	Benque	Maya-Mestizo	Maya-Mestizo	Spanish
Itzel	Teacher, Primary	Jr. college associates degree	29	Succotz	Succotz	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Valentino	Teacher, Primary	Jr. college associates degree	30	Succotz	Succotz	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Sofia	Vice-Principal, Primary	4-year university degree	30	Succotz	Succotz	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Malia	Teacher, Primary	Jr. college associates degree	30	Succotz	Succotz	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Veronica	Teacher	4-year university degree	31	Succotz	Succotz	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Diego	Community Knowledge Bearer	not provided	N/P	Succotz	Succotz	Maya-Mestizo	Maya-Mestizo	Spanish

During our first focus group, I shared my initial findings from the pilot study with the group. In my preliminary analysis, I had identified two larger themes: 1. Losing cultural heritage



has impacted identity; 2. A strong desire for reclaiming cultural identity. While collaborators agreed that cultural loss was a concern for everyone in our group, there was a discussion about whether or not the implications of cultural loss were all that important to identity. Dr. Penados posed this question to the group: “It doesn’t really matter if people identify with their own cultural heritage or not. Okay. It’s the other question I was thinking of, does it matter to young people you think? And does it matter to us?” As we discussed this, it became apparent that identity was not something that was on the forefront of anyone’s mind. It was seen as important, and as something that did influence a person’s identity, but it did not significantly impact anyone’s daily routine. Rather, there were other aspects of my findings that folks felt better articulated the group’s concerns; these being: a concern for cultural loss, a need for community engagement, and a need for spaces for youth development in the community. This dialogue offered another lens through which to analyze my initial findings. As I reflected, I realized that my initial analysis was hindered by my narrow focus on cultural heritage and the literature around heritage and identity. It wasn’t that heritage isn’t important—but that there was a bigger consideration, and I was getting bogged down with a narrow research mindset. I was blinded by my own “research gaze.” When I went back and considered how I might think through this differently and what perspectives I was leaving out I realized that I needed to reconsider how I defined my themes.

### **Consequences of Cultural Loss**

As our first community meeting continued, we collaboratively articulated a problem in the community, that being a need for youth development and greater community engagement. Heritage education became the vessel through which we might address these community concerns. As such, we spent time discussing the consequences of cultural loss in Succotz as a

way of identifying potential areas of focus for a youth program that might address these consequences. Diego offered his insight:

I can see the richness of the culture and I can say that we are not doing good. But somebody else out there is doing—is using us. And I say using us, I feel myself as a descendent of Mayas. There are business persons who are not descendants, who put a big sign “Mayan Culture.” And if they are doing it, why aren’t we? Part of it is, I can say, we have so many things that we are doing, but we don’t put the time aside to create these opportunities. Especially with the young people ... So, I feel that if we get together and think of how we can recognize the strengths in our community, and we can get organized, we can get some type of benefit from it. Because as I said, if others are using our heritage— which is myself, which is part of us—we ourselves should get involved in the business ... So, what are we going to do? Be dependent on others—not really be independent but work for businesses that use us and our natural resources? Or come together with our cultural and natural resources that are in our hands.

As Diego expressed, one of the consequences of losing culture is cultural appropriation and exploitation. But he suggests that one way to combat this issue is by coming together from within the community and organizing around issues related to cultural heritage. Rodrigo also contributed his thoughts around similar issues with regard to cultural heritage events inside and outside the community in which traditions are inaccurately portrayed. He articulates:

But then, but if we don’t know, or we lose all that [knowledge], we allow that to happen and they’re promoting the incorrect identity of the Mayas in our community ... Because everybody’s on their own. So, if I say anything about the people that are using or exploiting our culture, it just means we don’t do anything to stop it. But if we organize

with the kids, and try to get that going, that would be the voice of the community. But since there's no space for that in the curriculum, then it has to be done after regular classes or summers. But without it, it's hard for them to know who they are, not just imitating what they think they are.

Rodrigo and Diego emphasize the power of the collective voice and agency of the community. For them and other collaborators, the hope lies with encouraging youth involvement and promoting cultural knowledge from within the community rather than depending on outside interpretations. Additionally, Rodrigo highlighted the importance of finding space outside of school as everyone agreed that trying to affect change from within the school would not work.

In conversations about the consequences of the loss of culture on youth in Succotz, Beatriz states: "Loss of identity. Who they are. And then copying whatever they see on television. Or getting influenced by other people like young people who influence the other young people. And they just follow without really knowing why they are following." For Beatriz, the loss of identity is worrisome as it can lead to youth blindly following what they see others doing whether it has positive or negative outcomes. Veronica makes a connection between Beatriz's concern for a loss of identity and a lack of pride. She expounds:

In school, I've had children, and when you ask them, which ethnic group are you from, they don't really know. They don't have pride. So, I think like incorporating cultural things would give them sort of like pride of who they really are with they're identity, and they would be able to express themselves as who they are, but not just be a group together and not know the difference among themselves. That's what I see. I think that's one of the benefits that they would get with that group like this.

For Veronica, a space for youth that offers experiences to explore their heritage and culture could promote a stronger sense of identity and cultural pride.

Maribelle drew attention to the ways in which access to electricity, natural gas, and other appliances has impacted not only how and what people eat, but also a loss of traditional cooking knowledge for younger generations. She says: “For us, there was no choice we had to learn, but for now, now they have a choice. Do you want to make tortillas or you want to cook rice? Oh, cook rice. In our case, we had to learn.” This conversation went on to include a long list of traditional foods and ways of cooking that are becoming less common as time goes on. While no one had an interest in going back to the old ways of cooking, there was an acknowledgment that losing these traditional recipes was a consequence of cultural loss that should be considered in a program for youth.

As we considered the consequences of cultural loss, we reached a point in our dialogue where we realized it was time to change our discussion focus. Through the collaborative sharing of individual experiences, thoughts, and perspectives, we found that our conversations were reiterating previously discussed topics—we had reached a saturation point so to speak. By examining some of the major consequences of cultural loss in Succotz, we were able to collaboratively identify ways in which a youth heritage program might address these concerns. We were ready to begin designing the curriculum. In the next section I explore our process of developing the curriculum design for the program.

### **Curriculum Design**

While not completely intentional, our process of curriculum design and planning aligned with a transformative curriculum design as outlined by Henderson et al. (2000). I was familiar with this process of curriculum design prior to our meetings, although I did not suggest that we

use it as a guide. However, as I analyzed the focus group data, I realized the types of questions that I posed to the group were influenced by Henderson et al. (2000) and therefore did play a role in our process. The transformative approach to curriculum design and planning centers collaboration between community members, teachers, parents, etc. rather than “passively receiving someone else’s design” (Henderson et al., 2000, p. 85). While this approach is discussed within the context of schools, it may also help guide other educational initiatives. Henderson et al. (2000) suggest four steps to consider when designing and planning curriculum: “1. Deliberating about a school-based curriculum platform; 2. Rendering an overall vision of the curriculum; 3. Assessing student learning; 4. Planning the curriculum in the classroom” (pp. 86–87). During the first focus group we deliberated about the consequences of cultural loss and the need for youth development in Succotz. These discussions critiqued public education and national curriculum standards and generated a variety of ways in which a community-based educational program for youth could prioritize community needs, values, and beliefs.

In our second meeting, we began our discussion by asking ourselves: how might a community-organized heritage youth program address the consequences of cultural loss in the community? From this discussion we developed our primary vision: a community space for youth development through a cultural heritage program that leveraged community knowledge and resources. There was much discussion around when and how to develop a youth program. There were multiple suggestions such as a Saturday program, after school clubs, summer camps, and festivals. The concept of after school clubs was very appealing to everyone; however, we decided that this may not be the best starting point but rather a plan for further down the road. Most teachers had agreed that regardless of when a program was held, it needed to be during a

time when everyone could participate. As a result, we agreed that to start, it would be best to plan for a summer camp program.

There were several aims that emerged as a result of these collaborative meetings. These ranged from working to address consequences of cultural loss to promoting reciprocity and responsibility within the community. Veronica talked about her experience as a child participating in cultural programs that Diego offered. She shared:

I remember, when I was small, I recall going to Mr. [Diego's] pottery center and as children we used to carve the turtles and the whistles and that kept— that's, that's still in my mind so that I know that's part of me. And now, like children, they don't get the opportunity at all right now.

Veronica articulates how the experiences that she had learning in Diego's arts center had a lasting impact on her. She continued to discuss how today, children do not have these opportunities and a heritage youth camp could be a space that provided similar experiences. In turn this might promote a stronger sense of cultural pride. Diego expounded:

I see the importance of children participating in doing something. Because when they go out of school, especially when, sadly I can say that there are children, that doesn't make it in school. Not even to finish high school. So, they're walking out in the street. So, if they learn something, a skill, gardening, or art or whatever, they can do something.

Diego draws attention to how a community-based program has the potential to offer skills and knowledge that schools do not. For him, a program like this might be an important resource for youth—one that fosters opportunities for becoming contributing members of society. Maribelle talked about a need for giving back in the community. She states:

We have to teach our kids too that not everything is “Give me. Give me. Give me.” We have to give something back. No, because there are people who need our help. They will see nothing comes easy in life so they would have to give something.

Maribelle articulates what several collaborators shared as a need for both youth and adults in the community to give back to each other. Collaborators shared a desire to promote responsibility and reciprocity within the heritage youth program. Many felt that one way to promote these characteristics was by forging relationships between the generations. As Rodrigo puts it: “we will need to get the older people involved.” There was a strong desire for all participants to ensure that such a program prioritized intergenerational learning experiences.

One of the primary concerns that initially arose from our planning was around an issue of financial resources. Sofia articulates this concern:

I mean, personally as a teacher, you do feel like sometimes you have to do something for these children. But I speak from my experience, but, like, there are no resources. There is no support ... I already know if I want it to happen it has to be outa my pocket. So, there is where we lack resources.

Sofia and others recounted stories of trying to start youth centered programs or activities but they were often unable to sustain them because the financial burden fell on the teacher. As conversations circled back to the heritage youth program, Maribelle raised a similar concern regarding resources. She states:

I’m not talking about a big amount, but we would need like to, to buy materials. I was thinking that also that maybe we would have like Mr. [Diego]— he offered himself to help, but I guess in return, we need to give him something or the kids need to bring something.

Maribelle brought up the concern for funds for materials but also talked about paying collaborators. Dr. Penados shared his thoughts:

The way I see it, is that people within the community like say [Diego], Okay. So, he said, alright, I am interested in children and young people, I wanna teach them. So, he might not charge for his time. Right. Okay. But yes, there might be a cost in terms of materials. So, what you try to do is to reduce the cost as much as possible. But I, I see that we cannot start by paying people. That's why we won't, we won't as a principle, I think we won't pay. Right? 'Cause otherwise this will be unsustainable.

Dr. Penados addressed an earlier concern that collaborators shared about programs starting in the community but not being sustainable. Finding ways to make this program sustainable from the beginning was seen as an important goal. By bringing this concern to the fore, we quickly identified numerous ways to minimize financial costs by leveraging community knowledges and resources. This aspect of planning was picked up during our second meeting.

Between the first and second planning meetings, we articulated the form the program would take as well as our program aims, goals and objectives, or what Henderson et al. (2000) describe as the “curriculum design platform;” that is, “the goals, criteria, assumptions, and principles that direct and justify curriculum planning” (p. 86). The aims of the program were designed to address two specific community needs/ concerns—a need for youth development and a concern for cultural loss. Aims included promoting a stronger sense of cultural pride, a greater focus on intergenerational experiences, a more intentional “giving back” to others and the community, and an expanded body of knowledge and skills that schools do not adequately develop. Additionally, we identified the following program goals: to foster a fun and safe learning space for youth to explore their heritage; to offer youth opportunities to build a positive



self-esteem, self-efficacy, agency, and develop social and interpersonal skills; to provide youth opportunities to learn about their heritage and develop skills in a local art-form. Finally, we identified the overall objective of the program—to address community concern for cultural loss— loss of the Mayan language, loss of cultural expressions, loss of local history, and loss of traditional foodways and sustainability.

During our second focus group planning meeting, we narrowed our parameters for the summer heritage camp. We decided that the camp would span three days and would focus on eight- to ten-year-olds. Collaborators felt that this age group would be available during summer and old enough to participate in a full day camp. I mentioned previously that one of the biggest themes that arose from conversations around cultural loss was leveraging community knowledge and resources. This was at the forefront of our planning because this concept encouraged sustainable practices, community-building opportunities, and relationships between generations. To begin, we did a big brainstorm of all the possible activities related to culture and heritage. These included: Maya language, dance, marimba, guitar, basket weaving, embroidery, beading/ jewelry making with natural seeds, pottery, slate carvings, Maya ball game, implements and utensils with natural materials, painting, crafts with gourds, traditional cooking, traditional medicine, traditional toys, chiclet, moccasins, hammocks, weaving, mortar & pestle, storytelling, drama/theatre, ethnography/oral history of Succotz. As we discussed each idea, we identified potential community knowledge bearers who possessed knowledge of the skill or art. We also discussed the possible learning experiences for children related to each activity. We then considered what potential natural resources might be available for each activity. For example, as we talked about Mr. Diego's interest in working and teaching children about ceramics and pottery, Maribelle articulated:

Mr. Diego mentioned that he knows where in [Succotz] we can take the clay. The soil he mentioned there are three spots. He said that he's willing to do that. They would—  
Students come, he would bring them work to get the soil, prepare the soil, and he will teach the whole process.

By offering children the experience to participate in the entire process behind pottery making, they would be able to connect the importance of natural resources in the community to a skill/artform, and simultaneously be learning from a community knowledge bearer.

As we continued curriculum mapping, we considered the context of the camp, time constraints, the implications of community knowledge bearers sharing their expertise with children, and the fact that this did not mean they were also teachers or accustomed to working with children. While Diego was familiar with teaching children, most knowledge bearers that we identified were artisans who worked in the community but did not have experience teaching their skills and arts. As Dr. Penados articulates:

Most traditional knowledge is developed over a long period of time. True observation, you know, from when you're a little kid, you don't even know when you learned how to make tamales, but you know how to make it because you started when you were very small. ... There's so many things that you know, but in this instance, the things, times have changed. So, the children do not have that experience anymore. So, so now you have to teach it in a more structured manner than in a long-term apprenticeship. So that's why I think that there's help that's also needed, you know, to be able say, okay, so, alright, so you're a slate carver what, what do you need to do? helping them to be able to communicate that to the children.

In thinking about how to structure the camp, we decided there was a need for two people per activity—one person with the knowledge of the craft/skill/art and another person to help with the teaching and logistics of the activity for the children.

The other aspect of developing the heritage camp curriculum was the importance of intentional learning. As Dr. Penados explained, there is a difference between knowledge learned through long term exposure and experience versus the type of learning that happens in short compact periods of time. We wanted to be as intentional as possible in our curriculum design so that children might get the most out of each activity. As such, we reflected on the purpose of each activity and how it tied into our project aims and goals. We considered formal assessment as one way to do this; however, teachers were wary of making the program too much like school. So, we considered a simple non-formal formative assessment in the shape of questions to ask the children at beginning and at the conclusion of the activity. This was a way of getting them thinking about what they were doing and why and how they were doing it. It would also give us a sense of what and how they were learning. In this way, we followed the third step of transformative curriculum design as outlined by Henderson et al. (2000).

Over the course of the second focus group and the planning meetings that followed, we decided on dates for the first camp and developed a survey and letter of interest for teachers to share with children at school. Children learned about the upcoming summer camp and each of the activities that would be offered. They then asked their parents/ guardians for permission to participate in the program. We asked children to choose their top three activities. We felt it was important that children select learning activities that most interested them. Over 60 children returned surveys and permission forms. Based on the surveys we identified seven heritage-based activities for the first camp: beading, pottery, weaving, slate carving, marimba, traditional

cooking, and storytelling. Additionally, collaborators felt that it was important to include games, community building activities, as well as icebreaker activities throughout the camp. As a way of creating a camp keepsake for the children, collaborators decided that all camp facilitators and children would make tie-dye t-shirts and everyone could wear these on the last day of camp.

While the focus of the camp was on children, collaborators felt that it was vital to include parents and family in a celebration at the end of the camp. This would be a way to showcase children's accomplishments and encourage community building. As such, collaborators decided to have the last day of camp be a collective cook-up with some traditional foods: Tamales, Pozole, and coconut crust. During this time parents could volunteer to help with the making of the food and then share in a collective lunch.

Eisner (2002) examines the mainstream view that the curriculum planning process "is supposed to be a step-by-step process from the general to the specific, from ends to means" (p. 135). She argues that "the problem with this view ... is that it assumes curriculum activities that are educationally significant always have explicit goals or objectives, which they do not, and that the formulation of goals must precede activities, which is not always true" (p. 135). Eisner's argument is pertinent to how we decided to design the program curriculum. We did not create objectives in the traditional sense of what students are able to do after having experienced the curriculum. We wanted to ensure that children had a choice of activities that would take place during the camps and felt that knowing what types of activities we would focus on would then help us find ways to integrate our larger aims and goals into the curriculum planning for the camp. We also felt that learning outcomes or takeaways from a particular activity might be unique for each child. For example, a group of 5 children working on pottery with a local potter might not have the same experience. They might all learn how to make a small pot or cup using a

particular potting technique, three might recall a specific point about what role pottery has played in Maya culture through time, and one child might have developed a new sense of self-esteem because she was able to create a pottery vessel all by herself. In this example, each child took away something of value from the experience and given the potential for a multitude of learning outcomes, we did not want stifle or confine learning by preconceived learning objectives. Rather, we felt that offering space for student reflection was a more accurate way of assessing or identifying learning outcomes.

Having developed the curriculum design for the program we then turned to the logistics of planning and organizing the camp. For us, this was similar to step four, planning the curriculum in the classroom (or in this case the camp) as outlined by Henderson et al. (2000). Rodrigo and Maribelle offered their large open field as a location. Collaborators shared the responsibilities of meeting and organizing with community knowledge bearers, making lists of materials, creating a budget, and finding tents, tables, chairs. Many of the needed items were donated to the camp. Once logistics were in order, collaborators developed a detailed schedule of events for the three-day camp. The first camp was held from August 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>; however, hurricane Earl affected the last day of camp and so the last day cook-up was held on August 20<sup>th</sup>. I was not able to attend the first camp in 2016; however, I did help facilitate the camps in 2017 and 2018. Before I explore the second phase of this ethnography, implementing the Motmot Camp, I will examine my methodological shift that took place following my second field season and its implications for the second half of my research.

### **From PAR to a Postcritical Ethnography of a PAR Project**

I have discussed in previous chapters that I reached a point about midway through my research where I began to question participatory action research as the optimal methodology for

this dissertation. During my second field season in 2016, my thought process for structuring the community meetings as focus groups was to facilitate a space for thinking about how we might collaboratively address the needs of the community through PAR. Conversations with participants revealed a lack of desire engage in the research analysis aspect of the project. Instead, the project was viewed as a localized movement aimed at addressing specific community identified needs and desires. During our dialogues we explored other community programs as examples for what we might want to do, but there was no specific model that fit our community needs and desires. Participants felt that the collection of stories, experiences, and ideas that I had collected and shared back from my pilot study, and the dialogues that took place through community meeting focus groups had provided the platform from which to design and implement the heritage youth program in Succotz. Participants felt that they had clearly outlined the specific needs of the community and through our conversations had developed a vision for the program. This vision was seen as being specific to the context of Succotz. Collaborators viewed my role as an educator, scholar, and researcher as a useful contribution to the development of the project. My role as participant-observer was then leveraged as a way of gaining feedback from program participants and other community members as well as a way of examining the progress of the program. This also was a way for me to use my insider/outsider positionality to give back to the community. As a participant, I had the insider knowledge of what we were doing, and why and how we were doing it. But, as an outsider I offered a different perspective to details, events, and observations. My positionality as an outsider was also leveraged as a way of encouraging collaboration throughout the community. As I have mentioned, there have been tensions within and between community members for a variety of reasons, but sometimes having someone from the outside who can help organize, encourages

involvement despite differences. In regard to our first focus group community meeting, Diego said: “We need to get together and think. A day like this is good. We need more communication.” The initial focus group approach to the community meetings offered a crucial space for community dialogue and was a critical turning point for both the program development and my dissertation research. It was following my second field season that I went back to the drawing board to reconsider how I might frame this research project differently.

I was not in Belize for the first iteration of the camp, although I participated in meetings via Skype prior to and following the camp in August of 2016. During this time, my role as participant-observer was limited. Not to say that I did not participate in conversations around planning, as I certainly did; however, because I was not there in person, I was not able to take on physical responsibilities related to organizing and facilitating the camp. As I reflected on my role in this project, I realized that while I was a part of the project, my contributions had time and space limitations. While I was committed to the collaborators and to the project, I was no longer living in Belize, and I would at some point need to stop collecting data for my dissertation research. This awareness was not initially apparent to me, but once I recognized this, I was encouraged to consider how best to proceed with my contributions to the program and to my data collection process. As I considered next steps for research, I knew that I wanted my next field season to coincide with the summer camp for 2017. I felt that by being there before, during, and after the camp I would be able to participate most fully in the planning process prior to the camp, the facilitation of the three-day camp, as well as the debriefing at the end of the camp. As I considered my next research steps, I began examining alternative research methodologies—on the one hand I wanted my research to stay true to our collaborative partnership, to the reciprocal

relationships that we had developed as a group, and to the collective vision for the program, but on the other hand, I needed to find a way to present my research as a dissertation.

In chapters two and three I discuss my decision to frame this dissertation as a postcritical ethnography of our PAR heritage education project. Here, I briefly reiterate my intentions for doing so as this directly influences the way I present my data in the following chapter. I started by going back to the literature around qualitative community-engaged projects that shared commonality with my theoretical and epistemological underpinnings for this work. When framed by decolonizing praxis, postcritical ethnography stood out as a viable option because it aligned with my role as participant-observer as well as my desire to attend to positionality, reflexivity, objectivity, and representation throughout the research process. Additionally, this methodology allowed me to participate authentically throughout the research process both as participant-observer and ally, but also as a graduate student researcher because my analysis and synthesis of these data for this dissertation remains my own interpretation of the process.

### **Summary**

The process of developing the Succotz heritage youth program revealed my need to determine the methodology that best allowed me to participate authentically throughout the research process both as a participant-observer and ally but also as a graduate student researcher. It was also essential that such methodology support the collaboration and community engagement needed to address the concerns that came to the fore as a result of my initial pilot study. Ultimately, we were able to develop a program that attended to the specific concern of cultural and language loss and the desire to create a community-centered program for youth development, doing so by leveraging collective agency from within the community, simultaneously preserving my position as participant-observer/ally/researcher. In the following



chapter I explore the two iterations of the Motmot Camp in which I participated during the summer of 2017 and summer of 2018. This section relies heavily on my participant observations, and is more indicative of the thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) associated with ethnography. As such, this section represents my voice in my research process.

## CHAPTER V: APPLYING A HERITAGE EDUCATION PROGRAM

In this chapter I present my thematic analysis of the implementation of the heritage education program in Succotz. The chapter represents my voice as I explore our collaborative process to implement the Motmot Camp in Succotz. For this chapter, I continue in chronological order starting with the 2017 camp. I provide a detailed description of preparing for the camps, the camp schedules, events, and curricula, as well as camp debriefings with collaborators at the end of each camp. Through this discussion I explore the camp environment and how curriculum was enacted by examining participants' experiences with community and relationship building as well as participants' perceptions of place, heritage awareness, and agency.

### **The Motmot Camp**

The Motmot Camp emerged from our collective vision for a heritage education program for youth in the community. Following our 2016 planning meetings, the first iteration of the Motmot Camp took place in Succotz in August of 2016. As I have mentioned previously, I was not in Belize during the first camp, though I participated virtually in the debriefing and planning meetings that followed the first camp in 2016. These meetings provided a collaborative space to build upon organizational strategies and curriculum that worked well and to critique and change aspects that could have been better. My analysis in this section begins with the 2017 Motmot Camp as I was present before, during, and after the camp.

### **The 2017 Motmot Camp**

The 2017 Motmot Camp was held between July 7<sup>th</sup>- 9<sup>th</sup> in Succotz. The 2016 camp revealed a need for more adult help and support; as a result, members of the local Rotaract Club were invited to participate as camp counselors during the 2017 Motmot Camp. As in 2016, the camp sought to enroll children between the ages of eight and eleven years old, as this was the

age group for which we had designed the program curriculum. In total, 35 children participated in the second camp; however, participation varied by day. We started with 28 children, but the second day there were several younger siblings who accompanied the older ones who were already registered. Rather than turn them away, we decided to embrace the possibility for further youth development across a larger age span—the youngest being five. Three teachers, eight community knowledge bearers, seven Rotaract members, two parents, Dr. Penados, and I facilitated the camp. Not all camp facilitators participated in my research study. Table 6 provides a breakdown of participants’ demographic information for the 2017 Motmot Camp.

**Table 6. 2017 Motmot Camp Participants**

Name (Pseudonym)	Occupation	Education	Age	Ethnicity	Cultural Identity	Native/Preferred Language
Maribelle	Assistant Teacher, Primary	Jr. college associates degree	44	Maya-Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Rodrigo	Teacher, Junior College	4-year university degree	49	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Beatriz	Teacher, High School	4-year university degree	N/P	Maya-Mestizo	Maya-Mestizo	Spanish
Delores	Project officer at trade and investment firm	4-year university degree	29	Maya-Mestizo	Maya-Mestizo	Spanish
Yasmine	Student	4-year university degree	23	Mestizo	Mestizo, Belizean	Spanish
Megan	Student, Teacher	4-year university degree	30	Caucasian	American	English
Arturo	Student	Jr. college associates degree	27	Mestizo	Mestizo, Belizean	Spanish
Elsa	Housewife	High school diploma	46	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish/ English
Adriana	Housewife	N/P	31	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Jeraldo	Teacher, Primary	Jr. college associates degree	29	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Emilia	Housewife	High school diploma	35	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Nadir	Student	In primary school	9	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Josue	Student	In primary school	10	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Martin	Student	In primary school	10	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Jaime	Student	In primary school	9	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Alonzo	Student	In primary school	10	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Hector	Student	In primary school	9	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish/English

### *Camp Description and Details*

Prior to arriving in Belize for my 2017 field season, I had participated virtually in planning meetings for the camp with collaborators. This included Maribelle, Rodrigo, Beatriz, Dr. Penados, and me, in addition to the seven Rotaract members to whom I will refer as camp counselors. While the majority of planning had taken place prior to my arrival, we gathered for a meeting to address last minute logistics. We reviewed our plans to ensure we would have everything ready for the first day of camp. We also reviewed roles and responsibilities of facilitators during the camp, working to ensure that there was at least one camp facilitator working with each community-knowledge bearer and one camp counselor for every four to five children. Once community knowledge bearers' and facilitators' roles and responsibilities were confirmed we finalized the schedule for the three-day camp. Table 7 provides an overview of the 2017 Motmot Camp agenda for reference as I discuss the events over the course of the 3-day camp.

As in 2016, the 2017 camp was held in Succotz outdoors in a large open grassy field scattered with palm trees and other large deciduous trees that abutted a steep tree-covered hill on one side, providing additional shade. The other side of the field was bordered by a gravel road leading to the property. The field, offered by Maribelle and Rodrigo, provided a space that was not connected to local churches or political affiliations—we sought neutral space in order to address community concerns related to differing religious and political views among community members. As a way of leveraging community assets, collaborators made a list of items that we needed, such as tents, tables, chairs, etc. and then asked to borrow these items from various folks in the community at little or no cost. We set up two large tents with tables and chairs underneath. Maribelle and Rodrigo provided outdoor composting toilets, and we created hand-washing and

water bottle refilling stations. Following camp setup, we held one last planning meeting the night before the camp to ensure we had all materials prepared and to iron out last minute changes to scheduling and facilitator responsibilities.

**Table 7. 2017 Motmot Camp Schedule**

<b>Friday, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2017</b>			
<b>Time</b>		<b>Activity</b>	
1:00pm- 1:30pm		Registration	
1:30pm		Welcome	
1:40pm-2:10pm		Ice Breaker	
2:10pm-3:40pm		Story Telling	
3:10pm-3:40pm		Discussion/ Group work for Toh Story Project	
3:40pm-4:30pm		Tie-Dye T-shirt/ Toh Arts & crafts	
4:45pm-5:00pm		Closing, discussion about next day	
<b>Saturday, July 8<sup>th</sup> 2017</b>			
<b>Time</b>		<b>Activity</b>	
8:30am-8:45am		Opening Team-Building Activity	
8:45am-10:00am		Discussion/ Group Work for Toh Story Project	
<b>Time</b>		<b>Workshop 1</b>	<b>Workshop 2</b>
10:00am-12:00pm		Clay Pottery	Beading
12:00pm-1:15pm		Lunch	
1:30pm-3:30pm		Clay Pottery	Slate Carving
3:30pm-5:00pm		Marimba	Poetry Writing
5:00pm-5:05pm		Games/ Mask craft	
5:00pm-5:05pm		Closing Discussion	
<b>Sunday, July 9<sup>th</sup> 2017</b>			
<b>Time</b>		<b>Activity</b>	
10:00am-10:10am		Opening Discussion	
10:10am-11:00am		Cooking Session	
11:00am-12:00pm		Group work for Toh Story Project/ Games	
12:00pm-1:00pm		Lunch	
1:15pm-2:00pm		Closing Ceremony	

**Day 1.** On the first day of camp all facilitators met at the field early to setup activities and to get ready to greet the children. As the start time approached, children approached on foot, walking up the road in small groups or with parents. At first, many of the children were quite shy towards camp facilitators; however, many of them recognized Maribelle as she is a teacher at one

of Benque's primary schools. Maribelle's kind and jovial personality helped ease the shyness of the children, and as larger groups of children arrived, they began to recognize their peers and friends from the community and school. The children were quickly registered for the camp; we then invited all the children to join together as we welcomed them to the camp. Dr. Penados offered a brief welcome and introduction to the camp that highlighted the significance of Maya heritage and culture in Succotz and briefly talked about the activities that would be taking place during the camp. Once camp facilitators were introduced, the children participated in a getting-to-know-you icebreaker with teachers and camp counselors. Within a few minutes of the icebreaker activity children were smiling and laughing along with the teachers and camp counselors.

Following the icebreaker activity, the children were invited to sit in chairs underneath the tent for a storytelling time. The facilitators joined around, sitting alongside the children. As in many cultures, storytelling has always played a vital role in Maya communities, offering a special way of passing on cultural traditions and values. In developing the camp curriculum, collaborators felt that featuring storytelling emphasized Maya traditions and language. Additionally, as a way of promoting intergenerational relationships, Dr. Penados invited his parents to participate in the storytelling session. His father told the children a story and offered his knowledge of the Maya language as well.

To begin, Dr. Penados stood at the front of the group with his parents seated next to him and engaged the children in a fun and animated discussion of a variety of animals in Succotz. This dialogue was in English. He asked them what types of animals live in Succotz. Children shouted out responses: snakes, vultures, chickens, cats, rabbits, mice, monkeys, tapers, dogs, hamsters, Guinea pigs. Dr. Penados then asked what other wild animals they could think of that

lived in the jungle around Succotz. Again, the children shouted out responses: Squirrels, tigers, Jaguars, Pumas. The children were all very engaged and animated during this discussion, and became even more so when Dr. Penados showed them a bag with a wooden object sticking out. He invited the children to guess what type of animal he had in the bag. He then he pulled out a wooden armadillo-shaped percussion instrument and wooden mallet. He explained that this type of musical instrument was commonly used by their Maya ancestors and is still used within Maya communities in Mexico and Guatemala. Some are just simply made out of small hollowed out logs while others, like the one before them, were carved into intricate patterns and designs. He played the wooden instrument for a minute and then began another conversation with the children in a blend of English and Spanish. I provide a brief transcript of the short dialogue below.

