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Your Story, Your History:
Social Studies and History Instruction in a Nicaraguan Primary School

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Bridgewater State University

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Abstract

In the latter half of the 20th century, the country of Nicaragua experienced major political upheaval, which not only affected political, social and economic policies, but education as a whole. Education has been a constant struggle in Nicaragua – this country is the second poorest in Latin America and has the highest dropout rate in Latin America with 52% of individuals leaving school before finishing their primary school education. The Sandinista movement rallied the country together and as a result helped to foster a rich culture and history of Nicaragua, which can be found in primary school social studies classes. This qualitative and naturalistic study investigated the social studies and history curriculum present in Nicaraguan schools as well as which strategies and methods were utilized in instruction. Multiple data collection methods were employed, including participant observations in primary classrooms, field notes, administrator and teacher interviews, and student and teacher artifacts. The findings of this study revealed that social studies is directly taught in the classroom primarily by rote memorization as well as informal instruction by cultural influences prevalent throughout the country. Students in this city were surrounded by buildings covered with political signs, references to political figures and their colors. Findings also showed an expanding communities model of learning social studies and history in this particular public school and the frequent integration of social studies into other subjects such as language and literature and the natural sciences. Furthermore, this research suggests that these educators strive for success and overcome any obstacles that may be presented, such as limited time allotted to social studies instruction as well as insufficient resources.

Introduction

Nicaragua, originally a Spanish colony that became an independent republic in 1838, is located in Central America between the countries of Honduras and Costa Rica. The country features a diverse terrain, from coastal plains to active volcanoes, bordering the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean. The largest country in Central America, Nicaragua is home to almost 6 million people; 69% recognized as mestizo (mixed Amerindian and white), 17% as white, 9% as black and 5% as Amerindian. Nicaragua is also one of the poorest countries in Central America – and the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere - with 42.5% of the population living below the poverty line. Moreover, unemployment is a widespread problem. With major exports being coffee and other foods, this country relies on its agriculture and livestock produce as major means of income.

This country has more recently been defined by its political changes, after the Sandinista group took power in 1979 to improve the political climate in Nicaragua, which was facing major problems such as manipulation and corruption in the government. The Sandinista government revolutionized the country and focused some of their effort on improving the education system by increasing the budget for spending on education. Presently, Nicaragua still faces educational challenges, including over-crowding in the schools and not enough resources. Those who attend school in Nicaragua do not always finish; 52% of individuals leave school before finishing their primary school education, causing 22% of the population to be illiterate.

Literature Review

Social Studies Defined

According to the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS), the social studies can be defined as “the study of political, economic, cultural and environmental aspects of societies in the past” (1988). Social studies encompasses a large number of domains, including history, geography, anthropology, sociology, economics and political science. As such, this subject allows for multiple interpretations and much room for exploration and creativity. Moreover, it allows for students to better understand the world around them. The younger the children are introduced to social studies, in or out of the classroom, the better prepared they are for their own future, reports the National Council for Social Studies (1988).

Importance of Social Studies in the Elementary Classroom

History and social studies have a defining power. A complete social studies and history curriculum informs students on a country’s past as well as the political, sociological and economical perspectives of the country, creating a well-rounded student. The National Council of Social Studies (NCSS) views social studies as extremely important to the overall success of youth. Social studies instruction must start at a young age; this education is “crucial if we expect the young people...to become active, responsible citizens for maintaining the democratic values upon which this nation was established” (1988). The NCSS even reports that students, without a proper social studies education, may not be a successful, well-informed citizen in their society.