Dr. Penados: Who knows what the name of the armadillo is in Maya?

Children: no response

Dr. Penados: What do we call this animal in [Succotz]?

Children: many shout out “Wech”

Dr. Penados: Correcto! “Wech” is the Maya name for Armadillo! What do you call the dragonfly here in [Succotz]?

Children: several shout out “Tulix”

Dr. Penados: Correcto! “Tulix” es el nombre en Maya. [Correct! “Tulix” is the name in Maya.]

[Dr. Penados holds up picture of a black bird]

Dr. Penados: What do we call this bird here in [Succotz]?

Children: Many shout “Pich”

Dr. Penados: Pich actually is the name of the bird in Maya!

[Dr. Penados holds up picture of butterfly]

Children: Many shout “butterfly” several shout “mariposa”

Dr. Penados: let’s ask Mr. [Dr. Penados’s father] what’s the name of it in Maya?

Dr. Penados’s Father: “Pepem!”

Children: all say “Pepem!”

[Dr. Penados holds up another image of a leaf cutter ant]

Dr. Penados: Okay, let’s see this one. What’s that?

Children: several shout “zompopa”

Dr. Penados: Sí! Sí! It’s a wee wee ant—leaf cutter. A ver. ¿Quién sabe cómo se dice en Maya? [Let’s see. Who knows how to say it in Maya?]

Children: two children shout out “say”

Dr. Penados: Sí! Correcto! “say” Who knows what this animal is?

[Dr. Penados holds up as picture of a coati]

Children: Several shout out “raccoon”

Dr. Penados: It’s not a raccoon ... It’s called a coati or pizote.

Children: [laughter]

Dr. Penados: ¿Quién sabe cómo se dice pizote en Maya? [Who knows how to say pizote in Maya?]

Children: most do not know, but one child says “k’ulu”

Dr. Penados: Sí! Correcto! “k’ulu”

Children: “k’ulu”

Dr. Penados: that’s a funny name, isn’t it? You want to learn more?



Children: Yes!

Dr. Penados: What is this one?

[Dr. Penados holds up a picture of a gibnut]

Children: several shout out different animals: “squirrel, tapir, gibnut”

Dr. Penados: A gibnut! A baby tapir does look a bit like that, but this is a gibnut. How do you say Gibnut in Maya?

Children: “tepezcuintle”

Dr. Penados: “tepezcuintle” is actually a Nahuatl name [language of the Aztecs in Mexico].

[Dr. Penados removes his hand so the children can see the word at the top of the image”

Dr. Penados a Children: “Haaleb”

Dr. Penados: “Haaleb” is gibnut. How about this one?

[Dr. Penados shows a picture of a rat]

Children: several shout Rat! Some shout ratón!

Dr. Penados: How do you say it in Maya?

Children: several say “Cho”

Dr. Penados: “Cho.” You know this one.

[Dr. Penados holds up a picture of an armadillo]

Children: “Wech”

Dr. Penados: “Wech.” I bet you know the name of this one

[Dr. Penados holds up a picture of a tarantula]

Children: many shout out “chiwo”

Dr. Penados: How do you say it in Maya?

Children: [brief pause] many shout out “Chi’wo’!”

Dr. Penados: Yes. Tarantula is “chi’wo’.” Okay. Last one.

[Dr. Penados holds up a picture of a deer]

Children: many shout venado and deer.

Dr. Penados: in Maya?

Children: several say “Keh”

Dr. Penados: Yes! “Keh.” Okay. Alright, good. So, we’ve learned the name of some animals. We can learn some more later on, but we’re going to go into the story. Okay?

The Maya people used to tell lots of stories about animals that explain their behavior or explain what they do or how they look.

I provide a transcript of this dialogue for several reasons, the first being that this was the first Maya heritage activity presented during the camp and it was also used as an introduction to the stories that Dr. Penados and his father then shared. Second, this dialogue represents the intentionality of the program curriculum design as it was applied in the “classroom”/ camp setting. The purposeful use of interactive scaffolding as Dr. Penados guided the students through the collaborative activity by prompting, coaching, and asking questions provided a platform upon which the second activity was built. Third, I chose this excerpt to share the ease with which the conversation shifts between Spanish and English to highlight the bilingual knowledge within the Succotz community. Fourth, this dialogue highlights several a-ha moments for children with regard to Maya language. As I discuss in previous sections, there is a patois in Succotz that often blends English, Spanish, and remnants of Mayan. In Succotz, conversational Mayan is no longer spoken; however, there are linguistic remnants that are part of the colloquial dialect. Since these words are commonly spoken at home and/or within the community, many children are familiar

with them; however, as is often the case with heritage languages, their knowledge of the language is not developed (Montrul, 2016) and in many instances, they don't realize that these words are Mayan. This is evident in the first few lines of the dialogue when Dr. Penados asks: "Who knows what the name of the armadillo is in Maya?" At first, the children were silent and did not respond. Many children looked thoughtful and curious but unsure of how to answer. Dr. Penados then reframes his question: "What do we call this animal in [Succotz]? All of a sudden, many children shout out "wech" which is the Maya word for armadillo. The moment of clarity was evident on many of the children's faces—they knew that word and what it meant but did not realize that it was a Maya word. This continued to be the case for many of the animals that Dr. Penados presented to the children in this activity. Towards the end of the dialogue Dr. Penados no longer had to ask what an animal is called in Succotz; rather, he simply asks: "how do you say it in Maya?" to which many of the children respond correctly. It was not always the same children who responded correctly each time. However, the children who did not immediately respond with the Maya word seemed to recognize it once it was said aloud. Through this activity children gradually showed a distinct awareness that their linguistic knowledge encompasses Maya as well as Spanish and English. They also demonstrated a stronger sense of self-efficacy and agency in trusting their knowledge and their own voice. This activity intentionally emphasizes perceptions of *place* as it draws directly from the local language and culture of Succotz to inform children's learning experiences (Gruenewald & Smith, 2014). Children's participation in this activity also promoted relationship-building among peers as they rallied around a newfound shared awareness of a common heritage language.

Following this activity, Dr. Penados invited his father to tell a story and then Dr. Penados told a story. As with most Maya storytelling, there are morals to the stories. They often teach

about the environment, laws of nature and of life, social values and norms, etc. The storytelling session upheld the vision for the program by promoting and passing on traditions, values, and morals to the children. Speaking in Spanish, Dr. Penados's Father told the ancient Maya fable of "La Paloma" (Spanish) or "Sak Pakal" (Maya). I provide the transcript of this story in Spanish as well as the English translation in Appendix E, but I will briefly summarize the story here. This story is about a pigeon (or dove) who is sitting on her eggs waiting for them to hatch. She sings about how hungry she is but is afraid to leave her nest. The Ku'k (Squirrel) walking along hears the pigeon's song and stops and asks if he can help. The pigeon doesn't trust the squirrel and thinks he will eat her eggs, but the squirrel convinces the pigeon that he doesn't eat eggs—he eats seeds and fruit. While the pigeon is away the squirrel eats two of her eggs, leaving the other two. Upon returning to her nest, the pigeon cries out that the squirrel ate her eggs. From then on, the morning and evening call of the pigeon crying out sounded like "K'uk tu tusen, K'uk tu tusen" [Maya] which translates to "the squirrel deceived me" and this is why the pigeon only lays two eggs in a single clutch. This story tied directly into the previous activity of learning animal names in Maya and exemplified the ways in which Maya storytelling was used to describe and explain why/ how things are or came to be in nature. It also speaks to helping others in need, as well as responsibility and accountability—values that are promoted in Succotz and in the Motmot Camp. During the telling of this story, the children were quiet, and focused on Dr. Penados's father. They mostly kept their bodies still (as still as 8- to 11-year-olds can be) and were engaged in listening and following along with the story.

Next, Dr. Penados told the fable of the Toh bird. Prior to starting, he asked the children if they wanted the story told in Spanish or English. The children chose English and he began the story. The full transcript may be found in Appendix E. This story is quite a bit longer, and

therefore, I will not summarize it here, but I will offer a brief discussion of the moral to the story. Like the story of the Pigeon and the Squirrel, the Toh story centers animals and nature and is used to explain why the Toh's tail feathers look as they do (it has 2 long tail feathers that are spindly but fan out at the ends) and why it is a solitary bird that lives in cenotes (holes in limestone rock) deep in the jungle. The story also conveys several life lessons and cultural values, those being: you can get more done working together than alone; you have a responsibility to work together for the good of everyone in the community; no one is "too good" or "above" others to help; there are consequences to your actions; and a strong work ethic is important. As with the first story, the children kept their bodies relatively still, and their attention was on Dr. Penados for the entirety of the storytelling. Throughout the story, Dr. Penados engaged the children, asking them to recall the Maya names of animals, to imitate the sounds of the animals, and to make the sound effects of stormy weather. The children were absorbed in active listening and learning for the duration of the storytelling activity.

Following the storytelling, children were placed into four groups (7-8 children in a group) each lead by 2 counselors (one group only had 1 counselor). Rodrigo, Maribelle, Beatriz, and Dr. Penados spent time with each group. Tables and chairs were spread out into the lawn to give groups more space to work. With the guidance of their counselors, the children were invited to collaboratively explore the lessons they learned from the stories. Then, they collectively chose one of the stories and came up with a creative way to share that story through a song, skit, dance, poem, or art at the closing ceremony on the last day of camp. Time was built into the schedule each camp day for groups to gather and work on their storytelling project. For this activity, there was not a printed protocol or lesson plan provided for counselors. Each group spent time talking about the stories and counselors asked them questions about the lessons they learned from the

story. As I observed these group sessions, I noticed that children and counselors seemed excited and happy based on their laughter and smiles and they were engaged in animated discussions about the morals of the stories. Two of the groups, one led by Delores and the other led by Yasmine, were engaged in what I viewed as more reflective conversations about the stories that worked to make connections between the morals to the stories and present-day cultural values at home and within the Succotz community. For example, Delores asked her group: “Was there a time when you kept sleeping or do something when you were supposed to be helping [at home]?” All the children responded with a sheepish “yes”; they then talked about why it is important to do their share around the house and to take on responsibilities of helping parents or siblings. Yasmine encouraged her group to use the Maya names of the animals as they worked to create a poem/song about the Toh story. She also asked the children to reflect on the lessons learned from the story. In one instance, she took advantage of a teaching moment during the group work session when two children became distracted in a side conversation, breaking from the collaborative writing process. In a playful tone, she asked them to reflect on whether they were contributing in a meaningful way to the group or if they were acting more like the Toh and the Squirrel—implying that they were allowing other things to distract them from their responsibilities to their fellow group members and to their story project. This elicited some giggles from all the children in the group, including the two who were distracted, but they immediately joined back in the group dialogue.

The group led by Arturo spent time discussing lessons learned from the two stories, though less in depth. He asked: “What does the story of the Toh teach us?” The children answered with rather short responses. He did not ask many follow-up questions to their responses. Megan’s group also appeared to struggle with the meaning-making process, especially

in the beginning. There was discussion within the group about the morals to the stories, but, like in Arturo's group, the process seemed to lack intentionality. As teachers came around to each group, they helped to model ways to frame questions to get the children talking and thinking more deeply about the implications of the stories on their own lives. None of the counselors were teachers, and while Delores and Yasmine were more accustomed to working with children, the others had significantly less experience.

As the children in each group delved into their creative representations of their selected story, they progressively became more engaged with each other and with their counselors. All the groups individually decided to base their project on the story of the Toh. Megan's, Arturo's, and Delores' groups decided to work on skits to represent their story, while Yasmine's group wrote a poem/song. Each of the three groups doing skits had to make decisions together to share the responsibilities related to prop and costume design as well as character rolls. In Yasmine's group, the children collaborated to write their Toh poem/ song and created each line/ verse to intentionally capture an important aspect of the story. In the end they could not decide if they wanted it to be a song or a poem. During my time observing each group, I noticed many instances of children being supportive of one another's feelings and concerns, listening to their peers, and actively engaging in the process as well as children smiling and laughing together. I observed moments of children getting distracted and losing focus on occasion and some difficulty on the part of counselors to redirect and help them to reengage in the activity. This was particularly evident toward the end of group work time as we were preparing to transition to the next activity.

The remainder of the first day of camp was spent rotating the four groups between tie-dyeing their camp t-shirts and starting a Maya mask activity. The tie-dyeing was an activity that

carried over from the 2016 camp—the children loved the process of making them, the surprise of unfolding their shirts, and the fun of wearing them on the last day. They were also a meaningful keepsake for the children, as we stamped the back of each one with the name of the camp and the year. I facilitated the tie-dyeing t-shirt activity because I had previous experience with dyeing natural fibers, and because it gave me a chance to work with each child individually and develop a bit of a rapport with them. While I had been introduced to the children as a camp facilitator and researcher, they did not know me—I was an outsider to them and many were shy towards me during the first part of the day. As the children rotated through the tie-dyeing activity, I made an effort to speak with each child and share a little about myself with them. In turn they shared bits about themselves with me. This served in its own way as an icebreaker between us. I made a conscious effort to memorize their names and for the remainder of camp I worked to engage them in conversations and help them when they asked. Over the 3 days, the shyness dissolved and many children came to sit by me to talk.

The camp counselors had previously planned and designed the arts and craft activities for the afternoon. Each child received a cardboard mask template and various other cardboard cut outs that were glued together to create a replica of a famous ancient Maya burial mask. They decorated their masks with dried beans, corn, peas, and colorful dyed rice. The children had time to finish their masks the following day. Since I was facilitating the tie-dyeing activity at the same time as the mask activity, I was unable to observe how the counselors presented the activity to the children and to what extent they worked to connect the Maya mask making traditions to the vision and purpose of the camp. I was able to observe many children working on their mask project the next day, all of whom were engrossed in the creative process, sharing materials and decoration ideas with each other.



**Day 2.** When children arrived on the second day of camp, everyone gathered for a brief morning meeting to go over the plan for the day, then participated in a short team building activity with teachers and several of the camp counselors. Children then met with their groups to continue working on their story activity. Camp facilitators who were not working with the children in small groups organized the workshop stations. Community knowledge bearers arrived mid-morning and began to setup the materials for each station. Four workshop stations were established: pottery, beading, slate carving, and marimba. Each of the workshops offered children hands-on experiential learning based upon traditional Maya artforms and skillsets. This was an incredibly busy day with simultaneous events and many participants. I spent the majority of the day observing the various workshops and stepping back to take in the camp as a whole.

Slate carving was facilitated by three local artisans as well as one camp facilitator. Stone carvings depicting Maya art and hieroglyphs were prolific throughout the ancient Maya world and may still be seen across Maya heritage sites in Belize. Stone carving as a traditional artform has been passed on through the generations, and today, many artisans make a living selling their slate art. Slate is a natural resource found in various geological deposits in Belize. The relative softness of the stone makes it possible to carve. Several artisans in Succotz present and sell their slate works in shop stalls built along the river at the ferry entrance to “Xunantunich.” This site is visited daily by large tourist groups as well as Belizeans. Children are familiar with slate carving because they see it in the village. The campers were extremely excited to have the opportunity to try their hand at creating their own slate art. At the slate carving workshop, each child was given a small piece of slate. The knowledge bearers had a large collection of tools—these mainly being small hacksaw blades filed on one end to create a sharp edge to scrape away and carve the stone and smaller metal chisels to use for fine detail. Each child was given a filed saw blade and had

access to the other chisels as well. The knowledge bearers provided a finished carving of a sea turtle as an example for the children and demonstrated techniques so children could follow their example. In a very short time, the children were carving their own turtles on their slate pieces. This workshop promoted opportunities for children to build agency by teaching through a real-life experience. The assumption by facilitators was that the children were capable of using real tools and real natural materials. Consequently, the children did not question their ability to do the activity. Each time I observed this workshop, children were attentive to the instructors, and were rather quiet as they worked. They were incredibly focused on their carving, only occasionally stopping to ask a question or ask for guidance. I noted several instances where children asked their peers for assistance or made suggestions to one another about techniques they found useful. The children were intentional and cautious as they worked because they were using sharp instruments. The process of carving slate is time consuming and requires a fair amount of hand strength and dexterity. The children's final carvings varied in detail. Some children wanted to take the time to create a great amount of detail on their turtle, while others were content with just getting more of an outline of a turtle. The children's sense of self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and agency in completing these real stone carvings was evident in their focus while working and in their sense of achievement. The children who participated in my study, as well as many others, were excited to show me their carvings and wanted me to take pictures of them. Their faces beamed with pride as they held them up and showed me the details of their work. I asked Martin, age 10, if the ancient Maya used the same carving tools as he did. He giggled and said "No, Miss! The Mayas didn't have this [referring to saw blade]— they used stones!" The knowledge bearers talked briefly with the children about ancient Maya stone carvings, explaining that they would not have had the metal tools of today but that the metal tools were

easier to use and allowed for more detailed work. The slate carving workshop incited pride from the children as they learned a traditional skillset that they were familiar with but had not previously had the opportunity to try first hand. Through this learning experience with mentors and peers, children were also engaged in building stronger social and interpersonal skills. Overall, the focus of the slate carving workshop was geared toward the skill of slate carving. The knowledge bearers did not spend time engaging the children in detailed conversations about the significance of stone carvings for the Maya in antiquity. There was also no dialogue around the importance of stone carving today. In this way, heritage awareness was implied through the activity but not intentionally promoted.

Beading was facilitated by two local jewelry artists and two camp facilitators. This workshop focused on traditional Maya beading using a variety of natural seeds from local flora. When I observed the beginning of this workshop, the children were seated around a table with a variety of natural seeds in different shapes, colors and sizes. Holes had been predrilled in the seeds for the children. At first, the children were very talkative and wanted to start making jewelry right away. I asked them if they knew what the seeds were from. Several pointed to an almond sized/shaped seed that looked like a brown eye and told me that was from the Guanacaste tree—a very large tree with small leaves and large pods that fan out. Inside the pods are multiple seeds. Many children were familiar with the seeds they were working with but did not share any information about how the seeds might relate to cultural heritage in Succotz. When Dr. Penados introduced the workshop to the children, he provided some background information about the local seeds used in traditional beading as well as cultural connections to Succotz and Maya ancestors. He talked to the children about the types of trees that the seeds come from. Many of the children were familiar with the trees because they are common throughout Succotz.

Dr. Penados then shared some cultural information about the seeds. For example, the pod of the Guanacaste seed was traditionally used in the process of making soap. When the children heard this, they were very surprised and wanted to try to make their own soap. Dr. Penados also asked the children if there was any meaning to the small bright red seed of the coral tree. Many children replied “good luck.” Dr. Penados encouraged the dialogue and children talked about how coral seed jewelry is often presented to babies for good luck. He then shared that the red seed of the coral tree is also mentioned in detail in the Popol Vuh [the sacred Maya book]. In this instance, Dr. Penados referenced the book, but did not spend a great deal of time talking about the significance of the text, though he did do so the following year at camp. The knowledge bearers showed the children how to prepare their cord for a form of macramé, and demonstrated the techniques for making jewelry. The children learned by watching and by hands-on guidance from facilitators. Once the children got the hang of the knotting and adding beads, they became immersed in the process and were fairly quiet as they worked. Like slate-carving, the beading workshop provided a space for children to develop their agency through learning and accomplishing real-life skills. It also provided opportunities for heritage awareness in Succotz. Each child was able to finish at least one piece of jewelry and many made more than one piece to share with a family member. Many chose to wear their jewelry for the remainder of the day and came up to show me what they had made. When I asked them about their seed choices, they knew the names of their seeds. Josue said the one he made with Guanacaste and coral seeds was for his little sister who was too young to come to camp that year. His forethought for his younger sister struck me as an example of a strong sense in family values. A few of the other children also mentioned that they wanted to give the jewelry to their moms. The beading workshop, like slate carving, offered a space for children to learn a skill in a traditional artform from community

artisans in Succotz. Both artforms utilized natural local resources, promoting the importance of sustainability and versatility in the ways in which natural resources serve multiple purposes. Children also showed pride in their creations and wanted to share what they had made with family.

There was a significant difference in the emphasis that Dr. Penados placed on heritage as he helped to facilitate the beading workshop, versus my observations of the slate carving workshop. During our initial planning meetings, we talked about the need for intentional learning and the fact that we could not assume that the knowledge bearers would solely be able to encourage connections between the skillset and artform they were teaching and the larger pedagogical considerations of the camp curriculum. There was a Rotaract camp counselor present at each workshop to support the knowledge bearers as they worked with the children; however, as I noted in my observations of children working in their storytelling projects, the emphasis on camp curriculum objectives was significantly more apparent when Dr. Penados and the teachers participated in these dialogues. This became a bit of a balancing act as we considered the learning that took place between knowledge bearers and students and the aspirations of teachers to be as intentional in the learning process as possible. In the end, we opted for the authentic experiential learning that was taking place between knowledge bearers and students; though in later conversations we did discuss the possibility of working with knowledge bearers ahead of time to create more specific connections to Mayan heritage.

We had hoped that Diego, the local potter would be able to participate in the 2017 camp; however, he was unable to attend due to illness. Delores volunteered to facilitate the pottery workshop and Maribelle, Beatriz, and Dr. Penados took turns facilitating this station as well. Historically, pottery played fundamental and artistic roles in Maya communities. Ancient Maya

utilitarian and ceremonial ceramic vessels offer a wealth of information about Maya culture and heritage. Many ancient Maya ceramic vessels are on display at heritage sites across Belize. Many of these pieces were intricately painted with a multitude of scenes and hieroglyphs explaining the depictions. Diego often made replicas of some of the more famous vessels to sell in his shop. Pottery was also used for sculpture and other artforms.

For the workshop, Diego had contributed several examples of traditional Maya pottery to display for the children. Some pieces were more decorative and painted while others were more functional and plainer. These pieces were used to explain the significance of Maya pottery to the children. Children were encouraged to compare the different pieces and talk about what they might have been used for. I listened to children make comparisons of the pottery of their ancestors to the dishes in their homes today. Many felt that there were some similarities especially with one plain ceramic bowl example. Delores asked Nadir if he had a similar bowl at home, to which he replied that he did have many bowls but most of them were plastic rather than clay. They also talked about what pottery was made out of. All the children were familiar with clay, and when Delores asked the children where clay comes from, most of them said “dirt.” There are several excellent clay deposits in Succotz—something that Diego had brought up during our community planning meetings. We were unable to take the children out to dig for clay, although Delores explained to the children that there were local areas for finding good clay for making pottery. Each child was given a slab of clay and encouraged to make a creation. Delores demonstrated some techniques for making small pots or bowls as well as ideas for making figurines. There were no set parameters for what they should make; rather, they were encouraged to be as creative as possible. Most chose to make figurines of animals related to the stories told at the beginning of camp or small bowls similar to the ones on display. Several

children made more than one object. The children were engaged in their activities but also talkative with one another. Many of the conversations focused on what they were making. The children showed pride in their work by showing them off to their peers as well as to camp counselors, teachers, and me.

While the pottery workshop offered children a chance to explore the craft, I noticed differences in the interactions between Delores and the children versus those between the children and community knowledge bearers at the slate carving and beading workshops. Children were quieter and listened intently when the community knowledge bearers shared information with them. The children exhibited a more serious demeanor in the presence of the knowledge bearers as well. This may have been because the knowledge bearers were unfamiliar to the children, and also the children had been told that the knowledge bearers were taking time away from their own work to be there to teach them. In this way, the children may have felt a sense of responsibility and respect to the knowledge bearers. Because the children were familiar with Delores in her role as a camp counselor, the children were more playful and more talkative in ways that were not specifically related to the activity.

At noon, camp broke for lunch. All the children walked home to have lunch and returned at 1:30pm. The afternoon rounds of slate-carving, beading, and pottery workshops finished at 3:30pm. In the latter part of the afternoon the children had the opportunity to try playing the marimba. The marimba workshop was facilitated by two local marimba players, both elders in the community, as well as Rodrigo. The marimba is a traditional instrument that is still widely played throughout Belize and Central America. The instrument is similar to a large wooden xylophone. It is played with thin wooden mallets that have a felt or rubber ball on the end. Given its large size, it is commonly played by more than one musician at a time. Succotz has their own

marimba that is well known in the community; it was frequently mentioned during my interviews with participants, and we borrowed it for the camp. The use of this instrument was special because it is unique to Succotz; it offered connections to and an awareness of place. Two to three children rotated through this workshop at a time to ensure that the knowledge bearers had time to work independently with the children. While each child's lesson was only five or six minutes long, their excitement was palpable. They learned a small part of a song and then they all played together. When a child lost their place or technique, the knowledge bearers guided them. Children were incredibly focused during their time at the marimba; occasionally they got frustrated if they missed a note, but they would smile and try again. The instructors were patient and took time helping each child have successful moments. These opportunities offered children the chance to build confidence and self-efficacy as they realized they could play the instrument and could participate in playing an actual song so quickly. Given time constraints, there was no previous discussion with the children about marimba playing or the instrument's connection to Maya heritage. The focus was simply on learning how to play the instrument. This workshop was an important aspect of the camp that highlighted positive intergenerational experiences between children and elders through a commonly known traditional form of music.

To keep the rotating groups as small as possible for marimba, camp facilitators had planned a poetry writing workshop, a space for finishing the mask activity from the previous day, followed by some team building games. These workshops were facilitated by Megan and Arturo. The children were excited to continue working on their masks; however, the first group of children at the poetry writing workshop in the afternoon made it clear that it was too late in the day for the children to focus on creative writing. Counselors improvised and pooled the children together who were not working on masks to participate in some relay games. At the end



of the day, the children were invited back to a large group to thank the marimba players and to go over plans for the last day of camp.

**Day 3.** The third and final day of the camp focused on a collaborative bollos (tamales) cook-off for lunch followed by preparation for small group storytelling project performances and a large team-building obstacle course game. All camp participants arrived wearing their Motmot Camp tie dye t-shirts. Beatriz facilitated the bollos cooking session along with several moms of campers who volunteered to help with the process. Bollos/tamales are a traditional Maya food and variations are found throughout Central America. Bollos take several hours to prepare and cook and are often made in very large batches. They are often made for celebrations and big gatherings and are a familiar and well-loved cuisine throughout Belize. Oftentimes making bollos is a shared responsibility within and sometimes between families. For this activity, tables were lined up in one long row underneath the tents. All of the ingredients for the bollos were placed down the center of the tables and children and facilitators each stood alongside the table. Given the time constraints, the children did not participate in every step of making the bollos. However, Beatriz and other volunteers explained the process to the children prior to putting the bollos together. The three primary components to bollos are smoked banana leaves for the wrapping, masa—dough made from soaking dried corn in lime and water, and col—a base of stewed chicken cooked in herbs and spices to which is added a more liquid mix of masa and annatto/red recado (a paste that is made from grinding the red seeds of the achiote tree, and native to the region). For this batch of bollos, facilitators also included chopped Chaya, commonly referred to as Maya spinach, into the masa mixture. Preparation of each of these takes quite a long time, so it was done prior to the camp. Many children knew the components of bollos because they have seen their mothers and grandmothers make them at home. They were

also familiar with Chaya because it is a commonly available plant used in a variety of dishes in Succotz as well as other parts of Belize.

Dr. Penados talked with the children about the history of bollos, a food that goes back to the ancient Maya and passed on through the generations. The children were very excited to make their own bollos. Beatriz and other volunteers guided them through the process of assembling them: first, cleaning the banana leaf with a wet towel, then adding masa onto the leaf and patting it down into a thin layer, next, adding a spoonful of col, and lastly learning how to wrap up their bollos. Many of the children wanted to make more than one, and several got creative with the shape of their wraps and with their ties so that they might identify the ones they made after they had been cooked. This activity fostered opportunities for children to develop an increased sense of responsibility for themselves and others because they knew everyone would be eating the bollos for lunch. In this way children worked together within the spirit of collective agency as they all contributed to the final communal meal. The children also exhibited a sense of agency in making their bollos, wanting to take ownership of the ones they created. Rodrigo, Maribelle, and Beatriz created an outdoor cooking area and built a cooking fire. A large cast iron cauldron lined with stone at the bottom and layers of extra banana leaf was placed on the cooking fire. The assembled bollos were then stacked on top of the banana leaf layer. Water was added and the lid was placed on top. The boiling water and steam cooked the bollos in a little over an hour. Beatriz and other volunteers oversaw the cooking process which required continually stoking the cooking fire and watching to make sure the water in the cauldron did not evaporate.

As the bollos cooked, the children broke into their storytelling groups and finalized their plans for their storytelling performance. The children laughed as they worked; collaboration was very evident. Each group seemed excited to present their completed project. Following their

group work session, we invited the children to participate in a camp reflection activity. I discuss the methods and rationale for this activity in my methods section; the protocol for this activity may be found in Appendix C. I have mentioned previously that program collaborators felt it was important to offer children the opportunity to reflect on the camp and to provide feedback about their experiences. The purpose of the activity was multifaceted: first, we wanted to learn more about the how the children described their experiences participating in the camp; second, we valued children's critiques and suggestions and wanted to hear their thoughts and ideas for improving the camp; third, we saw this activity as a way of evaluating the effectiveness of the project curriculum. Children's responses to the questions posed were varied and unique. As collaborators, we took this feedback seriously and worked to address various comments and concerns during our planning sessions for the 2018 camp. I will discuss these considerations in the following section.

The children spent the remainder of the time before lunch engaging in an interactive team-building obstacle course game facilitated by Maribelle and Rodrigo and assisted by all the camp counselors. By this point, the children were familiar with their peers and the camp facilitators. This final team-building activity highlighted the ways that the camp encouraged youth development through community-building and collaboration. The game required that children work independently, with one other person, and with a large group. This activity encouraged the children to draw on their own strengths and the strengths of others to problem solve. It also provided a space for children to reflect on their limitations and find ways to work together with others to overcome them. I observed several instances of children getting frustrated because they were unable to achieve a segment of the game on their own or with peers, but other children stepped in and offered encouragement or suggestions. At first, as I watched the game, I

thought that several of the children, specifically a group of older boys, would see this activity as an opportunity to compete against one another. However, I was wrong in my assumption; rather, those same children took on leadership roles and interceded to encourage and help the younger children. By removing the competitiveness from this activity, the children came together through play and community with one another. At the end, the children learned that there was, in fact, a winning team. Maribelle and Rodrigo awarded “first place” to the group who consistently demonstrated collaboration, helping and supporting team members, consideration for other team members, and respect for themselves and their peers.

When the bollos were finished cooking, the children seated themselves all around the long row of tables, and the bollos were served. Many of the children showed a keen sense of pride in making their bollos and wanted to find the exact ones they had made; however, Beatriz, Maribelle, and the other volunteers reminded them that part of the joy of collaborative cooking is that everyone contributes and everyone enjoys the food. It is not about “mine” but about a collective sense of “ours.” While there were a few children who seemed momentarily disappointed by not getting to eat the exact bollos they created, their qualms were quickly quieted when everyone was invited to open their bollos and eat. Many children went back for second and sometimes third helpings. Toward the end of lunchtime, children’s parents and family members started to arrive for the closing ceremony.

Prior to family members arriving, we created a children’s work exhibition on tables around camp. Parents and family were invited to view the children’s slate carvings, masks, and pottery that were on display and then to sit in chairs with their children under the shade trees. Dr. Penados greeted everyone and gave a small talk about the purpose and goals of the camp, the activities in which children participated, and the agenda for the closing ceremony. Following this

introduction, the children joined their small groups and each group presented their Toh storytelling project. Arturo's, Megan's, and Delore's groups performed skits and reenacted the story of the Toh bird that Dr. Penados told on the first day of camp. They used costumes and props that they had created during group sessions in camp. Yasmine's group presented the song about the Toh story. While children took turns reading/ singing lines, two children played small flutes. Within each group each child participated in their group presentation. Several children were a little shy to stand up in front of everyone and talk, however, they were encouraged by the other children in their group and their counselors. Other children spoke in animated voices as they acted out their parts. These performances offered parents as well as all camp participants an opportunity to hear the Toh story retold through the words of the children in creative and unique ways. Each group used several of the Maya words for animals that they had learned on the first day. The skits followed the original Toh storyline as they children acted it out. The song performance also told the Toh story but using creative verse and rhyme. This activity underscored collaboration, heritage awareness, and character development and presented an opportunity for children to share some of what they learned with the audience of parents, facilitators, and volunteers.

Following the children's story performances, each child was called up to receive a camp certificate of completion from the counselors. As they received their awards, they shook hands and hugged their counselors and posed for a picture for their parents. Following the awards ceremony many children went home with their family members; however, parents had been previously invited to stay after the camp for a focus group to share their thoughts and ideas about the camp. Twelve parents joined the focus group meetings, and six of the parents agreed to consent to participate in my research project. We also held a camp debriefing meeting with camp

facilitators the following evening. In the following section, I discuss the key themes that emerged from these discussions as well as from the children's reflections. This feedback informed the 2018 heritage camp.

### ***Camp Reflections***

**Children's Reflections.** As I mentioned above, the "interactive focus group" with the children provided a way of assessing the camp as well as gaining feedback from the children. When the children were asked what activities they liked the most, the top three responses were beading, games, and pottery. When asked what activities they liked the least, the top three responses were pottery, slate carving, and marimba. Many children said the clay was too messy, the slate carving was too difficult, and there was not enough time to learn to play the marimba. Overall, each activity was mentioned as a favorite by a minimum of two children, and each activity was cited as a least favorite by a minimum of one child. Of all the activities, beading received the most positive feedback. When asked what would make any of the activities better, a common response was a need for more time for each activity specifically for slate carving and marimba playing. Additionally, a significant number of children wanted to learn more words in Maya. When asked to list three things that they learned that they never knew before, common responses for many children were the names of animals in Maya; how to make bollos and/or a skill from one of the other workshops/ activities. When asked what was the most important thing they would remember about this camp, children's responses varied but mirrored their responses to the previous question about learning something new. I describe the specific responses to these questions in my study in the polyvocal analysis chapter for children who consented to participate in my study.

**Parent Focus Group.** This meeting offered parents a chance to hear more about the specifics of what took place during the camp, ask questions, contribute their thoughts and ideas, and provide feedback. Generally speaking, parents were complementary and thankful for the camp. Several parents articulated that one of their primary reasons for sending their children to the Motmot Camp was because they felt it would offer them a constructive and safe space to learn something new and to play with other children. Alonzo's mother Emilia stated:

Um, to be honest, I was not aware as to what was going to happen at the camp. Maybe it was part of my responsibility to find out, but none the less I signed [consent/ permission to participate] as an opportunity for my son to socialize with others instead of being in front of the television, or misbehaving at home. I thought it would be something constructive for him.

For many parents, when school is out for the summer, it is a challenge to come up with activities to keep children busy and engaged. As Amelia points out, often technology, like television or tablets, becomes a crutch to fall back on. Parents articulated that having local activities for children within the community is helpful and needed. Emilia, commented:

What I like about the camp is the organization—you were well organized. You, um, you had a good means of communication with parents. You sent a schedule. So, I was quite aware of what was occurring on a given day. Um, I think the activities, they were very meaningful. Um, I know my son enjoyed it.

Emilia points out the importance of organization and communication between the camp and the parents. As collaborators developing the program, we knew that parents would want and expect clear communication in order to feel comfortable sending their children to the camp. Our success in being organized was a collaborative effort between Dr. Penados, Beatriz, Maribelle, Rodrigo,

and me, as well as the Rotaract camp counselors. This effort offered assurance to parents that the camp would be a constructive and safe space for their children. We worked to maintain this in 2018 as well.

The focus group revealed three key themes that parents identified as important opportunities they felt the Motmot Camp offered children to learn or practice: cultural values; cultural knowledge; meaningful and constructive skills. With regard to cultural values, several parents talked about a need for spaces outside of home or school to reinforce the importance of respect—for self, for elders, and for others. Related to respect, some parents brought up issues related to discipline. Specifically, they noted a general decline in teaching and modeling expectations for children’s behavior. Parents felt that this overall decrease in discipline negatively affected the cultural value of respect. Josue’s mother, Adriana, articulates:

The parents of yesterday would be more strict and you would have more discipline we would practice it in and out of home and nowadays we are having a hard time because when our kids are giving us trouble, we have a hard time and we expect other people to do it for us.

For Adriana and other parents, continuity with discipline and expectations for respect between home and community settings such as the Motmot Camp, bolsters these cultural values in Succotz. One of the primary goals of the camp—to provide youth opportunities to learn about their heritage and develop skills in a local art-form—also resonated with many parents.

Parents felt that the passing on cultural knowledge to youth was important because it helped children recognize and appreciate aspects of their identity and had the potential to incite a passion for a new hobby or skillset. The emphasis the Motmot Camp placed on topics such as Maya language, dance, music, other artforms, traditional foodways, and traditional skills was



also seen as a way to encourage cultural pride. In a discussion of his hopes for his children, Jaime's father, Jeraldo, mentioned the importance of passing on traditional artforms. He states:

There is a lot involved in heritage— like arts, especially the Mayas—our ancestors were the Mayas. So, um, I think art is very important [to pass on this knowledge]. It was used as a way of saying something or telling a story. I would suggest that, um, arts really implicates a whole lot of our culture.

Jeraldo also mentioned the importance of the marimba, dances, and foodways as being equally important for children to learn. With regard to other aspects of cultural knowledge taught in the Motmot Camp he goes on to say “If he [Jaime] would have that opportunity to learn it, that would be a yes for me on anything that has to with culture and heritage.” Many parents agreed with this statement which sparked conversations related to other skills and knowledge parents noticed their children bringing home from camp. This was particularly evident with the children's enthusiasm with making bollos. Many parents were surprised to hear and then see how well the children did making bollos because at home they were not nearly as eager to help. The discussion about children's attitudes and behavior at home towards other household tasks and responsibilities raised the topic of the influence of peers. Hector's mom, Elsa, articulated:

I guess that's what motivates them, seeing others doing. And then they want to do the same thing. Right? I guess that's why kids like being interactive—interacting with each other. So, you know, and that's how sometimes they don't do at home. But, if they see other kids doing and helping they want to do that too.

This comment led to a brief discussion of the types of experiences children have, particularly outside of home, that lead to behaviors and attitudes that go against community, family, and cultural values, such as the influences of peers or things they see or hear on television and social

media. Many parents expressed relief that the Motmot Camp placed a strong emphasis on community and team building, responsibility to self and others, intergenerational connections, and building self-esteem and communication skills. Several parents also commented on their children's excitement coming home from camp and sharing what they did and what they learned. Their excitement was evident when their child/ children came home and retold the story of the Toh or the story of the Pigeon and the Squirrel using Maya names for animals, asking if they knew those names were Maya and not Spanish names.

Overall, parents offered three primary suggestions for the camp facilitators to consider. First, there was unanimous agreement among the parents that there was a need for more time. Elsa shared: "The kids, they want to learn more. Like, for example, the slate carving. They like to do it but since it's only a couple of hours then they have to jump to another activity. It's not enough time." Josue's mom, Adriana, agreed. She said: "Um, like [Elsa] said right now, the time could have probably been, um, a little bit more so that they could actually develop the skill that was being introduced." The need for time was not limited to the camp; many parents loved the idea of afterschool clubs that children could attend to promote and support growth and learning over an extended period of time. Second, several parents wanted to see more opportunities for children to learn the Maya language. Elsa expressed, "I think the language is important. Some of us, our parents used to speak [Maya]. But the language is being lost." Adriana then commented, "Like how you had that storytelling. I think it would be important to like, if you bring somebody who, um, can teach them the Mayan language. It would be very important." Parents felt that finding ways to help children learn the Maya language would encourage stronger connections to the skills and activities they were learning at the camp, just as language connections had done with the storytelling session and their end of camp presentations. Third, parents articulated a

desire for the camp to include a wider range of age groups. Jeraldo articulated: “Two years may not be enough. I think you should expand the range instead of doing children eight to ten you can take it all the way to thirteen or fourteen years or bring it down to include younger kids.” For many parents, it was hard to explain to younger or older siblings why they could not attend the camp with their brother or sister. As I discussed earlier, several younger siblings ended up joining the camp. Maribelle explained one such instance regarding Jaime’s five-year-old brother. She articulates:

They [Jaime and some of the older boys] were concerned this morning because they said ‘Miss! [He] shouldn’t be here because he’s too small.’ I said, no, [he] will learn from you. So, whatever you do, he will learn from you if you do something. Then at the end of the day, like we had that game and they had to do teamwork. [Jaime] and the others were blaming [him] saying that because of [him], they can’t complete the task. But then I came around and we found out that [he] was not the problem. The older ones were not following instructions. So, I came and I said, okay, [he] will do the first step and you as the older ones will follow.

This example demonstrates the value of including a wider age range as it encourages reciprocal learning opportunities. Younger children benefit by learning from older children, and older children learn responsibility for being role models. There is also learning that happens when the younger children set the example for the older children. Creating a curriculum that meets the needs of a larger age range presents challenges; however, this example highlights the opportunities these experiences create for building interpersonal skills. The suggestions made by the parents during this meeting were addressed during the camp planning meetings for 2018.

**Camp Debriefing.** We held a meeting with all the camp facilitators on Monday evening following the camp. This was a time for the Rotaract camp counselors and the heritage program collaborators to unpack the camp experience. This meeting was intended as a collaborative space for everyone to reflect on and critique the camp, as well as to share thoughts, feelings, concerns, and overall feedback. We started by discussing the aspects of the camp that went well and then dove into areas of improvement. There was a general consensus that the camp provided a fun and safe learning environment for all participants. The children were engaged and excited to be there, and they took pride their group projects and individual creations. As a group, the Rotaract counselors did a great job of having fun and playing with the children as well as handling the camp logistics. They worked hard to keep the schedule working and to keep the children engaged.

The Rotaract counselors also identified some areas of concern. For many of them, working with young children was a new experience. Several articulated feelings of uncertainty and nervousness regarding interactions with children, especially when addressing behavioral issues or disagreements between children. Other counselors brought up concerns about time constraints. Many felt that there was not enough time for the children to complete the activities, especially during the Saturday workshops. Megan suggested a week-long camp might be one way to create more time for children to engage more deeply in the activities. Yasmine expressed concern over not having enough background knowledge to help children make deeper connections to heritage. This concern was also shared by the heritage program collaborators and was one of the initial concerns collaborators identified when partnering with the Rotaract club. During the 2016 camp, the camp facilitators were all teachers and many of the knowledge bearers were elders in the community who had experience working with youth. Because of this,

the camp curriculum among facilitators was understood, and because of their training, teachers were able to help children make multifaceted connections to heritage across the activities being presented. This was identified as an area in need of improvement going forward. Collectively, we identified the need for a more structured curriculum as well as training for Rotaract counselors as a way of supporting more critical capacity building. This dialogue brought up one of the primary concerns of the camp collaborators—that being that learning during the camp seemed more incidental than intentional and, in this way, strayed away from some of the larger aims and goals of the camp. Additionally, we recognized that while knowledge bearers possessed the expert knowledge for a given artform, they were not necessarily pedagogically inclined. We identified a need to expand content knowledge as well as to address the skillsets needed to aid knowledge bearers in facilitating activities in more intentional ways. The discussion around a need for more time led to the realization that the extra time was needed on the planning and organizational front rather than trying to extend the length of the camp. We agreed that the quality of the content was essential. Doing fewer activities with more intentional learning outcomes was more in line with the overall vision for the camp. Part of this process included clearly defining roles for everyone facilitating and participating in the camp. These issues and concerns were focal points for the planning of the 2018 camp.

**Personal Reflections.** My role as participant and observer offered two different perspectives of the 2017 camp. I was able to experience first-hand the effort that went into implementing the camp, but I was also able to step back from the fast pace of participating in an effort to explore the camp as a whole. Participating in the organization, setup, and facilitation of some activities made me aware of how much time, energy and volunteer help was necessary to carry out a two-and-a-half-day camp. As facilitators, we were working nearly around the clock in

the days before and during the camp to ensure each day would go as smoothly as possible. Because this was the first time that the heritage camp partnered with the Rotaract club, there was not a clear delineation of participant roles, and as tasks arose, people took on different responsibilities. There were many logistical considerations to ensure the camp ran smoothly, and there were also many other issues related to curriculum and organization. It was evident that the Rotaractors gravitated to the logistical side of things while the original camp collaborators were more inclined to take on roles related to the planned experiences for children. During the planning process this seemed to work; however, during the actual camp, these roles became blended because the Rotaractors took on the role of camp counselors, and their interactions with the children increased significantly. In the planning leading up to the camp, the relationship between all facilitators was more of a partnership. When the camp was in session, Rotaractors looked to camp collaborators for guidance and assistance. Dr. Penados, Beatriz, Maribelle, and Rodrigo maintained the role of camp leaders and tried to balance the need to stay true to the camp vision and curriculum with the needs of all participants. Collaborators identified a need for help from volunteers to be able implement the camp and also seemed to want to relinquish some control over the leadership of the camp given the tremendous time obligations necessary for carrying out the program. Efforts to plan for the organization of the experiences offered during the camp (materials, schedules, paperwork, etc.) overshadowed the need to be more intentional with the curriculum objectives given the fact that the Rotaractors did not have educational backgrounds. This oversight was in large part due to the fact that it had not been an issue in 2016, since the facilitators were all teachers and had the pedagogical knowledge to implement curriculum through experiential learning opportunities. Additionally, the facilitators in 2016 had all participated in collaboratively designing the camp curriculum. While eager to help and

participate, the Rotaractors were new to the project and to working with children; this was something that was not fully taken into consideration until the camp was underway.

During the debriefing, the Rotaractors seemed very interested in continuing their participation in the heritage program and were open to learning more about the program's curriculum and working with youth. I offered to facilitate meetings with the Rotaractors following the 2017 camp focused on the curriculum design of the program as well as pedagogical considerations for working with children in the camp setting. I shared some group readings, and we planned times to meet virtually to discuss them and to plan for the next camp. In the following section, I continue my analysis of the heritage program in the following sections as I explore the 2018 Motmot Camp in detail.

### **2018 Motmot Camp**

The 2018 Motmot Camp was held between July 20-22 in Succotz. As in 2017, the Rotaract club continued to help facilitate the camp and enrollment was open to children between the ages of eight and eleven years old. We kept the same age range in an effort to maintain a balance between the ration of children to adults. In total, 52 children participated in the second camp. As was the case in 2017, participation varied by day as there were younger siblings who accompanied some of older ones already registered. Three teachers, two community knowledge bearers, eight Rotaract counselors, two parents, Dr. Penados, and I facilitated the camp. Not all camp facilitators participated in my research study, although the same seven facilitators from 2017 continued to participate in my study. I invited all children and parents to participate in my study, though I only received consent/assent from eight parents and nine children; four of the parents and three of the children also participated in 2017. Table 8 provides a breakdown of participants' demographic information for the 2018 Motmot Camp.

**Table 8. 2018 Motmot Camp Participants**

Name (Pseudonym)	Occupation	Education	Age	Ethnicity	Cultural Identity	Native/Preferred Language
Maribelle	Assistant Teacher, Primary	Jr. college associates degree	44	Maya-Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Rodrigo	Teacher, Junior College	4-year university degree	49	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Beatriz	Teacher, High School	4-year university degree	N/P	Maya-Mestizo	Maya-Mestizo	Spanish
Delores	Project officer at trade and investment firm	4-year university degree	29	Maya-Mestizo	Maya-Mestizo	Spanish
Yasmine	Student	4-year university degree	23	Mestizo	Mestizo, Belizean	Spanish
Megan	Student, Teacher	4-year university degree	30	Caucasian	American	English
Arturo	Student	Jr. college associates degree	27	Mestizo	Mestizo, Belizean	Spanish
Elsa	Housewife	High school diploma	46	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish/ English
Adriana	Housewife	N/P	31	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Kailan	Housewife	Jr. college associates degree	36	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Juanita	Teacher, Primary	Jr. college associates degree	29	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Kamela	Housewife	High school diploma	29	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish/ English
Lidia	Housewife	High school diploma	46	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Nadir	Student	In primary school	10	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Josue	Student	In primary school	11	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Martin	Student	In primary school	11	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Alberto	Student	In primary school	8	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish/ English
Arabella	Student	In primary school	8	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Angelina	Student	In primary school	6	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish/ English
Mia	Student	In primary school	8	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Ernesto	Student	In primary school	11	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish
Tobias	Student	In primary school	8	Mestizo	Mestizo	Spanish/ English



### *Camp Description and Details*

In the fall of 2017, camp facilitators held several meetings that I participated in virtually as we began planning for the 2018 summer camp. During this time, I shared articles related to working with children, experiential learning, and critical thinking with the Rotaract group. We discussed these articles and explored the camp curriculum in more detail than we had done prior to the 2017 camp. Toward the latter part of spring 2018 we began planning and organizing for the summer camp. We identified dates, and I scheduled my final field season to encompass the time before, during, and after the camp as I had done the year before. As we planned the activities and schedule for the camp, we learned that a few of our community knowledge bearers would be unable to participate due to health-related concerns. The two knowledge bearers who volunteered to help for the 2018 camp were not from Succotz; fortunately, they both had considerable experience working with young children. Rather than having multiple workshops going on throughout the day on Saturday, we focused on three large-group activities. Additionally, the last day of camp overlapped with the Fajina (Maya word for communal labor/for the good of the community), a heritage event in the village center co-hosted by local archaeologists and National Institute of Culture and Heritage. We planned a field trip to the Fajina with the children as part of the camp schedule. Table 9 provides the 2018 camp schedule as a reference.

The camp was held at the same place as in 2017—Maribelle and Rodrigo’s field in Succotz. We spent time in the days leading up to the camp working through logistics, organizing, as well as developing clearer learning objectives for each activity. Program collaborators and I created a lesson plan for Rotaract camp counselors to help guide them as they worked with the children for the storytelling project. Much of the planning leading up to the camp focused on

intentionality behind the activities that the students would be experiencing. All facilitators helped to set up the camp the day before in a similar layout as the previous year with several tents and many tables and chairs. We had a final planning meeting the evening before camp to address last minute issues and concerns.

**Table 9. 2018 Motmot Camp Schedule**

<b>Friday, July 20<sup>th</sup> 2018</b>	
<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
1:00 pm - 1:30 pm	Registration
1:30 pm - 1:40 pm	Welcome/Nawal of the Day
1:40 pm - 2:10 pm	Ice Breaker
2:10 pm - 3:40 pm	Story Telling
3:10 pm - 3:40 pm	Discussion/ Group work for Story Project
3:40 pm - 4:30 pm	Tie-Dye T-shirt/Group work for Story Project
4:45 pm - 5:00 pm	Closing, discussion about next day
<b>Saturday, July 21<sup>st</sup> 2018</b>	
<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
8:30 am - 8:45 am	Welcome/ Nawal of the Day
8:45 am - 9:00 am	Snack
<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
9:00 am - 12:00 pm	Painting Class
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm	Lunch
1:00 pm - 2:00 pm	Group work for Story Project
2:00 pm - 3:00 pm	Beading with seeds
3:00 pm - 4:45 pm	Learning about the Maya Calendar/Calendar arts and crafts
4:45 pm - 5:00 pm	Closing, Discussion about next day
<b>Sunday, July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2018</b>	
<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
10:00 am - 10:10 am	Opening session/ Icebreaker
10:10 am - 11:00 am	Cooking Session
11:00 am - 12:00 pm	Field Trip
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm	Lunch
1:15 pm - 2:00 pm	Closing Ceremony

**Day 1.** The first day started in a similar way as the previous year with camp registration. Prior to the camp, we had 35 children registered; however, 17 more arrived with signed permission forms on the first afternoon. Eleven children had participated in the 2017 camp and

many children were new. Several of the new faces were younger siblings of children who had participated the year before. In total, nine children were under the age of eight, the youngest being 6. These children were siblings of older children registered for the camp. We did not want to turn them away and so we worked to pair them with their older siblings for activities. There were also four new Rotaract counselors. Maribelle welcomed the children and the facilitators briefly introduced themselves. As a way of promoting Yucatec Maya spirituality, the children were invited to participate in a circle of connection where everyone gathered in a large circle and held hands while Maribelle introduced the “Nawal” [spirit companion] of the day. This concept stems from the Maya calendar where each day of the year is associated with a specific spirit or companion. For the purposes of the camp, the focus of the day was to learn to live in community and gratitude with each other. During this time, the children were rather quiet and still a bit shy, but listened and participated as Maribelle talked. The children participated in an ice breaker activity about reciprocity in the spirit of community. Each child was given 10 kernels of corn; they had to greet ten different peers and give them a kernel of corn. There was a time limit so the children moved quickly as they gave their corn away. At the end of time, the children counted their kernels. The majority of children had given 10 kernels away but had also received 10 kernels; Two children gave all 10 away and received none. Megan and Maribelle then led the children in a brief discussion. She asked “Was it easy to give the away the corn?” Most of the kids said “yes.” She then asked, “Was it easy to receive corn from your friends?” Again, they replied “yes.” Then she encouraged them to think about what happens when the focus is on giving and receiving rather than accumulating the corn? Many children took turns sharing their thoughts. Mia (age 8) said “It is more fair, Miss!” Josue (age 11) shared “It makes us think about others and how to share.” Tobias (age 8) said “We all took turns.” Arabella commented “We all

got corn.” The two older boys who had not received corn said that they had given all their corn away but had not received any. Maribelle asked them how that happened. Martin (age 11), one of the boys, said that they were going around fast handing corn to their friends and moving on before they could get corn from someone else because they thought they were supposed to try to give it all away without getting any back. This made everyone laugh. Maribelle talked to the children about the importance of giving to others when they needed something and being willing to ask for help or receive help when you needed something. She asked them if they had heard the word “reciprocity” but none of the children seemed to be familiar with that word. So, she explained that this game they were just playing was about reciprocity. She said: “That is when you exchange things with each other and everyone benefits.” She continued her explanation and said that reciprocity was practiced by the Maya many years ago and is still practiced in Maya communities today. She talked about how when we live in community with each other we help one another so that everyone has what they need. She gave a hypothetical example of if she was growing corn and Megan was growing beans then they could exchange some of their crop so that they both had corn and beans. This activity supported the opening discussion of the importance of community and gratitude and it offered a space for the children to experience “giving back” to your community. Following the reciprocity game, Megan asked the children to participate in a second icebreaker activity that focused on team-building and collaboration. This camp opening focused on Maya values of community, collaboration, sharing, and reciprocity and was an intentional way of working to set the tone for the rest of the camp.

Children were invited to sit under the tent for the storytelling session with Dr. Penados. Throughout this activity, he frequently switched between Spanish and English. Dr. Penados greeted the children and asked the children who participated the previous year to share what

stories they were told. The children recalled the Toh story and the Story of the Pigeon and the Squirrel. He asked how many children who had not attended the previous camp were familiar with those stories. A few children raised their hands. Rather than tell them the story again, he encouraged them to ask a child who already knew the story to retell it to them before the next day. As with the previous year, Dr. Penados discussed the significance of storytelling for the Maya and for the community of Succotz. He talked about the purpose of storytelling and how stories tell about how to relate to each other, live in community, be a good person, explain things in the world, live, and relate to friends, family, community and the environment. He then talked about the two stories that he would tell them and how both stories talked about the importance of corn to the Maya people. The first story Dr. Penados shared was the story of how there came to be four colors of corn. As he did the previous year, Dr. Penados did a brief Maya language activity with the children to familiarize them with the Maya names of the animals in the story. He then told both stories to the children. The transcripts of these may be found in Appendix E; however, I will provide a synopsis of each story here to provide context to the descriptions of activities below. The first story was about how there came to be four colors of corn. The fable talked about how all the animals in the jungle were hungry and every day would go out into the world looking for food, but at night they would all gather back together having had no luck finding food. When they all slept, the “sereque” [Maya word for agouti] passed such terrible gas that it woke up the other animals. They realized that he was eating something and they wanted him to share. He finally told them that he saw the “say” [Maya word for leaf cutter ant] walking out of a tiny hole in the mountain carrying white corn. He just followed them and took some of the pieces they were carrying. All the animals decided to go to the mountain to see if they could get the corn out of the mountain. They all took turns trying to break open the mountain but had

no luck. Finally, the animals called to Chac the thunder god to please help them break open the mountain. Chac told the “ch’ejob” (Maya word for woodpecker) to start drilling a hole in the mountain and then Chac threw thunder and lightning at the mountain, which caused fire and burned the woodpecker on the top of his head. This is why he has red feathers on his head today. Finally, the mountain cracked open and corn came pouring out. Some of the corn was burned by the fire, giving it a black/blue color, some was a little less burned, making it red, some was just a little cooked, turning it yellow, and some was still white because it had not touched the fire. This is how the four colors came to be. The Maya cultivate corn today—there are four colors of corn, and sometimes you see corn that has mixed colors.

The Second story from the Popol Vuh is a creation story of how the Maya came to be and why they are called “people of the corn.” The story goes that the creators made the earth and put water, plants, and animals on the earth, but the animals could not talk and could not pray to them. So, they set about creating people. They tried making people out of clay and out of wood, but these did not work. So, they sent a flood to wipe out their failed creations and begin again. The third time they created people out of corn. The corn people appreciated the creators for making them and for providing the earth and farms for growing corn and other crops. They prayed to the creators and the creators allowed them to stay. The storytelling activity explored the significance of many values: reciprocity; sustainability; the environment; working together and harnessing individual and collective strengths; sharing; perseverance; respect; and gratitude. It made a variety of connections to Maya heritage and offered a space for the children to consider how these stories relate to their own experiences and world views.

Children were placed in five groups by one of the Rotaract counselors. Rather than randomly placing the children in groups, we intentionally considered the age of the children and

the gender balance in each group. There were between nine and twelve children per group; younger siblings who were not yet eight were placed in the group with their older sibling. In general, there were more younger children than older; however, the older children took on leadership roles and took responsibility for helping the younger children. We tried to make sure there were two adults for each group, although this was only possible with teachers rotating to spend time with each group. Even with trying to balance the age range, Megan's group was skewed to the younger age range. The counselors guided the children through a discussion of the significance of corn in the past and today, the morals and values that underscored the stories, and the connections to how these themes relate to the children and Succotz today. Counselors used the lesson plan as a guide, along with some materials related to corn, and teachers spent time with each group as these discussions unfolded.

I was able to briefly observe the beginning of each group's first group work session. While each group discussion was unique, the use of the lesson plan provided continuity between groups. In each group the children were engaged in the dialogue and eager to answer questions as they were posed. The children made clear connections to the use of corn in the past and the ways it is used in their own homes today. Each group had a collection of labels from store-bought foods containing corn. I observed a higher level of engagement from all the groups as compared to 2017, but this was particularly noticeable with Arturo's, and Megan's groups. The year before they seemed to have difficulty getting the children to delve into a deeper and more meaningful dialogue. In talking with both of them later that day I asked them if they noticed any differences in the 2017 and 2018 discussions. They both agreed that there were differences particularly related to their sense of confidence. Both Megan and Arturo attributed these changes to: 1. having a lesson plan; 2. having more experience and feeling more comfortable in their roles

as counselors; 3. Having the readings and discussions about pedagogy and critical thinking. It was clear that they were making an effort to encourage all the children in their group to contribute to the conversation by making space for some of the younger and quieter children to speak. Both their groups had more younger children than some of the other groups and were also slightly larger. They rephrased questions as needed to help children answer more articulately and they used probing questions to help the children think more deeply.

I observed children creating their own stories based on the conversations that arose during these initial conversations the following day. However, these observations were limited because I facilitated the t-shirt tie-dye activity as I had done the previous year. I enjoyed this time working individually with each of the children, learning their names and getting to know them. I especially enjoyed talking to the children who had attended the camp in 2017 about what was new in their lives. We concluded the first day by gathering the children together and inviting them to reflect on what they learned or enjoyed from the day's activities. I observed most of the children talking about the storytelling and tie-dye as the activities they enjoyed the most. Nadir (age 10) said he liked learning about the why the Mayas are called people of the corn. A couple of children talked about learning some new Maya words. Angelina (age 6) said she learned that there were a lot of foods made from corn. This sparked a quick discussion of foods that surprisingly contained corn like marshmallows, syrup, and box cereal. This quick reflection was something that had not been done the previous year with such intentionality. Facilitators learned what the children were taking away from the day's activities and children talked about shared experiences with each other. Once the children left, we held a brief meeting with all facilitators to discuss the plans for the following day. There were concerns for the number of children and the limited number of facilitators. Maribelle, Yasmine, and Delores reached out to the parents of



some of the returning children to ask for volunteer help. A couple of mothers were able to attend the next day to help lower the adult to child ratio.

**Day 2.** The second day began with another circle of connection followed by a brief discussion about the plan for the day. It was a beautiful sunny morning. To give the children more space, the tables and chairs were arranged out in the open field. The painting class was the first activity of the day, and this was led by a young Belizean artist. She had previously led painting classes for children in other summer programs and at other schools. She began the class by engaging the children in questions about art and paintings and how stories may also be told through these mediums. She asked the children about art in the community. Many children talked about the artisan stalls on the bank of the river in Succotz where local artists sell their works. She engaged them in a brief conversation about the ancient Maya murals and paintings on pottery that are on display at some of the national museums. Several children talked about the paintings on pottery that told stories of the past, and a couple of children mentioned painted ceramic vessels from Diego's pottery studio that they had seen on display during the pottery workshop at camp the previous year. She then invited the children to share their favorite spaces in Succotz. As children shared, she encouraged them to explain what or who made those places special. The children were given paper and paint brushes, and paint was placed on plates for children to share. She guided the children through a discussion of color—primary and secondary—and how to mix colors to get variations. The children were then encouraged to paint a story of their favorite place in Succotz.

The children spent time thinking about how they wanted to paint their stories. Several children were very excited to mix their own colors rather than using the exact colors from the jars. As they got into the planning process of what they wanted to paint, they became more

talkative. I overheard children's conversations with their peers as they talked about the community football [soccer] field, the basketball court, the river, school, Xunantunich, their homes, and several other places. They talked with one another about what they liked to do and who they were with at the places they considered painting. As the children started painting, many of them became more engrossed in their project and there were a couple of moments where it was incredibly quiet. I recall hearing more nature sounds than children's voices, albeit short-lived! For some of the children, their attention began to wane about halfway into the painting. Several older children finished more quickly and became easily distracted. At one point a group of the older boys began playing football in the field by the tables. Some of the younger children also finished early and were up moving around and wanting to share their art with their peers and camp facilitators. This was one instance where it was evident that the age spread, the children to adult ratio, and the allotted time for the activity were not ideal.

This activity supported the heritage program design particularly with regard to the intentionality of the camp curriculum. The painting activity directly built upon the larger themes addressed in the Nawal of the Day, the storytelling, and the team-building activities – themes such as the significance of communal spaces, and gratitude for family, friends, community, and the natural environment were evident. The focus on *place* was particularly important as this activity encouraged the children to think about their community, the spaces, and the people who make Succotz important to them. This activity offered an alternative way of thinking about and expressing their thoughts and ideas about these themes. As I viewed this activity through a heritage lens, I felt that the activity could have more explicitly integrated aspects of traditional and contemporary Maya culture and arts. There was no discussion of contemporary Maya painters or artists, nor a more in-depth discussion of the significance of painting traditionally. As

the discussion of mixing paints arose, I noted the possibility for connecting the natural environment to the artform. There are a number of naturally occurring pigments that exist throughout the region which were traditionally used by the Maya for painting and dyeing textiles. Some of these natural pigments such as indigo, derived from the indigo plant, and cochineal red, obtained by crushing the cochineal bug, are commonly used on a global scale today (Postrel, 2020).