Instructional time spent on social studies in early and elementary education classrooms has profound effects on the futures of students and impacts their lives greatly. This subject allows students to learn about the past in order to cope with the present and future and provides students with knowledge that spans into social, economic and political institutions. In short, social studies

is providing students with the skills they will need to succeed and prosper in their communities presently and in their future (National Council for Social Studies, 1988). These skills include decision-making – Yang, using research by Scruggs, Mastropieri and Okolo (2008) and Scruggs, Mastropieri, Berkeley and Graetz (2010) concluded that social studies instruction has a main goal of preparing students to make decisions that will help to better their society and create positive change (2012). Social studies instruction helps to build problem solving skills which students can apply to their own lives. Scruggs et al. (2012) also argue that social studies learners can “assimilate the knowledge and apply it to their own educational aspirations, and become more informed and productive learners”.

There has been much discussion on whether or not some aspects of social studies instruction are too advanced for the minds of young students. There have been arguments that students are not mature enough to comprehend some of the more complex social studies concepts, yet that has proven to not be the case. NCSS has found that “children are capable of earlier and more complex learning” and need to be learning these complexities earlier in their education during the optimal times in their early education years (1998). If social studies is not being taught at the elementary level, the success of the students to flourish in their later lives is at risk. Though topics may be complex, children are capable of learning much more than originally thought possible at earlier ages, and teachers must take advantage of this opportunity.

Social Studies and Education Policy

Though the National Council for Social Studies sees value in teaching this subject. Social studies has suffered cuts in instructional time in the past fifteen years, according to Heafner and Fitchett’s “National Trends in Elementary Instruction: Exploring the Role of Social

Studies Curricula” (2012). Building upon their previous research conducted in 2010, the authors have found that this diminishing importance of social studies has been occurring since the 1980s due to curriculum standardization and an emphasis on high-stakes testing that began in the 1990s (Heafner and Fitchett, 2012). Teachers, with pressure from administration, have begun to teach curricula with an increased focus on tested material rather than social studies, which is not tested as frequently as English Language Arts (ELA) or Mathematics in elementary classrooms.

According to the results of their study, Heafner and Fitchett, between the years of 1993 and 2008, observed a fifty-two minute per week increase in ELA instruction and a fifty-six minute per week decrease in social studies in grades three to five (2012). With more restrictions and guidelines to follow, ELA and Mathematics have begun to take precedence over social studies and science. Social studies has developed a stigma, one that classifies the subject as an “‘enrichment’ discipline or a topic for math and ELA integration,” therefore allowing teachers to incorporate it into ELA and math instead of dedicating time to explicitly teach the subject (Heafner and Fitchett, 2012). To meet these standards, Heafner and Fitchett found that teachers were allocating more time to ELA and math – “instructional time in ELA and math increased almost as much as science and social studies declined, suggesting significant restructuring of time allotments for core content” (p. 70). While these studies were conducted on social studies instruction in the U.S., similar studies have not been conducted on the Nicaraguan social studies curriculum and instruction.

Though teachers may want to continue to have a focus on social studies in the classroom, the recent educational policies do not allow for this; the pressures to fulfill standards weigh heavy on educators. Fitchett, Heafner and Lambert (2014), state how “elementary school teachers are under stress to teach a rigid and prescribed curriculum. High-stakes testing and

standardization rhetoric only magnify teachers' perception of narrowing curricular options" (p. 44). Creativity in developing a diverse curriculum is becoming less and less possible.

To be a highly functioning, well-informed member of society, social studies instruction throughout one's schooling is essential. Even in primary school, learning about families and communities will help better prepare one to meet the demands of the ever-changing world. Social studies encompass many diverse disciplines ranging from geography to economics to political science. A complete social studies curriculum helps to make sure students can handle any situation that may come their way, giving them problem solving skills that they can utilize throughout their lifetime. In Nicaragua, these statements hold true – a country defined by its recent political changes needs informed citizens to help better their society and positively influence the future. In addition, Nicaragua, with these recent political changes, has a unique history, one that students should learn about to create a better understanding of the world in which they live.