Following their return from lunch at home, the children broke into their smaller groups to continue working on their storytelling project. Based on the feedback and experiences described by counselors from the previous year, we intentionally doubled the total amount of time children had to work on this activity over the course of the camp. As I observed the groups, there was noticeably more thought and detail in the children's collaborative stories as compared to the previous year. Delores' group had ten children; the majority of the children were older, but included were couple of younger siblings around seven years old. They chose to retell their own versions of both stories about corn. They talked about how they wanted to present their story and decided that they would take turns being narrators. They drew story scenes on large sheets of paper to illustrate their story. Each group member contributed to the illustrations. They included the four types of corn from the original story and also incorporated two versions of multicolored corn. Once they had finished the story illustrations, Delores asked them how they might present some of the concepts they talked about in their first meeting related to the significance of corn in the past and present. The children decided to incorporate the ways in which corn is used in Succotz. They made lists of all the foods that are prepared at home as well as the ones they get from the store. They drew pictures of the various foods and created a script for talking about how corn is still important today in Succotz. They concluded that they were all still "People of the

Corn.” In Delores’ group it was apparent that the children worked collaboratively and harnessed their collective agency as they designed their project.

The dynamics of Megan’s group, having so many younger children, were different from most of the other groups. Her group was also the largest (12 children) because of some of the sibling pairs. While older siblings were with their younger siblings, the oldest child was nine years old and the youngest was six. Megan encouraged the younger children to contribute to the decisions about how and what they wanted their story to tell. Rather than recounting the corn stories, the children decided to tell a story about how “Corn is All Around.” With Megan’s guidance, they started with the four colors of corn and what foods are made with those varieties. The older children helped the younger ones think about all the different ways corn is used in Succotz as well as in other parts of the world. They had fun making a long list of foods that are made from corn both within the community and purchased from the store. A few examples included: bollos, tortilla, xpasha (purple corn drink), popcorn, corn flakes, marshmallows, etc. Together, they created a large poster with all the different foods they talked about. All the children helped to draw pictures and to write the names of the foods. As a group they decided the older children would narrate, and the younger ones would each share a different food that is made from corn. The original camp schedule was designed with eight- to eleven-year-olds in mind; therefore, the blocks of time were longer than the attention spans of some of the younger children. The children became easily distracted and had a difficult time maintaining consistent focus. Maribelle stepped into assist with the younger ones which provided space for Megan to work with the older children on a more age-appropriate level.

Arturo’s group, like Megan’s group, also had younger campers though not quite as young, the youngest being seven and the oldest being ten. His group was also larger with 11

students. This group also decided to focus on the significance of corn and how it is used within the community. Arturo helped guide the children through the story-telling process, also starting with the four colors of corn. He suggested each child narrate a small bit of the story about corn to share the responsibility because several of the children said they did not want to have too many lines. Much like Megan's group, the children enjoyed discussing the many foods that are made from corn both at home and in the store. Arturo encouraged the children to include a little more information about the foods they discussed such as how a particular food was made. They wrote out their individual scripts on a large piece of paper, and they each illustrated their section.

The fourth group was facilitated by two new Rotaract counselors. This was the smallest group with nine children between eight and eleven years old. The children decided to recount the first corn story to share how the four colors of corn came to be. From here they decided to explore the process of making foods that contain corn at home as well as from the store. Each child took on a narration role and contributed to the storyboard illustrations. I noted that this group was engaged in the storytelling activity more so than the other groups. They were focused on the project and wanted to make sure they each had clear story lines to share. While this group exhibited a more serious tone to the group discussions, plenty of laughter could be heard as they put their illustrations together. This may be attributed to the age range of the children and the fact that the group was smaller. Additionally, the camp counselors for this group changed from the first day to the second day. While the children were engaged in the project, there was an observable distance between the new counselor and the children because the children had already built rapport with the counselor from the previous day, and they had not had a chance to establish rapport with the new counselor on the second day.

Yasmine's group had ten children with a larger percentage of older children and only a couple of younger siblings. This group decided to write a story that wove together the Maya creation story and the significance of corn to Maya families—past and present. They collaboratively wrote a story script and then decided one person would narrate the story and the rest of the children would act out the story through movement. This was a very embodied experience and the children took it very seriously. Through the script and the enactment, they touched on the story of how the Maya people came to be created from corn, how the Maya showed gratitude for the gift of corn to sustain life, and how the traditional Maya family was structured.

This activity promoted a greater awareness of the impact Maya heritage has had on present-day Succotz. While the children enjoyed the first day storytelling session, it was not until small group discussions that they began to see the connections the stories had on their daily lives. This particular activity also fostered a collaborative learning space between different age groups. Older siblings and children often mentored the younger children and took on leadership roles within the groups. As the younger children gained more confidence in sharing their thoughts and ideas with the group, I observed times when the relationship between ages shifted to peer/ peer as opposed to mentor/ mentee. One example from Yasmine's group highlights this shift as well as an opportunity to build self-esteem. Josue and Ernesto (both age 11) had taken on leadership roles and were making comments and suggestions about how the group story should be told. They suggested that each group member should share in the narration of the story. At first, some of the younger children just went along with what the older ones said, but then Yasmine noticed that the younger children were not talking. She stepped in to encourage the younger group to share their ideas. Josue's sister, Arabella (Age 8) stood up and suggested they find a way to act

out the story rather than just read it aloud. At first, she was a bit timid, but she kept talking and, as everyone kept listening, she gained confidence and became more animated as she shared her idea. Arabella's idea seemed to resonate with the group and this was a turning point for how they decided to present their story. This shift seemed to also break the initial mentor/mentee dynamics between the older and younger children. As they continued developing their ideas, all the group members were talking and contributing to the final plan.

While there were positive aspects of the larger age spread between children, there were also some drawbacks. Many of the older siblings were playing the role of babysitter to younger siblings. This responsibility detracted from older siblings' abilities to fully participate in some of the activities. I also observed times when the older children in a group were exploring ideas or concepts that were difficult for the younger children to grasp. When the younger ones started to disengage or get distracted the older siblings and the counselors would have to stop to help get them involved again. This resulted in some groups resorting to more simplistic conceptions and stories that targeted the younger ages rather than the age group for which the camp curriculum was intended.

Additionally, between Friday and Saturday there were inconsistencies in Rotaract counselors' attendance. While four of the Rotaract counselors had participated in the camp in 2017, there were four new members. On the first day of camp, only six Rotaract counselors were able to attend the camp. On the second day, there were also six counselors present, plus two of the moms who volunteered; however, the two counselors present were the ones who had been unable to attend the first day. The lack of consistency created some difficulties in maintaining continuity and establishing relationships between students and counselors. This may have stifled the storytelling experience for the fourth group in particular because time was spent getting the

new counselor up to date on what they had been doing and there was a lack of continuity between the initial project discussions and story creation process of the second day.

While there were some difficulties, the storytelling project offered a space for the children to explore connections around Maya heritage and their experiences at home, in the community, and in the world. Each group took ownership of their project and had opportunities to practice sharing, collaboration, and taking responsibility for themselves and others. The project also offered a space for children to develop notions of self-efficacy, self-regulation, and agency. These story projects amplified the children's voices and empowered them to use and trust their knowledge and abilities.

Following the group work story activity, the children were invited to participate in a beading activity. In 2017, the majority of campers had noted beading as one of their favorite workshops. Delores facilitated the activity with the support of all the counselors, volunteers, and teachers. Delores began with a brief discussion of traditional Maya beading and how beads were often made from natural seeds as well as stones such as slate, obsidian, and jade. She showed the children pictures of ancient Maya jewelry as well as images of where the raw materials came from. She asked the children to talk about where they have seen the types of trees and plants from which seeds are harvested for beads; many children shared several places within Succotz. Delores then talked about the materials used and began demonstrating the techniques for beading. Given the number of children and limited adult help, the beading technique was adapted to the situation. Rather than macramé, the children used elastic cording to thread beads and seeds. The children enjoyed the activity and were very proud to show off their new jewelry to their peers and counselors. The majority of the children wore their jewelry to camp the following day as well. As I compared the beading experience in both years, I observed less of a heritage



connection in 2018. While there was reference made to traditional beading and seeding, the actual activity was more reminiscent of a kid's crafting project at school or at home. In part, I attribute this to the size of the group, the limited natural seed bead resources, and also to the fact that in the previous year, two community artisans had stepped in as knowledge bearers for the activity. This provided the children one-on-one opportunities to learn from local artists using a technique that was more traditional and intricate than simply threading beads on to a string. This is not to say the children did not have fun or to imply learning was not happening—it certainly was. I just saw this as an instance where the depth of knowledge production could have been greater, and the aims, goals, and objectives of the camp could have been more closely followed.

The final activity for the second day was two-fold; children were invited to participate in a lesson about the Maya calendar followed by a Maya calendar craft project. The Maya calendar lesson was taught by a Maya scholar, Elena [pseudonym], previously principal of the Tumul K'in Center for Learning in southern Belize, along with her husband, Antonio [pseudonym] a Mopán Maya who speaks Mopán and Q'eqchi' fluently. Elena and Antonio were not participants in my study because they were only present to teach the Maya calendar lesson for that day. However, I obtained permission and consent from them both to use the lesson that they presented to the children at the Motmot Camp in my research, as it was a part of the children's experience at the camp. Elena used a PowerPoint presentation to provide the children with visuals and more information as she went through the lesson. The children sat in chairs under the large tent along with the camp facilitators. To begin, Elena asked the children what they knew about the Maya calendar. There were several responses, but in response to one child's remark, Elena asked the group: "Do you think the Mayas are gone?" The children responded in a big chorus: "No!" Then several shouted: "We are the Mayas!" Elena said: "Exactly!"

Elena began with a discussion of the Maya calendar and explained that the three main calendars they would talk about are still used in some Maya communities today. For the Maya, the calendar was used to keep track of time and it was incredibly accurate. Elena explained that in order to understand the Maya calendars, first they needed to understand basic Maya math. She led the children in a quick tutorial about basic Maya counting and the symbols they used for counting. Several of the children were familiar with this method of keeping count. Elena then began by explaining the first calendar, the “Haab,” which translates to “year” and is a 365-day solar calendar with 18 months. All the months are made up of 20 days, with the exception of the last month which was made up of only 5 days. These 5 days were ceremonial days. Antonio walked the children through a discussion of the 18 months in the “Haab” calendar. He spoke the Maya word for each month [in Yucatec Maya] and had the children repeat the name. He then gave a translation of the word in English. For a few of the Maya month names, several children responded with the translation before Antonio did—they were familiar with the words and what they meant. Antonio explained that all the Maya month names related to an aspect of sustainability, the environment, food, animals, and the weather. I observed the older children paying close attention and engaged in the dialogue with Antonio. Many of the younger children were moving around in their seats, playing with their jewelry they had made during the beading activity, or seemingly daydreaming. It was later in the afternoon, and many of the younger children were yawning and visibly tired. As Elena quickly summarized, the “Haab” calendar, she asked the children how many days each month had, and they all responded: “20 days.” As Elena was about to move on, Angelina (age 6), sitting in the front row, raised her hand then said, “And the last one has 5!” Angelina was the youngest child at the camp, yet she was incredibly attentive and engaged during the entire lesson. So much so, that Elena commented to her that she will

make a great teacher. As she concluded the “Haab” calendar discussion, she articulated that it was used in much the same way as we use the Gregorian calendar— to keep track of things such as planting and harvesting corn and other crops, collecting taxes, and other economic activities.

Elena moved on to the second type of calendar, often referred to as the “long-count” calendar because it keeps track of larger periods of time. Again, she explained the math behind this calendar which was notated using Maya hieroglyphs. She explained that these calendars are often found on Maya temple sites and were used to document historical events. The third calendar, the “Tzolk’in,” was the Maya ceremonial/ spiritual calendar. which consisted of 260 days or cycles. It is best described as 2 gears—one gear containing 20 named days and a smaller gear with 13 numbered days. Each of the 20 named days also corresponded with each of the 13 numbered days creating (20x13) 260 unique days that held unique spiritual meaning. Elena shared that this calendar corresponds with the Popol Vuh, the Maya sacred book and each of the 20 named days is represented by a Maya hieroglyph [Nawal] that is associated with a sacred Maya spirit or deity. Each day carried a special meaning or connection to things like family, community, food, etc. She explained that this calendar is the one used to keep track of birthdays and that the day of a child’s birth was associated with specific characteristics and tendencies based on the spiritual associations for that given day. This discussion tied into the circle of connection and Nawal of the day that the children had experienced at the opening of each camp day.

Toward the end of the lesson, an outdoor party started across the road with loud music and fire crackers. This became quite disruptive for the children but especially the younger ones who were already fairly distracted. Luckily, Elena was just finishing up the calendar lesson and describing the Maya calendar activity that they would be doing next. The children moved to the

tables set up in the field and Arturo facilitated the calendar craft activity. He went through the calendar days from the Tzolk'in calendar and gave the name of the day in Maya. He then talked a little about the spiritual meaning of each day. Multiple printouts of the 20 different calendar days had been made; each child was given a day with the name in Yucatec along with colored rice and glue. Each child cut out their Maya hieroglyph, glued it on a paper plate and then decorated the glyph with colored rice. The children were animated and excited as they decorated their glyphs and talked and laughed with their peers for the duration of the activity.

The Maya calendar lesson and activity drew on children's prior knowledge and also offered new experiences for learning about Maya language, math, spirituality, values, and heritage. By the dialogue between the children, Elena, and Antonio, it was clear that many of the children were already familiar with spiritual aspects of the Maya calendar, some of the Maya words used in the calendar, and basic Maya counting. As Elena and Rodrigo talked with the children, they reaffirmed the children's knowledge and worked to help them build upon what they already knew.

Once the children finished the calendar craft, Rodrigo, Maribelle, and the counselors gathered everyone in a big circle to conduct a brief reflection time for children to share what they learned and what they enjoyed. Ernesto (age 11) shared that he learned how the Tzolk'in calendar worked, since he had heard about it but had not understood it. Alberto (age 8) commented on learning how to use the Maya counting system. Angelina (age 6) said she liked learning all the name days of the Maya calendar and making her Nawal, which was the first day called "Ix." Arabella (age 8) shared that she liked the Maya calendar lesson but had more fun making her painting of her favorite place in Succotz, which was the park. Following the

reflection, counselors talked about the schedule for the following day and the children walked home.

**Day 3.** The last day of camp was similar to the last day of the 2017 camp with the exception of the field trip to the Fajina. The children arrived in their tie dye camp t-shirts. Rodrigo started the camp by leading the children in a circle of connection meeting followed by a couple of short team-building games to get the children moving and working together. These games were very similar to the games in 2017, but not as long. While the children were engaged in this activity, Maribelle, Beatriz and several volunteers (mothers of campers) set out the bollos-making stations. As with the previous year, the ingredients were cooked and prepared ahead of time to speed up the process. Additional tables were set up to accommodate the large number of children, and camp counselors and volunteers facilitated the bollos-making at each station. The children were engaged in the process, and made as many bollos as they could until their tables ran out of ingredients. One of the differences between the 2017 and 2018 cook-off was the lack of an introduction to the cooking activity that tied the activity back in to the purpose of the camp. In 2017, Dr. Penados had given a short talk about the traditions behind bollos. However, the group was much smaller and the tables had not been so spread out the previous year. I did observe conversations between children and counselors as I visited each table that focused on the significance of corn as it related to making the bollos and other foods at home. Even without intentional instruction, the children made their own connections to Maya heritage.

Following the cook-off, counselors gathered the children into the same smaller groups they had been working in and talked with them about the field trip. Counselors and teachers reviewed rules and instructions, and children were reminded about the time they needed to return to camp for lunch. Everyone then walked over to the football field in the center of the village

where the Fajina was taking place. The Fajina was an archeology and culture fair hosted by a group of archeologists working on Maya sites within and around the Succotz Community. As with many programs, COVID-19 affected the continuation of the Fajina. Each year for several years, the fair was hosted in the village center at one of the local primary schools adjacent to the football field. Archeologists and members of the National Institute of Culture and History (NICH) set up booths related to the various projects taking place locally as well as nationally. Activity centers for children related to archeology and excavation, osteology, ceramics, weaving, ecology, beading/ seeding, and a variety of coloring activities related to ancient Maya culture and heritage kept children engaged. Additionally, there was a Maya ball game competition, palanquin races, atlatl/ hul'che (spear thrower) demonstrations and competitions, patolli games (a Maya board game that also has a gambling component), and a traditional Maya dance performance. The children were able to spend about an hour participating in the Fajina activities and demonstrations.

Following the field trip, the children came back to camp to enjoy their bollos for lunch just as periodic rain showers began. There was much excitement among the children as they talked about the various demonstrations and activities they experienced at the Fajina. I observed that the topics of conversations between the children focused more on the demonstrations, performances, and some of the crafts (specifically beading and weaving); not the archaeology. Many of the children suggested we incorporate a Maya ball game and dancing into future camps. As everyone finished their lunch, parents and family members started to arrive. We had hoped to create another children's art exhibition for family to view as we had done the previous year; however, we were unable to do so because of the rain storms. Dr. Penados welcomed parents and family and asked several children to showcase some of the artwork and crafts they had created

during the camp. He gave a brief overview of the camp experiences as well as a quick synopsis of the two stories that set the theme for the 2018 camp. He then invited the parents to enjoy the children's story creation performances. I have already discussed each group's story project based on my observations during their rehearsals. Their performances did not change from their practice run; though some of the children were a bit shy standing up in front of all the new people. Counselors had to encourage them to speak up and project their voices, but in a few of instances, the children deferred to their peers who then shared their parts with them. Following the story performances, children received their certificate of completion for the camp from their camp counselors and posed for a photo for their families.

### ***Camp Reflections***

**Camp Debriefing.** We decided to have a camp debriefing meeting immediately following the closing ceremony to accommodate concerns about upcoming scheduling conflicts later in the week. The first topic that came up was the issue of having so many children attend the camp with so few camp facilitators. As we talked through this, we concluded that the issue was not so much the sheer number of children as the age spread among the children. If all the children had been between 8-11 years old, the ratio of children to adults would likely have been less of a problem. However, there were many children who were under eight years old and this presented several difficulties. The camp was not intended for children younger than eight and therefore our camp planning did not align with the camp participants. The activities and schedule did not accommodate the needs of the younger children. This put stress on the facilitators as well as extra responsibility on the older children. There was a constant need to change or alter activity plans or to create alternative options on the fly to keep up with the needs of all the children. It was agreed that it was essential that future camps adhere to the policy concerning participants'

ages. Part of the concern both years was that we would not have enough children register to participate; however, for both years, this was not the case. Facilitators identified three steps to successfully adhere to this camp rule. First, parents needed to be made aware of the rules. The problems created when younger siblings were sent along with older camp participants made it difficult to meet the needs of all age groups, including health and safety concerns for the younger children. Second, registration needed to have a deadline prior to the first day of camp and no other children should be enrolled on the first day. Third, unregistered children who showed up to camp had to be turned away, even if this meant losing an older sibling who was already registered for the camp.

Facilitators also addressed the need for more activities. While we had planned for fewer activities than we had offered in 2017, some activities fell through at the last minute (pottery and the Nawal lesson), leaving gaps in the schedule that needed to be filled quickly. To address this, we discussed the need for consistent dates, such as the third week of July, to ensure that knowledge bearers and volunteers were able to commit in advance. This led to a conversation about the need for more organization and a delineation of responsibilities for camp facilitators. As with the prior year, everyone helped organize everything. As a result, we lacked efficiency and productivity that could come with certain people or groups taking on the responsibility for specific aspects of running the camp. This had been discussed in the previous year's debriefing meeting, though it had not yet been addressed.

Next, we addressed the issue of having inconsistent participation from camp counselors, volunteers, and community knowledge bearers. New counselors, such as Delores, Yasmine, Arturo, and Megan in 2017 and the four new Rotaract members in 2018, faced a bit of a learning curve. While there had been conversations between those who had participated in previous years



and the newcomers, talking about something is not the same as living the experience. Working with children, especially considering the makeup of the camp, can be challenging for folks who have not had much prior experience working with children. The original plan was to have the four new Rotaractors team up with the more experienced counselors—this did happen throughout the duration of the camp; however, because there were more children and fewer counselors on given days, some of the new counselors were asked to take on leadership roles. Maribelle and Dr. Penados discussed the importance of commitment and responsibility to the children, co-facilitators, selves, and to the program overall. For things to run smoothly and to be able to implement the agreed upon plan, all involved needed to follow through on the initial 3-day commitment to the camp. Dr. Penados invited the Rotaract members to discuss the possibility of forming a group within the club who might be interested in committing to the administering the program. We discussed similar issues related to parent volunteer help and the importance of more parental involvement as camp volunteers. Having more facilitators would provide for a division of responsibility based on everyone's strong suits rather than everyone doing everything. Additionally, we talked about the need to spend more time harnessing the local skills and knowledge of artisans from within the community. The past two years' health problems and scheduling conflicts prevented several knowledge bearers from participating. Part of the aims of the program was to find ways to encourage intergenerational experiences, particularly between elders in the community and children. We recognized this as a challenge because some of the elders who had an interest in partnering with the camp became physically unable to attend the camp. We talked briefly about the potential for bringing smaller groups to the knowledge bearers rather than asking them to come to us. We did not come up with a clear solution to this problem during the debriefing.

Finally, we discussed the planned activities, their implementation, and the extent to which the ultimate experiences of the children related to the original purpose of the camp. Facilitators felt that of the activities, the storytelling project and the Maya calendar lesson were most in line with the camp vision. The children were engaged and made meaningful connections to their personal lived experiences, their heritage, as well as to family and community values. The story telling project provided a variety of opportunities for children to develop self-esteem and interpersonal skills as they worked with their peers and counselors. Counselors felt that the lesson plan guide for the storytelling project was essential and felt that the level of detail provided in the plan would be beneficial for all the activities. While there were shorter plans provided for the beading and cooking, there was less actual lesson planning for the art and Maya calendar lesson because these activities were facilitated by community members who had experience teaching children. As we reflected, we discussed the need for access to all activity lesson plans prior to the beginning of camp so that counselors and volunteers would be better prepared help children make more meaningful connections to the objectives during each activity and to support the facilitator of the activity. We concluded the meeting with a plan for Rotaractors along with Maribelle to make house visits to the families of the children who participated as a way of establishing more rapport with parents and to recruit parent volunteers. We also planned a follow-up camp facilitator meeting after home visits were made.

**Personal Reflections.** My role during the 2018 camp continued to be that of participant/observer. I was part of the planning process and collaboratively worked with Dr. Penados, Maribelle, Beatriz, and Rodrigo to develop lesson plans that identified activity objectives and offered teaching strategies to help guide the children through the activity process. Logistics seemed to go a little more smoothly for this iteration of the camp, which I felt was in

part because four of the Rotaract counselors participated the year before and more of us were familiar with what needed to be done. The 2018 camp tried to address the suggestions offered by parents, children, and teachers in 2017. We tried to focus on community values, which I observed more consistently throughout the camp. Activities such as the circle of connection at the beginning of each day, the team building activities, the storytelling/ storytelling project, the painting project, the Maya calendar lesson, and the bollos-making all supported that goal. The concepts of living in community and gratitude with one another was woven throughout the camp and was visible in the exchanges and interactions between children and their peers and mentors. While we had many suggestions for more time and more activities, we ended up having to make a compromise with more time devoted to activity sessions but fewer activities offered. I felt that we still needed to work on a balance of time and activities, and we needed more volunteer and community knowledge bearer participation.

I observed many moments of intentional learning aligned with the vision of the program where teachers, knowledge bearers, and camp counselors were actively engaging the children in activities by scaffolding lessons, posing questions, encouraging active listening, and challenging children to think more deeply and, at times, more critically. I also observed moments of incidental learning, specifically following the field trip to the Fajina. I observed children's conversations about the Fajina during lunchtime and found that several children were making connections between the activities they were participating in at the Motmot Camp and the activities and demonstrations at the Fajina. As I mentioned above, several children requested the addition of the Maya ball game and dancing in the future—two activities we had discussed but had not yet found feasible, mainly due to the cost. In order to have the Maya ball game or

traditional dancing, we would be a need to hire Maya groups from Guatemala to come over to guide children in these activities because this knowledge was not readily available in Succotz.

To begin with, when we set the dates for the Motmot Camp, we did not realize that they coincided with the Fajina; however, this was brought to our attention by the Rotaract club a couple of days before the start of camp, and the Rotaractors thought it would be fun for the children to participate given the Fajina's focus on Maya culture. We also considered the fact that the children were most likely already aware that the Fajina was going to take place, and we were concerned that by not going, the children may not show up on the last day of camp. Therefore, we decided to make space in the schedule to take the children over to the festival. Dr. Penados and I both had reservations about this because of the general approach the Fajina program took in putting on this festival about the Maya in a traditionally Maya village without including the community members in the process. I had never attended the Fajina so I was not sure what to expect during our visit. I brought my field journal and took field notes and pictures of the event. As I explored the event, I felt like I was walking between worlds—my past and my present comingling. I knew almost every single person who was facilitating the Fajina. They were mostly all archeologists with whom I had worked, was friends with, or knew through academic circles and conferences. As I explored the booths, centers, and activities I was at once so familiar with everything on display and at the same time was having a hard time with the presentation of information. I vividly remember, and wrote a note in my field journal about one poster display with the title "Who Were the Maya?" This caught me off guard initially because of the use of past tense. Having just listened to Elena's presentation the day before and recalling her question: "Are the Mayas gone?" and the children's responses: "No! We are the Mayas!" I struggled with this juxtaposition. In context, the poster was about the ancient Maya and Maya archaeology in

and around the area. But in my mind, it highlighted many of the issues I have discussed previously about how first and foremost, contemporary Maya communities are viewed and portrayed in the country as a group separate and apart from the ancient Maya. Subliminal messages like these pervaded the festival right alongside contemporary Maya groups putting on traditional performances and demonstrations. For me, this was an example of how contemporary Maya communities are ignored for larger political purposes by larger institutions and the groups who work with withs entities.

I was not aware of how my own subjectivities impacted my observations during the Fajina until I began my analysis of my fieldnotes and compared them to my fieldnotes of my observations of the children's conversations following the Fajina. During my analysis, I realized that I had spent a large portion of time exploring the Fajina through a critical decolonizing lens and less time observing the experiences of Motmot Campers in the space. I did take notes at the Fajina about the activities or demonstrations to which the children gravitated; these most frequently being the crafts, dance performance, and ball game. These were also the topics the children were discussing during lunch. The way I experienced the Fajina was different from the experiences of the children who were ecstatic to have the opportunity to participate in other aspects of Maya heritage.

### **Summary**

Having spent so much time and effort collaboratively planning the heritage education program in Succotz, it was gratifying to see it all come together through the culmination of the Motmot Camps. While both the 2017 and 2018 iterations were similar, the modifications made in the 2018 camp reflected the results of an intentional process that elicited feedback from collaborators, participants, and parents gathered in the focus groups, written evaluations, and

interviews. Our constant objective was to improve the quality of the children's experiences while adhering to the original vision and purpose of the program. Looking back on evolution of the three camps, it was clear that much had been learned by both collaborators and participants. The challenge now was to sustain, even expand upon the program. We knew early on that in order to perpetuate the Motmot Camp and its vision, a permanent administrative team was essential. We also knew that financial constraints might make this difficult. Despite the challenges that might present themselves, the Motmot Camps of 2016, 2017, and 2018 have provided a foundation on which to build so that it is possible to continue offering the children of Succotz a fun and safe learning space to develop personal and social skills and to have opportunities for increased awareness around Maya heritage and agency. In the following chapter, I present my polyvocal analysis of participant's experiences in the process of developing and implementing the Motmot Camp.

## CHAPTER VI: POLYVOCAL NARRATIVES

This chapter represents participants' voices. I present participants' individual narratives through my polyvocal analysis as a way to share their stories in their own words. Postcritical ethnography framed by decolonizing methodologies requires that as a researcher, I find meaningful ways to ensure participants' voices are centered and respected, not only during data collection, but also in my representations of the data (Bocci, 2016; Noblit et al., 2004). As a collaborative, community-engaged project, our overall process has worked to ensure that all voices are heard and that authority is situated within the community and between collaborators. As collaboration is not part of writing a dissertation, this chapter is, therefore, meant to provide a space where participants' voices are given authority in the telling of their own stories of their experiences participating in the heritage education program. These narratives also offer participants an opportunity to introduce themselves and their identities, express their own conceptions of heritage and culture, explore how heritage and culture is practiced or celebrated within their community and between or within generations, and share how they choose or choose not to engage in cultural and/or heritage-based activities with family and community.

Using the methods for polyvocal analysis outlined in my methodology chapter, I constructed narratives by piecing together quotes from interview and focus group transcripts, survey questionnaires, children's work examples, co-facilitator journals, and informal oral contributions to camp activities and meetings (pulled from my field note transcripts). I chose each quote because of the way it supported each participant's experience or how it offered a fuller description and understanding of each participant. To maintain authenticity, I did not make changes to language, grammar, spelling or punctuation from the original data source. This is most evident in children's narratives, particularly excerpts that I pulled from children's written

data sources. For any Spanish or Maya words used, I did include an English translation in brackets. While I tried to stay true to the original syntax of each quote, there were times when I made small edits to maintain flow in each narrative. The quotes do not necessarily follow a chronological order within individual narratives; rather, I worked to mesh them together in ways that highlighted specific descriptions of experiences. Given the longevity of this research project, the depth and breadth of data that I collected, the number of participants, and their varying degrees of participation throughout this project, the length of each narrative presented in this chapter varies. There were folks who participated in the project from beginning to end, some who participated in only one phase of the project, and some who participated in multiple phases. This impacted the amounts and types of data that I had for each participant. Individual responses and participation also varied. There were some participants who made frequent and lengthy contributions and others who shared less. I intentionally chose to write this ethnography in chronological order because I felt it offered a more complete picture of the entire process. Somewhat in keeping with this style, I chose to order the presentation of each narrative based on the period of time each person participated starting with the beginning phase up to the conclusion of my research. I felt that this arrangement of individual narratives offered my readers insight into gradual progression of the project overall.

There were three participants, Ava, Marisol, and Isabel, who only participated in the preliminary exploratory interview that I conducted in 2015. I deliberated whether or not to include narratives for these participants because they did not participate in the program development phase; however, as I reflected, I realized that their contributions to initial discussions of a heritage program in Succotz were included in the compilation of thoughts and ideas that I shared with community members in our first focus group. Therefore, I felt their



voices should be included in this chapter. Additionally, there were several parents who participated in my study. While none of these parents participated in the actual heritage program, they either participated in the 2017 parent focus group, the 2018 individual parent interviews or in both, and their children participated in one or both summer camps. Consequently, I constructed family narratives for parent and child (in some cases sibling) participants. I felt that bringing these narratives together offered a more wholistic picture of parents' intentions for allowing their children to participate in the camp, children's experiences participating in the camp, and the possible impacts children's camp experiences may have had at home. In some of these family narratives, I also provide examples of children's work from the heritage camp as they relate to specific experiences that were shared. Table 10 provides the order of participants in this chapter, their roles, and the phases of the program in which they were a part.

**Table 10. Order of Participant Narratives, Project Roles, and Phases of Participation**

Name (Pseudonym)	Role	Phase 1: 2015	Phase 1: 2016	Phase 2: 2016	Phase 2: 2017	Phase 2: 2018
Marisol	Teacher, Retired	X				
Isabel	Cultural Heritage Specialist	X				
Ava	Teacher	X				
Sofia	Teacher	X	X			
Malia	Teacher	X	X			
Veronica	Teacher	X	X			
Itzel	Teacher	X	X			
Victor	Teacher	X				
Diego	Community Knowledge Bearer	X	X	X		
Jeraldo	Parent				X	
Jaime	Child				X	
Emilia	Parent				X	
Alonzo	Child				X	
Kamela	Parent					X
Tobias	Child					X
Angelina	Child					X
Lidia	Parent					X
Mia	Child					X
Ernesto	Child					X
Kailan	Parent					X
Martin	Child				X	X
Juanita	Parent					X
Nadir	Child				X	X
Elsa	Parent				X	X

Name (Pseudonym)	Role	Phase 1: 2015	Phase 1: 2016	Phase 2: 2016	Phase 2: 2017	Phase 2: 2018
Hector	Child				X	
Alberto	Child					X
Adriana	Parent				X	X
Josue	Child				X	X
Arabella	Child					X
Delores	Rotaract co-facilitator, camp counselor				X	X
Arturo	Rotaract co-facilitator, camp counselor				X	X
Yasmine	Rotaract co-facilitator, camp counselor				X	X
Megan	Rotaract co-facilitator, camp counselor				X	X
Beatriz	Teacher, Co-facilitator	X	X	X	X	X
Rodrigo	Teacher, Co-facilitator	X	X	X	X	X
Maribelle	Teacher, Co-facilitator	X	X	X	X	X

### Polyvocal Narratives

#### Marisol

My name is Marisol and I am a retired teacher here in the village. Here we are made up of mixtures, some mixtures. So, like, if I say Maya, my grandparents were Maya, but my father was not a Maya because my father came from Guatemala, so he's different from my grandparents. I learned a lot from my grandmother. So, we have a mixture of Maya, and we say Mestizo because others come and no, they're not Mayas, and they bring their culture and then we make a mixture. So, we've come to be like Mestizos like more modern than the, you know, than the ancestors. The dress, the way we live—everything. People used to have their milpas with many, many kinds of fruits which they dedicated themselves to, to plant, to, to grow corn and many other things. But we still have a li' bit from them, like the way we eat, because we still eat some of what they used to eat like the bollos or tamales, that's what we are known here in our village. But after that, we are being known also with the music, you know, because at first, a long time ago, you would hear the marimba music, but now it's not, it's not that common. We have [Xunantunich] which we are known here for that, for that site. We are also known for our

arts. We have many groups for the arts here. Um, they do stone-- little slates, and the carvings that they do with board. They have their special way in which they will do the carvings. There are many people who do their own embroidery and then they sell it. Many, many, many people live through their arts. They do it and they go and sell it by the ferry. There is [Diego's] center here. He used to teach pottery but see, he got sick. I remember when I was young, I used to see the older ladies with their long skirts and their embroidery. I saw many, many huipiles—not now. The embroidery and all of the beautiful work that's done, I think that that could still be taught. We used to have dancing groups, even in schools, we used to have a presentation from dancing. But in schools now, they don't do that. The teachers have to follow a curriculum. And that's our problem now, with our children, because when we used to go to school, it was far more different in, in our culture, in our religion. But now that is being lost because of the curriculums because they have to do much what the government is stressing to do. So, now it's being hard for teachers to include culture or values in the classroom now. And it's very hard now, you can't even scold the child. I remember in my time we could say "no you can't do those things, no, you have to ..." but now, children, they feel free. Nothing can be said to them. I think there is a need for something that would, that would maybe help some young people to get involved in the community. Sometimes maybe we are not being seen [as Mayan]. Like if children don't see something related to them in the country. But we know that we do have important things here in the village. It's important for us to pass that on. So, um, our culture is important. It's very important who I am. But I am old and don't participate much in other things, only in the church. But it's still important to me.

## **Isabel**

I am Isabel. I am 38, and I live and work here in [Benque]. I work as a culture and arts coordinator for [a government ministry]. I am mestizo, but whenever we are asked for our identity, we must answer, I am a Belizean. That's the first thing that we should answer. I am a Belizean, descendant of the Mayas and the Spaniards, and I am Mestizo; that should be our correct answer. And that is what we are trying to promote in our community, before being a Mestizo we are a Belizean. I consider the most important thing is that our traditions and our beliefs would continue for our future generations, um, the preservation and the conservation of our intangible heritage and our tangible heritage should continue and must continue. It is believed that, um, this part of the country, we are very traditional and that is true because of our beliefs. Our tradition cannot continue if we do not believe. So, we must believe in what we are doing in order that our traditions must continue. I am not so much related to the [Succotz] people. I studied abroad, I came here, I started to work. We do work with some of the groups, with the artisans over that side. From time to time, I have seen that some, not everybody, but [Succotz] people are not proud of their village, they deny being from there. I think that they should, they should get together. And they lack of leadership. To me, they lack leadership and education in schools. The principals in schools there need to have in their mind, our ancestry and pass it to the students. And also, the language, I know that they spoke Yucatec, and this will be very important to rescue. So, the people in the [Succotz] community, those people might have the knowledge and they can give their input. They should be invited also to come and participate and share their ideas. Because when, whenever you involve the community, they feel part of it and they are going to give suggestions and ideas. Also, education starts from home with grandma and the communication to the grandsons. You can see that the values are going out of the place.

The respect is going out of the place, because, um, what, what is happening is that because of lack of jobs, parents have to go and work and they would leave the children with like with the aunt, an aunt that doesn't know the values of the great-grandfathers and they wouldn't teach it to the children. But there is interest in the cultural arts and values, because whenever we offer the marimba classes or other activities here, that children, they come walking all the way from [Succotz] to come and learn.

### **Ava**

My name is Ava. I am 34 years old, and I live in [Benque] where I am a teacher and school counselor. I'm a mixture of different races. From my father's side I come from Mestizo culture. My grandparents came from Guatemala. I would say I'm Latina or Mestizo. At this point in my life, I see myself as a mother of three little children who I live for, and I want to do everything for them and I want to be their role model. I do see myself as, um, a person with, with a conscience in terms of values. I think right now the things I value are the things that were passed to me from my father. I did have my mom for a couple of years but, I think my dad made most of the impact in the way I think today. So, I feel my heritage and history comes more from him. When I think about heritage, I think more about, you know, the things that you can't touch, like those intangible things. But it's very important. I mean, that that defines who you are then. Today, youth, they don't see that as, as valuable. For example, my grandmother from my mother's side spoke Maya, but that was never something that was passed on to my mom. So, it was lost already one generation ago. Or thinking about my dad's side and traditions and Mestizo culture—the dances. They bring that back, but that's lost already. It was good for that time. Now it's something different. So, we can learn about how life was back then, but we can't bring it back.

## **Sofia**

I am Sofia, I've taught for—this is my twelfth year. I am teaching eleven- and twelve-year-old students again this year. I can say that I am a Mestizo. On my 30 years being a Mestizo and in living in this beautiful village makes me feel proud of it. Indeed, about the culture I—I can say that I want to learn more and take more part in it. Just today I was telling my husband that we need to have a trip up to [Xunantunich]. I visited the site maybe eight years ago and living in this village, we don't go often. And as villagers we are not quite involved in the work up there, which shouldn't happen. We should be more acquainted with the site, and what it brings the village as well because we have a Maya site here, and we must know about it. There are many things that are being—fading away here in our village, and I would want to bring it up as an educator. I'd say that working with the children would be a good start. I guess instilling in them who they are and knowing more about it. I see, even with myself sometimes, technology is one of the things that affects even small ones. When I was a little younger, I remember that, here in our village, when the village fiesta was on, the older people would do a lot of dances that reminded us about our culture. But as I said, it's fading away. And I feel now that we are talking about it—when I was five or six years, I remember the marimba playing and the dancing, the May Pole, and all those things. But after that, now, it's not that common. But if people can see things happening in the village, especially with the little ones, then they will say “okay it is starting up again ...” and they will be willing to take part in different things. I think for a program, summertime, especially in July, is good because children and teachers have more time. I think a program that lets the children explore different things—maybe have activities about Maya dialect, the arts and crafts, music. My parents they dance marimba music, and I look at them and I said “I really want to learn!” I'm willing to learn and work if a group of us can get

together. Because in that way, I would show my children, and teach them, and as an educator as well, it's very important to pass on the traditions and the cultural knowledge. Having a time like now where we can all talk, it is making us aware of what we're losing so we can maybe do something about it. Personally, as a teacher, and a parent, I feel like you do feel like sometimes you feel like you have to do something for these children. But I speak from my experience—sometimes you feel so excited and you want to do it, there are no resources. So, then it just falls down and then it just closes the idea and everything goes back again to normal. So, to do a heritage program for children, I think that's one of the main reasons I feel like, yes, we have to want to, but we need a good plan and a lot of help.

### **Malia**

My name is Malia. I am 30 years and I have been living here in [Succotz] all my life. I am a teacher here in my community. I belong to Mestizo a community. The most important thing in my life is my family and my job, and teaching. For me, heritage is learning about our roots—how our community was formed, how our population, from where it all began. As teachers we're usually expected to teach that, but whenever I am expected to teach history or heritage it would be only about our ethnic groups. How they are throughout the country and the formation of those groups. I see that when we are teaching now, it should be about the Mayas. Because it starts—it all started from there—from the Mayas. Like we have [Xunantunich] here. But from what I see, people usually don't visit. I see there, that they don't have the interest. It's usually people from outside that come and visit there at the site. Maybe because it's very close and don't think about it—they don't show any interest. And the same in the community they don't do a lot of activities for heritage and culture. We do have a fair here every year and they usually do—it's a Mestizo community so they do the dances that are based on Mestizo culture. I am usually engaged in

practicing some of the customs and traditions. One example would be food. Mestizo food is common in my everyday meal like corn tortillas, beans, bollos, tamales, escabeche. Spanish is my preferred language, and I am Catholic—these are also two characteristics of the Mestizo. Some of the common traditions that are usually practiced in the community are what we call the Novenas, which is the nine—we pray for nine days. And then another common thing would be November, the “finados,” and we make food and set the tables with candles, which is about the day of the dead. That would be the most common activities that we doing here that promote tradition. But our young people are usually not interested because it’s like more internet, more television, or electronics. Even in school, I cannot spend much time teaching about culture or ethnic groups—the times not enough. So, they don’t have opportunities to learn more. They need something to motivate them because the traditions are being lost. Maybe through after school clubs or a summer program. But the problem would be finding someone that is willing to give their time and organize it. I would be willing to help. That way we have something where you are getting children involved in something that would benefit them in a positive way. In the community I don’t hear anything going on in the summer for children. Nothing. Children they just stay at home with TV and electronics. But the children want to participate in things. With a summer program, I think the children would participate a lot. If before starting the summer they promoted it in school—not only to Catholic school, or the Nazarene school, but everywhere in the community, I think a lot would participate. It could bring in traditional things like the food, gardening, music, dance because the traditions are being lost.

### **Veronica**

My name is Veronica, and I am 31 years old, and I have been a teacher for 11 years teaching five- and six-year-olds. I think of heritage as like, where your roots come from. For me,



it basically means the beliefs and principles that have been passed on to me by my parents and grandparents. My greatest engagement in my cultural heritage would be my religion. The traditional prayers and yearly events that we celebrate and the culture. Like the Novenas, like, Christmas, like New Year's, like the Finados, that we celebrate at that comes from the—we're Mestizo that also comes from the Maya side, like a blend. As a teacher, I feel that children, they are not fully aware of their culture and their ethnicity. To me, culture and identity, it's like a gift from your parents and many children, they don't get that. Some children reach school and they don't really have a sense of cultural identity because when, I am teaching, then the children would say, "Oh yes, I speak Maya, my mommy speaks Maya" and then they realize their identity. They don't really have that understanding of what is a Mestizo they don't identify themselves until they come to school. But in school there is not enough time. Because we only have the "ethnic groups" unit and at the primary level, we only have it for two or three weeks and we only talk about four groups and basically show them pictures of how they dress and what they eat. In school there's no room for more. Like our school, we've tried having clubs, so if we had different activities about culture where children can get involved that might work. Also, I find that children do not have programs during summer. I remember, when I was small, I recall going to Mr. [Diego's] pottery center and as children we used to carve the, the turtles and the whistles and that kept— that's, that's still in my mind so that I know that's part of me. And now, like children, they don't get the opportunity at all right now. I think if maybe people gather like teachers and people like [Diego] and make a plan on how to make it interesting for children. I think that's the first step for doing something.

## **Itzel**

My name is Itzel. I am 29 years old. I have been teaching primary school for nine years here in the village. I am from [Succotz]. Culture to me means your roots. Where you come from, who you are, your background. Your culture is what is exposed to you every day. My heritage, it comes from the first people that inhabited our area—the Maya. My family, we are a mix. We are from—well, my great grandfather from the Yucatan and then my great grandmother from the Guatemalan side. So, it's about both mixture of Mayas. Since I was little, I was introduced to my culture without knowing. As far as I remember when my grandfather used to tell me stories about our village. And we Mayas, we have a lot of history to show and tell. And even in present day we are still discovering more and more things about the Maya. My mom introduced me to the food and religion. I believe I grew up with those customs in my family. Most of our children in school are Maya—decedents from the Mayas. But the children, they're moving away from their heritage. Some of them are really, really into their heritage; but others, other children, the really don't care probably, because it all comes part of the family as well. Bringing it from home. For some, they know about their heritage because it is, a custom in their house, but most of them, they would probably just ignore, or don't take really the importance. But it's really important. In our Catholic religion we have many beliefs and it comes back and dealing with the Maya as well. Even in our classroom we also do all those little things dealing with religion and culture. Like in October we celebrate Los Finados. It's in their background because they celebrate it in their family as well. And, well, even when school trips come, they try to take a specific day to go and visit [Diosa De Peidra]. As teachers, it's our job just to enforce and remind them about what their culture is and where do we come from and what's the meaning about this special festivity or this place or some part of our history. But in school there is limited time. In our village, the culture, it

all is dying out. We have a lot to offer and we need to find ways to help the children know and remember.

### **Valentino**

I am Valentino, and I am 30 years old. I believe I am going to die here in [Succotz]. I teach primary school here. For me, culture or heritage is going back to my roots and practicing and conserving the customs of my ancestors. It is being proud of one's self, from where I come from, my past, the teaching of my parents and the community as a whole. I believe that it's important you know and pass on the traditions to our children—those that will come. But we are losing our culture. I don't know if that's only here in Belize or if it's everywhere. We are modernizing ourselves; the children as well. The pride is not there. And we are influenced by television, internet, things like that. And in our schools—the system is so focused on covering curriculum, covering material that culture is not part of our curriculum. It's broad. It's just generally about Mestizo. Like also, we know that [Xunantunich] is there, but we don't have any voice or vote, or nothing. It is here in our village but hasn't and I don't think it will benefit my village in any way. NICH is responsible there. NICH is really not into, like, “okay, let's conserve our culture.” They are just there to make money and benefit in any way they can from the ruins. That's money. I don't really want to sound negative but they do.

And, when I was looking around and observing I noticed that most of our old folks are dying. And we are losing lots of information because I know from what my father tells me, but he's not old enough. There are older people who know more. And we don't take the time to go into to them because we're busy. But thinking and not doing any action, does nothing. So, that's one of the things that I would like to be a part of. And personally, I've been not much involved in cultural things, but I have it in my heart, and I believe that it should be, but it takes time.

Personally, I am a supporter of any activity that has to do with my culture, and I want to participate. With the children we can teach them the concept of the marimba, music, they would be engaged! They could write their own lyrics, using the language—not Spanish go back to your roots, which would be Maya. Use the basic words, simple lullabies, folk lore, have them participate in drama, or a short skit. Also, like bringing old folks from the community, and introduce them to the children, and maybe have them share something like a story. At the camp the children were really excited to do all the activities. I was helping with the slate carving and with the games. The slate carving, it was sort of hard for some of them; but they kept trying. And they were proud of their little slates when they finished. The children were asking for more and they want to do the clubs. I want to help with the clubs for fall. I think for us, as teachers, we have to make the time. If we don't make the time it won't happen.

### **Diego**

I am Diego. My ancestors were the Mayas. I have been a potter here in my community for many years. My family, we work with children and others from the village or any person who wants to learn. To me, our community needs to think about the bigger picture of heritage and culture. My understanding is that it looks like our heritage, our culture— it's forgotten or it's put aside and there's no one to continue as it was before. But really, what is happening is we are in the process of developing. But that doesn't mean that technology can take away all the cultural things. Technology is good but we must keep in mind that the community is so rich. We have put aside and preserve that knowledge. Especially when we remember that in the past it was so much better for cultural preservation. The activities during festivities, things like that, it was great. But today, also we can see—a kind of problem. And most of our problem is that when we want to start with something like some music, the young people turn to the television. And that is done.

Things cannot be put back again. I can see the richness of the culture and I can say that we are not doing good. But somebody else out there is doing—is using us. And I say using us, I feel myself as a descendent of Mayas. There are business persons who are not descendants, who put a big sign “Mayan Culture.” And if they are doing it, why aren’t we? Part of it is, I can say, we have so many things that we are doing, but we don’t put the time aside to create these opportunities. Especially with the young people So I feel that if we get together and think of how we can recognize the strengths in our community, and we can get organized, we can get some type of benefit from it. I can say that apart from being a person that was really part of culture in [Succotz], I feel that I am an artist. And together with art, and music, and the traditional dances, I think that is something that is wanted by all visitors. And the skills we have. For example, the marimba, was the most important musical instrument in our community before. Because as I said, if others are using our heritage— which is myself, which is part of us—we ourselves should get involved in the business. So, I feel that if we get together and think of how we can recognize the strengths in our community, and we can get organized, we can get some type of benefit from it. Which is not easy because I believe that teachers are hardworking and can be the ones that can lead and others who can understand and help the process of development. I myself am not in a condition to be the one to lead [due to illness], but I am wishing and willing to contribute my time. Our culture in Belize is rich in resources. Looking at our elders in the past and looking at our elders today, there’s a lot of difference but still our elders from the past have given us something. Especially when I think that because of my grandmother I learned pottery and from my father I learned art, which is carving, painting, and other things. So, what are we going to do? Be dependent on others—not really be independent but work for businesses that use us and our natural resources? Or come together with our cultural and natural resources that are in our hands.

Because culture, it's a way of life. And it's very important. We used to have a community center in the village center, but it is old and falling down; but there is a need for a proper space for community gathering and for children. We should not focus in schools because there we are up against bureaucracy of government and religion and political affiliations. It is hard because of politics in the village. We need a community meeting to clear the air. We can invite interested folks to talk and share out problems from the past and suggestions for future. A space for us to exchange our knowledge and share our ways of thinking.

**Family Narrative: Jeraldo and Jaime**

I am Jeraldo. I am 29, and I am a teacher here in the village. My son Jaime participated in the [Toh] camp this year. My younger son also came along on the second and third day. In my opinion, I think that everything is totally important concerning culture and heritage. There is a lot involved in heritage— like arts, especially the Mayas. So, um, I think art is very important. It was used as a way of saying something or telling a story. I would suggest that, um, arts really implicates a whole lot of our culture. I've got the opportunity to learn about the arts, like pottery and slate carving, when I was young. And so, I would like for my kids to learn also because it's a very good way of, of leaving something for the others to see like the Mayas did it that same way. They worked on their carvings, and they are still there. So, if my sons would have that opportunity to learn it, that would be a yes for me on anything that has to with culture and heritage. I also want to pass on to my children the values of, um, family love, family respect. I think as families, we need to work a lot on keeping the values and home and in the community. Because nowadays, um, you could say that many families are disintegrating, and there's a large focus from parents providing materials rather than teaching them respect and other values.

My name is Jaime, and I am nine years old. My favorite activities I did at camp were the beading and the clay. I like the clay because you can make anything. The clay feels sticky in my hands, but I like making my nest like the one from the story about the squirrel and the pigeon. I made like a little pot and then I made it bigger. Then I made little eggs from the clay to put inside the nest. I liked the story about the pigeon and the squirrel because it made me laugh. I learned that the Maya used seeds from trees to make necklaces. I made a bracelet with the Guanacaste seed. I liked the beading because I was good at it. I learned the Maya names for lots of animals in [Succotz] like the “kuk” that means “Squirrel.” I learned that I need to listen to my little brother. He came to camp with me today, but he was too small. And he was following me around, and he was in the way when we were playing games, but Mrs. Maribelle told us we had to listen because we were not doing the right steps for the game and that my brother was. I didn’t like the slate carving so much because it was hard and it hurt my hand. Next time we should play more games like football. I will remember the clay and the beading because I have my nest I made and my seed bracelet.

**Figure 2. Jaime’s Clay Bird Nest**



### **Family Narrative: Emilia and Alonzo**

My name is Emilia. I am 35 years old, and I am from [Benque]. I consider myself Mestizo. I don't know much about [Succotz] because I did not grow up in the village. I remember my dad always telling us stories of what he knows about the Maya because he worked at [Maya site] as a caretaker when I was small. But I am not a person who really emphasizes culture. I just believe in God and try to live in the present and make the best of now to enjoy tomorrow. Um, to be honest, I was not aware as to what was going to happen at the camp. Maybe it was part of my responsibility to find out, but nonetheless I signed [consent/ permission to participate] as an opportunity for my son to socialize with others instead of being in front of the television, or misbehaving at home. I thought it would be something constructive for him. What I like about the camp is the organization—you were well organized. You, um, you had a good means of communication with parents. You sent a schedule. So, I was quite aware of what was occurring on a given day. Um, I think the activities, they were very meaningful. Um, I know my son enjoyed it. Alonzo came home and shared the stories of the Maya he was told about. He liked the stories told, the activities, and being with other children. He learned a little bit more about the Mayas and their arts.

My name is Alonzo. I am 10 years old. My favorite part about the [Toh] camp was the storytelling and making my Maya mask. I liked to hear the different stories because they were funny. I learn some Maya names for animals like “wech” means “armadillo” I never know that before. I learn the story of the Toh, and I told it to my mom and dad. I learn how to make bollos, but I didn't like to eat them. I would like to have more time for games. The most important thing I will remember is about the Toh and why he has a tail that look funny.



**Figure 3. Alonzo Making His Maya Mask**



**Family Narrative: Kamela, Tobias, and Angelina**

My name is Kamela, and I am 29 years old. I have two children, Tobias is eight and Angelina is six years old. From my perspective, my culture is very important to me and my family. It's a tradition to pass our culture to our children and teach them how to conserve our culture. Like my grandparents, they take into consideration of what they have been taught before and they tend to give it to their, children. And then my parents pass it to me, and I will like pass it to my children. And, and that's a very great advantage. 'Cause um, nowadays the world is changing. Technology is changing a lot. And the time before, it's not the same as now. It's very different. So, um, I think passing my culture to them is very important because they can have like the difference between the past and now. Like the agriculture, because, um, my, grandparent used to be a chiclero. He used to hunt a lot. And like before, they would hunt for their food and it's very, precious that we know that. And nowadays it's not like before. But I have my uncle, and he has a ranch. We sometimes go there and dig out the, the foods from soil, or we go get plants. But they, my children, they learn. Whenever there are culture activities we tend to go and participate or take a look at what they have to show. For example, in [Benque at a government museum] they have many activities, and I like to go and see the performances they show. Also, at home my parents, for finados, they cook and make prayers for our dead relatives. and that's a

way to show my children that even if they have died, we still remember them and offer them what they used to eat or drink when they were alive. To me this [Toh] camp is a good way to make children take the advantage of making with their own hands clay and other activities. And, their drawings of the community. I, I think it's, it's a really great advantage about having them think about what is important to them here. The places and the people like that. And the calendar, I think it's very helpful for, for them. Especially when they, they go to school they know a bit of their whole— their culture and history. The camp had a positive impact on them because, um, well, they have brought home their stuff told me about, um, what they have done. And Tobias went to my mom's, and she told me that he was telling her about how he learned to make the brown color—mixing colors when he was painting. And he knows now how to mix the, um, colors and bring out the next color. And the tie dye. That was really nice. That's what he liked. And having games and sports. They love that. The camp is very beneficial for kids. It's summer right now and that's a way for them to participate and learn new things. Things that they might not learn at school, but they have the, the, the advantage to learn in depth and in the camp and engage and interact with new students that maybe, they haven't met before. I think that speaking with the children and teaching them to behave and, and discipline, and work together, that's a really nice idea. They, they go to meet them, and, and making friends. I take this program as a success for my children for them to learn more. And thank you all for the time given to teach these children something valuable in our community.

My name is Tobias. I am 8 years old. I go to school here in [Succotz]. I liked going to the camp and making my painting and my tie dye shirt and playing games with other kids. When I look at my shirt, it make me feel happy to see all the colors. I like the storytelling and making our stories and learning about all the colors of corn. The corn was important to the Mayas

because they believed the Mayan gods made them from the corn. The corn was the main food of the Mayas. We use corn for our food. Like the bollos and cereal. The corn stories tell us it is important to work together. I think it's like the corn game we played yesterday. We have to share. I like painting most because I learn how to mix the colors -- Yellow, red, and, Blue, makes brown. I made my painting of the river because it is refreshing you can have fun you can go swimming you can relax you can be with family.

**Figure 4. Tobias's Painting of His Favorite Place in Succotz**



My name is Angelina. I am 6. I liked going to the camp with my brother. I liked the story about the corn, it told us about the four colors of corn. The Mayans were made from the corn and they grew the corn the gods gave them, and they ate the corn. Like we eat foods here from corn, like the tortillas—I love tortillas. And bollos. And the marshmallows! I never know marshmallows has corn inside. On the bag it tells the things in the marshmallows. My favorite part was the calendar of the Maya and art. My favorite place in [Succotz] is the park because I play on the swings with my friends. I learned the numbers—how to count with the dots and lines like on the ruins. I liked learning the names of the days of the months. I liked making my Nawal the best. It's the day name called Ak'b'al.

**Figure 5. Angelina’s Maya Calendar Nawal Craft**



**Family Narrative: Lidia, Mia, and Ernesto**

My name is Lidia, and I am 46 years old. I live in [Succotz]. I have eight children. My eldest is 24 and my youngest is 3 years old. For me, culture is like what we keep from our ancestors, their way of living, especially the food. I am proud to be a Mestizo. Our culture is starting to disappear because our young people don't know about the culture. We need to teach our kids what is our culture, for them to teach when they have their kids. We don't have many cultural activities in our community that often. Our traditions are disappearing because there is not practice of it. So, my kids asked me if they could go to the camp; because I didn't know about it. I think it's very important what the camp is doing. For me it's like having— making more relationships between the kids and the community and getting more used to having communication with others. And then, um, the things that they're making, like, um, arts and craft. That is why I really appreciate the camp and all the activities for our kids. I was asking them, um, every day what they did. Mia said, “mommy, I'm going to make my own bollos. Because they said they're going to teach us to make bollos.” She showed me her bracelet and necklace that she made. Then she went and hide it because she said “nobody's supposed to touch that, those things that she make.” But Ernesto, he is a quiet child. He does not come home and

share with me the things he does. We as parents, we should help like in doing groups—like helping at the camp because Mia was saying how many children were there. So, we could donate for food or items or we can go along and show the kids our own recipes or activities to where they can get to know more about our culture and the people here.

My name is Ernesto. I am 11 years old. The corn was important to the Mayan ancestors and they grew the corn just like today. We use corn like for tortillas—like my mom make the corn tortillas, and she make tamales and bollos. That story about the four colors of corn—the cereque he didn't wanna share the corn he took from the ants and the animals were starving but to get the corn out of the mountain they must work together. I liked the story of about how the Maya are called "People of the Corn." In that one, I see the corn was important and the Mayas were thanked the gods for making them and giving them the seeds to grow. Like how we need to say thanks to our mom and dad for things. My favorite place in [Succotz] is the river. I go there with my family to swim and relax. It is very nice there with the trees and the grass. I learned how the Maya calendar works like two gears that go around to give the name day and the number day because before I saw the Nawal, but I didn't know that about the number days.

**Figure 6. Ernesto's Painting of His Favorite Place in Succotz**



My name is Mia. I am 8 years old. I liked giving the corn away, and I liked the story about how the colors of corn happen. The story tells us how to share. Corn was very important to

the Mayas. We eat corn at home, like tortillas. The stories tell us to be nice and kind. Today I did a painting of the park; I like the park because I can play games. It is my favorite place in [Succotz]. I love making the bollos. This is my favorite thing I did here. I want to eat all the ones I make, but Mrs. Maribelle says I have to share them. The Mayas made the bollos, and we're still Maya, and we make the bollos. I will help my mom make the bollos at home.

**Figure 7. Mia Making Bollos**



**Family Narrative: Kailan and Martin**

My name is Kailan, and I am 36 years old. I was born in Guatemala, but I live here in [Succotz]. Culture is a very important aspect of my life, like the food, the language, the music. Some things you're born with, others you learn and adopt to it. Things we do as a family is sometimes we cook traditional food, and other times we visit places that teach about our culture, like [Xunantunich]. Also, the dances, my parents teach us about that. I sent Martin to the camp so he could learn more about the Mayas and the culture. I see the camp teaching about how the Mayas used to live, and it gives the children a chance to learn those things and practice, um, making arts and crafts like before. For me, it's good for them to participate because in that way they, they are learning, learning, arts and craft, especially slate. There is no other way they can go and learn that. Not at school or anywhere. Like Martin, since last year, he now participates at

home with making the food; he never did that before. Like, he want to eat, but no want to help make it. He learned from the camp how to make the bollos. He loves to do that. This year, he said he liked the painting activity, and liked to paint the ruins and learn about the Maya calendar. For me, the camp teaches about the heritage in [Succotz], like how the Maya used to do things and how we do some of those things still. I think the camp also involves the community, like each year more and more children want to participate; they love the program.

I am Martin. I am 10/11 years old. I like the camp because it teaches me how to do lots of things. I carved a turtle on my slate. It was kind of hard, but I like how it looks finished. I like the story of the Toh and how it lost its tail. The other animals worked hard, but he did not help them so I think that's how come he lost he tail. I liked the slat carving most because it remind me of how the Mayas carve on the ruins. 3 things I learn I never know befor is how to make bolos how to call the animals in Maya like pepem buterfly I learn the story of the Toh. I never forget the bolos and the slat[e] carving. I learned about how to give the corn but also, I was needing to get it from others because I tried to give all my corn away without getting any to win the game. But, that was not how I was supposed to do it. I learn about give and take. The corn was very important to the Mayas, and they got the corn seeds from the gods and planted it and made their food from the corn. We use the corn for food also like the bollos—that's from the Mayas long ago. The story of the how come there's four colors of corn teaches about how to share things with others not just take. My favorite place in [Succotz] is the Maya ruins. It teaches us how the Mayas lived.

**Figure 8. Martin Holding His Finished Slate Carving**



**Family Narrative: Juanita and Nadir**

My name is Juanita. I am 29 years old. I am a teacher in [Benque]. Our family, we connect with our traditions especially with the food and also with our community. The person who teach us the past was my grandfather. But now if I don't tell my child all the past things that we do in our community, it'll be gone forever. But telling them this is what we do here in our community, this is what we, we have, we have our river, we have our land, our temple [Xunantunich]. We have a lot of things here in [Succotz] that children, some of them don't even know our ancestors were the Maya. I take my family up to the temple sometimes, but I um, I get very scared. It feels—like, haunting. But we still go. In [Succotz] We still help each other. Like it's sometimes the youth that is growing right now, we see that they are more into phone, internet, Facebook. And in the past, they used to go out and play and have fun. But here in our community, we still have youth that are out there playing and having fun with each other. We still have that here in our community. The camp, especially for the children is where they go they go and have fun and learn as well. And learn to communicate with each other. And that's how it's supposed to be in a community. Together. Learning new things. I like it because parents are



seeing that they're learning something from our community. Last year Nadir told me that he was learning how to do carving. Yeah. And that's very good because that's not something that he can do for himself. And he can start doing it. They sell it down there. It's something that will benefit him. He's learning something new. And also, I think the marimba, he could learn to play marimba—and those things, the youth from right now, they're not into marimba. And our old people who are playing marimba, they're old. We need young people to learn how to play that so our traditions continue.