The Current Study

Methodology

With my knowledge of effective practices in social studies instruction and knowledge of the increasing pressures being put on United States teachers to focus more on ELA and Math rather than social studies, I was interested to see social studies instruction in an educational system outside of the United States. Considering the importance the NCSS placed on early social studies instruction, I was interested to examine the social studies curriculum across grade levels within the Nicaraguan school system. With so much political change, and the country constantly progressing, I wanted to examine their social studies curriculum with these new changes.

Therefore, my overarching research goal was to examine the social studies and history curriculum in a Nicaraguan primary school. Specifically, I was interested in three major research questions:

- What does social studies/history teaching and learning look like in a Nicaraguan primary school?
- What strategies and methods do teachers use for social studies/history instruction?
- What topics and perspectives are included in the social studies/history curriculum?

Research Setting and Participants

This descriptive, naturalistic study was conducted in a Nicaraguan primary school in the urban area of Matagalpa, the fifth largest city in the country. This school contained preschool to sixth grade classrooms; there were two sections for each grade, with fourteen classes in total. This particular school had over 500 students, with class sizes averaging over thirty students per room, with a relatively even amount of male and female students. The school was separated into two sessions - a morning session and an afternoon session. The morning session began at 7:15am and ended at 11:00am for preschool and 12:00pm for the remaining grades. The afternoon session, which comprised fewer students, began at 12:30pm and ended at 5:30pm.

Aesthetically, the school featured a large courtyard in the center that was used for recess and physical education. Around the perimeter were classrooms as well as a main office, computer room and library. The rooms were along the outer edge of the courtyard, with concrete floors and decorated walls. On the outside of the school, there were high walls and a fence that was painted blue and white, representing the colors of the Nicaraguan flag, with a door that was locked at all times. There were two guards stationed at this school who questioned every person who wanted to come into or leave the school. However, when students were being dropped off,

parents were encouraged to come into the school and bring their children into the classroom, sometimes lingering to speak to other parents or the teacher. Students were required to wear a school uniform. Females wore a white shirt and a navy skirt and males wore white shirt and navy pant. However, on occasion, some students would show up to school in more casual clothes. In terms of administration, there was one principal for both the morning and afternoon sessions, but the Vice Principal differed from the morning to afternoon. In the morning, the principal's office was a busy place, with parents and teachers stopping in and out of the office. Some mornings, teachers met in the office to discuss a variety of topics.

Daily schedules varied between grade levels, but most had the following format: Each grade began with a morning prayer and the singing of the national anthem. The subjects followed a five day, Monday to Friday schedule. The day was broken up by topic - language and literature, natural sciences, social studies, mathematics, physical education, music and craft education, and a civilization course. Lessons lasted around 45 minutes and certain subjects were extended to one hour and thirty minutes once a week. In these lessons, throughout the subjects, students shared textbooks and wrote all information in one single notebook. Students did not have many supplies at their desk – they kept their backpack on their chair and would use that as a place to keep their supplies. In an interview with the principal, she mentioned that there was an increased focus on language and literature as well as mathematics, because these were the main focuses of the school. Most days began with language and literature, followed by mathematics. Each morning had a snack time as well as a recess, lasting a total of half an hour. Recess was a social time for students – they were allowed a free reign of the center square of the school and could buy a variety of snacks. Students engaged in games with a ball, such as soccer, or even made their own toy out of the remnants of their snack, such as a juice box.

The teachers at this primary school had different levels of formal training. All of the teachers attended some form of a Normal School in its entirety, while others chose to attend a university for a number of years; some completed their schooling while others did not. A Normal School in Nicaragua is a school that is specifically for teachers and would allow a person to obtain a teacher certification at the culmination. At the Primary School, there appeared to be no universal standard for the amount of schooling one needed to have to become a teacher. For example, a fourth grade teacher at the Primary School stated that she attended the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, known as UNAN, for three years, but did not finish her schooling. A sixth grade teacher, at the same school, in an interview explained how she attended and finished her degree at UNAN. One of the administrators spoke of how she attended a Normal School for five years, became a teacher and then later became an administrator.