My name is Nadir. I am 9/10 years old. I like all the activities at the camp like the beading, slate, masks, the clay, the marimba, and the games. I love all of them. I like playing the marimba. Before I didn't like the music much, but when I played it, I liked it because I learned a song. I learned about the Toh story and I never know that words we call the animals are Maya words. Like chi'wo that's how we call the tarantula. Wech is how we call the Armadillo. I like learning more names of the animals in Maya. I never know before how to do the bollos. I never know how to do the bracelet with the seeds and the slate carving. I think we need more games and football. The most important thing I will remember is the marimba and the slate carving. Today I learn about the four colors of the corn and how the animals worked together to try to get the corn from the mountain. The Mayas got the corn from the gods and the planted it. That's how come we have corn today. Like the bollos are made from the corn. I love to eat the bollos! I made bollos last year and this year. That is a Maya food. I learn today about the painting and mixing colors, and I made my painting for [Diosa D Piedra]. [Xunantunich] is important to me because it was made from the Mayas. I like going there sometimes with my family. The temple is very high.

**Figure 9. Nadir's Painting of His Favorite Place in Succotz**



**Family Narrative: Elsa, Hector, and Alberto**

My name is Elsa. I am 46 years old, and I have two boys, Hector, he is now 10, and Alberto is 8. I was born in [Benque] but now I live here in the village. Hector did the camp last year [2017], and Alberto did the camp this year [2018]. Culture and heritage to me means the customs, traditions and beliefs from our past ancestors that we continue doing, practicing in our present. My children and I are engaged in our culture. For example- food such as the bollos or tamales, which was prepared by our past grandparents. I learnt to doing and also to eat them. Now I prepare it and give it to my children. Also, another one would be the novena prayer our past ancestors used to do. I go, I practice it, and I take my children with me so that they can learn and practice it in the future. The same goes with the marimba music. My grandparents used to listen and dance the marimba, and so my grandparents, then my parents, and now I love the marimba music and if there is an opportunity to dance it, I dance and I hope one day I will teach my children to dance it too. I wanted my children to participate in the camp because it's very

important for him to learn our culture and traditions. Hector said he loved the preparation of the food—the bollos. He was excited he could do that himself. Before, he never shows interest in cooking. I guess that's what motivates them, seeing others doing. And then they want to do the same thing. Right? I guess that's why kids like being interactive—interacting with each other. So, you know, and that's how sometimes they don't do at home. But, if they see other kids doing and helping they want to do that too. The kids, they want to learn more. Like, for example, they slate carving. They like to do it, but since it's only a couple of hours then they have to jump to another activity. It's not enough time. Also, I think the language is important. Some of us, our parents used to speak [Maya]. But the language is being lost. Hector said about the story of the Toh and all the Maya animals names he learnt. This is very important to me because nowadays the children they don't know the language. This was Alberto's first year. He liked it and he said how he was learning about our food and stories about the Maya and the corn, also about the Mayan calendar and numbers. Alberto loved learning the Mayan numbers and preparing the bollos. I think the camp makes him aware that our ancestors are very valuable. He told me about the hard process corn goes through to reach our table and about milpa farming. I would like to participate—I could help the children learn to do some of the traditional sweets.

My name is Hector. I am 9 years old. I liked the games the most because the teamwork we used in the games. I got new friends. I like the obstacle course because it was fun to play together. Three things I learn I never know before is the Maya names of the animals, I learn beading with the seeds, the slate. Carving the slate was fun because it was east to scrape but it takes a long time. I will always remember the bollos because I learn to make them, and I love to eat them.

**Figure 10. Hector Carving His Turtle on Slate**



My name is Alberto. I am 8 years old. I liked the camp this year. Today I learned about the stories of the corn and about the Maya growing the corn. The corn was very important to the Mayas. We eat lots of corn today. I like my mom's corn tortillas. I paynt the school bicase I lorn to read and write and do things and play with frinds. I learned about the Mayan calendar and how the Mayas counted today. I liked learning about the Mayan calendar and the Mayan numbers the best. I made my nawal for the day Ix.

**Figure 11. Alberto's Maya Calendar Nawal Craft**



**Family Narrative: Adriana, Josue, and Arabella**

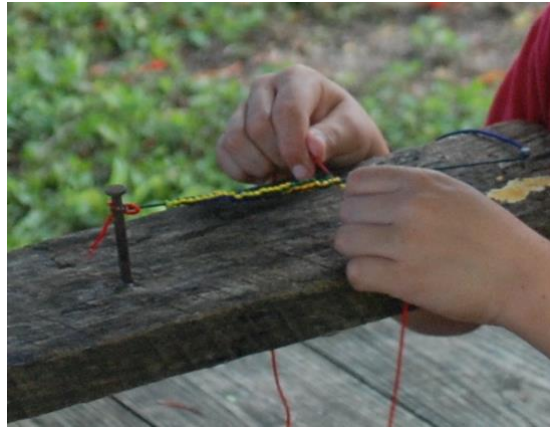
My name is Adriana. I am 31 years old. I have four children Josue is 10, Arabella is 8 and my little boys are 5 and 3. I am Mestizo. We practice our culture with the language. So like teaching Spanish, and then like the Maya ones. Like their grandpa, he tells them—he has a little

book about Maya—and he’s like, if you want to know or want to learn more, you can borrow the book. Also, the food. like the corn tortillas. Everything that has to do with corn. We normally do what they used to do before, like the tamales. I still try to like, keep it alive. Even at times they don’t like it. They say “I don’t want that or I don’t like it.” I tell them “You need to try it. Even it’s, if it’s just like a little taste, I, you need to try it.” And the dances. Like the May Pole dance. But here in this area, there is no one that teaches this. In my, um, opinion, I give them permission to attend the camp because I know they will learn something that they will not never teach at school, and they had heard about it, but they were excited to come. I wanted them to go to the camp to learn. I am the type of parent that probably people would say, I don’t prefer my kids to be at home because they will be watching TV and quarreling because they’re kids. So, if there is an opportunity for them to go out and spend time with people, different kinds of people and learn new things, well I’m up for it. And both of them, they like it. And if there’s more activities during the week or during the year, they say that they want to come and participate. Josue, he participated last year, and he really did like it. And I thought all, what he came to do there was interesting. He told me all what he was doing, carving. And, um, with the clay, when I come this afternoon, he even told me that he did bollos. So, I told him, well, now you will help me do bollos at home. So I think it was very interesting for him. And the storytelling. That is very important for our culture and to learn the language. Like this year, when Arabella went with him, they came home and Arabella told him he had to tell her the story of the Toh. So, he did but he couldn’t remember all of it. So, they got my computer and looked up the story to know it again. They were like we are doing the, um, the Mayan calendar, and told me they need to know about the importance of corn. And the old stories about how the Maya are made from the corn. And the one about the colors of corn. And see it’s something that they do need to be aware of. It’s not

like, oh, we get it already. They should know what it takes to take care of it. Like to cultivate. And to produce and to be able to use it at home. Corn is very important to our food. And learning new things, like the arts and crafts, then that's something that can motivate them in their spare time to like, I can do this and they can sit and do it. Because when I was growing up, I can remember my mom would teach me the embroidery and thing like that. And I am willing to help at the camp with embroidery or cooking. If I can help, well I'm off for it, instead staying home, watching tv, sleeping, I'm like trying to get myself busy.

I am Josue. I am 10/11 years old. I liked coming to the camp. I learned the story of the Toh and about how he lost his tail because he was sleeping when the other animals were working. I think the story teaches us about working together and not being selfish. I liked beading and the games the most. Beading is fun because instead of buying nakles you can make one. I made a necklace for my sister because she is too small to come this year. I learned how to do the slate carving, I learn to do the bollos, and the beads with the seeds. The most important thing I learn was about the Maya names for the animals. I didn't know how we call some is from Maya words. I learned today about the corn and how the Mayas are called "People of the Corn" because they were made out of corn, and they planted it and used it for food. We are making a presentation for the story about how they got the corn from their gods and how they passed this on to us. Before now, the dad used to go work in the milpas and the moms would be cooking for the family. And the children would help and everyone would eat together. Like today we still eat the corn tortillas with the beans and Chaya and cheese. But we should give thanks for our parents and family. I liked learning about the Maya calendar and all the names for the Maya days and about the Mayan numbers and how they count. I learned to work as a team at the camp during the presentation activity and the games.

**Figure 12. Josue Making a Seed Necklace**



I am Arabella. I am 8. Today I learned about sharing the corn and working together instead of trying to win. I liked the stories about the corn. I like the one about the four colors of corn and the animals trying to get the corn from the mountain. For our presentation we can act out our story we make. One person can read and everyone can have a part to act as the story is told. I learned about the Mayan calendar and their numbers; how they used the dots and lines to count. I liked the painting activity the most today. I love the park because I go there to play on the swings and I play with my friends. My mom takes me and it is fun. I love making the bollos I made three of them but they are small. Not like the big ones we make at home. I like to fold the leaf and wrap it so I know which one is mine.

**Figure 13. Arabella's Painting of Her Favorite Place in Succotz**



## **Delores**

My name is Delores. I am 29 years old. I am from [Succotz]. I consider myself Maya-Mestizo. Because my family, they are decedents from the Mayas who settled here. I work with the Rotaract club. For me, participating in the [Toh] program is important because it's a way for me to give to my community for something that will benefit the younger generation. I enjoy the children and helping them learn and grow. I think we [Rotaractors] can help with the organization of the camp and with helping to organize the children. The children in my group really liked the story of the [Toh]; they were excited to make the props for their skit. When the children did the pottery, they seemed to like it. We talked about how the Maya used the pottery and what they made with the clay. Also, like where the clay comes from. In my opinion, I think the camp [2017] was a success. Like the children were there all three days, and they had a lot of fun doing the different activities. I think the storytelling and their presentations were very nice and the parents seemed to like watching it. You could tell the children were proud to show them what they learned with their slates and pottery and their masks. I would say we could do better with organizing more in advance like with registration for the children and with getting more community artisans involved. Because, I think the children will get a lot out of working with the artisans especially like with the slate and beading activities. I think having the more detailed lesson plans would help for us as counselors to guide the children. Like how Dr. Penados was saying about having things be more connected to the purpose of the camp about what the kids are supposed to be learning at the camp. So, like, how Lauren gave us the readings, we can maybe have some time before the next camp to talk more about the program and working with the children so they are not just doing and that way they are learning more. For this year [2018] we don't have as many activities, we need to make sure we have enough to keep them busy and



engaged. This was a lot of children, so we need to make sure we have at least two adults for each of the smaller groups because otherwise they will be up doing things and not focused on their activities. I think the painting was good, the children liked it, but some of the bigger ones were off doing football because they finished early. I think the Maya calendar presentation was very very nice. The children—they were listening and liked to practice counting and saying the Maya names of the days. The camp [2018] went well but there were some things we need to work on. To start with, I think we needed more activities. There was a lot of gaps between, like, some of the older kids finishing their activities first and then they will just be running around. There was a group of them that their interest was only playing football. Also, we had like 52 kids. I think it, it was a really large group and the amount of people that we had helping, it was small to control that. The next thing, because like some people [counselors] only came one day, the next day didn't come. And if they are the group leader, then the other that comes and fill in, like I don't what they were doing. We need to make sure there are the same counselors helping the whole time. But I think that it was still good to have the camp. I enjoyed working with the children and watching them learn from each other and the activities.

### **Arturo**

My name is Arturo. I am 27 years old. I am from [Benque] and I consider myself Mestizo. I am also Belizean. I love the community here. I am part of the Rotaract club in [Benque]. We do a lot of work in the community and try to help wherever we can. I like working with children, but I have not had much experience with many kids all together. I think it will be interesting to help organize the [Toh] camp. I am interested in helping put together activities for the children. I found one idea to make Maya masks out of the cardboard. Like we cut out different shapes and the children can glue them together. Then also, they can decorate them like

with the different natural beans, rice and corn. And we can dye the rice with the food color so they have more fun decorating them. I think overall the camp [2017] was good. We had a lot of fun with the children. I think the children were excited to be a part and to do all the activities. I was sometimes feeling like a little—not sure how to deal with some of the children like with behavior. Also, like when we were in smaller groups for making their story presentations, I didn't know what to do after we talked about it. Then I asked them what kind of story they wanted to make for their presentations. I think I could use more help or guidance from teachers. Especially, because I am not, like I don't know how you're supposed to teach. I felt like the time for activities was short some of the children didn't get to finish their slates or their beading. So maybe trying to put more time on the schedule or make the camp longer. Also, like the volunteers. We were not enough; we need more people to help organize and do different activities. I think for this year [2018] we can go back and do some more research like Lauren suggested when we started working together last year. Like about teaching and curriculum. To be honest, I looked at some of the articles but they were so long and I didn't read them. But, I looked at the summary Lauren gave us. I think for this year like, having a script or some type of guide can help us as the counselors organize the kids and know what they should be doing. I am excited to be doing the camp again this year [2018]. Like, last year was a lot of work but the children were so happy and I feel like that motivated me to want to keep doing it. I had fun. Today was really hard, we only had four counselors to work with all the children and like 50 plus children were here. So, maybe finding some parents who can help. One thing was better today was having the lesson plan for the story activity. Even though there were many kids in my group, it was good because I had something to look at, like, to ask them questions or thing about the story that I never think of to talk with them about. Like the values. But that was very good. The

children did really nice work on their activities this year. I think we could have had more for them. Like last year we had the slate, the marimba, and more people from the community. In my opinion this year was good, but I think there's too many children and not enough adults to help. So next week when we go around to talk about the clubs again with the parents, we will need to ask for volunteers to help.

### **Yasmine**

My name is Yasmine. I am 23 years old. I live in [Benque], and I am a member of the Rotoract club. I am a Mestizo, and Belizean. Our heritage has always been an important aspect through generations in my family's background. We have always been engaged in one way or another to try and keep up with past traditions. We tend to maintain certain activities on a yearly basis. For example, we do Dia de los Muertos/Santos at the end of October/beginning of November. My family prepares food for the dead in our immediate family and take it to the cemetery. For me, I am excited to help with the [Toh] camp this year [2017]. I love to work with the children. I think the children really loved the storytelling. Dr. Penados kept them very engaged and they really like to learn the Maya names for the animals. I had fun working with them on making their song about the [Toh]. The camp [2017] was very good. The children worked hard on their activities. I think they needed more time for some things like the slate. For next year, I think how others have said about a plan for us to follow as team leaders would be very beneficial for us. As Rotaractors, we have been asked to help in the movement with the heritage education camp in [Succotz]; this being our second time getting camp together [2018]. Personally, I enjoy working with kids. I believe they help me understand how the world has changed as years passes by. The kids that attend this camp always come with full energy and enthusiasm to learn what planners and coordinators have outlined for them. Having this yearly

event made me realize that the community really wants to keep their traditions going forward; not only as for what the camp entails but also learn from their ancestors and never lose the hopes of making the tradition keep growing as the years pass, for they intend for generations to keep going with it. It amazed me that there would be so many kids willing to attend this camp; it gave me the initial thought that they were aware of the importance it is for their grandparents and parents for them to attend this camp. Dr. Penados had the initiative to unfold the stories making it as exciting and motivational for kids to maintain focus. Today, we learnt about the importance of corn back in the days to our ancestors and how it has developed until now; the different important traits that have never been lost along the way-which makes everyone gain and give respect. As Dr. Penados continued with the story, kids were already keen to respond to the upcoming questions they were making up in their heads. While in groups, we discussed on what the stories were all about. After getting all contribution from each member in the group, the children came up with their group story presentation. During an obstacle game, the kids they had to work in groups and not letting go of any member in their group while completing the assigned tasks. It taught them the importance of team work along with communication; some had trouble keeping together but they managed to find the way through and achieve the goal of the game. The game also taught them about the importance of not giving up just because one of the members was not contributing- nevertheless, they insisted and encouraged each member to complete the game while having fun. The children really liked the painting. These kids are so creative when drawing out their places around the village that they loved. The children also were very good at making the bollos on the last day. Some kids were already very trained and familiar with making these bollos. I believe it's a tradition of each family to prepare bollos at least once a year. I really hope that this tradition of the camp keeps growing as the year progresses. I think we

could improve on some things. Organizing ourselves more would be a plus. As counselors, I believe we should have a plan B for everything especially when kids are around. Having mini workshops, which was also brought up last year, can be organized and start being more prepared for events. Also, outlining more than one event taking place in case some kids are done with the first task then they can move forward to another one instead of playing around. We need to keep them into the learning path instead of getting distracted and out of order while others are still working in the tasks that were organized for them to complete.

### **Megan**

My name is Megan, and I am 30 years old. I am from the United States, but I am currently living in [Benque]. I am Caucasian and I would say my cultural identity is American. As an American of entirely European descent, I have the privilege of exploring not only my ethnic culture and heritage, but also that of other cultures and ethnicities. As part of the Rotaract Club I tend to participate in Belizean cultural events at least as few times a year. I hope to expand my participation in cultural events here in Belize. I am motivated to help Belizeans, particularly children, with educational initiatives that are meaningful and relevant to them. Personally, it's a great way for me to work together with the Rotaract Club and other community leaders, to give back to the community. I have some experience working with older children like late middle to high school age, but not much experience working with little ones so I am excited to have the experience to be a part of the [Toh] Camp this year [2017]. I enjoyed listening to the story of the Toh that Dr. Penados told the children. They were very excited about the Maya words for the different animals. In my group, the children talked about the story then we talked about how they might make their story presentation for their families. They decided to make props and do a skit about the story of the Toh. I think the activities like slate carving, beading

with seeds, the marimba and the pottery classes were meaningful to the students. I enjoyed helping at the pottery tables, and I also helped Arturo with the masks. The kids really enjoyed all the different activities. I have never made bollos before, but the children taught me how to do it because many of them already knew the steps and how to fold it in the leaf. Overall, I think the camp [2017] was very successful. The children really enjoyed the different activities and games. I think a couple of things could make it better. Like having more time, especially for things like the slate carving and the marimba because the children felt rushed, and I think some of them really wanted to have more time. I also think that we need to have more adult help with setting up the activities and organizing the kids because they are small and they need more assistance with things. The camp this year [2018] is much larger this year, and I think now that we've seen how the first day went, we need to find a way to get some more help. I think my most memorable experience from today was seeing how engaged the children were during Dr. Penados' storytelling. They really enjoyed the story, and you could see it on their faces. I learned a lot about the origin of corn from the story and how the Mayan people became known as the "People of the Corn." The biggest challenge I had was getting my group to participate in the discussion. I had many young children (under the target age range) who struggled with the concepts and older children who were shy. Eventually, the food product demo from Dr. Penados helped, and having them brainstorm other foods made with corn helped them to open up and discuss more. Finally, we were able to get ideas flowing, and they got excited about working on their skit. Seeing the kids' paintings and descriptions of their favorite place in [Succotz] was the most memorable for me today. They were so beautiful and creative! We all learned about the Mayan Calendar- the names of the days/months and some words in the Yucatec and Mopan Mayan language. I think the children learned a lot about the Mayan calendar, and they really liked the presentation. A lot

of the kids already knew a lot about the Mayan calendar- I was impressed! My most memorable experience today was making the bollos and the children's presentations. I think overall the presentations went well despite the rainy weather. I think overall, the camp this year [2018] went well, but there were several things that were challenging for me. The biggest issue was the number of little children who attended at the last minute with their bigger siblings. I think we need to be strict about the age range, or we need to plan activities that are suitable for the younger children. Also, as the Rotaractors, I think we could have collaborated better. Some members of the Rotaract were not actively engaged with the kids at all times. It made it more difficult for the adults who were. The art supplies/materials were very disorganized. We did do a better job of organizing them than last year, but the point is this needed to be done before the camp started. I think more active activities and field trips should be added, but we should take away some of arts and crafts, at least in one day (maybe spread them out more) and have more physical games like we did last year. Mr. Rodrigo and Mrs. Maribelle did those this year, but I think having that big obstacle course again would be helpful. Or, maybe trying to do the Maya ball game because so many of the children were talking about that after we returned from the archaeology fair. Overall, I believe the camp gives the community of [Succotz] an important way to work together to preserve their heritage.

### **Beatriz**

My name is Beatriz and I am from [Succotz]. I think I'm a Maya Mestizo person. I teach high school, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> form—that is ages 13-14 years old. I have been teaching social studies for 12 years. I think it's very important for children to have an understanding of their cultural background, because sometimes students don't know, like when asked to identify with maybe some ethnic groups, they don't know what to say or what tend to be something that is not. I

remember when I was a kid, the [Benque] people used to come and the people from [Succotz] would present. They would come from [all over] on the cultural day. But now it's the [Succotz] people go and watch how the [Benque] people dance, and there is no presentation from [Succotz]. For us as teachers, there is not space in the current school curriculum to give children the space to learn more about who they are and where they come from. I think it would work better to have a program outside the school. Because in schools it's kind hard because usually with the schools, if they think it's very important that's what they will push. And whatever is seen as not as important they try to—they still include it because they have to, but they push it is something that's not as important. It's the last thing to cover. Also, in the schools, everything runs off of religion. There're a lot of things that you can't do. We are banned from so many things ... I told a principal once when he interviewed me that they restrict too much. I have thought of doing this kind of thing for children in the community outside of the schools. Beyond the identity part, it could also include crafts because there are many other arts and crafts that we have lost, that I wanted to learn before my dad died, but I missed the chance because I was working, and working. I couldn't really sit with my dad learn you know, how to make, what we call the arms of the hammock. He knew how to weave that, but I didn't learn it. And then, he would make, like a huge basket from vines and that was used to put corn to store, like to pack corn. And to me it looks like a nice laundry basket! But I don't know how to do it but my dad used to know how to do it. I think that for me one thing that would be really crucial to know is language. Which I don't know. My grandfather used to speak Maya as well but he never taught us. It was Yucatec. I remember when I was a kid, I used to hear a lot of Maya, but I didn't know what they were saying. To start with, I think we need a conversation with community members. Because I think also now we have a lot of tour guides—there is the interest, one, coming to show



the gringos that they are able to speak at least a little, But they can't do it right now. I mean, they can, there are a few words that we use along with Spanish, that when I was a kid I thought it was Spanish, but that's not Spanish. So, there's still a few words that we use that are Maya words. And then we can invite the elders that are still alive, we have lost a lot of elders where who used to know how to speak ... lost lots. I think it possible to get the teachers involved outside of school. And as a community, at first, it might seem a bit—it might seem to some—some might be challenged by it because they're so used to not doing things for themselves and expecting others to do for them. At first it might seem a bit challenging for them—hard to accept. But I think after a while they would see the benefits and enjoy organizing. I went to see a few of the knowledge bearers and I spoke to the one, um, teaching marimba. Then I saw also for Pottery Diego, he is also willing to help and he keeps coming to the meetings. That's what we have done so far. I think we are progressing. And so, we have a meeting next week. Um, and then I guess I will start to work on my part for the, um, traditional cooking and probably I get some help since I will. Um, I'm working on the internship thing, so I wonder if I'll be able to do it. This year [2017] the camp was a little different from last year. We had a hard time getting all the knowledge bearers. But, I think the children really enjoyed participating. I enjoyed doing the cooking with the bollos again this year. I think to me what's important is for my kids to come to the camp because it helps them to value you what we are doing at home. Like at home we do a pot of bollos or tamales and he does it but it's not that fun and he doesn't want to eat it. But here it's fun, and he is happy making it, and he eats it. And I think they enjoyed themselves, especially because they see one another doing it. You enjoy it more than when it's just mom doing it at home. There are some things we could improve. I think we need more time for some activities. I was working on the slate carving, and I got tired carving and carving, and I like 30

minutes and I thought those kids must be tired. My hand hurt. I think maybe like that is more like, at least half a day or over the course of several days. Also, I think we need to include more language and the history of [Succotz]. This year [2018] I was not able to participate as much during the camp days as I have in the past. But I think we are still making progress because we were concerned maybe this year we would not have as many children because the recruitment started a bit later. But, we had over 50 children and that is a lot! I take that as an accomplishment; but still there are challenges with that many children.

### **Rodrigo**

My name is Rodrigo. I am 49 years old and I am from [Succotz]. Well, I consider myself a Mestizo—Spanish and Mayan. I am a teacher at [local junior college] and have been teaching for 13 years. I have 3 children. For me, culture is what makes you who you are; that is your identity. It has to do with the way you think, you dress, you eat, you act. What you believe. As family, we participate on the village fair, the [Benque] fair, where different cultural dances take place. For example, for the [Succotz] Fair we have the dance of the “Chatona,” ‘Grease Pole,’ marimba music. We like to visit the village of [name removed] because it’s a Maya village, we love hearing how the villagers communicate in Mayan language, we love their attitude, how they treat others, they are people that work together as a community, and we like how they celebrate their culture. We have always said that we are going to take the kids there and let them stay with their cousins there so that they communicate and they can get their language back. They won’t even realize that they are learning Maya. Because if they could go to school to learn Maya, they may not want to, but if they go there and they play football with the kids and the kids in the village are all speaking Maya they want to. So, it works! What matters is to be who I am, to be someone that the community or my country would be proud of. Someone that won’t let them

down. So, I try to do things the way—with the expectations of the culture. Expectations like family values, role models for the kids and the culture. It can be someone ... a good example in society. To be an active participant. To continue with the tradition, culture we want to pass to younger generations. But I think many children, like they would feel ashamed; like they don't really identify themselves—not proud of who they are. It goes back to the—we understand from the beginning, [Succotz] has always been seen like inferiors because Maya, like, years behind. And that's how the government, the British government used to believe too—"Okay, so, let's dismantle the groups—they would try to get rid of their language, their culture. But [Succotz] has been—they held onto their identity—they have come together and every time they compete they would go with everything. So instead of that inferiority, help them to grow. I would say that would be one of the challenges with focusing on heritage in schools is that teachers would not do it, or won't go all out because they don't feel that identity. Because there are opportunities to—let's say for example, for Finados ... we can do like the bollos and an alter, but we are using the calabash for xpasha—a porridge made with corn. And then you set it there. Okay, still it's religion, but still you have a connection with the Mayas. It's like nobody knows who they are where they come from like they say I am a Mestizo, but they don't know the Maya side. Especially the Maya. But, in order to do something, there should be like unity of a group that identify themselves and want to do something about it in the community. The identity of a group so others see that things are really serious. Especially for the children. I know other people that have expressed their interests. Teachers, people in the community, people that know—that have talent that they could share. But sometimes they say "oh, the old people they no wan' teach me" but have we approached them and find out exactly, or is it just—people like to talk? So, the thing is to approach them and say this is for your grandchildren. Because, I believe that they would be

able to assist. We have been participating with the community, and we see this is our responsibility to get the kids involved and teach them to get involved also, because sometimes when you see it's only Me! Me! Me! No community between the generations. But, I think having a core group that want to do it, I think it can start and then do planning from there. I believe that that idea has been in the mind of people here in [Succotz], but getting it going has been a challenge. But probably someone from outside could help. Having a summer camp I see as the best option for getting children involved out of schools and teachers will have more time. We have to think about what we want the children to do and learn. Like for me, building up the community—like teamwork and respect. This is also very important. The values of the family; the community. I would like talk about the, um, activities with sports that the children did at camp this year. Most of the activities that they did, had to do with respecting others, working together with others. That was selected activities. So just like going back the source, they used to do the Fajina. They would come out and help each other. There was no competition. There were tasks given, okay, this activity, you have a lot of time just make sure to do it. You would just move around. So that was how they, this sport activity went on. No competition, but just their participation. And then they did enjoy it. And I believe that they, they learned a lot, like, sometimes they had to work with partners. They would need to hold the other person. Cause he's a boy and a girl. So that's something that we're teaching them that they need to respect the other person. Some of them were kind of shy. So, I had to change the ball to use a bigger ball to make more space between them, but then that's the idea to make them respect the other person. But having fun while learning to work and trust others. I enjoyed organizing the games and activities, and I think it is something to carry on for the next time. The children enjoyed the marimba, and I was working with the marimba group. I think they do need more time—the children want to

learn, but only having a few minutes is not enough. So next year, we need to change it so it is for more time or maybe having clubs over the year so they can really learn. I want to continue the team-building activities this year [2018]. Maybe have some different ones spread throughout the camp; also, we can be part of doing the Nawal of the day. Maybe having that help to make more connections to the other activities. One thing this year, we just need to have more help and some different activities for the children. It's very good to see so many children participate, but we have to plan for that otherwise it all comes apart.

### **Maribelle**

My name is Maribelle, I am 44 years old and I live in [Succotz]. I am a teacher here in [Benque] and I have three children, two boys they are 13 and 15, and my daughter she is 20. Culture to me means where I come from that is my grandparents past the way they lived, type of things used, food, language, etc. I would engage in helping at school to make cultural presentations e.g., for September celebrations. Also, now and then I would help contestants for pageants dress up in cultural clothing. In school [now days] they would, they would tell you "I am a Mestizo." But, I remember when they used to tell us in school we're Mayas, like we would get offended because we were being taught we were Mayas. But now I am older and learning more about my heritage, I can say, "Yes! I am a Maya-Mestizo." Because my grandparents on both my mother's side and my father's side were Maya. So, what they—the language that they spoke, their way of life, their way of dressing, the way they used to have their milpas, the things that they used—their history. So, I guess that's being a Maya! And so now, people want to bring it out now. They want to make the other people aware of who we are. But still, because people are ignorant of the past—we don't know our history, and that is keeping us back from accepting who we are. So, I guess we need to be more aware and more conscious of who we are then that

would help us to identify ourselves: “Oh! I am a Maya!” So, I should try to do something to revive it again. Because our kids, if we don’t accept it then how can we teach our kids—our own kids—our family—to be proud of their heritage? But we need to get together as a group; invite people from the community. Let’s get a group; let’s share. More open to share. I guess that as educators, maybe people in the village would look upon us. Because I have a lot of students that say “Miss, lend me your Mestizo suit or lend me your Mestizo dress ...” I have some that I would lend them, but I would tell them, “You know what, please do a similar one, do a model of it because when my one gets lost, then there’s none to share.” I will do that with the music if I have music, I would share it, and I would tell them, every time I share it “please make a copy of this music if it is possible. I’m not being mean, I just want you to keep it up, and if I lose my one, I can count on you, and if you can share with somebody, do the same thing.” And I guess that’s how we should work, because if only I have the music, and nobody else has it, how will we know? How would we know? But, for the children, a summer program or after school clubs I think will be best. I belong to a women’s club, and we had a gardening project. We were the ones who would come on Saturdays, take turns coming, and would prepare the food, planting, prepared the soil to plant, watering. Eventually their kids were involved. No longer would you would see that the woman there alone, they, they would bring their families. So, it was like a family thing. But we had to borrow all the tools and things for it. And one day we were planning to get seeds to do more, but the man who we borrowed the tools from, he said, “okay, I need to take my stuff back.” So, he picked up all the things, and we were left right there. So, we couldn’t continue because we didn’t have the funds. I think that, that if you invite the kids, then the parents will come. It’ll be the other way, but we need to—like, we need to make it sustainable so it doesn’t fall apart. I think the camp (2016) was very good. We came together and we

accomplished a lot. The children were excited and wanted more time for activities. So, we will try with the clubs and maybe a November festival for them. I think it is important to keep the interest, but it is very hard—the time is a challenge when school starts up again. Today was very nice (2017) to see all the children participating and doing their slates and their beading. The marimba—those kids they just went and they learned fast to play a little song. I enjoyed working with them doing the games; they all tried very hard. Even the little ones like Jaime’s little brother. He’s only five. It’s good to see them all together here doing something productive. I think it was important for the children to participate in their camp reflections because they feel like they have a say in things, like with the first survey we did. But also, it shows us what they are learning and what we need to work on or do better. And with making the bollos, I was so proud of them; they did such a nice job. And, I guess sometimes we don’t give them the opportunity at home to help us much. They would value what they do if we let them help. Like today, some of them even marked their bollos, and they wanted us to give them their bollos. And some of them when we were making them, they said “ok this big one is going to be for my mom and the smaller one is for me” and when the time came for the sharing, one was for them to have here. And one was for mom or dad, but then they said, no, I want to eat two! They didn’t save them for their parent! So that, that shows that they really appreciated and, and they liked it. So I, I felt good seeing them so excited to eat them. At home I have seen with my kids, um, I would ask them, come and help me clean the leaves and they complain they don’t want to help. Nobody complained today. Everybody did this and everybody was happy, and they even wanted to prepare more than one bollos. So that shows that they’re interested also that now you have a helper at home! I think the camp (2018) went well, but not like the past two years. They needed more activities, but also, we have to be strict about the age. It was very hard for all of us with so

many children and all different ages. The Rotaractors, they do a nice job, but I think we need more organization and more teacher and parent help with the activities to get the children participating more. We need to plan now for the next year. This year we waited too long, and it was rushed. But still, the children did learn a lot. The ones from last year were helping the ones this year with the bollos—showing them how to do it. And that was so good to see them participating and working together.