Data Collection

From May 17, 2015-June 6, 2015, I observed multiple grade levels. I observed instructional time on task, multiple different styles of teaching including lecture-style as well as constructivist style, classroom management and transitional periods. I observed Monday through Friday in a public Nicaraguan primary school classrooms from preschool up to the sixth grade. While observing, I collected multiple forms of data including participant observations, field notes, semi-structured teacher and administrator interviews and teacher and student artifacts.

As a participant observer, I was an active member of the school on multiple occasions. With the translator and other researchers, I interacted with students by asking them simple questions during lessons. During recess, many students engaged with me to attempt to communicate even though there was a language barrier. On one occasion, along with a fellow

researcher, we supervised the classroom as students worked on their homework. Towards the end of my three-weeks, I was a part of the school's Mother's Day festival and engaged in a ceremony as well as games with students, learning more about their traditions.

While observing the teachers and students, I took detailed field notes - these included teacher and student interactions, lessons written on board, teacher movements, aesthetics of the room, etc. In addition to the field notes, I conducted semi-structured interviews mid-way through the observation. The interviews were conducted with a translator, a professor at Bridgewater State University, completely in Spanish. The interviews were later translated into English. For interviews conducted with teachers, the interviews were held in their classrooms in an informal manner; the translator and I sat at student desk with the teacher at a student desk. The questions asked were as followed:

- How did you prepare to become a teacher?
- How do you define the term, "social studies"? What does social studies instruction consist of in your classroom?
- How do you incorporate social studies into other lessons?
- What teaching styles and strategies do you use to teach in the classroom?
- In your opinion, do you have adequate resources to best teach social studies?

I conducted follow-up interviews to resolve any unanswered questions at the end of the observation. As aforementioned, I collected artifacts during my three-weeks at the Primary School. The artifacts included pictures of student work, pictures of bulletin boards throughout the classrooms and pictures of the school. One teacher gave a copy of an upcoming history lesson on a transparent sheet used for an overhead projector.

Data Analysis

After each of my observations, I reread my notes, revised for accuracy and elaborated on them and began coding them. Each evening while in Nicaragua, I would discuss my observations from the day with my colleagues and began to examine recurring themes. In addition, I analyzed the semi-structured interviews and field notes regarding my research questions.

The multiple data sources in this study were analyzed according to Strauss and Corbin's (1990) description of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. I used the constant comparative method as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) when I assigned, categorized, and modified codes throughout the data collection and analysis of my study. During open coding, I broke down, examined, compared, conceptualized, and categorized the data. Open coding involved the "naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of the data" (Strauss and Corbin, p. 62, 1998). These coding sheets organized the numerous sources of data as well as facilitated the categorization of codes into conceptual categories.

During open coding, coded text from observation and interviews were organized with the various codes and instances of the particular code labeled beneath. These coding sheets organized the numerous sources of data as well as facilitated the categorization of codes into conceptual categories. During axial coding, I categorized the numerous initial codes and concepts into larger conceptual categories by "making connections between a category and its sub-categories" (Strauss and Corbin, p.97, 1990). Axial coding resulted in the development of broad categories.

In addition to the constant comparative method, I utilized content analysis to analyze my data. This analysis method, described by Stemler (2001) as "a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of

coding.” This allowed me to examine all of my data in a systematic method, and focus my data into more concise categories. The categories, according to Stemler, have to be mutually exclusive and where no unit falls between two data points (2001). Content analysis using categorization allows for a more rich and meaningful analysis.

Findings

For a country with a rich and vibrant history, there is no surprise that the social studies curriculum is vibrant and rich itself. The social studies curriculum encompasses all of Nicaragua’s past up until the current events in Nicaragua. Social studies and history instruction begins far before students enter the classroom – informal learning occurs in the homes and in the community, primarily from traditions and holidays. When interviewing the vice principal, she discussed how traditions were of great importance in Nicaragua. Traditions showed pride for their country and respect and love for families. For instance, the vice principal explained that students learn a lot about Nicaragua from what they celebrate at home and at school. In late May, the country celebrates Mother’s Day, complete with weeks of preparation as well as a weekend-long festival and a day in school with a celebration for mothers of the students. The school and the city of Matagalpa are decorated with signs, ribbons and pictures honoring mothers. Family is an essential part of society and regarded with the highest honor. In the preschool to second grade, the students focused their history instruction on family and community; these students participated in making crafts and presents for their mothers and sang songs about the holiday at school. However, most of their exposure to history and social studies occurs at home through family and traditions.

In addition to informal learning that occurs in the home, the children of Nicaragua learned about their history and social studies by their physical surroundings. At the school, the fence that surrounded the buildings were painted blue and white, representing the colors of the national flag.

On numerous buildings, trees and various flat surfaces, there are Sandinista National Liberation Front, or the FSLN, propaganda. The colors of the FSLN, red and black, are emblazoned on buildings, with differing slogans supporting candidates, found in more rural areas to the populated streets of Matagalpa. The children of this city are constantly being exposed to the politics of Nicaragua, which allows them to begin to form a background knowledge of their government before they enter school and throughout their years at school, in the least becoming familiar with the visual representation of Nicaraguan politics.

The Nicaraguan curriculum for history and social studies reflects the country's deep nationalism as well as the recent changes in government. Aesthetically, the school appears to be proud of its country – each classroom features the Nicaraguan flag, anthem, flower and tree. All around the school are bulletin boards dedicated to different historical figures who are important to the history of Nicaragua: Augusto Sandino and Ruben Dario. Sandino was a Nicaraguan revolutionary during the late 1920s against US occupation and involvement, while Ruben Dario was a famous Nicaraguan poet at the end of the 19th century who helped the Spanish-American literary movement prosper. The colors of the Nicaraguan flag, blue and white, are found throughout the school in teaching equipment as well as the colors of the uniforms of the students. The main office features a wall of pictures of each past president of Nicaragua, in plain sight so that everyone who passes through the office can see this wall. This pride in Nicaragua can be coupled with the upheaval of government, which plays a large part into the history curriculum. However, the history taught is done with a winner's perspective; they focus on the positive changes of the new government and focus on the Sandinista government over any other group. However, after much struggle with government corruption, it is understandable as to why the country would rather focus on the positive parts, parts of which students could be proud of their history.

Though history and social studies are important to be taught at any age, this particular Nicaraguan primary school featured an expanding community model of teaching history. Essentially, an expanding community model of learning, explained by Stallones, is where “children learn concepts first in the context of familiar people, places, and events, then move to the less familiar by stages” (2003, p. 5). The students in the preschool to second grade classrooms were engaged in a social studies curriculum, one that focused primarily on families and communities. The students in these grades were learning about the traditions and holidays of Nicaragua, and prepared for the Mother’s Day Celebration by making decorations and gifts for their mothers as a sign of respect and appreciation. For grades three and above, a great deal of the history lessons involved the use of a textbook; if a student could not read, he/she would have trouble during the lesson. This would be a similar situation with writing; the Nicaraguan students wrote down excerpts from the textbooks, notes dictated by the teacher and questions to answer about the readings. There were not enough books for each student to have, resulting in students having to share books. If a student had poor writing skills, the students would not have notes to work with or materials to study before a test.