### **Summary**

These narratives provide insight into the unique experiences of each participant. All participants articulated the importance of the heritage camp in Succotz for youth in the community. For some participants the emphasis on heritage was vital, for others less so; though for all, it was an important community-centered space that offered Succotz youth educational and constructive learning opportunities. These narratives highlight the different rolls participants played throughout this project and, in some cases, how their experiences shifted and changed over time. The children's narratives offer insight into what they learned through the program as well as what they enjoyed doing. Many parents articulate how children brought knowledge home from the camp and applied it to their daily lives. For teachers, having a space to work with children outside of school and in a context that they helped create and design made for unique and special experiences with community. Camp counselors' experiences were varied as well; however, their willingness to learn along with the children and other co-facilitators helped improve the program over the two years that I was a part of the camps. These narratives in conjunction with my own story of developing the heritage education program in Succotz offer a more complete telling of our collaborative process. In the following chapter I explore my final thoughts on this study as well as implications for future research.



## CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

My research lens and my decision to write about this experience as a postcritical ethnography was framed by decolonizing methodologies and informed by postmodern and critical postcolonial thought. My choice to blend these perspectives and apply them to this research study was my attempt at offering a more localized orientation that reflected the specific characteristics of the Succotz community. I positioned myself as ‘allied other’ (Rogers & Swadener, 1999) in my role as researcher, participant, and observer throughout the research process. By flipping the gaze, so to speak, I sought to “research back” (L. T. Smith, 2012, p. 8) to the academy—to disrupt, deconstruct, and offer a critical and decolonial approach to heritage education research—something that is not frequently found within the literature of heritage education studies, particularly those conducted in the context of Maya heritage in Belize. As such this dissertation research simultaneously works to use my privileged position as a scholar in the Western academy to disrupt and challenge neocolonial research traditions while maintaining my commitments to collaborators, participants, and the greater Succotz community.

Previous heritage education studies in Belize have demonstrated that collaboration and community engagement have the potential to address and mitigate the multifaceted issues experienced by many communities in Belize regarding heritage in education practices; issues such as cultural, linguistic, and environmental knowledge loss (Baines & Zarger, 2012), appropriation of culture and heritage, heritage distancing (McAnany & Parks, 2012) as well as the homogenizing effects of promoting a singular national identity (McGill, 2011). My research reinforced these findings. Though our collaborative partnership in Succotz we addressed these shortcomings of heritage education practices and developed the Motmot Camp as a response to these larger issues. Different from these other studies, our project demonstrated the ability to

achieve these goals outside of the institution of school, apart from political and religious affiliations, and most importantly from within the community.

Having spent the better part of a decade working as a researcher on Maya heritage-based research projects in Belize, it was important to me that this research bring to the fore the issues surrounding the ways in which contemporary Maya communities in Belize are frequently ignored, essentialized, appropriated, and/or exploited through institutions, research, and public education. These problems were reiterated in many participants' personal narratives in Chapter Six, and were cited as key factors in contributing to an overall sense of cultural and language loss in Succotz. To address these concerns and others, project collaborators came together to develop what became the Motmot Camp. In this chapter I explore how my findings addressed my research questions, as well as the implications, tensions and future possibilities of this study. First, I explore participants' experiences engaging in this initiative and how these experiences may have offered opportunities for increased awareness of heritage and agency. Second, I examine the community, curricular, and pedagogical implications of this study, and I relate these findings to place-based education (Gruenewald & Smith, 2014; Johnson, 2012), culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies (CSRP) (McCarty & Lee, 2014), and Funds of Knowledge (González, 2009; Moll et al., 1992). Third, I speak to the implications of this research for heritage education programs in international contexts. Fourth, I discuss the implications for my blended theoretical conceptions of postmodern and critical postcolonial theories and decolonizing methodologies as they apply to heritage studies in Belize and elsewhere. Fifth, I address the tensions that came to the fore through my research process as well as future directions of this kind of work. I then offer my concluding thoughts and hopes for this research and similar projects in the future.

## Participant Experiences

Participants described their experiences of engaging in this heritage education initiative in different ways. Their experiences offered insight into why and how participants took part in the program, what aspects of the program they viewed as important and/or significant, as well as the ways in which the program impacted them. Each teacher I spoke with attributed his or her desire to participate in this project to feelings of cultural loss within Succotz. For most, these feelings of loss were associated with cultural/religious traditions, traditional artforms, Mayan language, sense of community in Succotz, traditional and family values. Teachers also expressed the importance of wanting to pass on traditions and knowledges to the younger generation. Itzel and Malia spoke of their feelings of responsibility towards the children in Succotz as a reason for wanting to take action. Over half of the teachers also addressed concerns for the lack of community-centered programs for youth development in Succotz. One of the most central themes that emerged from teacher participants' experiences was the lack of space within public schools for cultural heritage education. As Beatriz articulates: "For us as teachers, there is not space in the current school curriculum to give children the space to learn more about who they are and where they come from." Each teacher described his or her interest in being a part of a collaborative community-based heritage education project because they felt there was little to no space or support within the institution of school. Teachers felt that the current public school curriculum does not provide enough detail or time to explore cultural heritage in meaningful or thoughtful ways. In the primary school curriculum, there is a short unit that focuses on the superficial aspects of "cultural groups" in Belize. Beyond this, teachers are not given the time or leeway to expound upon Maya culture or heritage. Valentino succinctly states: "the system is so focused on covering curriculum, covering material that culture is not part of our curriculum."

This push to teach to the national standards leaves teachers with little autonomy to teach anything else. Marisol, a retired teacher in Succotz, noted a significant difference in the types of cultural activities that schools used to incorporate and what is included nowadays. Now, teachers are unable to offer these activities, because they are required to teach to the standard curriculum or as Marisol puts it the must do “what the government is stressing to do.”

Parents shared similar reasons as teachers for wanting their children to participate in the heritage program. With the exception of Emilia, who was not from Succotz, all parents expressed the importance of their heritage and culture in their lives, to their families, and to their identities and felt that the heritage program was a way to foster opportunities for children to engage with cultural knowledge. Most parents shared similar concerns to those described by teachers regarding cultural loss in Succotz and hoped that the heritage program might respond to these concerns and impart cultural knowledge to their children. For parents as well as teachers, the impact of technology on cultural loss in Succotz was a theme that surfaced over and over again. While participants recognized the benefits of technology, they also noted the multifaceted ways in which it negatively impacted children’s interest in and understanding of their own culture and heritage. Parents felt that the camps offered a space for children to unplug from technology and external influences and recenter community engagement and Maya culture. For Elsa and Juanita, the emphasis that the program placed on community-building contributed to their desire to allow their children to participate. Kamela, Kailan, Adriana felt that the program would offer their children experiences and access to knowledge that they would otherwise never receive in school. Additionally, Adriana, Elsa, Juanita, and Jeraldo, felt that the program would offer a space for their children to experience a heritage craft and/or skillset that they may utilize in the future.

Rotaract counselors Yamine, Delores, Arturo, and Megan attributed their desire to participate in the heritage program to wanting to give back to the community and to working with children in meaningful ways. For them this was important on a personal level, but also a part of the tenets of the Rotaract Club. For Yasmine, Delores, and Arturo, their family connections to Succotz as well as their personal cultural heritage and identity played an important role in their desire to work as co-collaborators.

Levels of engagement varied among participants. Several teachers and Diego collaborated for the program design phase; some were a part of the design phase and the first camp; Beatriz, Rodrigo, and Maribelle collaborated for the entirety of project. Yamine, Delores, Arturo, and Megan were not part of the design phase but collaborated for two iterations of the Motmot Camp. The parents in my study did not actively participate in the heritage project. Three children, Josue, Nadir, and Marin participated in both camps, and nine other children participated in one or the other. Levels of engagement impacted how participation played out. For example, Beatriz, Rodrigo, and Maribelle emerged as leaders among teachers early on in the process. This may be attributed to their connections with one another as well as their passion for wanting to see the program through to fruition. Among the Rotaractors, Delores took on a leadership role and was instrumental in organizing program activities and working through logistics. While the broader concepts of the heritage program were developed collaboratively, Dr. Penados and I worked together for the 2017 and 2018 camps to develop more intentional lesson plans that explicitly outlined objectives related to our program aims and goals. There were activities that encouraged children to express their thoughts and feelings regarding their experiences during the camps; however, parents provided additional insight into children's experiences as well as their own impressions of the camps.

Several other themes emerged through my data analysis of collaborators', parents', and children's experiences participating in the program that were identified as of particular importance or value. The camp provided a space for children as well as facilitators to explore a traditional Maya trade craft or artform that they would otherwise not have access to; slate carving and playing marimba were cited most frequently. Community and family values such as the importance of sharing, working together, dialogue, perseverance, respect for elders, gratitude, reciprocity, sustainability, treating animals and the environment with respect, were woven throughout the camp curriculum. The program facilitated intragenerational as well as intergenerational community, team, and relationship building. Traditional storytelling was the vessel through which aspects of Maya cultural knowledge such as language and values were presented to the children.

Participants also described aspects of the camp that were particularly impactful. Many children experienced moments of excitement and pride throughout their participation in various activities during the camps. Parents communicated that many children came home and wanted to share and discuss their camp experiences each day. For several children, the camp offered a space for making new friends, trying new things, and engaging in more communal ways. Among all participants, storytelling, the story creation project, team-building activities, and making bollos were most frequently mentioned as having a significant personal impact. The storytelling activity offered children, teachers, and counselors a unique experience to explore and make connections to past and present aspects of Maya heritage. The team-building activities offered children a space to work together for a common purpose rather than to compete against one another, and for several of the children this was a memorable and impactful experience. The cooking activity of making bollos brought together traditional Maya foodways and community

values of sharing and working together. While several participants expressed the importance of this experience, others shared the lasting impact that this activity had on children and families. This experience for Mia, Martin, Nadir, Hector, Josue, and Arabella left a lasting impression and encouraged them to participate in cooking at home. Several children stated that prior to making the bollos at camp, they did not enjoy eating them at home; however, the camp cooking experience changed their minds and they found that they did like them after all.

Through my analysis of participants' experiences, I found that this initiative provided collaborators and children opportunities for increased awareness around heritage and agency. Two specific moments surfaced during my field observations that were particularly memorable to me as special examples of camp experiences that fostered greater awareness of Maya cultural heritage and agency. The first was during the storytelling session led by Dr. Penados in 2017 when he led the children through an activity of learning the Maya names of animals. By the end of the activity, many of the children realized the names of animals that they used at home were actually Maya names, though they were previously unaware of this connection. Through this activity children demonstrated a stronger sense of agency in trusting their knowledge and their own voice as they responded to questions, as well as an increased awareness of Maya heritage as it related to language used at home and within Succotz. Many children and parents viewed this event as unique and/or significant to their experiences or their children's experiences in the program. The second example was during the Maya calendar lesson in 2018 when Elena asked the group: "Do you think the Mayas are gone?" and the children responded in a big chorus: "No!" Then several shouted: "We are the Mayas!" This moment highlighted the collective agency of the group as well as pride in their awareness of their own heritage identity.

Children and collaborators additionally expressed greater awareness of heritage and agency through several of the activities offered during the Motmot Camps. Slate carving promoted opportunities for increased heritage awareness of traditional artforms and created a space for children to build agency through a real-life experience as they completed stone carvings. For Martin and Hector this was evident in their sense of achievement and pride in their work. Beading similarly offered a space for children to gain heritage knowledge and skills. Both Jaime and Josue expressed their excitement in a newfound interest and skill that they did not have prior to attending the Motmot Camp. Jaime said he found he was good at beading with seeds and really enjoyed the process. Josue made a connection to the fact that having the knowledge and developing the ability meant that he would not need to go buy a seed bracelet because he now knew how to make one himself. For camp facilitators and children, the process of collaboratively making bollos stood out as an opportunity for increased awareness of heritage and agency. Everyone worked together and through a collective sense of agency created a communal meal that was then shared among everyone. The discussions around this activity explored connections to Maya ancestors and the importance of corn both past and present. This was most evident during the 2018 camp because children made connections between making the bollos and their discussions and story presentations around the significance of corn for the Maya in the past as well as for people in Succotz today. Children's and counselors' experiences engaging in the story creation project revealed additional opportunities to engage in collective agency as they worked together and pooled their abilities, skills and knowledge to aid in the creation of their own renditions of traditional Maya stories. In the following section I examine the community, curricular and pedagogical implications of this research.



## **Community, Curricular, and Pedagogical Implications**

My research findings of participants' experiences engaging in the Succotz heritage initiative have several implications for developing the Motmot Camp from within the community rather than through public schooling or government backed institutions and what that meant for our process. The idea for the Succotz heritage education project originated with a group of educators and community knowledge bearers in the Succotz community who envisioned a community designed and led program for youth that was not affiliated with any particular educational, religious, or political organization. The purpose of such a program would be to provide opportunities for youth development and community building, focusing on Maya-Mestizo heritage. As the vision became clearer, it became evident that this purpose would best be achieved by establishing a community designed and led summer camp program that centered on Maya heritage and served children in the community ages eight to eleven. The overall objective of the camp program and its curriculum was to address community concern for several aspects of cultural loss: loss of the Mayan language, loss of cultural expressions, loss of local history, and loss of traditional foodways and sustainability. In providing the various activities that met that objective, facilitators hoped to foster a space for greater awareness of heritage.

The objective of the Motmot Camps was achieved by designing a curriculum and activities that helped participants to recognize and appreciate the depth, significance, and uniqueness of their Maya heritage. The objective was the same for years 2016, 2017, and 2018. When Maribelle related the time prior to the implementation of the Motmot Camps when she had said to children, "We are Mestizo. We are Mayas!" and they replied, "No! Miss, we are not Indios!" it was evident that children did not appreciate their heritage. However, when Elena presented the Maya calendar activity in 2018, she began with the question, "Do you think the

Mayas are gone?” and the children replied in chorus, “No! We are the Mayas!” it appeared that a shift had taken place. Telling stories that highlight Mayan vocabulary, participating in the process of making bollos, creating images on slate, playing the marimba, as well as games that focused on cooperation and community building all contributed to awakening a sense of pride in their Maya heritage.

The concerns of community members focused on several aspects of cultural loss. Opening each session with storytelling that emphasized the Mayan language, examining the Maya calendars and how each is used, making and enjoying bollos as a community, making jewelry using local seeds, playing the marimba, and drawing on slate directly address local concerns for loss of language, cultural expressions, and foodways.

The children who participated in the Motmot Camps demonstrated that they experience aspects of their Maya heritage in their everyday lives without an awareness of the extent to which it is at the foundation of who they are. Aspects of the camps that connected the past to the present demonstrated that it is possible to keep an appreciation of heritage alive without renouncing the inevitable evolution of a culture over time. This process also shows that maintaining an awareness and a sense of pride in a heritage that has been challenged by external forces such as colonialism as well as the constant changes in the surrounding world takes deliberate, conscious, sustained effort.

This research offers several curricular implications for heritage education programs. I want to reiterate that the Succotz heritage initiative emerged as a result of local community educators and knowledge bearers coming together to address what they perceived to be a lack of space within the public education system for meaningful, accurate, and relevant representations of Maya-Mestizo cultural heritage as well as a general lack of space within the Succotz

community for youth development outside of schools. During the curriculum design phase, participants were practicing educators who self-identified as Mestizo or Maya-Mestizo and held a two- or four-year college or university degree. This research did not explicitly explore the relationships between ethnicity, identity, attainment of higher education degrees, and critical consciousness as they related to participants' experiences in developing the heritage program; however, this undoubtedly impacted the ways in which the program was conceived and implemented. I also believe that the similarities shared among participants' backgrounds provided a common "language" so to speak and familiarity with pedagogical and curricular decision making. Through our collaborative program design process, we established an overarching vision for the Succotz heritage initiative, and we identified key aims, goals and objectives for the program to help us achieve our mission. Below is a brief outline of our curriculum.

- Program Vision: To create a community space for youth development through a cultural heritage program that leverages community knowledge and resources.
- Aims:
  - To promote:
    - A stronger sense of cultural pride
    - A greater focus on intergenerational experiences
    - A more intentional "giving back" to others and the community
    - An expanded body of knowledge and skills that schools may not adequately develop

- Goals:
  - To foster a fun and safe learning space for youth to explore their heritage
  - To offer youth opportunities to build a positive self-esteem and develop social and interpersonal skills
  - To provide youth opportunities to learn about their heritage and develop skills in a local art-form
- The overall objective of the camp program and its curriculum was to address community concern for several aspects of cultural loss: loss of the Mayan language, loss of cultural expressions, loss of local history, and loss of traditional foodways and sustainability

We developed and incorporated activities that aligned with our curriculum. We did not create objectives in the traditional sense of what students are able to do after having experienced the curriculum. We wanted to ensure that children had a choice of activities that would take place during the camps; we felt that knowing what types of activities we would focus on would then help us find ways to integrate our larger aims and goals into the curriculum planning for the camp. We also felt that learning outcomes or takeaways from a particular activity might be unique for each child. This choice does not follow a typical curriculum design which generally assumes a process of general to specific (Eisner, 2002). We did not want stifle or confine learning by preconceived learning objectives. Rather, we felt that offering space for student reflection was a more accurate way of assessing or identifying learning outcomes.

My findings of children's experiences participating in the Motmot Camp provided insight into how the program achieved curriculum goals and aims. Children, parents, and camp facilitators expressed that the overall camp experience was fun, safe, well-organized, and offered

a variety of ways in which children could explore their heritage. Of the activities offered, participants most notably talked about traditional storytelling, slate carving, marimba playing, beading, pottery, the Maya calendar lesson, and team-building games. Children experienced many opportunities to develop social and interpersonal skills during camp activities. These experiences during camp were most frequently fostered through the small-group story creation activities, icebreaker activities, team-building games, and reflection times. There are two specific moments that stand out to me that highlight children's experiences building self-esteem during the camps. The first was during the 2017 camp slate carving activity when the children were taught how to carve real slate. Many children found this activity physically challenging and time consuming; however, they persevered, and in the end, they were ecstatic about their carving and their sense of accomplishment was palpable. Through this activity, children gained a sense of self-esteem in their ability to work through a challenge. The second is during the 2018 camp when Arabella stood up in her storytelling group and asserted her idea of finding a way to act out the story rather than just read it aloud. This was in direct contradiction to her older brother and other older children in the group, and as she shared her idea, she gained more confidence in her ability to participate on a peer level rather than as the younger sibling/child. The majority of activities that were offered during the Motmot Camps were arts-based and offered children opportunities to explore heritage through hands-on experiential learning activities. Many of these activities were facilitated by community knowledge bearers whose profession is based on these artforms. Consequently, children had opportunities to explore heritage arts and crafts, doing so in ways that offered knowledge of real-life skillsets.

My findings highlighted how children's participation in camp activities promoted a stronger sense of cultural pride. Participants commented on the pride elicited by completing

camp activities. Children demonstrated pride in their individual work and accomplishments. I observed multiple displays of cultural pride, particularly through the storytelling activities and Maya Calendar lessons that invited children to make and explore direct connections to their Maya cultural heritage, bridging connections between past and present. Through the inclusion of community knowledge bearers, particularly some of the elders within the community, children additionally had opportunities for greater intergenerational connections. I will expound upon these intergenerational connections in a later section when I discuss implications for future possibilities.

Children had multiple opportunities to experience reciprocity. Several games and icebreaker activities promoted the act of giving and receiving; however, this was most evident in the giving away of corn kernels activity as well as the concluding camp cook-off activity held at the end of each camp during which all camp participants came together to make a communal meal of bollos (tamales). The overall body of knowledge and skills promoted and explored through this heritage program far exceeded the limited opportunities that collaborators identified in school settings. The intentional planning and focus on heritage and youth development afforded children a unique set of experiences that explicitly addressed collaborators' original concerns. This demonstrates the achievement of the overall program vision.

The collaborative curriculum design process as well as the ways in which camp activities were performed hold several implications for pedagogical considerations in heritage education. In my literature review I explore three main pedagogical considerations: place-based education (PBE; Gruenewald & Smith, 2014), Funds of knowledge (González et al., 2009; Moll et al., 1992), and culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy (CSR; McCarty & Lee, 2014). My research findings support various aspects of these pedagogical considerations as they relate to the

development of the program curriculum as well as the ways in which activities were presented to the children during camps.

The emphasis that PBE places on community-based efforts that work to reconnect youth with community life (Gruenewald & Smith, 2014) is congruent with participants' experiences engaging in the Succotz heritage program. Through the curriculum we worked to promote a greater sense of community by incorporating community and family values, involving parents, community knowledge bearers, and members of the Rotaract club, and focusing on place-specific heritage content. Activities such as storytelling, pottery, and slate carving emphasized the value of the social and natural environments in Succotz. Additionally, through storytelling and the story creation projects, children explored the interconnectedness of people, animals, and plants both in the past and today. Through the painting activity, children were encouraged to think about their favorite places in Succotz and who/what and why these places were significant to them. In so doing, children had the opportunity to consider the importance place plays in their daily lives. Consciousness-raising opportunities through storytelling, studying the Maya calendar, and traditional art-based activities offered children a space to consider the historical memory and traditions that are a vital part of Succotz. This program also facilitated intergeneration and intragenerational collective effort and collaboration. Many participants discussed the importance of elders within Succotz and the cultural knowledge they held. One of the most unfortunate realities is that many of the elders in the community were not in a position to participate in the heritage camps due to physical or health-related restrictions. One of the saddest moments during my research was the passing of Diego the potter in Succotz. He was an incredibly dedicated, talented, and compassionate person who had such incredible visions for the possibilities of what Maya culture and heritage had to offer current and future generations of

Maya people in Succotz. His passing was a great loss to the community and it accentuates the urgent need to leverage elder knowledge and intergenerational opportunities because as teachers and parents discussed, their generation has minimal knowledge of the Maya language and cultural practices.

Collaborators' desires to develop a heritage education program from within the community and outside of public schools was, in many ways, a reflection of how public schooling in Belize limits authentic cultural and linguistic learning. Additionally, public schooling in Belize is a product of British colonization in the country. As such, schooling and education practices tend to reify colonial legacies and perpetuate heritage distancing (McAnany & Parks, 2012). In the context of Maya heritage and education in Belize and other parts of Central America, McAnany (2020) expounds:

The past five hundred years of settler colonialism has estranged Indigenous peoples not only from their landscapes but also from their intellectual history of book production.

There is little space for discussing Indigenous heritage within an educational system that is predicated upon racism and maintaining certain forms of colonial domination. (p. 8)

By focusing on heritage outside of schools, the Succotz heritage education program was able to leverage the multiplicity of knowledges offered from within the community and work towards reclaiming and revitalizing their own cultural heritage. This process was indicative of what McCarty and Lee (2014) identify as *culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy* (CSR), which confronts legacies of colonization in education and offers greater opportunities for and awareness of language and culture reclamation.

This research highlights the ways in which collaborators sought to harness multiple ways of knowing from within the community and children's lived experiences as mechanisms for



promoting greater awareness of cultural and linguistic heritage. This was evident in the ways some camp activities built on prior knowledge and cultural awareness. This demonstrates the pedagogical implications for integrating *funds of knowledge* or the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133) into the heritage curriculum. The heritage curriculum worked to create a space that explicitly connected heritage education with children’s lived experiences at home and within the Succotz community. One example was the collaborative cooking experience, which built upon children’s familiarity with bollos, a traditional food that is frequently made at home and within the community. This activity worked to build on prior knowledge and offer children more insight into the history and tradition of bollos as well as to build on the significance of collective and reciprocal process of making them.

The Motmot Camp program was built by a strong team of educators who knew that the public school system inadequately explored the concepts of heritage and culture. From the time of the camp’s inception, collaborators felt strongly that the Motmot Camp should be created and implemented independent of any affiliation with school, church, or government organizations. This independence allowed curricular and pedagogical decisions to reflect the community’s desire to address concerns of cultural loss and heritage awareness.

### **Implications For Heritage Education Programs in International Contexts**

This study has implications for heritage education programs in international contexts. While this research is site specific, I offer generalized considerations based on our experiences. This project highlights the ways in which community-organizing and outside/foreign partnerships may come together to create and maintain heritage education programs. Through PAR, this project was able to attend to the specific community-identified needs and desires

related to heritage education and take collective action to see the project through to fruition. The diversity of backgrounds and knowledges of collaborators and participants greatly contributed to the depth and breadth of the curriculum design and the experiences the camp provided for youth. The Motmot program development and implementation involved local educators, scholars, community knowledge bearers, and myself as an outside/foreign researcher/observer/participant. The multiplicity of ideas and insights generated by our collaborative process were reflected in what and how activities were presented and taught to children during the camp. By leveraging community knowledge and skillsets, collaborators were able to harness multiple ways of knowing from within the community and children's lived experiences as mechanisms for promoting greater awareness of cultural and linguistic heritage. Because this program served youth in the community, we felt it was important to include their thoughts and ideas related to the activities we incorporated. We invited children to choose their top three choices for activities prior to making decisions about what to include or promote. We also invited them to share their feedback based on their experiences participating in the camp as a way to make changes and improvements going forward. Involving children in the development process enabled us to prioritize children's interests and better address their desires. This research illustrates the possibilities for heritage education at the intersections of community-organizing and cross-cultural partnerships and demonstrates our collective ability to achieve our project aims and goals outside of the institution of school, apart from political and religious affiliations, and most importantly from within the community.

## **Implications for Blended Theoretical Conceptions: Postmodern and Critical Postcolonial Theories Informed by Decolonizing Methodologies**

From the beginning of this research, I felt my primary responsibility was to the folks with whom I was working. I also recognized the need to address the potential implications of this work given its postcolonial and Indigenous context, the identities of the participants in my study, my own positionality as a white foreign researcher, and the larger field of heritage research. As I initially worked to situate this research study within the theoretical discourses common to other heritage studies, I felt limited by some of the rigid parameters set by many of these theoretical approaches. I was concerned that orienting this work within too narrow a research paradigm would stifle more authentic engagement in my research process. I also struggled with the often-contradictory nature of PAR initiatives and individual research interests. I found that by placing postmodern and critical postcolonial theories in concert with decolonizing methodologies I was able to attend to these larger research concerns.

In Belize, many heritage studies tend to reify positivist and processual discourse. To me, coming as I do from a background in archaeology, this is perhaps most obvious in the archaeological work conducted in the country. Much of the heritage research in Belize is archaeological in nature, and as a field of study, much of this work tends to center western forms of knowledge and objective reasoning as the basis for interpretation and understanding. This tends to leave little room for critical reflexivity, positionality, and representation in the research process. By not attending to these concerns, research has a tendency to objectify, essentialize, and patronize contemporary Maya communities. Therefore, one of my hopes for approaching this research from within the Succotz community was to move away from more common research practices that take a top-down approach and position the researcher as expert. Rather, I

worked to position myself as ally/ participant/ observer/ researcher in the process of engaging in this initiative. In so doing, our PAR project focused on community knowledges and priorities identified *by* rather than *for* participants. This research offers a critique of coloniality as is evident by collaborators' explicit desire to design and implement the Motmot program outside the colonial influences of public schooling and any/all government associations. As a longitudinal study, this research offers unique insight into the process of collaboratively developing and implementing a Maya heritage education program from within the Succotz community from inception to fruition. As such, I was able to explore the preliminary impacts that the program had on participants. My choice to write this dissertation as a post-critical ethnography framed by decolonizing praxis was my attempt at finding a balance between my responsibilities to my co-collaborators and the Succotz community as well as to my academic work as a doctoral student. While this dissertation is my personal story of my experience and how I saw participants' experiences participating in the Succotz heritage program, I also made an effort to honor and give participants' voices more space and authority in the telling of this collaborative process; though in so doing tensions between coloniality/decoloniality came to the fore. In the following section, I address these tensions as well as possibilities for future research.

### **Tensions, Future Directions, and Reflection**

While this study explores the possibilities of alternative approaches to heritage research, my findings highlight several tensions that emerged between coloniality and decoloniality in the research process. There is an inherent tension between conducting research from within the western academy that was born out of and continues to promote colonialism and working with/in a community whose purpose and desire is decolonial. A second problematic layer relates to my position as a graduate student beholden to the politics of the academy in order to obtain my

doctoral degree. A third exists between my own positionality as a foreign, white, researcher working with/in Indigenous context. This conundrum speaks to myriad of quandaries that emerge when *working the hyphen* (Fine, 1994) through a decolonizing framework (Jones & Jenkins, 2008) and it is difficult to tease apart what separates these layers as they are tremendously interconnected.

I see the first two tensions as most tethered and as such hindered my ability to fully participate as an “allied other” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 6; Mutua & Swadener, 2004, p. 4; Rogers & Swadener, 1999) as I was limited in my ability to decenter the Western academy as the exclusive locus of authorizing power that defines research agenda” (Mutua and Swadener, 2004, p. 4). One of my hopes for conducting this research as a participatory action research project was that it positions the community as change-agent and situates power within the community. In so doing, I felt that this research was able to step away from some of the positivist methods of heritage studies that often reify coloniality in Indigenous research contexts. As I have discussed in various areas throughout this dissertation, collaborators were driven by the desire to use their collective agency to affect change from within their own community—the inherent goal of PAR; however, collaborators and participants did not have an interest in engaging in the research analysis aspect of the project once the action (Motmot Camp) was realized. This realization caused me to reconsider the methodological framing of my dissertation. As I began writing about the project, I kept going back to the literature around other PAR projects and felt concern that this may not be considered a true PAR project without full participation from collaborators throughout all steps of the research process. I began to consider the project as more of a community-engaged initiative rather than participatory action. However, conversations with Dr. Penados and my other committee members helped me to trouble my own research gaze and the

ways in which I was getting stuck in the coloniality of research itself. This realization brought me back to Nakamura's (2015) critique of PAR, that being the expectation in PAR that participants engage appropriately "might be considered another form of domination by authority" (p. 169). This consideration raises questions around who gets to define what research is or what the parameters of research are? If the collective goal is participatory-action, then these questions should be defined in terms of what the community feels they should be, not what the western academy or the foreign researcher thinks they should be. These tensions and considerations impacted my decision to write this dissertation as a postcritical ethnography of our PAR project. But, even with this methodological orientation, tensions came to the fore. Specifically, the issue of writing about a project outside of the project itself. This challenge that I faced as I worked to complete the dissertation aspect of my doctoral degree speaks to the constant conflict of decolonial endeavors in academia and highlights the coloniality of the western academy.