With this expanding community model, this primary school introduces “their city” in third grade – Matagalpa. For this year, the students focus solely on where they live. Logically, this makes sense, as students are learning more about their surroundings, which they are already familiar with before even entering third grade. Though they may not know specifics about their city of Matagalpa, they have knowledge of their city that can be expanded on during their social studies curriculum in third grade. Having this background knowledge provides the foundation to expand on what they already know, moving from the familiar – their city – to the more unfamiliar – their country and then continent as a whole. Their curriculum in third grade is not broad; they

are learning about the city that surrounds them, thus they could walk around the city to actually visualize what they are learning. When the students move to fourth grade, their focus widens, building on material taught in the previous year, and the topic progresses to include the whole country of Nicaragua. As the students move up in grade level, their social studies focus is becoming broader and encompassing a larger area. Each subsequent year follows this pattern - fifth grade broadens to include the entire continent of Central America and the sixth graders expand their knowledge to the entire world.

The expanding community model of learning allows the students to have significant background knowledge of topics that will be presented in their lessons. Using background knowledge, students can make connections about what they are learning, potentially connecting these lessons to facts they have learned in lower grades or even a connection to their own lives. For example, a fourth grade class at the primary school was learning about Christopher Columbus and his interactions with Central America and specifically his journey to Nicaragua, which tied in with their overall focus of Nicaragua. In an interview, the teacher mentioned to the class to focus on the material being presented, because this information would appear next year in more depth. In this lesson, the students learned about Columbus's past – where he was born, what year he came to Nicaragua, his original mission and the name of his three boats. The next day, one fifth grade class was discussing Christopher Columbus in more depth. The students were asked questions regarding their previous knowledge on Columbus and were successfully able to tell the teacher where Columbus came from, the names of the three boats and when he arrived in Central America (specifically Nicaragua). Though indigenous people were living in Nicaragua before Columbus, the teachers were stating that Christopher Columbus discovered the country. The knowledge learned in fourth grade is then to be carried over to fifth grade, allowing the teacher to expand on

the students' knowledge, delving deeper into Columbus' journey to Nicaragua and its purpose. If the students were unfamiliar with the basic information of Columbus, the teacher would have to start with an introduction to him, losing valuable time where instead he/she could expand their knowledge with more information on his life and his missions because they were able to bypass the original lesson on his life. The students are building on their knowledge of Columbus and demonstrating how the expanding community model of learning social studies is occurring in Nicaraguan classrooms. By introducing the information step-by-step each year, building on lessons learned in past years, the students are able to make more connections to the information and have an increased understanding of the subject at hand.

The curriculum provided limited time, approximately 135 minutes per week was spent on social studies lessons. Similar to the current situation in the United States, there is an increased focus on literacy studies as well as mathematics in Nicaragua. During an interview with the administration of the school, the principal expressed a stress on language arts and mathematics education in the school over social studies and science. As a result, this primary school calls for language and literature and mathematics to be taught explicitly every day, most often in blocks of 90 minutes per day for language and literature and at least 45 minutes for mathematics. Social studies, in the intermediate grades, was only given 135 minutes for lessons per week, split up into 45 minute blocks that occurred three days per week. On one day, there would be two blocks of social studies lessons that would occur consecutively and the third block would be split in to two days. These times were not rigidly followed; on more than one occasion during observation, the schedules were changed to fit in preparation for a holiday celebration or to continue a mathematics lesson, often overtaking a large amount of the time for social studies. However, as previously mentioned, holidays are a large part of Nicaraguan culture, and a holiday celebration could be

interpreted as a social studies lesson, as they were learning about traditions. In addition, time was often lost due to extended recess or snack time, cutting into valuable time on learning. Based on my observations, these missed social studies instructional times were usually not made up at another point during the school day or later in the week. The teachers certainly had to make use of the time given and on most occasions the teachers were able to teach enough to give students follow-up questions for homework or excerpts to read in preparation for the continuation of the lesson.

The Nicaraguan primary school utilized rote memorization as the primary method of learning history. A history lesson would most often begin with a teacher introducing the subject by writing content on the board and having the students copy this information into their notebooks. If the teacher had the students read from the textbook, he or she would ask them to copy down an excerpt of the text in their notebooks as well. If there was homework on the lesson taught, the students completed the work in their notebooks. Based on observations, rote memorization was popular for multiple reasons at this school – the students have all of their notes and homework in one place, which makes it much easier to keep track of and keep the work together. Another reason why rote memorization is utilized so heavily is because the students do not have the resources for handouts for homework. The school's best option is to have the students write everything themselves, as they do not have paper to hand out nor do they have a copying machine to use to make homework handouts or handouts with notes on them.

Rote memorization ties right into the practice of repetition, which is regularly used at this primary school. During one lesson in fourth grade, the teacher read a passage from the history textbook to the class. Then, she asked multiple students to each read a sentence or two of the story. After the students finished, they read the story again with a partner who was sitting next to him/her,

taking turns reading every couple of lines. This was finally followed by the students copying the short story into their notebooks where they were required to read the story again that night for homework. During this day, the students were exposed to the story a total of three times in the class and were required to read the story once again at home. In American elementary classrooms, this practice of repetition is prevalent – exposure to a story or any topic once does not guarantee that a student will understand the topic right away. Reading the story multiple times can allow for the teacher to have the students focus on a different part each time – the first time, a student could be reading for comprehension, but a subsequent time could be read specifically looking at the text structure. In addition, rereading a passage could clear up any lingering questions or allow the students to look back on a part they might have forgotten. Using evidence compiled by multiple researchers, Alligton and Gabriel (2012) concluded that struggling readers need to reread texts, and that rereading texts increased their reading abilities. With the limited amount of resources available at the school, the teachers have to be more creative with the ways of teaching – since they have limited access to projectors and computers, their best option in situations can be simply having the students rereading the information multiple times.

Repetition and rote memorization are coupled with meaningful discussion and comprehension questions for full, engaging lessons. In fourth grade, the students were beginning a lesson on the native people of Nicaragua or the students' ancestors. To begin the topic, the teacher attempted to make connections between the natives and the students in the classroom by discussing food. The teacher asked the students to say any food that they ate that day that came from their ancestors, such as tortillas or *pinolillo* (a corn, cacao and milk drink). By making connections between the lesson and the lives of the students, the students were more engaged in the topic and willing to talk in class. Food was a topic that was familiar to them and could be spoken about, no

matter their academic level. During this particular lesson, the energy was high in the room while the teacher attempted to have the whole class contribute an answer to the question. In addition to meaningful discussion, the teacher would ask questions regarding comprehension while reading passages from the text or after she introduced a new topic. This would serve to make sure that the students were understanding what they were being taught; if there were any questions the students did not know the answers to, this would signal to the teacher that he or she needed to clarify the topic. This also keeps students engaged, making sure that they are paying attention. Another option for keeping students engaged was to utilize maps, globes, and occasionally videos and the internet to supplement learning. Though not always an option for all lessons, the teachers made efforts to add visual aids to help students get a better picture of their world and their history. Since every student learns differently, incorporating as many different learning styles into the classroom was the most beneficial option. As noted previously, however, supplies were limited; sometimes globes and maps were not the most updated, but the teachers could, on some occasions, go to the small computer room at the school and show their students updated resources on the internet. The teachers never let the lack of supplies hinder them in any way; instead, they spoke of how the lack of resources allowed them to be more creative, and find different and interesting methods of teaching to make the lesson come to life.

Conclusion

Nicaragua, a developing country, coupled with high poverty and dropout rates, faces multiple obstacles within their education system. However, Nicaragua, a country defined by its political history, creates a passionate social studies curriculum that teaches students about “their story”. Never allowing the lack of resources to stop them, the results of this research show that

history and social studies are not only embedded throughout the school aesthetically but also integrated into Language and Literature lessons. A large part of the history and social studies curriculum occurs outside of the classroom; students are influenced culturally by their surroundings, but also are taught the importance of traditions and holidays at home and school through multiple holiday celebrations. This proud country certainly makes great strides to show the students how Nicaragua came to be what it is today as well as its importance.

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