While this was a longitudinal study, this dissertation offers a snapshot of one example of action-oriented community-organizing in Succotz. This research captures the multitude of ways in which systems of power in Belize reify neocolonial hegemony. The community-identified need for a program to address Maya cultural and language loss is a direct result of the impact of colonization and modern-day coloniality on Indigenous Peoples in Belize. From the beginning, collaborators and participants ensured that this project was for and by the Succotz community. There was intentional effort to create a space for children apart from the confines of public schooling, local and national politics, and any other government-base or religious institutions. The community's desire to work outside of these systems of power was intrinsically decolonial. Every effort was made to work from within the Succotz community to create and sustain the

Motmot heritage program. While we were largely successful, long-term sustainability was hindered by several factors. We struggled to find a person or a group of people who were able to take on the responsibility of leading the program. The unfortunate reality is that while co-collaborators were all vested in the program, the time requirements for organizing and maintaining the summer program were significant. As the program grew, the need for more collaborators became evident and we struggled to find the help necessary to propel the program forward. While many participants in my study articulated a desire to help and contribute their time and expertise to the initiative, it was not always feasible for them to do so because of work or family obligations that needed to be prioritized. Therefore, it became increasingly difficult to find skilled collaborators or help volunteers to develop the skills necessary to engage the students fully in the curriculum by asking them critical questions and making the explicit connections between the activities and Maya heritage. My role as collaborator, participant, and researcher had a somewhat defined endpoint. In giving up my roles in the project, I may have contributed to slowing down the momentum of the program. I do not mean to say that my participation was in some way essential to the continuation of the program. Rather, that it may have played a role in the discontinuation of the Motmot Camp. This is because simultaneously, the program was struggling to find and maintain a larger group of vested collaborators and to appoint a group leader or several team leaders. And shortly thereafter, were the impacts and repercussions the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the Motmot program did not have a source of funding. Collaborators contributed funds for materials and other necessities for the various iterations of the Motmot Camp, though during the planning process, we did consider and outline future possibilities for funding through local fundraising opportunities.

These challenges further highlight the ways in which decolonial grassroots movements are still impacted by systemic coloniality. While these issues impacted the long-term sustainability of the program, they also highlighted a need for public schooling to address the shortcomings of the national curriculum and make space for curricula such as the one we developed through the Motmot program. Afterschool program opportunities might be better suited to take on such a project. Moreover, the larger issue at play is the need for systemic change in Belize that recognizes Maya sovereignty and autonomy and addresses the large-scale Maya cultural appropriation and exploitation.

My experience participating in this initiative has been incredibly rewarding, but at times, saddening. I feel immensely fortunate to have had the opportunity to work together with such an incredible group of dedicated and thoughtful collaborators. The time and effort that we all contributed to the creation and implementation of the Motmot Camp was, in my opinion, impactful for the teachers, parents, children, and other volunteers who participated in the initiative as well as for myself. Seeing the project through to fruition was not always an easy path, but together we worked through the challenges and in the end, it was most gratifying to see the myriad of positive experiences that the camps created for the children.

Being a part of this heritage initiative has taught me several valuable lessons. Perhaps the most significant lesson is the power of collective agency in propelling forward a shared thought or idea. From the beginning of this research, it was incredible to see the ways in which teachers and collaborators came together to pursue and promote Maya culture and heritage education in Succotz. The collective contributions of all participants created the underpinnings for the development and enactment of the entire initiative. This was the first time that I have had the good fortune to be a part of a collective movement and to experience the challenges and rewards



that such an experience offers. In my role as a researcher, I learned that reciprocity is vital to this type of work. There was an authentic give and take that happened between and among all participants including myself throughout the research process. These moments were not always obvious—they were often in subtle, yet meaningful. Connected to notions of reciprocity, is the importance of thoughtful and meaningful relationships that develop as a result of this type of collaborative work. I found that the relationships that we established together helped me to more fully embody this research experience. This may be due, in part, to the longevity of this project and the friendships that evolved from this work. But I found that through the development of these relationships with my fellow co-collaborators there was also a built-in sense of responsibility to one another and for the project a whole.

### **Conclusion**

This research sought to explore an alternative approach to heritage education studies in Belize that emphasized participatory action research as the instrument through which a local youth heritage program was conceived, developed, and enacted. By leveraging community assets, we were able to create a Maya heritage education program for children in Succotz that addressed specific community needs, concerns, and desires and provided opportunities for youth development and community building.

While this research is not intended to be a model for other researchers or communities seeking to develop their own heritage programs, I feel strongly that this study and research approach offer insight into the process, advantages, challenges and implications of such a project. Future heritage studies involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous western researchers may consider integrating decolonizing methodologies into their own research designs. Communities looking to collaborate around heritage education may consider the possibilities of

community-organizing and PAR as mechanisms for realizing their own goals. Finally, researchers and communities situated in similar contexts may find the curricular and pedagogical implications of this heritage study helpful as a starting point for developing more critical, reflexive, and meaningful heritage education programs.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES

2015 Preliminary Survey Questionnaire

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Contact Information:**

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Background Information**

Age:	Place of Birth:
Ethnicity:	Cultural Identity:
Native Language:	Preferred Language:
Highest Level of Education Obtained:	Last School Attended (Name & Location):
Occupation:	
Employer:	
Do you have children? If so, how old are they? What school(s) do/did they attend?	

**Heritage and Community Engagement:**

1. How important is your cultural identity to you?
  - a. a. Very Important b. Important c. Somewhat Important d. Not Important
  
2. How frequently do you participate in local and/or national cultural/ heritage events?
  - a. a. Weekly b. Monthly c. a few times a year d. never e. Other\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Do you feel that cultural history and heritage should be taught in secondary schools?
  - a. a. Yes b. No c. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. How often do you visit local/ national cultural/ heritage sites, museums, centers, etc.?
  - a. a. Weekly b. Monthly c. a few times a year d. never e. Other\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. On the back of this survey, please describe what culture and/ or heritage means to you. Please also describe the ways (if any) in which you engage in cultural and/or heritage-based activities with your family and community, and the locations of these activities.

**Survey Questionnaire: Teachers, Community Members, Camp Counselors**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Contact Information:**

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Background Information**

Age:	Place of Birth:
Ethnicity:	Cultural Identity:
Native Language:	Preferred Language:
Highest Level of Education Obtained:	Last School Attended (Name & Location):
Occupation:	
Employer:	
Do you have children? If so, how old are they? What school(s) do/did they attend?	

**Heritage and Community Engagement:**

1. How important is your cultural identity to you?
  - a. a. Very Important b. Important c. Somewhat Important d. Not Important
  
2. How frequently do you participate in local and/or national cultural/ heritage events?
  - a. a. Weekly b. Monthly c. a few times a year d. never e. Other\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How often do you visit local/national cultural/heritage sites, museums, centers, etc.?
  - a. a. Weekly b. Monthly c. a few times a year d. never e. Other\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. On the back of this survey, please describe what culture and/ or heritage means to you. Please also describe the ways (if any) in which you engage in cultural and/or heritage-based activities with your family and community, and the locations of these activities.

**Survey Questionnaire: Parents with Children Participating in The Heritage Program**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Contact Information:**

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Background Information**

Age:	Place of Birth:
Ethnicity:	Cultural Identity:
Native Language:	Preferred Language:
Highest Level of Education Obtained:	Last School Attended (Name & Location):
Occupation:	
Employer:	
How many children do you have? How old are they? What school(s) do they attend? Please indicate the names of your children who are participating in the Heritage Program this year:	

**Heritage and Community Engagement:**

1. How important is your cultural identity to you?
  - a. a. Very Important b. Important c. Somewhat Important d. Not Important
  
2. How important is the cultural identity of you children to you?
  - a. a. Very Important b. Important c. Somewhat Important d. Not Important
  
3. How frequently do you and your children participate in local and/or national cultural/heritage events?
  - a. a. Weekly b. Monthly c. a few times a year d. never e. Other\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. How often do you and your children visit local/national cultural/heritage sites, museums, centers, etc.?
  - a. a. Weekly b. Monthly c. a few times a year d. never e. Other\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. On the back of this survey, please describe what culture and/ or heritage means to you. Please also describe the ways (if any) in which you and your children engage in cultural and/or heritage-based activities with your family and community, and the locations of these activities

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

### **2015 Preliminary Exploratory Interview Protocol for Teachers/Community Members**

How do you and/or your community connect with the ancient and historic past?

How do you view current connections or relationships between your community and the archaeology conducted or archaeologists working on heritage sites nearby?

Do you think there is an interest within your community for collaboration with archaeologists—specifically, in the research and excavation process, and/or in the production and distribution of the knowledge and resources obtained from investigations on local heritage sites? If so, do you have ideas or suggestions about facilitating this kind of collaboration?

What do schools and/ or community organizations do to promote cultural heritage of youth, their families, and the greater community? (i.e., fieldtrips to local museums or heritage sites; Festivals/ celebrations)

How is cultural heritage currently incorporated into the curriculum or curricula—i.e., a single course, social studies units, cross-curricular projects in your school? How much time do you think is spent on teaching and exploring heritage at school?

As an educator, what challenges or concerns do you have related to teaching heritage material?

Do you feel there are any improvements or changes needed to the current heritage curricula? If so, could you provide some specific examples?

Do you feel there is a need for youth to be offered more time or resources to explore their cultural heritage? If so, do you feel that this could be incorporated into current school curricula or developed into a stand-alone curriculum that might be part of non-traditional education settings? (i.e., Saturday school, summer classes, after school programs, etc.)

Would you be interested in partnering with a collaborative project aimed at developing a heritage-based curriculum?

What would you suggest as the first step towards collaboratively exploring options for cultural heritage curriculum development?



## **2018 Interview Protocol After the Camp: Camp Counselors/Teachers**

1. What role did you play during the camp?
2. In what ways did you see the objectives of the camp being met through program activities?
  - a. Give Examples
3. How do you perceive students' responses to these activities?
  - a. Give Examples
4. How do you perceive students to be acclimating to a community educational setting?
  - a. Give examples
5. Have you noticed any behaviors or expressions that hint towards greater affiliation towards one culture over another? Or a rejection of one culture over another?
  - a. Give examples
6. Overall, what aspects of the camp do you feel went well?
7. What could have gone better?
8. What changes would you like to see made?
9. What was the most challenging experience? How did you overcome it?
10. What was your most memorable experience?
11. Could you describe the collaboration process during the camp? What challenges did the organizing group face? How did they move past them?
12. What activities do you feel went the best? Why?
13. What activities could have been improved? How?
14. Based on the events and activities of the camp, what aspects of Maya Mestizo culture and heritage were best represented and taught?

15. What activities/events may have encouraged you to think differently about how culture and heritage have the potential to shift and change over time with new generations?
16. What activities would you like to see added, changed, taken away?
17. Talk about how you see (or maybe don't see) the Heritage program continuing in the future.
18. Do you see yourself continuing to participate in the program? If so, how?
19. What other suggestions do you have?

## **2018 Interview Protocol for Parents with Child/Children Participating in the Camp**

1. How do you and your families connect with the ancient and historic past?
2. What do you feel are the most important aspects of your heritage?
3. What do you want your children to know and remember to pass on about Succotz specifically related to culture, heritage, and history.
4. How do you see the Heritage program connecting to your cultural identity and ethnic heritage and those of your child/children?
5. Did your child participate in the heritage camp or club activities last year?
  - i. If so, why did you decide to enroll them in the camp?
  - ii. What did your child/children share with you about his/ her/their experiences during last year's program?
  - iii. What impacts do you think last year's program has had on your child/children?
  - iv. What do you feel your child/children learned from participating in last year's program?
  - v. Did your child/children join any clubs following last year's camp? Which one?
6. Why did you decide enroll your child in the Heritage camp this year?
7. What has your child shared with you so far about his/ her experiences in the camp this year?
8. What impacts do you think this year's camp will have on your child/children?
9. What do you feel your child/children learned from participating in the camp this year?
10. How did the camp reflect unique things about Succotz's cultural heritage?
11. In what ways (if any) has the Heritage camp encouraged community participation and involvement?
12. What do you like about the Heritage program?
13. What do you not like about the Heritage program?

14. What other activities could the children do to dig deeper into their cultural past?
15. What other elders or community members should be contacted who may share knowledge for the current activities or new ones that might be offered?
16. What would you like to see changed or done differently?
17. How do you see the Heritage program continuing in the future
18. Would you be interested in participating in helping to develop the camp? What would you be interested in doing?
19. Do you see yourself finding ways to participate more actively in the program?
20. What other suggestions do you have?

## APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS

### **Focus Group Protocol: 2016 Initial Focus Group with Teachers & Community Members**

**Note:** This focus group was a follow up to preliminary interviews that I conducted the previous summer. I invited that same participants to join this focus group as a way of sharing back my findings as well as to continue to move forward with the heritage education initiative. The following questions were used as a guide for the focus group discussion and were based on initial analysis of the preliminary interviews.

#### **Questions:**

1. What are the consequences of this loss of identity? What are the benefits to reclaiming it in this way?
  - a. Considering these consequences and benefits, what is your shared vision for this program?
2. Which of the outlined ideas do you see as doable?
  - a. Goals for the near future
  - b. Goals for the more distant future
3. What are everyone's thoughts and feelings about where to go from here?
4. Is there anything else you would like to add to the conversation?

## **Focus Group Protocol: 2016 Second Focus Group with Teachers**

**Note:** This focus group was a follow up to the first focus group. The following questions were used as a guide for the focus group discussion and were based on decisions that were made during the first focus group.

### **Questions:**

1. What form should the heritage initiative take, i.e., after school clubs, summer camp, monthly gathering, etc.?
2. What should be the age range of youth? First, second, third, fourth form? High school? All children?
3. Where should the initiative be held? School, community center, private yard/ field, etc.?
4. What should the focus be in terms of culture and heritage?
5. What other focus/ focuses should the initiative have? Community partnership/ engagement, leadership, capacity building, autonomy, self-care, etc.
6. What should the curriculum be?
  - a. How can we be intentional about curriculum choices? Not just a heritage craft fair ...  
etc.

### **Focus Group Protocol: 2017 Conversations with Parents**

1. What impacts do you think the camp has had or will have on your child, if any? Maybe about how they talk about culture, or how they talk about things they learned. New interests that have emerged.
2. What do you feel your child learned from participating in the camp?
3. How did the camp reflect unique things about Succotz's cultural heritage?
4. In what ways (if any) has the Heritage camp encouraged community participation and involvement?
5. Talk about how you see (or maybe don't see) the Heritage program continuing in the future.
6. What other activities could the children do to dig deeper into their cultural past?
7. What other elders or community members should be contacted to help share this knowledge to make the activities represent other things.
8. Do you see yourself finding ways to participate more actively in the program?
9. What other suggestions do you have?
10. Do you have any questions for me?

### **Interactive Focus Group Protocol: 2017 Children Participating in the Camp**

1. What activity did you like the most?
  - a. Why did you like that activity?
2. What activity did you like the least?
  - a. What did you not like that activity as much?
3. What would make any of the activities better?
4. What are three things that you learned that you never knew before?
5. What two clubs will you think about joining?
6. What is the most important thing that you will remember about this camp?



**Focus Group Protocol: 2017 & 2018 Debriefing Meeting at End of Camp with Teachers  
and Camp Counselors**

1. In what ways did you see the objectives of the camp being met through program activities?
2. How do you perceive students' responses to these activities?
3. How do you perceive students to be acclimating to a community educational setting?
4. Have you noticed any behaviors or expressions that hint towards greater affiliation towards one culture over another? Or a rejection of one culture over another?
5. Overall, what aspects of the camp do you feel went well?
6. What could have gone better?
7. What changes would you like to see made?
8. What was the most challenging experience? How did you overcome it?
9. What was your most memorable experience?
10. Could you describe the collaboration process during the camp? What challenges did the organizing group face? How did they move past them?
11. What activities do you feel went the best? Why?
12. What activities could have been improved? How?
13. Based on the events and activities of the camp, what aspects of Maya Mestizo culture and heritage were best represented and taught?
14. What activities/ events may have encouraged you to think differently about how culture and heritage have the potential to shift and change over time with new generations?
15. What activities would you like to see added, changed, taken away?
16. Talk about how you see (or maybe don't see) the program continuing in the future.

17. Do you see yourself continuing to participate in the program? If so, how?

18. What other suggestions do you have?

## APPENDIX D: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL PROTOCOL

As participants and organizers of the Heritage Program in Succotz, your experiences are valuable to understanding and documenting the process of the development of this program. As such, keeping a running journal to document your thoughts, ideas, concerns, etc. related to the heritage program will be beneficial to this study. I request that you make 5 reflective journal entries over the few days we will be working together at the camp. I have included prompts for each of the 5 entries, but please feel free to include more than what these prompts are asking! And please remember, there is not right or wrong answer these are simply your thoughts and ideas.

### Journal Entry 1: Before the Camp Starts

1. What motivated you to want to join this collaborative initiative?
2. Write about your initial reasons for participating in this initiative—think deeply: personal, political, social, economic reasons? (these may or may not apply)
3. Write about why this initiative is important to you and why you feel it is important to the community.

### Journal Entry 2: 1<sup>st</sup> Day of Heritage Camp 2018

1. What was your most memorable experience from today?
2. What did you learn today?
3. What do you think the children learned today?
4. What challenges did you face today and how did you overcome them *or* what might help to overcome them?
5. What did you notice with regard to Maya Mestizo culture and heritage today? Examples?
6. What went really well today?
7. What could have gone better?

8. Please write about anything else you experienced today.

Journal Entry 3: 2<sup>nd</sup> Day of Heritage Camp 2018

1. What was your most memorable experience from today?
2. What did you learn today?
3. What do you think the children learned today?
4. What challenges did you face today and how did you overcome them *or* what might help to overcome them?
5. What did you notice with regard to Maya Mestizo culture and heritage today? Examples?
6. What went really well today?
7. What could have gone better?
8. Please write about anything else you experienced today.

Journal Entry 4: 3<sup>rd</sup> Day of Heritage Camp 2018

1. What was your most memorable experience from today?
2. What did you learn today?
3. What do you think the children learned today?
4. What challenges did you face today and how did you overcome them *or* what might help to overcome them?
5. What did you notice with regard to Maya Mestizo culture and heritage today? Examples?
6. What went really well today?
7. What could have gone better?
8. Describe the Family Day today. Describe how you saw parents and family interact with the camp. Be as specific as possible.
9. Please write about anything else you experienced today.

Journal Entry 5: After the Camp is Over

1. What are your personal hopes for the direction of the Heritage program—for example, what is your hope for the future of the program?
2. Where do you see the Heritage program in 5 years?
3. How might these hopes potentially shift and change as this process continues?
4. How has your understanding of your own heritage impacted your involvement in the Heritage Program?
5. How do you think your thoughts and actions have impacted the larger collaborative group?  
Examples?
6. In what ways do you feel others in the collaborative group are impacting, challenging, supporting, your own notions of heritage education?
7. Talk about any shifts you have experienced in your own thinking about heritage, culture, community, etc. through this process.
8. Talk about any changes (if any) you see happening in the community or among the collaborative group as this program continues. Please provide specific examples if possible.

## APPENDIX E: STORYTELLING

### **The Story of La Paloma**

**(Sak Pakal [Maya]/ Pigeon & the Squirrel)**

**Told by Dr. Penados's Father, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

Bueno, te voy a contar la historia de la paloma. Aquí, nosotros conocemos- Pues vamos a decir- yo soy Maya. No, pues no hablo Maya, pero soy descendiente Maya. Pero entonces aquí muchos de nosotros, los viejos, le llamamos a la paloma "kusukun" así se canta [cantando como el pájaro] Siempre, todos los días se oye. Pero esa, su historia es. Porque el "kusukun" le dice. Porque lo que quiere decir en Maya Porque dice "K'uk tu tusen." "K'uk tu tusen, K'uk tu tusen" quiere decir "K'uk tu tusen." Porque por eso es que la paloma solamente tiene un par de hijos. Lo que pasó, que cuando- porque como las gallinas se ponen varios huevos- Pero entonces el el la ardilla. La ardilla se llama "k'uk" en Maya. Entonces ahora le comió los huevos y le dejó dos. Entonces fue y le dijo a la paloma que solo, solamente dos huevos tenía y se le rotó dos palomitas. Pero entonces cuando ella se dio cuenta. Que la ardilla lo engañó, entonces es que ella empezó con ese canto. "K'uk tu tusen, K'uk tu tusen." Lo qué quiere decir, "La ardilla me engañó. La ardilla me engañó." Porque el le dijo que solo dos huevos tenía y solo dos pollitos se le rotó. Entonces ella se dio cuenta. Entonces ella agarró ese canto que hace así, "K'uk tu tusen, K'uk tu tusen.". Entonces quiere decir, "La ardilla me engañó. La ardilla me engañó." Esa es una paloma que todo el tiempo la oyes en los árboles y canta. Esa es la historia de la paloma que le decimos nosotros, "K'uk tu tusen" y algunos dicen "kusukun." Todo depende en la forma que lo aprende decir. Aunque no ves que así exactamente es, pero lo que quiere decir por, por el canto que hace que la ardilla le engañó y por eso la gente Maya pues le sacó que eso quiere decir "K'uk tu tusen." Eso es la historia de la paloma.

I am going to tell you the story of the pigeon. Here we know it is, well, I am going to say it in Maya. I am Maya. I don't speak it, but I am descended from the Maya, well, anyway, hear a lot of us older folks, call the pigeon "kusukun" It sings like this [bird chirping sounds]. Always, every day you can hear it. But the story of the "kusukun," in Maya, the call it "k'uk tu tusen." "K'uk tu tusen" it means "k'uk tu tusen." This is why the pigeon only has one pair of children. What happened—because, we know hens lay several eggs—well the squirrel is called "k'uk" in Maya. Well, the squirrel ate two of the eggs and left two [in the nest]. The squirrel went and told the pigeon that two of her eggs broke. The pigeon realized that wasn't the case. The squirrel tricked her and that's why she started to sing "K'uk tu tusen, K'uk tu tusen." What she was saying was "The squirrel deceived me! The squirrel deceived me!" Because the squirrel told her that she only had two eggs [in her nest] and two had broken. The pigeon realized so she sings like this "K'uk tu tusen, K'uk tu tusen." What she was saying was "The squirrel deceived me! The squirrel deceived me!" Hear this pigeon all the time in the trees singing this. This is the story of the pigeon who we call "k'uk tu tusen" and others call it "kusukun." It all depends on the way you learned to call it. Although, you see it isn't exact, but what it is trying to say is that the squirrel deceived [the pigeon] and that is why the Maya people understood from what it was saying, "k'uk tu tusen." That was the story of the pigeon.

## The Story of the Toh

Told by Dr. Filiberto Penados, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2017

So, a long, long time ago, there was a lot of forest, lots of trees and lots of birds and lots of animals. The animals and birds and insects lived happy, very happy. There were leaf cutter ants. The ‘say’ there were also, ‘wech.’ There were also other kinds of animals. There was the ‘keh’, the deer. Alright, what else was there? ‘Haaleb.’ Okay, there’s the gibnut. Okay, there was the parrot, the woodpecker, okay? All of the animals were there in the forest. Happily eating and happily playing around, flying around, running around, drinking their waters, sucking their nectar, you know, eating fruits. The monkey was swinging from the tree and the jaguar was running around hunting for the deer. The deer was not happy when the jaguar’s hunting, but everybody was there, okay? All the animals were there living very, very happy. But one day came the news that there was going to be a storm. A huge storm was coming and so the animals were scared and they started making noises. Okay? So we have to make noises like the birds, like the animals. Alright? Who knows what the what noise the parrot makes. Okay? So this row here can make the sound of the parrots. Can you make a sound of parrots? No. Okay. Alright. You can make a sound. Okay? Everybody makes a sound of parts then. Everybody, everybody. Okay? And then the ‘Pich’ is over there also making a sound. What’s sound of the ‘pich’ make? And there was a ‘chatillo.’ You know what the chatillo is? Yes. What sound does the chatillo make? Chatillo. Chatillo. Chatillo. Okay, so all the animals were there, but they were all scared now because a big storm was coming. So, somebody said maybe it was the ‘Cho,’ It was the rat said, you know, we all need to come together to a meeting. We have to do something about the storm. The storm is coming. Okay? So, everybody gathered around somewhere in the jungle and they said, a big storm is coming. We have to prepare for the storm. We have to make sure that we



protect our food. We have to make sure that we protect our seeds, we have to store it. We also have to build a big shed so we can all go in there. So, when the storm comes, we will be protected and we won't die. And everybody agreed and said, okay, we should do that. Is everybody going to help? Everybody said yes except one animal. What animal was that? The 'Toh.' He said, "I cannot work. I'm too beautiful. Look at my feathers." At that time the Toh had its complete tail. He had a beautiful long tail and he was the most beautiful bird in the jungle. In fact, he used to hang out in the middle of the jungle along with his friends with a lot of pretty birds like the toucan and what else? The scarlet macaw. The chatillo. So, all the beautiful birds were hanging around together, didn't wanna work. He said, no, I'm too pretty and I'm very handsome. I'm royal. I'm like the king. And he just, you know, perched right there on the branch and turn around so everybody could admire his beautiful tail. He said "I cannot work. I might damage my tail. The animals said, "hold on, everybody has to help. We all have to work because we all have to eat after the storm. You have to help, Toh." So, they managed to convince him. The Toh didn't want to do it. He reluctantly said, "okay, okay, I will help a little bit. I will help he said, okay, let's move the seeds, let's move the branches, let's move the pods, move the sticks so we can build the house." So, everybody started to work. But the Toh thought he was smart. So, he said to himself, "I know what I'm going to do. I know a little hole beside the cliff there. I'm gonna go and hide in there while everybody's working. I'll go and hide." So, he went and he stuck in that little hole there, okay? Right beside it was a little path. He said, "Ha! I'm gonna hide right here. Okay, nobody will see me." So, he was sleeping and everybody was working. He was snoring. But everyone was working. There was a lot of noise. But the Toh continued to sleep. Continued to sleep. And everybody was walking up and down carrying things, okay? Carrying things up and down. The storm came and there was thunder. Boom. What sound does

the thunder make? Alright, you make the sound of the thunder day. Let's see, let's see who can make the loudest sound of the thunder. 1, 2, 3. Alright, so there was thunder. Okay? There was the rain. There was rain coming. Oh, I know how to make this name sound. The rain and the wind was blowing. The branches were breaking down in the jungle and the Toh continued to sleep. Branches were blowing. Suddenly everything went quiet. Everyone was quiet. The Toh woke up, and said, "what happened? The storm never came. What? What happened?" And then he turned around and looked at all the damage that happened and he heard all the birds there in some corner of the jungle singing very happily because they were all alive. And he went and joined the crowd and everybody was happy to see him. "We all survived the look we have all our food." "Yes." He said, "It's great. It really was quite the hard work that we did." "Yes, yes" they said. The Toh went on top of the branch there and perched there while everybody was talking. And he said, "you know, it was really hard work. It was hard work, but it was worth it because we have our seeds." And the animals looked at him and started laughing. They started laughing at Toh. They said "Toh, but, but what happened? What happened to your tail?" Toh thought that they were joking. He said, "what about my tail? My tail is pretty." "No, but something probably happened from all the work that you did, maybe. What happened to your tail?" The Toh looked back when he looked back some of his feathers had dropped because when he was hiding in the little hole, he had this tail on the roadside, on the little path. And everybody came walking on top of its tail and right there, see? Right there, okay. Everybody walked on top of his tail. And so all the feathers dropped. Toh was embarrassed because it's not because he was working hard and he damaged his tail, but because he was what? He was sleeping, he did not want to work. So, he was really embarrassed and ashamed because he hadn't helped. And so, he flew away and flew away into a cliff and hid there. And to this day, the Toh is a bird that likes to be by itself and he

likes to be in cliffs and little holes in the cliffs. That's where it makes its nest. That's why the Toh has its tail, the way it does the end. [The Toh has 2 long tail feathers that look a bit frayed at the end].

## **The Maya Story of Why there are Four Colors of Corn**

**Told by Dr. Filiberto Penados, July 20, 2018**

It was many, many years ago. There were all the animals together in the jungle. Every day, they had to wake up early to search for food. The Toh would fly though there look something to eat. The toucan flew and sat on a guarumo branch. Guarumo grows fruit. Through there the “wech” came running hoping he would find some roots to eat. He came out really early, to see where he might find the deer. The deer said, “No, I eat plants and grass.” The whole world had to search for food. And the “sereque” [agouti] also needed to search for food. And through the night the whole world slept. Together. They were sleeping like this: [snoring sounds]. And what do you think the “sereque” did? [tooting sounds]. Farts that started in one place could meet you all the way over there! But the “sereque” kept sleeping [snoring sounds]. And all of the animals woke up wondering—“who is the one that is passing gas?” “It was you!” they said to the toucan. “No! It wasn’t me” said the toucan ... “it was you!” “No! It wasn’t me.” “Whoever it is. Why so many farts? Enough. No more, they are toxic!” So they all went back to sleep. It continued like this for several nights. The “sereque” wouldn’t stop farting. “What is happening” the other animals asked. “What are you eating?” “Well,” said the “sereque” “there I was and I saw the ‘say’ [leafcutter ants] walking along in their line carrying white corn. And one would drop a piece and I would eat it!” “We want to eat too!” said the other animals. “But we can’t” said the “sereque.” “The ‘say’ are coming out of a little hole in the side of a small mountain carrying the white corn.” So they all went to where the “say” were all coming out with the corn. “What are we going to do? How are we going to take it out?” So they asked the “say” “where is the corn you are taking?” The “say” said “Oh! There is a lot of corn over there in that mountain.” “But how do we get it out?” All the animals took a turn trying to break open the mountain, but

nothing worked. Finally, they said “we will ask Chac [god of thunder].” So he came and told the “ch’ejob” [woodpecker] to knock on the mountain until he found a hollow sound. And the Chac then made a terrible sound [thunder] and launched a lightning bolt at the spot the “ch’ejob” found but he was not fast enough and his little head got burned and that is why the woodpecker today has a red head. And the mountain broke apart and all the corn came pouring out. The animals ran for they wanted the corn. But the fire was really close and it burned some of the corn and turned it black. Some of it was a little less burned and it was red. Some a little less and it was yellow, and then there was some white corn that didn’t get burned at all. And the Maya then gathered all the four colors of corn and planted them. And that’s why we see them [showing a picture of multicolored corn] mixed together.

## **The Maya Creation Story**

**Told by Dr. Filiberto Penados, July 20, 2018**

This comes from the Popol Vuh, which is a book that the Maya grandparents knew a long time ago. And this book tells us how they [the Maya] became the people we know today—how are the Meyer people arrived. This tells us about where the Maya people come from. It's been many many many many many years ago the creators were there. The creators looked around at the world and knew what was missing—men and women. “But we have to form them” they said. “Let's make them from mud—clay. We will make them from clay from the earth.” But this did not work because they could not move their bodies and the water washed them away. Next, they said “we will try wood!” They made them and carved little faces on them. The wood people could talk and they were sturdy but they could not remember anything and they did not care for their creators and did not pray or thank them. So, the creators were unhappy with these wood people and they sent a big flood to wash away all the wood people. So, the creators sent animals out to find a place where people could live and have food. And, we just heard the story about the four colors of corn. Now the animals went out and found the mountain but could not get in so that is when they called on Chac to help break open the mountain. But the creators didn't know what to do with the corn. So, they went to look for the two angel grandparents who were very old and very wise. “Two grandparents, we are looking for someone to help us make the people for the earth. How can we do it?” The old wise grandparents said to grind up some of the corn from the mountain and make a paste and from this masa they could make the people. So, the creators mixed the corn and made little people and gave them life. Right after they made the people, the people immediately, they said, “thank you creators for creating us!” “Thank you for the trees, for the water, for everything you have given to us.” And the creators were happy and they said these

ones are good. These are the ones we give life. So because of that we say that we, the Maya, are men and women of corn—“people of the corn.” The corn is important to the Maya communities. It is important and these stories how the world was made and why corn is so important.